

Those Dry Shady Areas in Your Garden by Mollie Shelley

Trees are wonderful, we need them, the environment needs them. But like most good things in life there is also a downside. In this case it is an increase in dry shady spots where your normal gardening efforts come to nought. What can you do?

Some years ago, the APA asked me to allow visitors into my garden. This was the first time such a thing had happened. I sat in a bus on an interstate trip, booked before I knew this was going to happen, and worried about what to do about a recalcitrant, dry, messy area under a Casuarina in the front garden. Inspiration hit – make a virtue out of a defect!

On my return home we paved an irregular area, about a square metre, with old bricks and installed a stone garden bench. I was fortunate that the man employed to do the work had an old convict-hewn gutter stone he didn't want which made a good garden seat. Then I scrounged all the odd pieces of tree fern trunk scattered around my garden and, hey presto, before long I had a bromeliad garden filling the nearby space. Nowadays in that difficult area under the Casuarina and a large sasanqua camellia, there are also a couple of large (plastic) pots dumped on me by someone who was downsizing. I'm using them to grow a tall Calathea in one and a large Spathiphyllum "Sensation" in the other. Both are thriving in that sheltered area although they get no sun.

When trying to rehabilitate such dry shady areas an important consideration is the amount

of leaf fall you'll have to cope with. Will you need to sweep it often? Is it subject to much traffic? If so you'll need to be careful what paving you use. You don't want sprained ankles - or worse. If this is not an issue you may be able to use fairly rough sandstones. Pebbles and bark used as ground cover are fine provided there is not much leaf or petal fall.

Council will generally permit underpruning of large eucalypts. Apart from the bromeliads, other plants that should do well in such an area include Kalanchoes, particularly 'blossfeldiana', grasses and members of the cycad family. You need to check the ultimate size you might expect although cycads are very slow growing. Be wary, many of them have sharp foliage which is better planted at a distance from paths. Some of the grasses that flower may be a problem for asthmatics and for those who suffer from hayfever.

Australian native orchids thrive in such areas with a little early morning sun. Tie them, or wedge them, onto stones to keep them stable



Cartoon by Wendy Bishop

so their roots have a chance to cling to the rock. Vireya rhododendrons grow well with some morning sun, plenty of leaf mulch and an occasional feed with a fish or seaweed emulsion. They are epiphytic in their native habitats. Mine responded well to having several large stones half buried under the mulch despite the enormous Tallow-wood growing nearby.

PERMACULTURE NORTH meets 3rd Monday evening each month in Lindfield. Contact 1300 887 145 or info@permaculturenorth.org.au.