CHAPTER 6 – PERTH HOME GARDENS

At a time of unprecedented environmental change and ongoing loss of biodiversity, the importance of gardening has taken on new dimensions. Gardeners can make a positive contribution, in a small or large way, to helping care for the diversity that underpins their enthusiasm for green companions in domestic and civic life. Indeed, it's becoming clear that without active help from gardeners, many more plants than the huge number already at risk would become threatened with extinction. (Hopper 2013, p. vii)

Introduction

In this chapter I draw attention to the role domestic gardens can play in environmental conservation. The data tables (Tables 8, 9, 10) identify the range of people surveyed during my fieldwork, their type of residence and the frequency of their visits to the Kings Park native plant sales. These tables demonstrate the broad range of informants for my research. I emphasise the interest from visitors from many different parts of the world. However, as the majority of my informants come from a British background, I acknowledge that some adjustment to Western Australian conditions is required for gardening purposes. I also identify the uniqueness of the plants of the kwongan and the role home gardeners can play in conserving them. I argue that promoting the use of native species for domestic use can be, in fact, a very convenient, if somewhat smaller scale, form of conservation for rare and endangered varieties, as well as for the more popular varieties of native flora.^{55}

The chapter also includes comments on the increased knowledge of visitors to the park and the popularity of native flora for home gardens in Perth. The topic of water awareness as part of the Australian lifestyle is featured in the chapter. Included in this chapter are details of the gardens visited during the research phase of this project. The gardens selected showed a range of choices in of blending the native flora with exotics, illustrating the diversity of ways of coming to terms with the different environmental conditions experienced in Western Australia contrasted with the influence of a colonial concept of what a garden should be. Some gardeners were confident in developing a complete native garden, whereas others ranged from tentatively introducing some native plants to an agreeable – for them – combination catering for both native plants and exotics.

^{55} For example, Chinocup Wattle (*Acacia leptalea*), Fitzgerald Woolly bush (*Adenhos dobragii*), Limestone Pea (*Chorizema varium*)
Home gardens

Within the context of this thesis, the home garden is a micro-social space, which takes on the role of ‘nature’ at home, hence a domesticated nature. To be involved in a natural environment in the home place, in an atmosphere of varying climatic conditions, is not an easy task when confronted with unresponsive soils and unrelenting summer heat, coupled with little or no rain during the months of November through to April-May, and sometimes later. As a researcher I ask myself, at every plant sale I attend, whether it is a form of compensation or not, to use local plant species. By compensation, I am referring to the factor of growing something that is traditionally alien to the thoughts socialised in those people, such as myself, with a British heritage. Does the influence of Kings Park and Botanic Garden, an instrument of government, while promoting the local Western Australian flora make up for the loss of a distant heritage of crocuses, snowdrops, buttercups and cowslips? After looking at William Robinson’s book *Wild Garden*, (1870, 2009 edition) the nostalgia of ‘home’ resonates loudly. To view pictures of lush green meadows alive with native English grasses and flowers, or small thickets of trees dotting the landscape, scattered among the harvested fields, creating a patchwork quilt of greens and browns, makes the Western Australian landscape appear, at times, to be a poor substitute. Gone are pleasant smells, neat hedgerows, and rippling meadows of the English countryside to be replaced by what appears to be a harsh, inhospitable landscape, of nutrient-poor sand and coarse unruly plants. As Jean Galbraith, an enthusiastic promoter of native plants, reflected, as one who had never set foot in England: ‘It was inevitable that we, gardeners all and lovers of the England we had never seen, should long to plant such a hedge’ (Galbraith 1939, p. 59).

Plants such as the Sandpaper Wattle (*Acacia denticulosa*), which is aggressive to the touch and resembles coarse sandpaper, would have an unfavourable effect on someone not familiar with the local native plants. The tactile senses have a profound effect on what will be remembered (Brown 2015, pp. 65-71). However, my role as a Friend of Kings Park and a volunteer Guide has modified my view considerably; I now confess to a more appreciative and understanding view of the native flora and see an environment that has its own particular beauty. This is, of course, an example of familiarity with the native flora replacing memories of homeland, an experience familiar to many newcomers. However, memory of homeland is a topic to be approached with caution. Memories can at times embellish past situations; remembering is not a simple process of retrieving an object, it is a creative process, like imagination and is subject to
simplification, distortion and error (Craver 2015, p. 120; Wallman 2002, p. 106). Therefore memories of homeland and homeland gardens may not be the same as the actual reality that is remembered. A strong element of nostalgia, a sentimental longing for a significant period in one’s personal past, has a strong influence on lifestyle choices made, including the choice of garden plants.

**Interest from different parts of the world**

A space such as Kings Park is a place of immense value to any society, in this case one which is dominated by Western culture. However, readily observable during the native plant sales held four times a year by the Friends of Kings Park are the diverse sections of the population interested in using native plants for domestic use. Although at first glance it would appear that the main users are of the Anglo-Australian middle aged to senior age group and primarily women, closer analysis shows a much wider coverage of the population. For example, my survey indicates a number of recent immigrants taking an interest in the unique Western Australian flora (See Table 7). During the course of surveying customers at the plant sales, the most ardent advocates of local native flora with whom I spoke were a married couple that had migrated to Western Australia from Singapore five years ago.

Table 7: Respondents’ region of origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>62.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>16.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islands</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>203</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fascination for the unique flora of Western Australia has been encouraged by Professor Stephen Hopper, who recently returned from his role as director of Kew Gardens. Hopper stated that there are approximately twelve to thirteen thousand plant species in the State of Western Australia, some of which are still to be named (Hopper 2012, interview 9/10/2012). Additionally, it can be seen that the ages of those interested in furthering the cause of native plants or using them for home use covers a wide...
demographic. Not confined to the senior age group, young couples, some with families are seen frequenting the sales, as are young single people (Table 8).

Table 8: Age group of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Count of Age group</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>19.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>19.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>27.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61+</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>24.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Residence of respondents

Although the vast majority of purchasers are those residing in suburban houses, residents of home units and town houses are also represented (Table 9). Flats or small home unit dwellers will seek native plants that are appropriate for outdoor plant pot use or even indoor use; unfortunately, very few local Western Australian native plants survive for any length of time indoors. However, if the plants are ‘aired’ outside at regular intervals, their survival rate is improved.

Table 9: Residence of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Row Labels</th>
<th>Count of Residence</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SUBURBAN HOUSE</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>79.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOME UNIT</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RURAL PROPERTY</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOWN HOUSE</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLAT</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DUPLEX</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VILLA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The demand for local plants is increasing as their popularity becomes more widespread throughout the community. My survey figures show an interest in growing native plants by ‘first time’ customers at the plant sales (Table 10).
Table 10: Frequency of visits to plant sales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of visits</th>
<th>Customer Numbers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANNUALLY</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>16.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIANNUALLY</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>20.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIRST TIME*</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>34.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUARTERLY</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOMETIMES</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A number of customers were making purchases to replace plants that had died throughout the summer. Other customers were purchasing native plants in addition to those previously acquired that had been successful.

**Increased knowledge by visitors**

Other more experienced Kings Park volunteer guides raised, during conversations, the topic of general knowledge of the public and visitors about Western Australian native flora. It was a general observation among the volunteer guides and Friends of Kings Park that over the last decade an increasing awareness has developed about the importance of conservation of our local flora, many emphasising their uniqueness and floral appeal. This supports the prediction made by Leopold (1949, p. 203) in 1949 that the embryo conservation movement at that particular time would lead to an affirmation that the natural environment would be included in peoples’ ethical considerations, as referred to in Chapter 1.

Members of the Kings Park guides and the Friends of Kings Park frequently referred to the increase in interest and knowledge among visitors over the last decade. An increasing number of visitors had traveled down from the northern regions of the State at the time when the wildflowers were in full bloom during the spring season from September to October. The expression ‘our visitors are better educated’ was frequent during discussions with my colleagues. Although such improvement is not directly attributable to the influence of Kings Park, a better-educated public does make the didactic role of the park more effective. For example, if visitors have some understanding of the challenging conditions that the local flora have to tolerate, they can achieve a greater appreciation. Knowledge about the local flora makes it easier to discuss their interest. Travelling through the northern part of the State, as many visitors to the park do, gives them a personal experience of the dry arid regions that can proliferate with wildflowers after only a moderate rainfall. Personal experience of the
desert regions coupled with a guided tour of the Botanic Garden, which identifies the specific zones favoured by certain plants, can develop a fulfilling experience and an increased awareness of the biodiversity of the State. A guide with fifteen years of experience stated that the reasons why the visitors to the park had a good knowledge of our native flora was that many of them had the use of laptop computers, iPads, or other modern technical means of accessing global data. Additionally, in the last three decades environmental conservation has been in the forefront of much debate, thus encouraging an interest in the local flora.

**Influences on knowledge of visitors**

One of the most significant means of imparting knowledge and influencing the views of the population is the media, including television and radio; their influence is significant on the activities and personal preferences of people. In its many forms the media play an important role in administering and regulating populations. To achieve this in the field of home gardening numerous programs have emerged over the last few decades on television and radio. Filled with expert advice on almost every aspect of gardening, this form of ‘infotainment’ is described by Rose (cited by Hawkins 2001, p. 187) as one of the key aspects of neoliberal forms of governing. He argues that guidance is not just limited to the State or other large-scale authorities but in the hands of ‘experts of subjectivity’ who transform questions about the purpose of life into technical questions about the most effective ways of ‘managing malfunction and improving “quality of life”’ (Hawkins 2001, p. 188). One of the most prominent gardening advice programs in Australia is the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s (ABC) program *Gardening Australia*. Differing from those of the commercial television channels, this program focuses more on aesthetic and ethical values suited to middlebrow tastes. Included in many of the programs are sections that feature native Australian flora, thus, forearming those who travel around the country with a level of knowledge not previously available. It is this knowledge that prompts interactive discussions with guides as visitors are taken around the Botanic Garden of Kings Park, which displays plants from different regions of the State. According to a number of visitors I have personally taken around the Botanic Garden, this knowledge has imposed a moral value by identifying the need to conserve the natural environment.
Perth home gardens and native plants

Although the domestic gardens of Perth are familiar, and would seemingly appear to be mundane ‘everyday’ landscapes, these gardens have frequently been the focus of some debate and theorizing in the arts, humanities and social sciences on the role they play in the lives of home owners (Gaynor 2006; Morgan 2011; Mulcock 2008; Seddon 1972; Trigger et al. 2008; Trigger & Mulcock 2005b; Head, Muir & Hampel 2004; Morgan 2010).

While some home gardeners may desire to grow Australian plants for patriotic reasons, as suggested by Head and Muir (2004, p. 201), the relationship between growing local native species and some form of emotional attachment to ‘being a good Western Australian’ or a ‘good Australian’ was never raised during the course of my research. Native plant enthusiasts within the cohort of my research area grew local native species primarily for reasons of practicality rather than out of patriotic motivation, including such basics as coping with the hot dry summer conditions, water conservation, minimal care and also for aesthetic reasons such as extended flowering periods, and their ability to attract local native bird species.

Although to those unfamiliar with local native species, many of the plants may look similar in their adaptation to this harsh environment, characterised by frequent droughts, bush fires and poor sandy soils, there is a great variety among the species. Seddon (1972, pp. 110-150) identified at least three hundred species of woody plants within an area of a hundred miles by thirty miles (160.93 kilometers by 48.28 kilometers) and more than three hundred species of non-woody plants in the same area. The Department of Environment and Conservation recognises up to 13,000 species within the State of Western Australia (2005). Many species are still to be formally named. Within the State 391 species are considered endangered and 120 are considered critically endangered out of 2,800 requiring some form of conservation action (Bunn, Turner & Dixon 2011, pp. 189, citing Atkins 2008).56 Over 1500 plant species have been exploited for commercial purposes. In 2013 Webb put a figure of at least 12,000 native plants in Western Australia (2013, p. xi). Numbers of species endemic to Western Australia are constantly under review. The figures recognised by FloraBase (2013), a list compiled by the Western Australian Herbarium as of June 2013, identified 12,307 taxa.57

56 As research continues, these figures are subject to review.
57 Biological taxa are groups of populations of an organism considered by taxonomists to form a unit.
Growing plants unique to Western Australia is an attractive prospect for home garden enthusiasts, for a number of reasons; they require less water, they withstand the harsh summer climate, once established they require very little maintenance and some species flower in winter. Some of my informants stated they got immense personal satisfaction when they successfully grew plants that are classified as rare and endangered. The volume of plants sold at the Friends of Kings Park native plant sales is evidence of this interest. Over the five-year period of 2010 to 2014, an average of 45,283 native plants were available for sale each year, with 10% of the plants declared as rare.58

Local native plants
George Seddon, one of the few scholars who had attempted to bridge the gap between the humanities and natural sciences until recently, cautioned that while to speak of ‘Australian native plants’ may be useful, it can also be fraught with difficulties. As he puts it, ‘plants know nothing of nationality’ (Seddon, in Snape 2003, p. 1). Although the nation is coterminous with the continent, the land mass of Australia covers many diverse climatic and geographic environments the plants that are endemic to one zone may not survive in another (Seddon, in Snape 2003, p. 1). It is for this reason that I identify plants specific to the Perth area of Western Australia as ‘local native’ plants; those plants that grow within the confines of the Swan Coastal Plain of the Perth region, in a natural environment and have done so since before colonisation.

Prior to white settlement across the coastal plain, natural plant communities ranged from those inhabiting the sandy coastal dunes, heath, low open forest, low closed forest with Rottnest cypress (Callitris preissii), tall open forest of Marri (Corymbia calophylla), Wandoo (Eucalyptus wandoo) and Jarrah (Eucalyptus marginata) trees. Moving further eastward towards the Darling scarp the vegetation changes to taller, more open forest of Tuart (Eucalyptus gomphocephala), Marri and Jarrah trees. Then, further east again, it proceeds on to woodland of Jarrah and Banksia (Banksia sp.), merging into low open forest of Swamp Sheoak (Casuarina obesa) with occasional areas of low, closed forest of Paper-barks, (Melaleuca sp.) and Tea Trees (Leptospermum ellipticum) (Seddon 1972, pp. 155-172).

58 Statistics supplied courtesy of the Friends of Kings Park.
The local native plants to which I refer inhabit this geographic range. Within this area there are many plants which are attractive and of particular interest to the local domestic gardening community. To further the cause of promoting an interest in native plants, the gardeners and botanists of Kings Park and Botanic Garden are breeding variations of many of these species specifically to make them easier for home gardeners to grow.

