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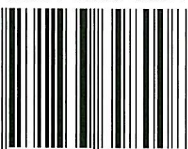
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ANNUAL EDITION



Colourful *Aloes*

by Kim Woods Rabbidge
Photography: John Downs

Garden owners Michael and Alexandra Dent moved from South Africa over twenty years ago to their Queensland home built in 1876 and modified by various former owners. The Dents have also added their own touches, transforming the cottage into an elegant, yet cosy abode.

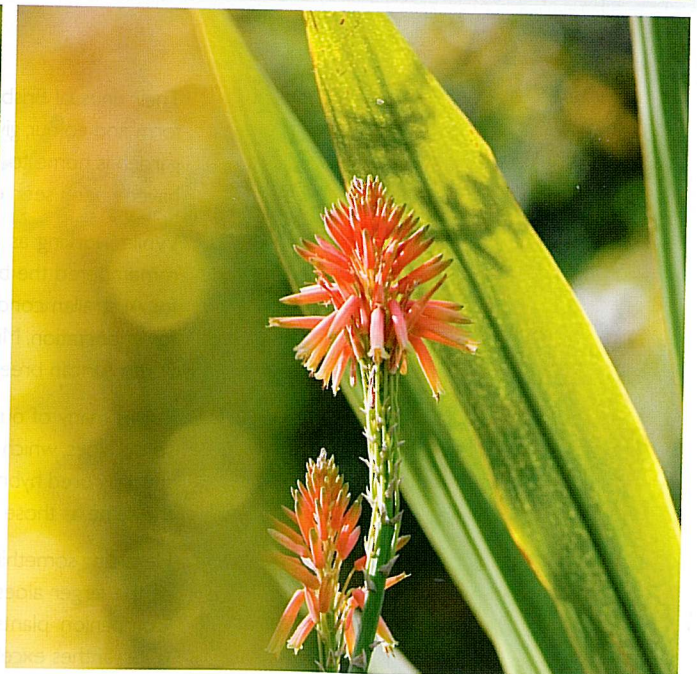
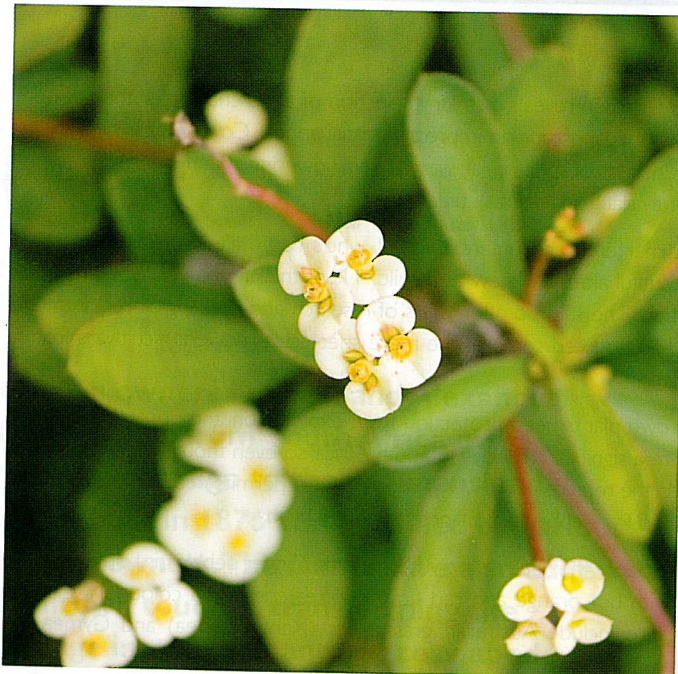
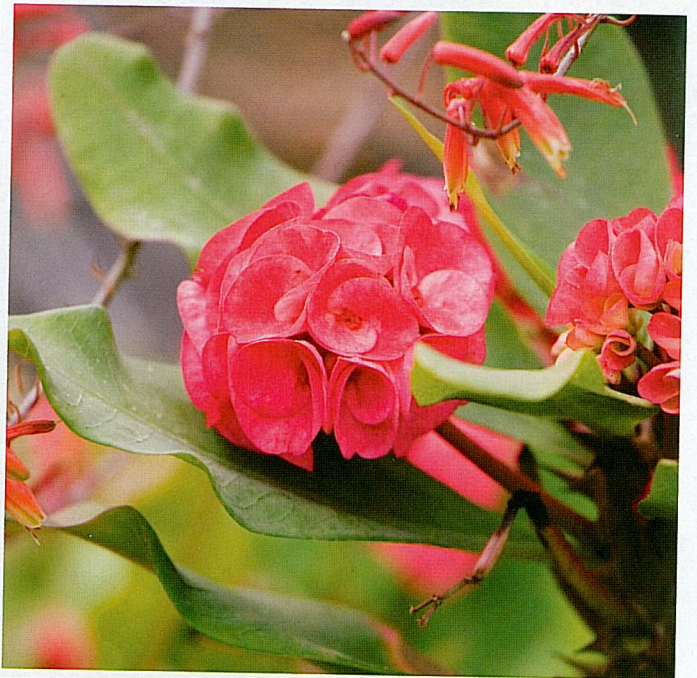


