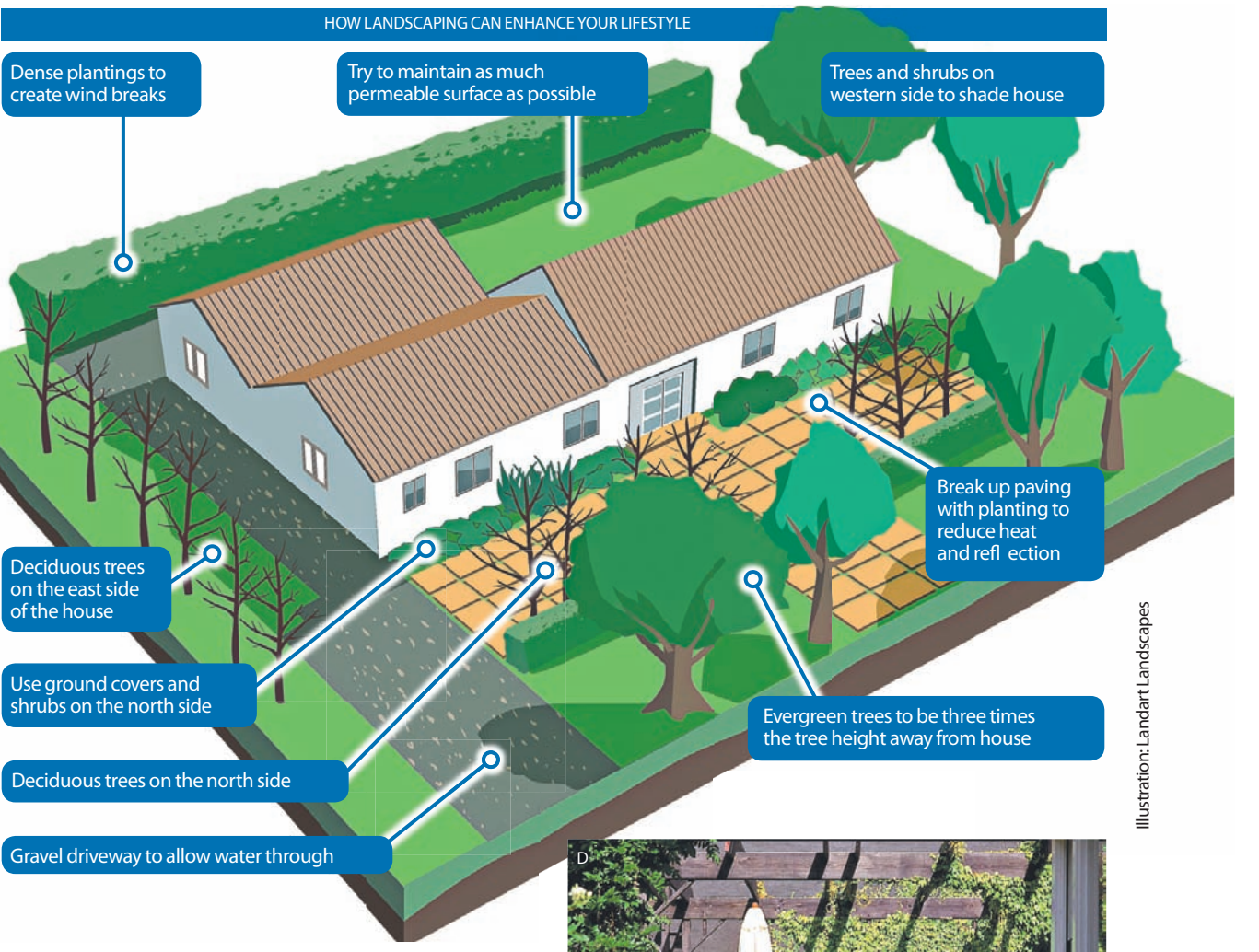


Illustration: Landart Landscapes

"When the breeze passes across the water, it drops by two or three degrees as it enters the living area," he says.

Large windows on either side of the house ensure this natural cooling method is most effective.

Because it is based on the principles of evaporative cooling, Luke says it works best in dry conditions such as those found in Sydney's outer west and relies on large areas of water such as pools.

"If there is a lot of humidity in the air, forget it, because it is too uncomfortable," he says.

But not everyone has the space for a pool or the ability to orientate their home ideally on the block.

Up the wall

To make the most of available space, Jock Gammon, says homeowners are showing growing interest in green walls where plants are grown vertically along a specially designed framework.

"It is very useful for passive solar design because the greenery absorbs the heat," Jock says. "It uses evergreen plants and there is an air cavity behind the green wall which provides good insulation properties."

Jock says the walls can sustain everything from drought-tolerant succulents to herbs and vegetables.

"On my wall [at home] I have lettuces, coriander and garlic chives," he says. "They will grow very happily in that environment. You need a good working system and the right type of growing media and good irrigation."

