

Landscaping with 'local' native plants

You've probably noticed that most sustainable urban developments feature native gardens but did you know they often use 'local' native plants?

'Local' native plants species are species that grow naturally in your area, typically they are grown from seeds picked within 40km of where they will be used. As a result, 'local' native plant species are naturally suited to the local climate, rainfall and soil conditions making them hardy, water efficient, and naturally resistant to pests and diseases.

For a lot of reasons using local natives in landscaping is a very sustainable choice and as our knowledge of 'local' native plants grows, some stunning results are being achieved.

Opportunities for the housing industry include providing information and incentives to prospective and existing clients encouraging them to choose local natives in their landscaping, forming a partnership with a landscaping company to provide as part of an eco-house package, featuring 'local' native plants around display houses and promoting your preference for local native plants as part of your marketing strategy.

Some benefits of landscaping with 'local' native plants are:

- Enhance biodiversity around where we live by leaving or re-establishing local native vegetation throughout urban areas. This provides occupants and visitors with an opportunity to experience and enjoy nature eg native birds and butterflies, lizards etc.
- Reduce maintenance time and costs. Native plants have natural defences against local pests and diseases so require less pesticides and fertilisers, are hardy due to their 'acclimatisation' to the local conditions and compared to non-natives have less frequent pruning needs. However that said, natives love a bit of a prune as it helps prevent legginess and produces a denser plant. Pruning can also be done to shape some plants into hedges or to reveal an interesting features eg a textured trunk.
- They look great. Sometimes when you go out bush, native plants can seem a bit tired and thirsty, but give natives regular water and they look a lot livelier and flower and fruit more. Providing food for native animals and even bush tucker for us.
- Save water. We all would like to offer reduced water use, and with the average households using 40% of their total water use on the garden, native plants are part of the solution. Water during establishment and then less often, once a week is plenty, less for trees.
- Cool down. Shady gardens cool the outdoor air temperature by on average 3-4°C, which makes a big comfort difference, especially in humid climates. Trees also provide shade for paving and buildings further reducing heat gain.

So where do you get local native plants? Your best contact is likely to be Greening Australia as they specialise in providing locally sourced native plants and can tailor plants to suit your particular location and landscaping needs. In addition to provision of competitively priced wholesale plants and general advice, they can also provide specific consultancy services and labour. Contact Greening Australia's Queensland Headquarters in North Qld on Ph 07 4728 6893 to be directed to a contact near to you.

In summary, give your houses an eco-advantage, use and encourage use of local native plants as part of your marketing strategy. Its something the housing industry can do to make a difference and make our environment just that little bit more enjoyable.

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