



Creating A Small Native Garden

With ever increasing urbanisation, there is a greater need to make the most of our small outdoor spaces.

A fantastic way to create something for ourselves, and our local wildlife, is with a native garden. You can use native plants to create any style of garden, just think of native plants as you would any other type of plant.

- If you want a formal garden, you might need to give your garden the occasional prune.
- If you want a lush, green looking garden, you'll want to choose lush, green looking plants, and may need to water your garden occasionally.
- Already have a non-native garden? Start by replacing some plants with native alternatives. Generally, the more native plants you use, the better suited your garden will be for native wildlife.



Kangaroo Paw in small native garden (Photo by Robyn Cox)

Types of Native Garden

When looking at plant options for your native garden, native plant species can be sorted into two main categories;

- indigenous plants and
- 'other' native plants.

Indigenous plants are the plant species that naturally occur in your local area.

'Other' natives are the plant species that originate from any other part of Australia. For example, Coastal Banksia (*Banksia integrifolia subsp. integrifolia*) is a beautiful and popular garden plant. It only naturally occurs in coastal areas of Victoria, but doesn't naturally occur in Mitchell Shire. This makes a Coastal Banksia a native plant, but not an indigenous plant in Mitchell Shire.

Choosing Your Native Garden Type

When starting on your native garden journey, you may want to decide if you want an indigenous garden or a broadly native garden. To help you decide, we've put together an outline of the two different types of gardens, and what the pros and cons are for each.



Mix of plants indigenous to Mitchell Shire (Photo by M. Stagg, TREC)

Indigenous Gardens

In its purest form, an indigenous garden uses only plants that occurred naturally in the local area prior to European settlement. Most of these plants can still be found growing in the wild. This may sound simple, but it doesn't just mean the plant species from your local area, but the actual plants from your local area. For example; look at a species like Happy Wanderer (*Hardenbergia violacea*).



Happy Wanderer plant in small native garden (Photo by M. Stagg, TREC)

It's a popular climbing plant for gardens, and occurs naturally in areas as far south as southern Tasmania, and as far north as northern Queensland. Now, let's say I'm designing a small garden in Seymour and I want to use Happy Wanderer. For that

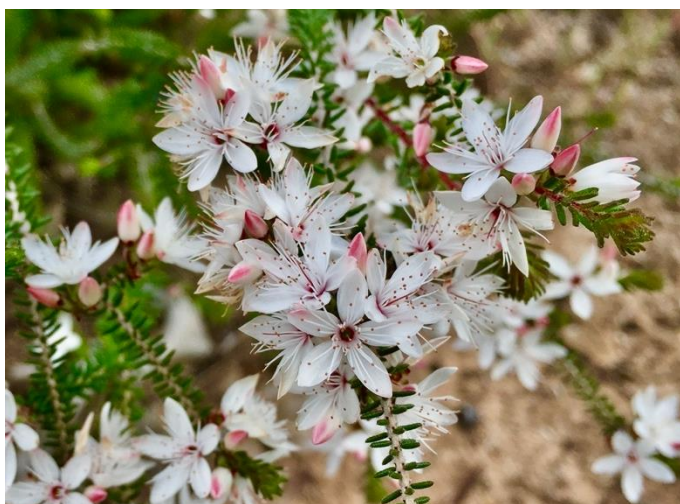


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plant to be indigenous, it can't just be any Happy Wanderer plant, but would rather need to be a plant grown from the seed of a Happy Wanderer plant from the local region. The best way to do this, is to buy the plant from a local indigenous nursery. Indigenous nurseries grow and sell a wide range of plants indigenous to their region. It can be fine to choose a Happy Wanderer plant from another nursery, but it may not be as well suited to your local conditions. E.g. if the seed your plant was grown from was collected from a plant in northern QLD, then that plant has evolved and adapted to the conditions in northern QLD, with high rainfall and humidity, so this Happy Wanderer plant most likely won't like the extreme dry heat and low rainfall of Seymour. **Plants from the local area on the other hand will have evolved for local conditions.**



Common Fringe-myrtle, indigenous to Mitchell Shire (Photo by M. Stagg, TREC)

To find out if a plant is indigenous to your area, check out the Vic Flora website vicflora.rb.gov.au.

