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How difficult to grow are Australian plants?

Nurseries are selling more Australian plants than ever before, however in many retail nurseries, there seems to be more knowledge available about exotic plants than about Australian plants.

With the resurgence of interest in Australian plants come questions about how difficult are they to grow. It is not possible to make generalisations about this because of the diversity of plants and their range of growing conditions in Australia.

Most people can make the distinction between tropical and temperate plants and can choose what to grow on that basis. However there is another distinction that has to be made for gardeners in the eastern states.

South of the tropics, plants growing west of the Great Dividing Ranges generally grow in lower humidity than those growing on the east coast. The further west we go the more marked is the difference in humidity levels.

This means that many plants that thrive on low humidity, can suffer badly on the east coast. This obviously impacts on the number of Western and Central Australian plants that can be grown on the East Coast.

On the basis of the above, one can group plants that can be suitable for sale into the eastern seaboard cities.

- For gardeners who like to grow trouble free plants there are the 'easy-to-grow plants' – ETG.
- For the enthusiasts there are the 'usually-difficult-to-grow plants' – UDTG - for those who are prepared to risk greater rewards for growing fussier but more beautiful plants.
- For the truly adventurous, there are the 'almost-impossible-to-grow plants' – AITG plants. They will reward you well if you can, but they may also break your heart! Much research and development is still required on these to crack their requirements.



1) Easy-to-grow plants - ETG

There are huge numbers of easy-to-grow Australian plants. The average retail nurseries are full of them. While many of these are fine flowering plants, there are also a good number of unspectacular plants that have become 'popular'.

Years ago, many of these were once considered difficult or impossible to grow, but someone worked out how to propagate or grow them. Once the 'secrets' of propagation and growing requirements were discovered, they became easy to grow. There are probably many more great Australian plants potentially in this group that are yet to be introduced to the industry.

2) Usually-difficult-to-grow plants - UDTG

Australia abounds in UDTG plants. Inland and Western Australia has a huge number of these plants, many of which we would love to have in our gardens. All of Australia's major plant families are represented in this group, as well as some of the more obscure ones.

Some of the reasons for plants being in this group are based on climate. If they come from a low humidity area, then they probably will not survive or thrive in high humidity. Drought conditions on the east coast can change this temporarily, but when normal seasons resume, the plants will struggle.

Attention also has to be paid to the origin of these DTG plants, so we can attempt to replicate their growing environment. This doesn't have to be exact, just approximate, but we have to consider soil type, pH of soil, shade or sun factors, air drainage, and ambient temperatures. All gardens have their own micro climates and distinct growing conditions – get to know them and use them to your advantage.

If you want to try UDTG plants, a good way to bypass soil problems is to buy grafted plants. If you don't want to or can't buy grafted plants, then generally the garden soils have to be modified in some way, such as adding drainage by raising garden beds. However grafting won't fix atmospheric conditions such as excessive humidity.

Many Australian plants resent any constantly waterlogged roots, they prefer being alternatively wet and dry. Soil drainage can be a major issue here, and this is why raised beds will give the plants a chance to dry out. Others in this group like their roots being kept from extremes of temperatures, so rocks have to be brought in for mulch.



Gardeners should have some expertise to be able to grow these type of plants successfully.

3) Almost-impossible-to-grow plants - AITG

Although there seems to be plenty of almost impossible to grow Australian plants, one has to remember the following: -

There are huge gaps in our knowledge about our flora. From previous attempts it is known that there are many good plants that have been classed as AITG. They haven't had the research and development done yet to find out their more exacting propagating and growing requirements.

While many of these plants may grow very well west of the Great Divide, we can't always expect a specialized desert plant to grow in humid East Coast conditions. The East Coast not only has higher rainfall, but the soils here are generally infested with a fungus that is fatal to many Central and West Australian plants. This soil fungus does not affect most East Coast species, and grafting is the most cost effective way of overcoming this problem.

This group contains some of Australia's most spectacular flowering plants, and some private and government nurseries are carrying out research and development to get some of these moved into the ETG or UDTG category. Tarrowood is one of many nurseries doing this type of work to bring more unique plants into the market.

What can you do?

You can become a member of the Australian Plant Society (APS) and be involved in finding out more about our wonderful Flora and how to grow it. There are also many specialist groups within the APS, conducting growing and propagation trials on all types of Australian plants.

See <http://asgap.org.au/> for more details on the APS in general, or if in NSW see www.austplants-nsw.org.au

Remember Tarrowood plants are: -

- new
- different
- beautiful
- appropriate
- grown to perfection



- ideally presented to attract customers
- * Many of our plants are new introductions to the nursery industry, and we release new plants each year.
- * We consciously seek out plants that are unique, different and appealing. We do not grow any "run of the mill" plants unless they are consistently in demand.
- * Plants we grow have to have customer appeal – their beauty reflects the land that formed them, as opposed to the softer Northern Hemisphere forms of beauty.
- * Most of our plants are water efficient species with some only requiring minimal watering in dry times. They are most appropriate for current low water use gardening.