



Creating an Indigenous Garden

Garden Design

Once you have decided which features you want and need in your garden, it is time to select a garden style. The following is a description of the most popular garden styles, that can easily be replicated using indigenous instead of the more commonly planted exotic plants.

Your garden may already be landscaped in one of these styles and, to blend in your addition with indigenous plants, you may want to continue the existing style.

If you are starting from scratch, your selection may be determined by the style of house you have (e.g. cottage, ultra-modern, rustic) and any existing hard landscape features (e.g. fences, paving).

Your site analysis sketch is a good base for your design drawing, giving you all the information you need to start laying out your design drawing.

The garden styles described below are just a sample of what can be achieved with indigenous plants. There are many more styles than can be covered, and there are of course no limits to the imagination applied in your design.

Bush Garden:

Probably the easiest garden to create with indigenous plants is a natural bush garden. While the overall result will be that of an informal garden that just “happened”, some thought and planning has to go into its design and the materials that are used. Some points to keep in mind are:

- Indigenous plants, like any other garden plants, have preferred growing conditions. Plants that like full sun will not thrive in the shade and vice versa, and plants that prefer well-drained soils will not do well in boggy conditions.

- Always select smaller plants for borders, gradually increasing in size towards the back of your garden beds to ensure you can enjoy a view of all your plants.
- Use natural looking materials for paths – crushed limestone is readily available, pine bark mulch or permeable paving.
- Break up planted areas with logs, small bogs or ponds. If you have rocks available they can be used to create rockeries within beds or by themselves. This will give depth to your garden and create variety.

Cottage Garden:

A number of plants indigenous to Warnambool provide a broad spectrum of flower colours, from white Daisy bushes (*Olearia* spp.) to yellow-flowering Daisies, Lilies and Bush-peas (*Chrysocephalum*, *Bulbine*, *Daviesia*), purple (e.g. *Viola*, *Veronica*, *Wahlenbergia*), red (e.g. *Kennedia*) and blue wildflowers (*Brunonia*, *Eryngium ovinum*). Mass plantings of these will result in vibrant colour displays. The addition of features such as an arbour to support climbers, birdbaths, sculptures and pots will add to the cottage garden look.

Smart plant selection will ensure year round colour. While the majority of wildflowers flower in spring, there are some that flower throughout the year, such as Rough Guinea-flower (*Hibbertia aspera*), Native Violet (*Viola hederacea*) and Native Flax (*Linum marginale*), or well into autumn such as Storcks Bill (*Pelargonium australe*) or Austral Bugle (*Ajuga australis*)

Most exotic plants will require regular watering at least during summer, whereas indigenous plants when established will only need to be watered under extremely dry conditions and continue to flower prolifically even during dry periods.

Photos, Top to Bottom: *Chrysocephalum apiculatum* - Common Everlasting, *Viola hederacea* - Native Violet, *Kennedia prostrata* - Running Postman.



Minimalist Garden:

Minimalist gardens feature mainly hard landscapes punctuated by sparse plantings of so-called architectural plants and modern sculptures. Architectural plants are those with interesting shapes and bold, distinctive outlines that make a strong statement in the garden. A number of indigenous plants fall into this category.

The design intent usually is to complement the hard landscape without softening or distracting from it. The design is held together by strong lines and symmetry, which is reflected in the planting. Each plant therefore needs to have an impact through its shape, colour and foliage for this to work, as plants will usually be planted as specimens and stand-alone, or in repeat plantings with substantial spaces between plants.

Every element of the minimalist garden is selected for maximum effect. Indigenous plants that create such an effect are Grass Trees (*Xanthorrhoea* spp.) Spiny-headed Mat-rush (*Lomandra longifolia*), Pale Rush (*Juncus pallidus*) Silver banksia (*Banksia marginata*) and Grasses such as Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda triandra*).



Formal Garden:

Formal gardens are characterised by symmetrical design and straight lines that are reflected in the planting. Preferred plants in formal gardens are those that can be shaped through pruning, either as stand-alone shapes or in hedges, and plants that look good planted in rows and as borders.

