

Flowering Plant: February

What is this, on the right?

Send your knowledgeable and considered opinions to bo.hoom52@yahoo.com.

The respected judge's decision is final and the winner will get a box of choice Belgian chocolates, provided they are shared.

There was no lucky winner in January so please keep sending in your entries! To make it easier we are now showing a picture of the same species of aloe flowering, which it did in July.

You can claim your prize at the next Outing on Sunday 26th February 2017



You can win a box of chocolates!!!

Send your entries to Mafungi at
bo.hoom52@yahoo.com

The plant above is the February entry.
What is it?

Photograph taken by Mafungi

My mind went blank when confronted with this space, so feel free to doodle here. A group of kids who came on one of our Chameleon Safaris wrote an inspirational board for us at the end of the evening! Enjoy!



Annual Membership: Members are encouraged to make payment for 2017 as soon as they can, thanks to all those that have already paid.

Membership is \$20 per person/couple per year. Children \$5 per year. Foreign membership \$40 per year. Make payment to a committee member, the CABS account, or through Ecocash:

CABS Platinum: Aloe, Cactus and Succulent Society

Acc #: 901 649 1871 Reference: kindly include your names as a the deposit reference.

Alternatively send \$21-00 through EcoCash to 0783 911314 : kindly include a reference



Thomas Cole, one of our esteemed Xerophytica Congress speakers, has completed the long awaited field Guide, **Aloes of Uganda.**

Tom has kindly offered to send copies of the book through to Zimbabwe, which will be available for purchase. They will cost \$25. If you are interested in getting your hands on this wonderful book, please email aloesocietyzim@gmail.com and we will put your name on the order list. We anticipate it coming off print in April 2017.



One of the great things that our Society does every month is visit a home and garden, usually in Harare, although we have ventured further afield as well, and see what happens on the other side of the walls and fences that encircle our increasingly tightly secured properties. Last month we visited this home where a centrepiece on the front lawn is a *Dracaena* spp. The dragon tree is famous from certain islands like the Canary Islands, Socotra, Madagascar and others. These are mainly adapted semi-desert inhabitants. They do occur in South America and mainland Africa and have spread widely through the ecological zones to be found. However we have indigenous ones which grow in the forest understorey here, and there are two species that are quite common in the Eastern Highlands rainforest areas, *D. steudneri* and *D. mannii*. Many of us have the Large-leaved dragon tree, *D. aletriformis* which is indigenous to the eastern forests of South Africa and Swaziland.

Dracaena are monocotyledons and therefore do not have annual growth rings like typical trees. Estimating their ages is fraught with error but the oldest and largest true dragon tree, which can literally drip red blood from wounds on its stem is a specimen of *D. draco* to be found at Icod, near Tenerife in the Canary Islands. This beauty is 22m tall, 10 metres in diameter and probably weighs in excess of 70 tonnes. Its age, somewhere between 290 and 365 years old! It is affectionately known by the misnomer "El Drago Milenario" which would otherwise indicate it to have lasted for 1 000 years or more, which as we well know, not even rebel regimes last that long!

The one in the garden in Harare was sold with a clause in the title deed of the property allowing the previous owners rights to come and collect seed in perpetuity. *Dracaena* make excellent houseplants, needing little care and maintenance and according to NASA, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, they are one of the best plants to have indoors to help clean up the air, filtering out toxic gases, heavy metals and general noxious, people-made emissions from the air we breathe.

All this information comes from Wikipedia!

What is a Garden For?

This is the ultimate question for all of us plant lovers. Do we really just want to be collectors of each and every type of plant, cluttering up our spaces with fat ones, thin ones, green-, red-, turquoise-leafed plants. Ones that flower in spring, summer or winter. Or those that flower only once in their lives and then die ignominiously? Or do we want a living ecosystem that we can share with others, that may be easy on the eye at certain times of the year, but at other times they take on a hard rugged look, saying I am not going away. When the rains, come I'll be back, just watch this space, my space, our space!

Looking ahead we will all need low-maintenance gardens. One day the light at the end of the Zimbabwe tunnel will flare and labour will be occupied doing much more lucrative jobs. Technology will take over completely and we will have automatic watering and fertilisation systems everywhere, robot-controlled mowers and periodic service providers coming and toppling unwanted trees, branches and weedy patches. The luxury of a double-degreed partner being in charge of the end of a hosepipe is doomed.



