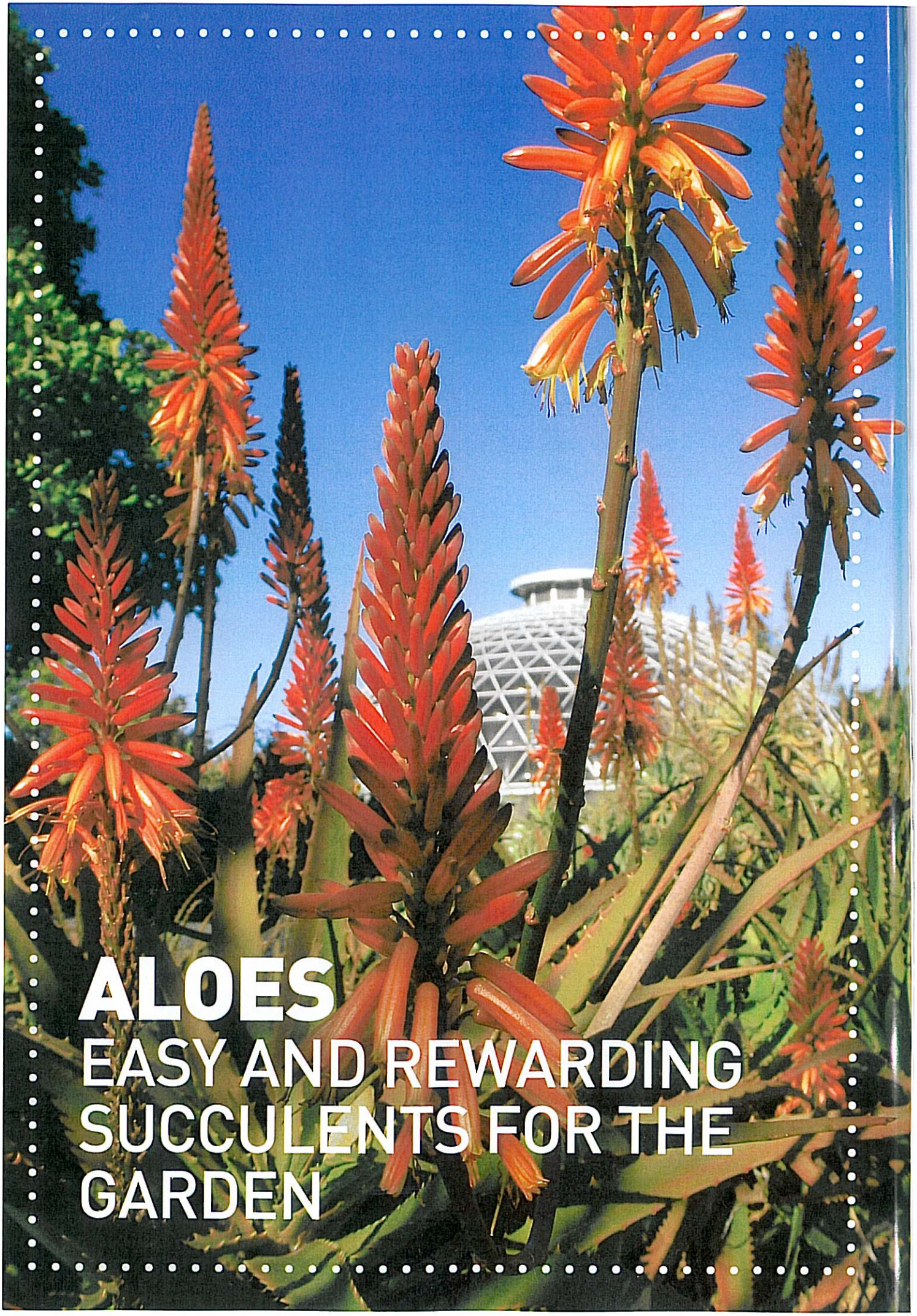


ALOES
EASY AND REWARDING SUCCULENTS FOR THE GARDEN

Aloe dorothea in winter-red foliage. PP

Aloe dorothea in summer-green foliage. PP

Aloe ciliaris PP

Mixed Aloe display. PP

Aloe vaombe PP

OPPOSITE: *Aloe arborescens* hybrids, Mt Coot-tha Botanic Gardens, QLD. PP

Cactus and Succulent Society of Queensland Inc.

