

# 16 Tips for Growing Australian Native Plants

Australian native plants are a diverse and beautiful group, reflecting the wide range of climates and landscapes found around the country.

From the vibrant kangaroo paws of Western Australia to the captivating banksias of the east coast, natives add a distinct character and appeal to any garden. They also contribute to overall biodiversity, encouraging a healthier environment by supporting native insects and wildlife.



However, there's a common misconception that these plants are always hardy and easy to grow, which isn't always the case. Their needs vary widely based on their original habitat and can often differ from other popular ornamentals.

To help you navigate these challenges and create your own thriving native garden, we've compiled this comprehensive list of tips for growing Aussie natives at home.

## Planning

1. **Understand the native plants suitable to your region:** Before you start, research and understand what types of plants are native to your specific region. These will generally require less maintenance and be better adapted to your local weather and soil conditions.
2. **Group plants with similar needs:** When designing your garden, consider each plant's specific requirements for light, water, and soil conditions. Grouping plants that have similar needs together will make it easier to care for them and ensure they thrive.



3. **Consider planting time:** The best time to plant depends on your local climate. In general, autumn is often the best time to plant, as this gives plants time to establish themselves before the summer heat. However, in areas subject to frost, it may be better to plant in the spring after the cold has abated.

# Planting

4. **Prepare the site:** Before planting, eliminate weeds from the area, particularly those spreading by underground runners. These can compete with your native plants for nutrients and water.
5. **Consider soil drainage:** Australian native plants prefer well-drained soil with some added organic matter. If you have heavy clay soil, add some gypsum to help break up the clay particles and increase the drainage. For sandy soils, it's a good idea to add some compost to help retain a little moisture.
6. **Test the acidity of your soil:** The ideal soil pH for natives is slightly acid, around 5 to 5.5. The soil also needs to contain a good supply of iron, as natives need this mineral to achieve good growth.



7. **Prepare the soil:** To prepare your soil for natives, just dig it over to a depth of around 30 cm. This gives the root system space to spread without much difficulty.

## Caring for Natives

8. **Watering:** Avoid overwatering your plants. Instead, water less frequently but deeply. This encourages the plants to develop deep root systems, which will make them more drought resistant in the long term.



9. **Use Mulch:** Mulch helps to conserve water by reducing evaporation, it protects the soil from erosion and limits the growth of weeds. It also helps to keep the soil cool and moist, creating an environment that is beneficial for your plants. One of the best mulches you can use in your native garden is woodchips that are made from Australian native trees such as eucalypts and acacias. This type of mulch not only looks great but it will be low in phosphorus too.
10. **Minimal Fertilising:** Most Australian native plants grow well without additional fertiliser. Over-fertilisation, particularly with high-phosphate fertilisers, can harm native plants.
11. **Pruning:** Regularly tip-prune your native plants. This promotes healthy growth, helps maintain a desirable shape, increases flower production, and imitates the natural process of fauna eating the tips off trees and shrubs. It's also a good idea to prune natives like calistemon and grevilleas after they've finished flowering. Cut back each flowering branch to just behind the flower. This will encourage an abundance of flowers the following season.

12. **Staking:** Staking should be minimal for Australian native plants. If you do stake, it should be light and for a maximum of 1 year. This allows the plant to develop a strong root system and stand independently.

## Protecting Against Frost Damage

13. **Understand the risk of frost:** If you live in a region prone to frost, you'll need to take this into account when choosing and caring for your plants. Some Australian native plants are more frost-resistant than others, and different landscape features can create microclimates that are more or less susceptible to frost.

## Pest and Disease Management

14. **Minimise pesticide use:** Try to avoid using chemical sprays and pesticides as much as possible. Instead, encourage a balance of insect life that can help keep pests in check naturally.
15. **Utilise your plant's natural defenses:** Many Australian native plants have developed their own mechanisms to deal with pests and diseases. For example, certain plants might secrete sap to deter stem or trunk boring insects. Understanding these defenses and supporting the plants to leverage them is a more sustainable way of managing pests and diseases.

## Rejuvenation

16. **Rejuvenating old gardens:** If you're taking over an old garden, take some time to understand which plants are already there and what their needs are. You may find that rejuvenating the garden is a better option than starting from scratch.

While it's true that Australian native plants may pose unique challenges, we believe that anyone can foster a flourishing native garden that not only adds aesthetic appeal but also contributes to a healthier ecosystem.

As you can see, it's not just about planting, watering, and waiting for the magic to happen, but rather a journey of understanding the distinctive needs of these plants and the environmental context in which they thrive.