

Usually when this topic is raised among gardeners it's suggested that the chemicals put into town water to make it safe to drink actually inhibit growth. Rainwater, on the other hand, doesn't have all those nasties and that's why plants do better with it. This supposition gains legs when you read through some of the literature relating to organic gardening, and particularly in relation to compost tea. Here you will read that in order to make an effective compost tea, you should use rainwater, or if you have only treated town water, the water should be allowed to stand in an open bucket in full sun to allow the chlorine to volatilise off into the atmosphere.

The rationale is that if used directly from the tap, the chlorine will destroy the microbes and other tiny soil micro organisms that enable the compost tea to do its most remarkable work.

As with just about everything in

life, there are the believers and the doubters. This is certainly true when the discussion centres on whether the chlorine and other chemicals in treated water inhibit the activity of soil micro organisms.

Those with a scientific bent argue that the exposure to air, sunlight and the soil quickly dissipates those chemicals and eventually some end up as plant nutrients. Twenty or 30 years ago I would have taken the scientific logic as being correct, but as I become more mature I don't necessarily agree that mainstream scientists truly understand the behaviour of soils and what goes into them. More and more exciting results are being achieved by gardeners and farmers using soil microbes and beneficial fungi which, in some bureaucratic and scientific circles, are still being labelled as muck and mystery.

So I am coming out on the side of those who think that the chemicals in treated town water could inhibit the activity of the soil micro organisms. As far as rainwater is concerned, we do know that it contains a range of different plant nutrients, some of which can, in certain situations, be present in toxic amounts.

Sodium is a plant nutrient that is required in minute quantities, but when large quantities are dropped on plants from rain, in the form of sodium chloride, which of course is damaged or die. This phenomenon occurs near the sea, so plants that are tolerant of salt must be chosen.

As we move away from the coast the levels of sulphur diminish, but there are still significant levels in the form of sulphate in rainwater. One of the roles of this nutrient is

to enhance the protein levels and generally improve the health and vigour of plants.

Nitrogen is another nutrient that has been found in rainwater and this too is in the form of nitrate and sulphate, both of which plants can take up almost immediately. Nitrogenous gases from sources such as that produced by the bacteria found on the roots of some leguminous plants, from factory and other man-made pollution make their way into the atmosphere and are delivered back to earth by rain.

Should the rain be as a result of a thunderstorm, it is quite likely to be even higher in nitrogen because lightning has the ability to produce significant quantities of nitrogen in a form that plants can take up immediately, or be quickly converted by soil organisms.

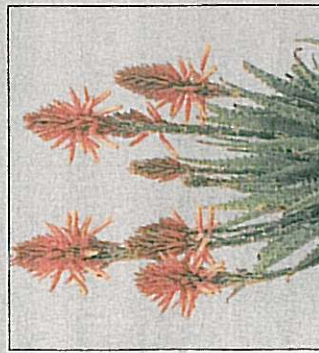
IN BLOOM

Aloe species

THE drought has taught us all the importance of water conservation and shown us that even when faced with restrictions, gardens of all descriptions can pull through and provide us with colour, beauty and form at all times of the year.

A group of plants that have come and gone in their popularity over the years is aloe. Best known for aloe vera, which gives us a soothing skin lotion, aloe has been taken for granted for so long that we've almost become numb to its presence. But now new forms of the plant have been released to capture our attention and bring them back into the spotlight.

In their homeland of South Africa, aloes of all descriptions proudly adorn the rocky outcrops



and grasslands where, on and off throughout the year, they provide vibrant colour and play an important role within the harsh circle of life as food sources for nectar-feeding birds and small mammals.

Being succulent by nature, their

water requirements are lower than most other plant species, but don't treat them like cacti or they will very quickly use up the nutrient reserves held within their thick, fleshy leaves and become dehydrated.

The new forms that have just been released bring with them a certain grace that immediately distinguishes them from the rest of this large family. Soft, tactile foliage that multiplies well is a real bonus, but it's not until the tall, elegant flower spikes appear from late summer through to winter, that the true beauty of these newcomers is revealed.

Four distinctly named cultivars — Topaz, Fairy Pink, Gemini and Aries — have hit the market, with others planned by year's end.

Fairy Pink produces wispy cream flower heads with a touch of pink at the base of each floret, while Topaz boasts coral/orange tubular blooms with lime tips.

Gemini stands alone with its strong textural spiralling foliage that is only matched by its soft red sturdy blooms.

Aries is a low growing, semi-sprawling variety that rewards with delicate mushroom pink blooms that are produced at an angle.

With this delicate growth habit in mind, these new cultivars would look most at home if interspersed with low growing ornamental grasses such as Carex species or even soft, seasonal annuals such as poppies, calendulas or daisies.

Noel Burdette

ensuring her pain is relatively clear. Or, if that's not an option, there is not much you can do. Some parents despair at the hygiene issues, becoming fearful that the child will catch some terrible disease. The current thinking is that a certain amount of exposure to dirt and everyday grime is beneficial for "priming" the immune system in babies. Give her plenty of opportunity to chew on soft toys and foods with texture, which require chewing. This stage will pass.

I HAD a normal birth but it was long and hard. Now I'm finding I can't hold on until I get to the toilet, and I wet myself. I'm so embarrassed, and am hoping it will improve without doing anything.

It's estimated that one in three women who have had a baby will have problems with leaking urine, so be reassured that this is relatively common. It takes about six weeks for the pelvic organs to return to their normal position after giving birth, though for some women this can take a little longer. Coughing, sneezing, laughing or bending over can cause the bladder to leak urine and for many women, trying to avoid these common situations can make their lives truly difficult. The problem is caused by the pelvic muscles being stretched and losing their tone by the weight of the pregnancy and the process of delivery. The nerve fibres that play an important role in being able to control bladder capacity and emptying also become stretched and in some women, particularly those who've had a traumatic delivery, they are damaged. Pelvic floor exercises will help you redevelop your bladder tone and ability to hold urine. Physiotherapists are experts in this field and you would benefit from seeing one. The key to success is to be consistent and patient and to get into a pattern of doing pelvic floor exercises frequently. "Bracing" yourself when you're about to sneeze or lift anything and holding your pelvic floor muscles by pulling them up can make a difference. Avoid constipation and restricting fluids. For some women, caffeine can be an irritant so you may benefit from limiting this. Being overweight or generally unfit will not help. There is a National Continence Helpline on 1800 330 066, their staff are specifically trained to assist women in your situation.

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