

Design

BYRON SHIRE HAS AN OUTSTANDING PALETTE OF INDIGENOUS PLANTS TO CHOOSE FROM. A GARDEN THAT UTILISES LOCAL SPECIES WILL LOOK MORE IN PLACE WITH ITS SURROUNDS AND LINK UP WITH EXISTING HABITAT TO 'INVITE' THE NATIVE WILDLIFE TO YOUR PLACE.

SUCCESSFUL GARDEN DESIGN BEGINS WITH A SITE PLAN - A SCALE DRAWING THAT INCLUDES ANY SIGNIFICANT FEATURES OF THE SITE SUCH AS EXISTING TREES, SHEDS AND PATHS ETC.

SITE ANALYSIS

Site Analysis is a pivotal stage that lists an inventory of existing and desirable features of the garden that guide the design. Typical features include:

- Direction of cooling summer breezes and warm winter sun (typically north east) – best to leave free of obstructions and keep plantings low.
- Direction of cold winter winds (typically south west) – best for larger trees and wind block plantings to shelter the property
- Desirable views to retain and areas in the garden or rooms of the house where you wish to create privacy
- Undesirable views to obscure
- Pedestrian and vehicle access

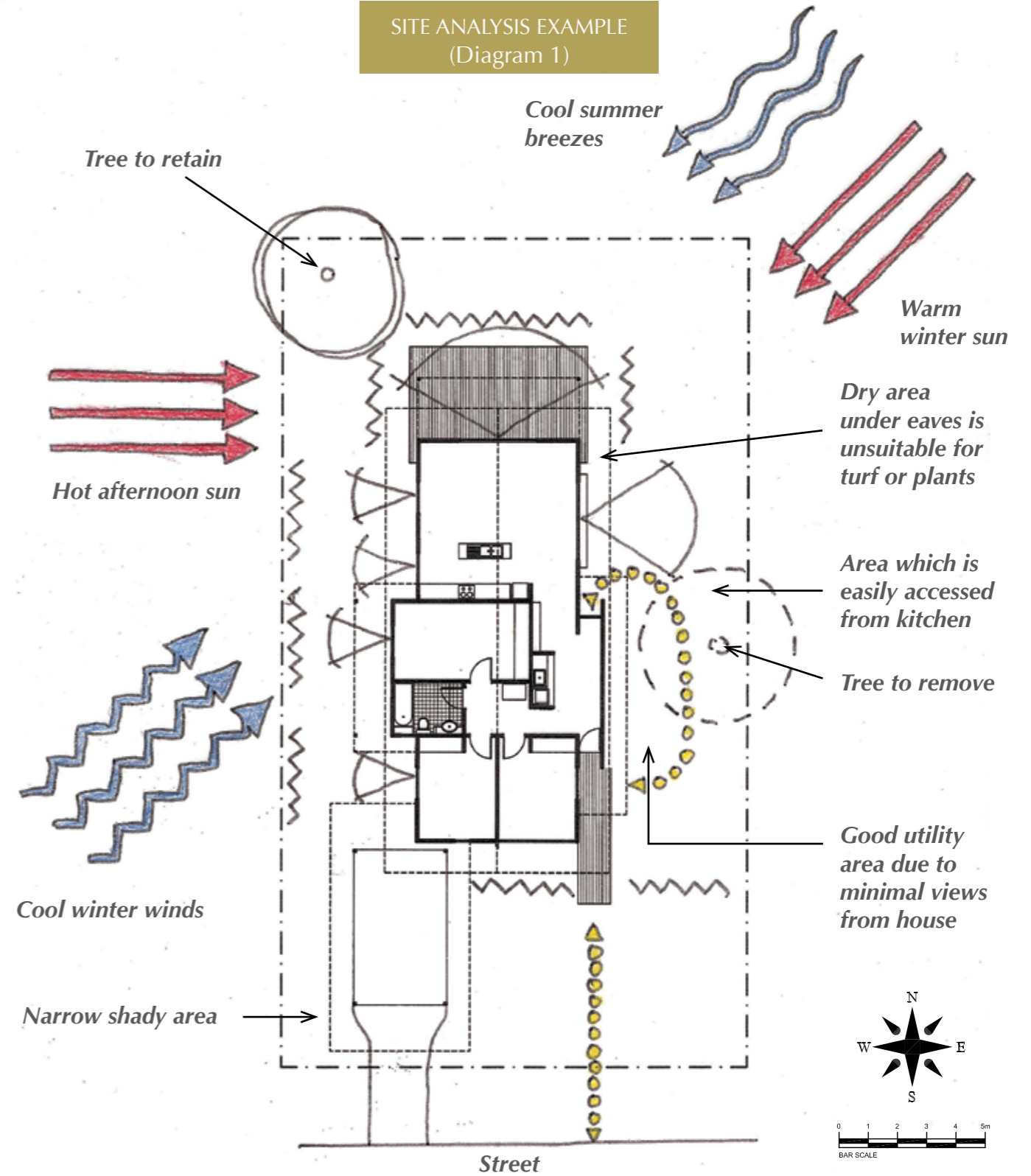
- Trees & plants to be retained
- Problem areas to address such as soil quality & drainage
- Fences, overhead power lines & underground cables
- Water outlets.