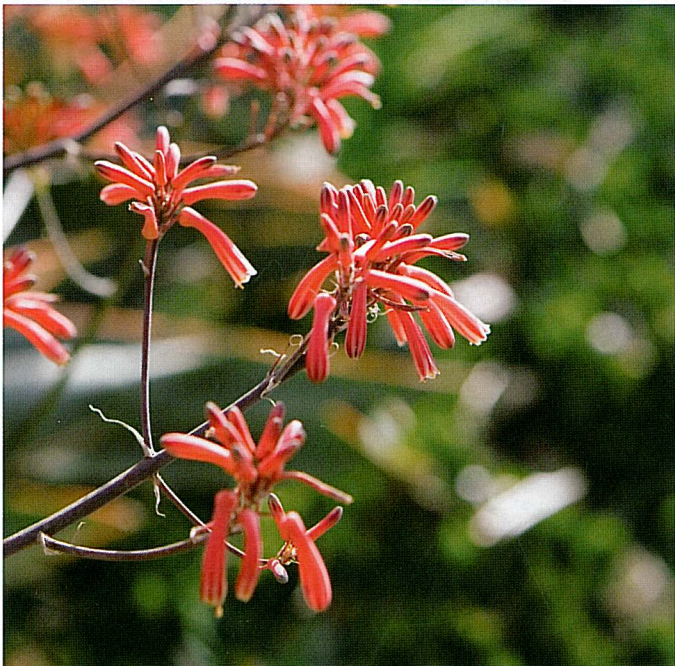
Their unusual Brisbane garden reveals a striking selection of aloes chosen for their texture, form and colour; giving the landscape an impressive visual appeal. Covering 23m x 40m the garden is home to hundreds of spectacular, warm-hued, flowering aloe hybrids, many which haven't been seen or available in Australia until recently.

While working as a chartered accountant, Michael, who's had a life-long love of gardens, remembered the beautiful aloes he knew as a child. "I kept thinking how suitable they'd be for Australian conditions," he said. So after years of research and meeting all requirements for importation, Michael sourced some of the more spectacular flowering cultivars from a South African breeder.

Just as many of our own plants need protection from exploitation and possible extinction, so do aloes, which are a significant species in South Africa; so even though these plants are specially bred hybrids, the requirements were stringent. "The permits needed to export are the same as those used for elephants and lions!" chuckled Michael.

Heralding something special, the nature strip with mounds of river pebbles, is home to some of the larger aloes with hot orange and red flower spikes ensuring a colourful welcome. Companion plants here include Australian grass trees (*Xanthorrhoea*) and Gynea Lily (*Doryanthes excelsa*).



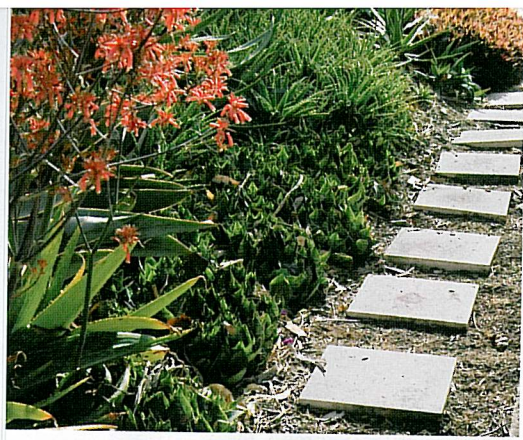


Along one side of the driveway an old cerise bougainvillea is trained onto timber uprights providing both privacy and delineation. On the other side, Crepe Myrtle trees adorned with staghorns grow along the steep bank where various tropical shade lovers are thriving: *Zamioculcas zamiifolia*, dracaenas, chlorophytum and bromeliads all have low water requirements.

Where once a huge Chinese elm dominated the front garden, stone and boulder terraces now form an amphitheatre overlooking a manicured patch of lawn in the shape of a cloverleaf. "The elm had been a family favourite, providing privacy and a place for the kids to climb," said Michael "however we removed it about four years ago, as it was impossible to grow anything beneath and as they're actually considered invasive, undesirable trees in Brisbane, the decision wasn't too difficult."

The new, painstakingly built terraces have proved to be very successful: while simulating the natural growing environment of many aloes they also provide space for more plants in the perfect free-draining locale. Access down the terraces to the lawn is via charcoal coloured concrete stepping-stones set amidst river pebbles.

Many of the plants chosen to complement the aloes have similar growing requirements, although it's obvious that other attributes play an important role –particularly texture and colour. From the lawn, the views back up the terraces are arresting, with patterns created from appealing plant combinations.



Cycads, dracaena draco, euphorbias, tulbaghias (society garlic), rheos, Jatropha podagrica, agaves and pachypodiums all make appealing companions and hardy Carissa's shiny deep-green leaves make a wonderful contrast.

"We're delighted so many birds visit the garden," remarked Alexandra. "They're attracted by either the nectar or the insects that feed on the aloe flowers". The flowering aloes in the garden range from tiny Fairy Pink at 0.2m to Aloe Big Red, which grows nearly 2m. The yellow flowering Southern Cross and the red and yellow bicour Saturn are two of Michael's favourites.

Hybrid aloes are suitable for both hot and cold climates and while their water storage capacity ensures resilience in dry times, they also love

rain and as long as drainage is adequate and they're given a little extra attention, they do remarkably well in many environments.

While the garden is appealing year-round, it's in the autumn and winter that it really stars, when masses of colourful aloe blooms light up the landscape like a kaleidoscope. Their hot hues, from pale cream, yellows, oranges, pinks, reds and bi-colours are the perfect tonic for any winter blues; the sunny colours cheer up both gardens and gardeners.

The garden is open next July 17th and 18th 2010
 Visitors can hear talks on growing aloes at 11am, 1pm and 3pm.
 Address: 34 Woolley Street, Taringa UBD Brisbane 178:KI