

sabrina's
dirty deeds



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month
by month
garden
chores
made easy

Sabrina Hahn



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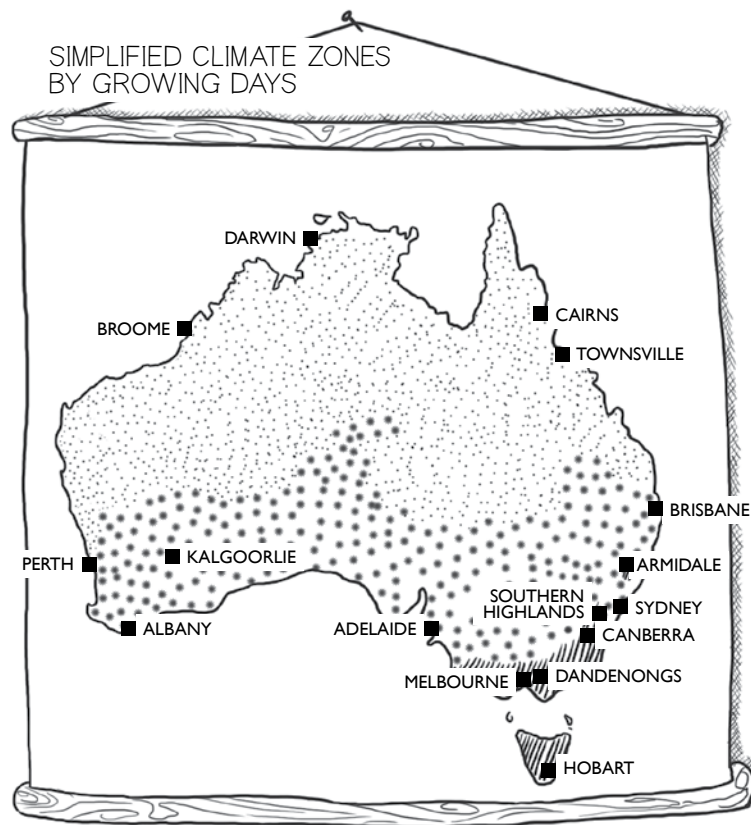
Introduction

If you are quite new to gardening it can be a bit daunting – there is so much information out there it's hard to know where to start. This book will certainly help you skip along the green pathway to make our planet more sustainable, give the basics required to grow your own and hopefully get you hooked on gardening.

In writing this book I have moved from the traditional times of the seasons because climate creep has made a big difference to when we do things in the garden. We have to acknowledge that climate change is affecting plant growth and we either embrace it and change our gardening practices or experience failure.

Climate is a very tricky business in Australia. We have about thirty different zones, which I have reduced to Tropical/Subtropical, Temperate/Mediterranean and Cool/Cold or I would still be writing when I'm a hundred years old. Australia is a huge landmass and timing for planting, sowing and pruning will be different for each zone. The table opposite will help you determine what climate zone you fit into. What you need to know is the number of days above 15 degrees in your area – these are your growing days. Temperatures below that will slow down the growth rates of all vegies and fruiting plants.

It's tough stuff for those who live in the inland northern parts of Australia because they experience half of the year above 36 degrees, yet plants also have to adapt to minus temperatures at night during the dry season. In this



	Climate type	Growing days	Examples
	Tropical/ Subtropical	over 250	Darwin, Brisbane, Perth (coast), Broome, Cairns, Townsville
	Temperate/ Mediterranean	150–250	Perth (hills), Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Kalgoorlie
	Cool/Cold	up to 150	Canberra, Hobart, Dandenongs, Armidale, Southern Highlands (NSW)

situation, it is best to plan your garden to cope with the heat, not the cold.

I have lived and worked in many different parts of Australia, from Cairns to Melbourne, the Snowy Mountains to tropical Kimberley, the arid inland of the Pilbara and the green mild climate of northern New South Wales. I understand the enormous differences in gardening due to the variability of soil types, individual seasonal weather patterns and spikes of extreme heat and cold – factors that determine what we grow and how and when we grow it.

I have been a long-time organic gardener and in this book you will find softer solutions to pest and disease control rather than broad-spectrum insecticides that affect others in the food chain. There will be at least one predator for every pest, so if you use pesticides every time you see a pest in the garden, you will be wiping out the good guys with the bad.

