

Where the lizards lounge and trees sing

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Forty years ago, when Lynda and Bill Woodhams bought a block of land in the new subdivision of Hamersley in Perth's rapidly expanding northern suburbs, the immaculate lush green front lawn was king.

Neighbours would swap stories about what sort of grass to plant, their secret to keeping it looking like a bowling green, the best fertiliser to use and when to embark on that mysterious Western Australian ritual of 'top-dressing'.

But Lynda had a different view.

'We had just come through a drought with severe water restrictions. Perth is a dry place and I didn't like the idea of pouring lots of precious water on a lawn,' she says.

'From the beginning I planned a native garden for the entire front yard, though we started with a little bit of lawn on the verge.

'The first natives I planted were callistemons and grevilleas. *Grevillea* 'Robyn Gordon' was really popular, and I planted five callistemon trees around the house. When in flower they sing with buzzing bees. I also planted several of my favourite tree, the Silver Princess, *Eucalyptus caesia*, but there is only one left.

'One of the original trees I planted was an Illyarrie, *Eucalyptus erythrocorys*. It grew to about ten metres and was covered in flowers every year but sadly was uprooted in a storm earlier this year.

'The garden developed quite slowly while I was working but once I retired from teaching, I started going to Friends of Kings Park native plant sales and buying dozens of plants. We soon got rid of the grass verge to make way for more plants and now it's all garden right down to the road.'

Linda credits the Friends plant sales for expanding her knowledge of Western Australian native plants and the helpful advice from the Growing Friends for ensuring her garden continues to flourish.

'I still buy lots of plants each sale and I am still learning how to care for them as different species have different needs,' Linda said.

As well as the all-important plants the front garden also incorporates a specially designed lizard lounge and a watering point for the birds which visit.



Lynda Woodhams in her front garden. Photo: Chris Olney



The Woodhams' front yard is bird and lizard friendly. Photo: Lynda Woodhams



Lynda and Bill's garden is like of chocolate box full of Western Australian native plants. Photo: Lynda Woodhams

In a street that is still mainly lawns in various states of disrepair, the Woodhams' garden is hard to miss. It is reminiscent of the magnificent entrance to the Western Australian Botanic Garden which offers a tasting plate of WA flora.

'I try to grow plants that have interesting flower formations and colour so that people walking past my house may be encouraged to grow them too,' Lynda said.

'I am not into symmetry with rows of plants that are all the same. Our garden is like a chocolate box with lots of different Western Australian species. I am always planting new plants. I don't mind if they die, at least they have given me joy in the time they survived.'

Lynda's garden has not gone unnoticed. Neighbours call in and ask for advice as to how they can transform their degraded front lawns into a riot of Western Australian colour. Lynda is often asked to speak to local community groups and offers advice on how to establish a native garden.

'We have thin drip lines under the mulch to water in summer,' she said. 'We run the lines around the plants that need more water and move it away from plants that don't need watering on our two watering days.'

'I am learning that I may be watering too much on things like kangaroo paws. There is a lot of trial and error, but that is all part of the journey. We mulch all our trimmings and also get mulch from MulchNet.com which is free.'

'Gardening Australia is my favourite TV show and I also like discussing my successes – and failures -with Kings Park horticulture staff Grady, Amanda, Digby, Tony and Shannon. They are a big help with lots of useful advice.'

Lynda joined the Kings Park Growing Friends about 10 years ago and along with Lester Zani coordinates the volunteers. The group is responsible for growing plants for the Friends plant sales. She is also a docent at Perth Zoo, and a member of the Hamersley Community Garden and the Friends of Warwick Bushland.

While there is no doubt many people are aware of the value of planting native Western Australian plants in their home garden most are still reluctant to take the plunge and opt for all native.

The Woodhams' vibrant bird and lizard friendly front yard serves as a beacon in their neighbourhood illustrating how that boring front lawn can be transformed to create a space that is not only appealing but thrives in our harsh dry climate. ■



Growing Friends Lester Zani and Lynda Woodhams in the Friends nursery. Photo: Chris Olney



The Woodhams' garden is picture of vibrant colour throughout the year. Photo: Lynda Woodhams