

# "Quarter Acre" Paradise

## Gardening Diary



# august

by  
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**Au-gust** (ô-g<sup>~</sup>ŭst')

**ADJECTIVE:**

inspiring awe or admiration; majestic; the august presence of the monarch; venerable for reasons of age or high rank

**ETYMOLOGY:**

Latin augustus;  
aug- in Indo-European roots

**OTHER FORMS:**

Au-gust'ly (Adverb)  
Au-gust'ness (Noun)

**AUGUST BIRTH FLOWERS - Gladiolus**

Flower of the Gladiators. Strength of character, sincerity, generosity, are traits symbolized in the Gladiolus. Gladiolus (from Latin, the diminutive of gladius, a sword), common name the sword lily, is a genus of flowering plants, iris family (Iridaceae).

The genus Gladiolus contains about 260 species, of which 250 are native to sub-Saharan Africa, mostly South Africa. About 10 species are native to Eurasia. There are 160 species of Gladiolus endemic in southern Africa and 76 in tropical Africa. The species vary from very small to the spectacular giant flower spikes in commerce. These flowers are variously coloured, pink to reddish or light purple with white, contrasting markings, or white to cream or orange to red and yellow.

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# Authors introduction

## *An Introduction to Your Monthly Hand-Book*

ew Zealand is a clean, green, garden paradise. One of the last and best in the world. We are blessed here in New Zealand with one of the most remarkable climates of any country on earth.

It often takes a prolonged overseas experience for most Kiwis to realise that the climate, land and lifestyle we so take for granted is what people in other nations would consider to be nearly ideal: a true paradise when compared to the extremes experienced in other parts of the world.

It is for this very reason that per head of population New Zealand has one of the highest levels of truly talented creative gardeners to be found

anywhere. Gardening has become part of our national character. It sets us apart and helps to develop and reinforce our high level of environmental awareness and sophistication. So if you aren't yet a gardener, give it a go. It will do you, your family, the community and the country a world of good. And if you are already stuck into the garden, congratulations!

You represent a better, more advanced alternative within modern living. And your efforts, even if they are only in your back yard, collectively are helping to inspire and lead the world into a cleaner, greener new age.

If you are new to gardening or if you are encouraging a young mind to love nature start small

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and simple. This way you can focus attention on learning enough about a few plants to give yourself a better chance of success. An initial small success generates pride, excitement and a desire to learn more so can make a garden lover for life.

While a big failure early on can stop an individual from ever trying again and ultimately lose a chance to experience one of the truly heavenly pleasures of life on earth.

When one remembers the classic words, "We are closest to God in the garden", we start to realise the tragic significance that such a failure can have upon one's future, or how by simply planting a few seedlings for the first time one can take a few real steps toward paradise.

Over the years my experience in the garden has brought me to the understanding that the

earth is a living organism, a timeless master and we are its pets.

This loving earth doesn't really need us, yet we are totally dependent on it for everything. Like all good pets, we've got to understand and obey the rules of the house. No longer are we little puppies allowed to soil our bedding and rip up the furniture.

Our survival comes down to something as simple as personal hygiene on a collective, global scale. As we come of age as a civilisation we either understand and obey, or we are put down like so many species before us. We are not saving the earth, we must save ourselves!

One of the easiest ways to serve the Living Earth is in the garden, which is a little piece of nature. The earth contains all the secrets and cycles that we know as life. So to garden

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is to interact with this great power which will ultimately put us on the path to understanding the secrets of life, for life unfolds daily there in the garden.

And, with time, becomes easy to understand. Understanding matures into wisdom which ultimately brings reward, your own paradise. And, collectively, if we all do our part those small bits of paradise start to merge, eventually creating a heaven on earth.

If you sincerely want to improve the quality of your life and those you love ... If you want your children to grow up remembering that you helped them create a world that they could enjoy living in.

If you are searching for a meaningful, constructive way to build a cleaner, greener, environmentally balanced world or if you want better health, are trying to overcome

loneliness, depression, stress, or just want a thoroughly enjoyable hobby to fill your spare time. Then it's time for you to discover gardening.

Gardening will give you something special! Surely it takes work, sometimes lots of hard work, but none of life's lessons are learned without determined effort. But stick with it! The greatest rewards come to those who consistently demonstrate true devotion and dedication to the garden. Over time these individuals gain such wisdom that they truly become "living treasures". The influence of such individuals through their collective contributions ultimately uplifts the overall development of the community, leading mankind toward a much better tomorrow.

