

# The Autumn Colour Wheel

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Many animals respond to colour, like sunbirds and many from our vast insect world, including bees; on the evolutionary timeline, flower form and colour were a late development, an adaptation by plants to improve the chances of reproduction. Some can see a fairly good range of colour, and this helps them tell the difference between an unripe green fruit and a ripe red fruit. Others use colour to identify predators, while bees and butterflies have a range of colour vision that extends into the ultraviolet where they're able to see nectar guides on certain flowers.

On the other hand, our human reaction to colour is emotional and often unconscious. For us, colour can be soothing or exciting, subtle or bold and influences mood and perception; so warm colours, like orange, red and yellow, excite and energise, while the cool colours of blue, purple and pink, relax and calm.

Browse our autumn colour wheel to get an idea of the hues available through this season; you'll find you have the same difficulty we had - what to leave out!!!

**Neutral colours** – white, cream, grey, black, shades of brown, even green in a garden setting. These can be used with any other colour without changing the effect that you are trying to achieve with your chosen colours. Neutrals tone down and soften the strong hues and act as a buffer between two plants that might otherwise clash, or even as a transition between warm and cool groupings.

**Complementary colours**, those opposite each other on the colour wheel, like yellow and purple or orange and blue, create contrasting displays that pop - but in a relaxed way.

If you're looking for a less adventurous option, use **harmonious colours**, those alongside each other on the colour wheel, as they blend together beautifully.

## Tips:

- To brighten your garden use soft, light colours, especially white and cream. Variegated leaves – cream and green, or gold and cream, also do the trick.
- Dark colours, like blue, purple and pink, create a calm, relaxed atmosphere, and tend to cool down your space. Use them in quiet, meditation gardens, for example. They also push out boundaries, making areas look more spacious than they are, so are good colours to add in small gardens.
- Bright colours draw attention to themselves shrinking an area. Plant bright reds, oranges, and yellows in the distance to bring the outer boundaries closer. Bright colours can put you in a party mood and are a good choice next to the entertainment patio.

## White and cream

**Gomphocarpus physocarpus: Wild cotton, Milkweed, Bishop's Balls, Hairy Balls.** Tall and single stemmed with sparse foliage, the wild cotton has long narrow leaves and little upside-down caps of white flowers that hang in bunches off the stem. What takes this scraggly plant out of the ordinary are the large round inflated balls, a bit like a plastic beach ball, which are attached by short stems to the plant. A multitude of tiny hairs or spikes covers them, giving rise to one of their common names. Initially yellow-green they age to a light brown at which time they burst open to reveal soft silky hairs- bird species use them to line their

nests. The plant itself is very poisonous, so keep children away. However, it is the host plant for the African Monarch butterfly which in turn is poisonous to predators! It is hardy and frost resistant, originating in rocky places in grasslands. Shallow rooted, it is unfussy about soil, but keep it mulched as it would if growing naturally. It looks beautiful planted with the purple-flowered *Polygala virgata* which is of similar height and growth habit.

**Bauhinia natalensis: Natal Bauhinia.** Soft form, delicate leaves and pure white flowers make this an attractive, ornamental shrub for even the smallest garden. Perhaps the only downside for the evergreen gardener is leaf-loss in winter. It is multi-stemmed, and plants in full sun have a more compact, rounded form than their more lanky siblings tucked beneath a shady canopy. Flowers are quite gorgeous; lightly crinkled petals fairly large (up to 4 cm in diameter) for a small shrub, with maroon stripes down the centre, said to be directional guides to night-flying insects;

**Carissa bispinosa: Forest Num-num.** 2 x 2 m shrub. It is spiny with an upright growth habit and thick foliage though less so in the shade. Flowers are small white stars, sweetly scented, from Oct-March. The Num-num is a neat shrub which makes a good hedge. Half-hardy. Fruit loved by birds. The growth rate is slow. Plants cope well with wind, salt spray, and drought.

