

Getting Started

It is important that your garden should cater for the needs of your household. Careful thought also needs to be given to the level of maintenance you have time for, or interest, to invest in your garden.

Before planting a new garden or revamping an existing one, there are many points to consider such as:-

- views you may wish to retain or hide,
- sun and shade,
- overhead wires and cables
- position of drains, underground cables,
- and water supply lines,
- type of soil,
- utility areas
- drainage - fall of the land,
- do you need an area for children to play?
- consider the neighbours.



Callistemon citrinus 'Endeavour'

The Plan

Having considered the points listed above, decide on the style of garden your block allows and the style of garden you would like, e.g. rainforest, formal cottage. Draw up a plan for the area, marking in existing buildings, trees, shrubs, overhead and underground cables and pipes. Select the best position for any additional features you would like to incorporate into your plan. Consider the types of plants suitable for the areas of sun and shade. Consider using ground cover plants instead of lawn. They usually require less maintenance, fertiliser and water than lawns.

The Preparation

Complete any structures such as water features, garden retaining walls, fences, paths, lighting and irrigation, etc. Using a garden hose, create gentle curves, for the garden bed design. If you decide to incorporate a lawn, avoid tight corners as it makes mowing difficult. All plants respond well to good drainage. Achieve this by raising the garden bed 15-20cm. The higher the better.

The Soil

When introducing any new soil into your garden, dig in well with the existing soil, rather than piling the new soil on top and creating layers.

Although sandy soils are much easier to work with than clay soil, they are usually low in plant nutrients because water leaches these nutrients away. For a healthy garden on these sandy soils, you need to be adding compost or slow release fertilisers two or three times a year. Compost will also improve the water retention capabilities of the soil.

Clay soils are usually richer in nutrients. The smaller particles bind together, holding nutrients and water in the soil. Adding gypsum to clay soils will change the structure of the soil, bonding the tiny clay particles together to form larger particles, thus allowing air, water, micro-organism and roots to move between these particles. As gypsum is not stable in the soil, repeated applications will be needed every five years to maintain this soil structure.

Once a clay soil has been broken up by deep working and not compacted by heavy machinery, it will not compact down hard again. Work with clay soil when it is on the dry side, never wet as this will destroy the soil structure. Compost should be added to any clay soil to help improve soil structure, circulation and drainage. Compost will also increase soil micro-organisms.

Composting

This will provide a cheap way of providing organic matter to improve any soil. If it has lived once it can be composted. All organic matter can be composted. By using compost and manures in your soils, you not only feed your plants, but also increase the organic matter or humus in the soil, which in turn improves the soil structure, soil organisms and plant growth.

By just using man-made fertilisers continually, there is no organic matter added to the soil. The soil becomes barren and lifeless.

Select your plants

Select your plants keeping your garden style and maintenance level in mind. Research the ultimate size of your selected plants. Remember a tall growing tree will always be a tall growing tree, no matter how often you cut it back. It is better to select a tree or shrub that will grow to around the height that you have space available.

For best results it is better to choose hardy local growing plants. The 'pretties' from Western Australia can look very tempting, but most do not like our humid summers. It is not always wise to

purchase large potted plants, as these are often root bound, thus taking longer to re-establish themselves. Generally smaller younger plants out-grow a larger root bound pot. Acacia and Hakea are species which can be planted beneath mature trees and survive.

Planting

Place out the potted plants ready for planting. Taller growers at the back with the low growers at the front. Stand back and visualise what the garden will look like when the plants have grown. If you need to you can easily move the plants around now. Loosen the soil for a square metre around the planting area. Before planting soak each potted plant in a bucket of water for 2 minutes. Water the plant again after planting to settle the soil around the roots. If staking is necessary, use three stakes per tree to form a triangle, tie the tree with soft material eg. old stocking. Avoid planting shrubs in the lawn, because they will become a problem to mow around later.

Mulching

A layer of wet newspaper and mulch will help conserve moisture and reduce watering. Never use black plastic under mulch. This material will starve the soil of air, moisture, nutrients and kill off beneficial micro-organisms.



Well-constructed native garden, with layers of planting for colour, texture and habitat!