Images Arno King AK
Paul Plant PP
Rob Davies RD

ALOES ARE NO LONGER SHUNTED to the rear of the garden – they have come out in a flurry of fashion and are in high demand by landscape designers with gardens featuring them alone or in conjunction with other plants.

In their native lands aloes had long been overlooked as landscape plants just as many Australians had overlooked gums and wattles. Appreciation for local indigenous plants and the need to conserve these species have enlightened designers and home gardeners in Africa and the Middle East so that these plants are now as cherished there as they are abroad.

Aloes are a drought resistant, water tolerant genus that require next to no maintenance, suffer very few if any diseases, thrive in subtropical conditions and reward home owners with a range of flowers that keep the local lorikeets and honey eaters enraptured.

There are probably three critical ingredients to growing landscape aloes:

- Choosing the right aloe for the climate and zone;
- Providing the right light, soil and water conditions; and
- Knowing their final size, shape and colour to suit the landscape design.

>>

Right aloe for the climate and zone

Aloes are a group of plants that originate mainly in Africa from the Cape of Good Hope in the far south, all the way up the east and west coasts, also extending eastwards into Madagascar and northwards into Oman, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. In that huge distribution range, there is a significant number of climatic zones, from cool, wet winter rainfall areas, warm wet summer rainfall areas, tropical savannah, desert and semi desert, high altitude wet mountainous ranges through to tropical monsoonal conditions. They have evolved to live in those various environments, and will flourish in similar zones within Australia and other parts of the world.

With over five hundred species and an ever-increasing number of new cultivars, there is a range of specimens to suit almost all Australian gardens. Some of those species that originate from the dry desert regions, will thrive in the heat of subtropical Brisbane if kept in a greenhouse or shadehouse, but will rot if planted out in the garden. However most of the species from warm to hot summer rainfall zones similar to those that we experience on the east coast of Australia flourish under local conditions.

The trick to successful culture is matching up the species with the local climate zone and providing the right microclimate – get that right and you have a plant or range of plants that are fashionable and maintenance free and which will provide extraordinary colour to your gardens throughout many seasons of the year, with no irrigation requirements. >>

For growers in the dry tropics

(such as Rockhampton and Townsville) the ideal specimens are the robust larger species, such as *A. marlothii* and *A. ferox*. In their natural habitat, they tend to go dormant in winter, but the temperatures from Brisbane northwards are such that they just keep on growing.

Refer to our on-line table for more options.

For growers in wet tropics

(such as Cairns, Darwin and Broome) excellent drainage is the most important concern. A suggestion would be to build the beds up a bit and supplement the mix with granite aggregate. Refer to STG website for options.