Across Mitchell Shire, we are lucky to have a large range of indigenous flora, suited to all kinds of conditions. Most plants available from indigenous nurseries will thrive in a garden setting. An indigenous garden has greater potential for increasing biodiversity, as our locally native birds, insects and other wildlife evolved alongside our indigenous plants, so they are more likely to better support them.

Check out our 'Attracting Birds & Other Wildlife To Your Garden' flier for more garden design tips.

Broadly Native Gardens

Regions across Australia with similar conditions to ours have plants well suited to our gardens. This gives the opportunity to grow some iconic Australian plants like the Waratah (*Telopea* sp.), Silver Princess (*Eucalyptus caesia*), Flannel Flower (*Actinotus helianthin*), and Kangaroo Paw (*Anigozanthos* sp.).

Choosing broadly native also opens you up to exploring cultivars.

For more inspiration, visit the 'Backyard Garden' display at Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne
www.rb.gov.au/cranbourne-gardens/discover-cranbourne-gardens

Something to consider when choosing 'other' natives, is how they might fit into the 'bigger picture'. This is especially relevant if you're creating your garden close to a native bushland etc. Some 'other' natives can be similar to our local indigenous species, and have the ability to crosspollinate with them. There are instances where wild plants have hybridised with garden plants, reducing the wild species resilience to local conditions, at times even resulting in plant extinctions.



Iconic Australian Flannel Flower (Photo by Tim J Keegan)

Native Weeds

It may surprise you to find out that many native Australian plants have become environmental weeds in Mitchell Shire. These are often plants that have been planted in gardens, then unintentionally spread to areas such as bushlands etc. Native weeds can 'take-over' natural areas and out-compete the local indigenous plants. Some examples of problematic garden escapee native weeds are Cootamundra Wattle (*Acacia baileyana*) and Sweet Pittosporum (*Pittosporum undulatum*).

Check out our flier 'Common Weedy Garden Plants & Suggested Alternatives To Plant'



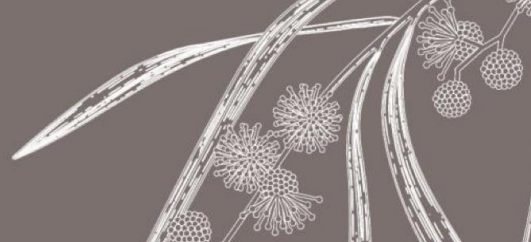
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Grevillea Magnifica, a beautiful non-weedy Grevillea example (Photo by M. Stagg, TREC)

Small Native Garden – Planting Design Tips

A good first step towards designing your garden, is to assess your site conditions. You may want to draw up a map/plan of your garden, and map out what you observe. What to look for:

- What is the soil type? (This can vary, even across a small garden)
- Where are the full-shade areas and full-sun areas?
- Do have areas that aren't sunny, but can get quite hot (such as against a metal fence)?
- Are there damp areas or dry area?
- Are there level changes? (e.g., are there steep areas?)

When To Plant

Across Mitchell Shire, Autumn to mid-Winter is a good time for planting native plants. Our Spring is often quite short, with temperatures heating up and soil dry out quickly, leading to excessive plant loss. Planting once the rain comes in Autumn to early-Winter is ideal. If you live in a frost-prone area, you may want to provide young some plants frost protection, such as frost cloth.

Choosing Plants

Knowing your soil is key to choosing your plants, and it can vary from one area of the garden to another. Soil can also vary with depth. E.g., you're top-soil can be rich loam, but underneath it's heavy clay. This becomes particularly important for deeper rooted plants such as trees and shrubs. No matter your soil type, there are native to suit. Just think, there are plants growing naturally all over Australia, in all kinds of soils and conditions. Everybody experiences plant losses, so don't be afraid to make mistakes; this is just part of learning about your garden. Start by using tube-stock, as these are more affordable.

Trees

Just because you have a small garden, doesn't mean you can't have one or more native trees. Not all native trees are huge gum trees. Many species of mallee eucalypt are naturally small. Some good examples are Blue Mallee (*Eucalyptus polybractea*), Green Mallee (*Eucalyptus viridis*), and Bull Mallee (*Eucalyptus behriana*). Many mallee species can be drastically pruned regularly, to keep them at a desired size. Some nice more mallees are Fuchsia Gum (*Eucalyptus forrestiana*), Bell-fruited Mallee (*Eucalyptus preissiana*), and Square Fruited Mallee (*Eucalyptus tetrapter*).