A garden handbook on its own is not going to turn you into a living treasure but this book is

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meant to inspire you to take a few more steps in the right direction. The rest is up to you! What is offered here are simple, easily understood monthly guidelines and snippets of information which only scratch the surface of all the exciting knowledge I'd like to share with you. Perhaps what you learn here will inspire you into the pursuit of further knowledge.

The serious gardener will want to purchase one or more good gardening books to use in combination with this diary. In this way you can expand your knowledge very quickly. The Readers Digest illustrated Guide to Gardening, the Yates Garden Guide, and Yates Garden Doctor are all excellent books to serve this purpose.

And even if you are on a tight budget, don't forget that most local libraries carry a wide range of reference books on gardening. But whatever

reference sources you choose, be certain they are written for southern hemisphere gardening otherwise you'll be planting everything at the wrong time!

The best way to use this book is as a handy reference to remind you of the various gardening activities that occur through the year. Be aware that this is only a general guide to New Zealand gardening.

The gardener will want to take into account local and seasonal climatic variations that can affect the timing of gardening activities. These variations can be recorded in the convenient spaces provided within each monthly calendar.

To make the handbook really work for you now and especially in the future, record all your gardening activities: dates of sowings, transplanting, harvest, and

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flowering; problems with disease/insects and methods that worked to control them as well as those that didn't.

Also record daily weather statistics and patterns: rainfall, storms, wind, cloudiness, temperature, frosts, first summer/winter weather, etc. Don't forget to make notes about new discoveries: plants, seeds, vegetables new to you; an old fashioned cure-all remedy passed on to you by a helpful old-timer, a really effective fertiliser combination; a new way to complete a garden job more effectively, etc.

To record successfully make this a simple part of your daily routine. Once recorded over a year your diary becomes your own personal garden guide that will be an invaluable reference. When I returned to New Zealand I immediately began reading my Granddad's garden diaries. They spanned

40 years. Very quickly I gained a deeper personal understanding of the man and his relationship to the land that he so loved.

Because he recorded his garden experiences over many years, patterns became obvious. With this information I was then able to plan and act with confidence knowing what to expect of the land and the local climate. And in this instance became alerted to how dramatically New Zealand's climate had changed between his generation and my own and was able to use this knowledge to advantage. Seasonal variations or climatic changes like the one that has been affecting New Zealand in recent years, can easily push ahead or pull behind many garden activities by a month or more.

For this reason it is best to read not only the current month's activities but also

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those in the months on either side. Since nature does allow a great deal of flexibility, this will give you a better idea of what major jobs are coming up in the garden, as well as reminding you to complete a project that there wasn't time to finish last month.

The serious gardener should read through the entire year repeatedly. Become familiar with the activities plantings, flowerings and harvests of each season. This way you can plan and detail your garden well in advance which will greatly help to focus your attention toward the successful achievement of multiple garden projects running simultaneously which is what it takes to create a truly effective garden.

Knowledge is power! Be aware that knowledge is constantly changing and ever expanding so do be creative, flexible and very open to the exciting

knowledge you can learn by listening to the inspirational "whispers" with which nature will guide you. Because New Zealand is blessed with such a wonderful, often forgiving climate many things will survive being planted or transplanted even at the wrong time. This is especially true when the gardener, armed with knowledge, proceeds with deliberate care.

Remember that we often learn as much from a mistake as from a success. Many new ideas come about because someone tried to do something in a different way or made a mistake. Be sure to record all that you possibly can to help insure that all your activities lead toward your ultimate success!

Throughout the handbook you will find references to fertilisers and many varieties of sprays. While I have used almost everything at some time or

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another, it has been my attempt to create a balanced garden paradise where there is little need to affect the environment to any great degree chemically.

To achieve this end in my own quarter acre paradise where we film the television series Living Earth for TV3, I attempt to create a healthy environment for the garden i.e. building high quality soils rich in organic fertilisers; providing adequate shelter, moisture, warmth; and planting the right plant in its appropriate microclimate. The logic being that a happy plant is usually a healthy plant.

The somewhat pampered, highly encouraged resident bird population takes care of most of the insects. And since insects transmit a lot of disease, the birds indirectly control fungus as well with every insect they catch. Those that they don't catch are

usually controlled with dustings of lime, derris and/or organic sprays like pyrethrum, pepper, or garlic.

And I find that foliar feeding with many types of organic and inorganic fertilisers mixed with a fixative like Nitrosol, fish emulsion, liquid soap, or spray fix, to help them stick to the foliage will often largely deter insect attack. Insects like a good meal just like the rest of us.

