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This time of the year we feel and see growth both in ourselves and gardens. There is a need to get stuff in the ground even if there is a chance of a dry summer ahead.

Some have gardens that are choc block with overgrown plants and feel there is no need for more, others have a gap to fill here and there while many just make space by doing an annual clean up, reducing, dividing bulbs and removing some of those tired perennials that have been around since previous owners.

No matter we always need some new colour and a dose of fresh veg and herbs. You either do veggies or you don't but from my experience we all do herbs, so when someone asked me to recommend a few fillers.. my answer was ..why not useful herbs.

They are multi taskers. Ornamental, edible and environmentally friendly when it comes to insects.

Yes, there is no doubt that some can become invasive if left to themselves but I believe that is a management challenge.

Most homeowners don't consider veg and herbs as potential ornamentals and tend to restrict them to pots or a small section of the garden.

Well we can break out and use them a bit more freely to our advantage.

Take for example the common sage *Salvia officinalis* – It has a silver grey leaf, beautiful vibrant purple blue flowers which last for a long time, is very drought tolerant and fits in well with our local conditions.

Oreganum and marjoram are perfect plants for sunny spots and require little attention to look good.

They flower for a long time, attract bees, are hardy perennials and come in both a bush and groundcover form.

If you don't have the space, a big hanging basket in a sunny spot will do.

Pineapple sage ... another *Salvia* type – is a hardy perennial with vibrant red flowers and can be used for colour in any herbaceous border.

The leaves have the wonderful aroma of pineapple and can be utilized in fruit salad, herbal teas and cool drinks.

Another striking edible but ornamental herb is "Bloody Sorrel".

Bloody because of its red veins and useful because you can add it to fresh summer salads or if you fancy why not on a ham sandwich!

I have seen it used alongside flowering annuals like lobelia in hanging baskets and it make a really stunning show!

Talking about practical plants – Rosemary comes both as a groundcover and handsome shrub and very floriferous.

A popular variety is McConnells Blue which has deep blue flowers for many months and does well in a hot dry position.

Of course they are one of the most useful culinary herbs.

Groundcover varieties of all herbs are ideal between pavers and sleepers by adding rich aromas to your walkways. Thyme, peppermint and the creeping forms of oreganum and marjoram.

They have little or no pest problem but snails and beetles might want to share your sweet basil, which by the way should be planted right now along with chillies, egg plant and tomatoes.

You don't have to have a special area at the end of the garden massed with herbs and vegetables and if you do then it might be one of the reasons for the pest problem.

So why not just give it a go this summer and spread it all around a bit.

Keep in mind that plants do not need water every day – they need water when they are dry.

Before I go, a quick mention of a plant family we could use a lot more of in our gardens.

The *Salvias* are a big group and do well in our hot dry summers and wet winters and many herbs I have mentioned belong to the family.

Many of the more ornamental garden subjects originate in Mediterranean areas but we have a big selection of indigenous and local as well.

Most are low shrubs but some species get up to a metre or more.

I have three special ones I need you to try out.

Salvia dolomitica is not a local but seems to do well here.

It has grey green leaves and bright lilac to white flowers in the early summer gets up to a metre or more and is very drought tolerant.

It's quite a neat bush so perfect in any garden.

A similar plant but local with interesting rusty red flowers is *Salvia lanceolata* aptly named the Rusty Sage. An unusual feature in the garden.

Lastly, bright and beautiful is *Salvia murii* often referred to as wild sage.

It will get to 40cm and the bright blue flowers with white centres are around most of summer.

With enough sun they are low and compact but as with any plant if they get a bit untidy give them a light pruning after flowering.

That's it this week....please don't give up on your garden, it plays a big role in our well-being.