For growers inland

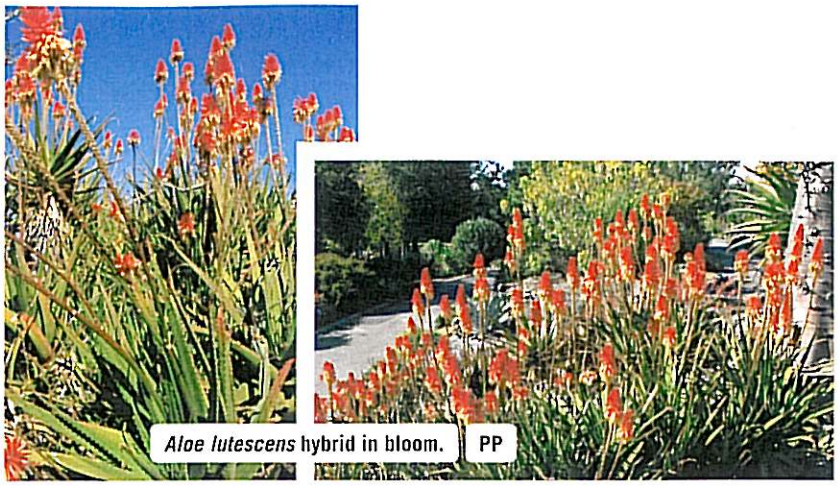
(such as Alice Springs, etc.) frost can be a limitation. While many aloes love the cold and do well in Sydney and Melbourne winters there are unfortunately only a few species that can tolerate heavy frost (such as *A. marlothii*, *A. polyphylla*, *A.pratensis*, and *A. aristata*).

For growers in warm temperate areas

(such as Sydney) popular single rosette choices are *A. reitzii*, *A. aculeata*, *A. petricola*, whilst most of the single stemmed (*A. ferox*, *A. marlothii* and *A. thraskii*) and shrubby species (*A. castanea*, *A. mawii* and *A. andongensis*) will thrive in these light frost conditions.

Aloe marlothii in flower. PP


Aloe ferox PP


Aloe lutescens hybrid in bloom. PP


Aloe petricola closeup. RD


Aloe petricola PP


Aloe castanea RD


Aloe bussei PP


Aloe mawii RD

Right light, soil and water conditions

The one thing that all landscape aloes have in common is that they need a well drained, open soil, with plenty of sunlight and air flow. Most species prefer full sun conditions where their leaves tend to take on more colourful hues however there are a few species that prefer semi-shade. Avoid placing specimens under other foliage plants or in a wet patch otherwise they may struggle and become leggy.

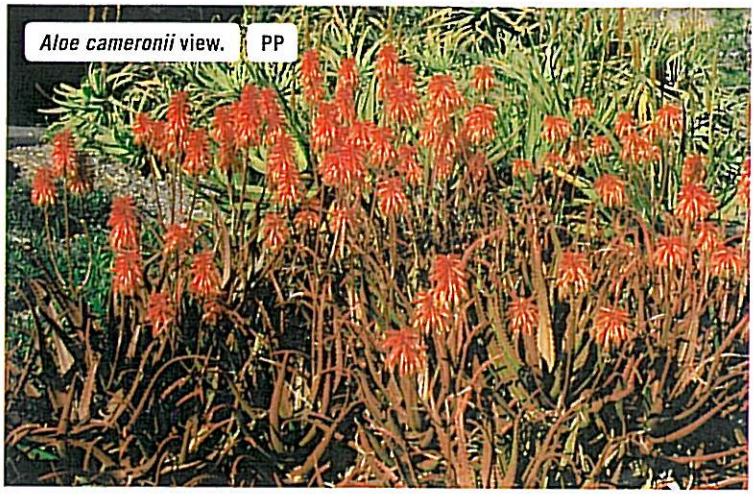
Soil should be rich but roots must be well drained. A suggested mix if you are planning an aloe garden is two metres of rich garden soil, mixed with 1 metre of coarse medium river sand (particle size 2mm or greater). Aloe roots tend to spread just below the soil surface and a soil depth of 45cm provides best growing results.

An ideal spot for growing aloes is on a slope (for better drainage), exposed to full morning sun (they can take afternoon heat too) where there is a breeze (the breeze helps dispel some of the effects of humidity). Do not irrigate as rainfall will be sufficient once the plants are established.

