

FOCUS

Garden protection program

In the excitement of building, it's easy to forget that your garden still needs you, writes Robyn Willis

Renovating and building is a stressful process and with so much going on, it's easy to forget about the garden. But neglecting your garden during building can be costly, in more ways than one.

Director of Growing Rooms Oliver Sizeland says builders are not generally known for their horticultural skills.

"The number of times we go to plant behind a retaining wall on a new build only to find all sorts of rubbish, you'd be surprised," he says. "Often there are so many subbies (subcontractors) on site, you find the painter will tip something on to the grass or someone will back up machinery over a bush.

"It's best to sort out all the boundaries and no-go zones during the planning stage."

Where practical, you can section off parts of the garden, or even remove plants altogether,

says director of Landart Landscapes Matt Leacy.

"Save anything you can, even thinking about what can be transplanted and relocated and brought back later on," he says.

Where trees are concerned, design consultant at Secret Gardens Mark Curtis says often the council will step in to ensure protective measures are in place.

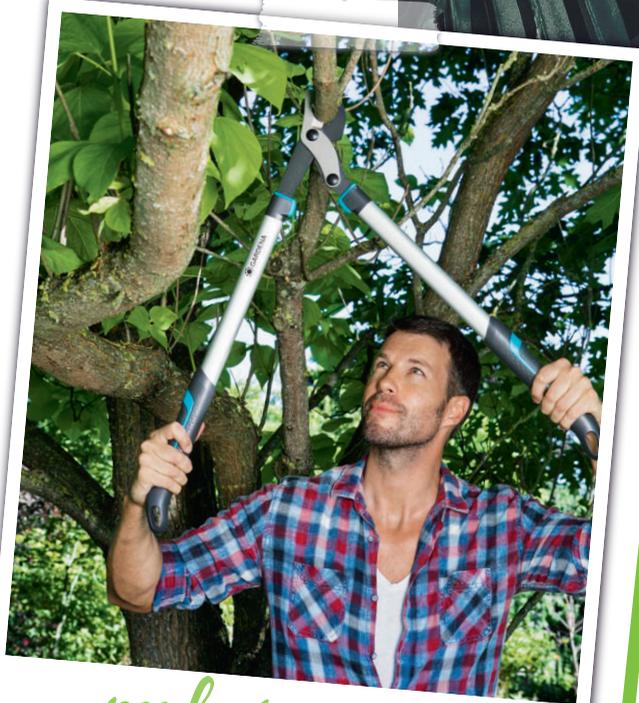
"We would closely match the protection with what council has requested in the development application in regard to tree protection zones subject to the size of the tree," he says.

"You will often find trees of a particular value will be requested to be protected with timber palings wrapped around them."

Often, the lawn is not so lucky.

"They are often flat so they're a great area to store materials, or cut things up," says Oliver. "The lawn is often the first area to cop it but they're cheap to replace."

More: growingrooms.com.au; landart.com.au; secretgardens.com.au



perfect pruning

With equipment and building materials coming and going all the time, it's a good idea to keep trees and shrubs out of harm's way. And this is the perfect time of year to prune while plants are dormant and easier to move.

"Prior to works commencing, it's a good idea to ensure that what remains in the path of the builder is 'prune protected' as much as possible, rather than builders coming in and ripping branches off accidentally," says Mark Curtis, design consultant for Secret Gardens.

If a plant is in the way, move it temporarily, says Mark. "It's winter so it's the perfect time to move plants while they're dormant," he says. "If it was the height of summer and the plant was in full flower, it would be really stressed."



for the love of it

Usually it is council that asks for a particular tree to be protected during works but that's not always the case. Matt from Landart Landscapes says sometimes it is the clients who request extra care of a tree or shrub because it has significance for them.

"Often people want to save trees because someone who has died gave it to them or they planted it when someone died or when someone was born," he says. "It's always nice to know about those special plants so that we can take extra care."

For the director of Secret Gardens, Matt Cantwell, and his wife Rochelle, there was a very special function in mind for a tree in their garden (pictured) – a children's swing.



water wise

Most of us understand that gardens need water to thrive but Matt from Landart Landscapes says this simple task can be forgotten during building.

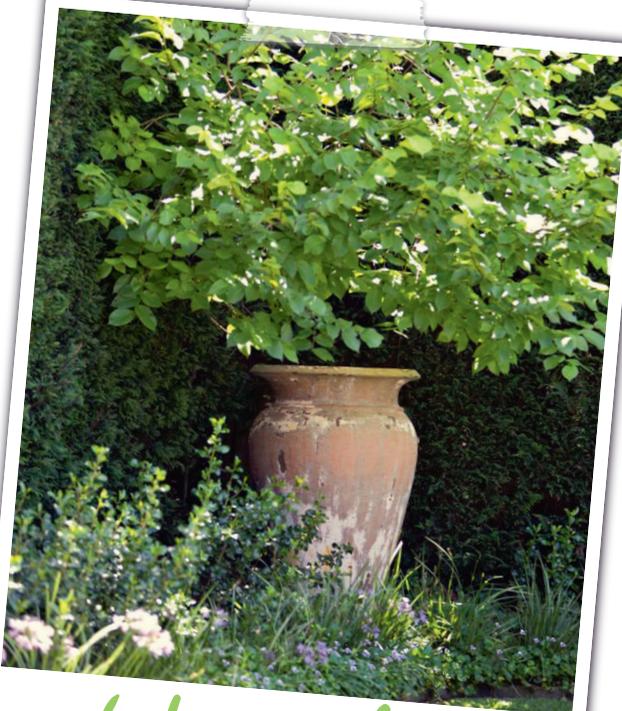
"Often the garden goes to ruin through neglect because the owners move out or they are so consumed by the renovation that they forget about the garden," he says. "The best way is to ensure it has an irrigation system through the process."

Mark from Secret Gardens agrees. "Having an operable irrigation system is key. Don't just think you can forget about the garden," he says.



TREE HUGGER

Mature trees are a gift to landscapers because they provide structure in the garden. Council will often require barriers to be put in place around trees but landscaper Oliver Sizeland says you can go further: "You could put a penalty clause in your contract so that if it doesn't survive, the builder has to pay."



hedge your bets

“OFTEN THERE ARE SO MANY SUBBIES ON SITE, YOU FIND THE PAINTER WILL TIP SOMETHING ON TO THE GRASS OR SOMEONE WILL BACK UP MACHINERY OVER A BUSH

Be sure to keep looking after your hedge during building work. "Often the mistake people make is failing to maintain the garden during the process and hedges in particular can suffer," says Mark from Secret Gardens. "They can get gangly and when it's time for repairing the garden, you might need some hard pruning to get it back into shape." Director of Growing Rooms, Oliver Sizeland, says caring for your hedge throughout the process will save you in the long run. "It can take years to grow a nice hedge and if someone has a really nice one, they generally know how much work has gone into it," he says.

