

INSPIRE! For all tropical, subtropical and warm climate gardens

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ISSUE 14  
QUARTERLY

# subTropical Gardening

and landscaping in warm climates

**local advice for  
local gardeners**



■ **CONTEMPORARY**  
– Queenslander garden



■ **COLOUR**  
– white

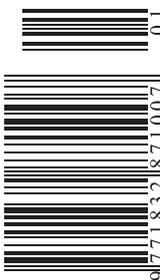


■ **SENSATIONAL**  
– salvias and curcumas



■ **SCENTED PLANTS**  
– flowers and leaves

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# Curcuma Magic

Versatility is what Steve Popple likes most about curcumas with their range of colours, funky foliage, suitability for mass planting, potted colour or under planting in areas of intense root competition...

**C**urcumas are a group of plants that have in recent years moved out from the realm of hard-core plant collectors to become invaluable accent plants in the garden during the warmer months.

Curcumas are subtropical to tropical perennials that appear at the onset of the first rains and die down over the drier cooler months. This has the benefit of making them a water wise addition to any garden. Curcumas are typically purchased as flowering plants with the first plants appearing in garden centres in November with plants remaining on sale until autumn.

One of the best known of the ornamental species is *Curcuma australasica* which is a native of Cape York in Queensland and across into the Top End of the Northern Territory. These plants are typically found on the moist

margins of monsoon rainforest patches and the first heavy rains in November see the plants push their leaves up through the leaf litter with flowers occurring en masse before the leaves have fully expanded. Individual plants will continue to flower through the Wet Season.

The onset of the dry season sees the plants die down with only withered leaves marking their presence. Unfortunately feral pigs have discovered the culinary delights of curcumas and can cause significant damage to native populations of this plant.

In the garden pigs are less of a worry and curcumas are happy in a variety of situations from dappled light to quite heavy shade. Curcuma leaves are attractive in their own right and even in the absence of flowers they provide an attractive addition to the garden.

**01** Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*) – a staple throughout Asia for its roots, is used for seasoning, colour and leaves used for wrapping food when cooking.



*Curcuma australasica* – Native to Cape York in Queensland across into the Top End of the Northern Territory. The onset of the early storms in November can transform suitable areas into a carpet of flowers. Visit Litchfield National Park south of Darwin to see these plants in flower.



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WHITE...  
IS FOR INNOCENCE



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15. *Leptospermum polygalifolium* 'Cardwell' – weeping habit plant to 2m. Covered in flowers during late spring and summer. Full sun and adaptable to most soils. Native.

16. Snow in Summer (*Melaleuca linariifolia*) – tree to 10m. Fluffy white blooms in spring and summer. Full sun and adapted to most soils. Native.

17. White Mussaenda (*Mussaenda frondosa*) – shrub to 2m with small yellow flowers and distinctive large white bracts during warm months. Prefers full sun, well drained soils and regular moisture during warm season.

18. White Lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*) – aquatic plant. Grown in a pond or large pot of water. The flowers appear over summer. The plant dies down over winter.

19. White Oleander (*Nerium oleander* 'Album') – shrub to 3m with scented white blooms. Full sun and adapted to a wide range of soils and drought conditions.

20. Cat's Whiskers (*Orthosiphon aristatus* 'Albus') – herbaceous plant to 50cm. Flowering throughout the warmer months. Part shade and moist, organically enriched soils. Native.

21. Bridal Bush (*Pavetta natalensis*) – shrub to 3m. Deep green leaves. Flowers in summer. Great screening plant. Full sun and moist soil preferred.

22. Egyptian Star-Cluster (*Pentas coccinea* 'Alba') – short-lived shrub to 1m with brittle stems and soft leaves. Flowers in warmer months. Full sun to part shade and fertile soil.

23. Peruvian Daffodil (*Ismene narcissiflora* syn. *Hymenocallis narcissiflora*) – deciduous bulbous plant. White spidery flowers produced over the summer months. Full sun to part shade. Moist fertile soil appreciated. Tolerant of drought once plant is established.

A close-up photograph of a pink tree dahlia flower. The petals are a vibrant pink color with prominent, darker pink veins running through them. The center of the flower is a dense cluster of bright yellow stamens. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue, suggesting a clear sky.

# TREE DAHLIA

# TRANSFORMING WITH TURF

Have you ever wondered what happens when you order turf fully installed? **Cynthia Carson** spent a day at a job site and watched the process of changing a run-down backyard that harboured unwanted vermin into an attractive usable space.



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## STEP 1

The site started off as a mixed grasses and weeds that occupied the backyard.

## STEP 2

In preparation, the whole backyard was sprayed with glyphosate. This is best done 10 to 14 days in advance of laying.

## STEP 3

At 7:20 am on the day of the transformation an all-terrain mini-loader commences work.

The dead grasses and weeds along with their roots are scraped away.



03

# GARDEN CALENDAR FEB/MAR/APR

By Arno King

01

01 : Protect yourself from sun damage.

**F**ebbruary, March and April are some of the best months for gardening in warm climates. After months of warm weather and continuous rain, the gardens are lush and green and bursting with growth.

As the weather cools visit some Open Gardens to be inspired. Take notes and photos of elements you like and consider how they might be incorporated in your own garden. This season is very popular with gardeners and some of the best Open Gardens vie to open in these prime months.

## General Overview Slip slop slap

Days are still warm and many gardeners spend the early morning and late afternoon in the garden, retiring to the house or shadehouse during the middle of the day. Ultraviolet light is still at high levels so ensure you are well covered with hat, sunscreen and long sleeves. Cloudy cool days can be deceptive – don't be caught with sunburn.

## Time to plan

When days are too hot to work in the garden, take time to do some planning. Cool climate gardeners have months off from the garden during winter in which to plan, scan catalogues and the internet, read books and do designs for their garden.

This 'down time' is often lacking in warm climates so catch up with some garden planning on the hottest summer days.

As in all parts of life, a little bit of planning goes a long way. This is nowhere more relevant than in

our gardens – do a scaled plan of the garden (1:100 or 1: 50 is very useful) or upgrade existing plan; make a list of projects to do over the next season; make a list of plants you want to feature in the garden and where they might go; assess which plants are working and which aren't and be strong, remove and replace; run through photos and notes made on garden visits and plan how these might be incorporated in your own garden; and consult with garden and landscape professionals.

## Planting

While plants with origins in the tropics and subtropics will thrive, plants from cooler climates may find conditions very difficult. This is particularly true of plants from Mediterranean climates which go into dormancy during the long dry summers of their native lands.

They are particularly susceptible to root rots. Overnight, seemingly healthy plants such as Lavender or Rosemary can turn up their 'toes' and die.