

# Welcome to the Gardens at Acara....

There are the following areas within the garden:

- Driveway area
- Top Garden (by the main house/stoep)
- The pool area and rose garden
- Vegetable patch/herb garden – leading to the wisteria arch and pond....
- Bottom garden next to the horse paddocks
- Pergola and pink/purple area...
- The yellow garden area
- WillowTree Cottage garden area
- Wildflower meadow and tree field – alongside the stream

The best time to visit the garden is in the spring, ie in November. The first 2 weeks in November are normally when most roses are flowering, giving a profusion of colour.

Autumn is also a colourful time – April through to May, when many of the trees are looking stunning and the plants are giving a wonderful show.

But there is something of interest and certainly plenty of flowers all year long.

The following pages show you what you might see of interest – throughout the months of the year...

The property is almost 2hectares (approx 4 acres) in size. The planted garden area is approximately 3,500m<sup>2</sup>, with large lawn areas, with the rest being grass paddocks for the resident horses.

All the design in the garden has been done solely by Fiona.

History:

Fiona moved into the Acara property in October 2004. But because of the oncoming hot summer (plants cannot be moved during this extreme heat) and the renovations that needed to be done to the house, nothing was done or changed in the garden until the autumn – April 2005.

Then the work started.

An irrigation system was put in place, which has since been changed and expanded as the garden has grown. Much needed compost heaps were built and started to fill...

Many plants were dug up and moved to more appropriate places – such as more shaded areas, or areas where there was better soil. Many plants were cut hard back to revitalize them.

In its current state, 3/4 of the garden is completely new –reclaimed from the exuberant Kikuyu grass/scrub and weeds...

Vuso & Witness work in the garden here – between them they work 8 days a week, also doing maintenance and helping with all the tasks needed to run a guesthouse and smallholding! They started working here in 2019, with no prior gardening experience. Now they know a lot of the latin names of the plants!

Please feel free to talk to Fiona or the gardeners and ask questions about the garden. They are more than happy to chat about their past – and future - projects!

Fiona has also been involved with the Stellenbosch Horticultural Society, so she has plenty of ideas for great gardens to visit in the area!

Continued overleaf...

## JUNE

The start of winter. Most of the autumn leaves and colours have finished, and most vineyards are bare... The last of the salvias are flowering, and the strelitzias are starting to come into flower – they will flower through the winter months...

We have 2 Nelson Mandela strelitzias in the garden – yellow rather than the common orange colour.

The lemon trees are normally weighed down with fruit... but they normally bear throughout the year too...

The arum lilies (indigenous) are starting to flower in the streams – they love boggy feet, and the watsonias (also indigenous) are flowering...

The flowers that look like snowdrops are actually called leucojum – or known as snowflakes here in South Africa.

The weather here is too cold for tulips – if gardeners want them to flower, they must be placed in the freezer for a short dormancy period! It's also too warm here to grow peonys – another plant I miss from Europe!

Our olive tree in the driveway is normally bearing fruit this month too.

## JULY

The vines, the bougainvilleas and the roses are normally pruned this month.. Sometimes the roses (and bougainvilleas) are still flowering and it seems a shame to prune them. But they need it – especially if we want a great show of flowers in October/November.

We also prune the *Lochroma cyancum* 'Violet Churcu' this month – it's in the central bed in the bottom garden. Originating from the mountains of Ecuador, this tender plant needs pruning back each year – it easily reaches 6feet or more!

The Cape Honeysuckle (*Tecomaria capensis*) – the driveway hedge of orange flowers, (but can be yellow or red), is flowering now, and throughout winter. It's great as it encourages sunbirds into the garden.

The aloes are starting to flower. There are many plants on the driveway, a few above the pool area and more in the vegetable patch...!

The wisteria is dormant and looking rather bare (in the vegetable patch and above the archway). This bursts into flower in late September or October.

The kniphofias in the stream by the stepping stones are in full flower – the birds also love these! The pink argyranthemum's are also normally looking their best in this cooler weather.

