

## Fifteen Ideas for Garden Design

### Diana Snape

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I was asked by Helen Moody for some suggestions for designing with Australian plants, to be included in an article she was writing for the Sydney Morning Herald (4/9/97). In her article Helen says "*The most distinctive quality of Australian plants and native gardens is that they impart a spirit of place that is uniquely ours. They create a feel, a sense, a smell and a sound of their own.*"

Here are those idea as I wrote them....

1. A garden is an artistic creation which evolves through time and is never 'finished'; gardeners are artists who follow their own vision and those of us who love Australian plants can gain inspiration directly from aspects of the Australian landscape.
2. Plants which occur naturally in the same environment - desert, for example, or coastal - usually look happy together in the garden because of their complementary adaptations as well as their similar requirements.
3. Sculptural Australian plants, like tree ferns, grasstrees, Gynea lilies and banksias, will distinguish a garden and deserve to be treated with respect and placed carefully in a garden landscape.
4. Three or four different species of the numerous Australian groundcover plants - daisies, hibbertias (guinea flowers), scaevolas (fan flowers), etc.- can be chosen and repeated to create a lovely tapestry effect at ground level.
5. Even in a small garden, a tree of the appropriate size such as one of the smaller eucalypts extends the space of the garden upwards, acting as a focal point as well as being a magnet for birds.
6. Don't just look at the shapes of the plants in a garden, look also at the shapes of the spaces between plants; the balance of 'mass' and 'void' should be satisfying.
7. Australian daisies and grasses combine nicely with rocks - a pleasing contrast of soft and hard textures, with clumped or sprawling daisies and tufted grasses complementing the definite curved or straight lines of rocks.
8. A huge variety of fine foliaged tufted Australian plants look excellent beside water - rushes, sedges and lilies, either upright or weeping. There are shrubs and small trees too with weeping foliage which is very appealing when reflected in water.
9. A sympathetic formal touch - a well made stone wall, paving of appropriate colour and outline, or sculpture - can bring solidity to the fine foliage of many Australian plants.
10. Australian rainforest plants continue to gain popularity because of their colourful new foliage, flowers and fruit; with



**Hoffman Walk, Victoria with the white trunks of *Eucalyptus scoparia* standing above the low, silver-white cushion bush (*Leucophyta brownii*).**

Photo: Diana Snape

glossy green leaves of medium size they blend well with exotic plants.

11. There are many small-leaved Australian plants (eg. lilly pillies, melaleucas, leptospermums, westringias) which can be pruned and treated formally for hedges or even topiary, to be used for example as a focal point among less formal shrubs.
12. From the variety of Australian shrubs now available, such as the range of beautiful grevilleas, it is possible to create wonderful massed or layered garden beds with colour schemes which can be vivid or subtle. Remember to tip prune.
13. The rapid growth of some large shrubs or small trees, in particular some acacias, is of benefit in planting for succession - it enables them to be used as 'nurse' plants for a screen and for shelter while slower growing plants are being established.
14. A garden of low shrubs (a metre or less, pruned if necessary to maintain this height) gives an open and spacious feel to the garden while several small eucalypts with fine trunks could provide a vertical element.
15. The variety of foliage of Australian plants is amazing, in form texture, colour - from large and dramatic to tiny, delicate leaves - and many attractive effects can be achieved with foliage alone.