



Native Inspiration

SANDRA BATLEY LOOKS AT NATIVE NEW ZEALAND PLANTS AS AN OPTION FOR A LOW MAINTENANCE AND BEAUTIFUL SOLUTION TO YOUR LANDSCAPING NEEDS

MOST GARDENS REQUIRE PATIENCE, EFFORT AND A LOT OF maintenance to achieve the desired results; and ultimately homeowners must decide how much effort they wish to expend when choosing designs and plants suitable for their new residential setting. Ensuring the garden grows and flourishes as intended requires a commitment to regular maintenance by its owner.

Despite the fact that our history is steeped in gardening and horticulture we have lacked for a great number of years any real national identity in our gardens. Native New Zealand plants have long played a minor role in our gardens; in fact most have generally been considered 'dull' as they lack the colourful flowers of the English gardens, where we have derived much of our inspiration.

While today there is still an interest in gardens and plants, less people are spending their precious leisure time creating and maintaining their gardens. Demographic shifts, changing work patterns and lifestyle changes have meant time is now our most valuable commodity. The terms 'outdoor living' and 'low maintenance' are the new catch-cries for many new homeowners when it comes to landscaping and garden maintenance.

The trend towards environmentally friendly gardening, following the principle of working with what nature has provided rather than modifying our conditions, makes natives an ideal option. New Zealand natives have now become a welcome, accepted addition to our gardens. For those hands-off gardeners wanting a 'low maintenance' option, there is a huge range of easy-to-grow native plants to suit any condition and level of expertise. Native plants can be used very effectively in many different styles; they



Gardening Solutionz

You are not only restricted to greenery with New Zealand natives. Red flaxes and grasses can add a vibrant mix of colour.



Naturally Native



Above The 100% Pure New Zealand Garden at Chelsea. Inspired by the West Coast of Auckland and the elements of this environment. This garden reflects the close relationship with the city and this wild natural coast line. Photo by Tourism New Zealand.

Opposite page Good juxtaposition brings out the best in native form and colour, as seen here (left to right) with plants from Naturally Native, Gardening Solutionz and The 100% Pure New Zealand Garden at Chelsea.

can be utilized not just for bush settings or alpine rock gardens, but also within formal and contemporary style gardens.

A great example of this was at the 100% Pure New Zealand Garden at Chelsea in 2006. This garden illustrated the unique culture and landscape of New Zealand. The design represented contemporary New Zealand and the relationship between design and the natural environment, and showcased the diverse and distinctive New Zealand flora brilliantly. For those not interested in pushing the design limits but who are willing to experiment, then going native is the way to go.

Firstly, it is important to understand the unique growing conditions of your particular garden so you can choose the appropriate natives without the need to alter the existing conditions. This is a key step in creating a 'low maintenance' garden. Get to know the damp and shady areas of your garden. Note where the hottest, driest parts of the garden are, and take the time to evaluate the type of soil you have. Even though there are a lot of natives suited to clay or poor soils, you will have a wider choice of plants if you improve the condition of the soil. Natives come in various forms, colours and textures, such as sword-leaved flaxes and Astelias, bold-leaved Puka and billowing tussock grasses. They can be planted in a multitude of combinations to show off their beauty and individual style. As well as providing year round interest, they also have the added bonus of encouraging birds and butterflies into the garden, as native birds enjoy feeding on the nectar, berries and fruit of many native trees and shrubs.



Naturally Native

Use a base layer of stones to surround your young natives. This not only covers soil, but accentuates the structure of your plants too.



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Photo Ross Henderson



Photo Rod Morris



Above Attract native birds to your garden by providing them with shelter and a source of food. The type of birds you attract will depend on their feeding habits. Make sure you plant native species that are naturally occurring in your area to provide a 'green corridor' between your garden and nearby bush. Photos by Department of Conservation.

Creating naturalistic gardens does take some experimentation. Using local species and seeds adapted to local conditions will allow for greater grow results than 'outside' stock, as well as requiring very little attention. This is ideal if you want to re-vegetate a large piece of land, or if you simply want to create your own scaled-down slice of nature.

Build seating areas and pathways to encourage others to move around the garden when entertaining, or to sit and observe the birds. There are also a number of natives which will help you achieve a modern 'architectural' look if you have a contemporary home. Nikau, Poor Knights Lily, Cabbage trees, flax and lancewoods have striking foliage and form which look great as single specimens or featured amongst other lush foliage natives such as tree ferns and flaxes. They also make great container specimens for the courtyard, entrance area or patio.

If you live in warmer parts of the country, natives can be used to mix and mingle happily with subtropical plants such as Palms, Cannas and Cycads. The bold-leaved Puka, Cabbage trees, Tree ferns, Nikau, Griselinia and Pseudopanax spp. help to create a lush, green tropical effect.

Celebrate the uniqueness of New Zealand's native flora, entice native birds back into your garden and create an easy-care garden by planting natives around your home. ■

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Sandra Batley of flourish is a multi award-winning landscape designer based in Auckland, with a passion for people, plants and design. Visit Sandra at www.flourishgardens.co.nz

Protecting What's There

For further information on identifying native vegetation and wildlife associated with your area visit the following websites:

www.smarterhomes.org.nz

www.doc.govt.nz

www.consumerbuild.org.nz

www.forestandbird.org.nz

www.landcareresearch.co.nz