

# Growing native plants in your garden

## Introduction

Growing plants on the Granite Belt can be difficult due to prolonged winter frosts, drying summer sun and drought. Despite this, the Granite Belt is noted for its attractive bush and wildflowers. With patience, understanding and time, it is possible to grow native plants successfully in your garden and have a display just as beautiful as you find in the bush. Carefully choosing the correct plants for your situation will lead to successful gardening.

## Planning your new native garden

To avoid costly mistakes it is essential to select plants carefully. Look at the finished height and width a plant will grow to when selecting their final position in the garden.

Consider plants that are local to your particular area. These should be the basis of your garden as you know they should do well. Start by finding out what is growing along the roadside and other nature reserves and get to know the natural communities and associated soil types of the district. This will ensure you create the correct habitats for your choice of plants.

When using plants endemic to the area, little or no soil preparation is needed, they require little or no fertiliser and they are the correct plants for the local insects, animals and birds. They will need very little watering after the first year. They may not be available in nurseries, of course, as nurseries tend to stick to the well-known varieties of wildflowers and native plants. Getting to know your local Wildflower or Landcare groups is a good way of legally sourcing local wildflowers and plants.

Wildflowers and native plants that are indigenous to other cold areas of Queensland are also popular. If they have special requirements such as needing summer watering, or protection from frost, they can be grouped together in the garden. Wildflowers and native plants from other parts of Australia can also be used to add interest to the garden. It is all a matter of deciding what effect you are after and planning accordingly. Visit other local gardens to see what is being grown successfully.

## Planting your new native garden

It is recommended that you plant your new garden in autumn. This gives the plants time to settle in before winter, and when spring/summer arrives, they should make excellent progress.

Purchased plants should be fairly small. You will notice that many native plants have not only small surface roots but deep penetrating roots as well. When local wildflowers or native plants are grown in a pot for any length of time, the strong penetrating roots grow around the pot.

When planted in the garden, the roots stay near the surface and the plant needs regular watering and fertiliser for the rest of its life. If a plant is put in the garden when quite small some roots will head straight down towards the water table and others out into the surrounding soil - it will quickly become self-sufficient and be able to fend for itself with little intervention.



Over time, a given area will be occupied successively by different plant associations. As plants grow, they react with one another changing the supply of sunlight, water and nutrients to their habitat. These factors affect plant growth. If they change, it follows that the kinds of plants that make up a population may also change. The first established plants (pioneers) are followed by a sequence of plant associations.

Cassinias, tea-trees, wattles and some eucalypts are hardy plants with tolerance to harsh conditions. Use them as pioneer species in your garden. Once they are established begin planting less hardy species beneath them. Wattles and tea-trees have an average life-span of 10-15 years (*Cassinia* spp. possibly less).

By the time the pioneer species die, your understorey shrubs should be well established and removal of an ageing canopy will not hurt them. Eucalypts will live longer but their size may make them unsuitable for a house garden.

Remember that many Australian native plants have short life-spans. Do not plant tall trees close to the house as they may drop limbs on the roof. As plants age, keep planting replacement shrubs and trees.

## After planting

**FROST PROTECTION:** Depending on the planting position, newly planted native plants may need protection from frost during their first few winters.

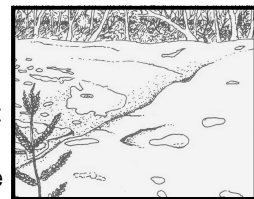
Most frost related information on plant tags relates to established adult plants. If you live in an area subject to severe frosts and prefer not to grow exotics it may be necessary to use landscaping techniques such as shade cloth or plant guards to give protection to your natives.

**WATERING:** Your new plants will need a little help receiving enough water to get through the first summer. If you wish you can set up a simple reticulation system using trickle irrigation and water about once a week during the hot weather. Do not water daily as this will encourage the roots to stay near the surface. You want to encourage the roots to go deep.

**MULCHING:** Mulch should be spread over the entire planted area to a minimum thickness of 50mm. Mulch will help to feed the plants as it breaks down, it will restrict weeds and keep the soil moist.

**PRUNING:** Most native plants benefit from some sort of trimming. You can take off about 1/3 after flowering each year.

Source: [www.mandurahwildflowergroup.org.au/gardens.html](http://www.mandurahwildflowergroup.org.au/gardens.html)



1. Algae and lichens grow on bare rock. Soil accumulates.



2. Mosses grow on the soil. Their decay adds nutrients to the soil.



3. Non-woody plants make use of these nutrients.



4. These provide humus and shelter for hardy seedlings.



5. With time, the changing micro-environment allows more delicate seedlings to survive and mature.