My Karoo koppie

Illustrations and text by Yvonne Quenet, Worcester

As the seasons come and go, so the plant displays and colours change from the different shades of green in winter to the silver grey and deep russets of summer.

One of my favourites is the ever-changing concertina bush or sosatiesbos *Crassula rupestris* with its thick, fleshy maroon, red and orange edged leaves threaded in rows along the stems. The flowers are crowded in clusters and change colour from light pink to a deep, dark russet in the heart of summer. *Crassula atropurpurea* and *Crassula subaphylla* are lovely dwarf shrubs with delicate clusters of flowers. Plakkies *Cotyledon orbiculata* are plentiful; their leaves have a waxy layer to reduce water loss, and the flowers are suspended like tubular bells on long stalks. The euphorbias remain green throughout the year, giving a softness to the hillside. Geelmelkbos *Euphorbia mauritanica* has yellow green stems with the most unusual flowers appearing in May. In contrast, soetmelkbos *Euphorbia burmannii* has a darker green stem and despite its milky latex is well grazed by our nine gemsbok.

The plants grow mainly in colonies, closely interspersed, protecting one another from drought and heat. An interesting shrub is *Tylecodon paniculatus*, commonly known as botterboom. This miniature tree stands up to 2 m high with a peeling, papery, thick succulent trunk. The leaves are fleshy, smooth and bright green, changing as summer approaches when water is conserved by shedding leaves before producing tubular flowers that open in late spring and early summer. The flowers are dull and red-streaked with re-curved lobes, similar to the plakkie.

The drought resistant ‘anker Karoo’ *Pentzia incana* is a low lying, grey green shrub with tiny yellow, button-like flower heads. Long wandering roots send out branches that bend over and take root where they touch the soil. This is the well-known Karoo bush that gives Karoo lamb that subtle herb flavour.

Our koppie has four species of the extremely hardy, drought resistant *Pteronia*, a low growing groundcover that provides a protective habitat for other plants. *Pteronia paniculata* (gombossie) is a woody shrub with resinous, tightly rolled, olive green leaves. *Pteronia fasciculata* (parafienbos) is a more rigid shrub covered with narrow, sticky bright green leaves that contrast with the small grey leaves of *Pteronia incana* that give this plant its common Afrikaans name of asbossie (little ashen bush).

Succulent

Leaf succulents such as *Crassula*, *Aloe microstigma* and *Cotyledon* are dotted around. (*Crassus* is a Latin word meaning thick, referring to the fleshy leaves that store water.)

Tough and drought resistant

The plants grow mainly in colonies, closely interspersed, protecting one another from drought and heat. An interesting shrub is *Tylecodon paniculatus*, commonly known as botterboom. This miniature tree stands up to 2 m high with a peeling, papery, thick succulent trunk. The leaves are fleshy, smooth and bright green, changing as summer approaches when water is conserved by shedding leaves before producing tubular flowers that open in late spring and early summer. The flowers are dull and red-streaked with re-curved lobes, similar to the plakkie.

The drought resistant ‘anker Karoo’ *Pentzia incana* is a low lying, grey green shrub with tiny yellow, button-like flower heads. Long wandering roots send out branches that bend over and take root where they touch the soil. This is the well-known Karoo bush that gives Karoo lamb that subtle herb flavour.

Our koppie has four species of the extremely hardy, drought resistant *Pteronia*, a low growing groundcover that provides a protective habitat for other plants. *Pteronia paniculata* (gombossie) is a woody shrub with resinous, tightly rolled, olive green leaves. *Pteronia fasciculata* (parafienbos) is a more rigid shrub covered with narrow, sticky bright green leaves that contrast with the small grey leaves of *Pteronia incana* that give this plant its common Afrikaans name of asbossie (little ashen bush).

Scented

On the lower slopes, many of the

---

Scented

On the lower slopes, many of the
Crassula atropurpurea

a small tree that grows up to 12 m. Its round yellow ball flowers, sickle shaped seed pods and slender white spines make it a very attractive Karoo tree indeed.

**Fynbos in the Karoo**

On the lower slopes of Draaiwlei koppies, where the karroid scrub meets the fynbos, a different plant community occurs. Large stands of plants belonging to the Restionaceae (sometimes known as Cape reeds) dominate the veld. When the sun falls on the 2 m tall stems of the sonkwasriet *Willdenowia incurvata* the dark green colour of the stems contrast spectacularly with the bronze colour of the bracts. The male and female plants of the ‘restio’ species are strikingly different making identification very complicated.

As spring approaches, many dead looking shrubs are transformed. The geelstertjiebos *Lebeckia cytisoides* becomes a soft-stemmed shrub with silvery grey leaves and, in August, yellow honey scented flowers. *Wiborgia obcordata*, and *W. macronata* produce yellow flowers in small sprays typical of the Fabaceae or pea family. Growing between the *Euclea* and *Rhus* trees, the wolwedoring *Lycium oxyccarpum*, produces leaves after the first rains. Birds are attracted to the tubular mauve flowers and shiny red fruits. There is a superstition that when the leaves fall off this tall and hardy shrub, drought is around the corner.

Another fynbos species that grows in loose sandy soil here, is the sandveld pincushion *Leucospermum rodolentum*. It is an erect shrub with silvery grey-green leaves that are covered in hairs, and the flowers are a deep yellow and occur in clusters.

In May, the veld comes alive with many different *Oxalis* species and then, in August the brilliantly coloured vygies take over. The Worcester vygie *Drosanthemum speciosum* has leaves that consist of large water-filled cells causing it to glisten in the sun, and flowers that are orange or red. *Ruschia caroli* with its splendid purple flowers, is plentiful. The daisy family is represented here by *Helichrysum hebelepsis*, *H. rutilans* and *H. moeserianum*, all with grey felted leaves and bright yellow flowers.

And last but not least is the renosterbos *Elytropappus* *rhinocerotis*, the dull olive green bush that dominates the veld. It has no grazing value, no pretty flowers and is highly inflammable. It is however, a pioneer plant that provides a habitat for the numerous geophytes.

*See note about the name change of this genus from *Elytropappus* to *Diceranthemus* on page 165.*