Flowers of Pear Fruited Mallee. A small tree well suited to heavy soils (Photo by Jean & Fred Hort)

Blooms

For colour in your garden, consider wildflowers. Often thought of as delicate and difficult to grow, so many of our wildflowers are actually really robust, hardy and easy to grow. For full to part sun try Sticky Everlasting (*Xerochrysum viscosum*), Clustered Everlasting (*Chrysocephalum semipapposum*), and Chamomile Sunray (*Rhodanthe anthemoides*). If you have limited sun many species of native Bluebell (*Wahlenbergia sp.*), Triggerplant (*Stylidium sp.*), and Austral Stork's Bill (*Pelargonium austral*) will grow in part to full shade. Another beautiful category for shade is lilies and flax-lilies. E.g., Tasman Flax-lily (*Dianella tasmanica*), and Bulbine Lily (*Bulbine bulbosa*).



Nodding Blue Lily flowers (Photo by Melissa Stagg, TREC)



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Shrubs

Small to medium shrubs are perfectly suited to a small garden. The Correa family (*Correa sp.*) is diverse, with most species fine in shaded conditions. E.g., Rock Correa (*Correa glabra*) and Common Correa (*Correa reflexa*). Correas also respond well to being clipped (great for formal gardens). Finding a good screening shrub for a small garden is easy. Just choose a shrub that responds well to pruning, to help keep it small E.g., Hop-bushes (*Dodonaea sp.*), Tea-trees (*Leptospermum sp.*), and Honey-myrtles (*Melaleuca sp.*). Ensure you choose a shrub-form when selecting your plants, as tree-forms will grow into trees.



Attractive Hop-bush seed pods (Photo by Melissa Stagg, TREC)

For a feature plant, consider shrubs such as the Possum Banksia (*Banksia baueri*), with its huge, woolly flowers. Standard Grevilleas are another great option. Grafted onto hardy root-stock, standard grevilleas are great for formal style gardens.

Groundcovers

Groundcovers are great for layering under trees and shrubs to avoid overcrowding. A groundcover that will be happy in dry-shade is often needed. To find dry-shade options, it's good to see what is growing in the wild in this niche. An often overlooked choice are groundcover Saltbushes. There are 250 species of Saltbush in Australia, many of which are groundcover.



Groundcover Saltbushes are great for stabilising steep areas (Photo by M. Stagg, TREC)



Mix of native groundcovers, Wallan (Photo by M. Stagg, TREC)

In dry-shade, a lush, green groundcover option is Berry Saltbush (*Einadia hatata*). For beautiful silvery-blues, try Berry Saltbush (*Atriplex semibaccata*). For a blooming groundcover, try Cut-leaf Daisy (*Brachyscome multifida*) for masses of flowers for most of the year. In damp, part to full-shade try Kidney Weed (*Dichondra repens*) and Native Violet (*Violacea hederacea*). In dryer areas groundcover forms of Emu-bush (*Eremophila spp.*), are great. E.g., *Eremophila* 'Kalbarri Carpet'.

Climbers

To hide a fence or wall, climbing plants are a great option, and are also a great way to squeeze in more plants. Some nice options are Happy Wanderer (*Hardenbergia violacea*), and Apple Berry (*Billardiera scandens*). In dryer areas Small-leaved Clematis (*Clematis microphylla*), and Bower Vine (*Pandorea jasminoides*) do well, but can become weeds in higher rainfall areas. In higher rainfall areas Mountain Clematis (*Clematis aristata*), and Twining Guinea Flower (*Hibberita dentata*) are nice options.

Grasses & Sedges

Many native grasses and sedges give beautiful shapes, textures and foliage colours, and create wonderful movement as they blow in the breeze. Grasses/sedges also provide food and shelter for wildlife. Blue-tongued Lizards are often found, even in the suburbs, foraging under Common Tussock-grass (*Poa labillardierei*). Native grasses and sedges are usually clumping, and range in size. Large species such as Red-fruit Saw-sedge, (*Gahnia sieberiana*), can make a great feature. Suited to all small gardens are medium to small options like Blue Tussock-grass (*Gahnia sieberiana*), and Velvet Tussock-grass (*Poa morrisii*). When buying grasses, do check they are actually native. Some non-natives grasses are mistaken for natives, and become problematic weeds in nearby areas. E.g., Foxtail Grass (*Pennisetum spp.* *Cenchrus spp.*) are noxious weeds in Australia, and is sometimes incorrectly sold in the 'native' section of nurseries.

