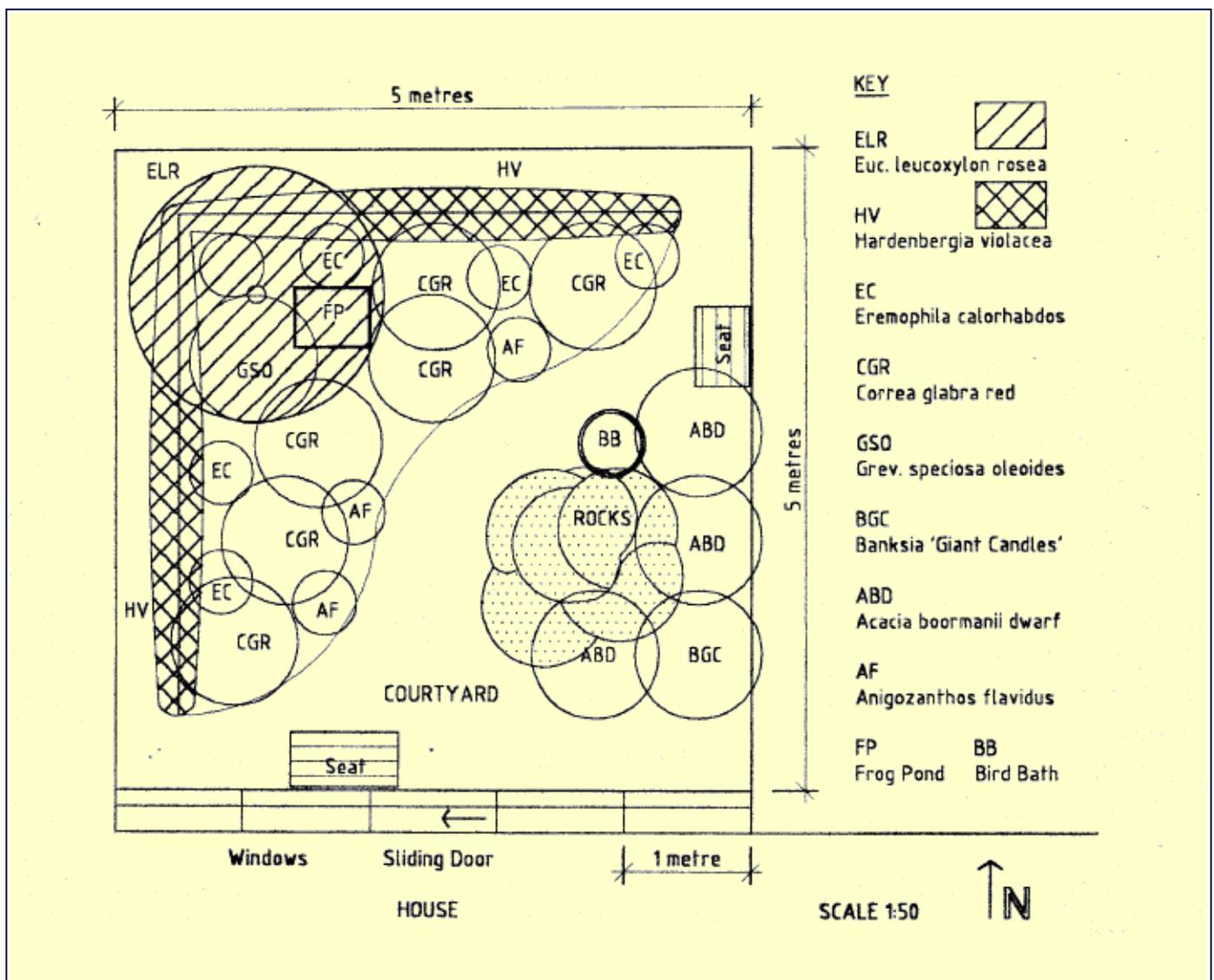


A Small Wildlife Garden

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From the October 2006 issue of the Study Group Newsletter.

