

A Fragrant Garden

ABOVE LEFT: Easy and fast growing, *Freesia alba* bulbs flower with the sweet scent of spring in full swing.

RIGHT: Strongly scented at night, the large lily flowers of *Crinum moorei* are a delight in the garden and a vase. Photos: Liesl van der Walt.

Scented and aromatic plants on sale at the Kirstenbosch Garden Fair

by Liesl van der Walt, Kirstenbosch

The Garden Fair at the end of summer is an important event on the gardening calendar, marking the change of seasons and activities. After the long dry summer dormancy in the Cape it is time to come back to life and sow and plant, starting with spring annuals and bulbs. The cooler autumn inspires me to take out the plant lists that I made in summer when it was too hot and dry to plant. Scented plants are always prominent on my list - they give that extra dimension to the garden, whether planting a windbreak, shade tree or groundcover.

Fragrant flowers

In spring and summer the fragrance of flowers travels easily through the air, surprising us long before we see them. The wild gardenias, *Gardenia thunbergia* (see cover) and *Gardenia volkensii*, have pure white, scented flowers and the wild jasmines, *Jasminum multipartitum* and *J. angulare*, are the well known, heavily scented stars. Always breathtaking is the bride's bush *Pavetta lanceolata* covered in white, scented flowers in early summer, followed by the pompon tree *Dais cotinifolia* that gives a spectacular show with an abundance of lightly scented, soft pink flowers. *Pittosporum viridiflorum*, the cheesewood, is another tough, small tree, but it hides its sweetly scented flowers in small clusters tight against the stem. *Buddleja saligna*, *Buddleja salviifolia* and *Buddleja auriculata* are all tough, fast growing shrubs or small trees with an abundance of small, fragrant flowers. The

buddlejas are excellent as a hedge or screen, or as a windbreak.

Slower growing but just as tough and beautiful as a hedge is the big num-num *Carissa macrocarpa* with scented white flowers that show up beautifully against the dark green foliage. Its crown of dark green, glossy foliage and starry white flowers with a heavy delicious fragrance make the poison bush *Acokanthera oblongifolia* a most attractive garden plant, but being very poisonous, it's not a wise choice for a garden with small children.

Hermannia pinnata, a groundcover that quickly covers a dry sunny spot with its fine green foliage, is a delight in spring with masses of small orange bell-shaped flowers filled with a sweet honey scent. Other fynbos shrubs with honey-scented flowers are *Protea repens* (sugarbush), *Metalasia muricata* (blombos), *Erica quadrangularis* (baby heath) and *Freylinia lanceolata* (honeybells) that also attracts butterflies and

birds with its golden-yellow, honey-scented flowers. Smaller but not to be missed are the strongly scented spring flowering bulbs *Freesia alba* (wild freesia or ruikpypie) and *Babiana nana* (klipuintjie) which are easy to grow, but often better to plant in pots so that they are not lost while dormant in summer. Flowering throughout summer the blue water-lily *Nymphaea nouchali* creates a cool and inviting atmosphere in a garden with a pond, the elegant flowers only opening in the full sun to release their fragrance.

In the shade, you may be surprised to find out that the striking flowers of the bush lily *Clivia miniata* are fragrant, while the scented flowers of large-leaved dragon tree *Dracaena aetiformis* and the Ngome lily *Crinum moorei* are at their strongest at night. The fragrance of many flowers intensifies at night to attract pollinators such as moths. A nocturnal visit to *Struthiola dodecandra*, a small fynbos

shrub with creamy flowers, the Ifafa lily *Cyrtanthus mackenii* with yellow tubular flowers and the March lily *Amaryllis belladonna* with large trumpet shaped flowers scented with a sweet fruity fragrance, could be quite a heady experience!

Fragrant foliage

A gentle touch or crush of the leaves releases the fragrance of many plants. Citrus, sage and pelargoniums are some of the more familiar garden plants with strongly scented foliage. *Hemizygia canescens* is a special sage to find at the fair. It is a summer-growing shrub with decorative leaves edged with dark pink lines that smell very strongly of coconut when crushed. *Orthosiphon labiatus* is not as strongly scented but worth a sniff and a place in the garden as one of the best small shrubs for summer display.

A favourite to plant along the path edge is *Pelargonium tomentosum* with



ABOVE LEFT: The elegant blue water-lily *Nymphaea nouchali* only opens its flowers in full sun to release a soft perfume. RIGHT: A buchu filled with scented oils, *Agathosma glabrata* only needs a gentle touch of its fine foliage to release a strong citrus smell. Photos: Liesl van der Walt.

