



Creating an Indigenous Garden

Attracting Wildlife To Your Garden:

One of the delights of a native garden is that it can be home to many kinds of native wildlife, including birds, bats, lizards, frogs, butterflies and other insects. The main requirements for any kind of animal are food, shelter, and protection from predators. A native garden that imitates the natural bushland attracts wildlife. To create a more natural garden use a variety of indigenous plants, including trees, bushy shrubs, small ground-hugging plants and grass tussocks. Also provide fallen logs, branches, leaf litter and rocks.

Attracting Birds:

Most gardens will have some birds. Some of the bushland birds can be attracted if there is suitable food and shelter. It is easier to attract these birds if your garden is close to bushland, or to other bird-friendly gardens. Many birds are nomadic. Others stay in the same area, and may even nest in your garden. Birds require a variety of food sources ranging from pollen, nectar, and seed, to caterpillars and other invertebrates, such as worms, centipedes and spiders. Some birds get food from the ground.

Others get food from treetops, shrubs or grasses, so providing a variety of indigenous plants and habitats is a good idea. Local species of *Melaleuca* (bottlebrush), *Grevillea*, *Correa*, *Banksia* and *Eucalyptus* all have nectar-producing flowers that attract wattlebirds, honeyeaters, silvereyes and lorikeets.

Insect-eating birds feed on insects and other small animals. Insects will appear when there is a home for them. Some insects live on plants while others are found on the ground in and under the leaf litter.

Plant a variety of indigenous plants, and have a varied ground layer, and let nature take its course. Birds that can be attracted to insects include silvereyes, wrens, honeyeaters and thornbills.

Other birds prefer seeds. These birds include finches, parrots and pigeons. Wattles and native grasses are particularly important food sources for these birds.

Small birds need shelter, shade and protection from predators. Some birds use low shrubs, others large shrubs or trees. Dense and prickly plants provide nesting sites, shelter and safety. Birds that may build nests in gardens include wrens, honeyeaters, silvereyes and Willie Wagtails. Prickly *Hakeas* and *Wattles* make good nesting sites for birds.

Attracting Butterflies and Moths:

Australian butterflies and moths have four stages in their life cycle.

The egg. The female lays her eggs on or near the caterpillar's food plant.

The caterpillar (larval stage). After hatching, the caterpillars eat and grow fat, shedding their outgrown skin 4 or 5 times.

The pupae stage. The butterfly caterpillar sheds its final skin and becomes a pupa. The moth caterpillar weaves itself a silken cocoon and pupates inside. In this stage the caterpillar changes to an adult butterfly or moth.

The adult stage. Adult butterflies are much less fussy about the food plant than the caterpillars, and will drink nectar from any flowers that are available. Moths do the same but usually feed at night. Adult butterflies can travel considerable distances, and may be found even if there is no suitable plant for the caterpillar. They will stay longer if there are flowers present. Although the adult butterflies feed on many kinds of flowers they seem particularly fond of *Bursaria* [Photo right], *Kunzea*, *Melaleuca* and *Leptospermum*.

Attracting Insects and Other Small Animals:

Invertebrates, including insects, spiders, centipedes and millipedes are the key animals for a wildlife friendly garden, because they are essential parts of the food chain. A garden with a range of indigenous plants and with ground litter will attract insects and other invertebrates to your garden. Indigenous plants are best because the local animals are adapted to the local plants. They may not be able to survive with introduced plants. Insects will attract other wildlife. If some insects are in excessive numbers, do not use insecticides – this will kill helpful insects as well as the pest. Manual control is usually sufficient. You can pick off insects or squash them, prune off the infected branches, or wait for the birds and other animals to control them.



Attracting Lizards:

Many town areas already have a surprising number of lizards. These include Blue-tongue Lizards, Jacky Lizards, stumpy-tails and the much smaller skinks. Lizards need shelter, which can be provided by dense, low growing shrubs, rocks with space underneath, fallen logs, agricultural pipes or your firewood stack!

