

February 20

We all know that all plants make a difference to us and the landscape in which they live.

This morning I would like to mention a few plants that have had an impact on me of late.

Some might be unusual or even unknown to gardeners but no matter, I feel they make a difference to both wild, informal and more structured gardens. Plants generally have no preference as to whom they associate with, so, they fit in anywhere

A good example of this is *Clematis brachiata*, a dainty deciduous creeper found throughout the country and a member of the *Ranunculus* family

Of course, we all know of the large flowering exotic cultivars which originated in China and Japan and are sought after by collectors and keen gardeners alike. *Clematis brachiata*, also known as Travellers Joy is a dainty, straggly little creeper climbing up anything in its path.

The plant is covered with white flowers from mid-summer to Autumn and the decorative fluffy seed heads hang on tight right through the winter.

Another little bonus is that the flowers are sweetly scented, adding even more charm to the garden.

It is an ideal plant for the wild garden with no need to worry about its future as with the right conditions it will self-sow and pop up again in spring.

Another easy to grow little gem, so often overlooked as many think it difficult to grow, are the *Streptocarpus*.

Be they in a pot or under a tree in the dappled shade, the Cape Primrose, commonly called by many, are probably one of the most rewarding and long flowering perennials you can have in your garden.

You will, have at some stage encountered its close relatives the African violet and *Gloxinia*, both well known house plants.

If you haven't heard of them, then ask Granny!

Streptocarpus are mainly summer rainfall plants, but don't let that hinder you as they are easy to grow and do well in our Cape gardens.

If you prefer them to be in pots then just make sure they get regular water in the hot summer months and are in the shade, as the leaves tend to burn in the sun!

They like a rich compost loam and good drainage so make sure your pots are well drained.

Species are many, hybrids are plentiful with flower colours ranging from white to lilac, blue, pink and striped.

They might be small in size but they make a big difference in any garden.

I am now going to go beyond our boundaries and suggest an unusual exotic for special occasions.

It is slightly more formal in appearance and fills a gap with its strappy grass like appearance we so often need when adding a different form to the garden....Why not?

My suggestion for the vacant gap is Liriope – Evergreen Giant which is the same family as the well-used Mondo Grass we often find between pavers or in courtyard gardens.

Evergreen Giant forms large controllable clumps getting up to a height of 50cm, sometimes more, depending on the amount of shade.

They nevertheless do well in both full sun and semi shade positions.

Their showy spikes of violet purple flowers appear in late summer and although not rising above the leaves they certainly are eye catching.

They are hardy all round and require average water to keep them looking good.

I find them very practical in small groups, as opposed to mass planting which does very little for both diversity and interest.

They are perfect pot specimens on their own, always there and looking good!

Another 'bread and butter' plant you will find in flower during autumn is Helichrysum cymosum- the Gold Carpet with its silver leaves and bright yellow flowers.

Many Helichrysums are in flower currently, with a big range to choose from, but I have chosen the Gold Carpet to talk about.

It is found on the Peninsula all the way up the East Coast, so is suited to our local conditions.

It is a spreading groundcover usually not more than 50cm tall and wide and can be cut back lightly after flowering if necessary.

It tolerates coastal and inland conditions and flowers all through summer to early winter.

Personally, I find most Helichrysums flower just about all year round, so you can decide.

They do well in both full sun and semi shade, don't like to be overwatered and prefer a layer of mulch to keep the roots cool.

The cool wet season will be upon us soon and now is the time to start that wild garden we have been talking about.

Its time to think natural and all the amazing wonders your garden can bring.

Don't follow fashionable trends or feel you are the odd one out...just get out there and do it.

Until next week, from me Sandy Munro, its Goodbye