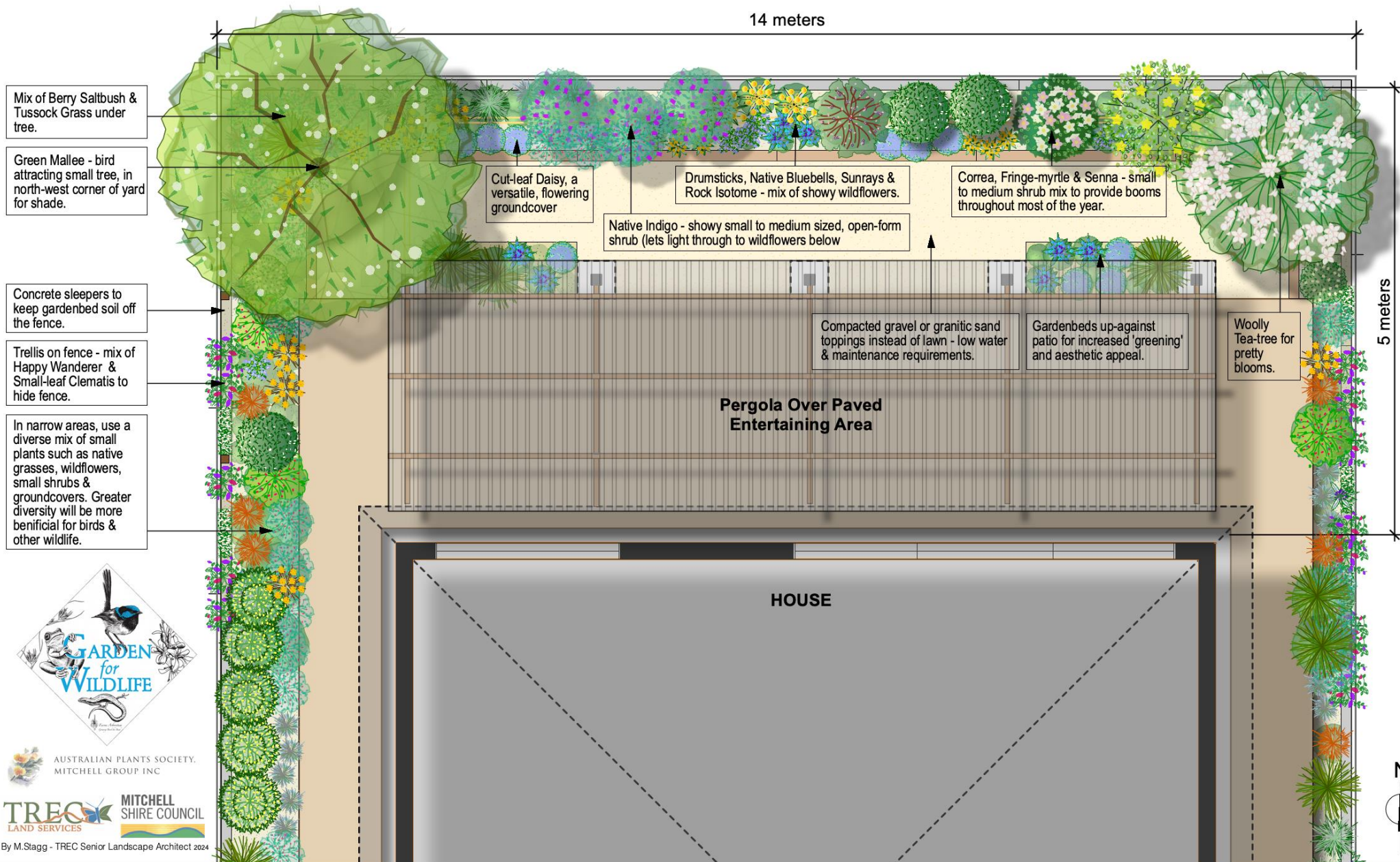
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DESIGN PLAN Native Garden - Small Backyard Example



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