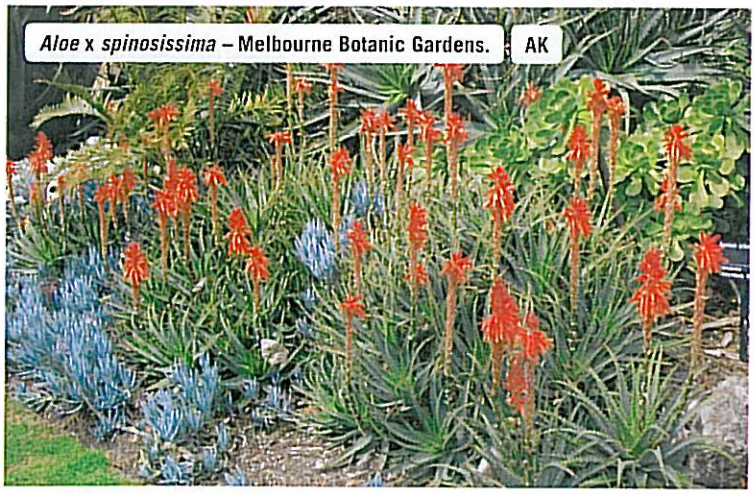
Nutritionally, some slow release fertiliser (NPK ratio of 16:4:10) is recommended at the beginning of winter when most of the species tend to flower. This will help provide the plant with extra energy. Apart from that they need very little attention. The only maintenance required is to remove the old flower stalks, and to prune back the shrubs as required. »

PESTS AND DISEASES

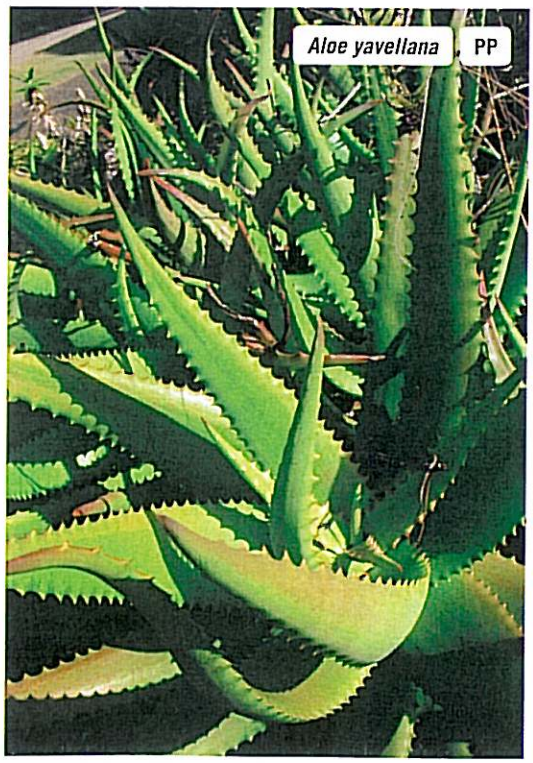
- Black spot on leaves – usually fungal, often a sign that the plant needs to be in a sunnier condition – not much you can do about the existing spot, but spray with a fungicide.
- Aloe aphid – can congregate in the crown of the plant – a spray with a systemic insecticide usually gets rid of them – does not damage the plant.
- Scale – can occur in potted plants, very rare in landscape plants – malathion and white oil spray works well.
- Hail and other leaf damage – will mark leaves but has to grow out.



