

February 6, 21

I am sure there are many new homeowners out there who have probably just moved in and need a bit of direction when it comes to the garden.

My first thoughts on this is to keep it as simple and natural as possible.

Make more garden less lawn, keep hard surfaces like brick paved pathways to a minimum, rather create a mulched pathway which is environmentally better as it allows water penetration, improves soil quality plus it aesthetically more pleasing and softer under foot.

Not to mention it is easier to do and no strain on the budget!!

Bulky formal water features can give way to shallow ponds with waterside plants...much more attractive to the local wildlife and less water required!

Initially, plant long term plants opposed to short lived annuals.

No harm in a splash of seasonal colour, just keep it minimal.

Don't only think of plants as design objects...consider their contribution to the natural cycle through your garden habitat. Think big!

We have many amazing local plants to choose from...learn more about them.

Stick with an environmental ethic that promotes survival of all living things in and beyond the garden fence!!

We get emotional and concerned about all our threatened big game but sometimes we forget that insects, birds, bacteria and many other organisms keep our plants and soil alive, ensure diversity and put food on the table.

Conservation starts at home and the impact of what we do at home is felt in the wild.

Use suitable local trees to provide shade where needed, the size of tree should be relative to the size of your garden.

Keep in mind they provide a safe habitat for birds and other animals.

It is essential to make your own compost and continually mulch the garden with any and all organic material.

A practical garden layout is sensible...don't spent time and energy on complicated designs that require a lot of maintenance.

The more natural the garden, the less work and more time available to be part of it and enjoy it....dont make it a chore!!

Consider the use of a grey water recycling systems and any other method of saving and re-using water.

Read up on plants regarding their size and requirements, before going off to the nursery and buying with your eyes

Speak to the nursery horticulturist about your site aspect, drainage and existing plants.

Its always handy to draw a site plan of your property with buildings showing the north aspect, slope and possible difficult positions for plants.

Its great fun and the long term benefits are many.

Join your local garden club or Botanical Society which has many perks and of course free entry into K'bosch and other gardens.

Usually our highest temperatures occur around January, February and that is when we really appreciate a bit of cool shade.

If you are one of the unlucky ones who never has enough shade then the answer is to plant a tree.....sooner than later!!!

The choice is endless but careful consideration goes a long way.

A tree we could use a lot more in our gardens is the White Ironwood- *Vepris lanceolata*.

Although not from the Western Cape (close enough though!), it certainly grows very well here and requires no special treatment besides a reasonably sheltered spot.

In their natural environment they can grow up to 10m or more but most of the specimens I see in Cape gardens are medium to small .

They have a nice spreading shape and give filtered shade but keep in mind that they are evergreen and winter shade does pose a challenge.

Interestingly they belong to the Citrus family so have an aromatic leaf, little white flowers and a berry that pulls in those birds.

All in all a worthy tree in the garden!!!

If you have a fair amount of semi shade in the garden, that is under trees , here are some easy specimens which cope with light or dappled shade.

*Pelargonium tomentosum* ..the Peppermint *Pelargonium* with soft aromatic leaves.

There is *Asparagus densiflorus*, two good forms are 'Mazeppa and Cwebe' which are both more bushy forms.

*Cineraria saxifrage* with its fine foliage and little yellow flowers

The wonderful succulent *Crassula multicaeva* and other *Crassula* species are always recommended.

The elegant *Brilliantasia* with its electric blue flowers, adds that tropical look to lush shady spots

There are of course the *Lobelias*, both groundcover and shrubby which make up an essential element in the shade.

The bulbs are many- Evergreen types like *Clivea*, *Agapanthus* plus many deciduous varieties like *Scadoxus*, *Veltheimia* and *Haemanthus* make for a good show.

Keep in mind that most shade plants like fairly rich well drained soil so before planting prepare well with compost and as always cover with mulch after planting. Until next week, it goodbye and good gardening!!