

THE
RESENE
EASY
DECORATING
GUIDE



New Zealand natives are a safe bet for an attractive and easy-care garden

RENTAL-FRIENDLY GARDENS

Experienced investors focus on making gardens user-friendly, low maintenance and attractive. By **Carolyn Brooke**

IN A PERFECT world rental properties probably wouldn't have gardens ... Imagine it, no messy-looking grass to scare off good tenants, no concealed rubbish to deal with when bad tenants vacate and best of all, no ongoing garden maintenance to worry about. But the reality of course, is we live in a country largely fixed on a quarter-acre dream, whether you own a home or not.

Planting, weeding, pruning, mowing and watering – you don't have to be an expert gardener to know a garden can be hard work. But with a bit of planning and some initial elbow grease, it doesn't have to be. Your best bet will always be getting the garden right, right at the beginning.

WEED MATTING AND BARK

All newly-established gardens will look good for the first week or so, but it doesn't take long for those pesky green shoots to start rearing their heads. If left alone, your

once manicured masterpiece will be full of weeds and looks messy in no time. So one of the most important things when it comes to a low-maintenance garden is weed matting. It helps prevent weeds coming through and also reduces watering needs by keeping moisture in the ground longer. Mulching is another way to improve moisture and slow weed growth.

GROUND COVER

Ground cover plants help keep weeds down and look good too. Native New Zealand varieties are often a safe bet and are more likely to suit New Zealand conditions. Flowering varieties add a nice touch. Talk to your local garden centre about the types of ground cover best suited to your property, considering aspects like soil, climate, erosion, shade, sun and water. Gravel or rocks can be another form of ground cover.

PLANTS

Once again New Zealand native varieties are generally a good option. Keep plantings simple and use only a small variety of plants that have year-round foliage – a bit of colour always looks nice. Choose evergreen shrubs and avoid high-maintenance annuals or deciduous plants to reduce leaf fall. Shrubs like hebes look attractive while most pittosporums are tough and adaptable to a wide range of situations and soils. There are many different foliage forms and colours to choose from. The lemonwood tree with its pleasant lemony smell is a popular pittosporum. Fast growing pittosporums can be used for shelter, privacy or hedging. Talk to your local garden centre about sun, shade, shelter, drainage and exposure for the plants, selecting plants suited to the climate will reduce water requirements. Avoid plants that cause hay fever or allergic



Citrus trees are popular and low-maintenance



Regular but quick mows are much easier

BETWEEN TENANCIES IS THE PERFECT TIME TO DO WORK OUTSIDE

reactions. Don't plant hard up against a house as it can wear at exterior cladding.

TRIMMING

When it comes to keeping hedges and trees trimmed, it is often unrealistic to have high expectations of tenants. After all, trimming generally requires ladders and extra effort to reach high places. Tenants won't necessarily know how to trim properly and you don't want plants damaged. Perhaps allow (either time or money) for occasional tree trimming and pruning, not only for upkeep but to let more sunlight into your property, reducing damp and moisture.

LAWNS

As most homeowners know, creating a lush lawn is difficult. Seeding, hungry birds, watering and then there's the ongoing weeds. But a nice lawn is bound to add value, both to market and rental prices. It's important to note that not all grass types are the same. Use the wrong seed and you could end up with a lawn full of clover. Kikuya is a hard-wearing and often easy-growing variety. Once the lawn is established, it needs to be regularly mowed but unfortunately (and despite Tenancy Agreement terms) not all tenants can be relied on to keep this up. Perhaps build the cost of lawns into rent and either mow it yourself or pay someone else. Investment in the establishment and the maintenance of lawns is always worth it. Remember, regular but quick mows are much easier than huge garden clean ups (also long grass conceals rubbish and all sorts of other nasties, not to mention attracting rodents).

FENCES

A new or freshly painted fence gives a property a whole new look. Shop around for a competitive quote or consider building a fence yourself if it needs replacing. For picket fences, perhaps only the pickets need replacing. You'll then just need to get to work with some timber, acrylic-exterior paint and nails.

PAVING STONES

Large paving stones can be bought from most hardware stores and landscape suppliers. Placing them in areas near letterboxes, outdoor taps and sheds will not only make life easier for tenants but will protect your lawn during the wetter months.

DRIVEWAYS AND PATHS

Concrete work is expensive and generally something you want to avoid if possible. If the concrete looks messy from mould, cracks or marks, then first try water blasting and see how it comes up. Using concrete stain can also make it look tidier. Talk to your local paint supplier and ensure the correct paint is used and the concrete is prepared properly.

EXTRAS

Planting a couple of fruit trees and herbs is never a bad idea, not only will this appeal to tenants but also to potential homeowners if you decide to sell down the track. Citrus like lemon trees are a great start, once established they'll probably just need a quick prune every now and then. Why not restock your lemon supplies each time you do a flat inspection? A hardy and easy growing herb like rosemary is very useful in cooking and has a pleasant smell, plant it near doors and drive ways.

Investing in a low-maintenance, attractive garden will help to attract long-term tenants, reduce ongoing time involvement and will increase both achievable rents and market values.

If you have a tenant vacating soon then remember the time between tenancies is a perfect chance to do work outside. Also, with the ground softer from a bit of rain and some sunny weather still lingering around, it's a great time to get to work now. ■