In a survey conducted in 2002-2003 of the bush land area of the park, a number of plants were discovered which had not been seen for many years and some that had never been recorded: these included Rufus Stonecrop (Crassula decumbens), Spurred Arrowgrass (Triglochin calcitrapum), Native Herb (Hydrocotyle diantha), Midget Stylewort (Levenhookia pusilla), and Southern Diplolaena (Diplolaena dampieri) (Barrett 2004, p. 14).

**Popularity of native plants**

Popularity of native plants for domestic use has fluctuated over the years. During an interview one of the Kings Park guides explained to me that in the nineteen sixties and seventies there was a campaign to encourage people to ‘plant native and they will live.’ Unfortunately, the optimism of this statement was not justified given the knowledge of native plants in this era, so this policy did not prove very effective at the time. When one of my experienced interviewees was questioned on the popularity in the past of planting native species his response was:

> It went through a boom, when the policy was ‘plant native and they will live’, but it was not very successful. Well, it was to a point, but the wrong information was given out and many of the species were not suitable for domestic use… that was in the sixties, seventies, but now it's coming back, more research and better breeding is making a huge difference. It's no good just putting it in the ground and it will grow, you’ve really got to improve the look and everything else. [Mac. 50-year-old staff gardener.]

Knowledge of various plant varieties and associated preferred soil types are essential for successful native plant husbandry. An extensive list of native plants and their preferred conditions and soil type is available from the Friends of Kings Park website and is updated just prior to each of the native plant sales. For example, the list will show the correct botanic name, common name, an accurate description of the plant, number available for sale, suitability for sun or part shade, suitability for potting and the natural location and soil type preferred by the plant within the regions of the Swan Coastal Plain. Up to three-hundred-and-thirty-five different types of plants with
approximately eleven thousand items are for sale. This number is exceeded at the September sales, which extends over three days. Revenue raised at these sales contributes towards the upkeep and general maintenance of the park. Advertising for a forthcoming sale shows the range of plants available:

The plants available for sale will include: some 40 species of Acacias and over 25 species of Banksias; a great range of 16 bird attracting Grevilleas and 17 small Mallee Eucalypts; there will also be 6 different Calytrix, 7 Chamelacium, 6 Chorizema, 10 Darwinia and 8 Hibbertia species on offer. A good array of Hakeas to provide food for Carnaby’s Black Cockatoos will also be available. (Friends of Kings Park 2014)

Although some local native plant species are relatively easy to grow in most soil types on the Swan Coastal Plain, some are very selective and need to be chosen with some knowledge of the soil conditions where they are going be planted. On hand at the native plant sales is a group of specialist Master Gardeners who are ready to assist with advice on all aspects of growing local native plant species.

Table 11: 2 examples of plant details for sale on the Kings Park website.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Botanic name</th>
<th>Common Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number available</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acacia alata var. tetrantha</td>
<td>Winged Wattle</td>
<td>Low spreading small shrub from 0.3-0.8 m h x 1.0-1.5 m w. Green triangular leaves. White fluffy ballflowers from April-July. Damp sandy soils in part to full sun. Prune after flowering.</td>
<td>SW, GS, SWA</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acacia applanata</td>
<td>Grass Wattle</td>
<td>Low growing spreading shrub. Grows 0.2-0.5 m high x 0.3-1 m wide. Dark green foliage growing from suckering stems. Bright gold flowers from July-Oct. Well-drained soils in part to full sun.</td>
<td>SW, AW, ESP, GS, JF, SWA, WAR.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the course of my research and while taking an active role at the plant sales, I found that the interest in using native plant species for home gardens was extensive. Although plant sales are due to open at 8.30am, a queue would start to form often before eight o’clock, and extend for approximately eighty to a hundred meters by opening time. During the course of discussions with some of the early customers, it was apparent that most of them had accrued considerable knowledge about growing native plant species due to many seasons of experience. When I related my own success with the local native plant Blue Leschenaultia (*Leschenaultia biloba*), to another grower, he
explained that the plant would only fully respond to the particular area on the Swan Coastal plain where I lived, whereas in his area the plant did not respond well, a point emphasised by Krauss et al. (2011, p. 23), when illustrating the ‘home-site’ advantage of native plants.

**The cosmopolitan garden**

Given that the desire to grow native plants for both practical and aesthetic reasons is well intentioned for such reasons as reducing water consumption, and longer flowering periods, there is still a strong feeling among Perth gardeners for a cosmopolitan type garden; one that includes both native and exotics, as I refer to in Chapter 1. My findings concur with that of other research studies (Head & Muir 2006; Trigger & Mulcock 2005b). This was evident in my research of customers at the Friends of Kings Park native plant sales. Many of them had only a portion of the garden dedicated solely to native plants. In other gardens many of the native plants were intermingled with exotics. Although this had a desired aesthetic effect, it did not achieve any water saving purpose, because many of the gardens had automatic watering systems set to cater for the exotic plants which are more water demanding than the native plants. For example, during the hot summer month’s exotic plants rely on watering two or three times a week, whereas many of the local native plants may only require watering once a month; some plants not even that often. This raises the point that what motivates gardener’s preference for plants is the desire to be in a familiar environment, most often reflecting a comfortable ‘home’ situation. As one British informant stated ‘I like to grow something that reminds me of home.’ This, in turn, leads to introducing plants that originated from another place, forming an emotional link to the past of the gardener (Trigger & Mulcock 2005b, p. 1304), a point I refer to in Chapter 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Of total garden area allocated to native plants</th>
<th>Total number of gardeners</th>
<th>% Of gardeners surveyed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - 25</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>22.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 - 50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>24.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 - 75</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>30.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76-100</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>22.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>203</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of 203 people surveyed at the native plant sales 45 people (22.17%) claimed they had between 76% and 100% native garden, with 62 (30.54%) having between 51% and 75% native garden and 96 (47.29%) of the people surveyed having allocated 50% or less of their total garden area to native plants (Table 12).

**Cultural cringe - horticultural cringe**

It was in the setting of the mid-twentieth century that the term ‘cultural cringe’ appeared in Australian discourse. Coined by A.A. Phillips (1950) after World War II the term ‘cultural cringe’ referred to the perception that the Arts in Australia were inferior to those of other countries, in particular those of Britain and Continental Europe. Webb (2013, p. ix), the Chief Executive Officer of Kings Park, suggests this could also be applied to the view of the natural Australian landscape, often appearing to those people from countries with a more temperate climate, as harsh, prickly and grey. 59 I draw on Phillips’s phrase, ‘cultural cringe’, and relate it to the Australian native landscape, gardens and local flora, to coin the phrase ‘horticultural cringe.’

Nonetheless, the home garden is an important part of everyday life and gendered leisure (Bhatti 2014, p. 1). Foucault identified the garden as an ‘ambiguous, liminal space; a very special place alive to possibilities for the self that have may have been cut off elsewhere’ (Foucault & Miskowiec 1986, pp. 25-26). People relate to gardens in different ways; the garden is often related to the comfortable domestic routines of home-making, spare time, leisure and relief from caring duties. In the past most of the migrants coming to Western Australia have been British, and their taste is reflected strongly in Perth’s suburbs with a distinct English-style garden (Morgan 2015, p. 121). That is, gardens with carefully manicured lawns bordered by annuals.

Gardens are a particular example of zones where the use and meaning of space, influenced by human agency and social interaction can have implications for how the interpretation of nature is defined (Bhatti & Church 2001, p. 366). For Francis and Hestor (1990) the concept of a garden changes over time but is always connected to the human relationship with nature:

> The garden has long served as a way of thinking about nature and about culture and how each influences the other … as the balancing point between human control on one hand and wild nature on the other. (1990, p. 2)

59 The whitish grey bloom on many Australian plants is a means of adapting to the harsh heat and sunlight, as it enables plants to reflect heat.
Gardening is often seen as nature under control, a place of safety away from the dangers of wild nature and ‘barbarian outsiders’, an idealised version of what society believes ‘nature should be and should look like’ (Francis & Hester 1990, p. 2). A garden is a place of order, even in a contrived wild garden environment. It is a place of exhibition, a display of how nature should be controlled and how it should look (Bhatti & Church 2001, p. 370).

The critic Robyn Boyd denounced Australian suburban housing development and promoters of the ‘great Australian dream’ as guilty of baring the landscape and developing a garden design that favoured ‘repressive trimness and Englishness’ (Duruz 1994, p. 198). Instead of the natural eucalypts, wattle trees and native plant species, there were rows of telephone poles and tidy beds of English annuals - an iconology of suburbia. This was an image viewed by Boyd as banal, conformist and materialistic. In contrast to the perception of suburban mindlessness and gardens of conformity, Hugh Stretton saw the Australian suburban garden as a ‘utopian site of intergenerational harmony and absorbing hobbies, a place for carpentering, digging, hosing, basking and leisure’ (1991, pp. 527-528). Within cultural studies, focus has been on theories of consumption, defining suburban gardens as commodities, as places of style and identity, particularly among the middle classes. An ironic account of consumerism and culture in Australia by Stephen Knight scorned this as a postmodern ‘appropriation of nostalgic images of English village life’ (1991, p. 31).

George Seddon characterises the iconic Australian backyard, in the past and to a lesser extent today with nostalgia (1930s – 50s), as functional (Seddon 1994, p. 23). Serving a number of purposes, the backyard of the classic quarter-acre block, could be readily identified by its structure and contents. This could also to a lesser extent be applied to the front yard. Seddon describes the familiar features including smells – a chicken pen, an outdoors lavatory (dunny), a rotary clothes-line (Hills hoist), and the ubiquitous lemon tree or in some instances’ an apricot tree. There was a total absence of any native plants, simply a replacement of the local scene by images of homeland: remove the new and continue as usual in the old familiar way (Seddon 1994, pp. 22-23). At the time three functions dominated: it was a means of economic production, it reflected nature in a rural context, and it was, and still is, a cultural zone. The backyard was an attempt at self-sufficiency, tidiness, and order, serving domestic needs (Gaynor

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60 Apricot trees were a popular feature in the backyards of British migrants residing in the city of Elizabeth, in South Australia, in the late 1950s.
In Seddon’s list of multiple functions of this ‘space’ we refer to as a backyard, there is economy, nature and culture as recognised in anthropology: ‘for its moves make the backyard exotic or distantiated, as well as familiar’ (Beilharz 2003, p. 23).

Private home gardens are of interest to sociologists and anthropologists because they reflect a number of desires; not least of these is to maintain property value in addition to a being a place of retreat, a thing of beauty, a place for family leisure activities, homemaking and an indicator of social status and conformity. Home gardens are founded in a political economy of suburban development, consumerism and influenced by the commercial garden industry, which, in the interests of profit, have made nature a desirable commodity (Seddon 1994, pp. 22-36).

Recognised as sites of ‘cultural consumption’ gardens are locations where social usage and agency have influence on the meaning and use of space, having implications for how we know and understand nature (Bhatti & Church 2001, pp. 365-367). Taken in today’s context, ‘backyards’, or those spaces better known nowadays as home gardens, are focused more on leisure and aesthetics than any real practical purpose. However, there is still an element of ‘home grown food’ interest shown by some enthusiasts, but more so out of cultural tradition and novelty value, rather than necessity. The main purpose nowadays for many is to ensure a connection with nature in an aesthetically pleasing way and in keeping with the conservation consciousness of the current era. As both back and front areas of garden change as the times do, Australians now withdraw to their home gardens to relish the outdoors without experiencing the tedium of long-distance travel. Now often boasting a swimming pool, barbeque and fashionable outdoor setting, they can enjoy the impression of being at one with nature. With the onset of high-density living the traditional backyard is becoming a feature more of outer suburbia rather than the inner city areas.

**Hopper’s argument**

In his forward to the book *Australian Native Plants: The Kings Park Experience*, Professor Stephen Hopper stated, ‘Gardening provides a powerful connection between people and plants worldwide’ (Hopper 2013, p. vii). The choice of plants grown is a celebration of each gardener’s aesthetic and practical connection to the world of plant diversity. He argues that home gardeners can play an important role in modifying the

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61 Professor Stephen Hopper is Winthrop Professor at the University of Western Australia. He is a former CEO of Kings Park and former Director of Kew Gardens, London.
loss of biodiversity, caused by unprecedented environmental changes, by making a positive contribution to care for a diverse range of plant species. It is becoming apparent that without this help from home gardeners many plants, including those currently under threat of extinction, would cease to exist. Rotenberg also earlier expressed this sentiment in his section in Low’s edited book *Theorizing the City*: ‘the house garden can be a refuge for threatened species’ (Rotenberg 2005, p. 147). The use of domestic gardens as a repository for native species is certainly not new and was recognised in the early part of the twentieth century and discussed at length by Hermand in Wolschke-Bulmahn’s (1997) book, *Nature and Ideology: Natural Garden Design in the Twentieth Century*. Hermand also refers to Wilhelm Bölsche, who states:

> Every owner of a sizeable garden or park or estate could easily, with a small allotment of land, create a small reserve, a protective corner for the indigenous animal and plant kingdoms. It suffices to dedicate permanently a corner (preferably one naturally favoured) to pure nature, in part leaving it entirely to itself, in part enriching it by the addition of indigenous fauna and flora, but at any rate placing it under separate rule for the foreseeable future that disregards its ordinary use value and consciously proclaims the goal of natural protection for this spot… One will provide here nesting sites for birds and seek to transplant rare and already disappearing regional plants to this spot. (Hermand 1997, p. 51)

The issue of planting native flora to attract birds is a topic raised frequently by the subjects in my research and discussed previously in Chapter 5.

Within the debate about the role social sciences play in the future of the natural environment, the garden and associated practices are important in not only conserving local biodiversity, which depends on local knowledge and experience, but is also a key feature of the understanding and the debate on environmental issues (Bhatti & Church 2001, p. 365).

Webb (2013, p. ix) refers to the focus of the early Australian gardens, both private and public, on the use of introduced non-native or exotic plants. In the late 19th century, there was some interest shown in the use of Australian native plants in public and private gardens; but this interest did not spread widely to the majority of homeowners or public garden planners. An interest in conserving and displaying Western Australian plants in a botanic garden has been an endeavour of the Botanic Garden and Parks Authority since the 1960s. At that stage the prospect of promoting the sale of local native species was still in its infancy.
Australian lifestyle and settler indigenisation

Australia has a climate that is conducive to an outdoor lifestyle. Therefore, according to Horne (1964, p. 17), many Australians display an almost pantheistic love of outdoor activity, with gardens and gardening playing a dominant role. Despite the popular myth of the outback ‘bush’ lifestyle, Australia, as early as the latter part of the nineteenth century, was one of the most urbanised societies in the world (Horne 1964, p. 16; Lawrence & Davies 2011, p. 251). The degree of urbanisation meant a great proportion of working people were spending time in gardens at weekends.