"When the breeze passes across the water, it drops by two or three degrees as it enters the living area"

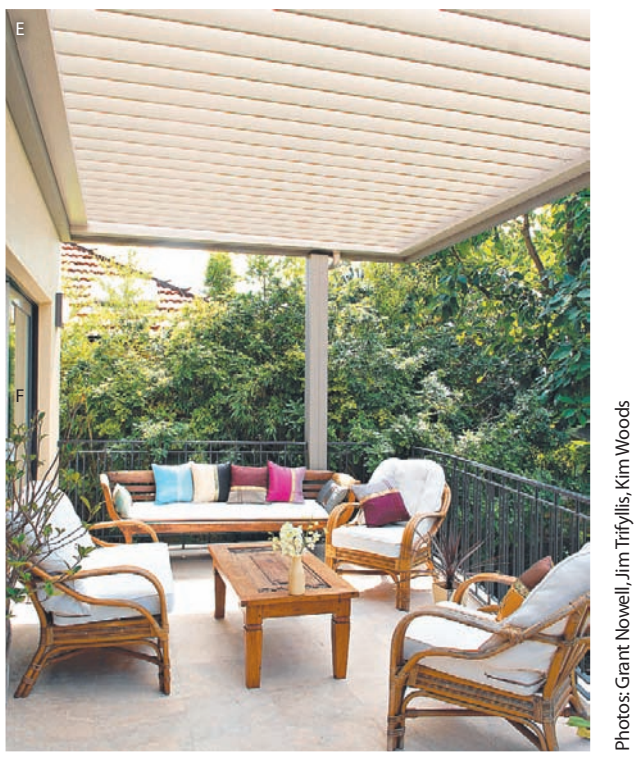
While green walls need to be professionally installed to be successful, there are other more accessible ways of providing your home with some green wall insulation.

Jock has planted Boston ivy along a wall at his house to provide some insulation and a green outlook. Species such as Creeping fig and Boston ivy, which change colour in autumn provide a visual barrier from bare walls.

"There are a lot of ugly walls out there that could do with some greenery," Jock says.

>

A Climbers such as Chinese star jasmine can be trained over walls B Slatted timber walls provide diffused light, reducing heat penetrating the house C Deciduous trees provide summer shade and let in winter warmth D Using stepping stones reduces the amount of heat absorbed and refl ected by paving E Deep verandas protected by trees make for comfortable alfresco areas



Photos: Grant Nowell, Jim Trifyllis, Kim Woods

Hit the roof

Roofs are also getting a makeover, with more homeowners interested in creating rooftop gardens. Jock says his company regularly gets calls from people who are extending and do not wish to be looking at a bare rooftop.

"The roof environment needs to be irrigated and mulched and we incorporate moisture sensors in our designs," he says.

New building work is the ideal time to think about a roof garden, because installing a garden on an existing roof can prove a little more challenging.

> "Most people want a vegie patch they can look after. A lot want to be educated about where their food is coming from"

"Houses are generally built to carry nothing heavier than tiles, and they don't weigh a lot compared to a garden," Jock says. "If you are doing a new build, it doesn't take much to include a green roof."

Those living inside will feel the benefits of having an upstairs garden, even if they never see it.

"Roof gardens are big in terms of passive design because they insulate the roof and any moisture that evaporates from the roof will keep the house cool," he says.

Food for thought

While they are receiving more inquiries about green walls, Matt Leacy, owner of Landart Landscapes, says an old favourite is making a strong return to Sydney gardens.

The vegie patch is on the menu again as homeowners look to provide food for the table from their backyards.

Since our brush with the global financial crisis, Matt says clients are looking to grow and eat their food locally.

"Most people say they want a beautiful garden and they want a vegie patch they can look after themselves," he says. "They don't mind us setting it up for them and then they look after it themselves. A lot of people want to be educated about where their food is coming from."

Robyn Willis

Green day: Using a variety of materials makes stormwater management easier and reduces the radiated heat from pavers

MORE INFORMATION
Landart Landscapes 9958 0462, landart.com.au

LEARNING TO REED

People living near reserves or waterways might consider making their gardens work a little harder by installing a reed bed water filtration system.

Similar to having a mini wetlands in your backyard, grey or rain water trickles through the reeds which naturally contain micro-organisms living on the root system and the litter, resulting in clean water at the other end. Landscape designer Jacki Brown from ecodesign says while not many homeowners are aware of the benefits of reed bed systems, they provide a natural water treatment method and a habitat for frogs and insects.

"We have seen a few rainwater filtration systems where they are designed to filter the toxins out of the water from residential properties," she says.

"It usually involves reeds and water plants that will filter the water but that will survive if it is dry.

"The soil underneath is also engineered to filter the water, unlike most soils that let it run off."

She says they can be particularly helpful for people living near bushland or waterways because they prevent toxins spreading into natural habitats.

"It is something we would suggest if they were backing on to a creek or river but it is not something people generally think to include."

Photos: Jason Busch, Mark Cranitch

Have You Got Nightmare Neighbours?

Goodbye Neighbours can be pruned to any height or width

If you're sick of your neighbours looking over your fence then "Goodbye Neighbours" is the perfect screening plant for you.

It can grow up to 2 metres a year and it's so thick and bushy you can sunbake nude in your backyard!

"Goodbye Neighbours" is super fast growing, thrives in full sun or shade and it's more frost tolerant than other lillypillies. It has bird attracting white flowers and it's native so it requires little water once established.

It's resistant to psyllid attack so you won't have to use dangerous chemical sprays.

For a thick screen, plant "Goodbye Neighbours" one metre apart and water often until established.

The more often you water and prune it the faster it will grow.

"Goodbye Neighbours" can also be grown in large pots to screen out nosey neighbours

Now is the best time to plant "Goodbye Neighbours".

This fantastic screening plant is exclusive to Tim's Garden Centre in 200mm pots.

Advance plants are $18.99 or buy 2 for $36.00

We deliver

We can deliver 5 plants in a box to your door for just $100.00 (normally $110.00 valid until the end of April 2010 conditions apply).

Guaranteed to grow! Goodbye Neighbours are guaranteed to grow or we will replace them.