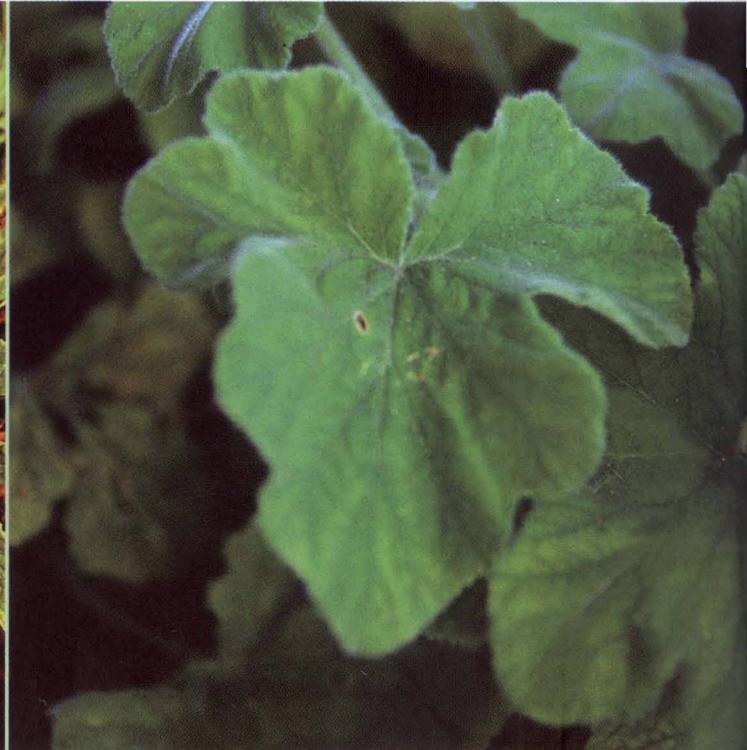
peppermint scented, velvety leaves that form a soft, light green carpet in the semi-shade. *Pelargonium radens* smells like peppermint and *Pelargonium citronellum* has a wonderful lemon scent. *Pelargonium cucullatum*, a strong shrub excellent for flower colour in early summer, has its own characteristic sweet smell while *Pelargonium scabrum*, with leaves shaped like chicken feet, has a peculiar bubblegum smell.

Belonging in the citrus family, Rutaceae, most of the local fynbos bushes are rich in strongly scented

oils. The evergreen confetti bush *Coleonema album* with a sweet lemon scent, is an excellent waterwise shrub. *Agathosma glabrata* also has a lemon scent, *Agathosma lanceolata* (heuningboegoe) smells like liquorice while *Agathosma cerefolium* (anysboegoe) and *Agathosma ciliaris* smell like aniseed. *Agathosma apiculata* (knoffelboegoe or garlic buchu) is so strongly scented, it fills the air around Riversdale and Mossel Bay. A deep breath of the intensely aromatic *Agathosma crenulata* (boegoe/buchu)

relieves a blocked nose or sore chest.

Many medicinal plants have smelly leaves; their strong fragrance being part of the cure as with *Mentha longifolia* (wild mint), *Tulbaghia violacea* (wild garlic), *Salvia africana-lutea* (wild sage), *Eriocephalus africanus* (wild rosemary) and *Helichrysum petiolare* (kooigoed). Some herbs have strange, sticky smells like *Stachys aethiopica* (unofficially called dead man's bush), *Melianthus major* (kruidjie-roer-my-nie), *Artemisia afra* (wilde-als) and *Tetradenia riparia* (iboza). *Clausena*



ABOVE LEFT: With a strong citrus smell, *Pelargonium citronellum* is a lovely shrub with attractive foliage. Photo: Liesl van der Walt.

RIGHT: With leaves that smell of peppermint, *Pelargonium tomentosum* quickly covers the ground in the shade. Photo: Liesl van der Walt.

BELOW RIGHT: The delicate leaves of this special sage, *Hemizygia canescens*, smell of coconut when touched. Photo: Cherise Viljoen.



anisata (perdepis) a pretty little tree with soft foliage and bright fruits, must be one of the strangest with leaves often smelling strongly of horse urine. Interestingly this is one of the most widely used of all trees in African medicine. Another popular medicine is the strong but pleasant smelling *Tarchonanthus camphoratus* (wild camphor) with aromatic foliage and flowers. It occurs naturally throughout South Africa and is one of the toughest shrubs or small trees from the coast to the Kalahari.

Dotted with oil glands that release a citrus smell when crushed, *Vepris lanceolata* (white ironwood) is a lovely small tree for the garden with a canopy of shiny, light green foliage. Fun to have in the garden is the strongly scented *Heteropyxis natalensis* (lavender tree) a small tree with a white trunk and glossy green foliage that turns a beautiful yellow-red in autumn. I can't resist crushing a leaf whenever I pass it.

If you'd like to add some sensory delight to your garden, come and visit the Kirstenbosch Garden Fair where these fragrant plants will be displayed for you to see, touch, smell and buy.

Further reading

Joffe, P. 2001. *Creative gardening with indigenous plants*. Briza, Pretoria.

Palmer, E & Pitman, N. 1972. *Trees of southern Africa*. Balkema, Cape Town.



ABOVE: A tough groundcover for full sun, *Hermannia pinnata* flowers in spring with small orange flowers that smell of honey. Photo: Liesl van der Walt.

BELOW: A fragrant walk through the medicinal garden, touching the scented leaves of *Helichrysum petiolare* (kooigoed), *Pelargonium cucullatum* (wild geranium), *Tetradenia riparia* (iboza), *Artemisia afra* (wilde als) and *Leonotis leonurus* (wild dagga), is a cure in itself. Photo: Liesl van der Walt.

