

The one drip flower garden



As our climate becomes more extreme (or has it always been?), our leisure time lessens, and water is an increasingly precious resource; we need to garden for our site and ecosystem, not emulate an unsustainable style.

Sustainable gardening is about making the best of what you have rather than wishing for what you haven't.

So looking at the vagaries of our climate as a glass half full, instead of half empty, we have a wealth of assets.

Our brilliant soul warming sun, clear light and relatively mild winters for a start. They are the envy of soggy climates.

Our climate demands that we keep our thin soils covered to prevent topsoil loss. It is therefore logical that we opt for permanent plantings, not broad expanses of bedding plants that devour our water resources, and after a brief gaudy display leave our soils exposed and requiring constant weeding.

Evergreens that tolerate dry conditions, are the obvious choices. They suppress weeds, and apart from the occasional clip over and mulch, need hardly any maintenance. They are plants that revel in our sometimes harsh conditions so they are less likely to be prone to pests and diseases. They give us more time to enjoy our gardens with friends and family. Giving up lawns in favour of paving or gravel is the next move. No longer need we be slaves



Spanish Lavender



Cushion Bush



Verbascum olympicum



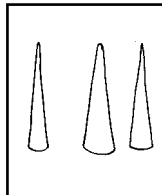
E. wildpretii



Domes

– well rounded, solid and peaceful.

Also choose from Rosemary, *Ballota*, *Cistus*, *Salvia*, *Leonotis*, *Buddleja*, *Plectranthus*, *Euphorbia*, Lavender Cotton and *Myrtus* 'Tarentina'.



Verticals

– reaching for the sky.

Also choose from *Echium simplex* and Hollyhock.

to pushing around noisy, fuel hungry machinery every weekend in spring.

The less imaginative among us may feel that we will give up seasonal variation, trade the excitement of massed colour for the dreariness of utilitarian plants – not so.

There is a huge range of plants that can fit both our climate and our new mind-set, we need to look at them with new eyes. They can be moulded into a living sculpture where there is still drama and peace – even without flowers.

Foliage form and texture should be our focus. The repetition of a simple rounded shape can be dramatic when contrasted with some strong verticals in formal gardens. In the new age cottage garden, layering textures and shapes together as William Martin does in his garden 'Wigandia' is the way to go.

Whatever your style we need to think of shapes first rather than flowers. Imagine different sizes of rounded shapes set off by a strong vertical, add some spiky plants, or strong upright plants, add some low tufts, and contrast with some flat mat shaped plants. Don't be seduced by visions of brilliant flowers.

The next consideration is foliage texture and colour. Consider the difference between *Ballota*, *Euphorbia wulfenii*, rosemary and lavender. Yes, they are all roughly the same rounded dome shape and size, yet their colours range from rich dark green to silver and smoky grey.



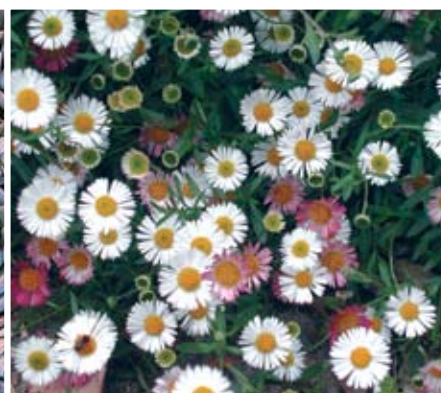
Purple Cabbage Tree



Yucca elephantipes



Echeveria

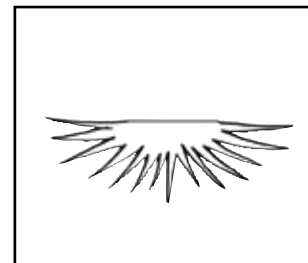


Seaside Daisy

Mats

– between garden and paving/gravel.

Also choose from Hanging Rosemary, *Achillea*, Snow in Summer, *Anthemis*, *Scabiosa*, *Convolvulus*, Oregano, *Senecio*, Thyme, Catmint, Lambs Ears, *Sempervivums*, Swan River Daisy.



Spiky Plants

– make their presence felt.

Also choose from *Eryngium*, *Cordylines*, *Agave* and *Furcraea*,



Ephemerals – transient highlights for every season.



Grape Hyacinth



Freesia

Scatter these fleeting beauties through your permanent plantings, they brighten every season.

