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A tour of soft landscape plantings around Australia



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A tour of soft landscape plantings around Australia

By Todd Layt

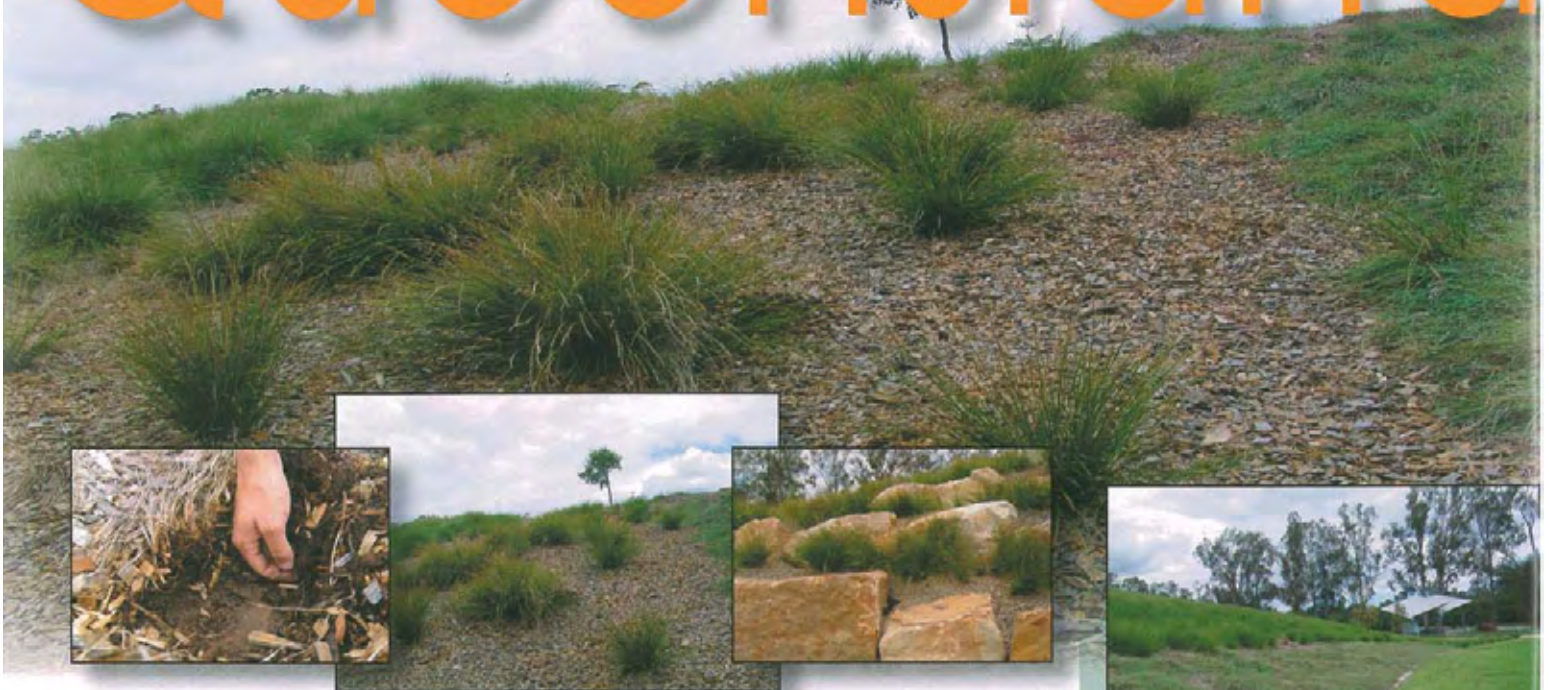
Recently, I had the privilege of showing 3 USA visitors around Australia, observing many soft commercial and domestic landscape projects. The three Americans were here to see how the Ozbreed plants are performing in the various Australian environments, especially in our drought conditions, as well as to observe maintenance practices. As the breeder of these plants, it was a great opportunity to see projects first hand. Obviously a lot of the photos you will see will have Ozbreed plants in them, which will show how tough and drought hardy they are, but hopefully there will also be lessons for landscaping in general, plus other common plants to look at. Discover that the same plants must be used differently in different climatic zones. This is a good opportunity, to see large and small plantings, in Queensland, NSW, Victoria, and WA, and to look at maintenance various issues.

