

# HANGING GARDENS AT KIRSTENBOSCH

by Liesl van der Walt, Kirstenbosch

At the Kirstenbosch Visitor's Centre the courtyard is designed to be stark - a cleansing experience before you enter the lushness of the garden. Huge hanging-baskets high on the pergola, apart from a few pots and planting squares cut into the paving, are the only areas that allow for plants. To our surprise these plants, neatly contained, went wild. Hardly surprising as Kirstenbosch is known for its wild plants, displayed and grown in their natural way.

The first planting of the baskets was a real gamble. We used different plants to give a year round display, but also to keep our options open: something had to grow. Sweet jasmine for the scent, Natal ivy, Canary creeper and black-eyed Susan for their cheerful yellow, ivy geranium for toughness and Port St John creeper to climb over the pergola. The large baskets are semi-circular and made of woven galvanised metal strips. To retain the soil the baskets are lined with shade cloth and bidum and then filled with soil. We use a mix of well-decomposed compost, bark and loam with bone meal and a slow-release fertilizer. The watering of the baskets is critical as one dead basket would ruin the whole display. The baskets dry out very fast in summer and have to be checked and watered daily.



A magnificent hanging basket of Natal ivy (*Senecio macroglossus*) and the grey vaaltee (*Plecostachys serpyllifolia*). Another photograph of the hanging baskets in the Visitor's Centre appears on page 36.

In the twelve baskets different shrubs, climbers and ground-covers were mixed, some more successfully than others. Four baskets were planted with *Plumbago auriculata*, *Plecostachys serpyllifolia* (vaaltee) and *Senecio macroglossus* (Natal ivy). Another four with *Podranea ricasoliana* (Port St. Johns creeper), *Pelargonium peltatum* (ivy geranium) and *Plecostachys serpyllifolia* (vaaltee). The last four were planted with *Rhoicissus digitata* (baboon grape), *Thunbergia alata* (black-eyed Susan) and *Jasminum multipartitum* (wild jasmine). The *Plecostachys serpyllifolia* or

vaaltee (which means 'grey tea' in Afrikaans) is a fast growing ground-cover from the Cederberg. The small silver grey leaves contrast beautifully with the green, yellow and mauve of the other plants. It has small creamy flowers that remind one of the papery everlasting flowers.

The first to flower in the baskets is *Pelargonium peltatum* (ivy geranium). From spring to summer it covers the baskets with white and pink blooms for months. During the summer, *Plumbago auriculata* makes a splash in blue and white, and the *Podranea ricasoliana* (Port St Johns creeper) sends out long arms waving

bright pink trumpet flowers. This vigorous climber would however be better planted down in the ground from where it can climb up the pergola.

The real surprise was *Senecio macroglossus* (Natal ivy), which just keeps on growing, covering the baskets and hanging 2 m down, almost touching the ground. It is very attractive with glossy ivy shaped leaves and lemon yellow daisies throughout summer and autumn. Flowering with it is the well known *Thunbergia alata* (black-eyed Susan), also a climber which hangs down with soft yellow flowers. Together they give a show all year round. ♡