



Contrasting leaf textures and colour of companion plants with aloe



Strong architectural lines of a yet-to-be-released large aloe



Aloe 'Fairy pink' in a display garden at the ABC Expo, Brisbane



A garden with aloe hybrids

## Aloes, tough and rewarding perennials

Text and photos by Michael Dent

**Australia is essentially a dry country. Less than robust herbaceous plants in our gardens have sadly struggled to flourish without precious water and we cannot keep replanting our garden beds year after year when mother-nature decimates them. Sadly many of our gardens have deteriorated and there has been a noticeable absence of colour. Sustainability is no longer a trend but is a necessity for the 21st century. Plants we use in our gardens must be able to sustain themselves, without needing regular watering, in order to survive.**

Increasingly aloes are becoming more widely appreciated for their drought tolerance but more recently a new generation of aloes has emerged which present improved flowering, a wider range of flower colours, younger flowering and longer flowering periods (up to 10 months) as well as better adaptation to all gardening conditions. These features enable the gardener to have vivid displays of colour for most of the year. As a consequence we are seeing aloes appear in the horticultural spotlight as essential home garden perennials that reward gardeners year after year, with an amazing show of flowers, no matter how tough the climatic conditions are.

Aloes can be used in most garden styles: modern, traditional, informal and formal settings. In selecting the right aloe, the gardener must be aware of the mature plant size, the flowering colours, the timing of the flowering and the appropriate climatic conditions required.

Planting large aloes too close together is a common mistake. The architectural nature of the aloe makes it the perfect accent plant. Large aloes make great feature plants in any garden. Smaller aloes should be planted en masse in garden beds. Aloes can also be used to great effect in decorative containers.

By understanding the flowering colour, contrasting tones can be matched. Colours of the new generation of hybrid aloes range from deep red to orange, yellow, pink, apricot, cream and white as well as bi-colours. Knowing the timing of the flower enables the gardener to plan the colour sequence for the year.

It is important to understand the climatic zone from which the particular aloe species originates. For example, many aloes from arid and winter rainfall regions in Africa do not survive in tropical and sub-tropical Australia. However the new generation of hybrid aloes are able to adapt to various conditions across Australia as they have been bred as garden

plants. With good soil drainage they can cope with significant amounts of rain and can be used effectively with companion plants such as agapanthus, dietes, dianella, daisies, zephyranthes, salvia, cycads, and most Australian natives.

A rich well drained soil and good light are the main requirements. More detailed information on cultivation is contained at [www.aloe-aloe.com.au](http://www.aloe-aloe.com.au) under 'Growing and landscaping with aloes'.

Using drought tolerant, easily maintained and visually pleasing aloes correctly is sure to lift the spirits of our water-stressed gardeners across the nation.

Michael is landscaper and nurseryman based in Brisbane, and is responsible for the marketing of the aloe-aloe collection of hybrid aloes across Australia ([www.aloe-aloe.com.au](http://www.aloe-aloe.com.au)). Michael gives regular presentations on landscaping with aloes to garden clubs. His own garden, *Taringa House*, will be open under the Australian Open Garden Scheme 18-19 July 2009. Michael can be contacted on 0419-476408 or at [mike@aloe-aloe.com.au](mailto:mike@aloe-aloe.com.au)