

April 25

The Garden Chat has been going for more than 20 years now and we have covered quite a lot.

The aim of these informal chats has always been about gardening for healthy environment and not just about the ornamental value.

Together our city gardens play a huge role beyond the garden fence and can either have a positive or negative impact on the broader environment.

We need to take responsibility for our actions and we can start off by not, just gardening, for our own pleasure!!

Gardens must be part of our local fauna and flora and because its a human activity, we tend to forget this and garden for our own pleasure.

We over design and concentrate on the ornamental and aesthetic value as opposed to the natural relationships and benefits that actually sustain our gardens and, in the end,.....our very own existence!

A successful garden sustains itself with very little input from us.

Times change, and with that, so must our attitude and behaviour toward our gardens!

To this end, I have been given the most amazing and appropriate book on the subject of gardening in the smallest and biggest sense.

Please have a pen and paper handy.

This is a must have book if you are dedicated to creating a healthy and sustainable environment!!

The title of the book is...**A New Garden Ethic.**

The author is Benjamin Vogt from Nebraska... but don't let that put you off as his message is aimed at all gardeners throughout the world.

His last sentence in the final chapter is

Quote...'*It is time for a garden revolution. It is time for daily wildness to be our calling. It is time for defiant compassion*'. End-quote

Well for many passionate and environmentally aware gardeners this is par for the course.

We are all trying to facilitate nature not destroy it.

You can order this book through the Botanical Society Bookshop in Kirstenbosch. Hurry!!

After all that lets get back to some unusual plants that can find a home in our gardens.

If you have a fairly sandy open position and need a striking waterwise plant then get out there and find a Tortoise Berry- *Nylandtia spinosa*.

Its new name is *Muraltia spinosa* but no harm in just referring to it as a Tortoise berry.

They start flowering roundabout now and are eventually totally covered in their purple, pink flowers right through until spring, especially up the West coast.

When you see them in flower you will want to give them a big floral hug (hugging plants is still acceptable right now) but this could be very uncomfortable as their branches end with nice sharp spines.

It's a look but don't touch kind of plant.

It must be one of the most hardy, drought and wind tolerant plants about and therefore an ideal garden subject.

The beautiful red berries are edible, rich in Vitamin C and very thirst quenching. Ask any tortoise and they will recommend it!!

It belongs to the Polygala or Milkwort family, the flowers are small and pea-like and the berry is also relished by many birds.

You don't often see them bigger than a metre all round so the perfect filler for open sunny gardens.

If you enjoy the many Buchu's then it's a good idea to get them in soon.

Most start flowering now right through to spring.

They like full sun and well drained soils but don't take kindly to scoffling around their roots and any form of disturbance.

I have seen many turn their toes up overnight after being disturbed!!

My last plant this morning is common, hardy, evergreen, fast growing, environmentally productive and not nearly used enough as a screener, hedge or small tree.

It's the glossy Wild Currant or Blink Taaibos – *Searsia lucida*

I cannot think of one reason why many exotic plants are utilized in its place when it's the perfect plant to do the job.

They get up to 4m sometimes higher depending on local soils and wind conditions

The birds love the seed which is around from summer to winter and a variety of butterflies use them as host plants.

Of course we can eat them as well or make a tasty brew!!

I classify it as an all year round activity plant!!!

Many deciduous trees will start losing their leaves soon.

This is nature's mulch so please don't rake them up and stick them in a refuse bag, They will form a good mulch feed the soil, and promote soil activity in the months to come.