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Lomandra longifolia is one of the most drought tolerant plants there is, providing a wonderful solution to no irrigation or low irrigation gardening in Queensland. Growing Lomandra longifolia in Brisbane, regardless of variety, needs some rules. Firstly do not bury the crown, with soil or fine grade mulch. For Lomandra longifolia in Queensland it is better to use a coarse grade chunky mulch, with no fines, as even if this covers the crown, the extra airflow provided allows the crown to breath. Secondly, do not excessively irrigate, which with water restrictions is a must anyway. Thirdly, do not plant in depressed areas such as gullies. It is much better suited to mounded or raised areas. If you need to plant into depressed or often wet areas use Lomandra hystrix (Not as drought tolerant as longifolia), or Dianella caerulea. Above are some Tanika, a particularly drought tolerant variety. It has done well in well draining soils or heavy soils in raised areas. Note: even with sensible drip irrigation, it is doing well.

Queensland



The three photos above show Lomandra Tanika, the two on the left show that it cannot survive saturated wet conditions, but on the same project it is doing well in the dryer raised conditions (Third photo). In Queensland landscapers must decide, do they want drought tolerance and No irrigation or plants that can handle excessive irrigation? Few plants other than Dianella Little Jess and Breeze, can handle both. Maintenance people must learn not to waste water through excessive drip irrigation.



Above; Both Pennisetum alopecuroides Nafray and Themeda Mingo coped well with the excess irrigation, and the slightly drier raised conditions.

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The dreaded red spot of death. In Queensland we saw many sites where maintenance people sprayed the weeds dead with round up, unfortunately also hitting the good plants. Only experienced people should be spot spraying.



Cassa Blue did well on many sites in Brisbane, and looked superb. The only time it did not look good, was when it was planted in areas that were constantly wet. Use Cassa Blue in raised or well drained areas in Queensland.

Left Below; Breeze is one tough plant, but it is also beautiful, illustrated well by this photo. Cassa blue, in the centre was one of the stars when it came to sheer looks in Queensland. Little Jess, in the photo to the right looked great and worked well whether in drought or in semi-water logged conditions.



The three photos below, give a clear indication of where *Dianella revoluta*, particularly Little Rev works. Slightly raised areas that are not excessively irrigated. In fact in this dry situation, many of the other plants did not make it, showing how drought tough Little Rev is. Little Rev seems to be able to handle well drained soils or heavier soils, provided the heavy soils are not in a depressed area.



Queensland

The three photos below show Breeze, *Dianella caerulea* DCNC0. Left; The Landscape Architect has created a seamless joining of the hard retaining wall and the shell mulch used in this design. The result is quite effective. Middle; The Breeze on the right (greener), is coping better with the conditions than the *Dianella brevipedunculata* on the left (more yellow), although both still look good. Right; shows the massive root system that the Breeze plants have already established on this site. Breeze is coping well with both the wetter and drier sections of this job.

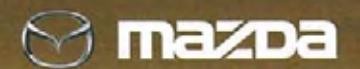


Most plantings in Queensland were doing well, but some plantings were in lower areas (depressions), and in many of these areas the water from drip irrigation was intensifying, leaving the ground over wet. So if you are using drip irrigation, make sure the site for that line is level, so over watering in some areas does not occur, or plant plants that can tolerate wet feet in the depressions. We were a little surprised to discover so much excessive drip irrigation in Queensland, especially given the current water restrictions. Three Photos Below; Cassa Blue is doing magnificently in the normal areas, but in the lower wet areas it is not coping. For Example, Breeze can cope with both wet and dry, so it is better to plant Breeze in the depressed areas, and plant the stunning blue foliage Cassa Blue in the higher areas. Cassa Blue needs either good draining soils, or slightly raised plantings when the soil is heavy clay in Queensland.



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NSW



The top six photos are all from areas receiving no irrigation once they were established. The left photo is of Breeze, growing on heavy clay soils in the centre median of Windsor Rd in Sydney. Breeze has been proven to work on the dry raised areas of Windsor Rd, or the depressed gullies that are often wet. The centre photo shows Lomandra Tanika, working well on a raised area of median. Tanika should not be planted on the depressed areas, which are often over wet. The photo on the right illustrates the benefit of using low maintenance Empire turf on a roadside. This lawn not only needs less than half the mowing of other varieties, but it is prospering without any irrigation.



