



Plant Life
BALANCE™

TREND REPORT
2020 PLANT PREDICTIONS



ABOUT PLANT LIFE BALANCE

 [@myplantlifebalance](https://www.instagram.com/myplantlifebalance)

Plant Life Balance is a program designed to get Australians excited and confident about styling their homes and lives with plants — while promoting the health and wellbeing benefits plants bring. The program is supported and funded by Hort Innovation using nursery industry levies and contributions from the Australian Government.

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FOREWORD

BY DR DOMINIQUE HES

Plant Life Balance Ambassador
and Researcher from Melbourne University

Humans have an innate connection to nature.

From the day we are born we are hardwired to appreciate our natural world. With diversity of shapes and colours, to intricate patterns that make living things both beautiful and functional, we can't overlook our underlying love of all that is alive.

Anecdotal and qualitative evidence suggests biophilia – a love of life and the living world – is rooted in the history of human existence. Tribal people and ethnic cultures across the world have developed their own customs, religious rights, folklore, songs, foods and medicinal practices to celebrate plants, suggesting that people lived in much closer contact with nature than most do today.

This connection is increasingly being explored and confirmed by scientific research, with studies pointing towards the same conclusion – plants make people happy and healthy.

Plant Life Balance commissioned a study from RMIT University and University of Melbourne which brought together half a century's worth of research about plants and human wellbeing. This discovered not only does the quantity of plants impact wellbeing, so does the diversity of size and species.

Simply adding one medium-sized plant to a medium-sized room improves air quality up to 25%. And when it comes to improving wellbeing, five or more plants leads to people feeling healthier and happier.

Plants also have the ability to both relax and energise us. Being relaxed improves your mood; you can concentrate longer and you are more productive. Simply seeing plants or being surrounded by them can be an effective mechanism for dealing with stress.

This research has helped create a collective conversation between horticulturalists, academics and stylists which helps people understand and maximise the benefits of plants in their lives. This report aims to explore the connection between people and plants – and to reflect on how we bring nature into our personal biome.

When we begin to appreciate our connection with nature and feel the benefits of plants, we begin to understand why it's imperative we protect them – because without plants, humans simply cannot exist.





MADE A HOUSE PLANT YOUR NEW FRIEND IN THE LAST YEAR? YOU'RE NOT ALONE.

An amazing 18 million Australians have done so. It's a craze growing faster than devil's ivy and one that is definitely here to stay.

Now, more than ever, Australians are looking to plants as a way to connect with nature. Plants feed us, shelter us and heal us. While we've always known this, there is a growing concern for our rapidly changing climate and natural environment and, with it, an increasing appetite to seek out and nourish nature in our homes, neighbourhoods and daily lives.

It's clear our relationship with the humble plant has evolved, and [Plant Life Balance](#) has been on a mission to find out:

Why people
buy plants and
from where

The most
popular
species

Where we
get our
plant-spiration

What we find
the biggest
challenges
to be

THIS REPORT IS THE FIRST FOR



AND OF ITS KIND IN AUSTRALIA.

Enjoy unfurling the leafy
learnings – the future looks green.

By interviewing

1000+

Australians who
bought a potted plant
in the last 12 months

9

experts across
horticulture, academia
and design

20

nursery retailers
from around
the country

And analysing

100+

academic, media and social
media listening sources from
Australia and around
the world

with

our panel of

GREENING EXPERTS

to bring you the hottest trends
for indoor and outdoor plants
in 2020

OUR PLANTASTIC EXPERT COMMENTATORS

DR DOMINIQUE HES

Plant Life Balance Ambassador and Melbourne University Researcher

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Plant Life Balance Ambassador and Owner of The Plant Society

NARELLE HAPP

Horticulturalist from A Garden for Life

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Interior and Plant Stylist

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TONI SALTER

The Veggie Lady and past President of Cultivate NSW, the Horticultural Therapy Society of NSW

SONJA CAMERON

Managing Director of Cameron's Nursery

JOHN STANLEY


International Garden Centre Consultant

CAROLE FUDGE

Sales Manager at Benara Nurseries



TREND ONE: LOW MAINTENANCE STATEMENTS



Over **40%** of people struggle to know when to water their plants

27% are unsure of why their plants have died

1 in 5 suspect not enough water

14% say too much water is to blame

Australians love plants

The latest report from the Nursery and Garden Industry of Australia estimates plant sales from retail nurseries totalled over \$1.3 billion, which equates to approximately a whopping 330+ million plants!

