



TJs Gardening Works

Thyme to Bloom!

Drought Tolerant Gardening Guide

"Stop for a moment to appreciate the simple things—the little bee, his legs covered in pollen, and the single lonely bloom when all else struggles to survive. That's where the true magic is."

– Tammy

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✨ Drought Tolerant Gardening Guide

Hi fellow garden lovers, my name is Tammy Johnson, self-professed 'plantie' and horticulturist in the Limestone Coast SA.

I've lived in the region for 25 years now and have grown to love and have a passionate respect and understanding for what works and what doesn't with the soil bio-diversities and climate challenges here in our region.

*Over the years, with some trial and error, I've built up a go-to list of favourite plants, tried, tested, and tough, that thrive in our region. I've also learned a few simple ideas and basic principles that make gardening more rewarding (and more sustainable) that I'd love to share with you to help **you** create the beautiful, sustainable garden you've always dreamed of.*



✨ The Principles of Drought-Tolerant Gardening

The principles of drought tolerant gardening are about making smart, sustainable choices to make your garden more resilient (and still absolutely beautiful). Just like us, gardens thrive when they have access to essentials, nourishment, water, and protection."

1. Soil nutrition is the number one priority.

Healthy soil acts like a sponge holding moisture, feeding plants, and creating resilience.

- *Add compost, mulch and organic matter regularly to feed your soil.*
- *Avoid tilling where possible, embrace the "do not disturb" idea. Leave microorganisms and soil critters to do their thing.*
- *Top regularly with mulch to lock in moisture.*

2. Mulch: It's Not Optional, mulching isn't a luxury, it's essential.

Not only does it suppress weeds and look tidy, but it also:

- *Feeds the soil as it breaks down.*
- *Helps regulate soil temperature.*
- *Keeps the soil cooler and moister for longer.*



3. Water deeply not daily.

Drip systems, wicking beds, and olla pots target the roots where water it's needed building resilience.

✨ The Principles of Drought-Tolerant Gardening

4. Shelter and protection.

Create microclimates by planting trees, shrubs, or hedges.

- *Windbreaks help protect delicate plants.*
- *Shade reduces moisture loss.*
- *Strategic planting can make a world of difference in keeping your garden cool, calm, and collected.*

5. Right plant, right place.

Let your garden's natural conditions guide your choices. Pick plants that thrive in your sun and shade zones, and group those with similar water needs to keep things simple and stress-free. Look to see what's growing in other gardens in and around your town, this in itself will give you an idea of what grows well in your climate.

6. Let go of perfection.

Drought tolerant gardens may not be lush all year round, but they are full of texture, colour, and beauty.

💬 From Tammy's Garden:

In the tail end of summer when the heat was relentless, I kept saucers and trays beneath my container plants. They could take up water as they needed it and stayed cooler longer.

I even sat small plants in and around the base of bigger ones, a perfect example of a microclimate.



Watering Methods

Watering Methods

1. Water deeply, not often. Shallow watering encourages shallow roots. Watering deeply trains plants roots to reach down deep where the soil stays moist, all the while building resilience.
2. Drip irrigation & soaker hoses target water right at the roots where it counts. They save water and reduce evaporation, are easy to automate with timers, and are great for veggie beds and borders.
3. Wicking beds are self-watering beds that draw moisture up from below as required. (A zero-waste watering method). Perfect for raised beds or busy gardeners. Use a reservoir layer of scoria or gravel, include a slotted fill pipe and an overflow outlet, cover with a geotextile fabric, then backfill with your soil and plant away!

HOW TO BUILD A WICKING BED



1. Use a raised garden bed



2. Line with plastic



3. Add a layer of gravel



4. Place a slotted pipe



5. Cover with geotextile fabric

6. Fill with soil and plant 

Watering Methods

4. Olla Pots (Buried Clay Waterers)

✨ How to Set One Up:

- Use an unglazed terracotta pot with the hole sealed.
- Bury it so the rim of the pot is above soil level.
- Fill with water and cover with a lid or tile.
- Surround with your plants and let them drink as they need.



(Have a go at setting up some olla pots throughout your garden, they might just be a total game changer!)

5. Time your watering. Early morning is best.

Avoid watering in full sun, windy conditions or at night to prevent moisture loss and fungal diseases.

☺ **From Tammy's Garden:** "I give my fruit trees a good thorough soak once a week and maintain a thick layer of Neutro Who Flung Dung organic fertiliser/mulch around the base.

Bonus tip: As my fruit trees are all in large containers and the blackbirds love flicking the mulch out, I've also placed a liner of coconut fibre inside the top of each pot, preserving my mulch AND preserving my moisture further!"

