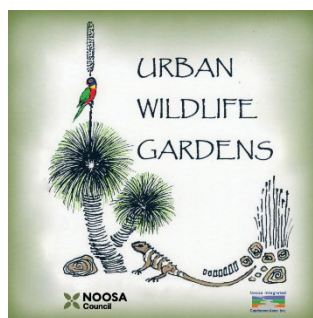




Native Garden Design Workshop 20 Sept 2026

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Introduction

Definition of Garden – “manipulation of nature for human joy”. Balance of biodiversity and human needs.

What makes good gardens and landscapes: Research, Vision, Discipline, and a bit of Emotion.

1. Understanding your Property

Grab a plan of your property and walk around and draw these things on your plan. It’s called a “site analysis”.`

Local council websites often have good access to property maps and recent aerial photos.

Soil	○ Sandy soils drain well. ○ Clay soil retains moisture
Aspect	○ North is good for winter sun ○ South is shady ○ South west is terrible for summer afternoon sun ○ South-east is good for summer breezes ○ South-west is terrible for cold winter breezes
Topography	○ Is your site gently sloping ○ Is your site steep? ○ Is there a gully or drain? ○ Is there a boggy area?
Privacy	○ Is the site overlooked?
Views	○ Are there good views? ○ Are there bad views? ○ Can you borrow landscape?
Vegetation	○ Are there good trees and shrubs that you like ○ Are there bad trees and shrubs that are weeds or are in the wrong place)
Biodiversity	○ Are there areas that have established value (natural forest and old trees) ○ Are there areas that have biodiversity potential such as drainage gullies and corridor connections
Fire Rating	○ What is your fire rating?

2. Functional Analysis

The boring bit but this is incredibly important to successful landscapes and making it a joy to use and easier to maintain. Make notes about these things on the same “site analysis”

Functional analysis	Description
Problems	○ What problems are on the site that need to be resolved
Water Supply	○ What is the water supply for irrigation?
Cars	○ What areas do you need for cars or other vehicles such boats or caravans?
Pedestrians	○ What pedestrian access do you need? Do you need or desire equitable access
Access	○ Access for maintenance
Maintenance	○ What are your maintenance abilities. Be realistic
Users	○ Who will be using the space and what are their needs
Production	○ Are you after part of the garden to be productive with fruit and vegetables?
Services	○ Electricity, Water lines ○ Solar Panel ○ Sewage System

3. Stating your Landscape Vision

Write down what you want you landscape to be. Use simple words and keep it very clear. Some examples.

- I want a yard that attracts lots of birds and the grandkids can play football on the lawn
- I want an elegant English countryside style landscape with large trees on the lawn and clipped hedges that reminds me of my childhood
- I want to restore the rainforest near the creek and have paddocks for my goats
- I want a landscape that I can sit in the shade and catch a breeze on a hot summer day and drink gin with my friends.

The most successful gardens and landscapes simply to stick to this vision and keep it as a priority. They stay disciplined and don't get distracted or deviate. Thus can be hard work and it means:-

- Don't buy random impulse plants at the market just because they look good
- Don't plant that weird bamboo that someone gave you as a house-warming present. You need to ruthlessly burn it (I confess I really dislike bamboo!)

And every-time you have a decision to make about the garden – revert back to this simple design vision. It will make decisions easy.

4. Exploring the Solutions

By now you will have a fair idea what you want and what your problems are. It's important at this stage to research solutions. Here are some considerations:

Design Fabric	Description	
Landform	○ Do you need to shape land? ○ Do you need retaining walls	○ Do you need drains?
Water source	Can you put a dam in t provide irrigation water	○ How is the same built?
Fire Rating	○ What is your fire response>	○
Choosing Hard Surfaces	○ Trafficable for vehicles and pedestrians ○ Paving or concrete	○ Permeable (rain penetration)
Choosing Soft surfaces	○ Lawns ○ Garden Beds	○ Edging details
Fencing and Screens	○ Timber, Steel or Solid?	
Lighting	○ Safety	○ Evenings (particularly summer)
Choosing plants	○ Suitability for site and climate ○ Size ○ Shape ○ Texture	○ Flowers ○ Aroma ○ Therapeutic values ○ Joy of wildlife
Budget	○ What is your budget?	○
Construction capability and sequencing	○ What are you capable of constructing? ○ What are the important things to do first	○ Landform, drainage and hard surfaces are very important to get right first

5. Emotion and Aesthetics in the Landscape

The best landscapes unashamedly embrace emotion and drama and aesthetics in the landscape. These can include

- Memories of past places or people
- Comfort including warming sun, and cooling shade and breezes
- Fragrance
- Theatre of reveal and conceal of views and spaces
- Dramatic events including seasonal flowering and wildlife. I love the silky oak and flame trees flowering in spring, as well as the drama of the Black Cockatoos attacking my banksia seed cones)