Sadly... we've all done it... excited by a surge of plant impulse buys, we give little thought to an overall layout. The result: a garden that doesn't function with the surrounding environment. Creating an initial design for a new garden or even renovating an existing garden will give you an overview of what to aim for, even if funds only allow realising the design gradually over time.



Pruned Lilly Pilly hedge with Giant Spear Lily. Photo: Veda Dante

SITE ANALYSIS EXAMPLE (Diagram 1)



- PRIVACY REQUIRED
- FOCAL POINT
- PEDESTRIAN ACCESS

Illustration: Mandy Lisson



Hibiscus Harlequin Bug. Photo: L Koesterke

DESIGN

Once your site analysis is complete you can start to develop a concept plan. This is a simple diagram that helps you to consider where the different functional areas will be located and how they will connect and relate to one another.

Effective landscape design is about context, balance and proportion. A garden that relates to the scale of the surrounding buildings and environment helps in settling the house into the landscape. Choosing the right plants is about both the aesthetic – contrast and harmony – and about the environment – providing vital habitat for native wildlife. Native gardens are not necessarily messy gardens. Many local shrubs respond well to pruning and will develop dense regrowth – providing better protection for small birds.

Think about what functions you want your garden to serve.

- Is there a place to sit and relax?
- Do you wish to attract birds, butterflies or animals?
- Do you require children's play areas or outdoor entertaining areas?
- What about a pool, garden shed or pergola?
- Would you like a pond or water feature?
- Is low maintenance a priority?
- Do you want vegetable gardens and/or chickens?
- Do you have pets and will they need to be fenced?

ARMED WITH YOUR SITE PLAN AND ANSWERS TO THE FUNCTIONS OF YOUR GARDEN, START DESIGNING WHERE THE FOLLOWING POINTS WILL BE ON YOUR PLAN

• FOCAL POINTS

A good design has a few focal points but not so many that they are all competing with each other. Where are the best locations to place striking specimen plants, sculptures or water features? Plenty of plain, green, bushy plants supports the more eye-catching elements.

• STRUCTURE

Structural diversity is a crucial to creating a variety of habitats. Choose a range of plants and layers, i.e. groundcovers & grasses, vines & scramblers, shrubs & thickets, small and tall trees. This will increase the range of wildlife that will come to nest, rest and play in your garden.

• TREES

Trees are an essential element of design. Be considerate of neighbours - one property's southwest is another's northeast - so this may mean a compromise in tree height. Try to get as much information about heights and habits as you can, including root growth. Incorporate existing mature trees into the design and they will provide vital habitat stepping-stones for wildlife.

• SHRUBS

Shrubs and groundcovers establish better when planted at the same time as trees. Thickly planted shrubs form excellent screens from winds or views. Smaller birds favour bushy, shrubby, prickly growth for protection.

• GROUNDCOVERS

Lower plants soften hard edges and create great habitat for frogs and lizards. They also add to the garden looking complete and can help to minimise weed growth.

• LAWNS

Lawns create a sense of space and are great open areas to play or entertain in. They are, however, labour intensive, so reduce their size or consider a native lawn (more info on page 37).

• VEGETABLE GARDENS

Choose a position that is easily accessed from the kitchen. Intensively grown vegies will cut down on size and maintenance. Does it need to be fenced from pets or netted for birds and bats?

• MATERIALS

Try to be creative - recycle materials where possible. Porous surfaces allow water to soak into the ground rather than hard surfaces that create large volumes of stormwater.

• BACKYARD BUFFERS & RAINGARDENS

Densely planted native species in buffer strips and raingardens (bioretention systems) can help to filter and reduce stormwater (more info on page 34).

• RAINWATER TANKS

Installing a rainwater tank is one of the easiest ways to reduce the amount of stormwater leaving your property. Rainwater tanks come in all shapes and sizes and the water can be used for watering the garden and washing vehicles. The tank can also be connected to internal plumbing for toilets and laundry.