While we'd love to say all plants are equal, styling experts suggest bigger is better with large statement plants such as the indoor tree fast emerging as the new 'it' plant, kicking the fussy fiddle leaf fig off its throne. We're now seeing a preference towards lower maintenance, large plants that retain the same visual impact.

THE PREDICTION

Easy care indoor trees and clusters

Over the last twelve months, 2 in 5 Australians bought a low-maintenance plant. In this same period, 80% of nursery retailers surveyed saw an increase in enquiries relating to easy maintenance plants. Based on what Aussies tell us, they have managed to kill at least 72 million plants in the past year.

With our lives getting busier everyday, and an ever-increasing need to be waterwise, it's no wonder low maintenance plants are seen as an attractive choice.

“Hard-edged man-made materials dominate today's world, so it's vital to incorporate greenery into the home for our health. Indoor trees with their beautiful leaf structure and sturdy trunks impart a strong style statement while being great for purifying the air.”

— Jason Chongue

Statement plants don't have to be all about the one bold plant either. With 30% of Aussies owning more than five house plants, clusters of varied species can create one living, breathing visual statement – a rising trend that is popping up on the social accounts of [plantfluencers](#)² and interior stylists alike.

When it comes to styling, Jason recommends grouping larger plants, such as the umbrella tree, with hanging vines like devil's ivy and smaller planters of peace lilies. Interior stylist Suzy Coassin reminds us that impressive plant styling can be achieved on a shoe-string budget by using common household items such as books, magazines, plant stands, an old thrifted box or any other decor items. These items can be used to raise one or more plants off the ground, giving the eye different levels to be drawn to around the room.

TOP THREE INDOOR TREES



Dragon tree

“An incredible succulent that ranges from a few feet tall to a few meters.”

—

Jason Chongue



Rubber tree

“Durable, easy care and always looking rich and amazing with those dark, glossy leaves.”