**Nuxia floribunda: Forest Elder.** This autumn-flowering beauty provides a massed display of cream-white flowers from May to August, feeding a variety of insects that in turn offer an insect buffet to insectivorous birds. Flower heads are large, made up of many individual tubular flowers that are sweetly fragrant. A great nectar-producing tree, it is a choice species for honey bees. This forest species enjoys good rains, plenty of leaf mulch and only copes with a light frost.

**Crassula rubricaulis: Red-stemmed Crassula or Rooistingelplakkie.** This multi-branched succulent carries heavy round flower heads through the autumn months – and even into winter depending on the area in which you live. Each white flower head is made up of many small individual flowers each 5 mm long, with 5 pointed petals. These are mostly carried at the tip of the bright red stems, but a few smaller flowers grow up the length of the stiff flower stalk. Parts of the flower turn red as they age and the overall impression is a gorgeous soft ball of white and rose. Plants grow to 50 cm wide, but they form rounded groups of up to a meter wide, creating a quite stunning effect in a rockery or a succulent garden.

**Crassula capitella: Campfire Crassula.** Height: 50 cm. Flowers April - June. A small succulent for full sun to partial afternoon shade, in grassland or rockeries. Plant in well-drained soil with a little fertiliser & compost, water when establishing, but don't over-water. It deteriorates after flowering so remove old leaves before new leaf growth in spring. Divide clumps every 2 to 3 years in spring or summer. Eastern Cape, Free State, Western Cape.

## **Pink and Purple: Packing a Punch**

**Grewia lasiocarpa. Forest Raisin.** This scrambling shrub or small tree boasts the largest of the pink flowering species of *Grewia*. a small tree with a tendency to scramble if, given the support of neighbouring plants, the Forest Raisin can reach heights of up to 10 m in the wild, though within a garden setting grows to between 3 and 5 m. Foliage is evergreen and very attractive, with leaves larger and rounder than its more well-known sister, *Grewia occidentalis*.

**Gymnanthemum coloratum. Lowveld Tree Vernonia.** One of the best insect shrubs we have. The leaves are most attractive, large with wavy, undulating margins that make it a lovely focal point even when not in flower. The Bitter-leaf grows into a large shrub but can be pruned into a small tree and is an excellent choice as a stand-alone specimen or as part of a bush-clump or wildlife hedge. In the garden, this multi-stemmed shrub grows about 4 m with a 3 m spread. Young flowers are a soft mauve/ pink, fading to white after a few days. It does flower when young and is one of the most reliable flowering shrubs for the garden. It is a fast grower, up to 1 m per year, thickening out as it ages. The flowers are nectar-rich making it one of the best trees in which to find butterflies, insects and birds; a valuable food plant during autumn and early winter.

**Hibiscus pedunculatus: Pink mallow, or Forest Pink Hibiscus.** This sparse shrublet is one of the most beautiful long-flowering small shrubs for light to semi-shade. Its slender size and form, around 1.5 m high, with rather sparse foliage and only a few branches off the main stem, makes it a perfect choice for narrow corridors and small gardens. For those who lament the lack of colour for shade, search out this little shrub; it will seed itself around the garden – helped by pollinators – providing you with handfuls of seedlings. The attractive grey-green colour is a perfect foil for the large flowers that cover the plant from October to May. These are either pale or dark pink, with a long pollen-coated stamen and they hang off long flower stems from the leaf axils. Each flower only lasts for a day, but there are always new buds waiting to open, so flowering continues for months. The Pink Mallow enjoys moist, hot summers and, as part of the forest, margin requires fertile soils enriched with decomposed leaves. Wildlife visitors: nectar and pollen filled flowers attract bees, butterflies and other insects, as well as, insectivorous birds and sunbirds. It is also the larval host plant for the Charaxes, Nymphs, commodores and Skipper butterflies.

