

Autumn the new Spring ... for planting

Autumn – my favourite season! A time for long lunches in the garden, picking bountiful produce, poaching quinces and being overwhelmed by the breath taking autumnal colours of Ballarat's majestic trees. Autumn is the perfect time to plant out trees, shrubs and generally any plants. With the soil temperatures still warm, plants can get a good start before the real cold sets in which is often not until July/August. Traditionally, many people like to plant in spring, but as the climate in our temperate zones gets drier, it makes better sense to plant in Autumn. You may not see instant results however while your plants may look like they're not doing very much over Autumn and Winter, what's happening under the surface is important. The plant root system is establishing and expanding and that will increase their chances of survival come next summer.

Take advantage of the Autumn palette, especially when planting deciduous trees, as you can see before you plant what glorious autumnal foliage you will have in years to come. Planting trees when they are dormant is advisable, since that's when handling them is least disruptive to the trees. The dropping of their leaves in autumn signals that they are entering dormancy. The unfurling of buds in spring signals that they are leaving dormancy.

When choosing plants, think about which are appropriate for your site and consider your needs; do you need tall screening shrubs, prickly plants to provide habitat for local birds, flowering plants to attract butterflies and bees or a canopy tree to provide summer shade? Remember to look up for powerlines and check for services below ground ie; storm water, power and gas lines. If space is an issue don't overlook vines, bulbs and groundcovers all of which can take little room but still provide impact.

Planting your garden with indigenous species is a great way to help your local environment by spreading biodiversity in your area. Autumn planting gives young plants the maximum amount of time to establish under good conditions before the next summer. Many indigenous plants are ideal in the garden as they often require little or no maintenance, have low water and nutrient requirements, and can provide habitat and food for many of the native birds, insects, reptiles and animals that inhabit your local area.

Preparation -

- ⊗ If you are planting in the ground, dig a hole the same depth as the pot but twice as wide. This will help the root system to spread.
- ⊗ When you place the plant in the hole make sure that the top of the soil from the pot sits level with the top of the soil in the ground. Then fill the hole and place the soil back firmly around the plant.
- ⊗ If you have a soil such as heavy clay which is hard to grow in, add small amounts of gypsum to help the soil break down
- ⊗ Add some water storing granules to increase the soils capacity to retain water.
- ⊗ Prior to planting give plants a thorough soaking in a bucket of water
- ⊗ If soil is dry, fill the planting hole with water and allow it to drain before planting.
- ⊗ Make sure you water the new plant well after planting and regularly over its first summer of planting - a deep watering once a week will help them survive.
- ⊗ Most trees require staking until established. Three timber stakes inserted around the root zone gives a balanced support frame. Tie with soft tree tie in a figure 8 allowing some movement.
- ⊗ Once the plants are established, they should cope with just the local rainfall.
- ⊗ Fertilising on planting is not required however once new growth appears in spring add an organic manure or your home made compost to encourage strong growth.

Control your weeds-

Weeds should be controlled prior to planting to reduce competition and ongoing maintenance. Spread mulch (lucerne, peastraw, newspapers, sustainable woodchips etc) over the garden bed to assist in retaining moisture in the soil. As mentioned in my summer article, mulching will conserve water by reducing evaporation and will also enhance root density and aid in weed suppression. The mulch should be well composted as the composting process consumes soil nitrogen at the expense of plant growth. When applied, it should be between 7.5 - 10cm deep and should be kept away from the plant stems, as this can cause rot.

Pruning -

All plants appreciate a light trim after flowering to promote new growth, increased flowering and a fresh look. Ensure new plants are pruned in their first season, this also allows you to shape your plants to suit the position, ie hedging, feature spheres or height requirement. You can prune throughout the year with heavier pruning usually taking place in winter ie roses.

Autumn colour :- my favourite trees-

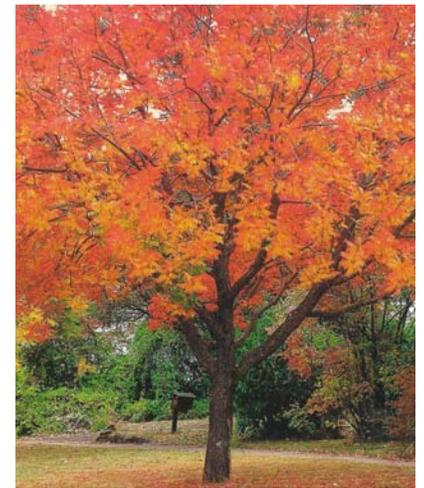
- ⊗ *Acer* – ‘October Glory’ – spectacular as an avenue planting
- ⊗ *Pistacia chinensis* – Chinese Pistachio – majestic specimen shade tree
- ⊗ *Cercis* – Forest Pansy – small tree featuring burgundy, heart shaped foliage
- ⊗ *Fraxinus* ‘Raywood’ – Claret Ash – feature tree turning deep burgundy in colour
- ⊗ *Pyrus calleryana* – Ornamental pear – popular non-fruiting pear
- ⊗ *Acer palmatum dissectum* – Japanese Maple – versatile small tree with many colour shades to select from



Ornamental Pear



Claret Ash



Chinese Pistachio

So whatever your garden style and taste, be sure to visit your local nursery this Autumn and plant up something special that you can admire and appreciate for years to come, whilst also doing something positive for the environment.

Happy gardening ... Helen

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toddesign December 2009 ©