The Japanese quince (*Chaenomeles japonica*) is in full flower - in the top garden... and the mulberry tree in the driveway normally has its first fresh green leaves now – a wonderful sign that spring is on its way!

## AUGUST

Normally, together with September, this is the wettest time of the year.

The almond trees alongside the boundary in the vegetable patch are covered in blossom (the squirrels normally steal the almonds before we get a chance to harvest them!)

The arum lilies (*zantedeschia*'s) are coming into bloom – all along the streams and banks. They are like weeds here – coming up where we don't expect and don't want them! ☺ They are the envy of our European visitors though!

The *argyranthemum*'s are still flowering, as are our daffodils! The various *abutilons* are also normally looking great at this time of year. There is an unusual white (with orange stamens) under the large leafed *philodendron* – in the yellow garden.

Our flowering plums (*prunus*) flower briefly with their delicate and pretty pink blossoms.

The jasmine is in full flower and smells lovely – alongside the swimming pool, and the *osteospermums* are flowering their little socks off – they give a FANTASTIC show of colour this month.

We also have a couple of lovely hellebore's – by the first bridge...

## SEPTEMBER

Spring is here! Many trees already have their leaves and everything is looking wonderfully fresh and green.

The various *pelargoniums* are flowering. Did you know *pelargoniums* are indigenous to South Africa?

We have many types including the peppermint *pelargonium tomentosum*

The roses are already growing fast – and some early ones such as the Banksia roses and Just Joey are starting to flower. Others are making their buds...

The *clivias* are in full bloom and the *verbena* is already starting its long flowering season. The Cape May spirea is a flush of white confetti and the wisteria is in full swing – it looks lovely against the yellow of the canna's and variegated plants in that area.

The iris – purple, burgundy and yellow are flowering, as are the *crocosmia*'s and the arum lilies continue to provide their wonderful freshness.

You'll also most likely see the leaves of the fiddlewood by the pool turning yellow/orange...

## OCTOBER

Springtime – the start of the year, and the guest season!

This is our hectic time in the garden! Getting things tidied, planted, moved, composted.

Last year, we had torrential downpours – and I mean torrential – with localised flooding. The bottom garden was almost washed away. It was certainly under at least 2 inches of water. We also had hailstones, which flattened many plants! But in between the downpours, we also had beautiful clear sunny days, and the roses are fresh and colourful, and the greens of all the new growth in the garden is incredible.

In 2018/19 however we had a severe drought, and the garden did suffer. Spot watering the larger plants mostly saved them – one upside was that there were almost no seedlings/weeds!

The list of plants of interest is too great to list. But I love seeing the iris in flower, and the bottle brush plants – both the common red, and the rarer pink flowers. We even have a few early *agapanthus* in flower!

*Limonium perezii* has started to flower too...

It's also at this time of year that we start to get the vegetable patch in full swing. Beans have already been planted (and hopefully survived the snails and guinea fowl eating the young leaves!). Our herbs are starting

into growth, and we have normally started sowing seeds of rocket and basil for the coming months. We normally have carrots, lettuce, cucumbers and peppers/chilli's on the go too. And of course, the tomatoes seed themselves! ☺

## **NOVEMBER**

Late Spring – the best time of the year to visit the garden

All roses are full bloom! Spraying for black spot starts – this is the **only** thing we spray for in the garden. Clematis are flowering. There is a Clematis Montana in the vegetable patch above the stone seat, alongside the Makaya Bella and Wedding Garland rose.

We have several varieties of lavender in the garden – known here as English, French, Australian, we also have pink, green, and white forms, along with the lavender that they normally use for oils and scent... We also have a large tea-tree bush – the type used for tea-tree oil (an antiseptic). It is normally in full flower in November.

The many fuschia's, hydrangea's, lychnis coronaria, and impatiens are also in full flower now

## **DECEMBER**

The agapanthus down the driveway is flowering and starting to turn heads. There are small, tall and white agapanthus dotted around the garden too. The largest are taller than me at 5'11! (1.79m) (along the gravel pathway past the yellow garden!)