The photo on the left below, demonstrates the toughness of Cassa Blue in dry land plantings, in the west of Sydney. Many other plants in this landscape have not survived these excessively dry times. In the middle Photo, Dianella Little Rev is thriving on this dry hillside. A lesson we learnt from these Sydney visits is not to plant either Cassa Blue or Little Rev in depressed areas, or areas that have excessive irrigation. It was clear however that the incidence of excessive irrigation in Sydney was far less frequent, than in Queensland. Maybe this is a sign of Sydney having lived with water restrictions for longer. However both Sydney and Brisbane, being more humid, must be careful about excessive irrigation killing drought tolerant plants. The same plants in less humid areas of Melbourne and Perth seemed to be able to handle excessive irrigation better. Free draining mulches with coarse particles (no fines), such as chunky mulches, also helped the plants cope better with excessive irrigation, or wet conditions. Mulches with too many fines had poor drainage, and stayed wetter, creating more diseases around the crown of the plant. Below to the right, Little Jess, a Dianella caerulea is flowering well, even though this garden has lived on just natural rainfall for the last 2 and half years.



The photo to the right shows a well maintained planting, being irrigated only occasionally, not wasting water. In fact these plants are tough enough to not be irrigated. The plants are Little Rev and Tanika. To the right are pictures of a golf course in Sydney. Rock provides a contrasting appeal to grasses and strappy leaf plants. The blue ornamental grass cascading over the rocks, and (Far bottom right) growing adjacent to the path is Mingo, a blue Kangaroo grass. Unlike the strappy leaf plants, ornamental grasses need at least one annual trimming. The middle photo shows what can happen when drought tolerant plants, are subjected to almost daily watering. The Dianella Tasred at the bottom of the photo is prospering, yet the Tasred and Cassa Blue in the middle are suffering water logging. The Cassa Blue in the background is doing well in the less waterlogged conditions. In the centre, every day run off comes from the turf irrigation, all running down the slight gully. Dianella Little Jess or Breeze, both Dianella caeruleas would have coped with the wetter conditions. So the moral is to plan your site, if it has a chance of being permanently wet, choose your plants carefully, or better still don't waste water and make the area wet in the first place.



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Melbourne Victoria

In Victoria *Lomandra longifolia* not only copes with the dry conditions, but also seems to be able to cope much better with wet feet. The Tanika in the two photos on the left, show the results people can expect from Tanika in Melbourne, even if planted in depressed areas. Water run off, in non humid climates has less impact on plants. Right Below; Good chunky mulch not only stops weeds better, but it also allows water to flow to the soil below. A recent study by Yates showed Mulch with fines can even reduce moisture in the soil. ie; It can be better with no mulch than mulch with mostly fines.

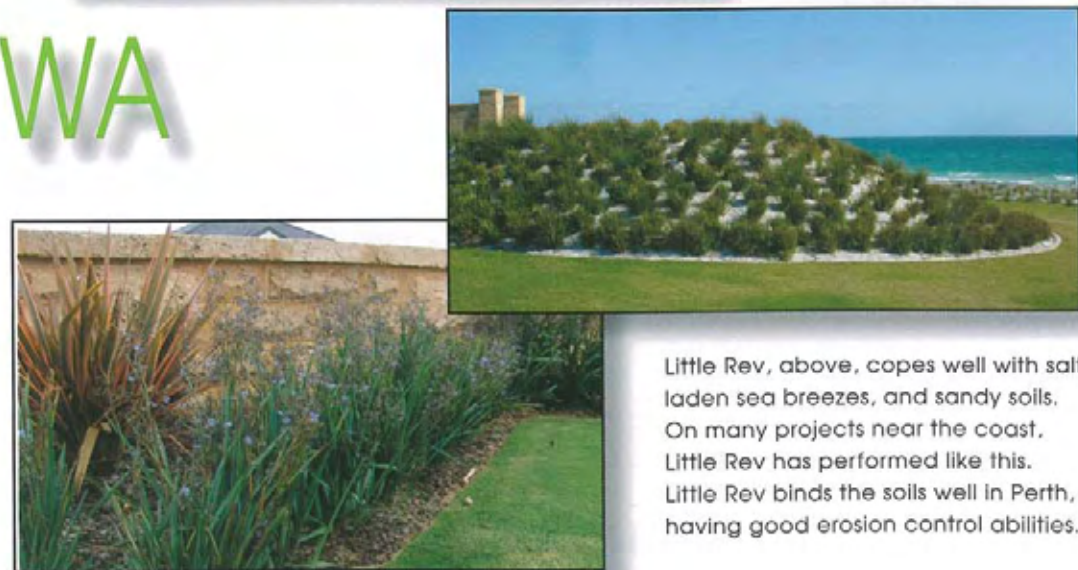


Below left; gives a good look at semi mature *Lomandra longifolia* Katrinus. This plant grows on average to about 700mm, being more compact than common *Lomandra longifolia*. Incidentally, Katrinus, whether in Queensland, NSW, or Victoria, is one of the best longifolia types at handling wet feet and of coarse drought conditions. The middle Photo below and the right photo shows two different stages of planting of Tanika. In Victoria this depressed planting of Tanika works well, in fact very well, however this should not be attempted in Queensland. This is proof that the same plants need a different planting criteria in different states. We also noticed that maintenance people can be careless spraying turf with chemicals near plants. Australia-wide turf sprays often drift into gardens. All maintenance staff should be aware of the dangers of spray drift.