GARDEN DESIGN EXAMPLE (Diagram 2)

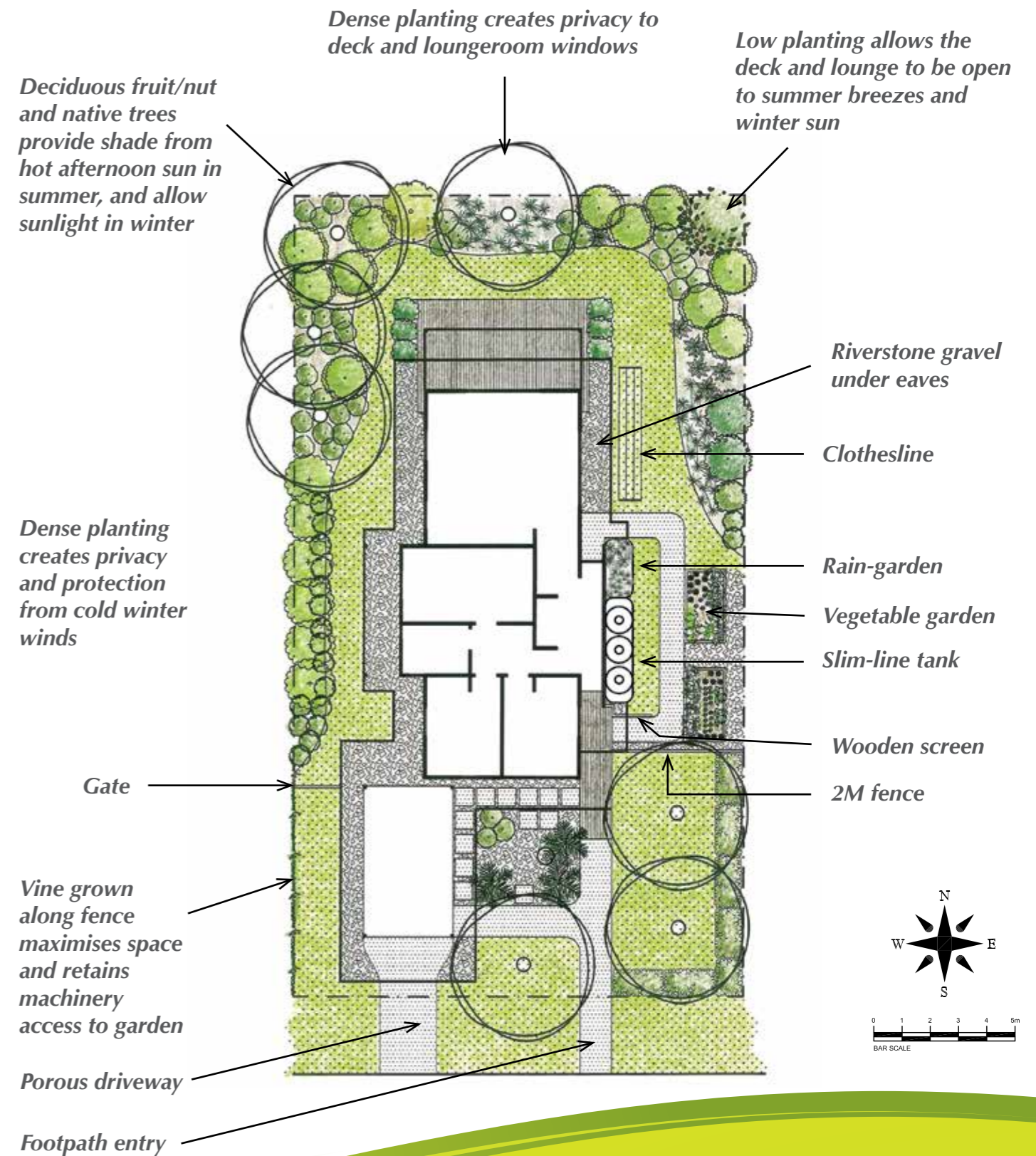


Illustration: Mandy Lisson



Davidson's Plum. Photo: Susan Allen

BASIC PLANTING GUIDE

Before you plant

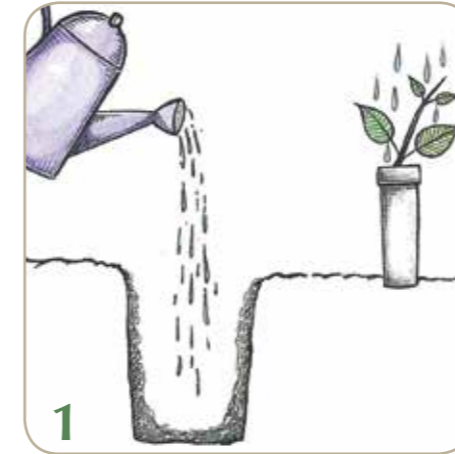
- Check your soil type – does it match the description & type of garden & plants in your zone? Does the soil need any conditioning (mulch, fertilizer, organic matter) before planting?
- Choose plants – pay attention to microclimate, (e.g. full sun/shade, etc).
- Prepare the site – preliminary weeding, dig all the holes and have fertilizer, mulch and water on hand.

Correct planting technique

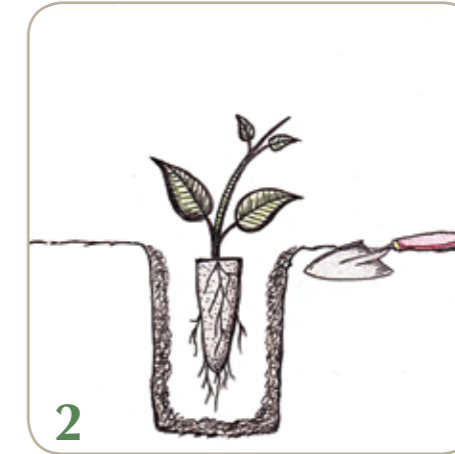
Check with the nursery where you purchase the plants about specific planting tips for your selected species, e.g. siting of the planting, watering & fertilizer requirements, mulching etc. Reputable online gardening websites can also be a great source of information.

GETTING HELP

Help can be obtained from local council, landscape designers, experienced bush regenerators, websites and nurseries. There are also a lot of great books and gardening magazines out there to help design your garden – why not put a scrapbook together of all the elements you wish to include? Most importantly, spend time in your garden, get to know the microclimates and plan your garden around its strengths and limitations.



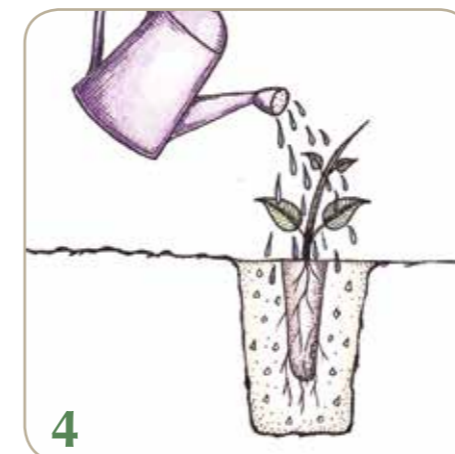