**Muraltia spinosa: Tortoise Berry.** 1 x 1. A favourite foraging plant for the well-loved ‘slow but steady’ animal of story-telling legend, this small shrub is a vibrant filler plant for fynbos gardens. Preferring coastal conditions along the Eastern, Northern Cape and Western Cape it nonetheless thrives in most situations throughout the country. Flowering displays are profuse, and from April to October, tiny flowers turn this stiff, spiky shrub into a pink-purple flowering ball! Its natural habitats suggest a preference for sandy, free-draining, even rocky soils. The Tortoise Berry is hardy and drought tolerant, coping well with a broad range of temperatures but needs a full-sun position. Tortoise food in the form of ripe red fleshy berries follow throughout summer, loved too by birds and people. Where to plant: in rockeries, on stony or sandy slopes, or in the front to mid-section of a flowering border or screen. The growth habit – stiff, arching stems – makes a useful contrast to plants with soft and feathery foliage.

**Ocimum labiatum: Pink Sage/ Shell Bush.** 1.5 x 1.5 m. A beautiful neatly rounded shrub with pale and dark pink flowers that show up well against the large, bright green aromatic leaves. Flowers up to 6 months of the year throughout summer and autumn. It ticks all the boxes for a water wise garden plant that thrives in both sun and shade. A good shrub to grow beneath deciduous trees as it copes with summer shade and winter sun. Evergreen to deciduous in colder climes; sun, shade; frost hardy and low to moderate water needs.

**Plectranthus fruticosus: Forest Spurflower.** The Forest Spurflower is arguably the most attractive of the medium size shrubs. The shrubby growth is upright, with large leaves so typical of the family with purple below, toothed margins and a strong midrib. P. fruticosus comes in a range of sizes and colour forms, from pale and dark pink to mauve. There are now 5 cultivars of this species that have been discovered: ‘Behr’s Pride’ has dark purple undersides with deep pink flowers. ‘Ellaphie’ has mauve flowers, again with dark

purple below the leaf 'James' is a smaller shrub of about 1.5m with lovely soft pink flowers and is one of the only shrubs to cope with sun. This is from the Barberton region and has softer leaves without the purple undersides.

**Dombeya burgessiae: Pink Wild Pear.** One of the most attractive shrubs for South African summer rainfall gardens. Large, heart-shaped leaves provide good screening and lovely, slightly furry grey-green foliage. This is a fast-growing shrub, so perfect for impatient gardeners and those in need of a quick privacy screen. Large, cup-shaped flowers cluster in groups at the tips of branches, pale pink to bright pink with dark pink centres. The Pink Wildpear is semi-deciduous in a cold, dry winter. Up to 4 m. Large shrub to small tree; a deciduous to semi-deciduous plant with large, velvety, lobed leaves that impart a tropical look. Flower colour is pale pink, and they cover the large green-grey leaves from summer to autumn. Old flowers remain on the tree, turning a golden-brown. Grows fast reaching mature height within 3 years. KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga.

**Podalyria sericea: Satin Bush.** Size: 1 x 1. Tiny, silky hairs cover the grey leaves giving them a silvery sheen, hence the common name. It forms a neat, rounded shrub of moderate growth rate that needs little attention once established; in summer rainfall gardens ensure soils are acidic and water well through autumn and winter. Pale mauve- pink flowers with a magenta throat, tuck into the leaves along the stems from May to August, followed by unusual inflated pods from October to January. Plant in full sun, in well-drained acid soils. Grey foliage provides a lovely contrast to the universal shades of green, and the Satin Bush would look stunning alongside *Anisodonteia scabrosa*.

**Plectranthus ambiguus: Pincushion Spurflower.** The flowers of this low-growing *Plectranthus* are outstanding. Large, fluffy purple sprays stand above the leaves though the flower display is often so dense the leaves remain hidden from view. This variety is encountered naturally in the understory of Eastern Cape forests up into northern KZN, forming a knee-high cover. Plants in the north tend to be taller than their southern counterparts. In this arrangement the purple sprays show up the brilliance of the grey/white trunk of the Wild Pear; the white flowers of *Plectranthus ciliatus* would be a beautiful addition as an edging border.