Perth, WA

The Cassa Blue right performs exceptionally well in Perth. They seemed to do well everywhere, in many different conditions. Phormiums also do well in Perth.



Little Rev, above, copes well with salt laden sea breezes, and sandy soils. On many projects near the coast, Little Rev has performed like this. Little Rev binds the soils well in Perth, having good erosion control abilities.



Left; When planting in Perth, it is a good idea to plant close together. These Little Revs have formed a dense planting, providing good soil protection and excellent weed competing abilities. Planting close can also work in planter boxes.



Above; The three visitors from the USA, from the left; Sam McCoy, Tobey Wagner, and Christain Broucaqault.

Below left shows Tanika and Little Rev in a commercial development, north of Perth. These types of plants are proving popular, as watering can be reduced compared to other common landscape plants. As Perth is so sandy, and has such dry summers, weekly or fortnightly watering of these plants is still required, however many other plants used in Perth require 3 waters per week. Landscape construction and planting is so different in Perth than the rest of Australia, however the common theme of saving water is critical in WA. Using plants or turf that requires less water is a regular theme in Perth. This visit proved that Perth has taken to, and are using successfully Australian drought tolerant strappy leaf plants probably more so than other



States. This is not surprising, as Perth was the first State to get the current round of water restrictions. Middle is Tasred, a *Dianella tasmanica*, showing its red base in Perth. Right; Tanika, Variegated *Ophiopogon*, and Kangaroo Paw in Perth.

Strappy leaf plants are becoming more widely used in Perth residential landscapes. Below left shows Little Jess, a *Dianella caerulea*, and Tasred, a tough *Dianella tasmanica*, with the addition in the middle picture of *Cordyline*, *Phormium* and Little Rev at the front. The middle picture also demonstrates the popular *Palmetto Buffalo*, now commonly used in Perth as an easy to maintain drought resistant lawn. The photo on the right shows one of the American visitors receiving a typical Australian welcome from our flies.



Examples of how plants can be planted in different situations in different states using the following seven low to no irrigation plants as examples; Little Rev, Tanika, Katrinus, Tasred, Breeze, Little Jess, Cassa Blue.

Depressed wetter Areas: SE Qld and NSW (Sydney & north): Little Jess, Breeze only. Katrinus if slightly depressed. Vic, SA, WA, Tas; Little Rev, Tanika, Katrinus, Tasred, Breeze, Little Jess, Cassa Blue. (All the Plants).



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Raised areas; SE Qld and NSW (Sydney north); Little Rev, Tanika, Katrinus, Breeze, Little Jess, Cassa Blue. In the other states of Vic, SA, WA, Tas, you can add Tasred to this list.



SE Qld and NSW (Sydney north); Little Rev, Tanika, Katrinus, Breeze, Little Jess, Cassa Blue. In the other states of VIC, SA, WA, TAS you can add Tasred to this list.

For a more detailed specification for your area for these plants phone Ozbreed on 02 4578 0866 or email info@ozbreed.com.au

Landscape maintenance - What can be learnt from this trip.

1. Be careful of chemical drift. We found more dead plants from round up drift than most other causes. Clients expect maintenance companies to look after their plants not kill them. We saw first hand many times, inexperienced operators killing plants.

2. Excessive irrigation by drip systems wastes a lot of water. Out of site out of mind. In humid areas, excessive irrigation hurts many very drought tough plants.

3. Plant the right plant in the right location or conditions. This is more important in Humid climates such as Brisbane and Sydney. Eg: Extremely drought tolerant plants in raised areas, and plants that can tolerate often wet feet in low frequently water logged depressed areas.

4. The roadsides in NSW are more likely to use No Irrigation plants that live on natural rainfall, than other states on the Eastern Seaboard. Perth's Sandy soils and dry summers require some low irrigation.

5. Free draining mulches with coarse particles (no fines), such as chunky mulches, also helped the plants cope better with excessive irrigation, or wet conditions, and worked better than fine mulch.

6. The states that have had water restrictions longer and harder, are landscaped better when it comes to saving water. Now the others are changing. It took water restrictions to bring changes in landscaping.

7. In Australia in October 2005 Perth had the most flies.

By Todd Layt, Ozbreed