(So cute watching the little blue wrens pull fibres to make their nests too 🐦)

My Drought Hardy Plant Recommendations

Silver Foliage Favourites

Pigs Ears (*Cotyledon orbiculata*): Striking succulent with large, waxy, silver white leaves potentially reaching 1m x 1m in height and width. A perfect plant for a standout contrast of colour in garden beds or rockeries.



Absolute Fav: Silver Bush (*Convolvulus cneorum*): Award winning, standout performer. A dense, bushy, shrub, masses of white flowers throughout the warmer months. Reaches 60cm tall x 1.5m wide. Perfect for borders, edges, mass displays, containers and pots.

Lamb's Ears (*Stachys byzantina*): Quirky little ground cover known for its velvety, soft, leaves, truly resembling lambs' ears. Reaches approx 30-50cm tall by upto 1m wide. Makes for a lovely mass planted filler.



Liquorice Plant (*Helichrysum petiolare*): fantastic little spreading ground cover that grows to around 50cm tall by 1.5 meters wide. Silvery white foliage complimented by dainty white flowers in the warmer months.





My Drought Hardy Plant Recommendations

Australian Native Favourites

Kangaroo Paw (*Anigozanthos*): Bird-attracting, strappy foliage. An array of beautiful colours available. Accent landscape feature plant.



Emu Bush (*Eremophila* spp.): Kalbarri Carpet An award winning, hardy Australian native ground cover, 30-40cm tall by 2m wide. Thrives in the dry.



Cushion Bush (*Leucophyta brownii*): Silvery white, fine needle like, hairy foliage. 30cm to 90cm in height and width. Coastal and drought tolerant, thrives in sandy free draining soils.



Callistemon 'Kings Park Special': Striking red bottlebrush with graceful weeping foliage and a profusion of flowers. Approx 4m tall by 2m wide. Favourite of the birds and bees.





My Drought Hardy Plant Recommendations

Australian Native Favourites

Grey Edge Saltbush (*Rhagodia Parabolica*): grows to aprox 1-2 m tall and wide. Popular in landscaping for its appealing foliage and form. perfect for soil stabilization in coastal or erosion-prone areas.

Native Coastal Rosemary (*Westringia*): a large variety of cultivars available from ground covers to tall hedges. Smokey is a lovely, variegated form with dainty white flowers from Spring. Dense, bushy & compact, it grows to 1 to 1.5m tall and wide.

***Corymbia Ficifolia* (formally *Eucalyptus Ficifolia*):** Red Flowering Gums reach upto 15m tall by 10m wide. Attractive to birds and bees, and easy to please. Happy in a well-drained sandy to sandy loam soil.

Australian Native grass tree (*Xanthorrhoea*): slow growing but worth the wait. Thrives in poor, dry sandy soil. Some species can reach upto 6m in height. Stunning feature plant in a native garden.



My Drought Hardy Plant Recommendations

Grasses, Groundcovers & Gap Fillers

Silver Falls (*Dichondra Argentina*): popular cascading creeper for spilling out over pots, rockeries and retaining walls.



Lomandra longifolia: strappy, lime green ornamental grass. Forms a dense clump upto 1m tall. Drought and disease resistant.

Blue Fescue (*Festuca Glauca*): Compact and cool-toned. Native Tussock Grass. 30-40cm tall, looks amazing mass planted for borders.



Creeping Boobialla (*Myoporum parvifolium*): extremely hardy sprawling groundcover. 10cm tall by 1.5m wide, dainty white flowers over the warmer months.



My Drought Hardy Plant Recommendations

If you're still stuck for ideas, look for some of these.

Perennials

1. *Lavandula angustifolia* (English Lavender)
2. *Salvia greggii* or *Salvia microphylla*
3. *Santolina chamaecyparissus* (Lavender Cotton)
4. *Echium candicans* (Pride of Madeira)
5. *Erysimum* (Wallflower)
6. *Bracteantha* (Everlasting or paper daisies)
7. *Scenecio cineraria* (Dusty Miller or Silver Ragwort)



Grasses & Groundcovers

1. *Thymus serpyllum* (Creeping Thyme)
2. *Dichondra repens* (Kidney Weed)
3. *Poa Labillardierei* (Tussock Grass)
4. *Pycnosorus globosus* (Billy Buttons)
5. *Dianella Revoluta* (Little Rev)

Cacti & Succulents

1. *Sedum Hylotelephium spectabile* (Autumn Joy)
2. *Agave spp. Attenuata*
3. *Dracaena* (Dragon tree)
4. Cacti- Many varieties
5. *Senecio Serpens* (Blue Chalksticks)



Design Ideas for Dry Gardens



Designing a drought tolerant garden doesn't mean you have to sacrifice beauty. In fact, limitations often spark the most creative gardens!

1. Play with contrasting colours and textures of foliage. Think cool silvery tones, blue-greens, and deep olive. Backdrop vertical, strappy grasses with large, smooth, fleshy succulents.