**Dyschoriste rogersii: Bushveld Ribbon Flower.** A small herbaceous shrub that grows to 60 cm and is covered with pink or purple flowers from May to December. It is an excellent low-growing plant for a bushveld mix.

**Thorncroftia succulenta: Pink Puff.** A small semi-succulent shrub growing to 1 m high. Large pink flowers look beautiful against the soft grey leaves. Good choice for shallow soils and rock crevices. Drought and frost hardy.

**Geranium incanum: Lace-Leaf Geranium.** A beautiful spreading groundcover for sun with grey-green lacy leaves and mauve/ magenta flowers. Grows to 40 cm in full sun or semi-shade, in well-drained soils. Suitable for hanging over walls. Requires moderate rains and is partially frost hardy.

**Dimorphotheca jucunda: Purple Trailing Daisy.** The flowers of this species, with large white florets around a dark blue eye, make a sparkling addition to a spring and summer garden. This soft bushy perennial grows to 75 cm with a spread of up to 1.5 m. Plants cover the ground rapidly. Growth form can be upright or decumbent (spreading) with the lower sections of branches bare of leaf. Older plants can get quite woody.

While commonly used in gardens countrywide, it is considered as threatened in the wild with only a small distribution area in the Eastern Cape which is under pressure from urbanisation. Prune hard after flowering in its second season and replace older woody plants. This daisy bush is poisonous to cattle.

**Hypoestes aristata: Ribbon Bush.** The well-known shrub is a hard worker providing late autumn and winter colour year in and year out. Adapted to grow in shady to partially shady areas, it seems to cope just as well in full sun, though the flowers may not last as long here. It will thrive in both moist and dry soils, and asks for nothing more than the seasonal rainfall, and will survive a short drought. Plant it along the boundary, or in neglected areas to add colour. Use as a low to mid-height foliage in a shrubbery where it will cover the woody stems of *Leonotis leonurus*, *Syncolostemon* species, and *Pycnostachys urticifolia*,

## **Yellow: Spicing it Up**

**Grewia flava: Velvet-raisin (South Africa) and Brandybush in Zimbabwe.** A multi-stemmed shrub or small tree up to 4m in height, this is the species for the bushveld and arid regions of the country, being both drought and frost hardy, and surviving readily in the deep Kalahari sands. Older stems are purple-black; younger branchlets are grey to purple, or red-brown, with a lovely satin feel. Leaves are grey-green, elliptical or oblong with a rounded to a pointed tip. Leaves are held erect, softly hairy above, with a paler and more velvet underside, with serrated margins. Yellow star-shaped flowers are lightly scented and cover the tree from October to March, followed from December to April, by round, red-brown, 2-lobed fruits.

**Bauhinia tomentosa: Yellow Bell Bauhinia.** Large yellow flowers adorn the Yellow Bell Bauhinia from November through to April. The growth form is airy and drooping, and flowers are conspicuous against the small, bright green leaves. Typical size is 4 x 3 m in a garden, and it makes a beautiful addition to a mixed screen. Flowers attract pollinating insects, like the CMR-beetles and the Orange-Barred Playboy butterflies. Insectivorous, nectar and seed eaters will visit, like Louries, Bar throated Apalis, Cape White-eye, Crested and Black-collared Barbets, and Red-capped Robin-chat, (Natal Robin). Grey Louries eats the flowers. Natural distribution range is Eastern Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Mpumalanga where it grows on forest edges, in woodland, bushveld, in scrub on rocky slopes and is common in coastal dune bush

