

Plant Selection

Plant selection is literally a matter of life or death. More than that, it affects our self-confidence as gardeners and, if we get it wrong, money is wasted and the garden is nothing like our vision for it. I know all this from personal experience. Now I have a checklist in my head to help me and others. It starts with the big picture of the whole garden and ends with selecting a particular plant.

Look at books, the Internet and gardens to select the style of garden and the colour palette you want. But don't try to replicate another garden exactly, unless you have the same climate, soil type, aspect, influences from neighbouring properties and time (or gardeners). Ask yourself if your family, friends and pets could live happily with that garden. Create a big picture statement such as: I love a formal garden, roses, low hedges, neat paths/ I love a rich palette of colours in a tumbling country garden mass/I love a park-like garden with deciduous trees and lawn/ I want to attract birds in all seasons.



In our region we have a relatively low rainfall, frosts and often long dry periods. Our worst winds come from the west and south but we can have northerly winds and temperatures over 35°C during summer. These are basic realities for all of us but your garden will have its own realities – where shade falls, where trees take up lots of moisture, if there is a natural pathway to the back door and whether your family and pets would respect a change. Be aware that 'native' plants are not all native to your area and may not do well.

Look at as many local gardens as you can to get ideas for plants that are doing well in your area and that fit your 'big picture'. Take a photo of a plant and show it to a nursery person or use an app on your phone for plant identification. Even better is to ask the gardener, because they may be able to tell you the name, its preferred growing conditions in your area and where they got it from.

Most nurseries sell a range of plants that they purchase wholesale from plant producers who may not be local. They are not all perfect for your garden. They are usually for sale when they are flowering. It is hard to resist the 'lolly shop' effect of seeing something gorgeous, buying it without a spot in mind or full knowledge of its needs. You might even buy it with no time to plant, with the result being 'death in pot'.

If you know the name of a plant you like – research it and ring around to see if it is available locally. Visit local nurseries and talk about the type of plant you need – 'I am looking for a low water flowering plant about a metre high that could be hedged. It will be in full sun. We have frosts.' Ask for, and listen to, advice and suggestions.



One of the most surprising and regular comments we have received at our nursery is that our plants really grow and thrive in customers' gardens. If the person selling a plant can't talk knowledgeably about what it likes and general gardening matters, look for someone who can.

Pop in to our nursery before we close down on June 3rd. We can help you with plant selection!

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