

A Water wise Design for Frosty Gardens

There are times when looking through books or wandering around the garden, you hit upon a combination that excites you enough to want to share it with everyone though you have yet to try it out in the garden. Case in point: this would provide a delicious mix of texture and form, a melding of subtle colour whose look changes through the seasons! All species are frost and drought hardy and will thrive in gardens around the country.

Aloe suprafoliata

This stemless Aloe is one of the more frost hardy aloes from the rocky slopes of Mpumalanga, northern KZN and Swaziland. The leaves are stacked like the pages of a book, swivelling and twisting into the more common rounded floret as it matures, often recurved. Leaves are blue-grey, edged in reds as the dry season lengthens, carrying sharp marginal teeth along their edges. Flowers are carried well above the leaves at the top of long stalks, slender spires of silver-orange – most unusual in the aloe family. Plants are in flower from May through July.

Kalanchoe thyrsiflora:

Green-grey leaves during the rainy season turn to intense maroon and russet when soils are dry. During the flowering season, they're dusted in a silvery powder. A tight-knit spread of this well-known succulent will harmonise beautifully with the grey and silver tones of the Book Aloe. Flower forms match those of the Aloe, tall, slender and stately, and the result is unusual and eye-catching. When not in flower, leaf shape and colour is a delightful component of gardens around the country. It is easy to maintain; cut flowering stalks back as they fall over. The silver coating is sticky to the touch. Plants flower from May through July/ August.

Othonna carnosa:

Linking the larger perennials together this little ground cover is reliable in its colour, form and year-round flowering abilities. It is a ground-hugging, spreading quickly to cover the ground beneath the hard, stiff leaves of the Kalanchoe and Aloe, but without smothering them. Masses of tiny yellow flowers balance on the thinnest of stalks on and off through the year. The yellow Othonna prefers well-drained soils in a hot, full-sun spot. Rooting easily, give it some room to produce a generous display. This tenacious groundcover flowers almost year-round.

Gazania krebsiana:

This famous clump-forming groundcover/ perennial is a hardy and water wise species for the summer and autumn garden. Plants love dry, sunny spots and well-drained soils, closing up their cheery faces under cloudy skies. Where to plant: rockeries, as edging plants in sunny beds, as a groundcover around tall aloes like *A. ferox* and *A. marlothii*; between pavers and in gravel gardens. There is an extensive range of colours now available, from plain to patterned, from white to dark red. These stand above the dark green or grey, strappy leaves. Plants may rot in humid summer rainfall gardens with insufficient air movement and in continually damp soils. Divide older clumps every 3 – 4 years; discard older stems and retain only the young, vigorous stems. Plants do seed themselves fairly readily. Plants are in flower from August through to April.