

# Simply Indigenous - ARTICLES

## 9. That Blooming Bulb Bug Summer-flowering Indigenous Bulbs

The indigenous 'blooming bulb bug' is contagious and this sentiment is shared by passionate plant collectors from the Pacific Rim to Scandinavia. South Africa boasts approximately 2000 bulb species. At last an ever-increasing variety of both summer and winter flowering species and hybrids are being made available countrywide. From late August we keep our winter dormant bulbs under 'frequent surveillance' and with sheer excitement the first sprouting heralds the arrival of Spring. We all love beautiful flowers, but the added bonus of the indigenous bulbs selected, is that many also have beautiful and interesting foliage, from fan-shape to recurved, wavy margins to large prostrate and overlapping leaves.

Incorporating seasonal indigenous bulbs into private gardens and landscaping projects does require some initial attention to detail but the rewards are plentiful. For many, the prospect of having to continuously lift and replant bulbs is daunting and few are satisfied with large patches of bare soil during winter but there is absolutely no need to lift any of the selected bulbs as long as they are not overwatered during winter dormancy. Select, low growing groundcover companion (filler) plants carefully and they will not swamp the feature bulbs in season. The indigenous garden is a veritable sanctuary and our bulbous plants are an integral part of this magical, natural wonderland.

### Container Landscaping

**Boophone disticha (tumbleweed) and Merwillia plumbea (blue squill)** are just two species well suited to natural stone, earthy textured or terracotta pots. They grow partially exposed above ground and the scaly, rough texture of the dormant bulbs interplanted with small rocks looks quite ornamental during dormancy. In spring and summer Boophone displays dramatic flowering and foliage. The blue squill produces tall arching flower stems. The dwarf, *Eucomis vandermerwei* with its maroon pineapple flowers and spotted leaves is ideal for bowl-type containers.

**Agapanthus** have for the most part been utilized purely as easy fillers for almost every type of landscaping but large pots brimming with showy large round heads on tall stems, particularly the new hybrids and the absolutely exquisite *Agapanthus inapertus* ssp. *pendulus* 'Graskop' have made us 'reassess' the beauty and versatility of these popular plants.

Many gardeners are familiar with **Haemanthus albiflos**, the white paintbrush, an autumn flowering shade bulb, but the Haemanthus family is full of surprises such as *Haemanthus humilis* ssp. *humilis* Kei bolo from the Eastern Cape. It has two long, broad, soft furry leaves which in themselves, are a topic of many a conversation and really are a focal display in a large broad pot on a cool patio.

### Stately Features for Shady Patios

Many modern homes have stylish patios which are partially framed by large built-in planter boxes. These are ideal for a mass display of tall flowering **Scadoxus, Veltheimia & Clivias**. *Scadoxus*, blood or snake lilies have large round to cup-shape heads of brilliant scarlet flowers from spring to mid-summer. The winter dormant, *puniceus*, *multiflorus* ssp. *katherinae* and the rare *multiflorus* ssp. *multiflorus* can easily be interplanted with *Pelargonium tongaense*, a dainty red-flowered, shade-loving pelargonium and the evergreen, winter-flowering *Haemanthus paucifolius*. *Veltheimia bracteata*, the glossy forest lily has wavy, glossy leaves and pinkish flowers on tall stems in Spring. Thriving in semi-shade in well drained soil, it has a very short dormancy period in late summer. They can be interplanted with low growing *Plectranthus verticillatus* 'ubombo', other suitable spur flowers or *Haemanthus albiflos*. Clumps of evergreen, prized *Clivias* which are strategically placed will offset the dormancy of the blood lilies. Many summer growing haemanthus grow very well together with clivias.

## **Waterside Beauties**

**The Crinum family** mesmerizes all who gaze upon the dramatic, large, showy flowers and equally beautiful large leaves. *Crinum bulbispermum* (Orange river lily) and *macowanii* (sabie or river lily) produce new flower stems in succession from September to November. They are ideally suited to seasonally moist areas along streams, ponds and wetlands. Interplant with *Geranium incanum*, *Falkia repens*, *Crassula expansa* var *fragilis* or *Crassula spathulata*. The very fine, grass-like evergreen, mid to late summer flowering nerine species such as *filifolia* and *masoniorum* also do well in small pockets between rocks around cascading waterfeatures. Arum lilies are popular waterside plants but often there are hot, drier pockets where *Zantedeschia albomaculata* 'Helen O'Connor' is ideally suited. Winter dormant with spotted leaves and beautiful apricot pink flowers with a deep purple centre in summer.

## **The Veld Garden**

A mass planting of green cream flowers in the form of slender pineapple lilies with those cute tufted heads does not go unnoticed. *Eucomis* have a long flowering period, their leaves are strapping, broad and shiny, they are quite amusing and very adaptable. Interplant with almost any groundcover from variegated hen and chickens, bulbines to cheerful *cineraria saxifraga*. *Brunsvigias* are true collector's plants, they are very slow growing but have beautiful, broad, greyish green foliage, tall stems and most unusual, very showy flowers. Mat-forming succulent *Othonna* groundcovers and *Senecio radicans* are good companion plants. *Ammocharis coranica* (ground lily) should be planted in between small flattish rocks so that the greyish green overlapping prostrate leaves can be fully appreciated. The flowers are glossy reddish pink, large and round, sweetly scented from October to January. *Crinum gramnicola*, is a true highveld grassland species. Broad wavy leaves, very slow growing but those flowers are quite hypnotic. This too can be complemented by a wide variety of succulent-type groundcovers and *Scabiosa incisa* pink.

## **Growing Tips:**

- Well drained, well composted soil & Mulch well around base of plants
- In winter-rainfall regions - all the bulbs discussed will thrive in containers and many in the garden, providing they are planted in very well-drained soil.
- Do not plant the bulbs too deep, ie neck must protrude just above the soil for some of the species discussed
- Feed the bulbs in summer with bonemeal or organic bulb food/booster.
- Water the evergreen and deciduous species once or twice a week in summer. In winter, water only once every 2-3 weeks for evergreen and once a month for deciduous bulbs depending on companion planting.
- For container landscaping, check every 2-3 days in summer and do not water unless the soil medium is quite dry. Keep dry in winter.
- Amaryllid enthusiasts be on the alert for *Brithys crini*, the lily borer. These nasties cause havoc and multiply profusely. They are active from October to April (although they have been known to continue their trail of destruction well into winter) They can either be removed by hand or spray with Margaret Robert's caterpillar spray or Karbaspray.

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