Many of the gardens I visited during my research had facilities for spending time outdoors. Barbecues for open-air cooking were a popular feature, as were alfresco dining settings, making an outdoor lifestyle appealing for most of the year\(^\text{62}\) and very also attractive to migrants, in particular those from the colder climates of Britain and Northern Europe. Nonetheless, even for one of my informants from a tropical Asian country (Singapore), the climate was more agreeable in Perth due to the less humid conditions. To develop a sense of ‘belonging’ and a feeling of home for the informants from overseas was the inclusion in their gardens of familiar plants strategically placed among the Australian native plants.

Following Trigger & Mulcock (2005b, p. 1301), the topic of which plants belong in a place and which plants do not belong is a subject of interest to home gardeners, yet at the same time can be grounded in cultural values and beliefs. This raises the issue of association with specific landscapes and has inferences for sustainability and planning. Additionally, Mulcock suggests that recent programs advocating the use of native flora for water economy and biodiversity conservation can also be seen as ‘a process of “indigenisation”, of becoming more native – a process that is being taken with varying degrees of self-consciousness by a diverse group of Australians’ (2008, p. 183). According to Seddon (2005, p. xv), knowledge about plants and an appreciation of native flora can help to instil a feeling of belonging for non-indigenous Australians.

Using Australian native plants in home gardens has been a gradual process over a number of years with varying degrees of enthusiasm and success. In the past many plants were found to be unsuitable for home gardens, and were often planted in sites inappropriate for the species. Advocates of the use of Australian native plants for domestic use, Betty Malone and Jean Walker, in the 1960s promised that native gardens were:

\[^{62}\text{The exception being the mid-summer heatwaves sometimes experienced in Perth.}\]
A sensible way to garden – a garden which will require no maintenance...no weeding no lawn mowing, it is above all an Australian way, in harmony with our own very wonderful environment. The garden was to reflect the characteristics of the Australian lifestyle: relaxed, easy going, and confident of its relationship the surrounding landscape. They continued ‘Don’t fight against nature: eliminate the lawns and let a soft, restful carpet of fallen leaves and bark eliminate your weeding for you. This is the first stage in carefree gardening.’ (Holmes 2011, p. 127 quoting Maloney and Walker)

Although the sentiments were well intentioned, not only were some plants aesthetically unpleasing to the Eurocentric vision, but also if planted out of place would often grow out of control. For example, some species of Melaleuca (*Melaleuca sp.*) and Lemon Scented Gums (*Eucalyptus citriodora*) grew to a point where they undermined house foundations, filled gutters with dead leaves and dropped branches into neighbouring yards. Others such as Bottlebrushes (*Callistemon sp.*) Wattles (*Acacia sp.*) and Hakeas (*Hakea sp.*), if not tended properly could develop into unruly thickets. Kangaroo Paws (*Anigozanthos sp.*) planted in the wrong place could degenerate into an unpleasant mouldy specimen without exposure to adequate sunlight (Timms 2006, p. 170).

As a result, this push in the 1970s to revitalise an interest in native plant gardens as a way to reduce water consumption and minimise maintenance did not prove successful. Webb referred to this period as ‘the tragic gardening story of the 1970s in Australia’ (2013, p. ix). Only a limited range of plants was available, and proper management methods were not generally known. This resulted in the plants becoming unruly and visually displeasing. According to Timms (2006) people of the time felt this type of garden did little to satisfy their perception of what a garden should look like, and in turn diminished the desire for outdoor living. Property values were not enhanced by an unruly and apparently disheveled garden (Timms 2006, p. 171).

A further revival in the 1990s of an interest in native flora for domestic use by the public and the landscape industry saw Kings Park and commercial nurseries develop a greater range of plants that are more durable and manageable than many of the former varieties. This demand for durability is reflected in my research. When the question ‘which plants do you prefer?’ was asked of respondents, 30% replied ‘anything that grows in this climate’, or words to that effect. Other comments recorded were, ‘hardy’, or ‘water-wise.’ For respondents who were prepared to specify a particular type of native plant, Banksia (*Banksia sp.*), Hakea (*Hakea sp.*), Grevillea (*Grevillea sp.*), Kangaroo Paw (*Anigozanthos sp.*), and Eucalypts (*Genus: Angophora, Eucalyptus, Corymbia*) were the most popular. Bird-attracting plants such as Callistemon (*Callistemon sp.*), Hakea (*Hakea sp.*), Banksia (*Banksia sp.*), and Eucalypt (*Genus:
Angophora, Eucalyptus, Corymbia) were an additional priority. The interest in attracting birds into home gardens was previously discussed in Chapter 5.

Water-wise gardening with appropriate knowledge in the southwest of Western Australia is a method strongly recommended by the scientific community:

Water-wise gardening is becoming increasingly important, and roses and birches could easily be replaced by grevilleas and eucalypts in urban parks and gardens. However, we do need to develop the knowledge on how to do this, and make that knowledge as widely available as the books on how to grow roses and petunias. (Lambers 2014a, p. 314)

Better management techniques are now being developed and greater knowledge of plant care and maintenance has been made available to the public. Much of the dissemination of information has been made available by the various gardening programs conducted by Kings Park and Botanic Garden, such as the Botanic Garden guided walks, the Master Gardeners advisory service, and the ‘Dig it with coffee’ sessions held once a month at the Zamia café/restaurant. Numerous popular television and radio gardening programs have advocated the use of native plants as an addition to the home garden, although introduced exotic plants still tend to have greater exposure.

The task of growing native species in comparison to exotics is not as onerous as previously imagined. Many rumours and ‘old wives tales’ abounded in the earlier years of introducing them to the domestic scene. Considered not suitable for pruning, many gardeners avoided native plants because of their tendency to appear ‘straggly’ and lacking in form. This was in contrast to the Eurocentric image of a garden plant. The traditional image of a neat and uniform garden surrounding a well-manicured lawn of the migrant middle-class permeated throughout the suburbs, examples of which are still to be found today in many of the gardens of Perth, even in the more recently developed areas of suburbia (Gaynor 2006; Head & Muir 2007). This is evident from the burgeoning number of small, private, lawn and garden care contractors seen dutifully trimming, with military precision, many gardens and lawns of Perth suburbs.

Reflecting on the cultural cringe theme, a lack of good taste was not only associated with the arts, using ‘Englishness’ as a measure, but was also reflected in the gardens of Australia of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and still is today. Dominated by the idea of English gardens, the image evoked an emotional connection that Australians felt at the time towards the Empire. Although the ‘Empire connection’ is diminished, the connection to the English garden image is still a powerful determinant as to how a garden should look (Holmes 2011, p. 123). However, this need not detract
from the use of Australian native plants as a suitable alternative to those exotics that bring to mind images of England.

In my discussions with a local gardener he said that local native plants can give a satisfactory emotional feeling to the most ardent ‘English garden’ enthusiast. In my research, I found that all the gardens I visited during the course of my inquiry had elements of Englishness about them, yet at the same time local Australian native plants dominated many of the gardens. There was the traditional paved walkway through the garden, but the plants, although not manicured to the extent that some of the imported plants would have been, had been carefully pruned to avoid that ‘lack of form’ look so often referred to in earlier garden writings by garden experts such as Bogue-Luffman, Gibson, and Hume (Holmes 2011, pp. 121-123). Although lacking the mandatory square of green lawn and borders, the disciplined use of local native plants gives an atmosphere of attachment to something that is uniquely Australian, yet at the same time still paying court to an inherited association with British roots by using similar garden designs.

Some of the gardens visited that were planted predominantly with native species had overtones of William Robinson’s ‘wild garden’ (1870) with an Australian theme, yet at the same time under control and well suited to an Australian suburban location. This was because they were growing in a soil type suited to the species, they responded to occasional pruning that kept them under control, and yet they still appeared informal. The gardens visited were large enough to allow a good space for a variety of plants, both native and exotic, and provided enough space for the occupiers to enjoy an outdoors lifestyle desired by most Australians.

**Gardens visited**

When interviewing respondents for research, my opening question was, ‘What do you get out of gardening and using Australian native plants?’ Most respondents said that gardening presented a reason for being out of doors, that gardens had an aesthetic appeal, and promoted a oneness with nature. For example, one interviewee responded:

> Well first of all, it gets me outside. The weather here in Perth is so miraculous it makes it great to be outside and I don’t have a lot of things to take me outside. I don’t particularly like physical sports, I walk, but there is only so much walking you can do, then that gets boring. Gardening to me is just so interesting. For me it is a wonderful synthesis of science and art. When I am working in my garden, I am

63 Charles Bouge-Luffman was the principal of Australia’s first Horticultural College, Burnley.
taking into account such things as light and soil, the possibility of moisture and lack of moisture and the properties of the plants so on and so forth. I am also taking in the aesthetics, the balance, well, I think of the garden as a composition. So that is very satisfying to be engaged in that. When you are down on your knees looking at a little plant, you start seeing all sorts of things. It is interesting, it is healthy, your body is moving, and you are involved in weight-bearing exercise, which is an issue for women of my age. Having a nice garden, having an attractive area that you can look at is I think is kind of sensual as far as I am concerned. I would hate to be looking at a brick wall. [Val, 60-yr-old gardener]

Other responses followed a similar theme: Ann for example, said,

I like the sense of creating something, creating, and managing a landscape, the creating of a garden that is aesthetically pleasing, that changes throughout the seasons, that attract small creatures to the yard. I like geckos, birds, and things like that. [Ann, 45-yr-old gardener]

‘Communion with nature and seeing things grow, but being disappointed with failures’, was another response. One respondent said gardening simply allowed him to ‘enjoy the moment.’ Other interviewees were following a family tradition; they had been introduced to gardening at an early age by a grandparent or parent, but were no less enthusiastic about the prospect of working outside and appreciating the aesthetic aspect of creating a garden.

The reasons for growing native plants were many and varied; although the general belief is that growing native plants is to reduce water usage, this was found not to be the only reason. For example, Val, originally from California, stated that she wanted to have local Australian native plants not only because of the ‘water issue’, but also that there was a familiar feeling about them:

Because I grew up with a lot of them, and I wasn’t aware of this until I started getting them, but a lot of the landscaping in southern California was not simply from Australia, but from Western Australia. So there were a lot of Callistemon there and Eucalypts, so in a way I suppose, actually there is a connection to home isn’t there? Because these are plants, I am familiar with and I had good feelings about, although as a child I had to learn to like Eucalyptus. My initial reaction to Eucalyptus was that it was ugly and kind of dirty, but that also depended on the Eucalyptus. Some are very foreboding whereas others such as the silver leaved[64] are very beautiful… Yes as a child not liking those messy gums. They are an acquired taste. Yet many of them are beautiful, absolutely beautiful. I love mine. [Val, 60-yr-old gardener]

Interestingly, the issue of ‘having to learn to like Eucalypts’ because they appeared to be ugly and dirty was a familiar theme that came up during the course of my research. This was not only associated with Eucalypts, but with native plants in general. While this was not always expressed in so many words, gardeners from a British or European

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[64] Silver Princess (Eucalyptus caesia).
background often referred to Australian native plants as, scraggly, unkempt, prickly, and dusty. This is a total contrast to the European sense of order and natural fit that the hedges, fields and tree-lined lanes provided (Graham 2011, pp. 16-17).

One of my colleagues, when he understood what my research involved, told me that his mother, who came from England said that she did not like Australian plants because they were ‘dirty and straggly.’ This was an opinion shared by earlier writers of gardening magazines and newspaper columns. One writer, Charles Bogue-Luffman, commented as early as 1903 that the Australian flora lacked suitability for the garden because it was devoid of fine natural shapes and ‘…graceful combinations in nature. There is indeed little of a soul stirring and invigorating kind’ (Luffman 1903, cited in Holmes 2011, p. 121). Some three decades later, Millie Gibson, a landscape architect and writer for the Melbourne newspaper the Argus, expressed the view that most Australian native shrubs lacked ‘beauty of form’ (Holmes 2011, p. 123). This reflected a problem with which many gardeners were, and still are, confronted. The dominance of the Eurocentric vision of what a garden should look like is still very evident. Hunt described this as the echo of an inherited ‘uneasy legacy of pictorial taste’ (2000, p. 128).

According to Bhatti and Church, the intimate domestic spaces of home and garden are where most city dwellers find the greatest scope to ‘produce complex and personalised connections with nature’ (2001, p. 365). Interestingly, there does not seem to be a shared definitive purpose for growing native species; perhaps I should say different people grow native species for different purposes. Mulcock argues that an interest in growing native plants in a society that has given preference to exotics can be seen as part of an ‘emergent sense of indigeneity’ (2008, p. 183). Flannery believes that a sense of Australian identity can only be acquired through ecological knowledge:

> Australians have long struggled with the issue of national identity; yet they have done so without really trying to understand the nuts and bolts of workings of their land. It is, I think, now clear that a lasting notion of Australian nationhood must arise from an intimate understanding of Australian ecosystems. (1994, pp. 390, as cited by Mulcock 2008, p. 183)

Others may grow native plants simply for the sake of convenience. For example, native species need only a minimum amount of water during the summer months or perhaps they are grown to attract local birds, such as Honeyeaters (*Lichenostomus sp.*) or Wattlebirds (*Anthochaera sp.*). One gardener stated that since changing his garden from primarily exotic plants to mainly native plants, his water bill had been ‘reduced by half.’ Although not all gardeners told of such a considerable reduction, others did state
that water bills had been reduced due to the introduction of native flora. Native bees and insects are also attracted more to native plant varieties than imported exotics.

A very good example of the use of native flora for domestic purposes was explained to me by a professional landscape gardener who told me that one of his clients wanted an ‘English style cottage garden’ for his new home. After giving the matter some serious thought and drafting a number of options, he presented his client with a plan for a cottage garden made up entirely of Australian native species. When the garden had been established, the client was delighted with the finished product. This resulted in an agreeable outcome, which satisfied the sentiment of the original homeland, and acceptance of the cultural hybridity of modern Australia. The cultural hybrid nature of modern Australia is a result of mass migration since the 1950s. Most migrants in the early years of mass migration came from Britain and Europe. This influence is reflected in the gardening styles of Perth suburbs. Two very good examples of this style of ‘cottage garden’ using Western Australian native plants can be seen at the ‘mound’, in the central visitor area of Kings Park, and at the front of the Zamia Café located at the Synergy Parkland in Kings Park, as previously discussed in Chapter 5.

