

FMR November 23, 2019

It seems we are all coping with the water restrictions, no complaints, so everyone has taken up the challenge and getting creative.

A positive outcome to this is that we do start understanding our gardens better in that they need less to survive.

Mulch and compost are relatively inexpensive when you consider how much water you save plus the amount of time and energy spent, watering, weeding and the old bad practice of cultivating the soil.

Cultivating, scoffling or whatever you want to call it might be good for your psyche but it destroys soil life and assists with evaporation and encourages weeds.

A quick fix for mulching if you feel time and money are not on your side is to buy a bale of straw and spread it around. You will probably save twice the amount that water costs.

I got a pile of landscape and gardening magazines the other day and was quite disappointed to see very little mentioned about water saving ideas, plant recommendations and creative ideas about sustainable practices.

The main thrust still seems to focus on design, incorporating hard landscape features and pretty ornamental plants.

We need more ideas about suitable plants and ways of creating a truly natural entity, not just an amazing design feature where plants play a secondary role to add some green to the landscape.

Plants, soils and climate are the landscape...just look at your natural surroundings to get the big picture and plan how you can fit into it!!

The renowned landscape architect and ecological planner Ian McHarg summed it up in his book...*Design with nature*.

His philosophy was rooted less in design and more in ecological sensibility that accepted and understood the totally entwined world of man and nature.

I was privileged to attend a talk of his many years ago and I think he had it spot on.

At this point let's swing back to nature and see what amazing plants she has to offer us for our Cape Gardens.

Only plant what you can manage, don't at this stage do a major planting if you don't have the time and resources of which water is probably the key factor.

Just don't stop planting altogether...it's hard to make it up later when you have lost a few seasons.

While talking to a group about water wise plants I was surprised that many did not know the benefits of planting *Coleonema album*- the white Confetti Bush, also known as the Cape May or Klip Boegoe.

This is without doubt one of our most rewarding fynbos plants for many reasons.

First up, it is exceptionally water wise and survives under the harshest drought conditions.

It can also deal with lots of wind throughout the year but by far its greatest attribute is its capacity to flower virtually all year around only taking a short break in the hot mid-summer months.

It's the total all-rounder, growing at any altitude, happy in poor sandy soils, not inclined to get tall and leggy, has highly aromatic leaves, can be utilised as a cut flower and reasonably fast growing.

They have a few basic requirements to grow well- firstly a sunny well drained position as the don't like standing in water.

Don't 'scoffel' or dig around their roots, rather put a layer of mulch down to keep them cool and moist.

I find them much more compact and easier to maintain than the pink confetti bush – *Coleonema pulchellum*.

Besides planting them throughout the garden they make excellent container specimens and can be planted as a good neat hedge especially right on the coast.

If you lean more to the artistic side then topiary is also an option as the fine leaves allow for a sculptured neat finish.

All in all, probably the most versatile and easy to grow specimen out of all the buchu's, some of which are difficult to cultivate.

One of the most important type of plants in the garden during hot dry times and especially now while we have water restrictions are ground covers.

We need to keep the soil cool and the water in.

The right groundcover does just that without taking up much water itself.

There are many we can use for those exposed bare spots but I am going to suggest an easy fast grower that fits the bill perfectly.

It's the common grey leafed, yellow flowering *Gazania uniflora*!!

They will require a bit of control after a few months if space does not allow them to go crazy.

The bright yellow flowers are around most of the year but even without flowers the silver grey leaves are a feature.

Other waterwise groundcover includes many *Plectranthus* and *Crassula* species for both sun and semi shade.

In the meantime....go wild!!

From me Sandy Munro.....Goodbye!!