

Gardens for busy people (part 2)

by Mollie Shelley. Cartoon by Wendy Bishop.

Here is more on how to establish a good looking garden that requires low maintenance. In the previous issue of the Gazette, I said we would talk about leaf colour, size and structure. First assess your garden's conditions. There is a vast difference between plants suitable for a small front garden which faces west, getting lots of hot summer sun or for a deep back yard receiving little sun and where you want to establish privacy.

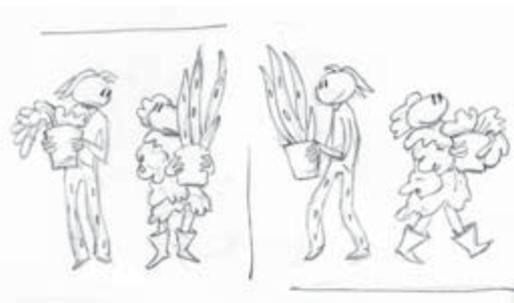
Shut your eyes and imagine how you would like each area to look when established. Think about the finished shape, the heights of plants you would like in various areas. Take into account any existing permanent plantings. When you choose plants, remember, except where you want to make a feature of one particular plant, repeat plantings tie a garden together. They help avoid that untidy, unplanned look. Apart from the border plants we talked about last time, think in threes or more. They do not necessarily need to be close together but should still be within sight of each other. Try to vary leaf size, colour and texture. Put in enough of any one kind so its individual character is not lost. Plants should contrast or compliment one another.

Leaf colour: grey-leaf plants like rosemary and lavenders, ground covers like *Cerastium* or Snow in Summer and *Stachys*, or Lambs' Ears, come from hot dry Mediterranean climates. Australian natives with grey, narrow,

rough or hairy leaves come from dry areas. Think of the tough narrow leaves of our banksias, wattles, grevilleas, the grey leaves of some of the grasses and plants like *Westringia Fruiticosa*.

The bigger and softer the leaf or the darker it is, the more likely it is to need shade and protection from harsh conditions. Plants develop large leaves to enable them to manufacture enough chlorophyll in shady conditions. Cliveas, Spathiphyllums and many Begonias have adopted that strategy. The soft texture of many ferns indicates their need for protection. Plants with variegated leaves generally need some sun to retain their variegation but many do not like exposure to too much hot midday sun. There are exceptions such as the recent hybrid *Abelia x magnifica* Variegata, an undemanding low growing shrub which looks like being an asset for small gardens and the currently popular variegated form of *Trachelospermum*, or Star Jasmine, used as a ground cover.

Many Begonias have a strategy found in succulents such as Kalanchoes. They store water in their fleshy leaves or stems, helping them to survive water shortages. This is a useful attribute to consider because they produce both flowers and interesting evergreen foliage. Among both genera are



plants that give you interesting leaf coverage with the added bonus of a splendid flower display. They strike easily so it is not difficult to have several plants.

Forget roses until you have time to feed, water, prune and care for them if or when they succumb to disease. One possible exception is the climbing Banksia rose which does require some pruning but seems to be generally trouble free. Long ago, I banned most climbers from my garden because of difficulty in keeping them within bounds and their need for annual pruning. One exception, my Wisteria, is confined to a large tub. ■

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