Planning a Garden

When planning a garden, whether in the school grounds or at home, you should always note the position of existing trees; for they can be of great help in providing shade and protection from winds during the summer months. Even if the trees are not good types, they can be kept until better specimens grow. These can then replace the original trees.

The buildings are of course the most important feature of a landscape, and your garden should be designed to emphasise the good qualities of the buildings. For example, you would not plant tall, bushy shrubs immediately in front of the school entrance, which is usually pleasant and well designed. Instead of blocking the entrance from view, you should plant shrubs on either side of it to form a frame and thus draw attention to the entrance.

Not only can garden planning emphasise the beauty of a building but it can also hide a building’s poorer aspects. Objects such as incinerators and unsightly garden sheds may be concealed by shrubs. Large expanses of brickworkcan be relieved by the planting of trees and shrubs. The flat line of a roof can be made to look less harsh by planting trees which will grow higher than the roof line; breaking the monotony of the long, straight line. Sometimes, an attractive view from the porch or a window of a house can be spoilt by the sight of gas works or a block of flats. A good-sized tree or a group of shrubs can conceal this, leaving only the pleasing view.

Most Australians like to enjoy some privacy in their backyard but building a ten-foot (three metre) fence around their property would be expensive. There are however, many **native trees** and shrubs which will grow to this height or higher which are far more pleasing to look at than fences. By careful selection and planning you can grow a ten-foot (three metre) screen of shrubs of delightful colouring and variety.

Particularly in a country school, it is sometimes necessary to break the force of biting easterly or westerly winds. **Melaleucas**, **gimlets** (pruned to encourage growth) or ***Kunzea baxteri*** may be grown to form a suitable break from winds.

Trees used to shade a house during summer should be chosen with care. If a tree such as a red-flowering gum is planted on the north side of a building, it will certainly provide good shade with its thick canopy of leaves. It will, however, also provide shade during the winter, when it is less welcome. A taller tree with less foliage such as a lemon-scented gum or even ***Eucalyptus spathulata***(swamp mallet), will provide shade during summer yet allow sunlight to filter through during winter. Early-morning sunlight will also be able to pass under the foliage once the tree reaches a certain height.

When you have decided on the position of your garden beds, the choice of plants is largely – though not entirely – a matter of personal taste. Remember that many **blush plants** prefer to grow in groups or colonies and that they look better if this type of planting is carried out. For example, one **kangaroo paw** in a garden looks rather lonely and scrawny, but a group of them make a striking picture. By planting in groups, you can develop what gardeners call the **“bush effect”** – something which could become a national gardening style for Australia, as distinctive as Japanese or English cottage gardens.

When selecting plants for your garden, you should consider their place of origin. Some plants you grow may come from Albany; these will prefer a peaty soil and plenty of water. Others will come from the Darling Ranges; they too, will like plenty of water, but there are plants which will favour desert areas where there is little water. If these plants are all placed together in your garden receiving the same treatment, some of them will certainly die due to unsuitable conditions. As such, it is necessary to know something of the background of the plants you wish to grow in your garden.

The main principle in planning a garden is summed up by H M Bloom in *Your Garden*: “The basic idea is to use nature as we find her, but adapting her unobtrusively to our needs, our comfort and our enjoyment.”

After planning your garden, check your ideas by asking yourself the following questions:

1. Have I made the best use of trees and shrubs to give shade, light and colour around the buildings?
2. Have I screened off objects such as the incinerator and the woodheap?
3. How much weeding and watering will I have to do in my garden?
4. Will the soil and the watering suit all the plants I have chosen?
5. Have I left enough room in the garden to allow free passage to rubbish bins, compost heaps, etc.?
6. Are the trees too large for the house?
7. Will my garden be pleasing at all times of the year?

**Glossary of Terms:**

**Blush plants**

**“Bush effect”**

***Eucalyptus spathulata***

**Gimlets**

**Native trees**

**Kangaroo paw**

***Kunzea baxteri***

**Malaleucas**