**Cineraria saxifraga: Wild Cineraria.** Golden yellow daisy flowers and delicate bright green leaves make this perennial shrublet a delight in the spring and autumn garden. It is a fast-growing evergreen plant that forms soft mounds in the front of a flower bed. The species name, 'saxifraga', indicates a preference for rocky habitats, and this little plant grows naturally on cliffs, rock outcrops, and forest edges. This shows its versatility; as long as the soils are well-draining and humus-rich, the Wild Cineraria grows well in semi-shade and full sun. Stems will be longer and form a less compact shrublet in shade than sun. Plants grow to between 20 – 30 cm high with a 40 cm spread and require little pruning, but give a light trim when necessary. Water well for a few weeks when establishing the plants; after that, they should cope with seasonal rains. Cineraria comes from the Eastern Cape region so while it does best in frost-free gardens, will take a light frost, and is grown around the country from coast to the cooler inland regions. Its preferred habitats make it an excellent addition to a rockery, or to drape down a wall, as well as in the mixed border. Plant the Cineraria to attract a range of insects to the garden; Geoff Nichols uses it as a companion plant in the vegetable garden to control pests. The Wild Cineraria is an excellent choice for balcony and container gardeners as it flowers prolifically in containers and hanging baskets.

**Hypericum revolutum: Curry Bush.** *Hypericum revolutum*. The Curry Bush adds year-round colour and does well in a large container on the patio. It makes a most attractive soft hedge with its neat growth habit and size and makes a bright and cheerful flowering shrub for smaller gardens as well. Attractive yellow flowers have soft fluffy yellow stamens massed in the centre of the 5 soft petals. Birds visit and can be seen scrounging for insects and once established this shrub will show off its flowers almost year round ensuring wildlife will be in attendance constantly. Its full size will be reached after 4 years or so, but it does begin to flower at 2 years. The branches gracefully arch from the central stem covered in narrow-pointed leaves. While enjoying both sun and semi-shade conditions, it will perform better in shaded conditions if it receives some sun through the day and does need good rains. It is frost tender.

**Psychotria capensis: Black Bird-berry.** 2-3 m; rounded, dense crown; yellow flowers in December to June; evergreen; neat shape; protect when young, then partially frost hardy; good rains; plant in shade to partial shade and full sun; attracts birds. Grows in evergreen forests, forest margins, scrub and dune bush, edges of rivers and rocky outcrops in high rainfall grassland, from Knysna through the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal to Mpumalanga, Limpopo, Northern Province, southern Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

**Aloe tenuior: Fence Aloe.** Up to 3 m, but make lovely small to medium-sized sprawling shrublet if trimmed yearly. Pretty lemon yellow flowers born in profusion through the year but peaking in March to Aug. Include in a mixed screen. Fast growing, and easy to propagate via slip; just snip off, allow to dry, and then push into the soil. Excellent plant for insects. Occurs naturally in dry thickets from Eastern Cape and southern KwaZulu-Natal.

## **Red and Orange – Vibrant Energy**

**Crassula alba: Red Crassula.** 50 cm; one of 3 subsp. Large rosettes of white to red flower heads grow at the top of elongated stems. Often so heavy they fall over. Leaves bright green in rosettes from the base, lance-shaped and succulent. Don't over water as they are susceptible to fungal diseases. Rocky places on gentle slopes in moist grasslands, sometimes in shallow soils on rock ledges. Eastern Cape, Free State, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, North West.

**Halleria lucida: Tree Fuchsia.** A stand of *Halleria lucida* in full flower is one of the more glorious sights in late autumn and early winter garden. The red fuchsia shaped flowers grow massed along the branches tucked beneath the leaves; around Durban and just inland, flower clusters are so dense and numerous it's as if the tree is alight. And the buzzing of contented bees can be heard from meters away. The *Halleria* is a small tree, usually growing to 5m, with a variable shape depending on its growing situation. Usually multi-stemmed, it makes an effective screen. As flowers grow on the old wood, a light trim to encourage dense foliage and a neater shape shouldn't affect the show. Bright glossy green leaves are small, with slight serrations – the species name, 'lucida' means 'glossy' – providing most attractive foliage year-round. The flowers appear anytime from mid-may onwards, and it is interesting to note quite a range of red and orange shades. Tubular in shape they open progressively through the season extending the feeding season and birds will visit from far and wide to feed on the largesse of this small tree. And it is multi-functional; use it to add height as part of a mixed screen, to bring seasonal colour and wildlife food to the woodland undercanopy or as a focal point in a shady bed. It is one of few frost resistant trees, and it provides a protective canopy for frost sensitive plants.