Grasses soften a space, adding movement and a sense of calm. Try using Poas, Lomandras, Carex, or Blue Fescue.

2. Utilise natural materials. Crushed limestone looks amazing for paths, while large rocks or hollow logs laying naturally in amongst plants adds that feel of 'as it would be out in nature'.

Hardscaping reduces watering needs while adding character and charm.

3. Consider including meandering garden paths that lead to a quiet nook or resting place. A garden path can also add a sense of mystery and curiosity inviting you in.

4. Dry riverbeds, water features, a pond, or a fire pit area are all opportunities to add a focal point of interest.



Design Ideas for Dry Gardens

5. Raised Mounds & Contour Planting.

Use gentle mounding to create variation in height and improve drainage. Raised zones are perfect for showcasing structural plants like yuccas or agaves, while the dips can cradle moisture-loving but still hardy species like native violets or pigface. Adding shape to the terrain can bring a nice ebb and flow appeal.

6. Feature a Statement Pot or Sculpture.

A large, weathered pot, a rusty metal sculpture, or a quirky upcycled feature piece can anchor a space and bring personality without requiring water.

Place them in gravel beds or nestle them among hardy plants like sedums and kangaroo paws.

7. Repetition for Rhythm.

Repeating small groupings of the same plants like rosemary, echium, or westringia gives a sense of simplicity, calm, cohesion and rhythm as the eye moves through the garden. Think 'Less is more'.



Gardening Through the Seasons

Just like us, our gardens move through cycles, times to grow, rest, reset, and re-energise. Autumn's a perfect time for planting and feeding the soil. The intensity of summer is done but there's still warmth in the soil. Winters rest period is ideal for pruning, lifting and dividing, and planning for the season ahead. Spring brings fresh energy and colour! A time for feeding, planting for Christmas cheer and prepping for the heat. And Summer? Summer is about protection and survival.

This section gives you a seasonal run-through of practical jobs that'll keep your garden thriving, no matter the weather.

Autumn

- Best time to plant perennials, natives, and trees.
- Sow cool-season annuals like sweetpeas, stocks, and pansies.
- In the veg patch: plant silverbeet, peas, beans, and brassicas.
- Feed soil with compost and mulch before winter.

Winter

- Prune dormant fruit trees and roses.
- Plan your garden design or upgrades.
- Divide clumping perennials and grasses.
- Let rain do the watering check for drainage issues.



Tip: Winters' when I love to top up my mulch and compost. It's a quiet time, but the soils still working!



Gardening Through the Seasons

Spring

- Time to plant! Herbs, flowers, veggies.... go wild.
- Watch out for sneaky warm winds that dry things fast.
- Start slow-release fertilising and liquid feeding.
- Refresh mulch as needed.

Summer

- Water early morning or late evening.
- Cluster pots for shared shade and microclimate.
- Look after your soil its your biggest water bank.
- Keep compost damp and protected.

Celebrate the resilience of your toughies-succulents, saltbushes and grasses will shine.

No matter the season, there's always something you can do to give your garden a helping hand. It's not about perfection, it's about paying attention, working with the weather, and celebrating the wins (like that hardy succulent still shining in summer!). By staying in rhythm with the seasons, you'll build a garden that not only survives, but thrives! Resilient, beautiful, and full of life all year round.

Bonus Checklist

Soil Health

- ☐ Add compost and organic matter regularly
- ☐ Avoid disturbing soil—let the microbes do their thing
- ☐ Top up mulch to lock in moisture and feed the soil

Plant Selection

- ☐ Choose tough, drought-hardy plants suited to your climate
- ☐ Group plants with similar water needs
- ☐ Include natives, succulents, grasses, and saltbushes

Water Wisely

- ☐ Water deeply, not daily
- ☐ Install drip irrigation, wicking beds, or olla pots
- ☐ Water early morning or late evening

Smart Design

- ☐ Create windbreaks and shade using trees or hedges
- ☐ Use gravel paths, rocks, and natural materials for hardscaping
- ☐ Design for microclimates and efficient use of water

Seasonal Care

- ☐ Autumn: Plant perennials, feed the soil
- ☐ Winter: Prune, plan, top up mulch
- ☐ Spring: Plant, fertilise, refresh mulch
- ☐ Summer: Cluster pots, protect soil, water mindfully





My Website Links

- [Spring Beginners Guide to Creating a Landscape Design for Your New Home](#)
- [Adapting to Drought Tolerant Gardening: Thriving in the Dry.](#)
- [Composting - the Beginners Guide!](#)
- [12 of the best Silver Grey foliage plants](#)
- [Micro-Climate-How to Create a Garden, Within Your Garden.](#)
- [How to save water in the garden](#)
- [Container Gardening.](#)
- [Plants going yellow? here's why](#)