



Grow local plants

What are local plants?

Local plants are species that would naturally occur in your neighborhood and are therefore adapted to the local climate and soil. There are a huge range of local WA plants that can be used to create many contemporary garden styles such as cottage, formal, Mediterranean and bushland. Be creative with local plants and use them in hanging baskets and containers, as hedges and as topiary!



Garden design tips

- Plan your garden design on graph paper.
- Think about areas of usage (eg eating areas, play areas) and incorporate these into your garden design.
- Keep in mind views from the house (eg retain good views and use plants to hide eyesores).
- Plant trees their mature height away from fences and walls so their growth isn't hampered and they don't become a nuisance.
- Make sure you prepare the site and remove all weeds prior to mulching or planting.
- You can use local plants in your whole garden, in a garden bed or mixed in with exotics.
- Group plants with similar water and fertiliser requirements together, especially if mixing local plants with exotics.
- Keep in mind the growing requirements of plants (eg don't plant a sun loving plant in the shade of a larger shrub).
- Be aware that there are different forms of plants you can use in your garden (eg dwarf forms of trees and groundcover forms of many shrubs).
- Select plants that flower in each season to provide colour in your garden all year round.
- Use a diverse range of plants but repeat themes of plants and place them in groups of uneven numbers for greater impact.
- Vary the height layers in your garden to add interest and habitat. (eg tree canopy, shrubs, groundcovers).
- Think of your garden like a room in your house and plant in stages. Lay the carpet (groundcovers) in first, then place the furniture (theme shrubs and trees) and then dress the room with the smaller flowering shrubs and feature plants.
- Continually review your design and keep complementing your garden with new plants. Think of your garden as progressive and ever changing to be built upon over time.



Plant selection and planting out

- Buy plants local to your area or suited to your soil type (see list overleaf).
- Buy small plants in bigger pots as they aren't root bound and better establish in the garden. You can buy some larger feature plants for a more instant effect.
- Always read the labels to check the size of the plant when mature to be sure that you are getting the desired plant form.
- Coastal plants will grow inland, but inland plants don't grow well on the coast.
- Don't choose plants that are environmental weeds.
- Plant in late April or May after the first good autumn rains, as plants have more time to establish before summer.



WA plant nurseries

Different nurseries have varying ranges of WA plants so you might need to shop around. If you really want a particular selection of plants, then it is a good idea to order ahead in about September so the plants can be grown ready for planting in autumn.



Watering

WA plants are adapted to our dry climate and low rainfall - they are used to a bit of stress and in fact need this to perform their best. Over watering leads to shorter lived plants with excessive growth and less prolific flowering. An excess of water leads to leaching of nutrients from sandy soils and encourages diseases that can lead to fatal root rot.

Remember the aim is to encourage plants to grow strong root systems, which makes them more water efficient and drought tolerant. To keep your garden looking its best, it may be desirable to give some plants a supplementary watering over summer.

When to water (always follow water restrictions)

For new plants water:

- Once or twice a week in the first few weeks after planting.
- Once or twice a week in the summer period for the first one to two years until plants are established (generally from about November to May until the first good rain occurs).

For established plants water:

- When there is a heat wave
- When the soil under the surface is dry
- When signs of stress are apparent (eg wilting, dull foliage colour, leaf shrinkage)

In general the watering regime for mature plants varies with the soil type, origin of the plant, season and natural rainfall.

What irrigation to use

WA plants like the soil surface to remain dry and many are sensitive to overhead watering (eg sprinklers, misters). Thus the best irrigation to use is adjustable dripper/trickle systems or subsurface irrigation.

Watering tips

- Watering in the morning is preferable as moisture sitting on plant leaves and stems overnight can cause plant diseases.
- Avoid watering only the soil surface layer as this encourages shallow roots making plants more susceptible to drying out and blowing over. Longer deeper watering encourages the growth of deeper, more stable roots.
- If water repellence occurs, apply a wetting agent.
- Use a dripper with a high flow rate for water demanding plants eg Boronia, Scaevola.



