Planning Your Garden

Why plan?

- Better production of fruit and vegetables
- More efficient use of resources (cheaper too)
- Greater success and more satisfying

Get to know your Site

Understanding your site is the essential first step in planning a garden. Pay attention to:

- **Slope** of the land
- Prevailing **wind** direction and at what time of the year (eg easterlies in summer and very drying and hot)
- **Soil** type - sand, loam or clay
- Existing **plants** - shade provided and nutrient uptake, check neighbours plants that grow well
- **Rainfall** when and how much - Mandurah -Mediterranean climate
- Where is **North**? Shadows and hours of sunlight
- What permanent **structures** are near the garden - paths, driveways, house
- **Sun** – consider summer and winter sun/shade. Keep in mind that the position of the sun changes with the year. Plan for summer shade for vegetables (either natural or from structures).

Elements of a garden plan

Before planning your garden you'll want a list of the things you want in it.

- Ask yourself "What I want the garden to do?" This will suggest the elements you may want to include.
- Broadly speaking there might be:
    - Types of **plants**: e.g. veges, herbs, flowers, shrubs and trees (natives and exotics), fruit trees, vines, berries etc.
    - Areas for **users**: e.g. outdoor living areas, lawns, areas for pets, children's play areas etc. Think about who will use the garden and what they might need.
    - **Utility** areas: e.g. compost bins, worm farms, tool storage, potting/seeding area, seed/seedling raising area
    - **Features** e.g. a pond, statues, pathways etc.

- You will also want to consider how the garden will be **watered**. Where will the water come from? How will it get to the garden areas? See also "Zones" below…it makes sense to group plants with similar water needs together.
- **Shade** is also an important consideration. You may want to add a **shade structure** for delicate plants over summer (e.g. veges).
- Finally, if you are keeping **livestock**, such as chooks, then it is really worthwhile thinking about how they will fit into your plan right from the start.

Garden Zones

Broadly speaking there are two ways of thinking about zones in the garden:

- **Watering zones** – it makes sense to try and keep similar water need plants together. E.g. natives, lawns, fruit trees and veges all have different needs. Design reticulation and water supply accordingly with watering zones for different needs (e.g. natives need once a week, veges virtually everyday).

  You may also consider alternatives to mains or bore water e.g. rainwater collection or greywater use.

  It is generally easiest to install reticulation before any other work is undertaken.

- The other way of thinking about garden planning is to think about **how often you will want to visit, tend, harvest or otherwise use an area**. It makes sense to think about placing frequently used areas close to the house, and rarely used ones further away.

  This idea come from Permaculture, and, broadly speaking you could think about three zones:

  - Zone 1: Visited, used and/or tended regularly - Close to the house e.g. veges, herbs, lawns, living areas, most commonly used tools
  - Zone 2: Visited every few days – further from home e.g. compost bins, seeding/seedling area.
  - Zone 3: Only visited/used occasionally – furthest from the home. E.g. fruit trees, berries, bushy areas, lawn mower storage.

Garden bed options

Once you've decided on the layout of your garden, it is worth considering which sort of beds you want to use for different areas. Some options include:

- No edging - easiest as low to the ground and does not get too hot and no construction
- Edged beds – timber or bricks are most common. Try to use recycled materials and if using wood, then hardwood is better as it more resistant to white ants.
- Raised Beds - keeps out dogs and chooks. Can be made from a variety of materials.

- You could also consider your vertical spaces and think about “vertical gardening”.

Lawns

Lawns deserve a special mention. They use a great deal of water and don’t do too well here. When thinking about a lawn you might like to consider:

- Do you need lawn and if so how much? Consider pet and children's needs. Try to keep your lawn area to a minimum.
- Consider non-invasive varieties (the commonly used Couch grass is very invasive) and ones that suit our climate. “Empire Zoysia” is a newer variety that appears to be fairly non-invasive, has lower water needs and yet gives a nice thick lawn.
- If you are putting in a lawn: preparation is everything. You need a good rich soil base. It is worth finding an expert to help with this.
- Consider non-grass groundcovers for low/non traffic areas. A possible exotic species is Lippia (it’s OK, but still needs quite a bit of water) or natives (myoporum is pretty good, but doesn’t like full sun; while hemiandra pungens is an excellent, hardy local species, but is prickly.)

More information:

The position of the sun changes over the year. Just in case you want to know the numbers:

Season	**Sun’s position in horizontal plane (degrees to east/west from North)**	**Sun’s position in vertical plane (degrees above ground)**
Mid-summer	108	80
Equinox (March/September)	91	57
Mid-winter	75	34