

Phillip Withers

Guide to creating your own Naturescape

Thanks for downloading and getting involved! In this guide we will be listing out some info and resources for you to create your own natural, resilient and uniquely Australian garden. Once completed, send this form back to us to receive a complimentary online consult to discuss how you can apply all these elements to your garden.

2. Getting local with fauna

It is also important to look at the insects and animals that live in your local area, so you can incorporate their habitat requirements into your Naturescape. In Victoria, there has been a lot of research done at the City of Melbourne into creating biodiverse plantings that support urban nature, with species such as *Wahlenbergia stricta* and *Myoporum parvifolium* being shown to support a range of native insects. Have a look at the Naturescapes book, or 'Habitat', a Wildlife Gardening book by AB Bishop, for a more in-depth tutorial on designing for biodiversity. Another great resource is **Habitat Stepping Stones** - an online tool developed by Macquarie University that explains how to incorporate habitat for local fauna into garden design.

3. Getting local with materials

The PW team always start by looking at the materials that are available near a site when we start a new project. We find that this creates a wonderful connection with the history of a place and helps a home sit in conversation with the surrounding landscape. For example, many parts of Victoria sit atop basalt bedrock, which was laid down by volcanic activity in the state millennia ago. If you look at some of the oldest homes in Melbourne you will see extensive use of bluestone, especially in building foundations due to its strength and durability. Quarries such as **Bamstone** still supply this stone, and it's a material we love to use in our gardens. Further north of Melbourne, other quarries such as **Hillview** supply local Harcourt granite, an incredibly tough stone often used in dry-stack walls. Understanding the geology of your home will help in choosing materials that are sensitive to the history of your landscape and reduce the cost and green-house-gas emissions associated with transport.

My local geology: _____

This is also true for other materials such as timber. Using timber that is grown locally is a great way to reduce the impact of your project; we often opt for Australian timber species such as **Blackbutt**, **Silvertop Ash** and **Spotted gum**, which are all endemic to eastern Australia and are both beautiful and strong. We also love using recycled timber in our projects, as every piece is unique and has a history. **Timberzoo** on the Bellarine peninsular is a great supplier of recycled timber, but have a look in your local area to see whats available.

For a non-exhaustive list of material suppliers that we like to use please head to our website -www.phillipwithers.com/materials - or have a look at the Naturescapes book, available from all good bookstores.

Part 2: Design

1. Planning /what to consider

One of the first steps of the design process for any space is looking into existing conditions. We like to use **Before You Dig** - www.byda.com.au - a free service that allows you to determine the location of any services that will need to be considered.

You will also need to understand any Zoning constraints or Planning overlays that exist at your property, as this may impact some aspects of your design. One way we check is to look at **VicPlan** - www.mapshare.vic.gov.au/vicplan - a freely accessible government database that allows you to generate a Planning Property Report. All you do is type in your address at the link below, then click 'Create Planning Report'.

2. Environment

A final step before you can get the pencils out is to have a walk on site, taking note of the existing environmental conditions. It can be helpful to get **surveying** done, to help you better understand what kind of terrain you are dealing with, and whether you will need to consider any steps or retaining walls. You will also need to determine the soil type of your garden, to see whether you need to ameliorate any issues or if you can work with the existing conditions. Have a look at this resource - [Determining soil texture using the ribboning technique](#) - to find a step-by-step guide on how to complete a soil texture test. You can also get simple **pH testing kits** from Bunnings, to determine how acidic or alkaline your soil is, and therefore what is best to grow in your garden.

My soil texture: _____

My soil pH: _____

Existing Trees

It is also important to take note of any existing trees on site. An arborist report can be helpful to determine their health, and the location of their roots. We always advocate for retaining existing trees where possible, as they are a huge help in combating urban heat and air pollution, and provide habitat for many insects and animals, however sometimes a good prune or other maintenance may be needed to bring them back to their former glory.

Aspect

Consider aspect - where is north? Which part of your garden receives the most sun or is in deep shade? This can play a huge role in the layout of a garden, and may dictate where the usable spaces are and what you can plant where. Use the space below to draw a simple plan of your garden, noting the sun conditions, overshadowing from buildings, and any existing trees that may cast a shadow.

3. Design with purpose

Now comes the fun part - designing your Naturescape! We start off by listing out potential ways you want to use your outdoor space, whether it be for relaxation, recreation, productive gardening, etc. We find zoning a large space into smaller, usable spaces, helps to ensure a garden remains functional and breaks the task of designing a garden down into manageable sections. We also like to brainstorm key words that will define the style or feel you want from your space. For example, you might want your garden to be **CALM**, **BIODIVERSE**, or an **OASIS**. Have a go writing out a few ideas below. It might also be helpful to look for some reference images or create a Pinterest board that can guide your design ideas.

[illegible]

Part 3: Build

1. Budget

After all this research and brainstorming, a good exercise is to list out your estimated budget and see whether you can make your dreams a reality.

My budget: _____

We understand landscape construction can be an expensive endeavour, but there are a few ways we can value manage projects to help with affordability:

- Using toppings (a crushed rock product) in the place of paved surfaces. This is a more affordable alternative to paving that is also permeable and weed suppressing. We love using this product in a range of projects from coastal to Mediterranean gardens for a soft, natural look.
- Reducing plant size and density. We usually start off proposing plants in 14-30cm pots for that instant-garden look, however tubestock is a more affordable alternative that will reach a similar level of lush-ness in no time.

2. Build/ contractor

Now that you have your brief and budget, it is a good idea to sit down with a professional to see if this feels like a well considered starting point. A smooth build depends on good communication, so ensure you decide to work with someone dependable who is keen to make your vision come to life!

Part 4: Plants

Here's where we list out a complete plant list, bringing together information about local plants, environmental conditions and personal preference - maybe you have a nostalgic connection with a certain flower, or love the architectural shape of palm trees. Don't be afraid to include a mix of native and exotic plants in your plant palette, as we find the most successful gardens often use plants in interesting and unique combinations.

When choosing plants however, our advise would be to look at both the different layers of the garden, and the flowering times of your chosen species, to create a rich tapestry of plants that provide interest year round. Many natives such as ***Hakeas*** and ***Hardenbergia*** provide flower interest through winter, while deciduous trees and vines provide stunning autumn colour. Have a go coming up with a palette below!

1. Trees

2. Shrubs

3. Grasses and Wildflowers

4. Groundcovers and climbers

Well done! We hope you like the seeds we've planted. Have a go using them to grow your own Naturescape, and please send this form back to the PW team at info@phillipwithers.com to organise a complimentary online consultation, or reach out if you have any questions.