

# Establishing a native garden



Local native species are adapted to the Adelaide region and after establishment, generally obtain their water needs from rainfall alone. The use of these indigenous plants will drought-proof your garden, save water and support local wildlife.

## Why use local plants?

When you buy a seedling from a nursery, it has invariably been grown from a seed or a cutting. The geographical location or source of that seed or cutting is referred to as the plant's 'provenance'. Golden Wattles grew across Australia but seedlings sourced in New South Wales may not be suited to Adelaide despite the fact that Golden Wattles were widespread here. The best native plants to establish in your garden are grown from seeds or cutting with a provenance as close as is reasonable, to your home.

While nearly all original vegetation communities from the Adelaide Plains have been lost to development there still exist small pockets (remnants), sometimes containing no more than a handful of specimens that retain that original locally-adapted genetic material. From these remnants local native plant growers can help bring back many of the species that were on the edge of becoming locally extinct.

Local provenance also means that these plants are adapted to local climate and soil conditions and can survive on less water than most exotic garden plants.

Once a 'native garden' implied a wild bush-like form made up of species from other states. Those days are long gone and the availability of numerous specialist native plant nurseries enables gardeners to select from a wide array of local species, often specific to their suburbs, to create whatever style of garden they choose.

## Planning your garden

Use the plant selector on our website to create a list of local native plants for your suburb, and use the Adelaide, or coastal gardens booklets to decide what style of garden you want to create.

Lots of native plants are sensitive to poor drainage, so locate the well-draining and poorly-draining areas of your garden. Then you can place a frog pond or wetland in naturally damper areas of the garden.

If you wish to achieve a natural look, avoid planting in rows by growing several of the same species together in a clump, as this generally looks better, has greater habitat value and makes watering more efficient.

Create a variety of mini-habitats, for example plan a shrubby area with groundcovers next to a grassland area and a wetland area. If possible include a patch of densely planted prickly shrubs for wildlife to shelter in or under. This is particularly important for small birds and lizards.



Establishing a native garden helps create habitat for wildlife and it can also play a role in making our city more sustainable in terms of adding to local amenity and reducing water use  
Photo by Shaun Kennedy

## Small gardens

Establishing a native garden does not mean that you need a large open space with full sun. As more people choose to live in apartments, units or houses with small yards, a garden can sometimes be as simple as a collection of potted plants.

When looking for suitable pot plants for verandas and courtyards there are many wonderful local native species that are suitable for growing in pots including: local Flax-lilies (*Dianella* species) or Karkalla (*Carpobrotus rossii*) the trailing succulent for hotter areas. Use Irongrass (*Lomandra* spp.), local sedges (*Juncus* or *Ficinia* species) and native grasses (e.g. *Poa* species) to attract butterflies.

If you are looking for some larger feature with a potted native plant, various acacias, melaleucas and even eucalypts are all recommended by State Flora. They also have a list identifying which native species are suitable for indoor use. See the native nurseries list on our website for contact details.

## Planting out

It is recommended to plant in autumn and winter to give plants a chance to get established using seasonal rainfall. Water your new plants about once a week during the first summer as they establish.

Often native plants can be slow to adjust after being transplanted from a pot. To increase the success and encourage healthy growth of your new seedlings:

1. **Dig the right sized hole.** The most common mistake when transplanting from a pot is digging the hole too shallow or too narrow. The ideal hole is the twice as deep and twice as wide as the container it is in. Fill the hole with water and allow it to soak into the ground.



2. **Soak the soil around the root ball.** Place the plant still in its container in a bucket of water until it stops bubbling (but don't submerge the entire plant). This helps get rid of air around the roots and makes it easier to get the plant out of the container.
3. **Carefully remove the plant from the container.** Be careful not to pull on the plant's stem or disturb the roots more than necessary. Support the base of the exposed seedling with one hand and use your other hand to hold the roots and soil together as you place it carefully in the hole.
4. **Backfill soil and tamp firmly without compacting the soil.** Allow for a small depression around the plant (see figure) which can capture rainfall and act as a water bowl. Water immediately to settle the soil and reduce the chance of transplant shock.

#### Additional tips:

- Tubestock (small pots) will generally establish faster and quickly outgrow 'advanced' natives planted from larger more expensive pots.
- Whilst a good layer of mulch improves soil condition, keeps soil temperatures down, and reduces weed growth and evaporation, carefully consider its use in your native garden. Thick mulch layers can hinder the recruitment of many native annual species and reduce the health of larger tree species such as the Messmate Stringybark (*Eucalyptus obliqua*).

## Garden weeds

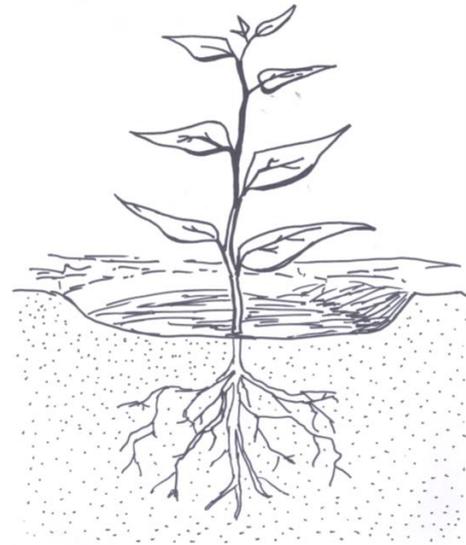
Weeds can escape from suburban gardens into roadsides and bushland. Weeds are a significant threat to biodiversity as they invade and compete with native plants for sunlight and nutrients.

They can also deprive some fauna species of native food sources and habitat. They also require costly management and removal programs.

Please avoid purchasing species known to be weeds especially those that have fruits, berries or seeds as these can be distributed by birds.

Gradually remove and replace known weeds with local native species.

Also make sure that you dispose of garden weeds thoughtfully by placing them in the compost or green bin. Refer to our *Environmental weeds Adelaide and the Mount Lofty Ranges* brochure for more information.



Establishing a watering bowl around your newly planted tubestock will help catch natural rainfall

## More information

Visit the urban biodiversity page of our website to access more Backyards 4 Wildlife information, weeds brochure, garden booklets, the local native plant selector and contact details for specialist native plant nurseries.

[www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/adelaidemtloftyranges](http://www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/adelaidemtloftyranges)

Or contact your nearest Natural Resources Centre

#### Black Hill

115 Maryvale Road, Athelstone, SA 5076  
P (08) 8336 0901

#### Eastwood

205 Greenhill Road, Eastwood, SA 5063  
P (08) 8273 9100

#### Gawler

43 High Street, Gawler East 5118  
P (08) 8115 4600

#### Willunga

5 Aldinga Road, Willunga, SA 5172  
P (08) 8550 3400

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