—

Suzy Coassin

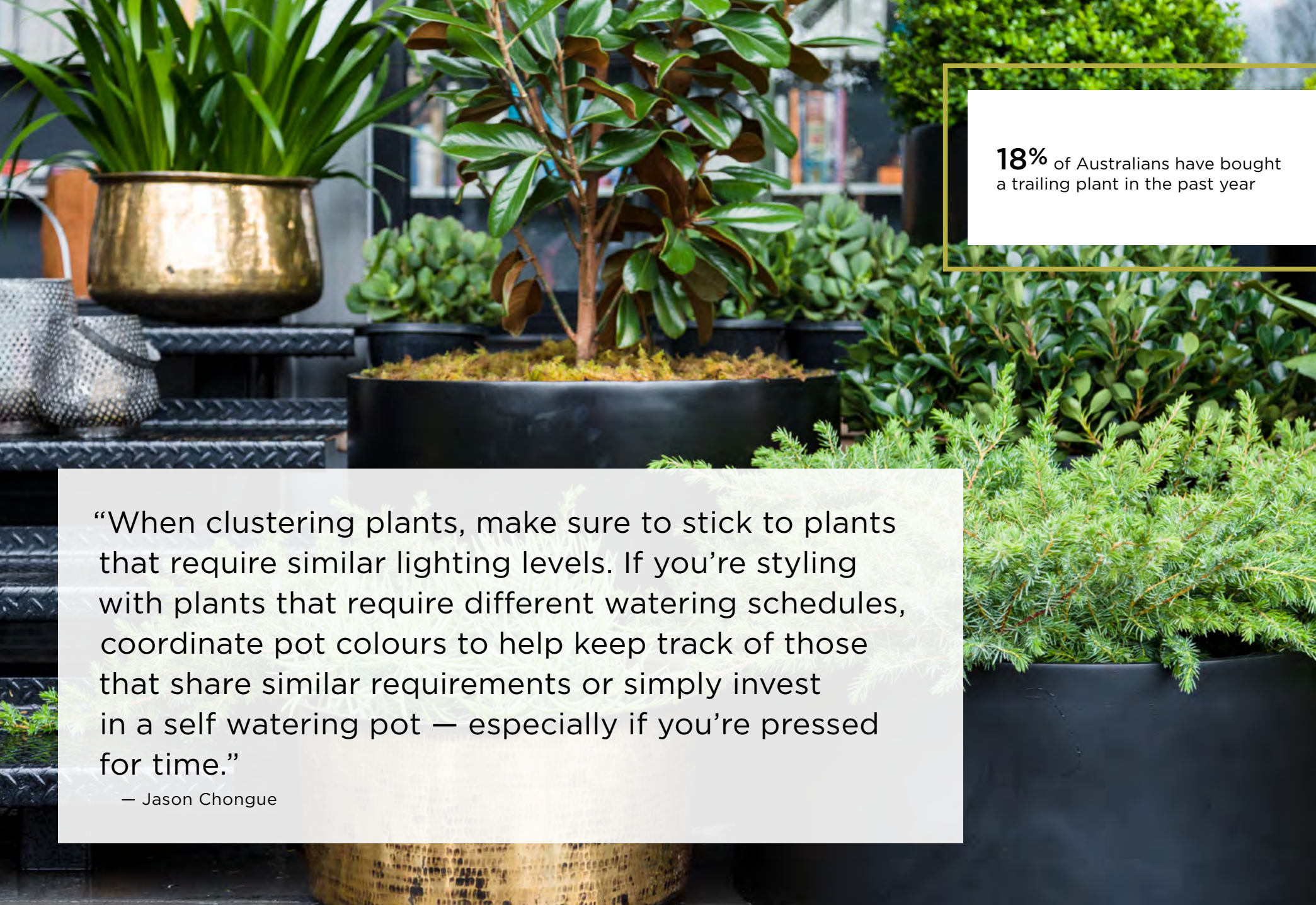


Olive tree

“If you have a spot that receives plenty of sunlight for most of the day, consider a dwarf olive tree. It's hardy once established and can deal with periods of little to no water, although will benefit from regular watering.”

—

Tammy Huynh



18% of Australians have bought a trailing plant in the past year

“When clustering plants, make sure to stick to plants that require similar lighting levels. If you’re styling with plants that require different watering schedules, coordinate pot colours to help keep track of those that share similar requirements or simply invest in a self watering pot — especially if you’re pressed for time.”

— Jason Chongue

ADD ONE OF THESE TO YOUR CLUSTER

Retail nurseries predict these to be the top 2020 low maintenance plants:

1.

Philodendron — try the philodendron red emerald for a tall climber.

2.

Devil's ivy — the popular climbing house plant that has gained its common name from its remarkable survival skills.

3.

Peace lily — one of the few houseplants that will bloom in low interior lighting conditions.

OR TRY YOUR GREEN THUMB WITH OUR FAVOURITE UP AND COMERS

1.


Rhaphidophora tetrasperma — the “mini monstera” that’s easy to grow and propagate.

2.

Pilea — easy going and good natured houseplant that grows fast.

3.

Hoya — commonly well-known as wax flower, it is an aromatic indoor species.



38% of Australians have bought a small tropical plant, like a peace lily, in the past year

A photograph of a palm tree trunk and a green plant against a light green wall. The palm tree trunk is on the left, and the green plant is in the center. The wall is a light, textured green. The overall mood is fresh and natural.