**Kleinia fulgens: Coral Senecio.** 50 cm; a beautiful succulent with grey leaves that can flush purple-red in a cold, dry winter. Bright scarlet buttons cover the plant through winter. Evergreen and fast-growing. Prefers a bit of shade in hot, inland gardens. Needs well-drained soils and do not overwater or fertilise. Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga.

**Kniphofia linearifolia: Common Marsh Poker.** This evergreen perennial is a strong grower, producing a thick clump of leaves, greenish/yellow in colour, with a prominent midrib. Large flower heads are borne on the tips of sturdy stems; initially pink-red to green, turning orange-red or yellow as they open from midsummer to autumn. It occurs naturally in dense clumps so plant a fair number of them together for maximum effect – plants given as close to their natural habitat will thrive. Very hardy, it survives light frosts and is happy in normal garden conditions. This tall poker does best in continually damp soils in full sun but does well in average garden soils in sunny beds or areas receiving afternoon shade. Initially pinkish red to green flower buds are followed by orange-red and yellow flowers in summer and autumn. Provincial distribution: Eastern Cape, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, Northern Cape, Western Cape.

**Crocasmia aurea: Falling Stars.** Luminous Falling Stars, *Crocasmia aurea*, are in full bloom in March gardens. This small bulb is incredibly easy species to grow; seeds are often bird planted surprising one with gorgeous late summer/ autumn colour beneath a shady tree. From mid-spring, bright green leaves push their way through the soil, rewarding the patient gardener with drooping orange flowers that are unexpectedly large. Perhaps it is the weight of the 40 cm flowers hanging off slender stalks that give the illusion of stars falling back to the earth. Flower stalks can grow as tall as 1.2m high, often seen peeping through the foliage of other shrubs, advertising their existence with eye-catching flowers from January to June. These are soon followed by orange seed capsules containing a multitude of small purple/black hard round seeds. Those not eaten by the birds germinate with ease and are often seen growing beneath popular bird trees like the *Erythrina* family. Falling Stars are dormant in winter, leaves turning brown and dying down soon after the last seeds fall. Growing in large groups in the wild, they look best if planted in large numbers in light to dark shade.

**Leonotis leonurus: Wild Dagga.** The Wild Dagga is a hardy, strong-growing shrub with a woody stem, lance-shaped leaves and large heads of velvety orange flowers in autumn and winter. Nectar-filled flowers attract sunbirds and insects and are an important part of the winter wildlife menu. Flowers are covered with soft, short hairs giving it a most attractive soft. The flower whorls open up consecutively up to the stalk, ensuring a continuous supply of food. In the garden, shrubs grow 2 – 3 m high with a narrower spread of 1- 1.5 m.

## **Shades of blue – Cool and Calm**

**Barleria obtusa. Blue Bush Violet.** What would autumn be without the familiar blue of the Bush violet? One of the better-known of our small indigenous shrubs, this Barleria has flowers of the most beautiful blue to be found on any shrub from the summer rainfall garden. It forms a rounded shrub with dark green leaves that are quite unnoticeable until March to May when they burst open into beautiful soft mauve/blue tubular flowers. It tends to be rather untidy so is a good choice for a natural and relaxed design. It can also scramble over a supporting shrub or up into a tree if planted in its shade.

**Pycnostachys urticifolia: Hedgehog Sage/ Porcupine Salvia.** This tall, rather lanky shrub provide electric blue cones at the branch tips from April until June; combine it with the orange-red velvet flowers of the Wild Dagga for a vibrant autumn display. Flowers are replaced by sharp spines that protect the seeds from browsers. The Porcupine Salvia is a natural inhabitant of damp soils around marshes and on forest edges, but it does grow quite happily in normal garden soils. Plant in a warm, sunny spot in frosty inland gardens. Frost-damaged shoots will grow back from the base.