**Water awareness**

Perth has a Mediterranean climate similar to other areas of the world experiencing reductions in rainfall and increasing temperatures. A climate shift beginning in the mid 1970s has caused rainfalls in South Western Australia to have diminished by 10-15%, and inflows into the reservoirs that supply the city of Perth and surrounding suburbs have been reduced by half. Although the reduction in groundwater, between 2-7%, may not be as great as the reduction in surface water, it is still a serious consideration taking into account the increase in population and the decline in winter rainfall due to anthropogenic global warming (McFarlane et al. 2012, p. 488). Authorities predict that the pattern of climate recorded in the years 1975-2007, including increased temperature and reduced rainfall will continue until 2030 (Cai.W., Cowan. T., 2007 cited by McFarlane et al. 2012, p. 489).65 Perth’s population increased from approximately 1,239,400 in 1995 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1995) to an estimated 1,832,000 in 2012 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012), thus creating an increased demand for water. This continuing trend will exert an ever-increasing pressure on a diminishing resource. Although the trend of reduced precipitation is predicted to continue, measures

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65 The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), Water Corporation of Western Australia and the Bureau of Meteorology.
to combat the problem are being implemented by the Water Corporation of Western Australia.

It is well known that the State of Western Australia is a dry State within a dry continent and that water is vital to the way of life, supporting the natural environment and the community in its various functions and activities. To this end, the Water Corporation of Western Australia formulated a plan to come to terms with this progressive reduction in water availability. A project titled, *Water Forever: Towards Climate Resilience* was implemented in 2009. Recognising that with the development of new sources alone, the demand for water over the next fifty years could not be met, a portfolio of management options was developed to cater for the demand and supply of water up to the year 2060. These included targets to reduce water use by 25%, increase water recycling by 60%, and seek new sources (Western Australian Planning Commission 2003). Although having little alternative, the community showed willingness to accept the project as is stated in the introduction to the *Water Forever* manual:

The enthusiasm and interest of the Western Australian community throughout the Water Forever project has shown that there is a strong willingness to accept the challenge of becoming more climate resilient. It is now up to each and every one of us to make it happen. (Water Corporation of Western Australia 2009)

The trend into the twenty-first century is for the population of Perth to double. This will have significant effect on water usage. From a starting point in 1990 to 2030, a decline in rainfall of up to 20% is the baseline for the scenario. Extending the period to 2060 this figure is expected to be up to 40% (Water Corporation of Western Australia 2009, p. 6). Rainfall reduction of this magnitude means that yield from existing dams supplying the Perth area would not be considered as reliable sources. According to statistics the water supplied by the Water Corporation of Western Australia represents approximately half of the water used in Perth. The remainder of the water, used for irrigation of market gardens, public open space, industry and household bores comes from the underground water supplies. It is therefore crucial that careful use of this resource by all sectors is monitored adequately to ensure that it is available for future use.

The significance of this for Perth gardeners who rely on water bores in their home gardens is that their household bores would no longer yield adequate supplies of water for garden irrigation. Not only would this apply to home gardens, but also to the market gardens, council gardens and sports fields currently being irrigated from the
underground water supply. Furthermore, this would mean depletion of ground water supplies to deep-rooted native trees and local flora, reduction in natural wetlands and lakes which are so much an integral part of the Swan Coastal Plain landscape, and reduced soil moisture all of which would have serious consequences on the natural selection of plants and their viability.

Although the Water Corporation is taking necessary steps to alleviate, as much as possible the predicted limitations on water supply, this cannot be achieved without the cooperation of the public. The gardening community in particular can play a significant role by modifying garden practices (Water Corporation of Western Australia 2009, p. 34), a point also made by both Hopper and Webb (Webb 2013, p. x). This means reducing water consumption by changing from water-consuming exotic plants to the more durable and less water-consuming plants selected from our local flora. This practice is currently recognised and encouraged by promoting the use of ‘water-wise’ plants. Incorporated in the ‘Water forever 50 year plan’ it is acknowledged that domestic households have the ability to make a significant contribution to reduce water use. At this level, the Water Corporation is focused on:

Providing education and incentives to help households and land developers plan
water-wise gardens more suited to a drier climate and working with land planning
agencies, land developers and builders to increase urban density and promote
climate resilient developments within the metropolitan area. (Water Corporation of
Western Australia 2009, p. 34)

Landscaping of home gardens, public parks and recreation areas will need to be
reviewed and modified to account for changing conditions. In the event of the
anticipated decline in rainfall, areas of land, whether public or domestic, currently being
irrigated will need to be reduced. Some of these impacts are already occurring and can
be noticed in areas where natural ecosystems are dependent on shallow ground water for
survival, for example, areas such as Tangletoe Swamp and Lake Muckenburra on the
Gnangara and Jandakot mounds (Department of Water 2012; Department of Water
2011).

Very much aware of this reduced water availability, Morgan (2011, pp. 15-18)
highlights the need to reduce water usage around the home and garden and strongly
argues for a ‘bush’ style garden. The trend for this type of garden featuring low
maintenance local native plants started as a necessity in the 1970s, at the time of the
climatic shift, with the introduction of water restrictions. I found during the course of
my research that in many instances the issue of minimizing water consumption, while it
is a significant factor, was not always the primary purpose of using native plants, although that is the popular belief.

**Water usage**

People attending the native plant sales held in Kings Park are a diverse group with a common interest: growing local native plants in domestic gardens. Many have been involved for a number of years with varying degrees of success. While some claim that water use is reduced, others when questioned, were either not sure, or said that it did not make any difference. Table 13 shows the response to the question, ‘Has the use of native plants reduced your water consumption?’

Table 13: Response to water usage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Row Labels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>31-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The combined ‘no’ and ‘not sure’ response is almost the same as the ‘yes’ response (47.29% to 52.71%). This indicates that water conservation is not as high a priority as I first thought.

Vivid, long-lasting colour of native flowering species ranked very high in preference, the attraction of local birds to native plants and minimal care and maintenance of local flora was also serious consideration when making plant purchases (Hopper 2013; Webb 2013).

When discussing gardens during the course of my research with home gardeners the issue of water conservation became part of the conversation, but was more part of the broader picture rather than the primary concern. Although there is a public consciousness and awareness about the use of water in domestic situations, the attention appears to be focused on token recognition rather than positive action. Use of domestic water tanks is limited to only a few homes in suburbia, and those are generally in the older suburbs dating back to the thirties and forties, when a corrugated rainwater tank was part of the house unit. Often used for laundry purposes and drinking water, the use of tanks went out of fashion; whether due to aesthetic reasons, indifference or a mains
water supply is a point for further research. Ghosh and Head (2009) refer to this in their research into the morphology and sustainability of suburban gardens. They raise important issues relating the changing structure of suburbia and the conservation of biodiversity. Within my own research the majority of the cohort studied (79.31%) were from the suburbs and living in a detached house as previously shown in Table 9, that is, a single house on a suburban block with front and back garden. Most were dependent on the metropolitan water supply with a few having domestic water bores.

Despite the issues of reduced water availability clearly identified by the CSIRO and the Water Corporation (McFarlane et al. 2012), the changing morphology of modern housing development has not been utilised to a greater extent. Accepting that the desire for the house and gardens as separate units will continue for some time to come and that the concept of suburbia will continue to be recognised as part of Australian life, attention must fall on the sustainability of suburban life in its present form. Gardens are a major form of land use and are a well-recognised part of the domestic requirement, but they need adequate amounts of water to survive. Significant amounts of water needed to sustain a reasonable garden can be collected from the increased roof area of the modern higher density type suburbs now being encouraged by local government authorities. This in turn raises the questions posed by Ghosh and Head: ‘Could suburban gardens continue to function as sustainable systems? Could rain water from building roofs supply sufficient water for these gardens in different types of suburbs?’ (Ghosh & Head 2009, p. 321). Although my research is not designed to address these questions, it is a subject for further research, focusing in particular on the Perth city and suburban environment.

Perth, in particular, has developed over a number decades into a metropolis of sprawling outer suburbs adhering strictly to a code of the traditional detached house on a single block of land, a modified version of the house on a quarter acre block as in previous eras. However, the trend now in some local government authority areas for modern higher density living gives a greater water catchment opportunity. For example, as discussed by Ghosh and Head (2009, p. 323) the increased: ‘impervious/impermeable areas: building roof areas; road areas and paved driveways, paths and surfaces’ provide an increased water runoff area. In their study they conclude:

Analysis of sustainability potential from the spatial patterns shows that the modern development with larger building roof sizes has increased potential for harvesting roof rainwater. In this case study, an additional 35 per cent to the total water demand of the households could be supplied by the roof rainwater collection. (Ghosh & Head 2009, p. 341)
This, coupled with greater utilisation of native ‘water-wise’ plants in the garden could considerably reduce dependency on the metropolitan water supply.

**Kings Park influence**

My research (Table 14) showed that 78% percent of respondents declared that they were directly influenced by the plants on display in the park and were at least prepared to try to grow native species the remaining 22% were either trying to grow native plants on their own initiative, or influenced by their association with the natural bushland in an earlier period of their lives. Others stated that they would use native plants because of their experience in the countryside or were influenced by the media, gardening shows on television, or magazine articles. As predicted, when asked if they believed Kings Park should promote the cause for conservation of the natural environment of Western Australia, 100% of the respondents said ‘yes.’

Table 14: Influenced by Kings Park

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<th>% Of those influenced by KP</th>
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<tr>
<td>22% NO</td>
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<tr>
<td>78% YES</td>
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<td>100%</td>
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**Conclusion: Gardens a sense of order**

Details of the respondents surveyed at the native plant sales show an interest in native flora from people from various regions of the world; however, the majority were Australian or British or had British heritage. The interest was more from a gardening challenge, simple curiosity and practical reasons rather than any patriotic inclination. Although in the chapter I raise the issue of some people making an unfavourable comparison with the landscape of England, it is apparent from my research that many visitors are well informed and interested in the native plants of Western Australia. This is due to a number of influences such as the availability of technology, which makes access to various botanic resources available, plus some media references to growing native species, the annual wildflower show and the Botanic Garden.

The desire to control nature and create a sense of order is evident in today’s civic and domestic gardens. However, this controlling process provides critics with reason to question the culture of Australian suburbia, which has bared the landscape of natural
trees and shrubs only to be replaced with features of modernity. Nonetheless, gardens of today are sites of cultural identity and social activity. They indicate social status and conformity to class standards. With the re-introduction of native flora on to the domestic gardening scene a strong element of conservation consciousness is evident.

Although the ‘cultural cringe’ described by Phillips in the 1950s may have diminished over time and the Australian arts can now hold their own within the global community, the ‘horticultural cringe’ is still very evident within the gardening community of Perth. Despite concerted efforts over many years, we still see many gardens emulating the traditional ‘British’ style garden, with the mandatory water-consuming lawns, exotic trees and flowers originating from a milder, less demanding climate. Faced with an ever increasing population and diminishing water supply, it is crucial that water consumption at a domestic level be reduced. Still coming to terms with what would at times appear to be rough, straggly and unkempt plants, most residents with a desire to ‘try’ Western Australian native plants as an alternative to exotics do so with caution. As a compromise they plant the native specimens alongside the exotics, thus defeating the water wise principle of growing natives. The native flora is watered at the same time as the exotics. As excessive water consumption is a growing concern in Western Australia, the promotion of waterwise native plants for garden use is an obvious way to combat the water shortage, which is increasing over the years.

There are indications that some gardeners are taking up the challenge and growing Western Australian native plant species. In my research I was fortunate to visit a number of home gardens, which were either a mixture of exotics and natives, or mainly planted with native species. Although water economy is a factor for growing native species, this was found to be only one of a number of reasons. Other reasons included that native plants generally flowered for longer periods than imported exotics; they attracted native birds and in general need less care and maintenance. Many home gardeners in my research cohort are now coming to terms with the perceived ‘lack of form’ mentioned by earlier garden specialists, and are finding that many local native plants give an equal sense of satisfaction and a sense of achievement that exotics do.

Steps taken by the State Water Corporation by introducing the Water forever scheme is a crucial step in combating excessive water use. First introduced in 2009 the scheme is designed to target water consumption that will cater for an anticipated

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66 Some small concession has been made to the water-consuming lawns by the development of less demanding types of grass and the use of synthetic lawns.
reduction in available water by 40% by 2060. Strongly advocating the need to harvest water for domestic purposes Ghosh and Head (2009) argue that in excess of 35% of household water can be obtained by utilising the catchment area of the house and roof to capture the runoff into tanks. Water thus obtained could be diverted to garden and other domestic uses, in turn reducing the stress on the government utility. Although this research referred to an Eastern States project, the same principles would apply to Western Australia.

Although there are signs that there is an increasing interest in growing native flora in domestic gardens in Perth, the attachment to a British style garden is still very evident. Driving around the suburbs of Perth this is very obvious. The process of wholesale change to a more environmentally waterwise, aware gardening theme will most likely take generations to manifest. Despite didactic resources of Kings Park contributing to changing environmental attitudes, as shown by the number of native plants now gaining popularity in home gardens and the attachment to exotics, the results have been mixed, indicating that the dynamics of environmentality as characterised by Agrawal (2005a) for Kumaon in northern India have not been fully realised in the Perth context.
CHAPTER 7 – COMPROMISE GARDENS

The aim is to encourage the growing of Australian plants so that they can be used more widely and contribute to interesting, attractive and diverse private gardens and public landscapes in a changing environment. (Webb 2013, back cover)

Introduction

Garden visits and interviews with a number of Perth gardeners proved to be fruitful in assessing the various modes of adaptation to gardening in what can be considered a harsh and difficult environment in comparison with the more familiar gardens of British heritage. Memories of early life introductions to gardening are illustrated in this chapter and demonstrate the significance of generational influences. Importantly, the influence of Kings Park is also discussed. The significance of adapting to gardening with impoverished soils and upgrading gardens to accommodate both exotics and native plants is raised in this chapter. Neighbourly discussions are also mentioned as a means of ‘spreading the word’ regarding the use of native flora for home gardens.

A discussion with a Kings Park officer resulted in the conclusion that a compromise garden, consisting of both exotics and native plants, was the preferred option for the majority of Perth Gardeners, although the influence of Australian native plants introduced from the eastern states did, at times, appear to be an acceptable alternative to local native plants. 67 The chapter also includes an interview with a senior staff member who raised the point of ‘water-wise’ gardening and how important it is in furthering the cause of water conservation.

