

In your garden

Issue 12 - 26 September 2021



The beautiful Common Coral Tree

If you have a garden with enough space to have a Coral Tree, then I must admit that I am very envious of you. Coral Trees have some of the most beautiful flowers on a tree and they certainly make stunning additions to a garden.

The Common Coral Tree (*Erythrina lysistemon*) grows to a height of around 6 metres and has a similar spread. The tree sheds its leaves over winter and then, as spring approaches, the flowers appear before the new set of leaves. The flowers are a coral red colour which gives an indication of how the tree got its name. When in flower the tree gets lots of attention from birds and insects. They are particularly popular with sunbirds who feed on the nectar. Other species also feed on the nectar and others still eat the seeds which are red in colour with a black stripe. They are often referred to as “lucky beans.”

Coral Trees are good garden specimens if you have the space. They are quick growing and can be grown for seed or from cuttings taken from the hardwood sections of the tree. There are two things to consider before planting one of these trees. Firstly, they are covered in thorns and secondly, they have an aggressive root system. They should be planted in a sunny position in well-drained soil. When planting the tree lots of compost should be provided.

Although this tree originates from the coastal regions of the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, it will survive various conditions and can be grown in the Western Cape. It may be drought-resistant, but it will not tolerate heavy frost.

Various parts of the Common Coral Tree are used to treat a wide variety of ailments. These include toothache, earache, relieve inflammation and to clear maggots from wounds. The wood from the trunk of a tree is sometimes used to make a canoe.



Chinspot Batis

If you are ever in the bushveld or woodland and you hear a plaintive call



A great succulent for indoors

that sounds like “three blind mice” then you are in the company of a Chinspot Batis. This is not a common garden bird, but it will enter gardens that border on well-wooded areas. The Chinspot Batis is found in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, Gauteng, North West and Limpopo. The Cape Batis replaces it in the Western Cape but can also be found in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. The Cape Batis is easily identified as it has chestnut colouring on its flanks.

The male Chinspot Batis, as shown in the image, is black and white with a black band across its chest. The female has a brown band across her chest and a brown spot under her “chin.” The male does not have a chinspot. They are small birds with a length of around 12 cm and a wingspan of similar width. They only weigh around 10 to 14 grams.

The Chinspot Batis is quite a confiding bird and will sometimes allow you to get quite close. They are normally found in pairs or solitary birds. They spend much of their time searching the foliage of shrubs and trees for prey which consists of small insects and spiders. To the best of my knowledge, they will not feed at a feeding table. Even though you can't lure them away from the preferred feeding spots they still make delightful visitors to a garden.

The breeding season varies from region-to-region September to February. They make a cup-shaped nest from plant fibres, held together with spider web, and then lined with lichen. The nest is often placed on a horizontal branch somewhere between 1 and 4 metres above the ground. Most often 2 eggs are laid. The female incubates the eggs and then both parents feed the nestlings. Once fledged the chicks will remain with their parents for 2 months or so.

The Pondo Cliff Crassula (*Crassula streyi*) is a beautiful succulent that is ideal for growing indoors. If you can find one at your favourite nursery then it is a worthwhile purchase.

This plant has unusually coloured leaves. The leaves are oval shaped, almost round, and are green on top and maroon to red underneath. In its natural habitat it grows on cliffs in isolated spots in KwaZulu-Natal such as Oribi Gorge and Mkambati Reserve. It only thrives in shady conditions, and it is believed the leaf colouration helps it absorb light in gloomy conditions.

It is this low-light characteristic that make the plant a good choice for growing indoors. If you have a heavily shaded spot in your garden, that does not get frost over winter, then you consider planting these plants as ground cover.

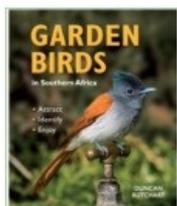
The Pondo Cliff Crassula is a small plant which only reaches a height of around 35 cm. As mentioned above the leaves are green and deep red. The flowers are borne in winter. The flowers are small and pinkish white in colour and are borne on long stalks.

Like most succulents this one needs to be grown in soil with good drainage. The pot should be filled with a mix of sand, compost, and potting soil. It is slow growing but long-lived. New plants can be generated by placing leaves in a mix of perlite and fine soil. The stalk of the leaf should be buried with the leaf above the mixture. Once the leaves have taken then they can be moved to pots.

Advertise in this newsletter

“In your garden” is looking for advertisers. This newsletter is aimed at South African gardeners, particularly those that are interested in indigenous plants as well as the birds, butterflies and more that their gardens attract. If you are interested, then please contact us at: steven@natureinyourgarden.co.za.

I look forward to hearing from you.



Subscriber Competition

As a subscriber to this newsletter, you are in line to win a copy of “Garden Birds in South Africa” by Duncan Butchart.

This excellent book describes around 100 birds that are likely to appear in gardens in South Africa. The book describes how you can set up a bird friendly garden to attract different species. 50 species of plants are described including trees, aloes, proteas and much more. The main part of the book covers 101 species of birds. This section not only helps to identify them but also how to attract them. Other chapters detail subjects such as feeding birds, providing nesting sites and migration.

This competition will close when the newsletter has 1,000 subscribers so why not encourage your

friends and family to subscribe! Unfortunately, this competition is only available to subscribers in South Africa. Delivery will be done to the winner's nearest branch of Postnet.

Send me your garden bird list

Do you keep a garden bird list, and you live in a housing complex or estate? I would like to start building up a database of garden birds for as many complexes and estates as possible. As I start getting information then I will make it available to anyone who is interested. So, if you have a garden bird list then I would like to ask if you would be kind enough to send me a copy, and to send any updates as new birds are added to your list. In future issues I will be inviting readers to send in a short article about the birds in their gardens. It is your chance to brag about the birds that visit you and how you attract them.

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