**Plectranthus neochilus: Lobster Flower/ Rotstuinsalie.** It thrives in arid, inhospitable traffic circles and city verges, on exposed rocky ground and baking-hot car parks, as well as more benevolent – though still dry - conditions in home gardens, beautifying the city landscape with hassle-free colour through spring and summer. The Rotstuinsalie is a herbaceous perennial groundcover thriving in both sun and light shade areas, in both dry and moderately moist conditions. The succulent, grey-green leaves form an attractive dense cover year-round, and from September to April are covered in tall blue to purple spires, quite stunning in a massed display. Plants form neat, compact mounds with a height and spread of 50 cm x 60 cm, and seem to flower better in sunny situations and well-drained soils, less so when grown in too much shade.

**Felicia amelloides: Kingfisher Daisy.** Usually a low-growing 60 cm groundcover for sun or partial shade. Frost and drought hardy. Plant in a light, well-drained soil. Trim lightly through the year. Will take a moderate frost. : Blue Felicia 50 x 50 cm. A shrubby perennial with cheerful blue and yellow daisies in profusion above small bright green leaves. Flowers best in full sun. Trim to keep vigorous and in flower. Easy-care, water wise, beautiful! Good pot plant and for borders and rockeries.

**Agapanthus praecox: Agapanthus.** Agapanthus praecox: Large Agapanthus. A well-known perennial growing to 90 cm, with bright green strappy leaves and large blue or white flower heads. Plant in sun in well-drained soil. Good for areas with poor soils. Drought hardy but enjoys summer rains. Will take a light frost.

### **Brown and green – Fresh and Earthy**

**Cymbopogon validus: Giant Turpentine Grass.** One often needs height and a change in texture in a garden planting and here is where Giant Turpentine grass ( Cymbopogon validus )comes into its own. Great big tufts of greenish grey leaves grow to 2m topped with golden brown seed heads . Plant, so that early morning or late evening light catches them for an eye-catching display. In my garden flocks of Weavers spend a lot of time scrambling up and down the tall stems . In a grassland garden plant at the back of a bed and mass the smaller, shorter grasses around. You can keep them neat by removing the dead leaves every so often, but I have never cut mine down completely as I really enjoy the golden brown effect in winter. This grass is frost hardy – if cut back by frost it simply resprouts in Spring. Giant Turpentine grass is a delight.

**Themeda triandra: Red Grass/ Rooi Grass.** A small to medium, tufted grass, 60 cm high, with purple-red leaf blades as they age. Unusual seed heads. Widespread throughout SA. Prefers soils high in clay and organic matter, though it will grow in any type of soil. Cut back in winter to a third of its size and remove dried leaves.



**Dodonea viscosa: Sand Olive.** The Sand Olive is a perfect small tree or large shrub for water stressed and windy gardens. Adding frost-hardiness to its bag of tricks, it is a true jack-of-all-trades! The Sand Olive is usually a multi-stemmed shrub of about 5m high, but it can be trained into a small tree by removing the lower branches. The pale green with a pale yellow tint, spangle the shrub from April to August, (autumn to winter), blend with rather than standing out from the foliage. These are then followed by drooping bunches of yellow to red fruits. The pale green with a pale yellow tint, spangle the shrub from April to August, (autumn to winter), blend with rather than standing out from the foliage. These are then followed by drooping bunches of yellow to red fruits.

**Eragrostis capensis: Heart-seed Love Grass.** A deciduous tufted grass up to 900mm. New leaves sprout after fires or in early spring. Biscuit-coloured flower/ seed heads stand above the narrow leaves, drying to a rusty brown. Damp soils suit it best, but it will grow in ordinary garden soil. Provincial distribution. Eastern Cape, Free State, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Northern Cape, North West, Western Cape. Frost hardy.

**Setaria sphacelata: Golden Bristle Grass.** The Golden Bristle Grass is a beautiful long lasting ornamental grass for the garden. Planted where they catch the setting sun the seed heads glow gold tinged with burnt orange. Plants seed themselves quite readily so may be too generous in small gardens. By winter, patches look quite untidy so may not be for all gardeners; for the wildlife gardener and birders, it is a must! this robust tufted perennial grows to over 1 m in height.

