

PLANT OF THE MONTH

LANDSCAPING DEPARTMENT

OLEANDER-LEAF PROTEA



Protea neriifolia

Oleander-leaf Protea/Baardsuikerbos

PLANT TYPE: SHRUB

SA DISTRIBUTION: EASTERN CAPE, WESTERN CAPE

SOIL TYPE: SANDY, CLAY, LOAM

FLOWERING SEASON: SPRING, LATE SUMMER, AUTUMN, WINTER

PH: ACID, NEUTRAL

FLOWER COLOUR: BLACK, RED, PINK, CREAM

ASPECT: FULL SUN

July may be one of the quieter months in the garden, but nature always has a few surprises up her sleeve. Enter *Protea neriifolia*—a wintertime head-turner that defies the sleepy season with its bold blooms and statuesque presence. Known as the **Oleander-leaf Protea**, this indigenous beauty is one of the hardiest and most striking members of the protea family, making it a perfect ambassador for our **fynbos-rich** landscapes.

BAARDSUIKERBOS



OUTENIQUASBOSCH WILDLIFE VILLAGE

Characteristics

This protea is a **medium to large** shrub, usually growing between two and five meters tall, with a neat, upright growth habit. Its narrow, leathery leaves resemble those of the oleander—hence the name *neriifolia*. These bluish-green leaves are sometimes tinged with red during colder months, adding subtle seasonal interest even before the flowers appear.

And oh, the flowers! Large, cylindrical flower heads emerge from the branch tips in a variety of shades, from creamy white and pale pink to deeper hues of red and even greenish tones. Each bloom is framed by velvety, dark-hairy bracts that give it a feathery, almost regal look. They appear in winter and early spring, providing a burst of life during the cooler months and attracting a range of pollinators—from sunbirds and bees to beetles and butterflies.

OLEANDER-LEAF PROTEA



Why the Protea neriifolia?

This is a plant with purpose. Not only is *Protea neriifolia* undeniably beautiful, it's also tough, water-wise, and low maintenance once established. Perfectly suited to our Mediterranean climate, it handles dry spells with ease and doesn't mind poor, well-drained soils. In fact, it prefers them.

Its dense growth habit makes it useful in the garden as a screening plant or windbreak—especially in exposed areas common to the Western Cape. And if you're the kind of person who likes to bring nature indoors, you'll be pleased to know that its long-lasting flower heads are a florist's dream. They hold their shape and colour well, making them ideal for fresh or dried arrangements.

But its value goes beyond aesthetics. As a key species in the fynbos biome, *Protea neriifolia* plays an important role in supporting biodiversity. Its flowers are a vital nectar source during the lean winter months, providing food for pollinators when little else is in bloom. By planting it, you're not just adding beauty to your space—you're contributing to a living, breathing ecosystem.

BAARDSUIKERBOS



The More You Know...

The name “Protea” was inspired by the Greek god Proteus, known for his ability to change shape—an apt reference to the astonishing diversity of forms within the Proteaceae family. And among these, *Protea neriifolia* is considered one of the oldest species, having adapted over millennia to survive fire, drought, and shifting landscapes.

If you’ve ever stopped to admire a sunbird delicately feeding from a protea flower, chances are you were looking at a *Protea neriifolia*. It’s one of the most bird-friendly species around and a powerful symbol of the relationship between plants, wildlife, and place.

A light pruning after flowering will keep the shrub neat and encourage fuller growth the following season. Just be sure not to cut back into old wood—Proteas prefer gentle shaping rather than severe cuts.