

May 16, 2020

Good morning and welcome to another beautiful day.

So quiet at times I can only hear the birds singing.

It seems quite odd for me that I have no news to pass on about gardening events, talks and shows, simply because there aren't any happening right now.

Unless of course, they are happening secretly behind closed doors or in candlelit gardens late at night. You never know with these gardening types.

The very big news right now is that the nurseries and garden centres are open.

The coffee shops we can do without, but not plants and gardening!!

Obviously normal precautions will have to be adhered to, but I do believe a nursery experience is what most need right now.

April and May are important months in the garden, not only do we have a lot of Autumn action, but it is time we prepare for spring and the forthcoming rain.

If you want those Mesem's and daisies to give you a spring flower bonanza then they must be in the ground now.

If you had African daisies last season, many will reseed and be coming up soon.

Keep in mind that soil does not have to be disturbed and turned upside down to prepare for planting.

With regular applications of compost and mulch on top of the soil, you will in time develop a healthy humus rich soil suited to most plants.

When planting, all you do is dig the hole, the good stuff is already there, but you can always add more if need be.

This is my favourite time of the year, as it is olive picking time, and makes me think of what practical trees they make in the garden.

They are very hardy, evergreen and certainly waterwise when established.

They don't get too big and are suitable for small to medium gardens when shaped and pruned correctly.

If you are seriously planting for olives you will need a few trees to ensure cross pollination as they are wind pollinated.

The Mission and Kalamata cultivars are good table olives and you will have to add a Frantoio variety, which is a good pollinator.

So, if you want more than just a small shade tree then you will have to find enough space for 3 or 4 trees to enjoy your own homemade olives.

It's a lot of fun curing your own olives and requires patience but is so rewarding in the end.

The question is ...what do olive trees require to grow well?

I assure you, not much!

They prefer well drained, slightly acid to slightly alkaline soils, and a sunny open position.

They don't need over rich soil, but good preparation goes a long way. Being Mediterranean plants, they enjoy our winter rain and temperatures that are not too cold.

They need about 15-20 litres of water a week in the summer and hopefully the winter rain does the rest.

Very little pruning is required, probably only once every 2 years, just to thin out and improve light and air circulation.

Sometimes it is just the removal of water shoots that clog up the inside.

Pruning is usually carried out after harvesting in autumn or early spring, but keep in mind they flower on the previous seasons growth, so one cant be too heavy handed with pruning!!

For some reason they often take a season off and don't fruit.... A trait followed by many Mediterranean people who need a siesta!!

The history of olive growing goes back more than 4000yrs and today some productive trees are a few hundred years old....so there is no rush!!!

There is nevertheless, a bit of a rush , to get certain plants into the ground.

Now that the nurseries are open we need to prioritize winter veg, herbs and the many ornamentals that will give us colour in August and September.

All established ornamental trees and shrubs in the nursery can also be planted now to benefit from the cooler, wet weather.

I hope you have a bird friendly garden with a birdbath, as right now it is a great time to observe bird activity.

Within a space of 1hour I have seen many either drinking, bathing or fooling around my small birdbath.

Mousebirds, Whiteeyes, Mossies, Thrushes, Bulbuls (these are the guys who usually fool around), Doves, Weavers, Bokmakierie, Fiscal Flycatchers and too many others to mention.

I do believe the lockdown has been very positive for all wildlife and our special domestic animals who have had to put up with us all day long.

Well that's it.... Goodbye from me and I look forward to chatting same time next week.