

July 4

Good morning

I was asked an interesting question this week which seem to develop as time went on.

The question...Where can I plant a Willow tree?

For many a Willow is just a Willow or a maybe a Weeping Willow!!

This is not so, as there are about 400 species of willows found throughout the world mainly in the northern hemisphere but I am pleased to say that we have a specie in South Africa with a few subspecies.

I found out that the willow tree in question was what we commonly call the weeping willow, found in some gardens, around dams and often planted next to rivers.

They are indigenous to N China and as we all know can become very big trees. Due to their ease of propagation, huge aggressive root system and thirsty appetite they are a declared Category 2 Alien invasive and therefore cannot be traded or planted.

It is very much part of Chinese culture and is depicted in much of their art and tradition.

The South African species of willow- *Salix mucronata* can be purchased in nurseries and if you need to see it first, then Kirstenbosch has a very good specimen.

Kirstenbosch is however closed during the lockdown but the Garden Centre is open with business as usual.

We are all hoping that the gardens open soon.

Many know *Salix mucronata* as the Safsaf Willow or Cape Willow and it is found throughout Sothern Africa.

It has been used extensively over the years to make baskets, musical instruments, wood carvings and interestingly Aspirin was originally extracted from the leaves.

Long before that all happened, Hippocrates wrote in around 460 BC that willow leaves relieved pain... it only became a hit early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century!

They are not large growing trees usually about 6m even in the wild along our rivers but can form quite dense stands under ideal conditions.

I think, given the right conditions this small to medium tree is an ideal garden subject.

It needs regular water or a moist position although it can tolerate very dry conditions for limited periods.

The roots are not invasive like the exotic Weeping Willow so it can be placed amongst other trees and shrubs.

Keep in mind, it is deciduous, the great advantage of this, is that it allows the winter sunlight to penetrate the plants growing beneath it.

Well, seeing it is the rainy season why don't we talk about other special plants that grow in moist soils and make good garden subjects!!

Some gardens only develop wet areas in winter when there is a fair amount of rain.

They tend to dry out in summer and therefore will need a bit of extra attention to keep the more wetland species alive.

Other gardens are fortunate to have all year round wetlands or very moist soil conditions.

There are many plants which grow happily in these garden conditions, as they do in the wild.

I mention *Psoralea pinnata* – the Blue Fountain bush, a lot, because it is a hardy local that withstands both wet and relatively dry conditions in summer. Blue flowers are quite scarce in gardens, so the Fountain bush fills the gap and has an added bonus of scented flowers.

These adaptable plants flower in early summer and get to a height of around 4m, making it perfect for small gardens.

It can be treated as a big shrub or small tree.

The other very special plant for wet areas, sometimes difficult to find is the Water Erica- *Erica caffra*.... A very underpromoted plant!!

Its hard to believe that an *Erica* virtually grows in water!!

It can be treated as a small tree or large shrub getting up to 4m in height and quite bushy.

The highly scented white flowers appear from spring onwards and what a delight to encounter when walking on the mountain.

They are pollinated by bees and other little insects but I have also been told that certain moths play a role. That's 3<sup>rd</sup> hand info so I won't swear to it!!

The only specimens I have seen for sale are at the Kirstenbosch Garden Cnt.

Many gardeners complain of wet areas but there are a host of plants that are looking for a wet spot to put their roots down.

I really love this time of the year as we can turn off the irrigation system knowing that our underground water reserves are filling up.

If we have reasonable rainfall every ten days or so, you won't have to turn a tap on for a few months.

There is a lot in flower presently so when the sun is out head for the mountain and feast on the many proteas and other species in full bloom.

I look fwd to chatting next week . Goodbye