Aloe cameronii view. PP

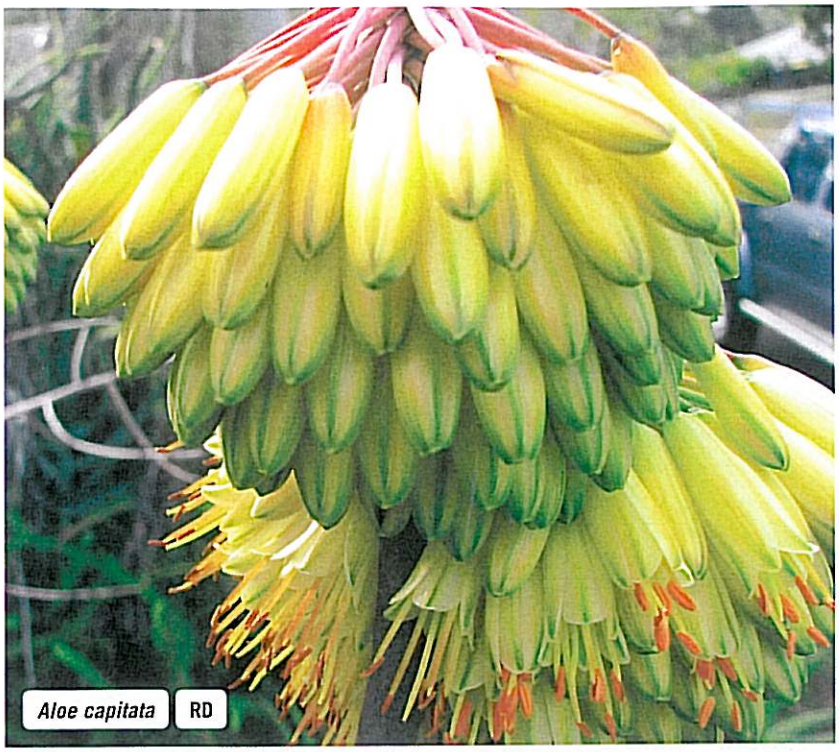


Aloe x *spinosissima* – Melbourne Botanic Gardens. AK



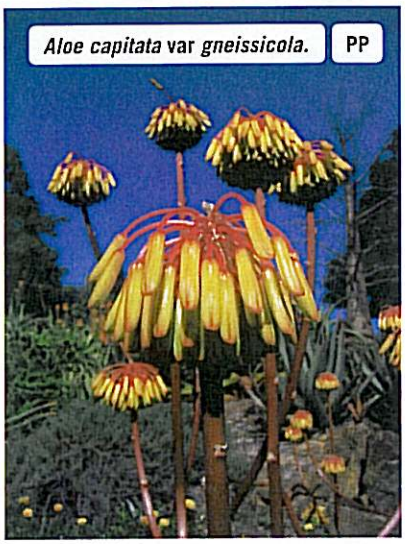
Aloe yavellana PP

Aloe speciosa hybrid. PP



Aloe capitata RD

Aloe ferox flower closeup. RD



Aloe capitata var *gneissicola.* PP

Aloe ferox – two forms. PP

Aloe excelsa infloresence. RD

THORNINESS CAN BE AN ISSUE FOR SOME PEOPLE AND THE ALOES VARY TREMENDOUSLY IN THIS FIELD

Size, Shape and Colour for Design

Aloes come in all sizes, shape and leaf colours. They range from the majestic *Aloe barberae* which will grow into a tree cm *Aloe parvula* from Madagascar that has purple leaves. The form can vary from single ground hugging rosettes, grass-like groundcovers or shrubs to statuesque single stem feature plants growing three to four metres tall.

They vary in leaf colour from a striking marble grey, lime green to dark green, purple and red, spotted, striped and any combination of the above. Flower spikes also vary in size, shape and colour from the brilliant golden yellow balls of *Aloe capitata* to the half-metre long white/red hot poker inflorescence of *Aloe petricola* or the diminutive 7.5cm white petals of *Aloe albiflora.*

Thorniness can be an issue for some people and the aloes vary tremendously in this field. Some species have no thorns, just a rough margin, whilst others abound in thick black or white thorns on both the sides and even on the back of the leaves.

Ultimately the species and cultivars you select should suit your garden, although there is a range of standout species that will enhance every garden. Like any genus not all of the species are spectacular and some are not worth growing in the garden. Here are some of the more spectacular (and most of these are available in garden centres or specialist plant societies).

Tree Aloes

At this stage *Aloe barberae* (syn. *A. bainesii*) is available locally but it is already taking off in contemporary landscape gardens.

