The Low Allergen Garden

How to avoid garden allergens
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If you are a gardener with asthma, hayfever, eczema or dermatitis, plants & gardens can bring about endless sneezing, itchy eyes, congestion, an itchy throat, as well as asthma symptoms.

Our gardens can harbour many allergens that can trigger asthma and allergy symptoms. Things to be aware of in the garden that can cause trouble for asthma and allergies include:

- Pollen,
- Organic mulch, as it can contain mould spores,
- Venom from stinging insects,
- Contact allergens and other skin irritants,
- Weather changes, and
- Fertilisers and chemical sprays.
Plants with bright showy flowers are generally pollinated by insects or birds and plants with small inconspicuous flowers are generally wind-pollinated. It is the wind-pollinated plants that should be avoided by people with asthma or allergies. So, pick plants that are sold as ‘bird attracting’ as these will almost always be pollinated by nectar-feeding birds. Avoid planting a garden with lots of European trees, like Birch and Ash, or using grasses if you think you might be allergic to them.

Aside from producing allergenic pollen, some plants can produce an allergic reaction when touched (allergic contact dermatitis). This generally appears as eczema (itching, skin redness & swelling) at the contact site although it can spread in more severe cases. Leaves of tomato plants, Grevilleas and English Ivy can all cause contact dermatitis, as can the seeds and seed pods of Norfolk Island hibiscus (pyramid tree or the itchy bum tree).

For your lawn, choose a low pollen producing grass that does not need frequent mowing. Examples of low pollen-producing grasses are the hybrid couch varieties such as Santa Ana and Windsor Green. An added feature of these hybrid varieties is that that they are very drought tolerant although the downside is that they are very invasive and hard to remove once established.
These are the plants to keep out of your garden as they are shown to be capable of worsening your asthma or causing allergies.

**Herbs to avoid**
- Chamomile
- Wormwood

**Weeds to avoid**
- Pattersons Curse
- Plantago or Asthma Weed (*Pellitory*)

**Shrubs and trees to avoid**
- Alder (*Alnus spp*)
- Ash (*Fraxinus spp*)
- Birch (*Betula spp*)
- Cypress (*Cupressus Semper Virens*)
- Elm (*Ulmus spp*)
- Liquidambar (*Liquidambar Styracielua*)
- Maple (*Acer spp*)
- Monterey Pine (*Cupressus Macrocarpa*)
- Mesquite (*Prosopis Juliflora*)
- Oak (*Quercus spp*)
- Olive (*Olea spp*)
- Poplar (*Populus Deltoides*)
- Privet (*Ligustrum spp*)
- She Oak (*Casuarina*)
- Walnut (*Juglans spp*)
- White Cedar (*Melia Azedarach*)
- White Cypress Pine/Murray Pine (*Callitris Glaucephylla*)
- Willow (*Salix spp*)
There are many things you can do to make your new or existing garden a low allergen garden. Look at the types of plants you have in the garden. Some can be pruned early before they begin to release pollen (including grasses).

When planning a new garden it is very difficult to determine the type of plants and trees you should purchase, as there are so many to choose from. A good nursery will be able to advise you which plants and trees produce lots of pollen or are heavily scented.

**Asthma-friendly Plants**
These plants have been chosen for a low allergen garden because they are either insect pollinated or sterile and propagated by cuttings or grafting.

**Scented flowers**
- Banksia Rose (*Rosa Banksiae*)
- Climbing Rose (*Rosa spp*)
- Glossy Abelia
- Rosemary

**Climbers for Fences**
**Introduced species**
- Banksia Rose (*Rosa Banksiae*)
- Chilean Jasmine (*Mandevilla Laxa*)
- Chinese Gooseberry
- Clematis (*Clematis Montana ‘Rubens’*)
- Climbing Rose (*Rosa spp*)
- Kiwi Fruit (*Actinidia Chinensis*)
- Passion Fruit (*Passiflora Edulis*)
- Trumpet Vine (*Campsis Grandi Flora*)

**Native climber species**
- Climbing Appleberry (*Billardiera Cymosa*)
- Dusky Coral Pea (*Kennedya Rubicunda*)
- Passionflower (*Passiflora Cinnabarina*)
- Purple Appleberry (*Billardiera Longifolia*)
- Purple Coral Pea (*Hardenbergia Violacea*)
- Sweet Appleberry (*Billardiera Cymosa*)
- Wonga Vine (*Pandorea Pandorana*)
How to create a low allergen garden

Lawn Grasses
Australian native grasses
These native Australian grasses generally only need to be mowed 3-4 times a year
- Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda Australias*)
- Rice or Weeping Grass (*Microlaena Stipoides*)

Non-native, low pollen grasses
(Some grasses produce little pollen because they are sterile)
- Santa Ana couch
- Windsor Green couch

Native Australian ground cover plants instead of grass
- Common Cotula (*Cotula Filicula*)
- Monkey Musk (*Mimus Repens*)
- Kidney Weed (*Dichondra Repens*)
- Swamp Mazus (*Mazus Pumilio*)
- Slender Mint (*Mentha Diemenica*)

