

Spring Daisies in the Cape

Daisies are popular in the nursery trade. Many cultivars have been grown with a wide range of bright colours. Although Asteraceae is the official daisy family, with about 1535 genera and 25 000 species worldwide, the Cape daisies referred to in South Africa is a loose term encompassing many plants with daisy-like flowers which appear in spring.

The broad common names given to these pretty spring flowers range from spring daisy to Namaqua daisy to Cape daisy. However, there is not solely one genus incorporating all the plants, but a few. These include *Dimorphotheca*, *Osteospermum*, *Arctotis*, *Senecio* and *Gazania*, amongst others.

The common Namaqua daisies found along the West coast belong to the genus *Dimorphotheca*. The centre for diversity of this genus is Southern Africa.

Osteospermum is a genus producing beautifully radiant flowers in a range of purple, white and yellow shades in spring. These daisies have hard seeds, hence their scientific name; *ostean* is Greek for bone and *spermum* is Latin for seed.

There are only a mere 50 species in southern Africa and Angola belonging to the genus *Arctotis*. These plants are popular worldwide because of their large showy display of flowers which come in a range of colours; they are also easy to grow.

Senecio, on the other hand, is a much larger genus with over 1000 species. An impressive 300 of these occur in southern Africa. The genus is extremely variable, including annuals and perennials.

Theodore of Gaza (1398–1478) translated certain botanical works from Greek into Latin and was honoured with the genus *Gazania* being named after him. These are popular garden plants because of their rich colours and wide variety.

Practical tips

Be sure to plant spring daisies where they receive full sun. These plants do not require a lot of feeding as they are adapted to a naturally harsh environment.

Spring daisies are great for water-wise gardening but be sure to water them well when they are first planted – think of it as a welcome gift to the garden. Once established, water regularly (but do not over-water) and make sure there is good drainage.