Tall single stemmed feature plants

Aloe marlothii, A. ferox, A. excelsa, A. thraskii – all grow three to four metres tall, have only one rosette, usually about 1m across, and all have magnificent flower spikes (inflorescences) that arrive early to mid winter each year. They are best used singly, as an eye-catching centrepiece or feature to any garden. »

Single headed rosettes with no stems

Aloe reitzii, *A. capitata*, *A. petricola*, *A. chabaudii* and *A. aculeata* are single headed greyish plants, all wonderful landscape plants that vary in shape, spination and flower spike.

Green leaved plants like *Aloe ibitiensis*, *A. wickensii* and *A. vanbalenii* make a welcome colour change, with *Aloe dorotheae*, *A. bussei*, *A. tauri*, and forms of *A. cameronii* displaying a wonderful red leaf colouration if left exposed to the winter sun. Add grey spotted aloes like *A. esculenta* (freely available) green spotted aloes like *A. maculata* (common too) and throw in the sculptural thornless *A. striata* and one has the ingredients of a blended yet diverse collection.

Shrubby plants

Shrubs range from small manageable clumps half a metre all round (*A. acutissima*, *A. andongensis* and *A. sinkatana*) to bushes that will grow into the space that is available. Species like *A. arborescens* and *A. kedongensis* will grow to 2 metres tall and will continue to pup, which is easily controlled with an annual prune.

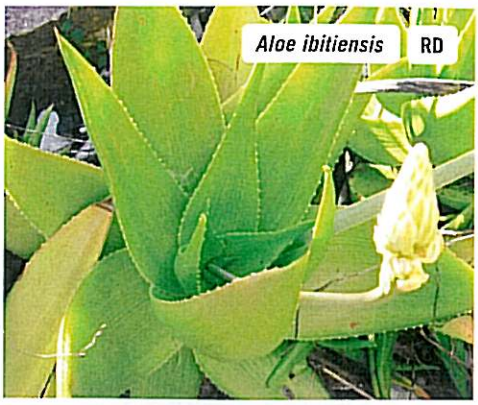
Small plants and fillers

These range from the small grass-like *Aloe bellatula*, the purplish *A. parvula* or could be the miniature mat forming rosettes of *A. brevifolia*. Other specialities like *A. juvenna*, *A. aristata* and *A. jucunda* are also useful to fill small pockets or for the smaller succulent gardens. The miniatures prefer morning sun and generally need protection from the afternoon heat. >>

GROWER TIP

An often held view is that aloes are desert succulents. Aloes are succulent, not because they live in drought affected areas (although some species do), but because they survive periods of 4-6 months dry in their native habitats. They can withstand long periods of no rain but will flourish and thrive when rain abounds.


