

*sub*Tropical Gardening

and landscaping in warm climates



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Your climate, your garden



Palms such as the popular *Carpentaria acuminata* are a feature of the subtropical skyline at Airlie Beach, Whitsunday.

Like many subtropical gardeners, I'm an ex-southerner and had to relearn and adapt the practices, techniques and plants that I had learnt in a temperate climate. I was lucky to meet up with some professional horticulturists and top gardeners shortly after arriving and got some good guidance before I otherwise spent a lot of time, money and energy in the wrong direction.

I know that many other gardeners have not been so lucky and therefore this article aims to pass on some of the information that has helped me.

Due to its size, Australia has many different climate zones. Most publishing houses, production companies, authors and presenters are based in Melbourne or Sydney and as expected, much of the material they produce relates to the temperate zone, which makes up less than 7% of Australia.

A guide to the locations of the climate zones in Australia is found on the Climate Classification of Australia based on Koeppen, on the Bureau of Meteorology Website:

[www.bom.gov.au/climate/
environ/other/kpnggrp.gif](http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/environ/other/kpnggrp.gif)



Clockwise from Top Left – *Alcantarea Orthophytum*, 'Galactic Warrior' bromeliad, *Phalaenopsis* orchid, Bright yellow Frangipani, Croton and *Cordyline* mix, Plants for a water feature, Croton, Perfumed blue water lily, *Phalaenopsis* orchid.



Tropical colour with bromeliads



Paul Hoffmann

MAIH – Brisbane
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Ananas bracteatus 'Tricolor', an exotic large clumping pineapple with variegated green and white foliage and full size pinkish pineapple is an exciting addition to any garden.

They're bright, bold and bizarre. These exciting plants instantly add a touch of the tropics to any garden.

Bromeliads conjure up images of out of this world colour, weird shapes and wild looking flowers, which fascinate both collectors and gardeners worldwide.

The Bromeliad family of over 3000 species and 56 genera, is native to the sub arctic, temperate, subtropical and tropical parts of North and South America and one species *Pitcairnia feliciana* managed to find its way to western Africa. This popular family is growing all the time as a result of breeders from Australia and overseas creating new hybrids and collectors sourcing new species.

The Pineapple (*Ananus comosus*) is the best known species of Bromeliad and was brought to Europe by Christopher Columbus over 500 year ago. The Bromeliad also has links to the Aztec, Inca and prehistoric civilisations.

Exotic names like *Aechmea*, *Guzmania*, *Neoregelia*, *Vriesea* and *Tillandsia* add to people's fascination for these exquisite plants.

Warm climate plants in Sydney?



Helen Curran

MAIH – Sydney
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Growing warm climate plants in Sydney is possible and relatively easy with the creation of a microclimate.

Even in Sydney's western suburbs where the temperature plummets to below zero in winter and soars into the low to mid 40's in summer you can still create a wonderful tropical paradise.

'Tropical gardens' by their design consist of layers of foliage and this layering of foliage is an integral part of the microclimate as each layer adds protection for the layers below it. It is this layering of the foliage that helps keep plants cooler in summer and warmer in winter.

When creating the microclimate, the canopy is the most important. It is an essential element as it is

also the starting point. Warm climate trees or taller solitary palms are ideal for creating the canopy.

Palms or trees should be scattered unevenly around the garden, in some areas more closely together to create shadier areas and in other areas more widely spaced to allow filtered sunlight through. This creates areas within the garden to cater for plants with different light requirements. Taller bamboos can also be added to the canopy to provide windbreaks.

The second layer is best described as a wind barrier protecting plants from the side plus added shade protection for the tender understorey plants. This layer may consist of clumping palms, taller shrubs or medium clumping bamboos mostly planted randomly throughout the garden.

2nd layer plants:

Acalypha wilksiana cultivars

Cordyline fruticosa cultivars

Ctenanthe species

Heliconia species and cultivars

Palms: Alexander, Gold Cane and Cascade.

Images this page:

Tropical Breeze, Seven Hills – Photos by Helen Curran.



Ginger Group

Hedychium

Family: ZINGIBERACEAE

These are tropical, subtropical and temperate herbaceous plants with rhizomes that grow on trees or in the ground. They are commonly referred to as ginger lilies.

Hedychiums are easy to grow in most gardens provided moisture and dappled light is maintained. They grow well in sheltered locations in warm temperate gardens yet can tolerate more exposed sites in the tropics. Full sun can be tolerated provided ample moisture is present. They prefer to have a dry season during their dormant period – winter.

Some species are very hard and continue to grow when dumped in waste areas or bushland. **DO NOT DUMP GARDEN PLANTS.**

Plants have an erect pseudostem from which the terminal cylindrical inflorescence appears. This sheath of leaf bases can grow up to 3m depending on species and support from nearby plants. Leaves are usually a lush deep green.

Flowers are highly decorative and fragrant making them ideal for a scented garden.

To keep the plant looking its best, cut the plants down to ground level following flowering and freshly mulch the soil.

Species worth considering for the garden:



Hedychium coccineum

Scarlet Ginger Lily

Pale orange to deep scarlet tubular flowers. This plant can reach up to 2m high.



Image: Courtesy Bruce Dunstan

Hedychium coronarium

Butterfly Ginger or Garland Flower

Highly ornamental and neat ginger favoured by landscapers. A highly scented white flower with a delicate yellow-green throat makes them ideal for Hawaiian leis. Flowers have a slight nodding habit.



Hedychium gardnerianum

Kahili Ginger

Decorative ginger with yellow to tangerine orange flowers. Fruiting body is also attractive bright orange. This species comes from higher altitude so it enjoys slightly cooler condition than the other species listed.