TREND TWO: NOSTALGIA FOR NATURE

“Colours creeping up are in the gelato tone spectrum — a fresh yet soft reinvigorated embrace of nature in the home, pairing well with other muted tones inspired by the natural world.”

— Suzy Coassin

As we become more attuned to the benefits of [nature](#)³, we're being inspired to bring the outdoors in like never before. Interiors are branching out from a focus on indoor-plants to a more holistic embrace of the natural world.

THE PREDICTION

Interiors that embrace the natural world from colour to wallpapers to homewares

We're seeing this come to life in three ways:

A fresh take on green

A fresh take on green is making its way into interior stylists' workbooks, with [minty](#)⁴ hues and [soft sage](#)⁵ set to splash bedroom, bathroom and living room walls.

These muted greens give oxygen to other earthy tones, in particular the ever popular terracotta which continues to flourish across fabrics, furniture, and plant wares.



Wallpaper botanics

Walls are an opportunity to show creativity, a blank canvas ready to transform. Backed by international designers like [Gucci](#)⁶, temporary wallpapers take the limelight as a way to blur the outdoor world with the inner. Plant Life Balance predicts it's only a matter of time until our walls are creeping with printed plants of our favourite species.

With Australians spending [90%](#)⁷ or more of their time indoors, walls are the perfect place to merge bold botanical illustrations with living plants in indoor spaces. Temporary wallpapers are a particularly great option for plant-lovers, renters, and small apartment dwellers who want to further embellish their indoor spaces with nature but may be short on space.

“Bring your botanical wallpaper alive with a seamless transition to matching plants to create your ideal room feel, whether that’s a tropical jungle, a Havana holiday, or a soft sanctuary amongst leaves.”

— Suzy Coassin





A recent Roy Morgan report found [9 in 10 Aussie shoppers](#)⁸ are more likely to buy Australian-made products than ones made offshore

Earthen basics

A preference for hand-crafted and locally-made natural products, coupled with an increasing interest in sustainability, is being reflected in the design and style of Australian homes.

In 2020, interior decorating inspiration will come from handmade clays in all of their organic-form glory, natural linens that become gentle and soft with time, and honeyed timbers that open indoor spaces.

“Your planters should continue the language of your interior. We are seeing a preference towards long term investments, so look for planters in neutral shades and simple classic shapes.”

— Jason Chongue

“Shades of burnt red, orange and brown will be celebrated in the coming months, while greens will also make their mark. Handmade planters that explore form and texture will continue to influence planter designs.”

— Jason Chongue





TREND THREE: A HOME AMONG THE GUM TREES

1 in 4 Australians have purchased a native plant in the past 12 months

Almost **1 in 3** have bought a water efficient species

From flared pants and bell sleeves, to botanical wallpapers and the houseplant revolution, Australian 70s suburbia is back – and in a big way. It's [on the runway](#)⁹, can be seen in the cane furniture on your patio, and is marching on the streets in a new age wave of environmental activism.

There's also a deeper craving for connectedness and a drive to create a biome of our own – where neighbours are known, there's a community spirit, and a strong sense of place is cultivated. In summary, it's a nostalgia for a simpler time and a lifestyle with less impact on the land we love, to contrast our frenetic always-on work lives.

THE PREDICTION

The resurgence of the 70's 'burb backyard and balcony

With 3 in 4 Australians tending to backyard plants, we expect to see wild native gardens a-buzz with pollinators and wildlife, while neighbours trade edible produce and stories over the fence.

The renewed enthusiasm for more climate-appropriate or drought-tolerant varieties of native plants can be partly attributed to our sensitivity for sensible water usage. This is particularly front of mind for many Australians in light of the ongoing drought, thought to possibly be the worst in 800 years¹⁰.

Horticulturalist Narelle Happ from A Garden For Life, is a specialist in native garden and permaculture design.

She explains, “There are native plants to suit every garden style from edible, formal, cottage and natural bushscape. Nurseries and plant breeders have been selecting native plants that are lower maintenance, better suited to gardens and better performing, so there really is something for every garden.”

