



Establishing a Native Garden

Backyards for Wildlife Fact Sheet

Water wise and Drought Tolerant Gardens

Water is a valuable and increasingly scarce natural resource and one that we all need to use wisely. Before water restrictions came into effect some households were using up to 70% of household water on the garden. The new water regulations mean that we can no longer afford to be as extravagant and we need to consider how better to plan and manage our gardens.

One of the options available to us is to grow locally native species that have for many millennia grown across the Adelaide region surviving on rainfall alone. The use of indigenous plants will drought-proof your garden, save water and attract local wildlife.

Local Provenance

When you buy a seedling from a nursery, it has invariably been grown from a seed or a cutting. The source of that seed or cutting is referred to as the plant's 'provenance', or where its genetic code originated from. Golden wattles grew across Australia but seedlings sourced in NSW would not be suited to Adelaide despite the fact that golden wattles were widespread here. The best native plants to establish in your garden are grown from seeds or cutting with a provenance as close as reasonable to your home.

While nearly all the original bushland from the Adelaide Plains has been lost to development there still exist small pockets, sometimes no more than a handful of specimens that retain that original genetic material. From these remnants local native plant growers can help bring back many of the species that were on the edge of becoming locally extinct.

Local provenance also means that these plants are adapted to local climate and soil conditions and can survive on less water than most exotic garden plants. Once a 'native garden' implied a wild bush like form made up of species from other states. Those days are long gone and the availability of numerous specialist native plant nurseries enables gardeners to select from a wide array of local species, often specific to suburbs rather than simply southern Australia.

Visit www.backyards4wildlife.com.au to access plant lists and download a list of local native plant nurseries.



Establishing a native garden helps create habitat for wildlife and it can also play a role in making our city more sustainable in terms of local amenity and reduced water use.

Planning Your Garden

First find a list of local native plants for our suburb and then decide what kinds of garden(s) you want to create. Lots of native plants are sensitive to poor drainage, so locate good and poor drainage spots to your garden accordingly. For example, place your frog pond or wetland in naturally damper areas of the garden. If you wish to achieve a natural look, avoid planting in rows by growing several of the same species together in a clump, as this generally looks better, has greater habitat value and makes watering more efficient. Create a variety of mini-habitats, for example plan a shrubby area with groundcovers next to a grassland area and a wetland area. If possible include a patch of densely planted prickly shrubs for wildlife to shelter in or under. This is particularly important for small birds and lizards.

Planting Out

It is recommended to plant in autumn and winter to give plants a chance to get established using natural rainfall. Water your new plants about once a week during the first summer as they get established.

Often native plants can be slow to adjust after being transplanted from a pot. To increase the success and encourage healthy growth of your new seedlings follow the advice over the page.

1. The most common mistake when transplanting from a pot is digging the hole too shallow or too narrow. The ideal hole is the twice as deep and twice as wide as the container it is in. Fill the hole with water and allow it to soak into the ground.
2. Soak the soil around the root ball by placing the container in a bucket of water until it stops bubbling (but don't submerge the entire plant). This helps get rid of air around the roots and makes it easier to get the plant out of the container.
3. Remove the plant from the pot being careful not to disturb the roots more than necessary. Support the base of the exposed seedling with one hand and use your other hand to hold the roots and soil together as you place it carefully in the hole.
4. Backfill soil and tamp firmly without compacting the soil. Allow for a small depression around the plant. Water immediately to settle the soil and reduce the chance of transplant shock.

Additional Tips: Tube-stock will generally establish faster and quickly outgrow those planted from larger more expensive specimens.

A good layer of mulch will improve soil condition, keep soil temperatures down, reduce weed growth and evaporation.

Small gardens

Establishing a native garden does not mean that you need a large open space with full sun. As more people choose to live in apartments, units or houses with small yards, a garden can sometimes be as simple as a collection of potted plants.

When looking for suitable pot plants for verandahs and courtyards many people traditionally choose exotic plants. However it should be remembered that there are many wonderful local native species that are suitable for growing in pots including: any of the local *Dianella* species, *Kakalla* (*Carpobrotus rossii*) the trailing succulent for hotter areas, and *Lomandra*, *Juncus* and *Poa* species to attract butterflies.

If you are looking for some larger feature with a potted native plant, various *Acacias*, *Melaleucas* and even *Eucalypts* are all recommended by State Flora. They also have a list identifying which native species are suitable for indoor use (phone: 08 8278 7777).

Environmental Weeds

Weeds can escape from suburban gardens into roadsides and bushland. Weeds are a significant threat to biodiversity as they invade and compete with native plants for sunlight and nutrients. They also deprive fauna of native food sources and habitat. Furthermore, they require costly management and removal programs.

Please avoid purchasing species known to be weeds especially those that have fruits, berries or seeds as these can be distributed by birds. Also make sure that you dispose of garden weeds thoughtfully by placing them in a compost bin. Gradually remove and replace known weeds with locally native species.

Why a Backyard for Wildlife?

In Australia, gardening has been recognised as one of our favourite pastimes and what we do in our home gardens has the potential to benefit or harm the natural environment.

By choosing to develop and maintain a garden that follows the five basic Backyards for Wildlife principles (see below), you can help contribute to a better local environment while at the same time conserve our local flora and fauna, create important habitat, reduce your maintenance costs, and reduce the threat of invasive environmental weeds.

Backyards for Wildlife principles:

1. USE LOCALLY NATIVE PLANTS.
2. USE PLANTS THAT ARE A RANGE OF HEIGHTS.
3. PROVIDE FLOWERS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.
4. MANAGE YOUR PETS RESPONSIBLY.
5. MINIMISE CHEMICAL USE.

Please consider applying some of these principles to your own backyard, so that together we can all help grow a great living environment for Adelaide.

Find Out More

Visit www.backyards4wildlife.com.au to access more Backyards for Wildlife and biodiversity information including an interactive map with lists of what grew in your suburb prior to 1836, a plant database and contact details for specialist native plant nurseries.



Backyards for Wildlife is managed by the SA Department of Environment and Natural Resources, with support from the Adelaide & Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board and the Australian Government

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