Despite being a rank amateur with no formal training in design, I found the idea of designing a small 5 metre x 5 metre garden such an appealing challenge that I decided to have a go. What would I do if the only garden I had were just such a small space? As someone who often has to stay indoors for long periods, my primary aim would be to attract wildlife, to have movement and sound that could be appreciated from indoors. I've imagined a heavily planted courtyard garden surrounded by a wall or brush fence, in front of north-facing windows.



The crucial element for this garden would be a slender tree with sturdy branches to act as a landing pad for passing birds. I'd sacrifice a little northerly winter sun for the benefit of having a bird-attracting tree, keeping it well pruned to maximize sun penetration in winter. Birds can enjoy quite a skimpy tree (our spindly *Eucalyptus caesia* of less than a metre spread is a big hit with birds - they love to perch in it). My first choice would be a nectar-rich, long-flowering eucalypt, probably a dwarf form of

E. Jeucoxylon 'rosea' (eg. 'Euky Dwarf') or perhaps *E. caesia*. Other possibilities are *E. curtisii*, *E. lansdowneana*, *E. mannifera* 'Little Spotty', *Acacia rubida*, *A. spectabilis* and *Banksia marginata*. All of these should suit training as a slender tree.

Climbers provide excellent habitat for small birds. So the second main element would be climbers trained on to an L-shaped structure on the north and west sides of the courtyard. The supporting structure, probably wire trellis spread between star pickets or timber posts, would be set about half a metre inside the fenceline. This is just enough space for me to squeeze along to prune and train the climbers, to keep them where I want them: out of shrubs and trees and neighbours. My colour preference would be purple or white *Hardenbergia violacea* or, more rampant, the gorgeous bright white flowers and feathery fruits of *Clematis aristata*. A lighter climber I'd consider is *Clematis microphylla*, which has cream flowers.

As well as climbers, I'd include several scrambling twiners, such as *Billardiera scandens* and *Eustrephus latifolius*, and that very scrambly shrub, *Epacris longiflora*. Because climbers usually leave an untidy gap at the bottom of the trellis, I'd grow a tall carpet of low shrubs (kept to about a metre high) such as *Correa glabra* red form or *C. baeuerlenii* or *C. reflexa*.

In the main bed, I'd add tall skinny shrubs (several *Eremophila calorhabdos* and a *Grevillea speciosa* ssp. *oleoides*), clumps of *Anigozanthos flavidus*, a *Grevillea* 'Poorinda Royal Mantle' as ground cover, and a small frog pond based on a 60 litre recycling crate placed in the ground beside logs. The frog pond would be outfitted with rocks, lots of oxygenating water plants (eg. *Vallisneria spiralis*, *Marsilea mutica* and *Myriophyllum verrucosum*), and small fish (preferably indigenous, definitely not goldfish).

Then on the south-eastern side of the courtyard, I'd put rocks and logs as habitat for lizards, a *Banksia* 'Giant Candles' pruned to a tall skinny shape, and a few small acacias (eg. *Acacia boormanii* dwarf). I'd add *Xerochrysum viscosum* daisies, small strappy plants (eg. *Lomandra* 'Tanika' or *Dianella* 'Little Jess'), and a shallow bird bath. Amongst the rocks, I might try a *Kunzea pomifera*, *Enchylaena tomentosa* or *Einadia nutans* (all have tasty berries, popular with birds and lizards). I'd mulch the whole courtyard with tiny pebbles because they allow excellent water penetration, don't become water repellent, and make a good firm footing for paths. And I'd have a bench seat or two for sunning and outdoor observation.

The plants mentioned are top-class plants for wildlife. Most are long-flowering and nectar-rich, with small tubular or spider flowers that don't favour the large honeyeaters at the expense of little birds. All of them do well for us and none are weedy in our conditions. In other areas, different species might suit better. However, the basics for a small wildlife garden remain: a tree, climbers, a large bed of shrubs, a frog pond, rocks and logs, a bird bath, and easy access for pruning so that plants can be kept within bounds and performing at their peak. Although I might modify the plantings after some years of observation, this is how I would set about creating a small garden for wildlife.