

## Colourful Perennial Combinations

### Natal Primrose, Beautiful Senecio and the Ifafa Lily

---

Two versatile perennial pairings brighten the spring garden this month. They may not be natural habitat companions, but, despite this, these special and hardy garden plants mix and match beautifully. The beautiful combination of *Senecio* and *Thunbergia* survived the prolonged drought in the shade of wild grasses that were cleared to expose them to the bright sun and spring rains. They doubled in size and produced flowers within a few days.

#### Cyrtanthus mackenii: Ifafa Lily

*Cyrtanthus mackenii* is a charming, hardy bulb for damp morning sun and light shade to semi-shade situations. It has glossy, narrow and strappy leaves year round, and in spring and summer, produces an abundance of fragrant, slim, tubular flowers in a variety of colours, from yellow to white, pink, peach and red. This little *Cyrtanthus* – only 20 cm high – is a beautiful plant for water features, containers, as a groundcover in moderate to damp soils, in both frost and frost-free gardens. Add organic material to soils to aid water retention and provide continuous nutrients through the flowering season. Plant with the neck of the bulb slightly above ground level. Plants prefer to remain undisturbed for a few years and will reward you by forming large, reliably flowering clumps. Keep a lookout for the lily borer in the summer months; they can wreak havoc on a small clump. Flowers are pollinated by night-flying moths.

**Size:** 20 cm

**Water needs:** moderate; high

**Frost:** hardy

**Rainfall season:** summer

**Flower:** from yellow to white, pink, peach and red; July – February; winter spring summer

**Garden situation:** am sun; semi-shade; damp shade; container; water feature

**Habitat:** wetland ponds; riverine areas

**Region:** thicket (Eastern Cape); Subtropical East Coast (KZN)

#### *Senecio speciosus*: Beautiful Senecio

The Beautiful Senecio is a clump-forming perennial with beautiful 40 mm pink to magenta flowers at the tips of numerous tall stalks from late winter through to summer. Size is variable from 30 cm up to 50 cm. Stems and new buds are softly hairy, quite beautiful just after the rains. Leaves are attractively toothed, at times wavy, 10 – 20 x 2 – 4 mm in size, and grow from a basal rosette. Plants are attractive even out of flower and may die back briefly.

**Size:** 30 - 50 cm

**Water needs:** moderate; high

**Frost:** moderate to hardy

**Rainfall season:** summer; winter

**Flowers:** pink, purple, magenta. July – January; winter spring summer

Garden situation: damp sun; grassland;

**Habitat:** grassland; wetland pond; fynbos

**Region:** Thicket (Eastern Cape); Highveld (Gauteng, Mpumalanga, North West); Subtropical East Coast (KZN); Bushveld Savanna (Limpopo); Western Cape.

### **Thunbergia atriplicifolia: Natal Primrose**

This delightful grassland plant forms a low mounding shrublet of up to 30 -40 cm high. Flowers are typical of this family, a pale buttery yellow in colour with a white or cream corolla covering the plant from October to March. It forms a tube of up to 2.5 cm which widens at the base, and the lobes (petals) are up to 5 cm across. Leaves are softly hairy, mid-green and oval in shape, up to 5 cm long and 2 cm wide. This grassland biome species flowers profusely after a fire. While this little groundcover does best in full sun and well-draining soils, in my Gillitts garden it also thrives in slightly damp soils and light shade from mid-afternoon onwards. In wild grasslands, it is often lightly shaded by neighbouring species and grasses, and through the season will grow upwards and send out limbs in search of a sunny spot. Pop in the front of a mixed grassland bed or as an edging plant along a pathway.

Size: 30 – 40 cm

Water needs: moderate

Frost: moderate; hardy

Rainfall season: summer

Flower: pale yellow; October – March; spring, summer, autumn

Garden situation: sun; roof garden; slope; wildlife: insects, butterflies, beetles

Habitat: grassland; Coastal Eastern Cape; Coastal KZN

Regional: Thicket (Eastern Cape); Highveld (Gauteng, Mpumalanga, North West); Subtropical East Coast (KZN); Bushveld Savanna (Limpopo).