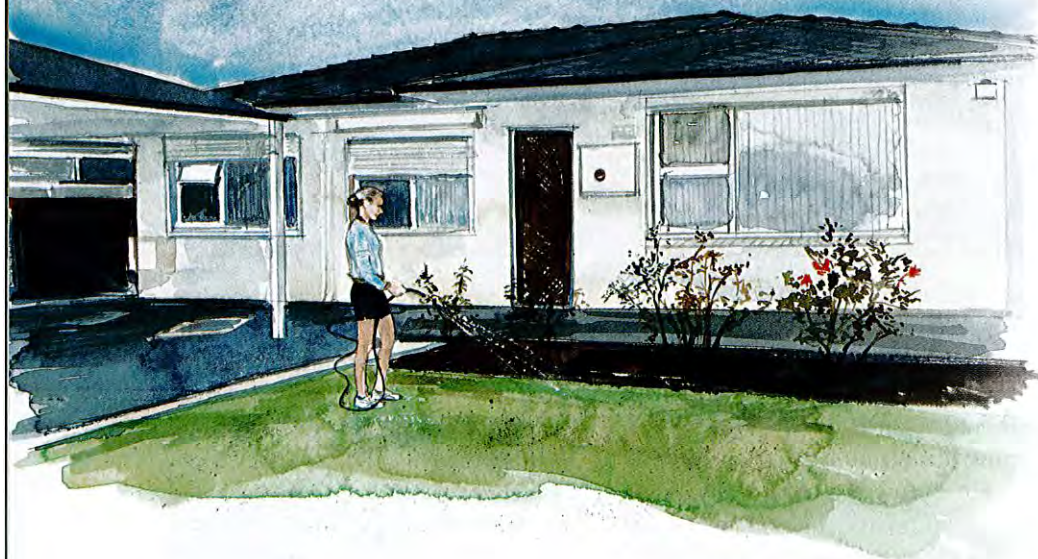


urban antics

by John Hunter



Dry as...

Apart from being bombed by golf-ball-sized hail and nearly flooded out of my home last March, the rest of the year in Perth has resulted in a lack of recurring rain ... it's as dry as a dead dingo, you might say.

Surface water reservoirs are extremely low, water bills are high and watering habits are as antiquated as a rusty Saxon sword.

Should we be worried? Nah ... not really, contrary to what some of the experts say, there is still plenty of water for Perth's domestic population, it's just that we have to manage better that which is readily available, and use it more efficiently. If we're serious, grey water treatment should be high on the state agenda. Watering by hand once a week, even in summer, will keep lawn green and alive, will reduce the number of mowing times and will enable you to appreciate the BMWs and fashion plate joggers as they cruise suburbia.

Let's face it, we are sandgropers, we are tough little diggers and we will do what is really necessary, that is, plant appropriate species, water by hand in the great outdoors and

enjoy the exercise. You can even install a sub-irrigation drip-system which is most efficient in saving water and delivers direct to the root systems of plants in amounts only according to their needs. For the most, fixed sprinkler use is wasteful because of evaporation, surface tension run-off, wind interference and often malfunctioning spray heads.

These days, there are some really interesting native gardens and road verge creations happening even in the suburbs of the bourgeoisie where once-proud European cottage gardens flourished. With a little effort and flair, householders are responding to the need for 'waterwise' gardens with positive results.

While not every native plant is suitable for the home garden,

recent advances have been made in selecting plants, forms and cultivars that are suitable for ornamental horticulture.

As a result, there is now a very wide range of native plants, most of which will attract birds, butterflies and other wildlife to your property.

It is necessary to know, however, that prior to planting, our local sandy soils must be improved with organic matter. Good compost will dramatically increase the moisture, nutrient and microfauna capacity of soil, all needed for healthy plant growth. Bare soil encourages weeds, wastes water and puts heat stress on plants; so use surface mulch with a mixture of large irregular-shaped particles of bark, wood, sticks and grass matter—and this will further feed the soil as the mulch breaks down. Erosion and temperature fluctuation are also overcome. Over time, more mulch can always be added. But remember to keep it away from plant stems so that collar rot and other diseases are not attracted.

By organising plant types that flower at different times of the year, not only will you be entertained by the usual magpies, mudlarks, willie wagtails and butcher birds, you will be able to see possibly six or seven species of visiting honeyeaters, from wattle birds to miners, spinebills and chats.

Go on, give it a go, you just might like the result.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Through its website (www.watercorporation.com.au), the Water Corporation puts out a good series of downloadable brochures on creating 'waterwise' gardens.
- To find your local Waterwise Garden Centre that can help with plant selection and water needs, go to the above website or phone the Waterwise Helpline on 13 10 39.
- We have to fit how we live with ways that will not interfere with our water in the future, if we are to sustain human life.

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Executive editor Madeleine Clews.

Editors Joanna Moore, Samille Mitchell.

Scientific/technical advice Kevin Thiele, Paul Jones, Keith Morris, Michael Rule.

Design and production Tiffany Taylor, Lauren Tyrrell, Peter Nicolas, Gooitzen van der Meer.

Illustration Gooitzen van der Meer.

Cartography Promaco Geodraft.

Marketing Estelle de San Miguel.

Phone (08) 9334 0296 or fax (08) 9334 0432.

Subscription enquiries

Phone (08) 9219 8000.

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