This will require a certain uniformity, that is usually achieved through plant breeding (e.g. certain types of Box). However, there are a number of indigenous plants that are suitable, e.g. *Correas* can be pruned into hedges, many of the Rushes (*Juncus* spp.) and Mat-rushes (*Lomandra* spp.) grow reliably uniform.



Photos: *Xanthorrhoea australis* - Grass tree, *Correa reflexa* - Common Correa

Incorporating Ponds into your Design:

Ponds add a whole new dimension to your garden; they will attract frogs, different birds and a wide variety of invertebrates into your backyard and expand your plant range to include aquatic and semi-aquatic plants.

Most of the design styles described can include ponds, however, the layout and plant selection will be different for each style. A bush garden is the most likely background for a natural pond, billabong or dry river bed feature, with the irregular shape and dense planting mimicking what would be found in the bush.

Cottage gardens may have ponds or birdbath type water features placed around the garden area.

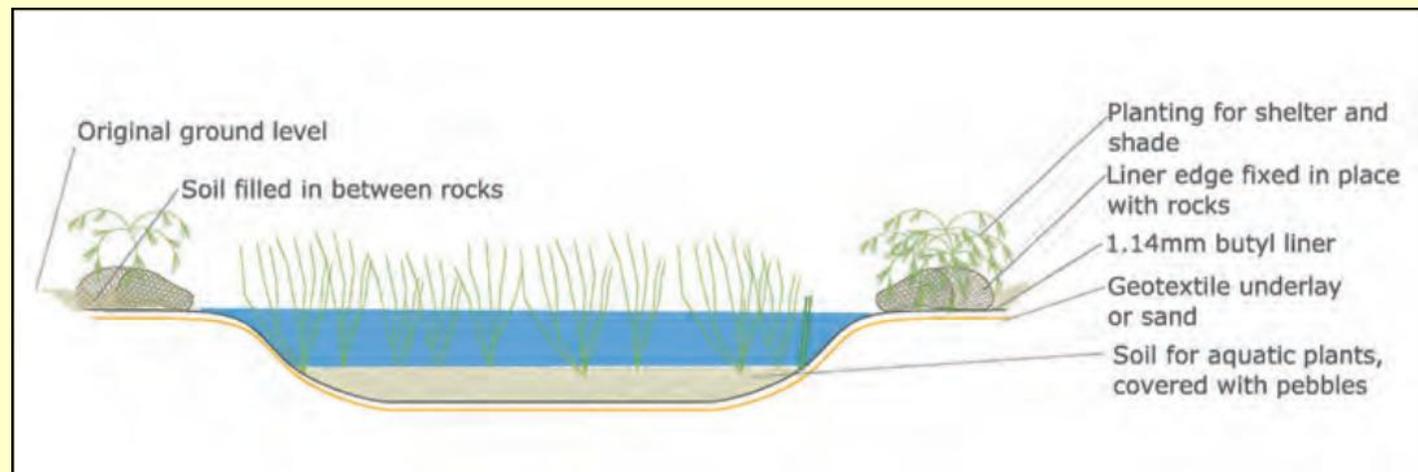
To suit formal gardens, ponds can be designed to have a geometric shape - exactly round, square or rectangular. This can be reflected in the pond side planting, with symmetrical rows of plants selected for their uniformity.

The basic considerations when designing and building your pond will be the same for all styles: Determine the position, size, depth and shape of the pond you want. Consider that if you want frogs, shallow edges will allow them to get in or out easily.

When digging the hole for the pond, allow for an extra 200 - 300 mm of depths for soil to be added to the bottom of the pond for planting. A ledge around the pond will provide space to place rocks, pebbles or soil to hide the pond liner and keep it in place.

The most UV-resistant and durable pond liner is a butyl-based rubber liner with a minimum thickness of 1 mm.

Once the hole is dug out, a string can be run along the two longest distances along the bottom length and width of the pond, including the ledges, and measured to give the dimensions for the liner.



Allowing for approximately an extra 300 mm of liner in each direction will ensure that the liner is not excessively stretched when the pond is filled with water and will cover the ledge so that soil and rocks can be placed on top to hold it in place.

To protect the liner, sand or geotextile underlay can be put down before the liner is placed.

