

NATIVE cunning



won't be planting roses and have the fragrance of jasmine in the air. But discovering the possibilities that are available and passing that knowledge onto others is the aim. Try the fragrant native frangipani — it's divine.

Why should you embrace 'the new native garden'? Simple. A great number of garden designs remain focused on simple, classic, elegant, European style. To make the leap to a truly Australian garden style, with across the board recognition, we need to take a step in between. That step lies in educating ourselves about the versatility of native plants. They are no longer just the scrappy relatives of the rest of the world's flora, and should not be solely relegated to contemporary garden style. They, too, require and deserve the same attention as any other garden plant.

The end result should be a deep and solid appreciation by designers and gardeners alike about the diversity, subtly and sheer beauty of Australian natives. From there, it is my hope that we can all create, define and develop

1. This modern billabong-style bush garden, designed by Sydney's Dekker Landscapes, uses kangaroo paw (*Anigozanthos*) to screen the raised deck. Paper barks (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*) and old man banksias (*Banksia serrata*) are featured with an understorey of native grasses and shrubs. The effect is stunning.

2. The work of AQL Landscape Design, this award-winning native garden in the suburbs of Melbourne combines just the right measures of charm and functionality. This is an inspiring example of a contemporary, low-maintenance bush landscape replete with seasonal appeal — and birdlife.

a style of garden that is distinguishably Australian in its feel and content. As I stated earlier, appreciation leads to innovation. ■

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Australian native plants are now a design must-have ... and about time, too

Story: Dean Boone, MAILDM

Are native plants finally respectable? Can they be a suitable, if not better choice for the average Australian gardener? That has been a message that every Australian garden designer has been trying to impart and it hasn't been an easy task.

The transition of Australian natives from strictly roadside plantings to a consistent pride of place in the home garden has certainly been spurred on by our changing weather patterns and increasing water restrictions. The nursery industry has also made many changes in a positive direction, promoting, propagating and developing some fantastic hybrids and cultivars. Of course, all levels of horticultural

media, especially television, has played a part in elevating our native flora to the same status as their European counterparts.

On a grass roots level, I have noticed the average home gardener is now excited about the possibilities of native plants. The shift is slow and there is certainly still room to improve, but like many art forms, replication comes before appreciation and appreciation then leads to innovation.

The new native garden is typically European in look, with all the traditional elements of hedging, topiary, small flowering trees and drifts of flowering shrubbery. The landscape materials are the same with soft hues of stone,

timber and wrought iron. Architecturally, the homes are even traditional in look, style and finish. The difference lies in the plant selection.

The new native garden uses solely and completely Australian native plants. Lilly pilli hedging is fast replacing English and Japanese box as the plant of choice, and has been used for many years overseas (just visit Disneyland). Native frangipani (*Hymenosporum flavum*), paper barks (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*) and native hibiscus (*Alyogyne huegelii*) are now seen as excellent choices for small flowering trees in urban gardens and a variety of amazing flowering shrubs and groundcovers are being substituted for more traditional choices.

The role of every gardener is to educate themselves about the array of new cultivars and varieties available. How many of us, I wonder, regularly spend time in nurseries making a note of what is new and exciting in the world of plants? Scouting around

and finding what is new in the world of native plants is exciting. Ground-truthing, the process of siting a plant rather than just seeing a glossy photo of it, is essential for every garden designer. Power lies in the information we have.

Any designer involved with council plans will be familiar with plant lists available of endemic flora to a specific area. I often take this list and consider what plants may be suitable in the design I am developing. I suggest making the bones of any design of a formal garden to embrace staples such as the lilly pilli, then painting the infill plant selections with endemic flora and their cultivars for your garden project.

The new formal garden can have a similar look and feel to an English perennial border, but is achieved with the use of drifts of flax lily (*Dianella* sp), dwarf lomandra (*Lomandra longifolia* var. *Tanika*), crinum lily (*Crinum pedunculatum*) and the like. Certainly, you