Other aesthetic consideration include:

- Balance and symmetry
- Picturesque (the foreground, mid ground and background/ horizon)
- Use of borrowed landscape to benefit your garden

6. Pulling it together Doing a Design

Designs usually come naturally once you have been through the design process of:

- Site Analysis
- Functional Analysis
- Landscape Vision
- Researching Solution
- Emotional and dramatic solutions

Draw up your design on paper. Keep this in the drawer and keep referencing it and refining it. Unashamedly talk to lots of people and experts / contractors about it

7. Gardening with Native Plants

The best gardens are a mixture of colourful flowers, dramatic foliage, lovely fragrances and beautiful bird sounds and deliberate planting. This is what makes a joyful garden! Native plants have plenty of scope to do this but I find achieving drama in the native garden the most difficult task. It requires a lot of thought and looking carefully at each plant, and seeing how you can arrange them to best affect! Here are some tips below.

Foliage Drama

Place plants to maximise contrast of colour and form. A subtle plant next to a dramatic plant will accentuate each others attributes.

*As an example planting a swath of subtle dark green red *Austromyrtus dulcis* (Midyim) as a foreground to bright green spiky foliage of *Crinum pedunculatum* (River Lily) will exaggerate each others forms and strengths.*

Also drama can be created on a grand scale with bulk impact. A piece meal approach with individual plant specimens may be more interesting from a botanical perspective, but creates disarray and confusion in the garden and conceals each individual plants identity. Create impact by planting in swathes and drift with a minimum of 6 plants and amplify the plants qualities.

*As an example planting a swath of *Cordyline* spp. Palm Lillies with their foliage contrasted against a skyline will provide immense impact. In a similar vein a green wall of *Platycerium bifurcatum* (Elkhorn), rather than individual specimens looks spectacular. A bank of any colourful flowering native will also have a multiplying impact from colour.*

Native Plants recommended for Foliage Drama
<i>Alocasia brisbanensis</i> Cunjevoi
<i>Banksia robur</i> Swamp Banksia
<i>Cordyline</i> spp. Palm Lillies
<i>Crinum pedunculatum</i> River Lily
<i>Cymbopogon refractus</i> Barbed Wire Grass
<i>Cyathea cooperi</i> Tree Fern
<i>Dendrobium tarberi</i> King Orchid

Doranthyes palmerii (Palm Lily as well – from Mt Warning rather than Noosa bioregion))

Gahnia spp Saw Sedge

Pandanus tectorius Pandanus - Beach Screw Pine

Platynerium bifercatum Elkhorn

Foliage Colour

It is fair to say that most native plants are various shades of green, particularly the smaller plants which are the subject of this workshop.

In the table below are some species that have distinctive foliage colour.

To achieve impact from foliage colour it is vital to plant these plants in bulk, and to contrast them with adjacent plants of bright green foliage.

Native Plants recommended for Foliage Colour

Croton insularis Silver Croton* Silver

Doodia aspera Rasp Fern (red and pink new foliage)

Plectranthus spp. (Silver foliage) (be careful to obtain native species, as some exotic species are weeds)

Themeda trianda Kangaroo Grass (straw coloured foliage)

Westringia species Native Rosemary (Silver foilage)

*Must be pruned to retain to size and shape suited to domestic garden

Flowers and Bird Attracting

Most native plants have flowers! Below are a list of common varieties that flower well locally and naturally. It is very easy to also purchase various cultivars from plant nurseries to get the most striking flowers, but the list below focuses on those found naturally in the wild.

Planting flowering plants in swathes and drifts will accentuate the drama of the flowers .

The most striking combination of flowering plants is see locally is when the Hoveas (purple) and Pultenea (yellow) flowering simultaneously in the understory of local forests. Incredibly striking and is a flowering association that could be used to much more effect in local gardens.

I also use *Pandorea jasminoides* (Bower Of Beauty) in full sun as a ground cover. With regular pruning it can be maintained to shape and will achieve regular carpet of continuous flowers.

A *Dendrobium tarberi* (King Orchid) in full flower in the right spot has to be one of the most spectacular flowering natives in Australia!

One the best things about flowering native plants is the birds they attract birds. Shrubs that are suited to the domestic garden provide the best cover and shelter for the most colourful and melodious birds, as opposed to the predators like the crows that rely on open ground.

Birds add colour, sound and movement to the garden and are a critical component to achieving drama.

The discrete flashes and movements of brigh yellow Eastern Yellow Robins, or the Azure blue of a Forest Kingfishers are superb darting in and out of the bushes. The warbles of numerous honeyeaters provides such a lovely sound!

How can you forget the sight and sound drama of a Yellow Tailed Black Cockatoo demolishing a swamp banksia flowers in the garden, or a flock of pin galahs eating seeds from a bank of native grasses.