When placing the liner, some wrinkles along the length and width of the liner will let the liner fit around any little hollows or bumps without too much stretching when water is added.

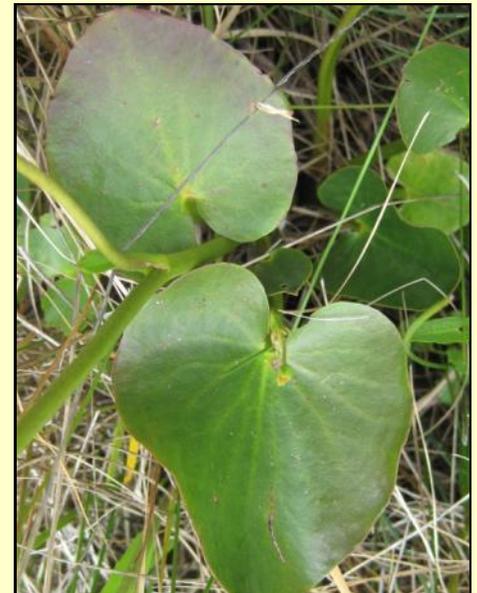
Once the liner is in place and the edges are fixed with soil and rocks, the pond bottom can be lined with soil for the aquatic plants.

Ideally, some rocks or pebbles should be placed over the soil to keep it settled.

The submerged aquatic plants can now be planted, then fill the pond slowly to minimise disturbing the soil.

After planting the pond bank, the project is complete. In most cases it won't be necessary to source tadpoles for your pond, frogs will move in uninvited, usually within the first two months.

If you choose to have native fish in your pond be aware that they may eat the tadpoles.



Plants for in and around a pond include: Nobby Club-rush (*Ficinia nodosa*), Streaked Arrow-grass (*Triglochin striata*), Tall Sedge (*Carex appressa*), Common Spike-rush (*Eleocharis acuta*), Common Bog-rush (*Schoenus apogon*), Angled Lobelia (*Lobelia anceps*), Spiny-headed Mat-rush (*Lomandra longifolia*), Water Milfoil (*Myriophyllum crispatum*), Slender Knotweed (*Persicaria decipiens*), River Buttercup (*Ranunculus inundatus*), Running Marsh-flower (*Villarsia reniformis*).



Photos top: *Carex appressa* - Tall Sedge, Bottom: *Villarsia reniformis* - Running Marsh Flower

Indigenous Lawn Alternatives:

If you are thinking of creating lawn areas, there are some drought-tolerant indigenous grass species that are suitable for gardening situations. Compared to the conventional lawn grasses, indigenous grasses need more time to establish, but become just as dense. Two local indigenous grass species that are suitable as lawn are Mat Grass (*Hemarthria uncinata*) and Weeping Grass (*Microlaena stipoides*) and while they take a bit more time to establish than conventional lawns, once they do, they can survive for prolonged dry periods. They grow in a wide range of soils and tolerate frost, moderate salt conditions and shade, but they may wear out in areas of heavy traffic.

Weeping Grass (*Microlaena stipoides*) grows into a soft compact lawn with leaves growing from 2 - 20 cm, and it does tolerate frequent mowing and can be cut to any height required.

It spreads from underground stems, much in the same way as couch grass, but is less prolific. It grows a tall (50 - 80 cm) flower stalk, but not when mown regularly. It does not go dormant during winter, stays green throughout the year and is frost-tolerant. It will grow well in a range of soils and in full sun as well as in shady conditions.

Mat Grass (*Hemarthria uncinata*) is a rigid matting, perennial grass which like Weeping Grass spreads from underground stems. Mat Grass is drought tolerant, but can also tolerate wet areas. It grows in full sun and semi-shade.

To achieve a uniformly green lawn all year round for a wide range of environmental conditions, including heavy traffic, Weeping Grass and Mat Grass can be planted/sown in combination.

Other indigenous grasses suitable for low-traffic areas are Wallaby Grasses (*Rytidosperma* spp.) and Kangaroo grass (*Themeda triandra*), however, these are less tolerant to mowing and should only be cut approximately twice a year and no lower than 4 cm.



Microlaena stipoides - Weeping Grass