

FMR OCTOBER 21, 2019

I would guess that many proud homeowners are attempting to get their lawns back into prime condition.

After our good rains maybe it's just a matter of keeping them looking good

We all know that lawns need a lot of water and attention to look perfect.

The question is will we always have enough water?

The weather might be kind to us for a few seasons but the chances are we land up in trouble when extended dry periods come around again.

Whether you have a borehole or not, we cannot afford to water lawns unless they are very small or made up of waterwise species that can do with the absolute minimum.

What is the alternative if we don't want large areas of bare earth which in turn contribute to more evaporation, unwanted weed growth and in some cases a potential dust bowl.

Some of the most natural and practical gardens I have ever seen do not have a blade of grass, but instead are mulched throughout with coarse chips.

This creates flowing access to all parts of the garden, requires no maintenance and always looks good.

It's a natural compost factory and probably only needs to be topped up annually, compared to a lawn that needs water and weekly maintenance at a high cost.

The odd weed that pops up is easily removed and if you need to plant additional shrubs, trees or groundcover it's an easy process.

Push the mulch one side, dig the hole, plant and push the mulch back around the plant base.

Besides mulch, gravel, peach and apricot pips there is the living alternative of groundcover which comes in many forms.

Not all can manage heavy and constant foot traffic but a combination of gravel, coarse mulch and ground cover will give an interesting dimension to your Cape Mediterranean garden.

It encourages us to be in our gardens and not on top of them!

If you feel that a patch of grass is essential then use one of the very hardy varieties of Kweek or Couch grass- *Cynodon dactylon*.

This fine leaved indigenous grass requires minimal water and maintenance, ideal for water scarce areas.

It can be planted by seed or plugs, and with little water to start off it develops into a good hardy lawn.

Many of us are looking for unusual fruiting trees, besides the usual deciduous and citrus varieties that do well in our climate.

There are many, but one in particular is the much sought after Pomergranate which many believe is a difficult to grow exotic fruit.

They originate in the Middle East and India but have been grown in Mediterranean areas for many years and are becoming a popular farming crop in drier South African areas.

There are many cultivars available today which I cannot advise about but I am told that the cultivar 'Wonderful' is the preferred one and is stocked by nurseries.

Pests seem to be minimal but basic feeding is required for good fruit.

They perform best in well drained loam soil, not too sandy, and don't like wet feet!

They can be pruned around end of July, not too heavily, more of a thinning out to allow in quality light and air movement.

Plants take about 3 years to fruit which is usually in Autumn, so patience is required as with most fruit trees.

They are classified as self-pollination in that they do not require another tree for pollination but the bees do the actual work.

They generally don't like too much wind so coastal positions are not ideal.

Another alternative is the hardy waterwise edible olive.

The popular variety called Mission will require other trees for pollination.

Pruning is minimal and all they need is thinning out to allow in light, removal of water shoots and creating a nice open shape.

My favourite fruit of which there are many in Cape gardens is the Kei apple, *Dovyalis caffra* with its tasty yellow fruit.

They can be used as a large shrub, small tree, or as a hedge.

They attract a lot of insects for pollination, the fruit is delicious and we should all have one in the garden.

On a more ornamental note and a reminder don't miss out on the Christmas Berry splendour this year.

*Chironia baccifera* is a wide spread indigenous plant growing up to a height of 50cm or more with bright silver pink flowers usually appearing in mid-summer and ending with beautiful red berries around the end of December onwards.

I grows in most soils preferring a slight sandy mix and does well in both sunny and partial shade positions. If very happy they self-seed so you should always have them popping up.

We are expecting high temperatures this summer so save your plants with a good dose of mulch.....Stay cool and see you next week.