Aloe chabaudii PP

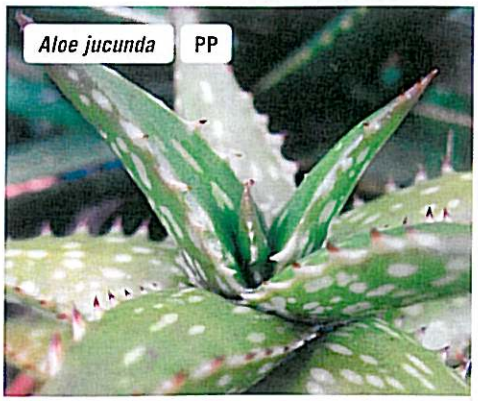

Aloe ibitiensis RD


Aloe vanbalenii PP

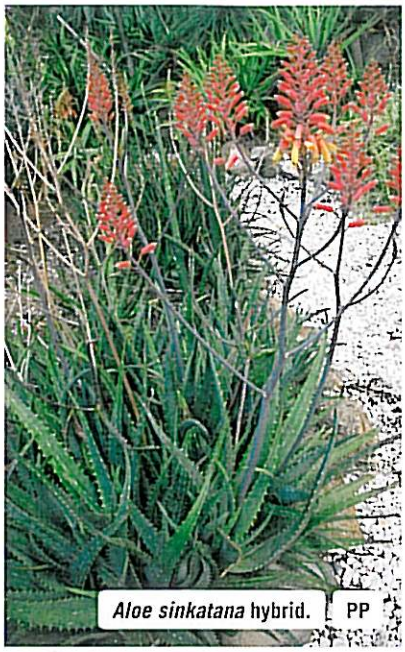

Aloe tauri PP


Aloe bellatula PP


Aloe esculenta PP


Aloe jucunda PP

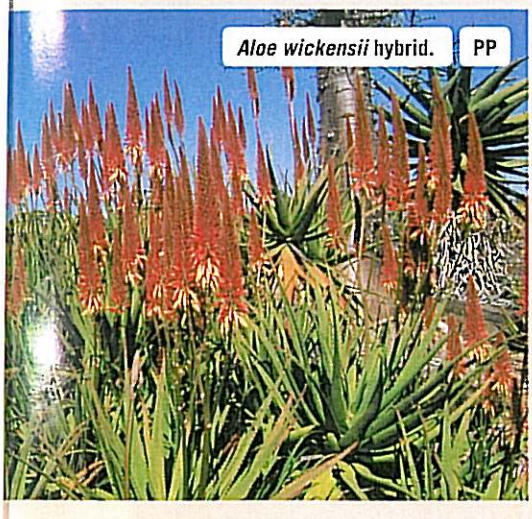

Aloe acutisissima foliage. PP



Aloe sinkatana hybrid. PP

Aloe kedongensis PP

Aloe brevifolia RD



Aloe wickensii hybrid. PP

Cultivars

There is a growing number of exquisite aloe cultivars about to appear on the market and become available commercially for landscape use.

As with many cultivars, species with desired properties are hybridised with a view to improving the final product and creating more robust plants, better flowering and with better spination. Many aloes freely cross-pollinate so care is needed when growing plants from seed. Most cultivars are robust, tend to grow fairly quickly and are usually more tolerant of local conditions. STG

GROWER TIP

In their natural habitat, aloes often grow in clumps (bunches of four to six plants in a small area) creating a stunning show. When landscaping rather than growing just one aloe grow them in a group. For added drama choose species that have distinct bright yellow flowers (*A. capitata* and *A. wickensii*).

MEDICINAL USE

The popular *Aloe vera* (sometimes incorrectly named *A. barbadensis*) is well known for skin care products and its soothing properties on sun burnt skin.

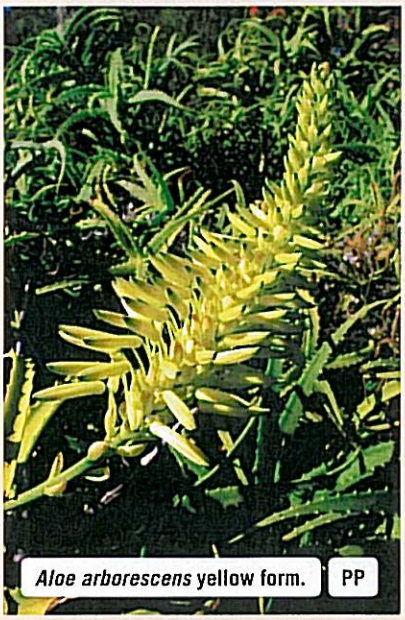
Aloe arborescens and *A. ferox* are also used for lotions overseas.

Where to see Aloes

Mt Coot-tha Botanic Gardens (Brisbane)

Sydney Botanic Gardens

Royal Melbourne Botanic Gardens



Aloe arborescens yellow form. PP

Hybrid aloes in a garden.
© Aloe-Aloe Horticulture

Go to www.stgmagazine.com.au for extra information on Aloes. We have an in-depth table including details on climate, size/form, flower season, flower colour and leaf colour.