

Spiky aloes provide protection

Gardening
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A COUPLE of months ago I visited a Brisbane suburban garden in which aloes were heavily featured.

Whenever the word aloes has been mentioned in the past I immediately pictured aloe vera, which to me has always been a totally boring garden specimen and thoughts of many failed aloe vera enterprises sprang to mind.

To say that I was totally converted would be an understatement.

As I loaded a couple into my car I was reminded that they do have a downside, that being the fierce spikes on the edges of the foliage, so they need to be planted where the spikes aren't going to hook onto children or passersby.

But, having said that, those spikes can also be an advantage in that they can be judiciously planted to keep out unwanted intruders and they often provide an interesting contrasting colour margin to the rest of the leaf.

I should point out that these are not your usual run of mill species aloes – they have been especially bred and selected to provide many colour variations and structural forms, as well as the other benefits of hybrid vigour and longevity.

They are commercially available as Aloe-Aloe Premium Hybrids.

Emanating from South Africa, these versatile aloes are able to withstand prolonged periods of hot dry weather and there are some that can also tolerate quite cold temperatures.

Most prefer to grow in full sun situations but there are also some that are quite



happy when grown in semi-shade. Although these aloes are said to be tolerant of a wide range of soil conditions, I certainly wouldn't plant them out into heavy, poorly drained clay soil as they would quickly succumb to root rot.

When I enquired whether they would recover from a root disease if treated with a soil fungicide, I was informed by another gardener whose aloes had suffered from too much water, that this wasn't necessary.

He had simply dug the plant out of the ground and left it on a path to dry out before replanting in a better-drained area.

If you have only poorly drained soils, an option is to grow them in a large pot, into

which a free-draining potting mix has been used. Because they become really heavy plants, it will be necessary to put them into a large container and even then you may have to provide some kind of support to stop them toppling over in the lightest of breezes.

Another option is to grow them in a built-up bed.

They are fairly heavy feeders but for optimum flowering a fertiliser that's fairly low in nitrogen and relatively high in phosphorus and potassium should be used in spring.

An organic rose fertiliser would be just right for these plants and, being organic, it

SPLASH OF COLOUR: An aloe in the front garden of Meadowbrook greenthumb Johanna Derks.

Picture: Heather Faulkner

What to do

- Both bush house and shade house plants can be repotted from now on. Always use a top-quality potting mix, incorporating controlled-release fertiliser. Immediately after repotting, water with a seaweed extract solution.
- Papaws are prone to attack from insects, possums and fruit bats. One way of keeping them at bay is to slip old knee-high stockings over each developing papaw fruit.

What's on

- The West Brisbane Orchid Society is holding its show tomorrow and Sunday from 8.30am-4pm in the Brisbane Botanic Gardens Mt Coot-tha auditorium. Admission \$3 adults.
- The Sunnybank Branch of the Australian Red Cross is holding its annual Chelsea Flower Show and Fair at Paloma Reception Centre, 121 Mains Rd, Sunnybank, today and tomorrow 9am-4pm. Admission \$5 adults.

could be carefully used on container-grown aloes as well as those in the ground.

There are some aloes which are low growing and trailing, some that form short or tall trunks, and some that have a clumping habit, making them useful in all garden situations.

Once the flowers form they stay coloured for quite long periods and by choosing several different cultivars it is possible to have flowers year round.

A massed planting would look really good. The flower colours available range from blood red and red, through red and white, white with a pink tinge, yellow and all the shades of orange.