

YOUR CORONAVIRUS GUIDE TO DAILY LIFE

Digging in for a growing passion

NEGLECTED YARDS AND GARDENS ARE COMING BACK TO LIFE AS ISOLATED AUSSIES TAKE SOLACE IN THEIR HOMES' OUTDOOR AREAS



Landscape designer Nicola Cameron in her garden with dog Tigga. Picture: David Swift.

EMMA BLAKE

There is a buzz in the air throughout the nation's leafy suburbs. And a hum as hedge trimmers, leaf blowers and lawnmowers whirr into action. With everyone confined to their homes, interest in gardens and outdoor spaces has never been greater.

Hardware stores and nurseries are now as busy as supermarkets as both experienced and new gardeners and home improvers swarm the shelves for everything from vegetable seeds to paint stripper.

Research by hardware and nursery giant Bunnings found two in five Australians are planning on maximising their gardens in the coming months.

"We've seen an increase in popularity across all plant types over the past month," said Alex Newman, Bunnings national greenlife buyer.

"Seedlings and seeds have been high in demand and we are working with our suppliers to increase supply and replenish our stocks, as soon as they become available."

Everyone has time on their hands, said Andrew Winter from Foxtel's Selling Houses Australia, adding that the lockdown was a great opportunity to make improvements.

"Get into the garden, tidy the driveway, gurney paths, clean fly screens — all those awful, tedious jobs that can transform a house," Winter said.

These jobs will keep you busy and, with many people feeling anxiety or stress due to the enormous changes they have had to adjust to in recent weeks, they can also be therapeutic.

"Something as physical or tactile as gardening can be so rewarding," said Nicola Cameron, director of landscape gardening business Pepo Botanic Design, who has been using this period of isolation to help people with their gardening via social media.

"Indoor plants are a great way to make you feel connected to nature, they are known to reduce anxiety and create a feeling of wellbeing — we actually stress less with plants around us," Ms Cameron said.

Often people think they can't grow anything or have a "brown thumb" but even an outdoor tidy up

can make you feel better.

"Collect all the old plastic or broken pots and remove any dead plants. This in itself can be an achievement. Once you have had a good tidy up you may see that some built elements of the garden also need some work."

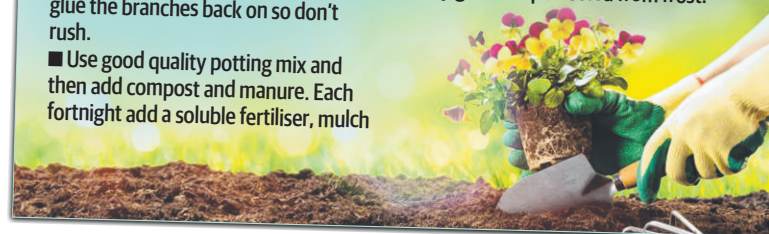
If you need a professional for bigger jobs, take some photos and measurements so you can get someone to quote remotely, she said.

Nicola's gardening tips

- Stepping into the garden for the first time in a while can be a little overwhelming, so start with a broad brushstroke and declutter
- Use clean sharp tools when hedging and pruning and remember you can't glue the branches back on so don't rush.
- Use good quality potting mix and then add compost and manure. Each fortnight add a soluble fertiliser, mulch

with lucerne or sugar cane and don't let the garden bed dry out.

■ Vegetables to plant at this time of year include: broccoli, kale, spinach, carrots — plant from seed, cabbage and leafy greens if protected from frost.



Good soil is crucial for healthy gardens. Adding organic matter such as cow manure and compost will do the trick and watering in liquid seaweed fertiliser regularly will stimulate root growth. "Autumn is a great time of year to plant as the soil is still warm and the plants are able to become established before it gets too cold," Ms Cameron said.

For more tips head to Gardening Club of Australia's Facebook page

DAUGHTERLY LIAISONS



WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

A loud smash startles our supersleuth couple

The crash of glass and whoosh of igniting petrol came just as Nick and La Contessa were getting into bed.

Nick dashed through the kitchen, grabbing the fire extinguisher his wife had insisted they had to have years before, and ran into the garden. The molotov cocktail had landed and erupted into flame inside Baxter's kennel, which was completely ablaze. Nick sprayed it with foam.

"Oh darling, what on earth happened?" gasped La Contessa, clutching his elbow.

"Molotov cocktail," said Nick and then, seeing her confused expression, he explained: "A bottle filled with petrol with a burning rag stuck in the neck to ignite it once the glass breaks. Clearly lobbed over the garden fence and by complete luck it landed in the kennel, which helped contain the blaze."

"But what if poor Baxter had been in there?" she asked in horror.

At that moment, right on cue, a sleepy Baxter pattered into the garden, sniffed at the still smoking kennel and lifted his leg to assist in putting out any remaining embers.

"Why on earth would the dog spend time in a hut in the garden when he is given pride of place in the middle of our bed every night?" said Nick.

"Who would do such a thing?" said La Contessa.

"Now you are thinking like a detective," said Nick.

"Who indeed? It seems my visit to Natalia Kowalski has caused a little consternation to the residents opposite."

Don't miss tomorrow's episode

See tomorrow's episode by Matthew Bennis



BRITISH BULLDOG

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