I've also have regular visits of echidnas and had local river turtles emerge in the garden to lay eggs (interesting predator in my instance to floods). How can gardeners in Australia not take advantage of these wonderful native wildlife attributes to help make the most wonderful garden

Native Plants recommended for Flowers and Bird Attracting

<i>Banksia robur</i> Swamp Banksia <i>Dendrobium tarberi</i> King Orchid <i>Grevillea banksia (prostrate form)</i> Red Silkyoak <i>Hovea acutifolia</i> Hovea <i>Pultenea villosa</i> Kerosene Bush — Hairy Pea Bush Macadamia spp* <i>Melaleuca sp.</i> Paperbarks and Bottlebrushes <i>Leptospermum sp.</i> Tea Trees <i>Pandorea jasminoides</i> Bower Of Beauty <i>Sannantha similis</i> Twiggy Myrtle

*Must be pruned to retain to size and shape suited to domestic garden

Fragrance

Many of these flowering plants listed above also have fragrance! I have provides a list is the most obvious and iconic fragrances that I find in local native plants.

Native Plants recommended for Fragrance

<i>Backhousia citriodora</i> Lemon Myrtle (foliage) <i>Crinum pedunculatum</i> River Lily <i>Hoya australis</i> Wax Flower <i>Mallotus laoxyloides</i> Smell of the Bush (<i>discrete but pervasive night odour</i>)

Plain Backdrops / Fillers

It is critical when planning drama in the native garden, that there is a foreground or backdrop of plainer foliage plants to frame the view, help define the space, and assist in exaggeration of the adjacent more dramatic plants.

Again it is critical that these be planted in bulk to achieve impact as a backdrop / filler
These one the ones that I like below. However any native plant that has more plainer attributes can achieve the same intent.

Native Plants recommended as Backdrops/ Fillers

Austromyrtus dulcis Midyim
Cissus antractica Kangaroo Vine
Isolepis nodosa Knobby Club Rush
Lomandra hystrix Mat Rush
Molineria capitulata Weevil Lily (slightly out of Noosa Bioregion, being from further north)

8. Special Section on Weed Management

Weeds can destroy your love of gardening. Cobblers Pegs that make 3 metre trees are not fun!

- What is your strategy – herbicides or natural?
- Disturbance is an invitation to weeds
- Quarantine strategies – don't transport weeds accidentally
- Weed Suppressing mulches and plants. Foliage from Silky Oaks, Cabbage Tree Palm and She-Oaks have weed suppressing properties
- Weed disposal – bin them asap

Shaun's top tips for garden design in this part of the world:

- Of course use the vast array of native plants as they are more suited to our climate and attract wildlife. Our native fauna and flora in our landscapes is unique and make the best gardens in this part of the world
- Top tips
 1. Hold fire - get to understand your property first before rushing out and planting. Many novices jump straight to plant selection and wonder why they end up with such poor outcomes
 2. Research and Experiment – we still have much to learn about Australia's native plants
 3. Gardening in the subtropics is hard sweaty work (not like the tv shows based in temperate regions) – use the seasons:
 4. Autumn is best time for major planting with warm moist soil and cooler weather to come
 5. Winter is for major capital works
 6. Summer is for maintenance only
 7. Be patient. Trees and shrubs grow large and most longer term problems caused by over planting. In addition many native plants can only be sourced at smaller sizes
 8. Be realistic – what can you conceivably achieve and maintain? But also be ruthless don't be afraid to rip out previous mistakes otherwise you will always be chasing your tail.
- These four things will make a comfortable garden:
 1. For summer put a shade tree in the south western corner to shade hot summer sun and block cold winter winds
 2. For winter don't plant trees to your north if you can avoid it
 3. Place an entertaining space in the south eastern corner for summer
 4. Place an entertaining space in the north western corner for winter

- Focus on your entry experience as priority. It lifts your spirits and makes you feel great every time you come home and motivates you to garden more, as well as being welcoming for visitors
- Don't plant regular symmetrical avenues and hedges. Monocultures are doomed to fail in this climate from disease and storms. Plant copse of trees and sweeps of shrubbery
- Mass planting of simple species has great impact. Contrast with different foliage forms.
- Plan areas of deep shade with lush green groundcovers. When it's hot and dry they will make the garden seem cool and lush
- Think about drainage – where does the water go and can you direct it and capture to assist plant health. Sub soil penetration of rainwater is critical to get through the dry periods. I think areas of poor drainage are a great opportunity!
- Focus on your edge treatments. A tidy edge will ensure a messy garden seem manicured
- Invest in comfortable and durable garden furniture that can sit outside all the time and be moved around as you wish (an invitation to drink gin or tea in the garden)
- Share your learnings - we have so much to learn about gardening with native plants