

Native grasses are a sustainable garden solution.

Earth First

By Peter West, ECCO

With conventional water supplies reaching critically low levels in Orange, and tighter water use restrictions soon to be imposed, what better reason is there for replacing your thirsty garden plants with water-wise native grasses and grass-like plants.

Many contemporary landscaped gardens now host native grasses and plants that have grass-like form, such as *Lomandra* species. The main reasons for this trend are because native grasses are extremely drought hardy and water-wise, require low levels of maintenance, are inexpensive, and can be spectacular in mass plantings or more formal rows.

Native grasses and grass-like plants are also quick to establish, and once established have very low ongoing water requirements. While most produce modest flowers, others produce spectacular flowers such as native iris (*Patersonia occidentalis*).

You don't need a contemporary garden design to benefit from native grasses. As there are an increasing number and variety of ornamental native grasses on the market, there are options for nearly all garden styles.

Benefits of native grasses

- water-wise and drought hardy
- rarely require additional water once established
- frost tolerant and resilient
- easy to grow and low maintenance
- look great in mass plantings
- have low nutrient requirements
- most can tolerate a wide range of soil conditions
- provide habitat for biodiversity, including frogs, butterflies, dragonflies and skinks.

Like many plants, native grasses look best in mass plantings – providing a more natural appearance. Some native grasses dry off towards late summer, and benefit from winter pruning to allow spring growth to emerge. Others remain green and vibrant all year round, and are long lasting.

There are a wide range of grasses, grass cultivars and grass-like plants available from reputable nurseries.

Common varieties include:

Poa labillardiere, *Poa sieberiana*, Wallaby grass (*Danthonia* species), Kangaroo grass (*Themada triandra*), *Carex appressa*, *Lomandra longifolia*, *Lomandra tanika*, Spear grass, Plume grass, *Stipa* species, Native Iris (*Patersonia occidenatalis*), or *Dianella* species.

Planting suggestions:

- plant en masse or in formal arrangements/rows
- plant native grasses along the nature strip
- replace thirsty lawns with native grasses
- use as a border for driveways or pathways
- ideal for stabilising sloping soil
- plant in pots/tubs for effect

Avoid the need to regularly water your garden by planting native grasses and grass-like plants. For further information, consult you local nursery, or read about native grasses in many gardening magazines or websites.

Sustainable tip for the week

If establishing a water-wise native garden, plant species that are local to the region – They have evolved here and are well-adapted to local conditions.

Future events

ECCO General Meeting, ELF building Orange Showground Wednesday 27 January
730pm.