

## Small Gardens for Wildlife

In

### Townhouses and Apartments

A well-planted small garden space enables us to maintain our link with nature which is important for our wellbeing. With the increasing density of housing in Bayside we need to make more efficient use of gardens to maximise their usefulness to wildlife. With other nearby gardens and parks, each small garden contributes towards the overall resources available to native wildlife. Small gardens can provide important links and stepping stones for wildlife as they move through the landscape, seeking food, water and shelter or even a more permanent home.

Small gardens include courtyards and balconies. Often, very small gardens do not have garden beds but rely on containers and/or vertical climbing plants. Container gardening can be challenging in many ways, particularly in relation to watering.

#### Plant Selection

Plants in small gardens need to fit the space available and often to survive extremes of climate be it hot Sun, deep shade or wind. A range of plants need to be chosen to provide food and shelter to wildlife year round. A variety of plants, growing to different heights will also help to mimic the layers of vegetation found in the natural environment : ground storey, middle storey and upper storey.

#### Shelter

One well-chosen medium to large sized bush might be sufficient to provide good shelter, recognising it will limit opportunities for other plants. So, try to choose one that is a food plant too. Also consider creepers which can run vertically up a wall, or over a pergola, as these can provide good nesting spots. Spaces under pots also provide shelter for lizards and invertebrates.

#### Food

Small lizards, such as skinks need the bugs that live in leaf litter and under pots and under low growing plants. Try and provide some ground covers and grasses for them. Bees , butterflies and other insects feed on certain types of flowers. Small insectivorous birds eat the insects attracted to the flowers and in leaf litter. Some birds are both insectivorous and nectar eating.

#### Plants

The following indigenous plants may be suitable for container planting. They have not been bred to be cultivated, or to be container plants. There may be other potential plant candidates than those listed below, for example, if you know that you can keep your plants well watered, then you may be able to use some of the more moisture dependent plants. So, some trial and error may be needed to grow plants successfully in your garden.

The following list highlights plants suitable for containers and vertical spaces . The plants listed are either small, or can be pruned to be small. Most can also tolerate dry periods once established and prefer well-draining soil. Note that in Summer, protecting container plants from exposure to hot afternoon sunshine is recommended to prevent plants from drying out. Container plants cope better with Summer heat if they are only exposed to Sun from morning to midday.

