

## Summer approaches – your garden needs help by Mollie Shelley

We have had recent good rains; the grass is green, trees and shrubs have fresh new shoots and leaves but don't forget that this was preceded by weeks of virtually no rain, one of those exceptionally dry periods we've been experiencing in recent years. It was accompanied by a warning from weather forecasters that another El Nino is developing in the Pacific. While we might hope that they are mistaken, now is not the time to argue. With luck, many gardeners found time to prepare their gardens for summer while the soil was still damp. Experts are advising us to use woody mulches like bark and sugar cane one year and grassy ones like lucerne the next. The first encourages the development of good soil fungi, the second soil bacteria.

Veggie gardens are thriving. Picking your own is not only good for one's health, but in some obscure way I don't quite understand, it nourishes the soul. Lettuce, rocket, carrots, silver beet, baby spinach, broccoli and herbs are easily grown in our climate, even in my fairly shady conditions. Grow pumpkins and potatoes too, if you have the space. I have had a tomato vine "Truss Sweet", planted in February, which gave a few strawberry-shaped fruit all winter and is now sending out strong new flowering shoots.

Green vegies like nitrogen - compost, blood and bone and/or a general fertiliser. Carrots are best grown from seed in a bed which was fertilised previously for some other crop. After the seedlings are big enough to grasp, thin

them out to allow the carrot roots room to develop. The down side to vegie gardens is that they do need water. This is no problem if you have your own tank water, but can be more difficult when you have to comply with town water restrictions.

I have been slowly converting parts of my garden to be more 'dry tolerant'. Deep-rooted trees and shrubs are able to forage deeply for moisture in our clay based soils and so are not a worry. Potted Baby Bear Camellias have been replaced with dwarf *Escallonia* 'Pink Pixie' with small, shiny, drought-resistant leaves. Clumping grass-like variegated *Dianella* has proved hardy in a dry, exposed position. Bromeliads, dwarf *Dracaenas*, *Cordylines* and *Stromanthe* have performed well without watering, as does the dwarf fine-leaved *Acacia* cognate 'Limelight' in a position where it was deeply mulched with fallen eucalypts leaves.

Sunnier gardens than mine enjoy plants with succulent leaves, though some *Kalanchoes* enjoy a little shelter. Plants with narrow, hard leaves like Rosemary and eucalypts cope well with heat and wind. Grey leaved plants come mainly from dry Mediterranean or desert climates and generally perform well in



Cartoon by Wendy Bishop

our summers. They may benefit from a good haircut while spring conditions and moist soils are still with us. Given reasonable, though dry conditions, Lavenders, *Artemesia* (*Wormwood*), *Senecio* (*Dusty Miller*), *Lambs' Ears* (*Stachys lanata*), *Snow-in-Summer* (*Cerastium tomentosum*), *Catmint* (*Nepeta faassenii*), and *Convolvulus cneorum* will all thrive in heat. ■

PERMACULTURE NORTH meets 3rd Monday evening each month in Lindfield. Contact 1300 887 145 or [info@permaculturenorth.org.au](mailto:info@permaculturenorth.org.au).