Many lizards sun themselves on rocks, so rocks in sunny positions are desirable. Cats and dogs are responsible for killing many lizards, and you are much less likely to have lizards if cats and dogs are present.

Attracting Frogs:

Frogs need food, protection from dryness, and shelter from predators. Although frogs need water to breed, many frogs do not need permanent water to survive. Some frogs are able to survive by burrowing into soil, or sheltering in thick tussocks or under logs and rocks. Frogs have many predators, and they need places to hide such as rocks, fallen timber and tussocks. Frogs eat insects and other small animals, so an abundance of litter, mulch and native vegetation is desirable.

If you have a shady section in your garden which might get extra moisture when it rains, consider setting up an area for frogs. Plant tussock grasses, and spread mulch. Have some logs and rocks to provide shelter. Frogs may be dormant or inactive over summer, and reappear when the area becomes moist after rain. It is wonderful to hear the male Pobblebonk or Banjo Frog calling in spring.

Water:

Many birds will make use of a birdbath. A shallow dish makes a suitable bath. Place it where you can see it easily so that you can watch the birds drinking and bathing. The bath should be in a shady area and close to overhanging branches and shrubs. It should also be well off the ground to help provide protection from cats. The water should be kept clean and changed regularly.

Artificial Feeders:

Artificial feeding of wildlife is undesirable. Native animals are able to get all their food from trees, shrubs, grasses and other sources. Artificial feeding can lead to an unbalanced diet and unhealthy animals. It may also attract non-native animals/birds such as foxes, mice, sparrows and starlings, which compete with the native animals.

Nesting Boxes:

Some birds and small mammals nest in hollows. It takes many decades before a tree develops nesting hollows. An effective way of providing alternative nesting sites is by installing nest boxes. Different kinds of birds, bats, and possums need different kinds of nest boxes, so it is important to make the box and entrance hole the correct size. For example a pardalote likes an entrance hole 4cm diameter, while a rosella needs an 8cm diameter hole. Nest boxes sometimes attract feral honeybees and introduced birds, so it is a good idea to check the box regularly, and remove unwelcome residents.

For information about nest box sizes: Frank, Alan and Stacey. (2006). *Nest Boxes for Wildlife: A Practical guide*. Bloomings, Melbourne.

Cats:

Wildlife and cats are incompatible. Stray and feral cats kill millions of native animals every year. Cats soon learn where birds like to feed, and lie in wait. If you must have a cat, then confine it.

You might like to keep a diary, recording all the different kinds of birds and animals you see, from day to day, from season to season, and the changes as your garden grows. Make sketches, or take photographs of the wildlife you see in your garden. A group of wildlife friendly gardens will be more attractive to wildlife than isolated gardens, so encourage your neighbours to have wildlife friendly gardens too.

References and further reading:

Flora of Melbourne - Australian Plants Society Maroondah Inc.

Native Trees and Shrubs of South-Eastern Australia - Leon Costermans

Bush Invaders of South-East Australia - Adam Muyt

Native Plants of Melbourne - David and Barbara Jones

Australian Plants for the Garden - Gwen Elliot

Gardening Down-Under - Kevin Handreck

Attracting Wildlife to your Garden - Rodger Elliot

Indigenous: The Making of My Native Garden - Don Burke. (2004).

The Australian Garden - Diana Snape. (2002)

Designing with Australian Plants - Bloomings.

Australian Planting Design - Paul Thompson. (2002).

The New Native Garden: Paul Urquhart. (2002).

Designing with Australian Plants. Reed New Holland.

Plants of the Great South West. Society for Growing Australian Plants - Warrnambool & District

Websites:

Sustainable Gardening Australia - www.sgaonline.org.au

Amphibian Research Centre - www.frogs.org.au

Australian Native Plant Society - <http://www.apsvic.org.au/>

Gould League Environmental Education - www.gould.edu.au