This resurgence has also been due to a growing interest in sustainability. Natives are incredibly important for encouraging biodiversity, serving as wildlife corridors for birds, reptiles and mammals, and providing flora for insects and bees, which pollinate the plants. Native plants are also much better at coping in our challenging climate, in comparison to exotic species that often require a lot of water.

“Hardly any Australian native plants need to be sprayed for pests and disease, whereas a lot of exotic plants do – so just by simply choosing Australian plants, you’re contributing positively to the environment,”

— Narelle Happ

Retail nurseries report enquiries have almost doubled for native plants in the past twelve months, while enquiries on drought-resilient species were up

70%

by those surveyed

Google searches of “native plant nursery” have increased by **44%** in Australia over the past 5 years



Designing a native backyard or balcony

According to Narelle, when people think of native plant varieties, they often think of muted browns, but there are many stunning varieties with sculptural foliage and bright colourful flora to choose from.

“The kangaroo paw, Australian daisy and grevillea are increasingly popular due to their range in colours and hardy nature once established.

Edible natives such as the delicious finger lime, native ginger and Warrigal greens taste unlike anything you'll typically see growing in an urban garden, and don't take up too much space!”

— Narelle Happ

Calothamnus quadrifidus
— One sided bottlebrush



Narelle's top five native plants

1. *Calothamnus quadrifidus* — One sided bottlebrush
2. *Correa alba* — White correa
3. *Grevillea* — Orange marmalade
4. *Anigozanthos* — Kangaroo paw
5. *Banksia* — Dwarf banksia

Anigozanthos —
Kangaroo paw



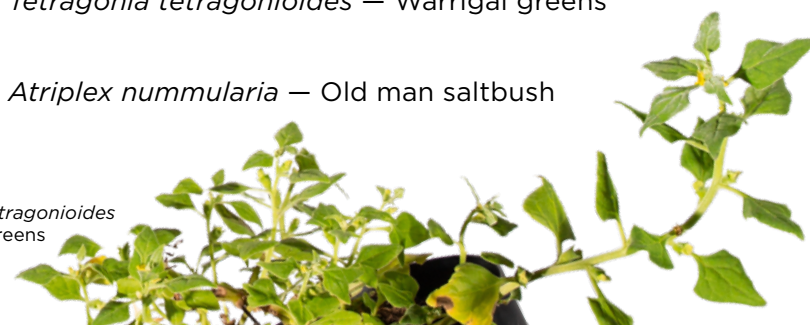
Narelle's top five edible native plants

1. *Backhousia citriodora* — Lemon myrtle
2. *Austromyrtus culcis* — Midyim berry
3. *Tasmannia canceolata* — Mountain pepper
4. *Tetragonia tetragonioides* — Warrigal greens
5. *Atriplex nummularia* — Old man saltbush

Backhousia citriodora —
Lemon myrtle



Tetragonia tetragonioides
— Warrigal greens



NARELLE'S TOP THREE DESIGN TIPS

1.

Embrace mass and void — mass planting in clumps, grouped by colour or leaf shapes, creates a striking feature in the garden. Leaving a void in the design can lead the eye to another area of the garden, while giving larger plants some breathing space to show their true form.

2.

Replicate the natural landscape — borrow design features from the natural landscape and use it in your garden design. Trees in the background become a canopy layer, allowing for more contrasting shrubs to be used in layers as the eye moves forward in the garden.

3.

Patterns in nature — designers often talk in odd numbers and love plants in threes. In nature, smaller plants and grasses usually grow in a group, and groups are often repeated in the landscape. Repeated leaf structures such as grasses clumped throughout the garden allow the eye to rest as it views the garden, rather than too many shapes creating a chaotic effect.



“Social media has given plants an aspirational platform that didn’t really exist for previous generations. Following a plant-based Instagram account can give snippets of inspiration and advice in an accessible way.”

