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Flowers inside

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Say 'alloy to aloes



Aloe-Aloe Horticulture director Michael Dent and his nursery manager Meredith Heymink say gardeners get excited about their plants.

They handle well in the dry, don't mind the wet, and can certainly take the heat. They are a plant for our times...

Melanie Kinsey reports.

TEN years ago after hearing Richard Turner, the editor of Pacific Horticulture magazine, give an illustrated talk about the Ruth Bancroft Garden near San Francisco, I wrote in an article 'drifts of Aloe siriata with flowers in ice-

cream shades of yellows, pinks and oranges lined the paths'.

At the time I had no idea that the flowers of aloes could be so eye-catching and so attractive.

Like many people I tended to lump all succulents together



Aloe-Aloe hybrids display their vibrant colour and (inset) their striking form that's sure to impress in any garden.



in the 'architecturally fascinating' category, but really the flowers are not what you grew them for.

Then I saw a bank of aloes in full spectacular bloom at Lyle Filipe's Roraima Nursery in Lara, Victoria and my interest in the genus was well and truly piqued.

I planted an *Aloe arborescens* X *ferox* in the corner of one dry bed in my garden and it produces tall spikes of red flowers in winter.



By Melanie Kinsey

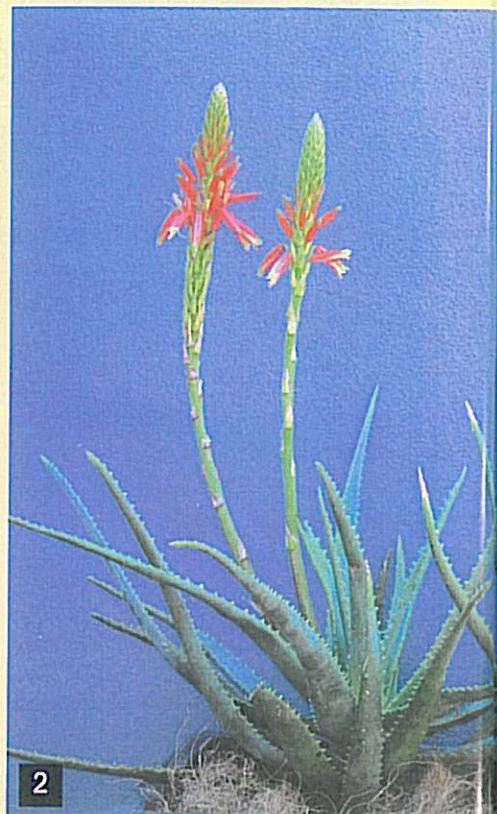
I also have a couple of pots of the spiralling *Aloe polyphylla* on the deck and cuttings of the fan aloe *Aloe plicatilis* do just as well in a pot as in the ground.

With the opening of a nursery devoted solely to the production of a new range of hybrid aloes, I think I will soon have more.

Aloe-Aloe Horticulture started in Brisbane about six years ago by South African born Michael Dent.

Originally a chartered accountant, Mr Dent wanted to do something more creative so he ventured into landscaping.

He quickly found that with no rain and



Aloe-Aloe hybrids are making a statement are 1 the bold 'Big Red', 2 the consistent 'Always Red', 3 the stunning 'Capricorn', 4 the brassy 'Copper Showers' and 5 the dainty 'Fairy Pink'.

tightening water restrictions, the plants he was dealing with began to die.

"I needed plants that coped with less water," he said.

Mr Dent knew aloes from his childhood days but he also knew that he wanted the very finest stock, vowing "to propagate the best, so we can offer a good range of plants for all parts of the landscape".

His search took him to an aloe breeder in South Africa who had been hybridising various species throughout many years and now had a collection of plants all exhibiting the characteristics of hybrid vigour.

Mr Dent imported into Australia a chosen selection of these hybrids.

He has been building up numbers of plants by tissue culture until earlier this year when he had sufficient quantities to release nine new hybrids on to the market.

Vegetative propagation (including tissue culture) is the only way of propagating these superior hybrids, as seed grown aloes never produce plants identical to the parents and the hybrid vigour is subsequently lost.

Mr Dent says his aloes have a number of



Aloes are a sustainable way of putting colour back into your garden.

characteristics setting them apart from aloes currently on the market.

These include:

- A wider range of flower and foliage colour and texture;
- Faster growth;
- Longer flowering periods;
- Dramatically more profuse flowering;
- More resistance to disease and pests;
- Generally much easier to grow requiring very little care;
- Plants able to flower younger in pots.

"With our range we can have an aloe in flower for 10 months of the year from February through to November," Mr Dent said.

"Aloes are a sustainable way of putting colour back into your garden and when I give

talks to garden clubs I find gardeners are very excited about them."

In April this year, his cultivar 'Fairy Pink' was used in a display at the ABC Gardening Australia Expo in Brisbane.

The dainty white flowers are washed with pale pink and they looked sensational in a cottage planting done by Bottletree Nursery with tuhlbagia, cotton santolina and an array of other perennials in the blue/mauve colour range.

"We try to get people to think of these plants as perennials or potted colour," Mr Dent said.

"We don't actually want nurseries to stock them in the succulent section."

The flowers of aloes attract a range of nectar eating birds – like the New Holland honeyeater – which is the bird chosen to be on the labels of the Aloe-Aloe hybrids. Mr Dent said the pollen in the flowers also attracted a range of insects closely followed by insectivorous birds.

"These plants are a real bonus for bird lovers," he said.

Trials of the new hybrids have taken place all around Australia and although their



drought tolerance is not in question the issue of frost tolerance is sometimes raised. "Some are more frost sensitive than others, especially the smaller ones," Mr Dent said.

The cultivar 'Capricorn', which gets to 1.5 metres high by 1m wide, is described as being moderately frost tolerant, whereas 'Fairy Pink', which gets to 30 centimetres high by 12cm wide, tolerates very light frosts only.

"Although this can vary according to position, placing plants in a north facing situation near a wall in a cool climate reduces the effects of frost," Mr Dent said.

The other cultural condition which aloe must have is good drainage.

With good drainage these aloes are able to cope with periods of heavy rain.

Currently Mr Dent grows all his stock at a nursery in the Gold Coast hinterland but he envisages that in the future he will be licensing other growers.

All the cultivars are either being test marketed under the Plant Breeder Rights Act or have already had their PBR application accepted.

The Aloe-Aloe hybrids are available at all the Plantmark outlets, as well as a range of other selected wholesale and retail nurseries across the country.

Aloe-Aloe Horticulture has chosen as its slogan "Blooming beauties for a sunburnt country - Colourful, Sculptural, Sustainable" and I think they have a real future in our increasingly drier climate.

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