

Native plants are good in the garden too!

The native garden is lower in maintenance because it requires less fertiliser, less water and a lot less molly-coddling! Their low water use (once established) is a key reason why natives are becoming so popular in urban, rural and local government gardens, to name a few, especially as many Australian states now have water restrictions in place.

WATERING

Amount: A longer soaking every few days beats a quick daily spray, and encourages a strong root system. A newly planted native needs only 1.5 litres of water per week going into the first summer. It is best to keep an eye on your plantings as some areas of the garden will be drier than others and may therefore need a little extra. In most situations, you can reduce or even turn off the reticulation system after the end of the second summer, but again, every garden is different so if you want to try this option, make sure you keep a close eye out so you can make adjustments as required. Remember, excess watering will lead to more growth and therefore a higher maintenance requirement.

Timing: Try to avoid watering in the heat of the day or evening as plants left wet overnight are more prone to fungal diseases. The optimum time for watering is early morning.

Type: Don't lose water to the wind - sub-surface drippers are the best option. Not only do they greatly reduce evaporation but native plants prefer their water to be applied to the soil rather than by overhead sprinklers, which wet the leaves and stems too.

FERTILISERS

Native plants in general require less phosphorus than exotic plants. In fact, you can kill native plants with an 'overdose' of phosphorus! Plants from the Proteacea family, such as Banksias and Grevilleas are most susceptible to too much phosphorus. We recommend using specialist fertilisers developed for use on native plants, such as the slow release pellets or tablets.

MAINTENANCE

Good management of any garden is crucial to keeping it looking good and this rule applies to native gardens too. Just like you wouldn't plant a rose and leave it from then on to fend for itself you shouldn't plant a native and expect to do the same. Almost all native plants can be cut back by about a third after flowering. This will keep their form nice and compact and avoid the 70's 'Straggly Bush Garden' look that is about as fashionable as that other 70s icon, the mullet. When planning your garden, group plants together according to their water requirements - keep Lechenaultias and other thirsty in a cool area at the bottom of an incline, near a watercourse or under some shade. Mulch with fertiliser-free mulches (ask the nursery staff to make sure) about 5cm (2in) thick to help the soil retain water but as with all plants, keep the mulch away from the stems.