Previous unsuccessful attempts at introducing native flora into Perth home gardens are mentioned, as is the improved information now available. This coupled with the breeding of improved varieties making the use of native plants a more agreeable prospect is also considered. This, in turn, makes the prospect of promoting a conservation ethic easier because people are more likely to adapt to change if it results in less stress and disappointment and a more successful outcome.

Although an element of ‘horticultural cringe’ is still evident in the majority of gardens in Perth, a number of home gardeners are making a concerted effort to embrace the local native flora as an alternative or an addition to exotic plants for home use. In this chapter I will discuss interviews with some of those people who are interested in

67 A discussion on the benefits or not of introducing plants from the eastern states does not fall within the scope of this project.
using native flora in their home gardens. Some of the interviews took place in their respective homes and gardens, and some in their offices.\textsuperscript{68}

**Soil for a compromise garden**

Jon is a gardener of many years experience. He is very much involved in community work, including working as a volunteer guide in Kings Park. He lives in an older established suburb with easy access to the city and Kings Park. Originally the soil type in his garden was shallow, yellow and brown sand overlying aeolianite (Seddon 1972, p. 91). Although a keen ‘native plant’ advocate, Jon has a garden comprised of exotics as well as native plants. Due to this mixture, he finds it necessary to purchase improved soil from specialists. This additional soil with organic additives enhances water retention in the soil and accommodates the nutrient requirement of his exotic plants, at the same time improving the growth potential of his native plants. Jon emphasised that a conventional commercial mix of fertilizer may not be suitable for local native species, which requires a neutral pH for soil similar to that of Kings Park (Bessell-Brown 1990, p. 16). Soil modification to suit plant requirements is a gradual process; Webb and Brand recommend planting a less sensitive cultivar of the same species to overcome deficiency problems (Webb 2013, p. 4).

At the rear of the house, the garden is a blend of native and exotic plants. This result is a compromise, which presents itself as a pleasant retreat, displaying undergrowth of lush sheltered greenery beneath tall shady Eucalyptus trees, surrounding a small patch of lawn. This is an example of blending native flora with exotics, showing a garden with an Australian atmosphere and character, capable of withstanding the harsh hot and dry summer conditions of Perth, yet at the same time demonstrating attachment to an English garden style.

The front garden, also a mix of both exotics and natives, is less sheltered and the plants show signs of damage and fatigue from a relentless long, hot summer. The constant battle for gardeners in the Perth region is against these long hot summers. Little relief is received during the months of November through to April. Summer rains, once a regular event, occur only very rarely. When asked how his garden survived through the summers, Jon emphasised the necessity to nurture new plants during the hot periods.

\textsuperscript{68} In order to respect the anonymity of the interviewees, I have given them fictitious names. Their contribution is greatly appreciated.
Although familiar with the catch phrase ‘water-wise’ plants, he felt it was a message that was easily misunderstood by gardeners. It is not simply a case of just ‘chucking it in the ground and it's going to live; it just doesn’t work like that’ he said. He has found in his experience, that many new plants purchased at the November and March Kings Park native plant sales need to be ‘potted on’ and kept in a moderate, dappled shaded environment for the first summer, and then planted out into the garden the following autumn or winter, thus taking advantage of the cooler weather and winter rains to become established.  

Jon’s involvement in gardening originated from an early induction by his parents’ involvement in the Naturalists Club and other nature-oriented organisations. His grandparents were active in the Rose Society, and his sister has a doctorate in botany. His interest in gardening is actively supported by his wife, who taught biology at Tuart College in Perth. Other members of his family have an active interest in the natural world. A daughter majored in zoology, and one of his brothers once owned a tree farm. Gardening and associated interests are embedded in the family culture. Jon sees great value in the way Kings Park emphasises the use of local native species, he also regards it as having immense cultural and social value.

Jon expressed strong concern about the rapidly increasing population of Perth and the effect that this might have on Kings Park. As he said, in a rapidly growing and crowded city the only ‘breathing space’ many Perth people had was Kings Park. An ever-increasing population would place increasing stress on the already limited motor vehicle parking areas, catering, public conveniences and other facilities in the park. He is concerned that with the increase in population the emphasis on botanic displays and research may diminish in favour of social and cultural activities. The park is already used for movies, popular concerts and occasional theatrical and cultural events. Although increased use of the park may have detrimental effects in some areas, it does display the beauty of local plants to more people.

In part of the interview, Jon discussed the social class association with parks and the issue of the rapidly increasing population of Perth:

One other thing, I am a bit worried history might repeat itself, with Perth’s population rapidly expanding. I am just worried that we will end up with, er, you know, street after street of units. I am suggesting particularly the inner city areas close to Perth; it's going to be very noticeable. The only breathing space a lot more

69 ‘Potted on’ is a term used by gardeners when moving an immature plant from a small pot to a larger one.
Jon’s fears about the population increase of Perth and the detrimental effect it may have on the park are understandable after his experiences overseas. However, when I raised the issue with park staff of an increasing population having an effect on the park, it appears from their statistics that the number of visitors has stabilised over recent years. As Perth expands and the population grows, there is an ever-increasing demand for urban open space in the outer suburbs, which in turn takes up the need for recreation areas. At the same time the local government authorities often keep some of the remaining natural bushland intact in these areas, as well as planting additional local native trees around the public facilities. From my own observations these suburban open spaces are well utilised by local residents and provide opportunities for cyclists, joggers, walkers (Giles-Corti et al. 2005), dog owners and naturalists. Many native birds and trees that are not seen in Kings Park are seen in these areas. Most of these suburban parks provide public conveniences, sporting facilities and barbeques for social gatherings and play areas for children.\textsuperscript{70} These suburban open spaces, are now places of cultural value (Low, Taplin & Scheld 2005; Nankervis 1998; Tuan 1974), and provide other opportunities, rather than local residents travelling sometimes long distances, to Kings Park to satisfy their cultural, recreational or sporting requirements. Appreciation of these areas is evident in my discussions with a number of residents who use these areas for their activities.

\textbf{Childhood memories}

An interest in gardening can often be associated with early childhood memories and experiences through periods of influence. Ann, a home gardener, stated she was directly

\textsuperscript{70} For example, Stirling, a local government area, has 16 such parks and 500 hectares of native bushland reserved for public use.
influenced by the example set by the Botanic Garden at Kings Park. She also associated her aesthetic choices and preference for local native plants with her maturity:

It is largely an aesthetic attraction as my tastes have matured. I used to be interested in gardening for food production and then for sustainability. So as a child, I was interested in food gardening first and foremost. Growing unusual things, useful things, I was interested in utility. Then I carried that through into permaculture, which I was very into as a young adult. Er, but even then I was very much starting to develop an appreciation of the bush, of the landscape of the southwest, of the Swan Coastal Plain or what remains of it. I have always loved Kings Park; it is wonderful, it is the jewel in the crown of Western Australia, it’s marvelous. I wouldn’t say it is just a retreat because it is a lot more than that, because it is…. (hesitation). I find it very hard to put into words it is just beautiful. Er, I don’t know, I am attracted to a certain sparseness and ruggedness in plants. It is not only Western Australian plants. I like alpine species and I love to visit alpine collections if I go overseas. So I go to botanic gardens and I will visit them. I love alpine plants, I love desert plants, but I can’t grow alpine plants in Perth.

[Ann, 45-yr-old gardener]

Although Ann started her interest in gardening as a child, it was initially about growing food or unusual things. It was at this early age that she also started to develop an interest in the natural bushland and landscape of the Southwest of Western Australia and in particular the Swan Coastal Plain, or as she said, ‘what remains of it.’ Referring to Kings Park and Botanic Garden as the ‘jewel in the crown’ of Western Australia, she felt that it was a lot more than just a retreat for people of Perth. In contrast to some of the opinions of the native Western Australian bush, Ann found an attraction in its sparseness and the ruggedness of the plants. Having said that she added that she also had a liking not only for Western Australian plants, but also for alpine plants. This partiality required visits to botanic gardens in more appropriate environments. Although recognising a very keen interest in local native plants, Ann conceded she was not a purist, and was not trying to create an environment by restoring what had been in existence before. Her main purpose was to create a landscape that she would find aesthetically pleasing, making few demands on the environment and which would provide a habitat for an array of creatures, birds, lizards and insects. Although she recognised that the term local Western Australian plants would refer to plants growing on the Bassendean sand plain and the Darling scarp areas, she had some specimens from the Kalgoorlie region. She developed an agreeable compromise with some plants that may have been growing on her home site prior to colonisation. Relishing the modest success with native plants, Ann explained that originally her house block was little more than a ‘builder’s dump’, made up primarily of sand and rubble, and she had considerable difficulty growing anything for some time. When defining a species preference she said she loved the Marri trees (*Corymbia calophylla*), but, recognising
the limitations of the house block size and also the limitations of the soil type, this
species was not a valid option. The same limiting factors applied to her preference for
Banksias (*Banksia sp.*). However, preference was given to the Grass Tree, (*Xanthorrhoea
sp.*), various Wattle trees (*Acacia sp.*), and for smaller shrub type specimens, such as
Leschenaultia (*Leschenaultia sp.*), and Calothamnus (*Calothamnus sp.*) for their
‘Japanese look.’ Ann was very familiar with the names and forms of the various local
species, describing her liking for ‘architectural’ plants. For example, she emphasised her
preference for the Eucalypts and went on to describe in detail a ‘book leaf’ Eucalypt
(*Eucalyptus cruciana*) growing in her garden.

Following the theme of the shape and form of plants, she referred to the sparse
foliage of some of the Melaleucas, describing the foliage as ‘wispy and abstract’, with
remarkable bottlebrush type flowers. Grey smoke bush (*Conospermum stoechadis*) and
Verticordia (*Verticordia sp.*) were other preferences described in detail by Ann. Illustrating her desire for a garden with a variety of native plants, she spoke with
authority on the flora of the northern sand plains, the Stirling Ranges in the south of the
state, and the inland desert flora of the Meekatharra region.

When asked if the displays of local native flora in Kings Park influenced her, she
replied that they had significant influence on her choice of plants. For example, the
Guinea flowers (*Hibbertia scandens*) had never previously been given any consideration
but when they were on display in the Botanic Garden, she chose them as an understory
plant for growing under a Hakea (*Hakea sp.*) tree in her garden. It survived the summer,
a crucial factor with people preferring native plants for their home gardens.

Environmental education was a topic of interest to Ann. She emphasised the
importance of it in the environmental consciousness, particularly the modernist aesthetic
and reproduction of middle class values. Such values reflect order and control, civic
virtue, community responsibility, also cleanliness and neatness (Heald 1963, p. 81) as
frequently seen in middle class gardens in Perth. The middle class also emphasises the
potential of education for solving social problems and a preparation for life as an adult.
Additionally, as recognised by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, middle class
values include, prudence, aspiration and social acceptance (McDonald 1995, p. 4). These values are a fusion of the ideals brought in over a long period by many different
communities that make up the population of Australia, though in that mix the overall
prevalence of ‘western’ family values is irrefutable. The original majority population
constituting settler Australians, despite the recent intake of migrants from Asia, has
been dominated by those originating from Western and Northern Europe. The demographic norm of most Australian families is very similar to that of England, and the English legal system, which is described by McDonald as the ultimate expression of values (1995, p. 1).

The ‘middle class’ referred to by Ann raises some interesting points, especially in an Australian society, that is claimed overtly to being egalitarian (Horne 1964, pp. 6-9; Bennett & Carter 2001, p. 121; White 1981, pp. 167-168; McGregor 2001, p. 181). Although a class system in Australia is often difficult to define, the ‘middle class’ is generally considered to consist of those who work in white-collar work, upon which postindustrial society is dependent. They work in white-collar jobs as opposed to blue collar jobs as supervisors, professionals and middle managers, and have considerable autonomy in their work (McGregor 2001, p. 201). They have aspirations for their children to have a higher education and continue the family tradition of a middle class lifestyle; the vast majority lives in what is termed the mortgage belt in the suburbs, in a house with a front and back garden. This constitutes the majority of the Australian population (Salt 2013, pp. 1-4), exemplifying many of the features Marx had accorded to a group with common position relative to the means of production (Burgmann & Milner 1996, p. 117). Viewed from this perspective the middle class is an intermediate class between ‘labour’ and ‘capital’ consisting of salaried non-owner members of the work force who do not actually produce ‘surplus value’ in the process of production, but who organise and supervise its production and distribution (Clegg & Emmison 1991, pp. 26-27). The Australian Bureau of Statistics (cited by Mulcock 2008, p. 183) classifies gardening as one of the most popular pastimes for home occupiers, the majority of whom would identify as middle class.

Influences on gardening

Although the majority of people surveyed responded that Kings Park was influential in their choice of native plants for their gardens, so too was the influence of family, as well as having experienced a history of growing up in a gardening environment. For example, Geo, a member of the Friends of Kings Park and a keen gardener who live in Fremantle, a port city twelve kilometres south of Perth, explained that both his and his wife’s family had had significant influence on their gardening interest:

…I am from England and she’s [his wife] from South Africa, and we had a biggish property, and my parents were both…my mother in particular was an avid gardener. So, it has quite an impact on how you feel about gardens and gardening and plants because it’s sort of innate, it’s there, it’s been with you from when you were very young, and my wife is from Durban in South Africa. Her mother was
er…she was into; she had a really lovely garden. She knew a lot about plants and so on. Actually, her husband, my father-in-law, was an artist. So, he painted many native plants. We still have quite a lot of his paintings. [Geo, 60-year-old gardener]

In reference to traditional English style gardens the first thing Geo mentioned was the struggle he had with trying to grow roses in the Fremantle environment. Attributing their poor performance to the excessive heat of summer and salt air from the nearby coast, he suggested he should ‘be ripping the roses out and planting natives, but we do love our roses. Some times of the year they are very nice.’

The expression ‘but we do love our roses’ was one I was to hear a number of times during the course of my research. Referring to the influence of Kings Park, Geo focused on the significant changes that had taken place since he came to Western Australia in 1981. He recalled that at the time the park was displaying a number of plants from other countries, many from South Africa. He felt it was because people who migrated to Australia came from other countries, and ‘brought with them what they thought at the time were “nice” plants and planted them in the park.’ Observing something familiar, constituted in migrants a sense that they belonged in this country, which was new to them. To develop a sense of belonging is crucial to feel comfortable in a place that is not originally ‘home.’ As Trigger (2005a, p. 307) asserts, to really belong is to be born in a place and to have an ancestral association with the place, as is the case with Australian Aboriginals. However, the majority of Australians nowadays have an ancestral lineage linking them to countries with a different natural environment, hence the importation of plants originating from overseas. There is still some evidence of the South African influence in the park, with some plants from that country still growing in one small section of the Botanic Garden.