Bulbs: *Nerines*, *Cyclamen*, *Sternbergia*, Spider Flower, *Zephyranthes*, *Ipheion*, *Ixia*, Belladonna, *Lachenalia*, *Allium*, Single Anemone, *Tritonia*, *Sparaxis* and *Bloomeria*.

Easy annuals: Alyssum, Poppies, Pincushion Flower, Love in the Mist, Heartsease, Chinese Forget Me Not, Cornflowers, Mignonette, Queen Anne's Lace and wildflowers.



Helipterum



Cream California Poppy

Blue chalk sticks (*Senecio serpens*) and Hen and chickens, (*Echeveria glauca*) may both be the same shape (mat forming), and the same colour (silver-grey) but their textures are quite different. The *Senecio* is a mass of vertical foliage, whereas *Echeveria* is a conglomerate of crisp rosettes. By combining and contrasting foliage colour and texture we can start to use plants as pieces that will make up a many textured and coloured sculpture.

The same goes for grasses. Blue oatgrass and Carex 'Frosty Curls' are both low growing tufted shapes. However the Carex has the silky relaxed shape of a fountain, while Oatgrass has the bristling silhouette of a contented Echidna.

Just as any good recipe is a balance of many ingredients, we should take care how we mix shapes and foliage in the garden. Plants of predominantly vertical shapes, be they Hollyhocks at the small end of the scale, to Pencil Pines (*Cupressus sempervivens*), and Lombardy Poplars (*Populus nigra*), are always most effective on sloping ground. So whether you have a garden the size of a hillside on the Mediterranean, or just a sloping backyard, strong vertical shapes are ideal. However using too many strong verticals will make us feel hectic and hemmed in, rather than uplifted – like salt, they should be used sparingly. Conversely, a preponderance of rounded shapes that you see in municipal gardens will make the garden feel



Sisyrrinchium striatum



Echium 'Heronwood Blue'



Blue Fescue

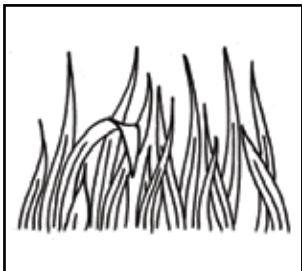


Lily Turf Blue

Strong upright types

– for gardens with intestinal fortitude.

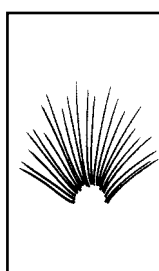
Also choose from *Dietes*, *Dierama*, Flax, *Agapanthus*, *Aristea*, Bearded Iris, *Isoplexis*, *Echium* 'Silver Pink', *Astelia*, *Kniphofia* and *Crocsmia*.



Tufts

– perky perennials.

Also choose from *Sisyrrinchium bellum* 'Californian Skies', Blue oatgrass, *Dianthus*, Mondo Grass, *Carex* 'Frosty Curls' and Fountain Grass.



"Waterwise plants with foliage form and texture are the building blocks of the 21st century Australian garden."

heavy, like too much boring bland pasta, an unappealing stodgy mass.

Plants with no particular shape can blend the hard edges of strongly formed plants. These 'Airy Fairies' lend that touch of romance that no garden should be without. The 'pretties' that produce airy heads of flower for months. Again they should be used with restraint as too many will feel like a formless mass of over sweet pudding.

In gardening as in life, getting the right balance is essential.

So is the new ecologically sustainable garden just planted and left? It can be, but we would be missing out on all the ephemeral jewels that brighten each season. A few simple wildflowers can grow amongst our permanent plantings to disappear before our hot summer. They can self sow in gravel paths or pop up through loose ground covering mat shaped plants. Hardy spring bulbs such as *Ixia*, *Freesia*, *Muscari* and *Ipheion* can have their place in the sun without displacing others. The delicate beauty of *Nerines*, *Zephyranthes*, *Cyclamen hederifolium* and *C. coum* brighten autumn and winter. When summer is at its hottest, we can be astonished by the abrupt emergence of Belladonna lilies rising triumphantly out of sunbaked soil.

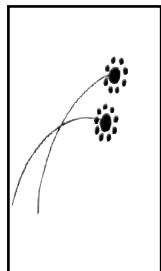
Just like gardeners that don't give up!

Jane Voth



Gaura lindheimeri

Russian Sage



Airy Fairies

– because we all need to dream.

Also choose from *Crambe scaberrima*, Bronze Fennel, *Verbena bonariensis* and *Gypsophila*.



See how beautifully structural the Garden of Wigandia is when flower colours are eliminated and only the shapes are revealed, as in the drawing below.

