

# KIRSTENBOSCH GARDEN CENTRE NEWS

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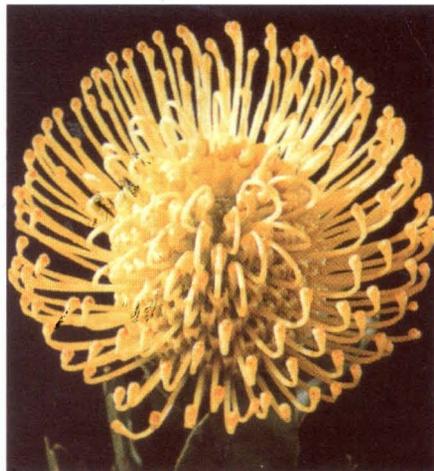
## FYNBOS ON THE COAST

Everybody in the south-western Cape will agree that this past summer was an exceptionally brutal one - especially on plants. Once again the Southern Peninsula was faced with water restrictions, which were most unwelcome considering the gale force winds and the baking hot days. Exotic plants like roses, hydrangeas and azaleas had the hardest time of it all, but many indigenous plants also took strain. The most important lesson to be learned is that even though a plant is indigenous, it still has to be watered through summer, especially if it is young and has not yet established itself. The popular misconception that indigenous plants are planted and then just left to look after themselves is the main reason why so many newly planted fynbos gardens suddenly die.

To make matters worse, many Cape gardens are planted in beach sand. A common complaint from gardeners in these areas is the lack of variety of plants that can be grown in such extreme conditions. Most gardens have to settle for a few vygies, a taabos and a couple of daisy bushes. However, two volunteers from the Kirstenbosch Garden Centre have been growing fynbos plants in their gardens in Kommetjie and Sand-vlei: gardens that normally would be considered unsuitable for fynbos plants because of the gale force winds and sandy soils they have to endure.

Amongst the twenty five species from the Proteaceae that flourish in their gardens are *Protea longifolia*, *P. burchellii*, *P. repens* (sugarbush), the small *P. scolymocephala*, *P. neriifolia*, *P. eximia*, *P. obtusifolia* (which grows naturally in alkaline soil), *P. lepidocarpodendron* and *P. susannae*. A number of protea hybrids have been planted as well. Protea hybrids are often over-looked by gardeners as they are not as well known as the more common pure proteas. In fact, these plants were hybridized to increase the number of flowers and the length of the flowering period. Hybridizing also enables certain proteas that are very specific to certain conditions, to be grown in other conditions. An example of this is *Protea* 'Susara', a hybrid of *Protea magnifica*, which ordinarily would not grow along the

coast, and *P. susannae*, which comes from the southern Overberg and grows in alkaline sand. Other successful hybrids are *Protea* 'Atlantic Queen', *P.* 'Pink Ice', *P.* 'Frosted Fire', *P.* 'Sylvia' and *P.* 'Sneyd'.



Proteaceae *Mimetes hottentoticus* (top) and *Leucospermum* 'High Gold' (above) do well in Cape coastal gardens.

Pincushions that are growing really well are *Leucospermum tottum*, *L. cordifolium*, *L. patersonii*, *L.* 'Veldfire', *L.* 'Scarlet Ribbon', *L.* 'Yellowbird', *L.* 'Ballerina', *L.* 'Tango' and *L.* 'High Gold'. Other Proteaceae that thrive are *Aulax cancellata*, *Mimetes chrysanthus*, *Serruria aemula* and *Leucadendron* 'Safari Sunset'.

Most impressive are the numbers of different ericas that have been grown successfully in these gardens. Ericas come in many different sizes, colours and flowering seasons. The red ones include *E. versicolor*, *E. cerinthoides* (rooihartjies) that flowers in January, *E. mammosa*, *E. plukenetii* and

*E. chloroloma*, which grows naturally in alkaline soil. *E. baccans* is a beautiful magenta-pink colour. Other pink varieties include the popular *E. bauera*, *E. verticillata*, which is endemic to the Cape Peninsula but now is extinct in the wild, the small *E. haematocodon*, *E. hirtiflora* and the Prince of Wales heath, *E. perspicua*. *E. peziza* and *E. walkeria* are a beautiful white, *E. patersonia* is yellow and *E. sparrmannii* a greenish yellow.

One of the toughest and most beautiful ericas is *E. glandulosa* which is orange and flowers from March to September. The bonus about ericas is that they attract birds and

tend to flower when other plants don't, for instance in the middle of summer. One of the most rewarding fynbos plant groups are from the Rutaceae family, which is more commonly known as 'buchu'. Unfortunately, the medicinal buchu, *Agathosma betulina*, will not grow along the coast as it grows naturally high up in the dry mountains of the Cederberg and the Piketberg. However, there are quite a few buchus that do grow well including *Agathosma ovata*, *A. ciliata*, *A. collina* and the garlic

scented *A. apiculata*. Other buchus that grow naturally in alkaline limestone along the south coast are *Acmadenia heterophylla* and *A. mundiana*. The confetti bush, *Coleonema pulchellum*, also thrives in sand. Most of these buchus flower in winter and spring. If the wind is very strong, then it is advisable to plant a windbreak to protect young plants, especially those that are newly planted, from the sun and wind. There are a number of really tough shrubs that grow locally along the Peninsula coast. Many of these attract birds and, because of the dense habit of the shrubs, are also used by birds for nesting. The best shrubs are the candlewood (*Pterocelastrus tricuspidatus*), *Rhus crenata*, *R. lucida*, bastard saffron (*Cassine peragua* and *C. maritima*) and the popular camphor bush (*Tarcho-nanthus camphoratus*). You should time your planting too as this also determines whether they are going to survive or not. Autumn is definitely the best season as it is cool and the winter rains allow the plants to settle before the growing season begins in spring.

Certain of the ericas and proteas may need a slightly acidic soil. In this case it is a must to mix the garden soil with Kirstenbosch Fynbos Mix, which is sold only at the Garden Centre. ♡

### Acknowledgements

Special thanks to J. Sykes and P. White.