— Jason Chongue

The houseplant is now a firmly embedded feature of Australian homes, subject to ever-changing trends (who could forget 2018’s monstera craze) and more recently the rise of the “plantfluencer” – the social media stars of plant style, care, and tips.

Over the last twelve months, the biggest increase in spending observed by the nursery retailers surveyed has been from 18-35 year olds, and this is thought to be largely driven by social media. For example, popular plantfluencer Jason Chongue has filled his home with over 400 plants, images of which he shares regularly with his 40,000+ followers across social media.

Retail nurseries commented that customers often feel confused and overwhelmed about plant care. This feeling is further compounded by an overload of online information, different environments people are gardening in, increasingly unreliable rainfall patterns and a warming climate.

This is leading people to seek help online, but as more tailored advice is needed for plants to truly thrive, we predict a return to old fashioned 1 on 1 support at local nurseries.

After all, while social media is a key source of plant inspiration, when it comes to care tips it’s best to consult horticulture experts who know both plants and the local climate, to lead us down the greenest path.

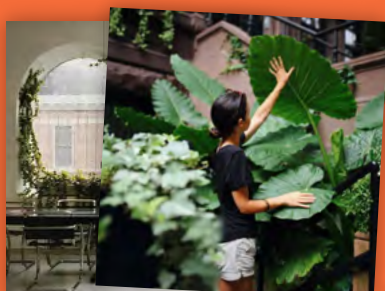
THE PREDICTION

2020 will see a shift in how Australian plant-lovers seek advice

TEN AUSTRALIAN PLANTFLUENCERS
TO KEEP AN EYE ON IN 2020



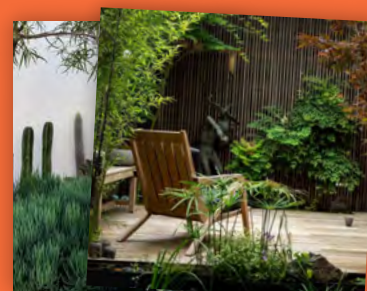
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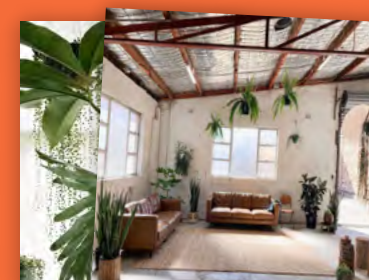
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[@craigmilran](#)



[@plantmama_](#)



[@the_plantroom](#)

Sonja Cameron, Managing Director
of Cameron's Nursery explains:

“People often feel gardening is more complicated than it really is! Expert greening advice can assist new gardeners get on their way, and once new gardeners get their hands dirty, they start to explore, and become tempted to try all sorts of plants which helps build their confidence.”

This sentiment rings true with Carole Fudge, Sales Manager at Benara Nurseries. Her advice?

“Find a local nursery and make it your regular weekend drop in and browse destination. Horticulture and expert advice is given freely and many run gardening clubs and workshops which are great at bringing together the community and distilling information. All good gardens are built on failures – it's how we all learn what works best for our situation.”

When exploring where the majority of plant parents go to seek information, local nurseries are the most popular

(65%)

followed by friends
and family

(54%)

Almost half of Australians
(49%) use social media as a source for seeking gardening advice, with social communities offering care tips, style advice and tutorials

Plant Life Balance, with a social community of 85,000 and Crazy Indoor Plant People Australia, a Facebook group with 71,000 followers, are providing platforms for both beginner and experienced plant enthusiasts to share ideas, ask questions and engage with like minded people



But don't ditch the inspiration

John Stanley, an International Garden Centre Consultant, believes,

“Personalised solutions offer the best chance of success. Your local nursery will be most familiar with local light, humidity and soil conditions and able to offer tailored advice to ability, budget and time. If you've got a specific styling aesthetic in mind, take a screenshot and your nursery can help match the look and feel if the species isn't quite right for you.”



