

## Bush Gardens

A “bush” garden is probably one of the trickier styles. We want our bush garden to reflect and in fact become part of the local environment. The result will be apparent untidiness with fallen sticks and leaves, probably tangled undergrowth, referencing the local ecosystem, and plenty of habitat for insects, birds, small animals, reptiles and whatever else happens to live in the neighbourhood.



Some of the local Regional Ecosystems are relatively open but the coastal wallum can be very dense. The wallum spring wildflower display is colourful and incredibly varied. There are many species from which to choose and information about growth habits, soil preferences, water needs and much else is available.

A bush garden sounds great but every garden requires some level of maintenance and that means access for inevitable weeding, pruning, perhaps watering, and other tasks. Access via mulch or leaf litter paths is essential.

Old logs can define a path through the “bush” and provide food over time for borers and the animals which prey on their larvae. The old bush gardens of the 1950’s fell out of favour because they were hard to maintain, the limited selection of shrubs grew taller than expected and after a few years all the foliage was on top (to access the light of course), leaving bare, uninteresting stems and branches in the lower and mid-levels.



Gardeners now have much more choice but it is important to learn as much as possible about the plants in your local patch of bush and plan the garden with their growth habits in mind.

It will also be valuable to research the identity and growth habits of the local dominant weeds as they will inevitably turn up in your garden courtesy of birds, the wind and other forms of transport. Should they appear, early removal will save much work later.

It is difficult to weed in a mass of tangled undergrowth (long sleeves essential) so choose your low understorey plants with care and never forget that for healthy foliage and flowers, light is essential.

Some plants thrive in the shade of other plants but many ground covers and low shrubs need full sun. Banksias are useful for their open growth habit and seasonally long supply of nectar. They tend to cast only light shade and most are not too tall for smaller gardens. There are several local species.



A bush garden can reflect any ecosystem and the defining character is informality. Just don't forget that it will require some level of maintenance. Plants have a habit of growing and keeping on growing. There is no such thing as a no maintenance garden. Low maintenance is the best we can hope for. A bush garden is, however, a great delight.