The rainy season is a wonderful time of year for all of us and here at Rockyvale we are just disappointed that the much-hyped Cyclone Dineo did not hold its form and veer north and come to fill our dam which has remained empty since 1992 when it was dug by a really confused gardener we employed at the time.

However somehow we think that we are getting some of the things we do right. Water soaks into our soil, we channel it into the property from the main road. Our neighbour steadfastly refuses to believe us that raking leaves is bad for the eco-system so most of his rainfall runs off his property in great torrents and soaks into ours, an arms-length away from the boundary fence.

Our borehole plods along giving us just enough water for the households and to keep a few prize plants, usually those pot-bound, like the bonsai, alive. If you are clever and most of your potted plants are part of our xerophytic herd, they can probably ride out the dry months with a few judicious cup-fulls of water. All around us the road is hammered by the water bowsers cruising back and forth bringing water to households where the boreholes have long since dried. New drillings shower the neighbourhood with dust and empty the neighbours wallets mercilessly.

Some of the property we leave as bush and the rainy season sees a bountiful explosion of plant-life, fungi, insects and the birds and animals that predate upon them. We don't spray, ever. Fertilisation is done through bags of cow manure bought from the roadside vendors and only occasionally some bought compounds. Pests we control with tobacco dust.



Grassland fire is avoided by cutting down the indigenous grasses long before they become a risk. Just like nature used to do before man interfered. Great herds of pachyderms and ungulates would sweep through the landscape knocking it down, churning up the soil leaving dollops of dung and stained urine patches, preparing the ground for the next rains. And we have the fun of hosting Chameleon Safaris where participants see the annual crop of baby chameleons clinging to the grass stalks at night! The Safaris end up at the bottom of our empty dam where miraculously, despite a metre of rain this year, we can breathe seamlessly! And the lichen covered trunks and branches of the Miombo woodland we have wandered through on our way to the dam tell us that we can breathe deep, because lichen is an indicator of good air quality!

We were even given some panda eggs recently, they hatched and they enchant the kids!

Camouflaged mantis at Rockyvale.

Life is really fun in the rains!



Rockyvale dam, gloriously empty in the dry and wet- season but full of imagination and surprises in the rains. Home to termites and a brown flamingo and now that a blue roof conveys a sense of water, perplexed ridgebacks encounter an underwater cobra guarding a treasure chest. The swan is just there-because that is what swans do in summer!



The Health Corner:

At the last meeting I was approached by Jenny Rietz, one of our members, who passed on an article about how much more useful to our bodies are the hydrated gels that plants contain to keep us suitably hydrated than normal water. Especially desert plants, our plants!!! Health pundits everywhere insist that we should be drinking 8 glasses of water every day, but apparently this can do more harm than good. Pure water just flushes out our systems, taking valuable nutrients with it, whereas the hydrated plant gels allow our bodies to absorb the water required more slowly and is general better for us. There is a lot of science, a different molecular structure for this water than the usual H₂O we know, apparently the plants have H₃O₂ and our own bodies generate this with the help of good old-fashioned sunlight. But not enough what they call EZ water. You need the plants' gel.

Dehydration is a problem often for young people, who don't realise that they are getting thirsty and the elderly, who probably try and cut down their intake so that frequent trips to the other room are minimised. Dehydration leads rapidly to incoherence and inability to coordinate movement and bang, you take a tumble, the hip joint is hanging on by a thread due to osteoporosis and snap, it breaks. Then you are in a wheelchair and what follows is the fast and furious downhill ride, usually under the control of out-of-control grandchildren or avaricious dependents until you are tipped unceremoniously, wrinkled like parchment to the bone, into a coffin and left to feed the very plants that you should have been munching to avoid these difficulties. So there you are, just Google Mercola and see what they have to say, watch the videos and Ted Talks given in the text and adjust your lifestyles accordingly!!! Personally I have opted for the no water on its own ever, whisky with ice, crushed juices and multiple teas. There is one for every condition these days!

Cheers, Mafungi