

A spectacular *Crassula ovata* in full bloom on a nearby verge stopped me in my tracks recently (if you were the driver behind me, apologies). This year's flower display is breath-taking, barely a single leaf to be seen beneath the mass of white and pink flowers resembling an out-sized bridal bouquet.

Browsing through my extensive image gallery, I was hard-pressed to find photos of *Crassula ovata* in a garden design. This is such a well-known shrub, yet appears to be little used. Perhaps when out of flower it is too average; a Plain Jane overlooked by gardeners requiring that each and every plant in their garden have a year-round wow factor.

But, focus on it for a moment; note the beautiful neatly rounded shape, the bright green egg-shaped leaves with a high-gloss shine. These characteristics alone make it a high-value plant in any garden. Add a bonsai-like style and grey-brown rough, often gnarled trunk, and you'll have an easy-to-grow no maintenance plant with great character gracing your garden. Then, from May to the beginning of spring, this shrub steps into the limelight with compact clusters of white star-like flowers touched with pink. These invite in bees, butterflies and other insects.

### Where to use it:

- Pop it into the back or middle of a bed as a neutral backdrop against which the perennials, succulents and groundcovers will stand out.
- As an accent plant in a rockery or gravel garden.
- Plant a few close together to form a low hedge, to line a path or a set of steps.
- The Pink Joy is an excellent container plant.
- On rocky ground and slopes.
- Use it to bridge the gap between tall aloes and low-growing species in the succulent bed.
- *Crassula ovata* thrives in coastal conditions.

### Companions:

Pair it with succulents that carry touches of pink and maroon to bring out the pink blush on the flowers and maroon tinges on the leaves during the dry season. Try *Kalanchoe sexangularis*, *Kalanchoe thyrsiflora* and *Kleinia fulgens*.

Match the shrub with aloes that flower simultaneously; try the grey-green leaved *Aloe arborescens* and *A. chabaudii*, for example. Many of these aloes are coloured in shades of red and russet, the depth of this colour dependent on just how dry the soils are. The apple-green leaves of *Aloe vanbalenii* can carry just a sliver or a full coat of orange-red colour.

Planted around the skirt of a young *Aloe ferox* produces an eye-catching arrangement.

The high-gloss, ovate leaves are most attractive alongside the angular, spiky limbs of *Euphorbia grandicornis*.

Size: 1.5 – 1.8 m

Speed of growth: moderate

Light conditions: full sun; hot and dry seems to produce the best flower displays.

Water needs: low

Frost: low; moderate

Habitat: Thicket, Fynbos, Grassland, Indian Ocean Coastal Belt; Bushveld Savanna