## **JANUARY**

I was too busy to write up about this month(!) But here is what I remember: ☺

The hemerocallis (day lilies) are flowering – we have a selection in the garden, the normal and the spider varieties – please ask for their names!

## **FEBRUARY**

This is the driest time of the year, with harsh hot sunshine and desiccating winds. It is a tough time for the garden and our irrigation system is essential! Drippers and sprayers are checked meticulously, as for some plants, even one day without water is a death warrant. For colour, this is also a difficult time of year. The bougainvillea's often still have some flowers, but the main stars are the dalia's, verbena and (some) roses. The icebergs especially continue to provide a show.

The indigenous plumbago – we have the blue and white forms, also are in full flower.

Most of the agapanthus have finished flowering, with their architectural seed heads looking so regal. We cut these off reluctantly, they look so wonderful, but by cutting them off, they do improve the flowering ability for following years.

In the evenings, the moonflowers, the brugmansias (some call them datura's) provide a wonderful scent. We have a cream one with single flowers in the vegetable patch and one with cream double flowers close to the stoep of the main house.

The vegetable patch is also looking rather empty, as it is now too hot for most plants – lettuces, runner beans and fennel having gone to seed. We keep the oregano, thyme and lemon grass trimmed back to keep it neat. Our baby tomatoes are favourite at this time of year – they seed themselves all over the garden (unfortunately!), but we just keep 3 or so plants to give us plenty of warm, sun-ripened tomatoes for the summer months... Yum! ☺

We often have potatoes on the go at this time of year too, and maybe a few cucumbers and squash...

### **MARCH**

March lilies, salvias, roses, the lawn is looking a little tired (with the intense heat), restios, grasses miscanthus, penta's, bouganvillea's

### **APRIL**

Ginko tree – buttery yellow leaves in Autumn.

Liquidamber styraciflua – gives wonderful autumn red foliage. Various types of plectranthus are also looking wonderful around the garden.

### **MAY**

Still a lot of Autumn colour around. Many roses are still flowering, before the colder weather causes them to hibernate and their leaves to drop. The grasses are looking at their best now. Our Sedum spectabile are normally flowering now, and the bouganvillea's seem to like the cooler weather too. Our plumbago continues to flower, looking so pretty in blue and also white. Our many dahlia's are also in full flower (still!). Due to the amount we need to prune, we start already with some plants now... It takes a while to do everything in the garden!

We also prepare for our winter storms – the first normally rolls in around Easter, or towards the end of May.

### **Unusual / General Interest – throughout the year**

Ginger plant – *Zingiber officinale* we have the variegated form, it's close to the first bridge, on the left hand side. Large strap-like leaves.

Lemon grass – in the vegetable patch

Tillandsias – or air plants – in the Willow Trees, including the old mans beard *Tillandsia usneoides*.. We also have a staghorn fern (*Platyserium*), also in the Willow tree.

Tea tree plant – in the vegetable patch, on the right hand side of the gravel path.

Echeverias and aeoniums – normal and the black leafed variety (Black Prince) – in pots.

We have a few different types of restios in the garden – *thamnochortus cinereus* (x3) in the bottom garden by the horse paddocks,

In late August the *diets grandiflora* start flowering – and continue to do so right through summer and into Autumn. They really are tough plants that continue to give pleasure throughout most of the year, normally giving an extra flush of flowers just after some rainfall.

The large alocasias (elephant ears) alongside the stream continue to amaze people with their size!

We also have a gunera (large serrated leaves) growing in the stream. Many tree ferns varying in age and height to about 10 feet high, and a few banana plants – which regularly give us tasty banana's.

We have the plants commonly known in Europe as spider plants here growing outside in the garden. (*chlorophytum comosum*). Here in South Africa they are known as “Hen and Chickens”! 😊

Trees: *Podocarpus henkelii* (in horse field), *syzygium cordatum* – we have a few – dotted around in the horse paddocks. Fever tree, water berry, young oak trees, liquid amber trees.

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