



GARDEN GURU

Philip Johnson, sustainable garden designer

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A double gold medal-winner at this year's Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show, Philip Johnson is on a mission to bring sustainable gardening into the mainstream. Here are his five top tips for making your own garden more sustainable:

1 Collect stormwater in tanks, bladders, and billabongs. A billabong creates habitat for wildlife including frogs, butterflies and birds. The average house can collect more than 97,000 litres of water a year (that's 718 baths).

2 Plant productive trees that bear fruit. Grow herbs in the garden (in pots if you have a small courtyard or balcony) and plant vegetables for your daily use, even if it's just a few heads of lettuce. Install a chook pen and have fresh eggs; then reuse the organic matter from the chooks to feed the soil.

3 Zone your plants in the garden for more efficient water use. Create habitat with introduction of plant species that attract birds. Aquatic plants absorb nutrients and clean the water in billabongs naturally without the use of chemicals.

4 Mulch garden beds to retain moisture and repress weeds. Try to mulch every year before the warm months (October through November). Ground covers are a great solution too. They create a mat over time, reducing weeds and holding moisture. A good ground cover is *Myoporum parviflorum*, a creeping native shrub that has clusters of honey-scented white flowers in summer. It can also be a substitute for a front lawn or nature strip.

5 Reduce waste and recycle nutrients back into the landscape. Collect your leaves and allow gum leaves to fall straight on to the garden. Leaves from deciduous trees like elms or oaks need to be broken down more than eucalypts – speed up the process by running your lawn mower over them to mulch them up a bit.