1. Dig a hole slightly deeper and at least twice as wide as the pot size. Loosen the soil around the sides of the planting hole. Water the plant & fill the hole with water and allow both to drain away. If the water doesn't drain from the hole you may need additional help with the addition of gypsum or build up a free draining mound of soil to plant into.



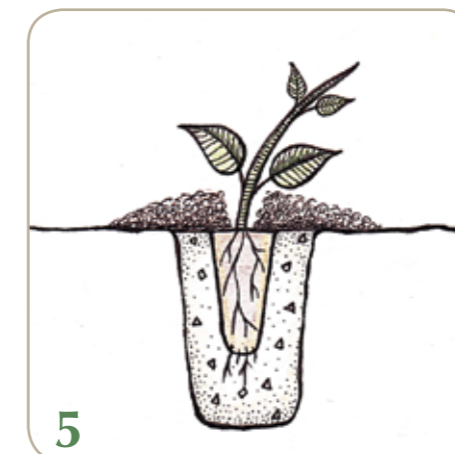
2. Gently remove the plant from the pot or tube and place in the planting hole - the top of the root ball should be level with the surrounding soil. If the roots are pot-bound gently loosen the root ball and then place in hole.



3. Backfill soil, making sure that the surface root ball is well covered and include a little slow release native plant fertilizer and water crystals/gel. Press the backfill down with your hands and shape the soil surface slightly to hold water. Do not place organic matter or too much fertilizer at the base of the hole as this may encourage root rot or fertilizer 'burn'.



4. Water the plant thoroughly after planting and then once a week for the first few months, (depending on season). Thereafter, water generously when the soil feels dry.



5. Mulch around the plant - 10cm thick with at least a 50cm radius - this will help to retain moisture and discourage weed growth. Avoid placing mulch against the stem of the plant as this may encourage collar rot.