



# FOR ALL SEASONS

Established trees and water-wise qualities are key ingredients in this native garden

Story: Terry Meehan  
Photos: Patrick Redmond

*water-wise gardens*



When designing a new garden it's not always necessary to remove everything — especially when it comes to green life. Established trees can give a mature look to a young garden and can be given a new lease on life as they become the framework for a new garden.

There was much debate as to whether or not to keep the three large eucalyptus trees in the front of this property but, in the end, the decision to keep them was vindicated as they became the heart of the garden.

The planting theme was for a low-maintenance native garden incorporating indigenous plants from the local area. A three-metre-tall hedge of mixed varieties of bottlebrush (*Callistemon*) and grevillea create a great privacy screen from the neighbours while attracting native birds.

Gardens do not necessarily need flowers for colour. A combination of small grasses such as *Lomandra* 'Tanika', *Dianella* 'King Alfred', *Festuca* 'Elijah Blue' and *Pennisetum setaceum* 'Rubrum' planted in groups adds variation, with contrasting foliage shapes and colours mixed through some small shrubs such as coastal rosemary (*Westringia fruticosa*), *Correa alba* and *Eremophila* 'Gubburra Bells'.

Another big advantage with the above-mentioned plants is their drought tolerance and low water usage once established. The lomandra, dianella and festuca can also be planted in rows to create a more formal look compared to the more traditional plant selections.

A permeable path of granitic sand was created through this garden with rambling edges of creeping boobialla (*Myoporum parvifolium*) and snow in summer (*Cerastium tomentosum*).



The garden was first established with the help of a subsurface in-line drip system but now more than 12 months on, with the plants settling in, the irrigation system gets minimal use. Another reason for the minimal water usage is the thick bed of recycled mulch the garden gets every 12 months. When choosing mulch, we like to use one that breaks down over time, enriching the soil and adding organic matter to it. The plants will appreciate an annual topping up of mulch every spring to help get them through the warmer months.

In contrast to the front garden, the rear garden was built for four young sports-mad boys. Maximum lawn area was required for summer cricket matches and winter football games. Keeping the water-conscious theme in mind, a 5000-litre corrugated steel rainwater tank was installed and connected to the lawn irrigation controller.

Buffalo instant lawn was the preferred choice of lawn because it has proved to stand up to most conditions in the past. It is a surface runner type of grass, which means it is easy

to contain and less invasive, as you can see when it starts to creep into garden or paved areas, and can be cut it back at that point. Like most lawns, it responds really well to water, so topping it up occasionally over the drier periods from the rainwater tank as well as three-quarterly feeds and regular mowing in the growing periods keeps it thick, lush and weed-free.

The plant selections for the rear garden were more practical choices based on the plants' abilities to bounce back after being crushed by a stray ball. *Pittosporum* 'Green Pillar' was chosen for boundary hedging, with under planting of *Dietes iridioides*, a slightly smaller version of the *Dietes grandiflora*.

This garden has developed into a practical and private space for a young growing family to enjoy all year round, with minimal water and maintenance requirements. ■

Terry Meehan is the director of Seasons Landscape, a Melbourne-based landscape design and construction company.