Pruning

To keep WA plants looking their best, it is necessary to do some pruning to help keep the plant in shape and promote flowering.

When to prune

In general prune after flowering has finished in late spring or early summer. Avoid pruning in winter or mid-summer, as this may cause plants to die back extensively. It is better to prune young plants lightly and regularly. Older plants can be rejuvenated by more extensive pruning after flowering.

How to prune

There are two main types of plant flowering habits each requiring different pruning methods:

1. Plants that flower on the end of each season's growth - trim off the flowering stems from behind the seed capsules after the plant has finished flowering. Regular pruning prevents these plants from becoming straggly. Eg Callistemon (Bottlebrush), Pimelea.
2. Plants that flower on old wood - remove the oldest wood from the centre of the plant, letting the younger wood remain. Eg some species of Melaleuca.

Tips for pruning

- Cut off the whole branch cleanly at the join leaving no protruding stump.
- Remove low branches to make weeding easier.
- Use chopped up prunings as mulch.
- Only prune the softer wooded plants (eg large wattles) lightly as they aren't as hardy as the woodier plants and tend to die back extensively.
- Eucalypts, Callistemons and Melaleucas respond well to pruning and can tolerate a hard prune.
- Cut back Kangaroo Paws to the ground after flowering each year. It helps prevent black ink disease and promotes better growth.

Mulch

Good mulch consists of a mixture of different sized materials such as leaves, twigs and bark, lets water easily penetrate through to the soil and prevents evaporation. The mulch materials shouldn't absorb too much water, otherwise they make less available to the plants.

The best mulch

- Groundcovers and natural leaf litter formed by the plants in your garden.
- Street tree loppings - may contain some weeds but they are easily seen and removed.
- Inert materials (eg gravel, crushed brick) are particularly good in windy areas as they don't blow around.

When to mulch

Organic mulches need renewing seasonally as they break down over time, but are best applied at the start of warmer weather in spring and early summer.

How much mulch?

Apply mulch about 5cm thick, creating a bowl shape around the plant to aid water retention.

What to avoid:

- Avoid layering mulch too thickly as this can impede water infiltration and reduce plant survival.
- Avoid mulching too close to the stem of the plant as the constant humidity encourages plant diseases and WA plants prefer the surrounding soil surface to be dry.
- Avoid using sawdust and raw wood products (eg wood chips) as they can interfere with iron uptake, draw nitrogen out of the soil and cause the soil to become water repellent. Always compost woody mulches for at least 6 months before use.
- Avoid using mulch from soft leaved plants like many exotic species, as it decays too fast and releases too many nutrients for WA plants.
- Avoid some packaged mulches as they contain high levels of nitrogen and phosphorus which isn't suitable for WA plants.

Fertilisers

As WA plants are adapted to soils that are low in nutrients they usually don't require fertiliser. In a garden situation you can apply a little fertiliser to keep plants looking perfect, but be cautious as some species are sensitive to fertilisers, particularly phosphorus. Sufficient phosphorus is naturally present in the soil.

When to apply

Apply fertiliser when planting by mixing into the soil at the bottom of the hole. Subsequent fertilising should be done on the surrounding root zone only when nutrient deficiency is apparent and only when plants are actively growing in spring.

What fertiliser to use

(Note: always follow the manufacturer instructions on dosage and application)

- Slow release fertilisers for native plants.
- Low phosphorus and low nitrogen fertilisers.
- Fish emulsion or seaweed fertiliser to boost plants immunity to disease.

What not to fertilise

- Some plants are highly sensitive to fertilisers, particularly fertilisers that contain phosphorus. Eg: Banksias, Grevilleas, Dryandras, Hakeas (Proteaceae family).
- Don't over fertilise Everlastings as they get too tall and weak and lie down when flowering.

Guidelines

The City of Swan have published the Landscape Guidelines for Streetscapes and Public Space which provide a set of landscaping criteria and standards for residents and developers. The guidelines are available from the City of Swan website www.swan.wa.gov.au