

Choose Water Wise plants

There are many beautiful plants which are naturally drought resistant and require little watering once established

Water Wise gardens focus on plant varieties that thrive with little water. However, no plant is 'wrong' in a Water Wise garden – it just needs to be in the right zone to use water most efficiently. You can select exotic as well as indigenous plants, as long as you plant them in the appropriate zone.

Recognising Water Wise plants

All Water Wise plants have certain characteristics that make them water efficient. By knowing these characteristics, you will be able to

make a well informed decision as to whether a particular plant is suitable for the low water zone in your garden. Watch out for the following characteristics:

- **Small or needle-like leaves.** This minimises the surface area from which water is lost by evaporation. Examples are ericas, most acacias, rosemary, origanum and thyme.
- **Reduced number of leaves.** Some plants reduce moisture loss by dispensing with leaves altogether, or shedding their leaves during drought periods. Examples of the latter are



the karee tree, acacias and buffalo thorn.

- **Grey foliage.** The light colour reflects the sun's rays away from the plant, thereby keeping it cooler, which in turn reduces water loss. Examples are lavender, artemesia, arctotis and giant honey flower (*Melianthus major*).
- **Hairy leaves.** Hairs slow down air movement past the stomata, thereby reducing water loss. Examples are the silver tree (*Leucadendron argenteum*), lamb's ear, beach salvia and helichrysum.
- **Succulent leaves.** Water is stored in thick fleshy leaves to be available when necessary. Examples are crassulas, aloes, echevarias and vygies.
- **Closing leaves.** The leaves of some plants close when they are water stressed. This reduces the amount of leaf exposed to sunlight and reduces water loss. Examples are acacias, Jerusalem sage (*Phlomis fruticosa*) and rock rose.
- **Waxy leaves.** A waxy coating helps to prevent moisture loss. Examples are euonymus, kalanchoe and Indian hawthorn.
- **Plants with lighter colours on the undersides of their leaves.** When stressed, they turn the lighter side upwards to reflect the sun away. Examples are wild olive tree, gazanias and indigenous buddlejas.
- **Sturdy internal structures.** Water Wise plants have a strong internal skeleton which supports the leaf and prevents wilting during dry spells. Examples are strelitzia, restios, agaves and New Zealand flax.
- **Volatile oils in the stomata.** This is common in plants from the Mediterranean, which has hot dry summers, and is extra protection against water loss. Often the oils are scented. Examples are rosemary, lavender and sage. *



Echeverias have succulent grey foliage.



Lavender has needle-like leaves, grey foliage and volatile oils.

Plant selection