Dwarf Shrubs and Ground Covers
Australian native plants
- Angled Lobelia (*Lobelia Alata*)
- Coast Banksia or White Honey Suckle (*Banksia Integrifolia, Prostrate Forms*)
- Dampiera (*Dampiera Diversifolia*)
- Fringed Heath-Myrtle (*Micromyrtus ciliata*)
- Guinea Flower (*Hibbertia Serpyllifolia and Hibbertia Pedunculata*)
- Native Violet (*Viola Hederacea*)
- Pink Cascade (*Leptospermum spp*)
- Rosy Heath Myrtle (*Baeckia Ramosissima*)
- River Rose or Dog Rose (*Bauera Rubioides*)
- Small or prostrate forms of Callistemon (e.g., *Callistemon Comboynensis, Callistemon Personii*)
- White Correa (*Correa Alba*)
- Violet Kunzea (*Kunzea Parvifolia*)
- Ulladulla Beacon (*Melaleuca Hypericifolia*)
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**Introduced plants**
- Carpet Rosemary (*Rosmarinus Officinalis*)
- French Lavender (*Lavandula Dentata*)
- Ivy Leaf Geranium (*Pelargonium Peltatum*)
- Juniper (*Juniperus Conferta*)
- Low Growing Cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster Conspicuus ’Decorus’*)
- Snow-in-Summer (*Cerastium Tomentosum*)
- Thyme (*Thymus spp.*)
- Variegated Periwinkle (*Vinca Major ‘Variegata’*)
- Honeysuckle Banksia (*Banksia Spinulosa ‘Giant Candles’*)
- Old Man Banksia (*Banksia serrata*)
- Red Boronia (*Boronia Heterophylla*)
- Red-flowering Paperbark (*Melaleuca hypericifolia*)
- Silky Tea Tree (*Leptospermum Lanigerum V. Macrocarpum*)
- Twiggy Heath Myrtle (*Baeckia Virgata*)

**Shrubs for Middle Height (up to 2 metres)**
**Australian Native shrubs**
- Bottlebrush (*Callistemon spp*)
- Bracelet Honey Myrtle (*Melaleuca Armillaris*)
- Coastal Rosemary (*Westingia Fruiticosa*)
- Common White Heath (*Epacris Impress*)
- Heath Banksia (*Banksia Ericifolia*)
- Kunzea (*Kunzea Affinis*)
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Introduced shrubs

- Azalea (*Rhododendron spp.*)
- California Lilac (*Ceanothus Cyaneus ‘Blue Pacific’*)
- Camellia (*Camellia Japonica, Camellia Sasanqua*)
- Cape Plumbago (*Plumbago Auriculata*)
- Chinese Bell Flower (*Abutilon X Frazeri*)
- Escallonia (*Escallonia Macrantha*)
- Gardenia (*Gardenia Augusta*)
- Glossy Abelia (*Abelia X Grandiflora*)
- Guelder Rose (*Viburnum Opulus ‘Variegata’*)
- Marmalade Bush (*Streptosolen Jamesonii*)
- Orange Browallia
- Rhododendron (*Rhododendron spp.*)
- Snowball
- Yesterday Today and Tomorrow (*Brunfelsia Australis*)
- Weigela (*Weigela Florida*)

Introduced Flowering Annuals and Perennials

- Ageratum
- Alyssum
- Anemone
- Aquilegia
- Begonias spp.
- Canterbury Bells
- Clarkia
- Coleus
- Cornflower
- Delphinium
- Foxglove
- Impatiens
- Lobelia
- Nemesia
- Nasturtium
- Pansy
- Petunia
- Phlox
- Salvia
- Snapdragon
- Sweet William
- Verbena

Herbs for the Garden

- Basil
- Chives
- Dill
- Fennel
- Horseradish
- Majoram
- Mint
- Parsley
- Oregano
- Rosemary
- Sage
- Summer Savory
- Tarragon
- Thyme
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- Scribbly Gum (*Eucalyptus Haemastoma*)
- Scarlet-flowering Gum (*Eucalyptus Ficifolia*)
- Willow-Leaved Hakea (*Hakea Salicifolia*)
- Willow Myrtle (*Agonis Flexuosa*)

**Trees for Height, Shade and Wind Protection**

**Australian native trees**
- Broad Leaved Paperbark (*Melaleuca Quinquenervia*)
- Cabbage Tree Palm (*Livistona Australis*)
- Kentia Palm (*Howea Forsteriana*)
- Lilly Pilly spp. (*Acmena Smithii* or *Syzygium spp.*)
- Norfolk Island Pine (*Araucaria Heterophylla*)
- Peppermint Gum (*Eucalyptus Nicholii*)
- Peppermint Tree
- Pincushion Hakea (*Hakea Laurina*)

**Introduced trees**
- Apricot
- Cherry (*Prunus spp.*)
- Chinese Pistachio (*Pistacia Chinensis*)
- Citrus
  - Lemon
    - Orange
    - Lime
    - Grapefruit (*Citrus spp.*)
- Deep Purple Orchid Tree (*Bauhinia Blakeana*)
- Flowering Almond
- Japanese Crab Apple (*Malus Floribunda*)
- Maidenhair Tree (*Ginkgo Biloba*)
- Papaw (*Carica Papaya*)
- Sweet Bay (*Laurus Nobilis*)
- Tupelo (*Nyssa Sylvatica*)
- Weeping Crab Apple (*Malus ‘Echtermeyer’*)
Where to get help

- The Asthma Foundation of Victoria:
  T: (03) 9326 7088
  Toll free: 1800 ASTHMA (1800 278 462)
  E: advice@asthma.org.au
  W: www.asthma.org.au

- Australasian society of clinical immunology and allergy (ASCIA)
  Pollen Calendar: guide to common allergenic pollen

- Your doctor or pharmacist

- Your local nursery, horticulturalist or landscape designer

In the event of an asthma emergency call emergency services on ‘000’.

References


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Don’t Let Asthma Hold You Back