

FRESH! For all tropical, subtropical and warm climate gardens

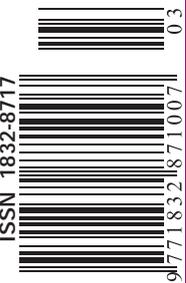
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ISSUE 8  
QUARTERLY

# subTropical Gardening

and landscaping in warm climates

local advice for  
local gardeners



■ LARGE GARDENS  
– design



■ FLOWERING SHRUBS  
– 10 favourites



■ PROPAGATION  
– playing with fire



■ SUBTROPICALIA  
COLLECTOR



Coloured stones complement structural shapes of cacti and succulents.



Front garden planting welcoming visitors.

### Tip

Cacti in the garden are best not hand-watered at all – let them be themselves and they will prove how resourceful they really are.



*Chilicactus jujuyensis* – stunning, but it grows best in cooler climates.

which the collection of succulents was eventually planted. Gum trees were removed to maximise sunlight into the garden, safety concerns from these ‘widow makers’ and to minimise termite issues.

Drainage was always seen as a priority in order to achieve the themed garden. The natural volcanic black clay was very heavy and gummy when wet and rock-like when dry – not the preferred soil type for growing succulents and cacti. Soil had to be built up to aid drainage and imported local red soils and mulch were added. Darby commented that around 60% mulch to existing soil was needed to address their soil conditions.

Noting that some of the cacti specimens in this garden are from Brazil, the success of these plants comes down to drainage. With good fast drainage even torrential downpours should not adversely affect these specimens.

Most of the plants were transferred from the owner’s previous Toowoomba garden as potted plants. With more room to spread out, the new garden has become a place to experiment to determine what can and cannot grow directly in the garden’s soil. Darby and Sue reflected on their trialing methods – “When a plant proves it does not like the spot, it will be moved.” It was also noted that plants that grow 1½ hours east of Toowoomba (i.e. Brisbane) grow differently in this garden – some specimens successfully grow and others do not.



*Sedum x rubrotinctum* ‘Aurea’.



*Astrophytum myriostigma* var. *potosinus*.

*Agave victoria-reginea*.



*Aloe distans*.

*Chilicactus jujuyensis* – flower in close up.



The image features two fern fronds in various stages of unrolling. The fronds are a vibrant yellowish-green color with a slightly fuzzy texture. The unfurling leaves reveal a complex, spiral pattern of smaller, darker green leaflets. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey, which makes the ferns stand out prominently. The text is overlaid on the image in two white rectangular boxes with dark green lettering.

**FERNS – CLASSIC QUEENSLANDERS  
AND SHADY CHARACTERS**

# Orchids

Botanical  
Common  
Family

*Thelychiton speciosus* (previously *Dendrobium speciosum*)  
rock orchid, rock lily  
ORCHIDACEAE



The common rock orchid can be seen growing wild from north Queensland down to Victoria as an epiphyte (on trees) or lithophyte (on rocks). These orchids flower in spring with up to 120 individual creamy yellow blossoms above the dark green leathery leaves. The exact time for flowering will depend on the climate, although most specimens flower in mid spring.

Originally named *Dendrobium speciosum*, the two most commonly cultivated forms have recently been reclassified as two different species:

- specimens with stout pseudo-stems observed on rocks known as *Dendrobium speciosum* ssp. *speciosum* but are now *Thelychiton speciosus*; and
- specimens with longer pseudo-stems and observed on trees, formerly known as *Dendrobium speciosum* var. *hillii* are now *Thelychiton tarberi*.

Other names changes in this species include:

- *Dendrobium speciosum* ssp. *capricornicum* are now *Thelychiton capricornicus*;
- *Dendrobium speciosum* ssp. *curvicaule* are now *Thelychiton curvicaulis*;
- *Dendrobium speciosum* ssp. *grandiflorum* are now *Thelychiton rex*; and
- *Dendrobium speciosum* ssp. *pedunculatum* are now *Thelychiton pedunculatus*

(For more details of name changes refer to [www.sgapqld.org.au/taxonomy.html](http://www.sgapqld.org.au/taxonomy.html))

## Best growing conditions:

- grow these orchids in dappled light to near full sun
- depending if your specimen is a rock or tree dweller, attach specimens directly to the rock/tree using stockings or plastic coated wire
- keep watered until new roots establish
- these orchids like to be positioned where they capture fallen organic matter, such as in branch nooks, beneath trees or where leaf matter falls into rock crevices
- can be grown in hanging baskets filled with rough bark chips
- keep an eye out for the dendrobium beetle (*Stethopachys formosa*), an orange and black beetle that causes serious damage (refer to Issue 4)
- avoid frosts
- can be divided by separating the clumps of pseudo-stems.

