



More on Gardening Ethics

Diana Snape

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I agree with Chris Larkin's comments in her article on gardening ethics, Newsletter No.51. Our direct dealings with other people are a principal concern of ethics. However, as Tim Flannery points out, what we do and how we live today impacts strongly on future generations and this should not be ignored. I think ethics also involves a concern for other living organisms - animals, even plants? - and certainly for conservation of the natural environment. Can we choose plants to grow in our gardens and forget about their shrinking and damaged homes in the wild? I'd join Chris in recommending Tim Flattery's 'The Future Eaters' for his perspective. After reading that, try Jared Diamond's 'Collapse', especially the chapter on Australia. It makes very sobering reading.

Probably our initial impulse in gardening (and garden design) is just to create something beautiful, obviously doing no harm to anyone in the process. Then other considerations emerge, such as those listed by Chris, making the process of design more complex and maybe more challenging and stimulating. I think we mostly do the best we can. We change as the parameters change but it gets difficult to alter an old garden which has become rather set in its ways. I remember when, 30 years ago, we began work on altering the house we had bought, it was illegal to have a water tank in the garden. Also the use of grey water was not even on the horizon. Now we would almost need to bulldoze and rebuild the house to change significantly its water catchment and distribution. Much of the roof water drains into a pipe which goes right under the house. If only we were starting again now

I can think of two ethical questions we might ask about having a formal garden. The first is whether it necessitates the use of more water and I don't believe this has to be true. The second would be concerning wildlife habitat and this one could be more difficult to resolve, as a very formal garden with everything trimmed and tidy is likely to provide minimal habitat (as in Chris's comment about "minimalist gardens and box hedges"). Otherwise I see no reason why an Australian garden has to try to mimic 'the bush'. Restoration of a natural area with indigenous plants is a most worthwhile activity but it's at one end of the spectrum of creating a garden. Using indigenous plants in a formal design is different again. In the middle of suburbia, your informal Australian garden may stand out in a conspicuous way from the rest of the street does this matter?

As always Chris Larkin can be relied upon to introduce thought provoking and contemporarily relevant issues into our newsletters.

For yet another take on gardening ethics, read Val Plumwood's "[Decolonising Australian Gardens: gardening and the ethics of place.](#)" This paper criticizes the popular ideal of the all native garden purified of exotic elements and proposes an alternative - the adaptive garden.....