Extolling the virtues of Kings Park, and how the park influenced his choice of native plants for his garden, Geo said it was a well-planned place and that after looking at various plants, Banksias, for example, he felt that he would like to try to grow them. Although not as successful as he would have liked, he now recognises that he needs to grow the types that would be most suitable for that particular area.71 So far, he has discovered that a prostrate Banksia (Banksia petiolaris) is most suitable for his garden.

As the conversation turned to water economy, Geo expressed frustration at having to constantly water the grass verge in front of the house. Although the verge is council land, Geo felt responsible for the area and a Peppermint tree (Agonis flexuosa) currently

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71 Home site advantage (Krauss 2011, p.23).
growing there. His source of frustration was, apart from the constant watering, that the tree is diseased, showing sign of stress; with dead leaves and withered branches it was starting to look unsightly and impeding the aesthetic appeal of the locality. He and his immediate neighbour approached the council in the hope they would remove the tree and allow Geo and his neighbour to replace it with native shrubs at their own expense. Unfortunately, the council response was that they would not allow what they believed to be a mature healthy tree, to be removed. He felt the council did not understand the situation fully. He had hoped to emulate other areas around the town where grass had been removed from the verge, covered with mulch and planted with native shrubs. Whether this was done with council approval or not was a debatable point. In spite of this, it showed that the interest in growing native plants was well entrenched in the community.

Although Geo came from the UK, he acknowledges that some of the plants, Euphorbias (Euphorbia sp.) for example, that grew in Western Australia could just as well grow in Britain. However, it did take some adjustment to gardening in Western Australia after gardening in England. He reiterated what another gardener, Jon, had said in a previous interview that growing native plants was not just a case of planting them out and hoping they would look after themselves. They need to be well looked after initially, taking into account the climatic conditions and the soil type.

Whether neighbours were following his example of growing native plants was a further topic of conversation. Geo’s neighbours directly opposite on the other side of the road had followed his example. Although the back garden showed the owners were successfully growing roses, the front garden was planted with all native shrubs. Successes and failures of certain plants were often topics of conversation between neighbours on either side and those opposite Geo’s house, and promoting the use of native plants on the verges and in gardens was also frequently discussed.

**Influence of Kings Park**

Referring to the influence of Kings Park, Tess, an administration officer in the park, focused on a number of issues. Initially, she spoke enthusiastically about the Naturescape project, previously discussed in Chapter 5. Having a young family, this is of particular interest to her. She is involved in the project as a ‘bush guardian’ and assisted with the education of children who spend time in the area. Her role as ‘bush guardian’ involves meeting and greeting visitors and explaining the purpose of
Naturescape as: primarily an education facility promoting environmental conservation for young children and primary school students. Through playing an active role with the Friends of Kings Park, Tess has considerable inside knowledge and experience about the aims and purposes of the Park. One of her many roles is to try to attract more support from corporate bodies to assist the Friends of Kings Park, which will in turn advance the cause of conservation education.

High on her list of activities within the park is conservation of the native bushland areas and particular species. Of particular interest to Tess is the location of various plants throughout the state. Explaining how many of them were peculiar to a specific area and using the example of the popular Geraldton Wax (*Chamelaucium uncinatum*), she explained that certain native plants were endemic to particular areas and that some in the park had been removed because they were not endemic to this area.

Although the soils of the Swan plain are lacking in nutrients and low rainfall, the ability of plants to adjust to this and to favour specific areas is a phenomenon of particular interest to students and visitors (Seddon 1972; Lambers 2014b). This is a point that is frequently raised by the Friends of Kings Park and the volunteer Guides when promoting conservation in the course of their duties.

Focusing on the meaning of gardening, Tess, like other respondents, emphasised not only the influence of Kings Park, but also the introduction to gardening by her father, a reflection on childhood memories:

> Well, I was very lucky in that my father introduced me to gardening as a child. Very lucky my parents travelled around Australia when I was young, eleven, and for a couple of years they settled in central Queensland. We were in a very remote area and my father basically gave me a shovel when I was bored and said ‘come on, let’s dig a garden.’ Which we did, and we went through and dug with beautiful mulch. So we started growing vegetables and plants. I just loved that connection with the soil. To me that was extremely therapeutic and I’ve always done that. Now I am growing more of a kitchen garden in my own garden. More herbs and my husband is so impressed that I can just go and pick a lettuce and we don’t have to buy them, and he just goes, “Wow! I don’t mind if we can do that.” [Tess, 35-year-old gardener]

Although not as significant as they were twenty or thirty years ago, contemporary gardens still have a role in the ‘production and consumption priorities of late modern capitalism as well as highlighting the range of socio-ecological possibilities in everyday spaces’ (Webb 2013, pp. 2-5).

Raising the prospect of growing native flowering plants for ornamentals in preference to imported exotics Tess illustrated a situation where trying to grow lush exotics was a futile exercise in her domestic situation:
I think I have fallen in love with West Australian native flora, which I really enjoy. I actually rent [a house], but I rent from a retired Italian garden landscaper and I have a beautiful garden that they look after. However, they have a back part that I look after, and they have a very hot fence, which gets up to sixty degrees. And they keep planting these beautiful lush plants that I have to water twice a day in summer and they still die. Because it’s not the water, it’s the heat. So I noticed they put a Geraldton Wax there that I don’t water at all and it thrives. This was a couple of years ago before I came to Kings Park. So every time something dies I go to the nursery and buy a Western Australian native plant and replant, and it thrives [Tess].

Tess continued:

So I have rebuilt this back wall garden thing with natives. I haven’t been able to put natives throughout the property because it belongs to someone else. But they said I could do what I liked with my area. So rather than have a dead garden, I have got this gorgeous native garden. It’s really amazing. I’ve put in natives that look really hardy and they’ve died, and then I’ve put in some natives that look a little bit lush and beautiful and they thrive with no water. It is very interesting like you said about all the natives they are very particular to what they like [Tess].

As a Friend of Kings Park, she frequently assists at the plant sales. It is clear from the enthusiastic response that Tess is a great admirer of local Australian native plants. As the interview continued, she identified her preferences for particular local species, at the same time reiterating what previous respondents had said. That was, that if the plants are bought in small ‘tubes’ they need to be nurtured through the first few months of growth and repotted before being planted out into the garden. She was aware that a number of customers at the plant sales were purchasing plants to replace ones that had not survived the summer. One of her particular preferences is the Wedding Bush (*Ricinocarpus tuberculatus*), described by her as an example of a native plant that can be used as an ornamental plant adding a degree of exoticism to a domestic garden.

A significant feature of her preferences for local native plants is a reduction in water consumption. When she first rented the property, her garden was primarily filled with lush tropical type plants, which, she said, required water twice a day throughout the summer months; otherwise they would die. Many of the plants expired due to a very long hot summer. These were replaced with native plants and almost immediately, she noticed a reduction in watering requirements. As the native plants have become established, some areas of the garden need little or no watering through the summer months.

Tess observed that in her neighbourhood people were increasingly planting native species on the verges in preference to the original grass areas. As she stated, ‘verges are particularly ‘tough’ areas and need plants that are durable, needing little water and
requiring only minimal maintenance.’ As my research continued this was a familiar theme. Living in a suburb described by Tess as a traditional one, it was apparent that some deference was given to the Western Australian climate, by using tough grasses, ground covers and strong hardy shrubs and trees. This would suggest that public verges are recognised to be utility areas and subjected to hard use with little maintenance. Regular walks around the suburb where I live, which is a high-density housing district, shows a distinct difference in verges outside owner-occupied properties and rental properties. Most owner-occupiers spend resources on maintaining the verges outside their properties, often fertilizing, mowing and watering the verges, even though the area is used for overflow parking. In contrast, verges outside rental properties show little sign of regular maintenance and are often reduced to little more than sand pits with a few patches of dry grass and damaged shrubs.

**Influence on neighbours**

My research showed that communication between neighbours regarding gardening interests was varied. In some instances, as previously mentioned in the case of Geo, it was a topic frequently discussed by neighbours, yet in other areas, it was a topic of little significance. For example, in one of the most affluent suburbs of Perth one of my interviewees, Peta, a regular customer at the native plant sales, had little communication about gardening with her current neighbours on either side, even though she had been resident in the district for forty years.

Her experience with using native plants in her garden reinforced the principle that specific plants, native or otherwise, were suited to particular environmental conditions, and would survive better in areas reflecting their natural state, or were durable and adaptive. Peta’s house and garden are situated in a suburb with the Swan River on the eastern side and the ocean on the western side. Sea breezes tainted with salty air tend to be detrimental to most exotics and many native species. This presented particular gardening challenges to Peta, who had a distinct preference for roses, echoing the sentiments of a number of my interviewees as previously mentioned. Roses are a distinct symbol of an English home. However, after many years of frustrated effort, and little success, she has decided to yield to the forces of nature and replace her roses as they died with suitable native species. This, in turn, presented another set of gardening challenges in determining which native species were tolerant to salty air; hence Peta fostered a proliferation of Grevillea species (*Grevillea sp.*) in her garden.
Gardening interest in Peta’s case also reflected not only the influence of Kings Park, but also family influence. In Peta’s case, it was not an inherited influence from previous generations, but influence from her son, who was an avid gardener and supporter of the use of native plants in preference to exotics. In response to the standard question, ‘What do you get out of gardening?’ she echoed what other interviewees said: that it gets her outside and she gets satisfaction seeing plants grow. An added dimension mentioned during the interview was that she enjoyed seeing the native birds come into the garden. The pleasure of seeing Honeyeaters (*Phylidonyris novaehollandiae*), Wattlebirds (*Anthochaera sp.*), and the Ring Neck parrots (*Barnardius zonarius*) coming into the garden was extremely satisfying.

**Kings Park example**

In a discussion with an officer of the Botanic Garden, Brad, I raised the issue of influence through the example set by the park and Botanic Garden. The influx of high-level international visitors to the conference facilities within the park for the 2011 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) prompted the question of using this occasion to promote the use of local native species. Garden beds surrounding the conference facilities were in need of revitalising. Although the area is within the agreement with the lessee of the conference and restaurant facilities, the surrounding garden beds were in a state of decline. The influx of international visitors was seen as an ideal prospect for the park authority to take responsibility for the area and in turn provide an ideal opportunity to highlight the use of local native flora. The occasion was seen as an appropriate mechanism to upgrade garden areas that had fallen into neglect. Even though the conference was specifically for the Commonwealth Heads of State and their respective entourages, it was anticipated that it would attract numerous other visitors and provide the opportunity to highlight the park and Botanic Garden to the world.

During the course of our discussion, he acknowledged that the majority of home gardens in Perth were focused on what he called a ‘compromise garden’, that is, one growing both exotics and native plants. He said that people had considerable influence over the plot of land they lived on. For example, they will change the soil structure, but our native flora will meet with a varied response if the wrong modifications are made. Emphasising the fragility of our plants in certain situations, he stated that unless the householder is committed to growing just Australian plants over a number of years, the
finished product is a compromise garden, an agreeable situation satisfying the European heritage and at the same time giving deference to the Western Australian climate. He recognised that in our climate, not too many people want a completely open garden, and consideration has to be given to the requirements of the resident. Most people when they design a garden want to enjoy it, by sitting in a suitable comfortable shaded position and reaping the rewards of their labour.

Focusing on the durability of our native flora, Brad acknowledged that Australian plants imported from the Eastern States are more robust and not as fragile as our local species; they are tougher and more adaptable, or as he put it, more ‘bullet proof.’ That is why Eastern States flora are highly represented in home and civic gardens in Perth: they are commercially more acceptable than our local western Australian species. Botanists within the research unit of the park, the Botanic Conservation Centre, are addressing this issue by developing more robust hybrid species. Adding to his previous comments on a compromise garden, Brad went on to say that having Australian plants, preferably Western Australian plants, in a garden develop a feeling of accepting the Australian conditions. He did not want a garden full of roses, but one with a majority of local flora.

A garden is a mixture of different things. Brad feels that there is a strong degree of association with plants on a personal level. For example, he said, ‘There might be a plant associated with a loved one at a specific period in that person’s life. You do not just say ‘I love the plant’, but you are in fact saying that you love the person who is associated with that plant.’ Adding significance to the place, a garden design that displays not only plants, but also art pieces or memorabilia, or other such points of interest, might also be associated with a parent or grandparent. Brad explained that gardens are more than just a collection of plants, but a site for social cohesion within a group of family and friends, an extension of a person’s life: a garden is a space that people can share together. Expanding on the point and the influence of gardening, he sees it as an extension of life:

> It’s like the influence of one person in a neighborhood on their neighbours. They’re talking to them, “come and have a look at what I have done”, “let me come and give you a hand.” It’s sort of, I don’t know, an extension. Gardening to me is not an insular thing. It’s something that should extend your life and not be something that is all about you. The liberating thing in life is all about friendships and associations of sharing the space with others and going to theirs and helping inspire them, you know. Trying to overcome what has happened in the world by being positive and so on. [Brad 55-year-old professional gardener]

This quotation from Brad illustrates gardening as an expression of positive social relations, an interpretation of intellectual thought and values that are very important for
the development of a mature personality with an appreciation of moral values. It is a place, which nurtures respect for life where one can understand the unity of humanity and nature, and harmony and where one can learn a way of life that is environmentally friendly (Motiejūniatė & Juodkaitė 2014, pp. 10-11).

**Mixed gardens and watering**

Much emphasis is placed on ‘water-wise’ gardening in Perth; this was discussed at length with Mik, a senior staff member of the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority. He said that in recent years the introduction of automated reticulation systems had taken a lot of the tedium out of maintaining a garden. However, this had brought with it some unforeseen problems for the native plant enthusiast. For example, if a garden is planted with a mixture of native plants and exotics, the watering regime will invariably be set to accommodate the exotics, which need more water than the natives. This, in turn, will mean that the accompanying native plants will be receiving two or three times their normal water requirements, thus defeating the purpose of planting ‘water-wise’ native species. It is better to plan the garden with an area allocated to natives and another area allocated to exotics. An interesting point raised by Mik is that although the policy of the park and the Friends of the Park is to promote the local species of flora, there are native plants from other parts of Australia, with similar ‘water-wise’ attributes, which will complement the local species.