TREND FIVE: HORTICULTURE FOR HEALTH

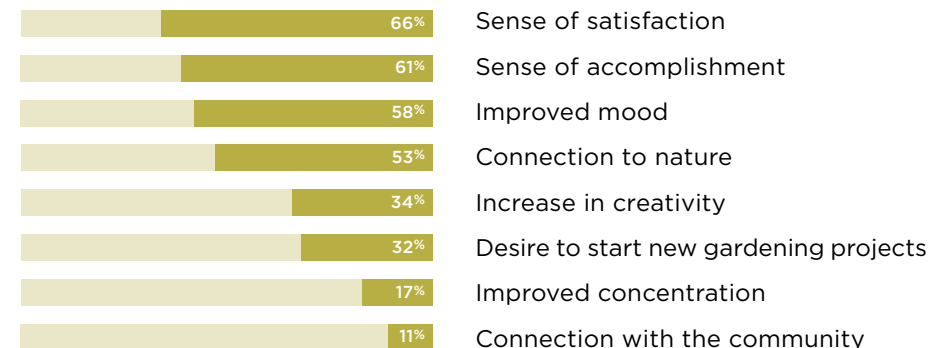
1 in 4 are motivated to buy plants for mindfulness

Whether it be forest bathing, social gardening, or therapeutic horticulture, nature has become a force in helping us switch off.

So move over adult colouring books and mindfulness apps – gardening will be 2020's go-to activity for improving mental and physical health through sensory engagement with plants and soil.

Plant Life Balance ambassador and researcher Dr Dominique Hes explains that the human brain evolved while being surrounded by natural environments, and seeing patterns and colour reminds us of that connection. "Being able to see plants or be surrounded by them can be an effective mechanism of dealing with stress. Experts say tending to plants can be one of the most accessible and simplest ways to engage in mindfulness."

The harvest high: Australians feel good when they are in the garden and caring for their plants:



THE PREDICTION

2020 will see a rise in the use of gardening as a tool for mindfulness

Both active and passive forms of gardening can make a difference to your mental and physical health, according to horticultural therapist, Toni Salter.

“Gardening activities like digging, shovelling and playing with soil can provide instant gratification for your mind. Focusing on an activity like this can be a great distraction from feelings of anxiety and can produce a rewarding end result. It helps to ‘stay in the moment’ and appreciate the process.”

Toni explained that even more passive activities like potting up seedlings or sowing seeds can be a form of relaxation, especially if the gardener is given choice over what is being planted. Both activities can encourage creativity and optimism through planning something that will bloom or be harvested in the future.



With the incidence of mental health issues rising in Australia – anxiety and depression in particular – people are looking for different ways to reduce stress.

“Gardening is something that is non-threatening, non-clinical and immediately brings you into an engaging space and surroundings. There’s evidence that both passive and active involvement in garden activities is helping to reduce stress, increase positive feelings and brings a sense of fun and hopefulness to participants.”



TONI'S ADVICE ON MINDFUL GARDENING

1.

Take it slow, don't rush the activity and use your senses at every step — see, smell, taste, listen and feel the objects you are working with.

2.

Don't expect perfection — it takes time and practice to get things perfect, but plants are often quite resilient, just like us, and will handle a few mistakes along the way.

3.

Enjoy the process more than the end result — it's not always about how things turn out, but we can make the most of the time we spend on it.



WHAT IS BIOPHILIA?

Biophilia can be defined as our innate need to connect with nature and the natural environment. Biophilic design incorporates elements from nature, such as plants, water features and natural lighting, into a space.

Beyond floral spring dresses and the classic Hawaiian shirt, modern botanicals prints are back in fashion and have hit the streets. We're seeing foliage splashed on everything from swimsuits to oversized jewellery. But it doesn't stop with fashion and accessories – our favourite venues are also now dripping in green.

Biophilic design has been steadily adopted in office buildings, homes and public spaces for the better part of a decade, praised for its ability to bridge the disconnect between the built environment and the natural world.

