



Pathway to a low CO₂ future. Gardening for the future

Gardening as it was meant to be

With tough water restrictions over the past five or six years, many gardeners have had to rationalise their gardens. In this part of Victoria we have a few choices about what sort of gardens we want,

Many gardeners have watched their silver birches and other exotics perish, so have turned to **natives and indigenous**. Plenty of us are growing **food** successfully in low water gardens. And because you've got natives doesn't mean you can't splash out with some exotics here and there.

A word on mulch and weeds:

If your garden is badly infested with weeds you can have the soil 'scalped' to get rid of the weed seed layer. A kinder and cheaper option may be to weed by hand or join Castlemaine PermaBlitz, a great example of the power of community.

Always be aware of the weed potential of what you are about to plant. Cootamundra wattles and pittosporums are among the natives that have gone feral in our area, not to mention the host of overseas exotics that are causing headaches as well.

Organic mulch can draw moisture and nitrogen out of the soil as it breaks down, making the soil hydrophobic, so investigate alternative mulches such as sand or gravel. Never have organic mulch close to your house or deck – it will burn in a bushfire.

Native and indigenous

If you're going to go native or indigenous, the main point to remember is preparation.



A eucalypt growing through bitumen, while nearby Planes planted as street trees were dying.

Preparation

It's all in the preparation. Native plants love native soil, not prepared soil with additives like fertilisers and composts. Native clays and soils hold the nutrients that natives need. Modified soils are often free draining, meaning they dry out quickly and the nutrients wash out and add to pollution in waterways, contributing to outbreaks of blue-green algae.

If you need more soil for your native or indigenous garden look for excess soil from dam and house construction.

A lot of soil has been heavily compacted, so rip your soil along its contour lines to a depth of 200-300mm in autumn, when it's still dry. If you've got a large area do it with a bobcat or dingo digger.

This ultimately reduces erosion and makes the soil retain water and act as a 'water tank'.

For more information on preparing your soil, see: <http://www.goldfieldsrevegetation.com.au/PDFs/Preparesuccess.pdf>

Why go indigenous?

"I've seen so much land clearance and extinction of animals and plants, and that concerns me," says Marilyn Sprague at Goldfields Revegetation Nursery.

"Big bright exotic flowers guzzle up the water. To re-establish native vegetation with limited water requirements makes so much sense. Pick and choose the plants for where you are, and don't choose environmental weeds. Remember, nobody waters the bush."

July and August is the best time to establish your natives, although you can plant at other times if you have water. Grey water is harmful to natives.

Fire

We're in a fire-prone region and predictions are it will get drier. Always be aware of plants close to your house, native or exotic. In a bad fire anything can burn, but it gets complicated because plants can provide protection from radiant heat. The CFA has a great fire-ready kit you can download from their website.

Growing your own food

Backyard fruit and veggies make good sense for the planet and your health. Starting with a couple of square metres is realistic for most people. You can also join the MASG Local Food Production Working Group to get hands-on experience. Contact Peter Sansom via the MASG office on 5470 6978, or email www.info@masg.org.au

Many people have started putting in large planter boxes with a plastic 'skin' underneath to retain moisture. The jury seems to still be out, as some say the soil could compact or waterlog over time. The results in the short term, at least, are spectacular.



Backyard vegetable boxes built of corrugated iron with a plastic 'skin' inside to retain water.

Always use compost from your kitchen – a great way to reuse your household waste – and manure collected locally. Coffee grounds from your local café are also high in nitrogen and great for the garden as long as they are composted first.

The primary schools in this shire are leading the way. Every one of them has a vegetable garden, and many are channelling the produce from them into purpose-built kitchens in the school, teaching kids the basics of the importance of growing their own food for the table.

If you've got limited space for growing food – and it's the rare backyard gardener who can grow *all* their own food – buy locally grown, in-season food where possible. It means less transport and storage, better taste and often a lower price. See the food section in our resource guide for local suppliers and growers.

www.masg.org.au

Check out this excellent guide to seasonal produce in Victoria at:

<http://www.environmentvictoria.org.au/library/eating-green-environment-victoria-guide-seasonal-food>

Locally

There are several local food production groups such as permablitz. Contact MASG at www.masg.org.au or drop in to the MASG.

Wesley Hill Market, every Saturday morning, Pyrenees Highway Wesley Hill.



There's always plenty of fresh produce on offer at Wesley Hill Market.

Castlemaine Farmers Market, first Sunday morning of the month, Mostyn Street behind the Market Building. It also has a produce exchange run by the Food Garden.

For general information on gardening go to <http://www.abc.net.au/centralvic/topics/lifestyle-and-leisure/gardening/>

CFA's fire ready kit:

<http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/residents/summer/firereadykit.htm>

Francis Cincotta's nursery Newstead Natives:

<http://newstead.vic.au/business/newstead-natives-nursery>

The Bold Garden: <http://www.boldgarden.com/>

MA Transition is soon to publish online a guide to local produce.

There are several other local food production groups such as permablitz. See the MASG local resource guide for contact details at www.masg.org.au or drop in to the MASG office.

MASG has a local food guide, full of food producers who don't cost the earth. Call 5470 6978 and ask about the Carbon Reduction Action Group (CRAG) Local Food Guide.

Join MASG, a great source of information and activities, and a strong community group of over 1000 members working on these problems.