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Hedging Natives



Presenter: John Patrick [28/07/2006]

John learns about hedging Australian plants

When it comes to choosing screening plants people usually think **cypress**, **pear trees** or **pittosporums**, and native plants like **lily pillies** such as **Syzygium 'Aussie Southern'** – which is a real beauty. But horticulturists are now looking to Australian native plants and reviewing their suitability as hedges.

Horticulturist, Dave Kendal, works at Hume City Council. His passion is making hedges and he is doing a masters degree on using native plants.

Dave says: "I've always been interested in strong design elements in gardens and landscapes generally and hedges are one way to do that with plants.

"The traditional plants used as hedges often need a bit of water to look good, whereas the ones we're looking at haven't been watered and there are ecological reasons to use them. For example **Bursaria** is the food source for the Eltham Copper Butterfly, and it's a good habitat for some birds.

A favourite for use as a hedge is **hop bush**, **Dodonaea viscosa**, which is an indigenous plant. "I love the colour, and it grows quite quickly. You wouldn't use it as a formal hedge, but for more informal screening it's great" says Dave.

Dave has also used **Gold Dust Wattle Acacia acinacea 'Ruby Tips'** which seems a most unlikely plant to use as a hedge, but it's responded extremely well.

"It was selected as a bit of a punt. In some ways I expected it not to work. But it's certainly one that a lot of people like and it's really attractive as a hedge," Dave said.

"The **bottle brush Callistemon 'Captain Cook'** is another that is quite popular and most people like as a hedge."

It's nice and dense, but you also get lovely young foliage against the old foliage colour which is something people comment on.

Dave says: "The **Callistemon** hasn't flowered

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during the trial because it was cut in early September. But if you clipped it now and let it grow to the end of the year, you'd have it flowering through late spring and summer."

There are so many different **Callistemon** cultivars of different heights that it should be possible to select one that suited your particular need.

Dave says that grey foliage plants might work well as a hedge in a Mediterranean garden, whereas some small leaved, dark green plants might work well in a more English style garden with flowering larger-leaf plants in front of them.

The **Philothicas** or **Eriostemons** are sometimes a bit unreliable. But **Philotheca myoporoides** as a hedge really looks excellent.

Dave agrees: "I think the colour makes it look English and it flowers superbly. It's covered in flowers in spring and is the best one to work with because it smells great when you're cutting the foliage."

The native plants recommended for taller screens in urban gardens are the denser ones, like **hop bush Dodonaea viscosa**. They seem to be fast growing, which is an advantage for a screen.

Dave wants to do more work with **Correas** because of the great range of foliage shapes and growth habits, including dwarf ones that would make good hedges. "But the biggest surprise is that pretty much everything has worked as a hedge. So I'm beginning to suspect you can hedge anything if you really put your mind to it."

When it comes to choosing an Australian native for a hedge there are many issues to think about. Firstly choose a plant that suits your growth conditions. Think about the size you want the hedge to grow and choose something that's going to grow tall enough to meet your needs. But one thing is certain - that amongst native plants there are many wonderful hedges. And you have the opportunity to trial and experiment with plants and see exactly how they work for you.

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