SUSTAINABLE LIVING TASMANIA

Gardening Basics

Sustainable Living Information

Gardening is one of the best ways to reduce our ecological footprint as well being an extremely rewarding and rejuvenating pastime. Most of our food is transported long distances and grown using harmful chemicals. Growing your own food and buying locally not only supports your local community but greatly reduces carbon emissions, saves money & is more nutritious.

Water

Water is essential to all gardens. Tasmania has been blessed with higher rainfall than much of mainland Australia, but most food gardens still require some additional watering. Using water efficiently and planting responsibly is the key to creating a healthy, productive garden that minimises wastage of our precious freshwater supply.

- Add organic matter and compost to your soil. This not only adds valuable nutrients, but enables the soil to hold more water.

- Mulch your garden beds and pots. Up to 70% of water can be lost through evaporation from the soil.

- Water in the cool of the evening and direct the water to the plant root zone with long, infrequent watering.

- After you have watered, dig down to see how far it has penetrated – it should be at least 10cm. Water the same area three times in the same morning or evening to make sure the water soaks in.

- Use local plants, they are suited to your local soil and climate. Intersperse them with other plants with similar water requirements.

- Group plants according to their water needs.

- Check and clean you irrigation system every spring.

- Have either a timer on your taps or shut-off valves on your hoses to reduce overwatering.

- Micro-sprays waste up to 70% of water through drift and evaporation-and if the soil is mulched, water will not penetrate through.

- Consider soaker hoses that deliver water to the roots of plants under mulch.

- Water pots and plants with low pressure on the hose. The water should be running slowly, not on a spray, as this does not penetrate very deeply.

- Try to reduce your lawn area. Consider extending mulched beds, using porous paving or a drought-tolerant lawn. If you do have a lawn, cut it long over summer (8-10cm)

- Go for a tough drought-tolerant grass like 'Sir Water Buffalo', a native grass such as *Microlaena stipoides* or a native groundcover like *Myoporum parvifolium* for the front garden.

- Greywater from the bathroom or laundry is a great source of water that is available every day, though there are some health concerns. See sustainable living guide on 'Greywater'.

- Check the weather forecast to avoid watering before rain.

Mulching

Mulching not only reduces water loss, but helps suppress weeds and can add nutrients to the soil as it breaks down. Mulch should be applied about 8cm deep and topped up about once a year, depending on what type of mulch you use. Many different materials can be used as mulch, from pea straw and hay to black plastic, depending on your needs.

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Pests

Birds love nibbling at ripening fruits. The best way to protect them is by netting your trees, strawberry plants, etc. Pre-recorded sounds, such as birds in distress calls, frighten scavenging birds away. Hanging CDs from stings in trees can help deter birds. One can also try the age-old technique of creating a scarecrow.

Many gardeners promote the idea of planting sacrificial plants and/or companion planting to deal with unwanted visitors. For smaller pests, some people suggest inter-planting garlic and/or marigolds amongst your vegetables to repel insects.

See Sustainable Living Information Sheet on 'Pests' for more ideas.

Fertilizer

Tasmanian soils are generally deficient in many nutrients. Adding these can greatly improve the health and fertility of your soil. Steve Solomon suggests adding a blend of minerals and trace nutrients that he has named, Complete Organic Fertilizer. This mixture contains:

3 parts seedmeal
1 part blood and bone
1/2 part dolomite lime
1/4 part agricultural lime
1/4 part gypsum (more in heavy clay soils)
1 part phosphate rock or guano
1/2 part kelpmeal

Add this with a bit of organic material to optimise your garden's health.

Composting your kitchen scraps, shredded paper, manures, lawn clippings, weeds and many other items is a fantastic way to reduce waste and feed your garden with lots of nutrition. Compost is an all-round soil builder and plant tonic that can be made in your backyard at little cost and effort.

See Sustainable Living Information sheet on Composting for more information.

Permaculture

Permaculture (permanent agriculture) was developed in Tasmania by Bill Mollison and David Holmgren in the 1970s. Permaculture is a system for creating sustainable human settlements by integrating design and ecology. It is both a philosophy and holistic gardening style, which mimics natural systems and embraces ideals of interconnectedness and self-sufficiency.

Seeds

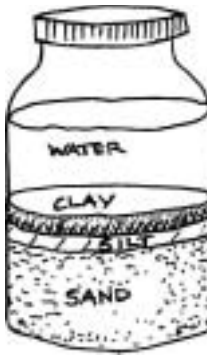
Saving your own seeds can save money and helps preserve local, organic plant strains. Seeds can last many years if properly stored. They keep best when stored in cool, dry environments. It is said that seeds held at 15 degrees Celsius with 60% relative humidity will last twice as long as those stored under normal household conditions. Easy ways to decrease temperature is to store in the refrigerator, under the house or along a dark south facing wall. To lower the relative humidity, keep seeds in an airtight container with some silica gel to absorb any excess moisture.

Soil

You could say building soil is the defining act of organic gardening. By regularly replenishing the nutrients your plants use, you keep the soil productive. By mixing organic matter (preferably compost) into the soil whenever possible, you mimic Nature's cycles of birth, decay, and rebirth. Ideal garden soil is dark-colored, smells kind of sweet, compresses into a loose lump in your hand when moist, and is full of earthworms.

