

MIMETES CHRYSANTHUS MAKES A SPECTACULAR APPEARANCE

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In April 1988 I visited the Gamka Mountain nature Reserve with Dr John Rourke. There was much excitement about the discovery by ranger Willie Julies of a new species of *Mimetes* (which John Rourke later described as *Mimetes chrysanthus*). The conservation officer in charge, Rory Allardice, arranged our visit and I was able to make a collection of cuttings for propagation purposes. The few scattered plants we visited were in full bloom at the time, which was fortunate as, much like *Leucospermum reflexum* var. *luteum*, the only way of finding these plants in the field is when they are in flower.

The first *Mimetes chrysanthus* plants at Kirstenbosch were cultivated by Mrs Margaret Thomas from cuttings collected in April 1988. Although *Mimetes chrysanthus*, unlike its relatives in the same genus, produces copious amounts of seed, they are not easily germinated. We found cuttings to be the most reliable method of propagation as they root relatively easily. Grafting was also tried but with little success.

Mimetes chrysanthus is best planted in a warm, sunny position. It grows well in a clay rich soil with sharp drainage and benefits from having its roots kept cool by mulching.

In well drained soil *M. chrysanthus* can tolerate high levels of rainfall.

It has a long and spectacular flowering period from February until the beginning of June. The upright flowering spikes are easily 20 cm long and the florets a rich buttercup yellow. Immediately after flowering, if collection of seed is not the priority, pruning is advisable. Prune by cutting back the flowering branches to within 15 cm above the lowest leaf line. This stimulates sprouting from the axillary buds in the leaf axils. The previous years growth will thicken and be able to support the new growth which produces the flower for the following summer. Branches that hang on the ground should be cut off flush with the main trunk. A pruning wound larger than 1 cm can be sealed with a sealant such as ABE tree sealer.

If the bush should become too dense for ones liking, judicious thinning out of a few branches is recommended. Again cut flush with the main trunk and seal. Lack of pruning results in weak growth which tends to hang downwards and spoil the flowers, break off, or develop a snake-

like growth habit.

M. chrysanthus has responded well to cultivation at Kirstenbosch - in fact far more positively than any of the other species in the genus. A mature plant pruned regularly will form a dense shrub 1 m wide and 2 m tall with flowering spikes covering eighty percent of the shrub. Coming from dry mountain fynbos, yet doing well in a high rainfall area, indicates

that *M. chrysanthus* is quite adaptable and will very likely grow in most areas of South Africa.

This species has been free of disease and can withstand relatively dry summers. Responding so positively to cultivation, in 7 years we have been able to propagate *M. chrysanthus* up to sufficient numbers to be able to make it available for sale, and a limited number of plants will be in the Kirstenbosch Garden Shop in March 1996. ♀

The upright flowering spikes of *Mimetes chrysanthus* are easily 20 cm long.

Photo: NBI.