If you can adversely alter the taste of their dinner even if it is with a friendly, helpful fertiliser, they'll often move on to find a more palatable meal in a less well cared for garden. But the day will come when you will need to spray. The art is to learn when, how much and what of, to knock out the problem before it can cause damage. In my quarter acre paradise it's likely that I'll have to spray perhaps three or four times a year. At these times I

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am extremely careful and very thorough with all aspects of the operation.

Sprays are meant to kill off disease and pests but they work on all living things, including us, so every precaution needs to be taken in dress, gloves, hats, masks, etc. to insure your safety.

Attempt to insure the safety of your garden by spraying either very early or quite late in the day when most helpful creatures like preying mantis, lady bugs, bees, and birds are not liable to be actively feeding in the gardens where they could get contaminated.

Be careful not to spray water sources like ponds, bird baths, buckets of water, creeks, etc where pets or wildlife drink or where sprays could runoff and contaminate something they shouldn't. If the garden is wet when spraying this will be an advantage as the spray will

bleed through the plants into places otherwise unreachable. And mixing the spray with a fixative like spray fix, fish emulsion, Nitrosol (liquid blood and bone) or even liquid detergent will help the spray solution to stick and penetrate much further and be more effective.

The person who coined the phrase, "An ounce of prevention beats a pound of cure", must have been a lover of the garden. As you discover the garden world's darker side of disease, pestilence and sprays you will come to understand just how true this is. Just like a person catching a cold, there is that first day when one is exposed to the virus.

If one is healthy, well rested and strong there's little chance of the germs taking hold. And even if they do, a good rum, lemon and aspirin drink and an early night to bed can often

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stop the cold before it ever gets out of control. But we all know what happens when things get out of control.

The garden is exactly the same. There is always that first day of exposure. Perhaps the air is warm, humid, very damp and the weather forecast promises more to come. At such moments the experienced gardener can almost feel the fungus spores exploding like cluster bombs in the garden.

In another situation, for the past three days a strong northwest wind has been blowing bugs off Queensland and dumping them over your garden. Already there are aphids on the broccoli, and there's a dusting of thrip on the roses so you know there must be a legion of invisible mites also just starting to attack

These are the times to act and prevent their spread quickly. A

thorough spraying at such critical moments will usually prevent the attack from ever happening. Use your diary to learn to anticipate such moments by recording the weather patterns and what they bring with them.

You'll soon learn to anticipate when, where, and how much to spray so that disease never visits your patch of paradise. And just like Nana's chicken soup, never miss a chance to feed your garden to keep it healthy. Foliar feed your garden by mixing in a liquid fertiliser when you spray for disease and fungus. You'll help strengthen the plants to resist any pests you missed while encouraging strong healthy growth.

I compare spraying plants with people taking antibiotics, which are also poisons. Used unwisely, antibiotics are ineffective or could even cause death yet many of us owe our

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lives to the effective use of antibiotics.

The same applies to the effective use of plant sprays. We can see the results of an effective chemical campaign and accept it as a necessary situation. But we all hope that soon we will find a better way that will lead us a step closer to true balance and harmony with our world.

There's so very much to be learned in gardening. So if you become confused or get stuck for ideas ask a neighbour with a lovely garden; contact a professional at a local garden centre; visit a well planned garden and talk to the gardener(s); buy more reference books or ask your librarian for help or join a class or club where you will discover garden knowledge to be as abundant as the harvests you will one day grow! But whatever you do, don't give up. While no one promised you

that this would be easy, we are promising you a rose garden if you are willing to work for it!

As a general rule just about anything that will grow in the ground will grow in a pot. So even if you are in a small flat or unit with a tiny concrete backyard there is a wealth of plant material that you can grow indoors or outside in containers that will still allow you to create your own piece of paradise.

As mankind races toward a new millennium in our ever changing modern world we count with regret the cost to our environment. A new generation is rising, soon to lead, that realises, as we all must deep in the heart, that survival depends on finding a balance between our needs and those of our loving, living earth.

Already the wise are searching, looking for green

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solutions that blend with a modern world.

In New Zealand we already stand by the garden gate to paradise yet sometimes take it for granted! The world needs a green model to look up to and we do it best.

This is our chance to blossom into a real life island nation paradise that cares. Let's become a nation of gardeners and nature lovers and plant our nation with the plan to harvest a rainbow of colourful, natural abundance for the entire world to see.

Through tourism, direct horticultural/agricultural employment and the economic

spin-offs of lodging, entertainment, food and human services we could employ all our people. We would literally be paid to live in paradise!

