South African Jasmines for the garden

Indigenous jasmines recommended above exotic species for local gardens, and how to achieve best results.

by Rod Saunders, Kirstenbosch National Botanic Gardens

In South Africa, Jasminum is neglected horticulturally and the 10 indigenous species are not widely cultivated. Occasionally native species are grown in gardens and are sometimes sold at nurseries. In my mind, these rival most of the exotic species for showiness and ease of cultivation. These two native species are Jasminum angulare and Jasminum multipartitium.

World-wide, the genus Jasminum has some 200 species of trailing, climbing or erect shrubs, occurring mainly in Asia and Europe. Flower colour is generally white, sometimes yellow and rarely reddish. The blooms are usually scented and at least one species, Jasminum officinale, is a source of perfume. The plants are easy to cultivate (propagation is mainly by cuttings) and they succeed in a variety of soil types. The genus is important for its horticultural value, and provides us with some well-known climbers.

Jasminum angulare: In nature, this plant is found amongst boulders on hillsides, along rivers, in coastal bush and scrub forest. Its habitat extends from the eastern Cape, through the Transkei and Natal, to the Transvaal border. It is best described as a straggling shrub or climber, and is equally at home covering a bank or used as a ground cover. If encouraged, it can be made to climb a trellis or fence.

The white, sweetly scented flowers (1.5–2 cm across) are borne in terminal cymes and appear erratically throughout summer, although a flush of flowers is produced in late spring or early summer. These are extremely showy, particularly against the evergreen trifoliolate leaves.

Established plantings can withstand a fair amount of drought. For example, plants of Jasminum angulare at "The Wilds" in Johannesburg grew and flowered well during the 1978-1986 drought, with minimal water. No evidence of frost damage was observed, therefore plants should succeed in colder gardens.

Plants can be propagated easily from semi-hardwood cuttings made in spring or summer when plants are actively growing. Cuttings must be placed under mist. Rooting is improved if the cuttings are treated with Seradix 2 or similar rooting hormone. For anyone wanting one or two extra plants, they grow well from runners.

Jasminum multipartitium: This species has a wide distribution in South Africa, occurring in the Cape near Uitenhage, King

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William’s Town and Albany, and throughout the drier parts of Natal, Swaziland and the eastern Transvaal. It may be found growing on rocky slopes, in woodland and in scrub.

This is a real aristocrat amongst plants, growing up to 3 m tall. If encouraged, it will climb, although not very strongly, and is best used as a shrub of up to 1.5 m. The characteristic single large, white flower (4 cm across) which appears in spring and early summer is delicately perfumed during the day, but becomes markedly stronger scented with nightfall. As with J. angulare, the flower set against the contrasting dark green foliage makes a fine show in the garden.

Although it will tolerate full sun, it prefers a partially shaded position — a well-drained, shaded corner of the garden is ideal. It is also able to withstand some frost, although in colder gardens it will need a protected corner. During long, dry spells in summer, the plants will require some watering.

This species of Jasminum is an extremely successful container plant, and is attractive even without flowers. It succeeds in a variety of soils and shows no particular preference for soil types, although it grows best in a soil which has plenty of well-rotted organic matter added.

Other South African species
At present, three other species of Jasminum are cultivated at Kirstenbosch. They are Jasminum breviflorum, J. glaucum and J. tortuosum. J. glaucum appears to have good horticultural potential and, as it comes from the Van Rynsdorp-Clanwilliam area, will be of particular interest to south-western Cape gardeners. In time we hope to be able to introduce all 10 species of South African jasmines to the gardening public.

Bibliography

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The Johannesburg Botanical Gardens

A unique Shakespeare Garden, the best lithops collection in the world, a gigantic collection of succulents, the only Alpine glass house in the southern hemisphere, a rose garden and a herb garden, all neatly arranged on 91 hectares of vivid green lawns — that is the Johannesburg Botanical Gardens.

"It is my ambition that residents of Johannesburg should adopt the Johannesburg Botanical Gardens as Capetonians have adopted Kirstenbosch. People from Johannesburg should be proud of their Botanical Gardens," says Mr Patric Chambers, information officer of the Botanic Gardens.

The main interest is to create a garden containing as many plants as possible which grow on the Witwatersrand. As an international botanic garden, it exchanges seed with 114 botanic gardens globally, with the result that it receives 3,000 seed packets annually.

Apart from the conservation of plants for posterity, the Johannesburg Botanical Gardens offers various services to residents. These include an information service where people can have plants identified. Assistance in solving problems with landscaping and gardening is also provided. A visit to a problem garden can be arranged. A guided tour through the Botanical Gardens is held once a month. It takes place on the first Tuesday of the month at 09:00, winter and summer. School groups are also taken through the Gardens and everything is done to ensure that each tour fits in with the syllabus of the specific standard.

The Shakespeare Garden, under construction at the moment, will be unique in every respect. All the plants that Shakespeare mentioned in his plays will grow here.

Another garden planned for the future is a prehistoric garden. There is also a yellowwood forest, a collection of plants from Europe, as well as a nursery.

To start a botanical garden is a slow process requiring lots of patience. The Johannesburg Botanical Gardens is, at the age of sixteen, very young. At its official opening in 1973 there was nothing more than a rose garden. Today it is a real showpiece — indeed something to be proud of.

The Johannesburg Botanical Gardens opens daily half an hour before sunrise and closes half an hour after sunset. Admission is free. For further information phone (011) 782-0517.

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- free entry to all National Botanic Gardens
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