Plant	Attracts	Flowers when?	Position	Other comments
Ground level (ground up to 1 metre)				
<i>Alyxia buxifolia</i> Sea Box	Butterflies	Dec-Feb	Well drained soil. Full Sun.	Can prune.
<i>Austrostipa stipoides</i> Prickly Spear-grass	Butterflies and small birds	Sept-Nov	Full Sun.	Prune hard after flowering to maintain vigour.
<i>Chrysocephalum semipapposum</i> Clustered Everlasting	Butterflies and their caterpillars	Oct-Feb	Full Sun Well-drained soil.	Prune in Winter to encourage growth otherwise can die back.
<i>Chrysocephalum apiculatum</i> Common Everlasting	Butterflies and their caterpillars	Sept-Dec Possibly all year	Full Sun. Well drained soil.	Severe pruning rejuvenates old plants.
<i>Dianella laevis</i> var. <i>laevis</i> Pale Flax-lily	Butterflies, small birds, parrots	Aug- Jan	Full to Part Sun Well-drained soil. Tolerates dry soil.	
<i>Disphyma crassifolium</i> subs. <i>Crassifolium</i> Rounded Noon-flower	Butterflies	Oct-Feb	Tolerates wet or dry conditions. Full Sun.	
<i>Franenia pauciflora</i> Southern Sea-heath	Butterflies	Aug-Feb	Well drained heavier soil. Withstands dry and wet conditions. Full Sun-part shade.	
<i>Goodenia geniculata</i> Bent Goodenia	Caterpillars of butterflies	Aug-Feb	Well drained soil. Full Sun or part shade.	Groundcover
<i>Hibbertia sericea</i> Silky Guinea-flower	Butterflies, small birds, honeyeaters	Oct-Dec	Well-drained soils. Part shade to full Sun	Needs care in establishment phase.
<i>Kennedia prostrata</i> Running Postman	Butterflies and honeyeaters	April-Dec	Well drained soil. Full to Part Shade	Groundcover but can cascade from hanging baskets.
<i>Pimelea humilis</i> Common rice-flower	Butterflies	Sept-Jan	Full Sun or partial shade Heavier well-drained soils.	Likes Summer watering.
<i>Platylobium obtusangulum</i> Common Flat-pea	Butterflies and honeyeaters	Oct-Jan	Full Sun or partial shade. Well drained soil.	Occasional pruning encourages bushy growth.
<i>Leucophyta brownii</i> Cushion Bush	Butterflies, small birds, lizards	Sep-Dec	Well drained soil. Full to part Sun.	Regular rather than hard pruning promotes compact form.
<i>Leucopogon virgatus</i> Common Beard Heath	Insects	July-Dec	Well drained soil. Tolerates dryness. Full Sun –part shade.	Older plants may need pruning for growth.
<i>Xanthorrhoea minor</i> Small Grass-tree	Insects	Nov-Dec	Well drained soils. Full or partial Sun. Tolerates dryness once established.	Very slow growing.
<i>Xerochrysum viscosum</i> Sticky Everlasting	Butterflies	All year.	Full Sun, dry spots	
Mid storey level (1-2 metres)				
<i>Bossiaea cinerea</i> Showy Bossiaea	Butterflies, small birds, honeyeaters	Aug-Dec	Part shade-full Sun. Well drained soils.	Prune hard after flowering to encourage compact shrub.
<i>Correa alba</i> White Correa	Butterflies, small birds, honeyeaters	All year	Well drained soil. Tolerates moisture and extended dry periods once established. Full Sun or partial shade.	Can be pruned to be lower.
<i>Correa reflexa</i> Common correa	Honeyeaters	March-Sept	Well drained soil. Sun or semi-shade.	
<i>Goodenia ovata</i> Hop Goodenia	Butterfly caterpillars	Aug-Feb	Damp soil but tolerates dryness. Full Sun to full shade.	
<i>Olearia axillaris</i> Coast Daisy-bush	Butterflies, small birds	Feb-April	Well drained soil. Full Sun.	Prune after flowering.
Taller storey level (2 metres plus) Climbers and creepers (can cover multiple levels)				
<i>Billardiera mutabilis</i> Common Apple-berry	Butterflies honeyeaters, small birds	July-Dec Followed by berries.	Dry to moist heavier soils. Full Sun to complete shade.	When fruit is ripe and translucent , is edible for humans.
<i>Clematis microphylla</i> Small leaved Clematis	Butterflies and small birds	July- Nov	Well drained soil. Full Sun or part shade	Birds use the fluffy seeds for nesting.
<i>Hardenbergia violacea</i> Purple Coral-pea	Butterflies and honeyeaters	July-Oct	Dry, well drained soils.	

## Choosing a Pot/Container

Pots should be approximately a third to half the size of the plant you wish to grow at maturity, or the pruned size you plan. Choose containers with adequate drainage holes and use saucers or trays to prevent too much overflow. Thick and lightly coloured containers are recommended for hot locations where it is important to avoid over heating the root system.

## Planting Medium

The soil for your pots should be a “premium quality” potting mix, suitable for pots, tubs and containers. These will be more expensive than normal potting mix, however they will have moisture storing crystals, slow-release fertilizers and micro-nutrients already added. Do not buy cheaply priced potting mix as they are made from poor quality materials and may adversely affect the growth and health of your plants. Keep soil level 35mm below the pot rim and add a 25mm thick layer of fine organic mulch to keep soil cooler, retain moisture, reduce weeds and improve soil fertility.

## Maintenance

Critical to container planting is your watering regime. Pots should not be allowed to dry out completely for long periods, or the roots may become damaged. Constantly wet soils can also cause damage to plant roots. Try to maintain a reasonable, constant soil moisture level. Saucers at the base of your pots can provide a small reservoir to help plants survive periods of dry weather. If you can water your pots using an automatic irrigation system, then this will ensure regular watering, particularly if your are away on holidays. A hand held soil water meter is also very useful, so that you can test how wet or dry your pots actually are.

You can prune the plants after flowering to keep their shape and your desired size and to encourage further flowering.

## Other Elements

Some other wildlife resources in small gardens:

- Provide a water bowl (see water bowl leaflet). This is likely to be a magnet for birds.
- Provide some crevices under which skinks or geckos can live eg. Under rocks or tiles placed around the garden.
- Provide a butterfly rock or sand pit (see butterfly leaflet).

Further information:

<https://www.bayfonw.org.au/g4ws/small>