

# Formal Garden

## Backyards for Wildlife Garden Design Fact Sheet

### What is a Formal Style Garden?

Formal style gardens feature a geometrically symmetrical layout with or without unsymmetrical inner details. They usually consist of regular geometric spaces and stylised planting such as hedges and topiary.

Many people think that native plants cannot work in a formal garden as they are too messy. With the right planning however a native garden can be formal, neat, and colourful. First of all, **the formal garden style largely depends on how plants are used rather than which plants are chosen.** A Formal style is obtained by placing plants in patterns such as lines, squares and circles. A symmetrical design can also create a formal effect. **Don't forget that many Adelaide native plants can tolerate pruning.** It can even extend the life of some species, as well as improving their shapes.



Some examples of Adelaide native trees and shrubs that are suitable for formal gardens:

Top (left to right): erect guinea-flower, small-leaved bluebush, small-leaved mallee pea; Middle (left to right): native pine, Christmas bush, native cherry, twiggly daisy bush; Bottom (left to right): ruby saltbush, hop bush, berry saltbush

### Create Your Formal Garden Step by Step

Formal gardens usually require initial planning because of their strong structure, and may also require more work and time to get established if you choose slow-growing hedge plants. Once the plants are placed however, then future maintenance can be quite easy.

**1. Formal gardens have various formats.** For a beginner though, **a symmetrical layout can be a safe start.** No matter what the overall size, scale or shape of your garden, it will always show a strong sense of order and balance if one side mirrors the other.

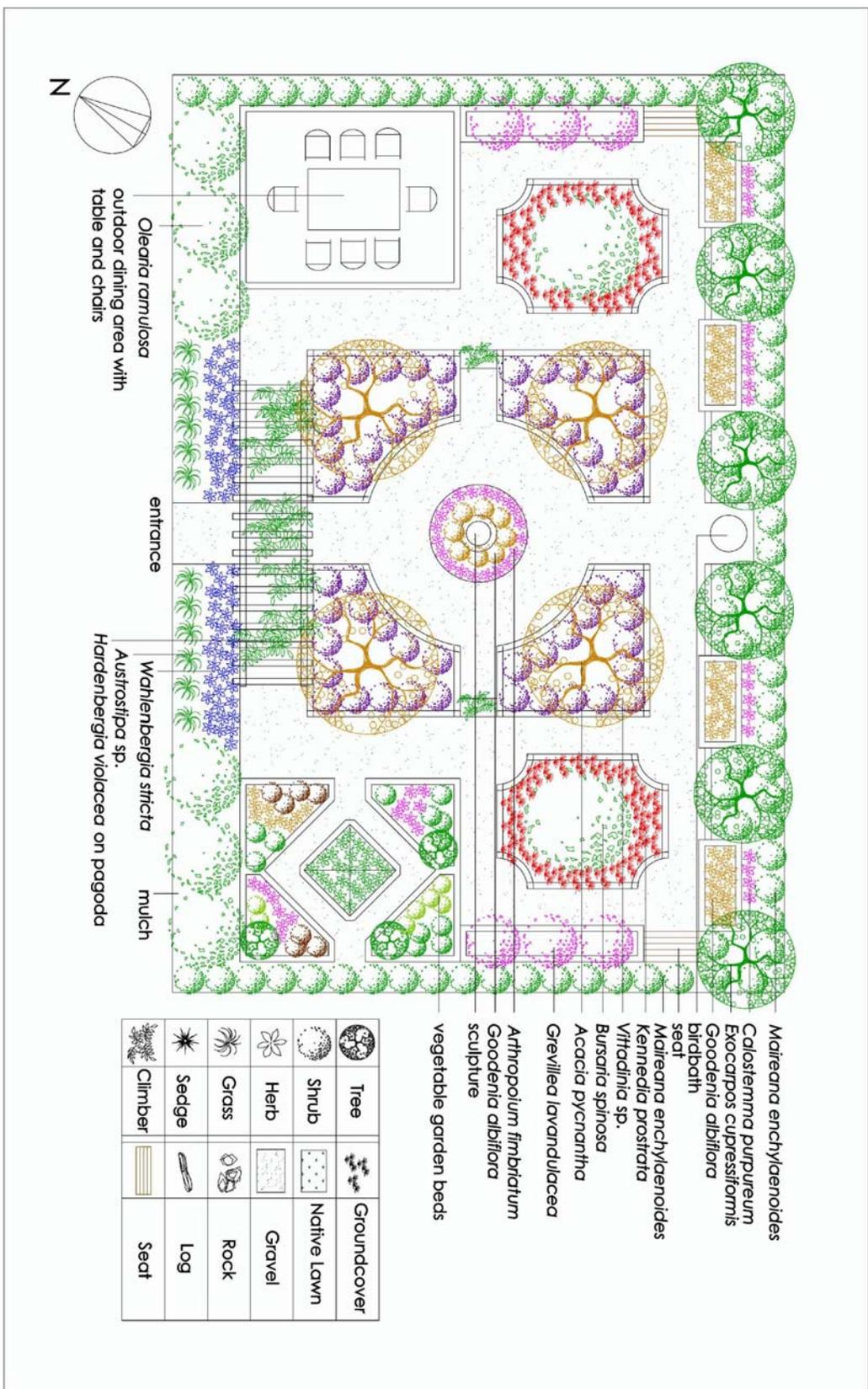
**2. Limit material types in your garden.** Too many different hard materials, such as a mix of wood, stone and gravel will clutter up your formal space. It is better to choose only one hardscaping material and one colour scheme. It's a good idea to **use regularly shaped pavers** to strengthen the formal feel of your garden. For example, bricks rather than flagstones.

