

Gardens Information Sheet

More sustainable gardening means using less water, fewer fertilisers and planting vegetation more suited to the local climate. Here are the major principles for you to assess the sustainability of your garden.

Principle One:

The garden is designed to take account of local climate, site features and soils.

Only by carefully working out the different characteristics of your own site can you be in a position to "*put the right plants and features in the right place for the right reasons*". You may find, for instance, that you have sandy soils over the whole site, 5 different 'microclimates' on the property and constraints such as a long narrow boundary, shady area in front of the house and large west facing wall. All these factors when carefully considered can help you ensure that the garden works because your choices and gardening decisions are well informed and based on solid information.

Principle Two:

The garden should have all plants grouped according to 'hydrozones'.

'Hydrozones' are the various areas of your garden that require different watering regimes. For instance you would group all of your 'water guzzlers' together and in a protected area, so that they can have their own more intensive and effective watering system.

Drought-tolerant plants would dominate the garden and would be grouped together with their own less intensive watering system.

Principle Three:

The garden should be dominated by water-wise/drought tolerant plants, or is being transformed into one that is.

This is an essential component of a sustainable garden. There are so many wonderful plants available that fit within this category and *if carefully chosen and managed will, within one year, be virtually beyond the need for summer watering!*

It will be important to ensure that any non-native water wise plants chosen, have been screened to ensure they have minimal weed potential. This means choosing hybrids and ensuring that the nursery the plants are purchased from is accredited with the NGIWA (www.ngiwa.com.au) and the Water Corporation (www.watercorp.com.au)

Principle Four:

The garden has the latest water efficient irrigation and at least some subsurface irrigation.

Your garden will be a model for water-efficient irrigation. It will have little or no evidence of watering, no runoff and will be controlled so that it only comes on when the soil moisture level indicated watering is necessary. 'Grey water' will be an important component of this system and will provide valuable summer/autumn water supplies.

Principle Five:

Gardens will use and incorporate mulch into all garden beds.

The garden will display the best quality (and the cheapest) mulch – e.g. street tree pruning. These will be carefully added to all beds at least once a year to maintain soil health, reduce evaporation and suppress winter weeds. Wherever possible, garden and kitchen waste will be recycled and turned into compost for the garden.

Principle Six:

The lawn areas will be minimised and will only be put in when they serve a purpose for the household.

All lawn areas will be carefully managed to minimise water and fertiliser use and will be maintained through the use of organic management principles wherever possible. Lawn areas will be:

- Sown or laid with drought-tolerant species such as velvet buffalo and lippia
- Soil will be amended first with sand remedy and slow release organic additives to ensure it holds on to water and nutrients more effectively
- Lawn or lawn alternatives will be set up and maintained using slow or controlled release, broad spectrum fertiliser, applied at the recommended rates and when the plants are actively growing
- Lawns should be irrigated wherever possible with sub-surface systems and at all times, and from all sources, watering regimes must follow the water restriction guidelines
- Once established, lawns should be maintained using phosphorus-free fertiliser, they should be de-thatched, de-compacted at least once every two years and high quality wetting agents should be applied (if needed) at least 4 times a year

Principle Seven:

Integrated pest, weed and disease management strategies (IPM) will be adopted in the garden.

This will mean that any problems in the garden will be controlled by ensuring that:

- Through organic management of the soil, planting of a range of local plants and increasing garden diversity the biodiversity of the garden improves, thus helping to provide 'natural control'
- A range of control and management measures will be used providing an integrated management system, this will be based wherever possible on a sound understanding of the life cycle and causes of the particular problem
- Wherever possible low toxic, environmentally friendly chemicals will be used
- Toxic chemicals will be an absolute last resort.

For further information on what you can do visit www.greatgardens.info.

Source: Great Gardens