**Note: Conserve and Preserve the species – please grow this plant.**

It is illegal to harvest wild stock from the bush. Only buy cultivated plants from reputable specialist growers or garden centres.

**Phoenix sylvestris**

Another one of the palms with silver tones is the silver phoenix palm suited to all tropical and subtropical climates.



**Strobilanthes gossypinus**

The Persian shield (*Strobilanthes gossypinus*) is a small shrub with bronzed coloured new growth that mature to silver. This plant grows best in the cooler zones of the subtropics or highland tropics.

Below is a small sample of species available for use in open sunny gardens – the full listing of this table is accessible on our website (refer to right).

Go to [www.stgmagazine.com.au](http://www.stgmagazine.com.au)



Species	Common Name	Zone suitability ratings at left						Description
		Dry Subtropics	Wet Subtropics	Dry Highland Tropics	Wet Highland Tropics	Dry (Monsoon) Tropics	Wet Lowland Tropics	
<i>Alcantarea glaziouana</i>	bromeliads	4	4	4	4	3	4	Large bromeliad with silvery grey leaves.
<i>Dichondra argentea</i>	silver falls	4	4	4	4	3	3	Very low, mat groundcover with small silver leaves, good in hanging baskets.
<i>Gazania rigens</i> var. <i>leucolaena</i>	silver gazania	4	4	4	3	4	2	Well-known seaside groundcover daisy from South Africa, typically has glossy dark green leaves, but also forms with silver felted foliage can have either white or yellow flower.
<i>Helichrysum petiolare</i>	licorice plant	4	4	4	4	1	1	Scrambling mat groundcover, rarely flowers in warm subtropics.
<i>Kalanchoe pumila</i>	flour dust plant/ quicksilver	4	3	4	3	4	2	Succulent groundcover from Madagascar, good in baskets, silvery foliage & pink flowers.
<i>Phoenix sylvestris</i>	silver phoenix palm	4	4	4	4	4	4	Silvery, feather leaved palm with a stout trunk.
<i>Strobilanthes gossypinus</i>	Persian shield	3	4	4	4	0	0	Bushy shrub with silvery flannel foliage, bronzy younger leaves, flowers terminate lifespan, hence dies prematurely in the tropics, needs cooler subtropical or highland conditions.
<i>Tabebuia aurea (argentea)</i>	silver trumpet tree	4	4	4	4	4	4	Small, sculpturally gnarled tree from South Africa with dark corky bark, glaucous foliage, showy yellow flowers while semi-deciduous in winter spring.
<i>Tradescantia sillamontana</i>	white gossamar	4	4	4	4	4	3	Semi-succulent groundcover with silver, hairy foliage.
<i>Westringia fruticosa</i>	coast rosemary	3	2	2	1	2	1	Popular native bush. Can be unreliable and short lived. Prefers well drained, poor sandy soils.

# Lights in the landscape

## LEDs

To maximise the use and visual appeal of a garden at night, a range of outdoor lighting is available ranging from the simplicity of solar to more complex wired low-voltage systems. When done well with the right equipment, lighting will add significant value to your property both for re-sale and for your own pleasure. This article introduces the use of LED lights.

LED stands for Light Emitting Diodes. They create a relatively bright quality light with minimal energy usage; last a very long time when compared to traditional incandescent light bulbs; are far less likely to break or shatter than an incandescent bulb; and they put out minimal heat and are therefore safer to touch. In other words they cost less to run and out-perform traditional bulbs for maximum effect in a landscape.

Lighting systems such as 'orientational luminaires' (those that provide a visual guidance system for pedestrians and vehicles) will tend to require a low-voltage system. Provided an electrician installs a power transformer, a home handyman should be able to install the light components.

For a more simple LED option, solar technology can provide sufficient lighting for gardens. However for peak performance, the solar lights need to be placed where they receive sun for most of the day.

Traditionally, landscape lighting has yielded white coloured light. Modern systems are now available in a range of colours to create dramatic effects that better reflect the theme of a landscape or to emphasis particular plants, structures and ornaments.