The three main constituents of soil are sand, silt and clay. Sand has the largest particles and clay has the smallest, which is why it packs so tightly together. Silt particles are of intermediate size. An ideal garden soil, or loam, would be about 40% sand, 40% silt and 20% clay. The easiest way to see what type of

soil you have is to dig a few holes and take some samples. There are a number of simple tests you can do to determine the composition of soil. One method is to take a fistful of soil and squeeze it into a ball. If it is unable to hold its shape, your soil is probably too loose, or sandy. Now try to break the ball apart by pressing on it with your thumb. A good soil will break apart readily; if not, you probably have too much clay in your soil. Another method is to take a couple of cups of soil and put them in a large jar half filled with water. Agitate the mixture until all the soil is in suspension and then let it settle overnight. The next day you will see that three distinct layers have formed: sand at the bottom, then a layer of silt and clay at the top.



Native Gardens

Planting natives, rather than exotics, in ornamental gardens has many benefits. Native plants require less water, are more resilient and are cheaper to buy. They also tend to require minimal maintenance, so there is less work for the gardener. Perhaps the best part of starting a native garden is that it provides habitat and food for our unique Tasmanian wildlife.

Further information

Growing Vegetables South of Australia – Year 'Round Tasmanian Food Gardening.
By Steve Soloman

The Seed Savers Handbook
By Michel and Jude Fanton

Growing Australian Native Plants from Seed By Murray Ralph

Backyard Organic Gardening
http://home.vtown.com.au/~dbellamy/contents.html
Originating from Hobart, this is a grassroots e-source for information about the basics of backyard organic gardening.

ABC Gardening Australia
http://www.abc.net.au/gardening/

Garden for Wildlife
http://www.gardensforwildlife.dpiw.tas.gov.au
The 'Gardens for Wildlife' scheme supports, encourages and recognises people who wish to make their property friendly for local wildlife and the environment.

Permaculture Association of Tasmania
http://www.permaculturetas.org/
PAT organises public events, member meetings, field days, and workshops in order to share skills and knowledge.

Sustainable Living Tasmania - Environment Resource Library. 2nd floor, 191 Liverpool Street, Hobart. (03) 6234 5566.

Suppliers

The Lost Seed – www.thelostseed.com.au
Local seed and seedling suppliers specializing in heirloom, open pollinated, chemical-free and non hybrid varieties.

Woodbridge Fruit Trees –
PO Box 95, Woodbridge, 7162
www.woodbridgefruittrees.com.au
Growers of chemical-free, heirloom varieties of fruit and nut trees.

Plants of Tasmania Nursery - (03) 6239 1583
65 Hall Road, Ridgeway TAS 7054
Huge range of Tasmanian Native Plants.

Soil Health Services – (03) 6295 0605
Tests and improves soil for growing nutrient rich foods.

July 2008

*Tasmanian Planting Guide**

January
Beetroot, cauliflower, kale, Brussels sprouts, English spinach, lettuce (chill seed in fridge first), broccoli, carrots, Kohlrabi, spring onion, silverbeet, turnip, cabbage and late swede.

February
Cauliflower, winter radishes, lettuce, Asian roots, spinach, beetroot, broccoli, carrots, kale, cabbage, parsnip, silverbeet, leek and Chinese brassicas.

March
Spring onions, cabbage, cauliflower, corn salad, rocket, small salad radishes, lettuce, carrots, coriander, beetroot, mustard greens, leeks, endive/escarole, parsnip, Asian leaf and root vegetables, English spinach, broad beans, turnip and green manure crops.

April
Winter lettuce, corn salad, garlic cloves, late leeks, silverbeet, broccoli, Asian cabbages and root vegetables, tic beans, broad beans and green manure crops.

May
Continue sowing green manures like tic beans, broad beans, Shaftal clover and lupins. Also English spinach, Asian brassicas and root crops, spring and salad onions, shallots, chives and garlic cloves.

June
Asparagus crowns, early potatoes, rhubarb divisions, Jerusalem artichokes, globe artichoke suckers, potato onions, chives, shallots, long-keeping onions, broad beans, spinach and garlic cloves.

July
Asparagus crowns, early potatoes, shallots, potato onions, long-keeping, salad and spring onion as small seedlings, rhubarb divisions, Jerusalem and globe artichokes.

August
Seed potatoes, Jerusalem artichokes, shallots, peas, broad beans, turnips, swedes, Asian brassicas, English spinach and potato onions. Sturdy young seedlings of cabbage cauliflower, celery, broccoli, lettuce, onion and leek.

September
Potatoes, Jerusalem artichokes, globe artichokes, chives, rhubarb divisions, turnips, swede, mustard greens, broad beans, peas, lettuce, carrot, beetroots, kohlrabi, broccoli, spinach and small salad radishes.

Start seedlings of tomato, capsicum, zucchini, pumpkin, sweetcorn, cucumber, okra, melons and eggplant indoors.

October
Globe artichoke and chive divisions, early cabbages, broccoli, celery, parsley, parsley root, summer carrots, silverbeet, potatoes, beetroot, spring onions, leeks, lettuce, English spinach, radishes, parsnip, cauliflower, spring and salad onions, late peas, tomato, zucchini, pumpkin, squash, melons, runner beans, bush bean and French beans.

Plant seedlings of zucchini, pumpkins, cucumber, sweetcorn, melons, and tomatoes.

November/December
Lettuce, cabbages, broccoli, parsley and parsley root, silverbeet, beetroot, spring onions, leeks, English spinach, kohlrabi, celery, parsnip, Brussels sprouts, Asian brassicas, pumpkin, kale, sweetcorn, tomato, zucchini, summer carrots, cucumber, melons, French, bush and climbing beans.

Plant seedlings of zucchini, pumpkins, capsicum, eggplant, cucumber, sweetcorn, okra, melons, and tomatoes.

***This is simply a guide, planting dates may need to be adjusted to suit your specific location. Everything is directly seeded unless seedlings are specified.**

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