

DAZZLING DAISIES



Daisies - what could be simpler? They are ubiquitous, the world's second largest plant family (after orchids) with c.25,000 species and a mind-boggling 1,267 genera. Nobody can possibly know them all! They are also amazingly diverse and without them so many of our floral experiences would be the poorer. For the purposes of this post I try and stick with daisies and not get drawn into my love of thistles even though they are all in the same stable. For us they are a spring delight, with *Anthemis* bursting from just about every patch of open ground, rocky slopes and waysides, providing that lacy foil to much of the other flora. Annual daisies are a mainstay of the Mediterranean climate, a weather pattern that encourages a swift life cycle, prompting rapid winter/spring growth before the withering summer drought ensues and dries the land to a crisp.

In the Mediterranean Basin we find an abundance of tangerine *Calendula arvensis*, various white *Anthemis* (and pretty pink *A. rosea*), huge patches of much taller blinding yellow *Glebionis*, *Senecio*, unfathomable *Crepis*, *Picris* as well as more refined gems such as *Lactuca tuberosa*, a perennial with attractive scalloped leaves and soft yellow flowers that open early in the day and close up by early afternoon. They are joined in that behaviour by

Tragopogon porrifolius

Calendula arvensis (left)



Cladanthus arabicus





Blennasperma nanum (yellow) with *Limanthes douglasii*



Rudbeckia californica



Senecio triangularis



Rhodanthe manglesii

Tragopogon and Scorzonera, the former certainly providing some of the finest spring daisies on show. Near Delphi, Tragopogon porrifolius is part of rich olive grove flora, mingling with delicate Tordylium apulum, Vicia villosa and orchids such as Ophrys sphegodes subsp. spruneri. At the other end of the Mediterranean the concentric rings of Ismelia carinata can be found in dunes beside the Atlantic Ocean and Cladanthus arabica tumbles amongst the cactoid stems of Euphorbia resifera. And, the sky-blue of chicory, Cichorium intybus is a constant throughout the region, it also closes up in the afternoon - it seems Asteraceae had the siesta well established before we turned up.

Mountain areas have some of the same genera, together with more perennial and woody species, with rocky slopes in Turkiye filled Anthemis cretica, Tripleurospermum and shrubby Tanacetum prateritium amidst big patches of orange Papaver pilosum and clumps of Tragopogon latifolium. Damp areas have various dandelions, but let's not go there. Later in the season the spinier brethren - the thistles take over with Cirsium, Onopordum, Carduus, Lamyropsis, Picnomon and globular Echinops, the latter two flowering well into September, even October.

Crossing the pond to California and we again find a great number of spring annuals with great carpets

of aptly named goldefields, Lasthenia californica, early on. These provide the background for the dazzling March displays at Table Mountain (near Chico), when uncountable pink spikes of Castilleja exserta blend with Lupinus nanus and the orange cups of Eschscholzia caespitosa colour the landscape in broad drifts of colour. Annuals in California also colour the vernal pools, the temporary wetlands that fill during the winter and dry up in summer. A succession of species flowers around these as the waters recede and a key genus is Blennosperma. Each species also has a dedicated species of mining bee that pollinates it, spending most the year below ground in radiating tunnel networks, they emerge during bloom time. There are spring flowering annual and perennial Californian daisies; Wyethia, Layia, Madia and by July many Eriophyllum too, growing just about everywhere from cliff top to mountain top, rubbing shoulder with mats of Penstemon davisii, Lewisia cotyledon and fiery castillejas. Senecio is here too (it is just about everywhere in the world in one form or another), varying from tiny annual to feisty perennial and this year I saw S. triangularis in vivid stands with lupines and castilleja in burnt forest near Lake Tahoe. There are Erigeron too and many more Aster appear later still. Biggest and boldest is perhaps Rudbeckia californica, a wonderful swamp daisy that keeps some exclusive company and is invariably



Chaetanthera villosa



Mutisia subulata



Cephalipterum drummondii

Xerochrysum macranthum

alongside big stands of coppery *Lilium pardalinum* and the sculpted snake-like pitchers of carnivorous *Darlingtonia californica*.

Moving south to Mediterranean-climate Chile the number of annual daisy is far less. *Senecio* is still very much in evidence, but often as woody montane species on ash flows or in marshes where we find the hefty *S. fistulosus*. However, the daisies do not stand still, instead we find some of the loveliest of all, especially in the Andes where the tumbling and scrambling stems of *Mutisia* decorate woods and edges in January. Most impressive are perhaps the floriferous mounds of *M. oligodon* at Laguna de Laja, each covered in big pink flowers. Or maybe the blood-red of *M. subulata* that sprawl across alpine slopes at Altos de Lircay, or maybe even *M. decurrens* illuminating the woods with vivid orange. It does not end there, we also find *Leucheria*, *Perezia* and some beautiful *Chaetanthera*, a genus or annuals and perennials, that includes the alpine gem; *C. villosa*, growing in the starkest of barren ash fields.

Travelling west along the same 30-40 degree band of latitude, we reach southern and south-west Australia and new daisies. To date I have only visited the south-west, but it is here that we can find some fabulous displays of 'everlastings' in September, when *Cephalipterum drummondii* colours the landscape shades of yellow at Coalseam and stunning drifts of *Rhodanthe manglesii* does much the same in pink around Eneabba. There are other genera; *Waitzia*, *Brachycome*, *Olearia* and large-flowered *Xerochrysum*.

