



A prize-winning show garden by Peter Donegan at last year's Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show.



# FRESH IDEAS FOR GREEN THUMBS

*With the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show just around the corner, DARE digs up the latest flower bed trends for 2024 and shares tips for autumn gardening.*

Words **KAREN BURGE**

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**A** new year brings fresh inspiration in the garden and there are plenty of trends to tempt plant lovers over the coming months. Bright, bold colours and stand-out blooms are tipped to capture the imagination of green thumbs throughout 2024, along with landscape designs that support wildlife.

Adding to the inspiration is the highly anticipated Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show (MIFGS) from 20-24 March, featuring spectacular floral displays, landscape designs and workshops from leading garden professionals.

If you can't attend the show but still want to get across the latest trends, our experts share their thoughts on some of the top gardening themes to fill your weekend jobs list.

## **BACK TO THE WILD**

One of the joys of gardening is sharing what you've created with wildlife, including birds, bees, lizards and butterflies. Creating habitats that attract garden visitors is known as rewilding, and it's a trend that's gaining

momentum in Australia.

Horticulturist and *Gardening Australia* presenter Tammy Huynh says it's all about embracing nature and supporting wildlife by installing insect hotels, bird-nesting boxes and ponds, as well as creating habitat areas within the garden. "There's also less reliance on chemicals and more planting of nectar-rich flowers and fruit trees," she explains.

This is particularly important in communities that have seen increased development and reduced green space for animals to seek food and refuge. Sydney-based horticulturalist Steve Falcioni says bare spots in the yard and street verges are ideal locations for creating biological refuges.

"Expect to see more areas turned over to veggie patches, native plantings and garden beds filled with a mix of flowering annuals and perennials. These are dynamic plantings, which change throughout the year, and help us to reconnect with the cycle of the seasons. They also provide valuable food and shelter for beneficial insects, birds and other critters, so everyone wins." >







### COLOUR AND CHARM

Bright blooms with high appeal in the garden are continuing their time in the spotlight. Says Steve: “Big, bold flowers have arrived and are here to stay. Think dahlias and hydrangeas.” He also notes some enticing flower options gardeners should put on their radars.

“I’m excited to see more Australian-bred roses appearing in nurseries, so look out for those. Gardeners should also expand their bulb collections. There are so many amazing bulbs (more than just tulips and daffodils), which are easy to grow and will flower at different times of the year.”

Tammy also suggests a few stand-out plants to bring colour and movement to the garden this year. “Mexican sage (*Salvia leucantha*) is beautiful, hardy and

a fast-grower, and *Pennisetum ‘Nafray’* is a native grass with creamy-golden feathery flower plumes that looks gorgeous mass-planted in beds or along borders. It’s hardy and drought-tolerant.”

For more inspiration, keep an eye out for the MIFGS garden competitions (and prize winners), with more than 50 displays across five categories covering boutique, landscape, balcony, border and achievable gardens.

### SUSTAINABLE APPROACHES

Reusing, upcycling and planting with purpose are some of the ways gardeners are bringing sustainable awareness into their own backyards.

Tammy says this might include using salvaged or reclaimed materials in the garden, choosing plant species that will cope with

the hot and dry climate rather than require additional watering, and growing food.

There has also been a recent shift towards ‘chaos-gardening’ – a rebellion against tidy, non-native gardens in favour of more sustainable gardens that are part of the solution to environmental concerns.

Irish garden designer Peter Donegan, who won gold for his show garden at last year’s MIFGS, says people are opting for more natural and green landscapes.

“There has been a definite shift in ideology away from quick and fast, low-maintenance, and not-so-green home garden design,” Peter says. “Statistically, for example, fake grass demand in Britain in 2023 is down 66% on 2021 figures and this appears set to continue.”





Above: an edimental-style garden at the 2023 RHS Chelsea Flower Show in London won over the judges. Left: big, bold blooms like hydrangeas are back on trend. Far left: the Urban Wild garden was another winning design at the 2023 MIFGS.

### EDIBLE ORNAMENTALS

You've heard of ornamentals and edibles, but how about 'edimentals'? This means growing plants that both look and taste good, like fruit trees, artichokes, rhubarb, rainbow chard and society garlic, explains Tammy, who expects to see more gardeners paying attention to edimentals this year.

An edimental-style garden turned heads at last year's RHS Chelsea Flower Show in London, with judges awarding it a medal for its planting of edibles alongside inedible bright cottage flowers like foxgloves.

### BALCONY GARDENING

With more and more people living in apartments and townhouses, small space gardening is only

going to increase in popularity, says Steve, who is a keen balcony gardener himself. "I love to see change in my garden and achieve that in part with flowering annuals. So I'm itching to plant a bunch of my favourites, including larkspurs, linaria, Livingstone daisies, poppies and sweet peas."

Interest in container gardening is expected to continue to grow as urban populations increase. And balcony gardeners are getting creative, maximising vertical space with trailing plants and filling pots with plants that produce food, offer privacy and add beauty to small spaces. ●



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## AUTUMN PLANTING TIPS

With TAMMY HUYNH

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**Autumn** is the best time to be gardening – the soil is warm, but day temperatures are cool, so it's perfect for getting plants established.

**Plant** evergreen shrubs and trees, and spring bulbs – such as tulips, hyacinths, daffodils, ranunculus and babiana – or sow sweet peas for colour when the weather warms.

**Also plant** veggies, including broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbage, lettuce, climbing and dwarf peas, beetroot, coriander and spring onions.

**Prepare** beds for autumn/winter veggies, incorporating compost and organic matter prior to planting.

**Collect** fallen leaves and turn them into leaf mould (a nutrient-rich soil conditioner). In a cool spot, pile the leaves in a wire cage fashioned out of chicken wire or similar. Moisten and add handfuls of organic fertiliser and cover with a tarpaulin to help keep the pile moist. Turn with a fork every few weeks and moisten if it's dry.