Creating paradise in New Zealand is a long term, epic journey and all great journeys start with a simple first step. That's easy enough for any of us to achieve.

Every day of your life promise yourself to take another step by becoming actively involved with nature.

Soon you'll have travelled deeply into paradise, probably one you've created in your own backyard.





august

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August begins Late Winter in New Zealand and for the gardens of the Southern Hemisphere. On the finest days it is easy to feel that spring warmth in the air.

Changeable August can bring a few of our coldest days, storms, heavy rain and hail, winds or the first real spring weather.

“Be prepared” is the wise gardeners’ motto for August. There will surely be times when it will be necessary to protect tender treasures from the ravages of late winter.

Then again, especially near the end of the month, be ready whenever weather permits to sow, plant, fill in gaps and holes in the flower border, tidy up winter-damaged area, feed on the winter displays and continue to establish the main spring garden show that will soon burst into bloom, next

month! For many weeks now the Earth's tilt sweeps the Southern Hemisphere back into longer, warmer days and stronger radiant sunlight.

Already Nature can sense the change and its effects are clearly visible: buds are swelling, grass is greening and flowers are popping up everywhere. The Spring Show is about to begin!

Surely, the finest outdoor displays are to be found in the blessed 'winterless' subtropical regions where August can be a glorious time for blossom and harvest.

While in mild temperate regions where the climate is still a bit unpredictable signs of spring will be obvious in warm and sheltered corners; but the safest displays are still under glass or protective shelters that trap the radiant heat. Hardy winter flowering species should be shining. Anemone, Azalea

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and *Calendula*, sparkle and thrive in sunny, sheltered corners.

*Camellia*, *Cineraria*, *Helleborus* (Winter Rose) and *Myosotis* (Forget-Me-Not) add lovely pastels to partly shaded and protected sites. Taiwan Cherry (*P. campanulata*), Japanese Plum, Ornamental Apricot feature along with deciduous *Magnolias* and a variety of flowering shrubs like *Daphne*, *Forsythia* and *Viburnums*.

Many 'Down Under' classics feature strongly: *Acacias*, *Banksia*, *Diosma*, *Eriostemon*, *Leucadendron*, *Telopea*, *Proteas*, *Leucospermum* and many more vivid and unique Southern Hemisphere species are in full bloom now.

Classic *Crocus*, *Hyacinth*, *Muscari* (Grape Hyacinth), *Snow Drop* and *Snowflake* (*Leucojum*), Early *Narcissus*, *Freesia* and *Tulip* all provide memorable moments by the

end of this month and long into spring. This Late Winter flurry of growth and flowering is surely meant to inspire the keen Gardener to 'gear up' for the busy season is beginning!

The Wise Gardener already knows that now is the time to get everything ready to insure this year's garden is the best ever.

Make final garden plans, inventory supplies (fertilizers, pots, sprays, soils, stakes, string or plant ties, tools, etc.); sharpen tools; purchase bulbs, container plants, perennial roots, tubers, seeds, seedlings. Clean up all work areas and garden beds being sure to keep pace with weeding and cultivating regularly. For a truly successful garden, here are more really important things to accomplish and consider:

### **Lawns:**

Lovely lawns are an essential part of many gardens and

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landscapes. Late winter through early spring is the classic time to (re)sow the lawn and give it a good feeding.

Most professionals use a commercial lawn food, or sulphate of ammonia (one handful per square meter/yard), watered in well.

If moss is a problem, spread sulphate of iron in similar proportions, or dust frequently with lime or use a commercial moss killer.

If the winter has been excessively wet, or the lawn receives a lot of foot traffic, the ground will compact until the soil ultimately becomes so dense that grass roots smother and die as the ground bakes into concrete. To avoid this it would be wise to aerate the lawn with a special aeration roller or systematically go over the lawn with a garden fork; going down a full fork's depth if

possible then turn the fork lifting the soil just slightly.

Immediately after aerating the lawn dust with Gypsum to further improve drainage or substitute powdered compost, loam or clay on light and sandy soils.

On very heavy, poorly draining land, first aerate the lawn then covering it with a thin layer of river sand followed by a dusting with Gypsum and the commercial lawn food, all of which is then watered in lightly.

Lawn seed can be sown in warm and sheltered sites. Germination may be slow if the weather turns cold and wet but otherwise it should sprout within a couple of weeks. Be sure to protect the germinating seed from hungry birds.

### **Cottage Garden Lawns:**

If you have a lovely cottage garden lawn full of English daisy in bloom now, avoid the

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