Mutisia oligodon (left)



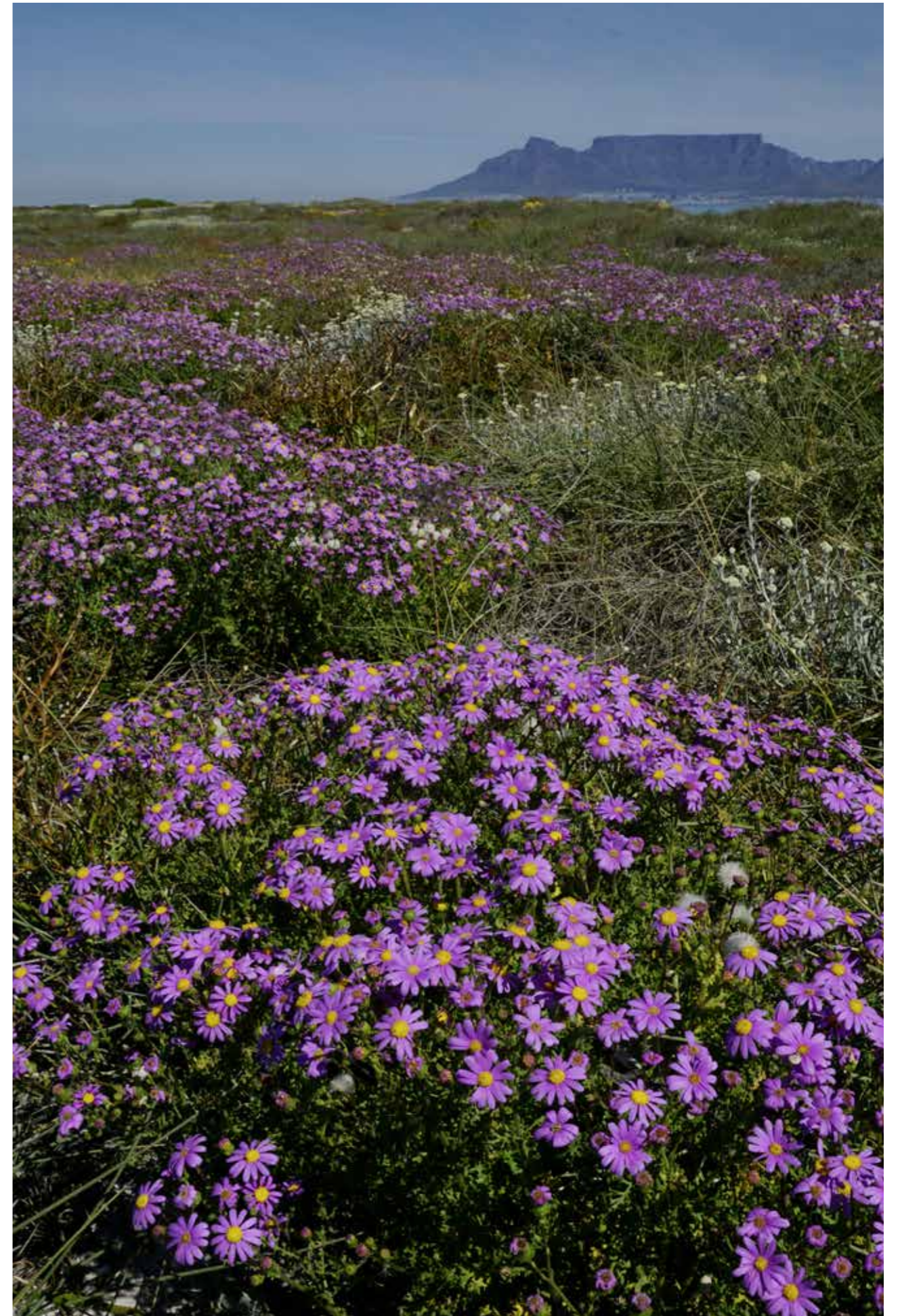


Gazania pectinata



Sticking with the same latitudes our last but by no means least Mediterranean climate location is the Western Cape. The glorious carpets of Namaqualand need no introduction, but these areas lay outside the our climate region and are desert. However, many of the same genera do very well in the Med areas, where there is an astonishing diversity of Asteraceae. The Cape Peninsula has silvery drifts of Cape snow, *Syncarpha vestita* in October, its large cousin *S. speciosissima* is just a lovely at Silvermine both everlasting daisy look as does shrubby *Phaenocoma prolifera* which flowers for many weeks. Innumerable *Euryops* sprinkle garish yellow across the fynbos and recently burnt areas, big mounds of lilac *Felicia* colour coastal strand along with the widespread and *Senecio elegans*, a vivid pink and a departure from the typical yellow for this genus. However, it is perhaps the larger, showier daisies we associate with South Africa, genera such as *Osteospermum*, *Gerbera*, *Arctotis* and *Dimorphotheca*, all with handsome flowers, often suffused red on the reverse of the petals. My favourite though is *Gazania*, stunning orange flowers with intricate central patterns that create a blaze on the sandy fynbos. It is no surprise that so many of these beauties have become garden essentials and to combine them all in one glorious feast would be quite something, if a little hard on the eyes.

Phaenocoma prolifera



Senecio elegans