

FMR OCTOBER 12, 2019

Every year as spring and summer merge we are totally spoilt as we have this amazing preview of plants that do so well in our climate.

Many are common, some are rare, but nevertheless all can be represented in our gardens.

Sustainable, natural gardens are mostly made up of common locals and other suitable indigenous plants that are waterwise and withstand our winter rain and long dry summers.

Can we ever get tired of Confetti bushes, Pelargoniums, Arum lilies, Pincushions, the Buchu family and Agapanthus to mention a few?

The Cape Floristic Region has over 9000 species, but to that we can add many other suitable non-invasive indigenous plants which do well here in the Western Cape.

It goes without saying that the more local we go the better it is all round for all other local life forms.

I think we often go wrong when planting massed groups of the same species. It is not natural in most cases and certainly not arty!!

Believe it or not maintenance is minimized with diversity and natural beauty is maximized!!

A few weeks ago I was given the opportunity to revamp a small 50m<sup>2</sup> garden which had been totally neglected for many years and was overgrown with runaway creepers and unsuitable plants!!

It reminded me that small space gardening requires good plant knowledge, careful plant selection and a lot of discipline regarding basic landscape principles.

The challenge is that small gardens are more difficult to design and construct because there is no room for error!!

We cannot afford to purchase plants with our eyes only or choose only those plants we prefer. Its much bigger than that.

In this day and age, small gardens are by far the majority and therefore require professional expertise and input.

Most trees are too big for small gardens.

The solution is to find small trees or large shrubs that can be pruned into small tree forms.

Good examples here are

*Rhamnus prinoides*- the African Dogwood which will probably not get much higher than 5 m and is easily shaped

*Buddleja saligna*- the False Olive, also about 5m tall here in the Cape.

Its root system is not aggressive and it too can be pruned to shape.

My favourite local is *Searsia lucida* (*Rhus lucida*). They get to 4-5m max in height and width, have glossy green leaves and the flowers and fruit attract many insects and birds.

It's a tough specimen growing on the coast and inland with no problems. They can be pruned into the perfect small garden shade tree and require very little water or attention when established!! A champion plant

If its more a flowering specimen you seek then the Honey Bell Bush, *Freylinia lanceolata* is the answer.

The yellow scented flowers appear in late summer and autumn but an additional feature is its willow like appearance.

They do better with regular water in summer but good rich soil and mulch go a long way in keeping this plant happy throughout the year.

I have even seen one with platted stems as a feature but natural growth is good whether it's a single or multi stemmed plant.

I doubt it will get taller than 4-5m so a perfect small garden subject.

Another thought for small garden design is the use of small and fine leafed plants which have a visual advantage in making space bigger because they look further away.

Large heavy leafed plants look closer and make space smaller in the eye.

On the hard landscaping features avoid large heavy items like big water features, garden furniture and sculptures.

Scale down to smaller, lighter less bulky items which immediately make the surrounds seem bigger.

Most importantly, avoid large aggressive creepers like Ivy, many Bignonias

Like the Golden shower and Zimbabwe creeper and even the common Jasmine, *Jasminum polyanthum*- which is pretty and scented but can take over and become a nightmare in the years ahead.

Instead rather use our indigenous Jasmynes, the Cape Sweet - *Dipogon lignosus* with its fragrant pink flowers.

You might also try *Senecio macroglossus* sometimes referred to as the flowering Ivy but its no relation to the Ivy we know.

The buttercup yellow daisy flowers are exceptional and it can be used on fences and lattice work in the sun or semi shade.

A perfect and unusual creeper for hot dry gardens is *Aloe gracilis* which weaves it way up amongst trees and shrubs and its bright orange red flowers pop out all over the show from May month onwards into spring.

It is non aggressive, waterwise and really needs no attention at all.

So the final word for those with small garden, plan and select carefully if you want to create your little corner of paradise.

From me Sandy Munro.....Happy planting.....Good bye