



Plants for a Dry Garden

Melissa King 26/02/10

The world of dry-tolerant plants goes well beyond cacti and succulents. There are thousands of plants adapted by nature to thrive in the driest conditions. Look to dry climates around the world for inspiration - the Mediterranean, Canary Islands, the Americas, Africa and of course Australia.

The Water Conservation Garden at the Royal Melbourne Botanic Gardens is proof that a water wise garden shouldn't be dull or boring! This garden doesn't get any additional water; it thrives on natural rainfall.

Here are some of the stand out plants:

Sedum 'Autumn Joy'

- It has clusters of little star-like flowers from February to April.
- The flowers change colour from pink to red to lovely bronze colour in autumn.
- The dried seed heads are really very attractive too, so don't be too keen to dead head your plants.
- It has succulent green leaves and a compact form to around 70 cm tall.
- When many plants in the summer border have finished this little plant is still very showy, so it's a great choice for late perennial colour.

Miscanthus 'Grasillimus'

- It's an attractive clumping grass that brings height and architectural drama to the garden.
- It grows to 1.5 metres tall with beautiful arching foliage
- The feathery summer flowers dry off and hang on the plant right through winter

Kangaroo Paws

- They are iconic Australian plants which bring a strong sense of Australian style to the garden.
- Kangaroo paws grow naturally in Western Australia
- They put on a show stopping display with spikes of kangaroo paw shaped flowers through spring and summer.
- Once established you can get away with watering them very little.
- The look superb on mass and make stunning cut flowers. They have the added bonus of attracting birds to the garden.
- In the wild kangaroo paws experience warm temperatures with very dry summers and cool, moist winters. They grow best in areas which mimic these conditions. They enjoy a sunny, well-drained position.
- Prune plants in late summer (after the main flowering) to promote masses of flowers the following spring. Don't be afraid to cut them back hard.

Dragon's Blood Tree (*Dracaena draco*)

- It comes from the Island of Tenerife in the Canary Islands.
- It's a hardy tree and can live for well over 400 years. When mature its form resembles an inside out umbrella.

- It's called Dragon's Blood Tree, because when it's wounded, the tree oozes a deep red sap that looks like blood.
- It enjoys full sun and good drainage and thrives on very little water.
- It's an ancient tree and very Jurassic looking with sword like grey-green foliage, a striking trunk and spikes of creamy-white flowers in spring followed by orange berries.
- It's very slow growing, but in the wild it can get up to 10 metres tall over a long time.

Yellow Buttons or Common Everlasting (*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*)

- In the wild it grows in a diverse range of environments in all States and Territories in Australia.
- It makes a lovely groundcover up to about 60 cm tall. Space plants 60 or so cm apart to form a nice compact mat.
- The leaves are covered in fine silky hairs, which make the foliage appear grey-green.
- Prefers an open sunny position. If it's grown in dappled light tends to be more open in habit.
- Little golden yellow daisy like flowers (look like compact little balls) generally during spring and summer - this one is still in full flower!

Blue Euphorbia or Silver Spurge (*Euphorbia rigida*)

- It can be found growing wild in the Mediterranean.
- It has narrow, sharply pointed steely blue leaves and an attractive sculptural form. The leaves can take on a burgundy tinge in the cooler weather.
- It does have a showy yellow flower from early spring to summer. This one has finished blooming but you can see how attractive it is even out of flower.
- It enjoys light, well-drained soil and full sun

Water Wise Tips

- A good layer of mulch can help to reduce water evaporation from the soil surface by up to 70%. It also helps to suppress weeds and improve the look of your garden!
- From a design point of view plants can be grouped according to their watering needs to help you to water more efficiently.
- We are coming into autumn now, which is the perfect season for planting. Getting plants in the ground in autumn gives them plenty of time to establish before summer hits again.
- Apply a seaweed based plant tonic fortnightly to help plants to more easily cope with stresses like heat and drought.