

November 21, 2020

One plant really stuck out for me this week, not only because of its stunning flowers but its character and unusual structure.

It was the Purple Broom, *Polygala virgata*. Do you know it?

It is very widespread, not from the SW Cape but very happy to set up home here as you see them growing easily in many gardens.

For some reason they are not as common as many other *Polygala* species!

It is waterwise and a fast grower, getting to around 2m in height, not bushy but straight up, which to me is a great characteristic, especially in smaller gardens as there is always a space for them and they don't get in anyone's way!

They develop a straight stem with a mass of flowers on the terminal ends, reminding one of a flowering bamboo!

They handle any type of soil and self-seed easily without too much encouragement when settled into their environment.

They are happy in full sun or semi shade and not too fussed about soil type

The spectacular eye-catching magenta flowers are present from early summer and attract a wide range of insects, of which the most notable is our very own, Carpenter Bee.

It is often called a Bumble Bee but this name usually refers to the European Bumble Bee.

The Carpenter bee is smaller although it has the same colour combination of black and yellow.

It is an important pollinator in our gardens and should be encouraged to visit.

You might ask why is it called the Carpenter Bee?

Well, it likes wood, especially dead wood where it spends a lot of time drilling holes to make a home. Keep a few old dry logs around and get the buzz!!

The *Polygala* family are all what I term the bread and butter specimens in our gardens, full of character and busy as a shopping mall!

It's a good idea to put the Purple Broom on the shopping list whilst they are still in flower!!

Without doubt a must have, which I recommend for all gardens.

Lastly, if you like aromatic leaves, especially the strong smell of fresh lemon, then consider some of the many waterwise *Pelargoniums*.

A favourite of many is *Pelargonium citronellum*- The Lemon Scented *Pelargonium*!!

It grows well in sun or a bit of shade and has attractive pink and purple flowers through the summer, but the prize is without doubt the strong, clean aroma of a concentrated lemon.

It can grow to over a metre in height and width, thrives with minimal water and prefers fairly well drained soils.

In simple language its an easy grower!!

What I love most about all the Pelargoniums is that they grow easily from cuttings and only take a few weeks to root.

I hope you have noticed the Rose scented Pelargonium, *P capitatum* in flower at the moment.

All Pelargoniums are perfect for coastal gardens.

Over the past few months we have seen many Helichrysums in flower all over the local veld, into the Karoo and along the coast.

This family of plants are most rewarding as they flower for long periods and the majority give all year round effect with their silvery leaves.

A nice dense groundcover variety is *Helichrysum argyrophyllum*. The Golden Guinea Everlasting which comes from the Eastern Cape.

I have used it extensively both up north and here in the western Cape to great effect.

It doesn't get much higher than 10cm but forms a beautiful dense mat in sunny spots but do well with a bit of shade as well..

Although most are waterwise I would advise watering them regularly, especially during the hot dry months in summer.

They grow in most soil types but it is always a good idea to prepare soil with compost before planting.

They look good for a number of years but if they get a bit scraggly then just cut back and feed lightly with an organic fertilizer like a 3;1;5 or similar.

They are useful on slopes, in rockeries and make excellent hanging basket specimens.

What more can we ask for... a carpet of silver that is easy to grow.

Containers in general, especially those smaller than 20cm, are going to dry out quickly so any form of mulch is essential now in summer!

Besides organic material you can use stone drainage chips or cut up cardboard if you prefer to recycle material.

It's too late when your prize plants dry out and starts dying back...do it now and give yourself peace of mind.

Its important not to till the soil or dig it over as this encourages weeds, dries out the soil, and not seen by the naked eye, it destroys soil bacteria and fungi
Its better not to disturb the soil, rather leave it alone or throw down a layer of mulch.

Right now, it's time to enjoy breakfast in the garden.

Good bye and see you next week .