

# Creating an Indigenous Garden

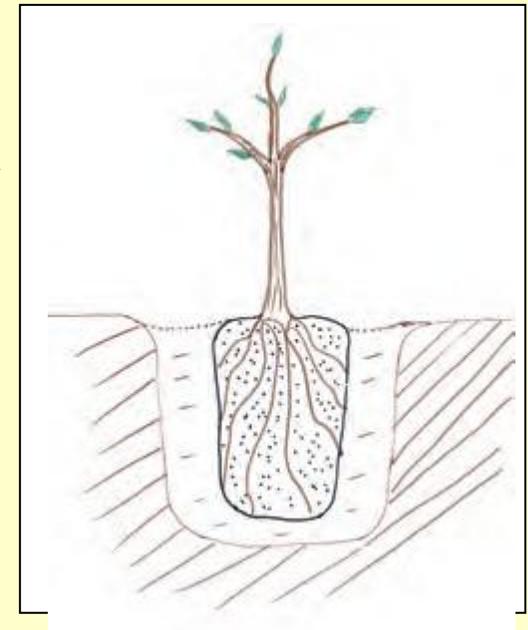
## Planting and Garden Maintenance:

The best time to plant is autumn; the soil is usually still warm despite cooler days and autumn rains provide sufficient moisture for plants with only minimal or no watering required during the establishment phase and throughout winter.

Plant growth slows down during the cooler months, so the energy of the plant goes into its establishment without the stress of having to cater for growth spurts. During growing phases, plants require more nutrients and water. If you want to plant during late spring or summer, be prepared to water regularly to nurse your plants through the hotter temperatures.

The best time to plant is in mild, still weather after good rain. Plant when the soil is moist. The roots of the plant will grow downwards as the soil dries out. Dig a hole that is about twice the width and twice the depth of the pot. If the ground is hard and rocky, loosening with a pick will help with water penetration. Fill the hole with water at least once, and allow the water to soak in before planting. Thoroughly water the plant in the container before planting. Soaking the plant in a bucket of water is an effective way to do this.

When removing the plant from the container, avoid disturbing the roots of the plant. However, if the roots are coiled in the pot, gently tease them out. If necessary prune the roots to remove the coils. The soil level around the new plant should be fractionally lower than the level of the garden soil. Some gardeners plant in slight depressions to make watering easier. Water well after planting. Five to ten litres per plant is suggested. Avoid staking of the plant if possible. If a stake is used, it should be hammered into place before putting in the plant, to avoid root damage. Remove the tie as soon as possible. Guards may be necessary to protect the plant from grazing or accidental damage, strong wind and frost.



### Watering:

If extra water is given, the aim should be to allow the water to penetrate deeply. Deep watering encourages deep rooting. Shallow watering can cause stress to the plant as the surface soil dries out.

### Mulch:

Loose gravel, screenings and coarse sand make excellent mulches. They help suppress weeds, allow water to penetrate, retain moisture, and reduce temperature fluctuations. Wood chips, eucalyptus mulch, coarse weathered sawdust, chopped up garden prunings, and pea straw can also be used for mulch. These mulches are good for reducing water loss, but rain may not penetrate deeply. Hay and grass clippings often contain weed seeds.

Mulches placed against the stem of a plant may cause it to rot. Ground covers such as Kidney Weed [Bottom left] (*Dichondra repens*) or Ivy-leaf Violet [Bottom right] (*Viola hederacea*) can be used as a living mulch. Mulch should never be taken from the bush.



## Garden Maintenance:

**Pruning** - usually very little pruning is required for indigenous plants. Remember plants are pruned naturally in the wild, by animals, birds and insects usually a little at a time. Try to replicate this. Pruning can encourage bushiness, maintain density and shape and is best done after flowering. Simply cuttings off flower heads can be sufficient. Many will not grow back if cut to ground level. Indigenous grasses can be rejuvenated by cutting them back severely and encourage new growth.

**Staking** - Staking may be required for young tree saplings in very wind-exposed situations. In general, saplings that have been hardened off properly will not need to be staked.

**Watering** - Indigenous plants will require watering for an initial period of time to allow them to establish when planted in late spring/summer or into very dry soil. Better to plant in late autumn or winter after rains so plants are established before soils dry out. Plants chosen for their suitability to a particular situation may never require watering, even in extreme dry times.

**Fertilising** - the closer the composition of a garden soil is to that of original soil in local bushland, the less fertilising will be required. Usually native plants require little or no fertilising as they have evolved to exist on Australia's poor soils. Commercial native fertiliser or organic fertiliser can be applied at the time of planting. These have a phosphorus content of no more than 2%. When using organic fertiliser, ensure that this is not exceeded, as most Australian native plants are very sensitive to phosphorus and high phosphorus fertiliser input may result in phosphorus toxicity.

**Mulching** - a sufficiently thick layer of mulch (minimum 8 – 10 cm) will prevent moisture evaporation from the soil and achieve a degree of weed suppression by cutting out light. Composted mulch is best; uncomposted mulch will lower Nitrogen in the soil, as it is used up by the micro-organisms breaking down the mulch.

Right: *Banksia marginata*

