

## The Right Water

by Leigh Murray, photo by Jan Robilliard

I've had some significant successes in our scruffy gardens, just by the judicious use of water.

Our Queanbeyan house sits on a shaly, exposed west-facing ridge with hardly any soil. On the barest section, most efforts to grow plants failed, even when watered by drippers and occasional hand watering. Success only came after I set up a soaker hose in an otherwise unwatered area planted with some of our toughest cookies: *Lomandra longifolia*, *Correa glabra*, *Acacia iteaphylla*, *Billardiera scandens* and *Allocasuarina verticillata*. After several years, these plants are beginning to form into a nice bushy patch. This is a big change for such a previously bare area. And a bonus is that downhill of this patch, a good variety of indigenous plants are starting to pop up (such as cassinias, acacias, exocarpos and grevilleas). So, the occasional use of one 15m soaker hose has helped to establish quite a large community of plants.

At Tuross, our northern nature strip started out as 3 lonely-looking *Callistemon* 'Dawson River' planted by Council in a sea of kikuyu grass. After a wet summer some years ago, a few grevilleas and acacias began to grow there. I added lomandras, callistemons and carpobrotus, and gave the new plants an occasional watery top-up. The area is now a dense shrubbery needing little attention.



Water is a marvellous drawcard for wildlife, especially if it's in a variety of containers. For instance, Red Wattlebirds love to dunk in a bucketful of water, whereas the little birds (wrens, thornbills, fantails, spinebills) adore splashing in a 22cm pot base. Choughs pack together along the rim of a 50litre recycling crate to drink (about 14 choughs fit), and this container-size is also patronised by kangaroos.

The location of the water can be important too. The Little Bird Base was set up under a leggy callistemon with a dense, spreading canopy. Our

Blue Frog Bowl (a 40cm dishwashing bowl) was popular some years ago with Swamp Frogs, but little interest had been shown in it recently. I moved it to near a pale grey compost bin favoured by Peron's Tree Frogs (they're the same colour, and like to sunbathe on its lid). Within 10 days, there were Peron's calls from there, and then frogspawn.

So, when water has been delivered in the right way, or in the right container in the right location, I've had success with plants and wildlife.