**3. Select native plant species with compact forms and dense foliage.** These kinds of plants usually have neat growth patterns. They can tolerate pruning well, and provide excellent homes for wildlife. Dense plants are also easy to plant in regular geometrical shapes. For example, small ones can be easily arranged into low hedges while tall ones can become a column of a formal screen.

**4. Place the same plants repeatedly to create a sense of order.** Repetition throughout a design ties together the various parts of the garden. For example, replicating the use of a shrub to form hedges along the walls on both sides will give your garden uniformity.

**5. Add something eye-catching in the centre of your formal garden.** This can be a sculpture, a fountain or even a small ornamental tree.

**6. Prune your plants lightly but regularly.** This is actually more effective than lopping them once a year. If you have just started a new formal garden, hedging and shaping needs to be done early in the life of the plants, and be continued frequently. A formal garden, even a native one, will still need more maintenance than other garden styles.



This is an example of a formal garden for locations which were once originally Grey Box and Blue Gum Woodlands. The plant species selected for this design are based on a plant list of this vegetation association. **If you are not sure about the association of your area, please visit the BFW website to find your list.**

There are over 80 species lists for different vegetation associations in urban northern and southern Adelaide. There is also a Native Grower's List and both are available on the BFW website [www.backyards4wildlife.com.au](http://www.backyards4wildlife.com.au)

Click on the interactive map or Nature Maps for your list. If you have a trouble finding your list, please contact the **Urban Biodiversity Unit** with your suburb.

You can also substitute plant species of each plant type with those on your species list if the plant you want is unavailable. Then you can create your own local native garden which benefits your local environment. If you would like to know more information about your local native plants, such as height and flowering time etc, please visit our **plant selector** through the BFW website.

Backyards for Wildlife is managed by the SA Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources, with support from the Adelaide & Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board and the Australian Government.



**For further Information Contact**

Urban Biodiversity Unit, Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources  
 Wittunga House, 328 Shepherds Hill Road, Blackwood SA 5051  
 Telephone: (08) 8278 0600 Facsimile: (08) 8278 0619  
 Email Address: [info@urbanforest.on.net](mailto:info@urbanforest.on.net)  
 Web Site: [www.backyards4wildlife.com.au](http://www.backyards4wildlife.com.au)



Government of South Australia



Australian Government