

Native landscape a winner for new home

A foliage garden designed to suit its Colonial-style home



Designer Sue Torlach.

Having just built a Colonial-style double-storey home in Mosman Park, the owners decided the only authentic garden to grace the limestone, timber and tin of their new house would be a contemporary native landscape.

They asked designer Sue Torlach, of Wild About Gardens, to come up with a scheme which would not only complement the home but be environmentally sensitive.

With the owners, Sue chose indigenous plants for their foliage colours, shapes and textures rather than for their flowers, concentrating on species that thrive in the sandy coastal soil and don't mind a bit of a hammering from the Fremantle Doctor.

Greys, silvers, greens and some yellows form in soft, undulating clusters, visited by a variety of birds and insects.

Sue said she used a coarse chip mulch that allows water to penetrate the soil around the plants which, once established, never need watering or fertilising.

Fine gravel was spread on the winding pathways.

She explained that when planning a new garden she draws it on a scale of one to 100, pencilling in the biggest feature and screening plants first before adding the smallest plants, creating levels, layers and textures.

A yen for fresh vegetables drew Sue to gardening about 15 years ago when



A bee sits on a grevillea, a great carpeting plant that is good for verge colour instead of lawn.

she began growing her own eggplant, capsicum and tomatoes organically.

She then studied permaculture and horticulture before getting a job with Zanthorrea Nursery, where she still works part-time, and launching Wild About Gardens.

"In this garden, the owner loves the deep, refreshing green of *Grevillea crithmifolia*, a great carpeting plant that is good for verge colour instead of lawn," she said.

"The grey *Eremophila Kalbarri* Carpet looks lovely mixed in with the *crithmifolia*.

"To further the grey theme, local plants *Olearia axillaris* and *Leucophyta brownii* have been used, giving a sense of place.

"Grasstrees make striking feature plants and their spiky foliage is echoed in the knobby club rush, *Isolepis nodosa*.

"*Conostylis candicans* is a lovely tufting grey grassy plant which flowers

spectacularly in spring with masses of yellow button flowers. It is another local.

"The cooling green of *Acacia howittii* Honey Bun complements the greys of the other plants and is offset by the red-tinged growth of the *Agonis Nana*.

"The dwarf lilly pilly Bush Christmas has grown well and solved the dilemma of a narrow planting strip along the driveway as it can easily be pruned into shape.

"To give some screening from the road, two sheoaks have been planted on the boundary."

For the proud owners, who have already won a council award for their garden, all these plants add up to a hardy, reliable, water-wise and beautiful combination.

Contact Wild About Gardens on 9344 2585.

Off the shelf

Bonsai Secrets: Designing, growing and caring for your miniature masterpieces
Peter Chan (Reader's Digest, \$45)

British bonsai guru Peter Chan shares the secrets of this ancient oriental art gleaned over his 30 award-winning years refining the process. Starting with a clear explanation of what bonsai is, it is surprising for those not in the know to discover bonsai are simply miniature trees created from ordinary trees or shrubs. Where the secrets lie, however, is in the principles and techniques behind the successful creation of bonsai and Chan offers a practical step-by-step guide to producing a

fine example of one — without the mystique of its 1700-year history. Among the subjects covered are advice on the best bonsai to grow; tips and short cuts; growing and shaping secrets; advanced techniques; and troubleshooting and maintenance. The down-to-earth advice is accompanied by concise, easy-to-understand illustrations and delightful photographs. Beginners and experienced bonsai growers will find something of value.

Lesleyann Lingane



Natives are water-wise.