Mik raised the issue of longer flowering periods with native species when compared to exotics. Using Grevilleas as an example, he explained that given the correct conditions such as low alkaline soil, they will flower for up to ten months of the year; once established, they will require little if any watering through the summer months. He added a note of caution about using bore water, which in many areas around Perth has a high alkaline content and is not suitable for many species. Continuing on the water usage theme, Mik referred to the seventies period, as others informants have, when promoting native species was a feature of gardening practices in Perth. Although well intentioned, the information given about using native plants was not always correct. People were led to believe that they were all low maintenance and low water users, and unfortunately many people planted the wrong species. This resulted in plants either dying or growing out of control, as Mik stated in the interview:

…the seventies was a bad time for planting natives. People were told that they were low water users, low maintenance and low everything. So they planted them, and they planted the wrong species and all they did was die or go absolutely

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During the course of my fieldwork I discussed this period, the seventies, with gardeners, other guides, Friends of the park, and staff members. Many had similar experiences to Mik. Those who remember the time told me it was a disappointing period for growing native species. Information was sparse, misleading, or misunderstood, and knowledge about soil differences on the Swan Coastal Plain, although known by geologists and professional gardeners, was not general knowledge to the home gardener. This proved to be a considerable setback to promoting native species for home gardens, and a serious interest in growing native plants for home gardens did not revive until the late 1990s. Since then, knowledge has increased and information about production techniques and growing requirements has become readily available to the home gardener.

Mik stated that he felt that the awareness of water economy was more of a feature of the less affluent and newer suburbs of the metropolitan region rather than the more affluent western suburbs. He felt that water prices were having a significant impact on the choice of garden type in these suburbs. It would not be a good measure of garden types to use the western suburbs as a yardstick because they could afford to use more water without imposing financial stress.

When considering the climatic requirements of native plants, Mik expressed reluctance to use the term ‘climate change.’ He said he would much prefer to use the term ‘changing climate’, saying that the plant-breeding program at the Biodiversity Conservation Centre was focusing on plants that were adaptable to a range of climates. This, in turn, would allow for the climate getting hotter and dryer or wetter and having plants that were resilient to the change.

**Gardening in different countries**

A couple interviewed in their home in a high socio-economic enclave in the northern suburbs reflected the statements made by the previous interviewee with regard to consideration of water economy. Although they were keen native garden enthusiasts, it was apparent that part of the garden was set aside for plants that would consume considerably more water than native plants. Both front and rear garden areas are meticulously attended. A water feature on the back garden wall surrounded by topiary
bushes dominates the rear garden area. Plantings are a mix of exotics, roses, annuals and local natives. Although a well-manicured ‘lawn square’ is in the centre, a native ground cover commonly referred to as ‘Pig Face’ (*Carpobrotus rossii*), a succulent coastal ground cover, borders the paved areas of the garden and blends well with the general ambience.

Both agreed that they got a lot of enjoyment out of gardening, having had experience in a variety of climates ranging across the extremes of Canada, New Zealand, New South Wales, South Australia and now Perth, Western Australia. Eric was a mining consultant and Joy a retired schoolteacher. Both emphasised the relaxing qualities of gardening and the therapeutic value it had. After looking at a computer screen all day, Eric said he simply wanted to get home at weekends and spend as much time in the garden as he could.

Comparing gardening techniques in Perth with his original experiences gardening, Eric related stories about how difficult it was in his home environment, Calgary, Alberta. Gardening was an activity that could be done for little more than five months of the year, with planting commencing about the last weekend in May. Joy declared:

> You can guarantee the first snowfall in the first week of September. So you would plant annuals, but things like roses grow ok. But I was thinking of things more like lilacs and peonies and tulips because you plant them and they sit in the frozen ground over winter and then poke their heads up in the summer and things like that. You have the wildflowers in the mountains and that sort of thing...You have very long days in the summer, so things have time to grow. Even though it is only a very short season, things grow pretty well there.

Although very experienced gardeners in a number of different environments, they felt that they still had to learn different techniques gardening in a climate that was for the most time hot and dry and with soils that lacked nutrients. Their interest in gardening in Western Australia was enhanced by living close to Kings Park when they first came to Perth. Taking advantage of their location, they became regular clients of the native plant sales run by the Friends of Kings Park. One of their first purchases was a Thryptomene (*Thryptomene sp.*), a medium shrub growing to one and a half metres high to one and a half metres wide. Covered with small white or pink flowers, it has refreshingly pungent foliage when it comes in contact with clothing and is frequently used in cut flower arrangements. They had previous experience growing this plant so were familiar with its requirements. As their contact with the park continued, their interest in Western Australian native flora increased.

One of the main challenges confronting Eric and Joy in their gardening endeavours growing local native plants was adjusting to a different soil type. Previously familiar
with the rich loamy soil of Alberta, the Hawkesbury sandstone type soil of Sydney, and the clay loam of Adelaide, the impoverished soil of the Swan Coastal Plain offered a considerable challenge. Although they were very enthusiastic about growing native plants, they recognised that success and failure were part of the process. When asked if there was any particular type of local plants they preferred, Joy proudly referred to two Qualup Bells (*Pimelea physodes*) growing in the front garden. They were a point of interest in the neighbourhood and soon became a feature in other gardens. Other plants popular with Eric and Joy were Blue Leschenaultias (*Leschenaultia biloba*), although growing them initially was not successful due to planting them in an inappropriate location with insufficient direct sunlight. Persevering with further purchases and planting them in full sun proved successful.

When I raised the question of using native plants to reduce water consumption, Eric said that it didn’t make any difference due to the fact that they had a ‘cosmopolitan’ type garden and an automated reticulation system covering the whole garden. The previous owners of the property had installed this. This meant that all plants got watered at the same time irrespective of whether they were native or exotics. To make any significant adjustment to the reticulation system would mean digging up the whole system and re-laying it and installing additional timers or modifying the garden to such an extent it would not meet with their plans. To compensate they imposed a strict regime of minimal watering. Joy said she was a great believer in the ‘survival of the fittest’, in a garden and plants that did not survive minimal watering would be replaced with a harder variety.

Very much aware of the range of climatic conditions in Western Australia and the different types of plants associated with those areas, Eric emphasised the necessity for prospective native garden enthusiasts to be aware that plant choice had to be relevant to the chosen area of planting. For example, he said, ‘a variety growing in the Kimberley region may not grow successfully in Perth suburbs on the Swan Coastal Plain. It is always a good policy to concentrate on plants that have a record of success in the chosen location.’ When they first purchased the property, Eric mixed forty kilos of gypsum and compost into the soil to accommodate the variety of plants they were planning to grow.

Both Eric and Joy have been interested in gardening for over twenty-five years. Learning further skills in garden care for Joy was a result of her being involved in a gardening project in Sydney. She volunteered to be part of a group called ‘easy care
gardening.’ The purpose of the group was to assist elderly people who were still living in the family home but were not capable of intensive work required to keep a large garden in good order. Most of the homes and gardens had been established for many years; they were well advanced and contained mature plants. The gardens were quite large and were planted in the years when the traditional Australian quarter acre block was the norm (Timms 2006). For a charge of ten dollars a month, a team would clean up the garden, do weeding, collect garden refuse, prune trees and shrubs and attend to mulching and watering where needed. Learning to prune shrubs and small trees was a skill she was to find useful in later years.

Eric also confirmed that gardening interest was something learnt from previous generations. He said that his father was a very keen gardener: ‘He had the best lawn in the neighbourhood and was an active gardener into his eighties.’ Likewise Joy also said that her parents, in particular her mother, were keen gardeners. They gardened not so much for pleasure, but for necessity during the years of the depression when vegetables were scarce. Joy recalled that when she was a young girl picking ‘a lovely fresh tomato and slicing it on toast for breakfast.’ Spending time in her grandmother’s large garden in southern Saskatchewan also had considerable influence on Joy’s gardening skills. Although the primary function of the garden was to provide vegetables for the immediate and extended family, familiarity with growing plants gave her a good foundation for future involvement with gardens.

**Challenge for botanic gardens**

Stan, an academic who has experience with both Western Australia and overseas flora, provided a detailed account of the plant life of botanic gardens. Making comparisons between the climatic and soil conditions of both local and overseas facilities, he identified different challenges in both areas. One overseas botanic garden of particular interest to Stan was Kew Gardens, which focused on plants from the United Kingdom, Africa and the British colonies. In recent years the emphasis of these gardens has been on conservation and on making an impact on the quality of people’s lives through the study of plant diversity and applied use, following the influence of Heslop-Harrison (Gunning 2000). Over the last six years Kew Gardens has established a ‘United Kingdom native plant seed harbour’, in which seed from most of the flora has been
collected and stored with the intent of assisting restoration ecology by providing high quality viable seeds for reproduction.\textsuperscript{72}

Stan had previous experience with Kings Park and Botanic Garden and the transition of the park from one which displayed flora from similar Mediterranean climates to one which concentrated wholly on Western Australian flora. Giving an example of the earlier policy, he described how it had not been possible to view examples of local flora in the park unless one went around the back of a wall at the War Memorial. Places of prominence for easy viewing were taken up with plants from California, South Africa, South America and the Mediterranean. In his experience West Australian flora has gone through a ‘Cinderella’ phase from being the least interesting and the least diverse of Mediterranean type flora to currently enjoying a phase of discovery. The area of South Western Australia together with South Africa is now recognised as among the most diverse temperate floristic zones on the planet.\textsuperscript{73}

Referring to informal surveys conducted in the 1950s by the Naturalist Club, Stan explained that the bushland of Kings Park was considered by the majority of the population consulted to be of higher value than the proposal to build a swimming pool and associated infrastructure at the time. The uniqueness of the place made it equal to any form of parkland. Pushing aside places of natural bushland for mainstream development was an attitude that prevailed in the 1950s and 1960s. For the sake of conservation, that attitude had to change; otherwise much of what we now value would be lost. Being central to life in Perth and a site of commemoration for the lives lost in various conflicts, Kings Park was seen as being much more than a place for war memorials and tourists. The iconic status of the park lent weight to gaining support for promoting the natural bushland and the native Western Australian flora. In an exercise involving people with the flora in new and interesting ways, the cultural attitude to the bush changed to embracing the natural world within the park, rather than replacing it with urban development.

Reflecting on his early association with Kings Park, Stan recalled the critically inadequate funding for the park at the time. Subsequently a report into the financial state of the park was commissioned by the government of the time.\textsuperscript{74} A business plan was

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\textsuperscript{72} An initiative of the Millennium Seed Bank is designed to secure the safe storage of seed from 25% of the world’s bankable plants. The bank targets plants most at risk from climate change and the ever-increasing impact of human activities. The bank also saves seeds of the world’s plant life faced with the threat of extinction, and those that could be of most use in the future.

\textsuperscript{73} South Africa is one of the world’s biodiversity hot spots.

\textsuperscript{74} The Western Australian Liberal Government of Richard Court, 1993 to 2001.
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submitted to cabinet for approval. A committee was formed and a ten-year plan for the park developed coinciding with the 1995 centenary of the board. Included on the committee were George Seddon, Craig Lawrence75 and Kerry Sanderson76 - all high-profile people with a civic interest in Perth, experience in executive management and an interest in conservation of local biodiversity.

Emphasis on the flora of Western Australian by the park raised a number of issues for the home gardener. Questions such as ‘Will this plant grow where I live?’ were often asked at the Friends of Kings Park plant sales. Stan addressed this point by referring to the extensive databases and research available in Western Australia regarding the different soil types and related flora. An unprecedented turnover of species within a relatively short distance is a botanic feature of the Western Australian landscape, significantly more so than the landscape of the Northern Hemisphere. For example, between Corrigin and Kellerberin, a distance of 79 kilometres, there is a greater range of species in the flora than there is between the United Kingdom and Russia, a distance of 2500 kilometres. Trying to determine how this species proliferation over a relatively short distance has evolved is a project that will be the focus of future research.

Quoting the example of how his garden was similar to the majority of native garden enthusiasts’ gardens, he had chosen varieties relevant to the area and ones that would attract birds, lizards and insects, an ecological garden that would satisfy his interest in landscape and biodiversity. He went on to say: ‘one of the great joys in Australia is the dawn chorus. City people would like to accommodate local birds familiar with native flora rather than those living in the exotic flora.’

Sited on the Quindallup dune system, where Stan lives, it was not easy to grow species that were available at the Kings Park native plant sales. Living close to the coast as much of the population of Perth does, presents particular problems, notably exposure to salt air and strong winds. His advice was to concentrate on the selection of well-tried and tested coastal species, but if the gardener wished to grow exotics he suggested creating a microclimate ensuring adequate soil moisture and protection from the salt air and strong winds.

Discussing his role in the protection of rare and endangered species, Stan said that little information was available at the initial time of his involvement. Which species were rare and endangered was not really known. Therefore, much of the fieldwork was

75 Craig Lawrence - CEO & Executive Director, Future Directions International Pty. Ltd.
76 Kerry Sanderson - Chief Executive Officer of Fremantle Port Authority from 1991 to 2008. Governor of Western Australia 2013.
involved in searching out hypothesised rare and endangered species and testing where they actually occurred. With respect to the vast diversity of flora in Western Australia, he explained that the underlying bedrock of granite of the Yilgarn plateau, which constitutes the main landmass, is a contributing factor to the species of the South West Australian Floristic Region (SWAFR). As a result, it was discovered that about ten percent of the highly localized endemic species were peculiar to granite outcrops in the Eastern Wheatbelt and Southern forest regions. Granite outcrops can be compared to islands in a sea of terrestrial vegetation and deep soil; they have a great concentration of habitats.

These areas are of particular interest not only from a botanical perspective and, in terms of interest to the gardening fraternity, but are also of interest from an anthropological perspective. For example, many of the granite areas were vital water sources to the Aboriginal people of the area. Hollows in the rock served as water catchment areas and were frequently used as sites for social and cultural gatherings.

If the rock pools had dried up in the summer months, water could often be found at the lowest rocky area. Eucalyptus trees often exemplify that. Many of the plants available nowadays for the home gardener originated from these granite outcrop areas, they are proven to be hardy and tolerant of harsh conditions. Coming from such an environment they can survive through the hot dry summers, and are deep rooted and therefore suitable for a native garden environment; once established, they require minimal watering. Included are many of the Eucalyptus varieties. One popular native garden species in Perth, the Silver Princess (*Eucalyptus caesia*), now currently under threat in its native environment, originates from the granite outcrops of the Eastern Wheatbelt. The One-sided Bottlebrush (*Calothamnus quadrifidus*) is another example popular with home gardeners in Perth. Many of the granite outcrop plant species are well represented in the garden nurseries of Perth, often requiring pollination by birds, making them very attractive for home gardens.

The Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority have increasing public support, and the geographical location of Kings Park means that the urban population need not entirely remove itself from the daily experience of the bush (Botanic Gardens & Parks Authority 2015b, pp. 7-19). Stan’s understanding was that approximately half the population of Perth visited the park at least once a year.

Stan suggested that a level of knowledge acquired from the Noongar people, the original custodians of the land, would be an advantage in terms of how to care for the
natural bushland of Kings Park. Now an isolated remnant of the original natural environment, much has changed in the botanic make-up of Kings Park. Constant vigilance is required to moderate the threat of fire and to control and restrict the introduction of alien species. For example, the populations of Tuart and Banksia trees are gradually reducing. Reversing this trend is a high priority on the Kings Park management list. The stumps of some very large Tuart trees, about a metre across, remain in the bushland areas. Many of the practices in the past have since proven to be contrary to the advantage of the natural bush environment. For example, after devastating bush fires damaged Banksias, they would be felled and cut up for firewood and replaced with Eastern States Eucalypts such as Sugar Gums. If the fire-damaged trees had been left as they were they would invariably have re-sprouted from their lignotubers and regrown.

Stan theorised that one possible explanation for the diminishing population of Tuart trees and Banksias was that the fire regime once implemented by the Noongars has changed from regular burning in some areas to intermittent accidental burning. Some areas would receive regular burns, whereas other areas may not be burnt for up to thirty years. Grazing on the new regrowth after a burn by a range of vertebrates had significant impact on what would survive and what would not. Research showed that the most significant animal in terms of post fire grazing was not the kangaroos, but the small nymph of a grasshopper. They would move in after a burn and selectively graze out small Jarrah trees and some of the large shrubs thus allowing the Banksias to grow with little competition. In response to a question I asked about returning the bush to its former state, Stan replied:

If you had a bigger fire, you would reach a point where the nymphs couldn’t get in quick enough to get all the seedlings, so you would get a little copse of Jarrah and Banksias. If it was a huge fire, then all the nymphs would be destroyed and other things would come in. Equally, the kangaroos would come in and selectively graze Sheoaks, which are quite rich in nitrogen after a fire. If you remove the kangaroo, which has happened in Kings Park, there is nothing suppressing Sheoak growth. So what we are finding at the moment is that Sheoaks are becoming more common and Banksias and Tuarts less so; it is a very long-winded answer to your question, but I think if you decide that in parts of Kings Park you want to have big Tuarts back again and you want to have Banksias back again, then the humans are going to have to become the grazers and the bush land managers.

Many challenges are confronting the authorities now and in the future and the effectiveness of the Friends of Kings Park, as ‘substitute grazers’, cannot be overestimated. For example, the Native Gladioli (*Gladiolus caryophyllaceus*), Freesias’ (*Freesia sp.*) and Veldt Grass (*Ehrharta erecta*), which have seriously invaded the park
are being removed by hand or controlled spraying as part of a thirty-year program. The Veldt Grass (*Ehrharta erecta*) was originally introduced as a fodder plant in the early years of establishing the park in an effort to raise funds for the park. As with many introduced species, it had dire consequences. Stan proposed:

Future challenges are not too dissimilar to the challenge for the Noongar people living for forty-five thousand years of living in the landscape, with variable and changing climatic conditions, perhaps not changing as rapidly as it is today. The level of sophistication will require very clear objectives to be set for different patterns of the bush and the appropriate biological understanding of whatever holds and controls the level of different species, what you have to do to favour those species you want to grow and what you have to do to control those species you don’t want to grow.

Focusing on future challenges, Stan referred to the facilities in the park for educating children. He suggested that the location of the park is an ideal place for teaching future generations about the natural environment. Being central to a city of one and half million people, the park provides an ideal opportunity for teaching children without having to travel long distances. Throughout the metropolitan area of Perth there are numerous small parks and patches of natural bushland, ideally situated for teaching socio-environmental subjects.

**Low maintenance gardening**

Ted was a founding member of the Friends of Kings Park who still maintains an active interest in the park and often works at the Friends Native Plant sales in an advisory capacity. Together with his wife Bet, he established a garden in one of the northern suburbs of Perth. A low maintenance garden featuring native flora was their aim. Confronted with a block of land that was little more than a ‘sand pit’, they realised that to achieve their ambition some specialist knowledge would be required to grow ‘natives.’ To this end Ted enrolled at the local Technical and Further Education centre in 1978 in a gardening course on growing native flora. A local Perth gardener who was conversant with the requirements of local native flora conducted the course. Inspired by this, Ted became further involved in growing native flora by joining a branch of the Wild Flower society in the northern suburbs and, in turn, came in contact with other prominent Perth garden experts.

Very much aware by now that the State of Western Australia had an abundance of unique native flora, exceeding that in most parts of the world, he realised there was very little information available to the home gardener. As a result of his inquiries, funding
was allocated to develop a website database documenting the State’s natural flora; ‘Flora Base.’

At the time of his evolving interest in promoting native flora with the Wild Flower Society, the opportunity arose to become involved with the development of the Friends of Kings Park group arose. At the time guides were showing visitors around the park, but funding for the promotion of native flora was limited, giving rise to the proposal to sell native plants to the public. The park nursery often had surplus plants and to further add to the stock for selling these to raise funds a ‘growing group’ was formed. Since then the promotion of native flora has evolved to the situation of the four native plant sales being one of the highlights in the Perth gardening calendar.

Of specific interest to Ted and popular with the native garden enthusiasts of Perth is the Verticordia species. Although the Verticordia species is recognised as delicate and difficult to grow as a home garden-variety, considerable effort has been made by the ‘growing group’ to develop stock that is robust and will survive in a home garden environment. Plants to be sold at the plant sales are closely monitored in the nursery before being presented to the public.

Commenting on the recruitment of volunteers for the Friends of Kings Park, Ted referred to an interest in gardening as often being inherited from previous generations and that there appeared to be an increasing interest from the younger generation towards growing native species. During the course of my fieldwork I had observed people from different ages and backgrounds volunteering to work in the park and attending the plant sales. Very keen on the continuing progress of the native plant sales, Ted highlighted the ever present need for funding; proceeds from the sales made a valuable contribution to the park’s finances.

He expressed appreciation for the efforts of the various subgroups within the Friends of Kings Park and how their focus on various parts of the park would ensure ongoing care and maintenance. In particular he was appreciative of the ‘bushland carers’ group (substitute grazers) who assisted in the removal of invasive species, such as Freesias, Geraldton Carnation weed and Bridal Creeper.

Acting in advisory capacity at the native plant sales Ted was familiar with the various soil types within the dunal land system of the Swan Coastal Plain and the plants that were endemic to the various zones. Referring to a soil map of Western Australia, he identified plants that were available at the plant sales that would thrive on each particular soil type.
Example from a Master Gardener
An avid native home garden enthusiast and volunteer gardener at Kings Park, Reny is an active volunteer native plant adviser (Master Gardener) to visitors of the park. Having had many years experience, she has developed expertise in the specific requirements of the local flora. Her duties as an expert volunteer involve responding to phone queries, answering email queries, and acting in an advisory capacity at the Friends of Kings Park native plant sales and the annual flower festival in the spring season. Additionally, she and other experts are available to give talks to various groups with an interest in growing native plants in home gardens.

As a result of her expertise in native gardening, she became involved in a group called ‘solar city consortium’, which is part of an initiative titled ‘solar city program.’ The object of the exercise is to introduce people to a sustainable lifestyle, by encouraging energy efficiency by the use of solar power and modifying water usage. Involvement in the project from a gardening perspective was that a native garden was developed for the winners of a competition. This resulted in an ‘open house’ displaying the energy efficient systems and the native garden, thus promoting environmental conservation and minimal water use by growing ‘water-wise’ plants resulting in a sustainable garden. The project was good publicity for growing native plants in the home garden.

When she was domiciled in Perth after living in Indonesia and not yet familiar with the climate and growing conditions, she recruited the assistance of a friend who introduced her to the prospect of growing local native plants in the garden. Not willing to spend time and money on a water-consuming lawn that was a feature of the garden at the time, she decided to plant native species. This first attempt at ‘native gardening’ was an expensive exercise and not successful, resulting in most plants dying. Seeking further advice, she attended the Kings Park festival and sat in on one of the propagation demonstrations being conducted by one of the Kings Park botanists. Seeing the advantage of becoming involved in a group with similar interests, she subsequently enrolled in a gardening course being conducted by Kings Park. Since becoming familiar with native species and their unique requirements, her garden has flourished, and fewer plants have died. Being familiar with what to grow and where to grow it is essential to success with native flora. As previously discussed it is not simply a matter of planting a species and expecting it to grow. Knowledge of soil type within the suburb is crucial.
In her role as adviser, when she is asked about various plants and their potential as a home garden specimen, the first thing she asks is, ‘Where do you live?’ She will then explain to the client that she needs to be able to assess the soil type in the particular suburb and whether it is suitable for the plant in question. For example, a garden in Kalamunda, one of the hill suburbs of Perth, would not be suitable for plants endemic to the suburb of Bull Creek, one of the sand plain suburbs, unless the soil is changed. She was adamant that the idea of native gardening is to accept the soil type available in the home garden and introduce plants accordingly. Plants of Western Australia are very specific to soil type, even those of the same family; however, a different variety may not be adaptable to the local soil. She said the plants were very individual, a component which made the prospect of native plant gardening challenging.

Figure 11 - Reny's native garden

Photo taken by the author 2014.

Using her gardening experience, Reny is well versed in the pitfalls of native gardening, in particular the necessity to apply a strict minimal watering regime. Now that her own garden is well established, watering is not frequent, except when she is establishing a new specimen. Watering during the first summer is required to encourage root growth and acclimatisation; subsequent summers should necessitate only occasional watering.
Changing the gardening culture of Perth residents to accept local flora as the norm is a slow process according to Reny. Increasing queues of enthusiasts at the native plant sales is an encouraging sign, but the ‘hit and miss’ nature of the exercise is still a discouraging factor. Although many customers are repeat customers and determined to keep trying, others are trying to grow native plants for the first time.

Finding plants for customers that are easy to grow and give satisfaction is one of Reny’s main tasks. Also included in her tasks are getting children interested in native flora. At the flower festival, in the spring, schools come to the park and are introduced to various aspects of the local flora. Recently, emphasis has been on Banksia and the capacity of the plant to accommodate insects and birds, the Black Cockatoo for example is a popular favourite. Banksias and Tuart trees are diminishing in Perth; therefore, a policy of restoration and research is vital to avoid endangering the species.

Lamenting the low staff numbers, Reny said that it was necessary to encourage more volunteers to help with the workload in especially during the time of the flower festival when invasive weeds are very dominant and need to be removed. Reny also discussed the unsuccessful trend of the nineteen seventies when information was limited and people tended to plant the wrong species in the wrong place (Timms 2006). One of the staff members who joined us during the interview said that the commercial plant nurseries selling native plants were now very much more aware of their requirements and were giving out accurate information to the home gardener, thus assisting in the promotion of using native flora in domestic gardens.

**Conclusion: Home gardens**

A home garden can be a window on how present-day Australians interact with nature. Because of a generally agreeable climate most people spend a lot of time in their gardens, either by themselves or with family and friends. It is an area where a high level of control over the natural environment can be imposed. It is, as Head describes it, a ‘nature culture hybrid’ (2007, p. 155). It is a space where the contrast between people and the natural environment is reduced.

In the majority of gardens I visited there was a compromise between native flora and exotics which appears to show an acceptance of a combination of the hybrid ecologies and cultures of Australia. For the majority of immigrant and Australian-born gardeners, this environmental hybridity is accepted as the norm. This indicates that the
fundamental principals of environmentality are having some influence through the medium of Kings Park, a government instrumentality, on the subjects of my research. Furthermore, the garden is a place where people can connect to a place through plants.

Although there is a strong indication by the people interviewed that Kings Park and Botanic Garden has some influence on the use of native flora for domestic gardening, the desire for a ‘compromise’ garden, using both native flora and exotic flora, is firmly entrenched in the selected cohort. Not altogether relinquishing the idea of traditional type British gardens, respondents clearly indicated a strong interest in growing local native plants, but with firm allegiance to a gardening style that is familiar. That is the traditional ‘nature tamed’ and bordered style of garden. Although Kings Park has significant influence on the gardening choices of the people interviewed, there is acknowledgement that association with gardens from early childhood also has a profound effect on a person’s fondness for gardening. Following a family tradition had a strong influence on gardening and choice of plants with the majority of informants, hence leading to the use of exotic plants that were familiar.

Awareness of the water-saving qualities of native flora was a frequent topic of discussion; however, there were other factors that influenced the choice of plants. For example, local native plants attracted local native birds; the uniqueness of local species of flora such as the One-sided Bottle-brush (*Calothamnus quadrifidus*) and the Kangaroo Paws (*Anigozanthos sp.*) made growing local native species an interesting, yet challenging, prospect. Many of the local species also had extended flowering periods, with some species flowering in the cooler seasons.

Although the practices of home gardeners in Perth are slowly changing, some inroads are being made due to the development and availability of more durable native plant species together with increased information and advice on their requirements. Additionally, the current community awareness of conservation of the natural environment coupled with the uniqueness of Western Australian native flora, provides motivations for Perth home gardeners to develop an interest in native flora as an alternative or addition to exotics. This is evident in my research, with 78% (Table 14) of respondents acknowledging they were influenced in their approach to their choice of native flora for domestic use by the parks native floral displays in the botanic garden and the native plant sales.

A Western background influences many of the volunteers in Kings Park. Whether they are migrants or Australian-born, there is still a strong desire leaning toward an
environment of familiar landscapes which align with previous cultural and social paradigms. Therefore, developing a 'sense of place' to a space alien to their upbringing has been and remains a confronting challenge. Adapting to an Australian environment by using local native plants in gardens can give a sense of 'home'; and put in this unique location an identity with its own natural character. To acquire an Australian gardening style and develop a sense of belonging the media advocate ‘going native’, linking native flora to cultural identity. This is evident among those I interviewed, many of whom were strongly involved in using native plants in home gardens. Although ‘going native’ was very evident there was still an attachment to a traditional British style garden, often in some small way. For example many of the strong advocates for ‘going native’ whom I interviewed had a discreetly placed pot plant of an exotic flower somewhere in the house or garden.