



A Tropical Garden Using Local Native Plants

TIN Topic 10

Want a tropical/Balinese garden? You can do it with local native plants. Not only will these plants give you the lush, tropical look that you're after, but you get the added bonus of attracting native wildlife like the Regent Bowerbird or Satin Bowerbird to your patch of paradise. Many of the exotic plants sold by nurseries to achieve this effect have significant weed potential, such as many of the exotic palms (Cocos or Queen Palm and Phoenix Palms), exotic gingers (*Hedychium spp*), and lilies (Canna Lily, Calla Lily, Arum Lily, Glory Lily, Black-stemmed Taro, Agapanthus, etc).

If you live near a patch of remnant bushland or remnant gully or creekline rainforest, then why not enhance the Reserve by planting some indigenous species that will achieve the same effect?

The most obvious feature of many tropical gardens is the planting of palms. Two attractive local palm species are the **Cabbage Tree Palm (*Livistona australis*)** and the **Bangalow Palm (*Archontophoenix cunninghamiana*)**. Both are majestic, tall-growing species in time, and the Bangalow Palm has the added advantage of being self-shedding (the old fronds drop off by themselves rather than having to be pruned). The Cabbage Tree Palm has toothed edges to the fronds, and so care would need to be taken with its placement in the garden. It would not be good edging a pathway or around a pool where people might brush against it. Palms look best when massed in clumps as they grow in the wild, and would eventually form the canopy of a tropical style garden. Another local palm-like plant is the **Native Tamarind (*Diploglottis australis*)**. This species is also a bush-tucker plant, and many native frugivores would be attracted to it when it is in fruit.

Many of the local rainforest species have large, glossy leaves, attractive, sometimes scented flowers, and colourful fruit that would suit the look of a tropical paradise garden.

***Abrophyllum ornans* (Native Hydrangea).** Large, toothed, hydrangea-like leaves: about 8 metres.



Livistona australis



Diploglottis australis



Cassine australis



Elaeocarpus reticulatus

Cassine australis - Red Olive Berry. Large, glossy leaves; bright red or orange fruit: 10 to 12 metres.

Elaeocarpus reticulatus - Blueberry Ash and **Elaeocarpus obovatus - Hard Quandong or Ash.** Delicate, white or pink flowers; blue fruit: 10 to 15 metres.

Eupomatia laurina - Bolwarra. Large, glossy leaves; scented, white flower; edible fruit: 2 - 3m.



Eupomatia laurina

Hibiscus heterophyllus - Native Hibiscus. Palmate leaves; white or pink, red-throated, edible flowers: 2 - 3m.

Rapanea howittiana - Brush Muttonwood. Glossy, undulate leaves; interesting grey/white bark on mature trees: 8 - 10 m.

Wilkea hugeliana - Wilkea. Toothed, glossy leaves; small white, butterfly-attracting flowers; black, olive-shaped fruit; 2 - 3m



Hibiscus heterophyllus

Want the scent of Frangipani drifting through your Backyard-Bali? **The Native Frangipani - Hymenosporum flavum** has pale yellow/fading to white, Frangipani-scented flowers on a tall shrub/small tree with glossy, evergreen leaves. 6 - 10m.

There are also many local native plant species to landscape the understorey of a tropical-style garden.

Alocasia macrorrhizos - Cunjevoi, Spoon Lily, Native Taro, Elephants Ear. The name, Elephants Ear, aptly describes the leaf size and shape of this clumping, rhizomatous plant; the flower is highly scented and the plant likes a moist, shaded position.



Dianella caerulea

Alpinia caerulea - Native Ginger. A clumping, strappy-leaved plant to about 1.5 metres; edible, round, blue fruits; near its southern distribution limit in Newcastle / Lake Macquarie.

Cordyline stricta - Palm Lily. A strappy-leaved plant to 2 - 3 m; mauve/blue flowers; black berry.



Alpinia caerulea



Cordyline stricta



Crinum pedunculatum

***Crinum pedunculatum* - Beach Lily or Swamp Lily.** A clumping native lily to about 1 metre with long, glossy leaves and spidery, white flowers; likes a damp spot, good around a frog pond.

***Dianella caerulea* - Paroo Lily.** A strappy-leaved plant to 50 cm; blue/yellow flower; blue, edible berry



Dianella caerulea

Massed plantings of native ferns such as the ***Adiantum* - Maidenhair species**, the ***Doodia* - Rasp Fern species** and the ***Blechnum* - Water Fern species**, together with dense native groundcovers like ***Viola hederacea* - Native Violet** and ***Commelina cyanea* - Scurvy Weed**, would out-compete weeds in a moist, shaded rainforest understorey.

To complete the picture of a tropical jungle, you would need some vine species to scramble through the shrubs and trees.

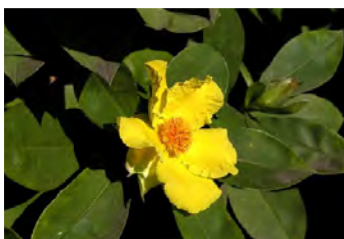
It is usually a good idea to plant vines some years after your initial planting as many vigorous vines can smother young plants. When shrubs and trees are about 3 – 4m tall, local species like the following could be planted:

***Hibbertia scandens* - Golden Guinea Flower or Snake Vine.** A vigorous, glossy leaved climber with bright yellow flowers similar to the exotic Allamanda

***Pandorea pandorana* - Wonga Wonga Vine.** A scrambling climber with small, tubular flowers, white with burnt red markings

The native grape species, ***Cissus antarctica*** and ***Cissus hypoglauca***, could also be planted. Both are excellent habitat plants as drey sites for ring-tailed possums or nest sites for birds, but both are extremely vigorous and may need to be pruned back occasionally.

TIN has many local rainforest species. Seed collection is opportunistic. Many rainforest seeds have to be sown immediately to be viable, particular plants are not available all the time. Species not in stock can be ordered for future planting when available, so drop in to the Parry Street Nursery, and chat to staff about your plans for paradise in your backyard.



Hibbertia scandens



Pandorea pandorana



Cissus antarctica