**Juncus effusus: Common Rush.** An attractive rush for damp to wet areas although many gardeners plant them in average garden soils, usually with aloes. Forms clumps of 1 m high. Stiff leaves and attractive brown/ cream seed heads. Frost hardy.

**Cyperus prolifer: Dwarf Papyrus.** 35 cm spreading. This miniature Cyperus species is perfect for small water features and damp soils in even the smallest garden. Soft round feathery heads form at the tips of hard, slender stems. The entire plant is bright green and glistens in the sunlight. Needs wet to damp soils year-round. Can spread and pop up a distance from the mother plant, but this is easy to control. A gorgeous textural plant. Evergreen sun, light shade, high water needs, light frost.

**Cyperus albostriatus:** Another dwarf Papyrus, this time of the popular *C. textilis*. This 30 cm high sedge adds a rough texture to a shady to lightly shaded area. Use where lawn battles or in damp shade, though it will cope well in normal garden soil. It is a strong spreader so plant where this won't be a problem or grow in a container for easier management.

**Melinis species: Natal Red-tops.** *Melinis nerviglumis* (Bristle-leaved Red-top) and *M. repens* (Natal Red-top). Two of our prettiest grasses are our local 'red tops'. In summer they send up long stalks which open into deep red/pink fluffy heads. Favoured by small seed-eating birds like Cape White eyes, Mannekins, and Waxbills, the seed heads are also used as soft nesting materials. Happy to establish themselves in disturbed soils, they are very good plants to stabilize the topsoils and are commonly found along roadsides and in the cracks in pavements. In nature they are 'pruned' by browsers and fires, so they do need to be cut right back in a garden situation to prevent them from becoming moribund (forming thick mats), that can smother the growth of other grassland bulbs and perennials, and prevent the rains from penetrating to the soil level. The 'red tops' are great garden plants; very easy to grow and needing little in the way of general maintenance and preferring no fertilisers at all, they bring wonderful texture to the garden. The leaves and flowering stalks are fine and light, reacting to the slightest changes in airflow around them, so

there is constant movement. They glisten with early morning dew, or raindrops after a storm, while the rising and setting sun enhances the glowing red -flowering heads. Not many garden plants respond so well to our daily weather and sun movements, and this really ought to make them more popular than they currently are! They should not be seen as part of a temporary fashion in garden design but as one of the essential elements of it. The most obvious area in the garden for grasses is within the grassland bed. Grasslands though are characterised by many gardeners as not really gardening', or too messy and scrappy. But grasses will do equally well in a normal mixed herbaceous bed.

**Restios:** Striking, low-maintenance and mostly water wise plants from the Western Cape. There are about 30 local species in cultivation; most need full sun but will cope with a little shade through the day. Select carefully for your conditions as some do like moisture, so harsh, dry and sunny spots just won't do. Select the correct size as they range from over 3m down to just 50 cm. Ensure they get plenty of circulating air.

*Elegia* species: Many, like *Elegia capensis*, need year-round moisture, as does *Calopsis paniculata*. *Elegia fistulosa* (shown here) grows to 75cm x 40 cm with strong stems tipped with golden brown bracts for most of the year. Adds glorious texture to a flower bed. Plant in full sun; prefers frequent watering but will cope in dry conditions.

*Elegia tectorum*: the most commonly grown of the restios; height is variable, from 60 cm – 2 m high. A striking accent plant that will grow in damp soils and the average garden soil. Plant in full sun to retain its strong form.

*Thamnochortus insignis*: Dekriet A tall, grass-like reed that grows in large tussocks with a diameter of 50 cm and 1 m at the base, leaf spread of up to 3 m wide, and a height of 2, 5 m. Separate male and female plants. Older stems arch over. Flowering is from January to February; seeds occur from April to May. Heavy pollen crops on male plants attract large numbers of bees. Use a single plant as a focal point in full sun with good air circulation. Give enough room to spread.