

Daisies and Forbs: Add Colour and Diversity to your spring garden

Some like it hot

Daisies are the happy emojis of the floral world, with a grin from ear to ear they exude playful delight, joie de vivre, ‘joy of living’! To the fresh spring garden they bring halos of colour from fire and gold, to saffron, alabaster and snow – no, that won’t do; it’s spring – ah, daisy white!

Osteospermum hybrids, *Arctotis* and *Gazanias*: plant them in pots positioned inside a flower bed, as groundcovers to fill gaps, or tuck them around the now flowerless spiky winter aloes for contrast. The flowers will fuel the flight of butterflies, beetles and bugs, and provide hunting platforms for spiders while the foliage protects the soil against heavy raindrops and drying sun while offering cover to wildlife. Grow the bulk of your garden with original species that pack optimum levels of pollen and nectar, and spoil yourself with a few of these irresistible colours.

Grassland and Wildflower meadows

In grassland beds or wildflower meadows, depending on whether grasses or forbs dominate, needles of green grow before your eyes from winter-brown tufts. Bristly spikes in shades of purple, bronze and biscuit, cover the tips of impossibly slender stalks. Increase the diversity of your grassland by adding new species between the existing plants. Try these grasses; *Cenchrus ciliaris*, *Melinis nerviglumis*, *Eragrostis curvula*, *E. capensis*, *Eragrostis racemosa* (for Highveld gardens) and *Themeda triandra* and *Andropogon eucomis* for mid-height.

Add low-growing cushions of bright green leaves and yellow stars with the small *Hypoxis* species, *H. villosa* and *H. angustifolia*. They take up little room and add golden yellow flowers for weeks.

The mauve-blue plumes of *Merwilla plumbea* in all its guises (a few old varieties are now in one group) are outstanding bulbs for a spring wildflower display; they’re a protected plant as wild populations are rapidly declining due to the unlawful collection, so are not always easy to get. The large Blue Squill is perfect for the back of the bed amongst tall grasses. The smaller variety has smaller bulbs that form a rounded clump.

Jamesbrittenia species: search for varieties of this genus; they are perennial herbs producing a few leggy branches and spare, feathery foliage. Flowers are most attractive and come in shades of pink, orange, red, purple and cream. Many were previously in the *Sutera* genus.

Pelargonium luridum has a long growing and flowering season, from September through to the first frosts around May. Plant it among the short grasses in the dampest section of the bed (if necessary, scoop out some soil to create a dip, and keep the bulbs well mulched). Plants grow to 60 cm, with lovely flowers that come in a variety of colours, white to yellow, salmon-pink, other shades of pink. Flowers are night-scented so most likely attract pollinating moths.

Pelargonium schlechteri grows together with *P. luridum* (botanists are looking to lump them together). This grassland forb competes with the taller grasses and wildflowers, their two-tiered flowering stem easily reaching above other flora and grass fronds at 1 m high. Flowering begins in mid-October through to the end of December, with a November peak.

Lemon and butter-yellow flowers for Cape gardens

Cape gardeners can enjoy the butter-yellow flowers of the Saffron Bush, *Gnidia oppositifolia*, from September to the end of November. Slender 2 m high stems carry silky-soft bright green leaves on the upper section with clusters of small, tubular flowers at the tips of branches. Always in motion, this tall, wand-like *Gnidia* adds an attractive wispy height to a sunny bed.

Cotula sericea is a low-growing spreading groundcover with feathery foliage and delightful lemon-yellow buttons carried on long stalks well above the leaves from early spring and summer, plus intermittently through the year. Plants prefer full sun but will cope in light shade for short periods. It is a water-wise little perennial and can survive long, dry stretches, plants do appreciate regular watering.