THE PREDICTION

The hybrid store: would you like plants with that?

It's been around for years – the deli-come-cafe, florist-come-cafe, and even whiskey bar-come-barber shop. Hybrid plant nurseries are growing fast and are predicted to pop up even more in 2020.

The plant store hybrid is all about giving customers a real experience – the chance to invigorate senses through touch and sight, while tasting and smelling their Sunday brunch. The hybrid creates an opportunity for consumers to connect with their communities and with nature while going about their regular eating, drinking or shopping activities.

A 2013 U.S study found places with greenery are often regarded as destination places, with shoppers prepared to travel further, pay more for the goods, and stay longer in these locations than in those without greenery¹¹.

The plant hybrid store isn't all about hospitality and retail however – the concept can be applied to art and culture spaces, too. Jana Stewart of Sydney's Mini-Mart, a concept store designed for creatives to display their art and wares, observes:

“People are longing for community, so having a space that is as multifaceted as the community that surrounds it provides a casual environment for people to make friends, discover local artists and feel a part of something bigger.

“We want our customers to feel like they have stepped into the lush, leafy lounge room of a friend. Plants make a space more welcoming and people slow down to really appreciate the handcrafted homewares and art that we have from local designers. When our customers are relaxed, they're more likely to chat and ask for advice on which plant will be best for them, so it's extra personal.”

Now, more than ever, brick-and-mortar stores are competing with the internet

Currently **7%** of Australian's purchase plants online and this is only expected to grow





The concept of the nursery-after-dark is sure to grow alongside the hybrid plant store, too. Whether it's for weddings or workshops, expect nurseries across the country to open their doors to people looking to live life amongst the foliage.

Pioneering plantfluencers, Jason Chongue and Nathan Smith from The Plant Society, opened up their first B&B in 2019 above their Sydney nursery. "The guesthouse is an extension of the store. It's lush with plants and encourages you to play with your senses through natural surroundings whether plants, fibres or fabrics," says Jason.

"We couple nurseries with what we love – in Melbourne it's a shop and cafe, and in Sydney it's a B&B."



“It’s all about the experience for us. Just like gardening gives you opportunities to learn, grow and appreciate the little things, curating spaces full of pieces and plants we love, allows people to escape to nature in a unique way.”

— Jason Chongue



THE WRAP

As this report has shown, the nursery and garden industry is *booming* and it is only set to grow.

With biophilic design on the rise, both indoors and out, 2020 offers new creative ways to merge our homes and lifestyles with the natural world.

As we navigate our way through environmental issues such as drought and a changing climate, expert knowledge on plant care alongside a continued excitement for nature will be more important than ever.

[Plant Life Balance](#) will continue to celebrate the plant world by covering [leafy places](#), [people](#), [culture](#), and [plant styling](#) because as the experts say; plants simply make us feel good.

Head to myplantlifebalance.com.au to get your daily dose of green, or follow us on Instagram [@myplantlifebalance](https://www.instagram.com/myplantlifebalance)

All media enquiries, get in touch at hello@myplantlifebalance.com.au



HOW DID WE COME UP WITH OUR FINDINGS?

General public

A nationally-representative online survey was conducted between 23-25 October 2019 into perceptions and attitudes of indoor and outdoor plants in Australia. This survey was answered by 1,001 Australians aged 18-65 who had purchased a potted plant in the past twelve months, and was conducted by Pure Profile. ABS benchmarks for gender, age group and state were applied to survey quotas. This survey was commissioned by Hort Innovation.

Throughout the report, Australians that have been referred to as the collective refers to the Pure Profile research.

Nursery industry

An online survey and qualitative interviews were conducted with 20 members of the nursery industry in September 2019 about the plant purchasing behaviour of Australians.

Throughout the report, the insights from this survey and these interviews have been referred to as 'nursery retailers surveyed'.

Source review

Over 100 sources were analysed from international, national, mainstream and specialised publications to understand current trends and perceptions of plant-purchasing behaviours.

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