

# Gardens for busy people (part 1)

By Mollie Shelley. Cartoon by Wendy Bishop.

You would like to have an interesting garden but you are time poor? Perhaps both partners work and your children have continuing demands. It's a common story for couples in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as it was for me during many years of my working life. One thing I did learn was that design is everything. Get the shape and the plants right and you can have a good garden requiring little maintenance - after the initial planning and work. From watching people put enormous effort into establishing/restoring their garden and then doing nothing while the garden gradually sank back into its previous state of neglect, the lesson absorbed was that

**a little and often,**  
as for many other things, is a

better solution. During my worst years of time poverty in a new weedy back garden that had previously been a quarry, I set myself a plan to restore a minimum of one square metre per weekend. Sometimes I was able to do more but always I had to do that minimum of one metre. By the end of a year I had a garden that gave me pleasure.

You don't need a lot of flowering plants to make a garden interesting. Think instead of the foliage. You'll no doubt end up with flowers too but if you concentrate on the size, shape and colour of the foliage your garden will be interesting whatever the season.

Edging plants hold the garden together whatever else might be happening farther in and they'll probably need attention only every five to ten years. Unlike recently popular box hedges, they won't need frequent trimming. Low growing, grassy evergreen edging plants such as the *Ophiopogon* or Mondo Grass come in several sizes and colours - plain or dwarf dark green, black or variegated, some producing spikes of white flowers followed by purple berries. Dwarf Mondo is also a good groundcover. *Liriope* can be plain or variegated and rewards with spikes of purple flowers in late summer. Autumn Crocus, the Storm Lily, *Zephyranthes candida*, is an evergreen with white flowers in late summer or autumn.

Other taller edging plants are dwarf Agapanthus, white such as 'Snowball' or various tones of blue, but you must spend a few minutes each year cutting back deadheads.

Some dwarf true geraniums can be useful being long-lived and easily propagated. Low growing, long-

lived begonias and Amaranthus with its leaves variegated in pink, cream and green though not as tightly disciplined as the grassy plants above can be used as edging.

Among the natives there is clumping grass-like *Dianella*. The hybridists have been at work on that plant so that there is now a choice of colours including variegated green and cream and others in blue or reddish tones. The native daisy *Brachycome* is also an attractive edging plant but not as long lived as others.

Leaf structure, its size, shape and colour are important elements that I hope to be able to explore with you next time.

PERMACULTURE NORTH meets 3rd Monday evening each month in Lindfield. Contact 1300 887 145 or [info@permaculturenorth.org.au](mailto:info@permaculturenorth.org.au).



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