

# Summer survival in the garden



**Water** ... our most precious resource! With water restrictions not likely to alter in the Ballarat area for some time, a lot of us have already put in place water saving measures. Whether it be the obvious things like rain water tanks, grey water diversion units, dual flush toilet systems or simply fixing leaking taps it all goes to help conserve what water we have.

Water and gardens do go hand in hand, however you can still have a vibrant, abundant garden during drought periods utilising only limited water. We can dramatically reduce the amount of water we use on our garden by simply making changes in garden design, plant selection and maintenance.

## Water saving tips:-

- ⊗ During dry periods, give your garden a thorough watering once a week rather than a light sprinkle daily. Deep watering encourages strong and deeper root growth.
- ⊗ Install an automatic timer on your irrigation system that turns off your water source after a set period
- ⊗ Preferably water when the weather's cool – early morning is best
- ⊗ Remove weeds – they are competition to your plants for any available moisture
- ⊗ Add compost to your soil regularly to improve structure, nutrients and moisture holding capacity
- ⊗ Mulch, mulch mulch – it's a must ! Mulching your garden can reduce water loss from evaporation by more than 70 percent. Furthermore it reduces weed activity and protects the soil from erosion.

## Water efficient garden design:-

Whether designing a new garden from scratch or revamping an existing garden, there is a lot you can do to greatly reduce the amount of water you use.

- ⊗ Reduce your lawn area – ask yourself do you really need a front and a back lawn area – consider replacing your front lawn area with a native groundcover, for example: Grevillea, Myoporum or Correa. This will provide you the same green, lush effect without the mowing and water requirements and will also provide a food source for native birds. Other permeable surfaces like granitic sands and gravels are also a great alternative.
- ⊗ Create different watering zones in your garden. Group plants with similar water requirements together to make watering easy and give each group the correct amount of water, reducing the risk of over watering and wastage.
- ⊗ Plant out beds densely rather than just a few plants scattered around. This not only protects the soil, it creates microclimates where larger trees and shrubs can shade and protect smaller plants and groundcovers.
- ⊗ If installing irrigation, go with a drip system as opposed to upright sprays, so that water goes directly to the root zone of plants where it's required and not lost in evaporation.
- ⊗ Plant selection is paramount – think beyond traditional plants and read labels to ensure suitability. Instead of opting for English origin plants, look for plants from the Mediterranean which are more suited to our climate. The possibilities are endless and there is no need to trade hardiness for beauty.

- ☼ Waterwise gardening applies to pots as well. Choose large pots and add good quality potting mix, along with a water storing granule. There are many available and they do work. Be careful with plant choice, understanding that pots will dry out quicker than plants that are in the ground.
- ☼ Be sure to leave out water for the birds and bees – a simple shallow bowl or bird bath placed in a sheltered position will provide a welcome drink and bath for our feathered visitors.

## Waterwise plant choices :- my TOP 10 favourites

1. **Callistemon** – a popular Australian native producing colourful bottlebrush flowers through the year – prune after flowering for shape and vigour
2. **Westringea fruticosa** – a native shrub with fine blue/grey foliage, ideal for hedging or clipping into spheres. Small white or mauve flowers throughout the year
3. **Echium candida** – a dramatic grey foliaged plant producing tall purple flower spires in Spring
4. **Lavendula dentata** - an all time favourite Lavender, grown for its aromatic foliage and flowers – prune for shape after main flowering
5. **Sedum 'Autumn Joy'** – an essential perennial with succulent green foliage and broccoli looking flower heads appearing in Spring and turning from pale green to pink ending in copper brown in Autumn
6. **Dietes grandiflora** – hardy strappy plant ideal for narrow, awkward areas producing an iris like flower throughout the year
7. **Lomandra 'Tanika'** – great year round performer – fine lime green foliage, ideal as a border or mass planted
8. **Grevillea 'Mt Tamboritha'** – good lawn replacement – prostrate form that flowers for months
9. **Rosmarinus 'Tuscan Blue'** – an upright form of Rosemary, perfect for borders or clipped into spheres
10. **Echeveria elegans** – use in pots, as an edging plant or groundcover – this succulent is very versatile



Callistemon



Succulents



Echium

So with the right advice, sound techniques and a bit of smart thinking when it comes to your garden surviving the heat this summer – break tradition, try something new and be the envy of your neighbours.

Happy gardening ... Helen