The same can be said for fungicides – there are so many beneficial fungi and bacteria that are essential for soil and plant health, so if we use fungicides indiscriminately it will be detrimental to those organisms whose job it is to keep the balance.

Finally, don't forget gardening is about connecting with the natural world. So don't be afraid to get your hands dirty and just have a go.

November

Summer-proofing your garden

Due to climate creep, we are experiencing longer, hotter summertime temperatures. The heat can be relentless in many parts of Australia and rainfall is totally unpredictable. Even the night-time temperatures are becoming warmer with weather patterns bringing stronger winds and storms.

Once daytime temperatures reach above 34 degrees for consecutive days, plants will go into major stress mode – as we do, too. Here's what you can do to help them:

1. Create more upper-canopy shade in your garden, particularly over the vegie patch. Do not use more than 30 per cent shade cloth or the plants will become weak and leggy. Plants that have been recently planted or crisp up every summer can have a shade cloth tent erected around them. This helps keep out the hot winds and reduces evaporation.
2. Apply a wetting agent again to make sure all water delivered is actually getting to the root zone.
3. Mulch – I know, you have heard it a million times, but here I go again. Only use very coarse mulch that water particles can pass through and make it only 5–6 cm thick. All the latest research has found that at 10 cm thick the water does not get down to the root zone (unless there is a torrential downpour

or the retic is on for three times as long). The purpose of mulch is to prevent evaporation, not stop water penetration. Everything in the garden can be mulched, but keep it clear from the trunk of plants to avoid fungal infection.

4. Spray sun-sensitive plants with DroughtShield; it's an acrylic polymer that protects plants from drought, heat, wind, frost and transplant shock. If you are putting new seedlings in at this time of the year, I highly recommend you spray them with DroughtShield first. I spray my fruit trees and more tender plants every year in November and again in February – it lasts for around 90 days. It works a treat for roses that otherwise get that sizzled look.
5. Do not prune fruit trees or heat-sensitive plants during the summer months. This encourages new growth that will be soft and sissy when it comes to temperatures above 34 degrees. The more leaf-cover the better as this provides shade for the plant. The trunk, stems and leaves experience sunburn – you can either put shade cloth around the trunk or paint with a layer of white acrylic paint.
6. Don't panic when your plants wilt. They do this to reduce the amount of sunlight hitting the leaf surface, which reduces transpiration. Wilting is not a bad thing – it's a survival thing. Remember, plants are very clever and have adapted survival mechanisms that we can only dream about. Although I also wilt in the heat.

7. Do not fertilise any stressed plants and certainly do not spray any pest oil or horticultural oil during summer. This will be the equivalent of putting your plants on the BBQ and whipping up a green grill. Fertilising encourages new growth that will succumb to the heat.

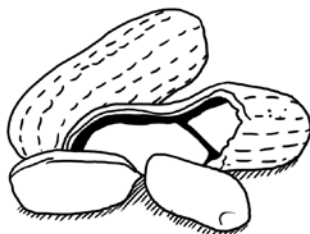
It's all mostly common sense – think how we as humans protect ourselves from the heat. I am so thankful I have a garden that has created a cool microclimate around my house.

Peanuts

I remember growing peanuts as a kid – it was always so rewarding and exciting to see the size of the crop that a few peanuts could produce. I guess

that's why peanuts are one of the world's leading food crops. They are certainly high in protein – the highest per hectare of any food.

The weather in Perth lately has made me think about peanuts because they love the heat and humidity. Peanuts are a long-term crop for the summer as they need four months of heat to grow. It's a great plant to use for crop rotation (see pp. 54–7), putting nitrogen and potassium back into the beds. In northern parts of Australia they plant out at the start of the wet season or November, and harvest at the end of February or March.



Over the past decade there has been a lot of genuine concern about peanut allergies. But if no one in your household is allergic, they are great fun. Kids are absolutely fascinated by the way in which a peanut bush grows.

Go to a health food shop and purchase some raw peanuts, shelled but with the skin on. They are hungry feeders so make sure the beds have compost, manure, trace elements and fertiliser. The soil needs to be friable and free-draining. Plant out the individual nuts 2 cm deep and cover with mulch.

After only one day the nut will have produced a root. It will quickly form a pretty small bush. After four weeks the bush produces gorgeous yellow flowers that are self-pollinating. At flowering time, apply a small handful of gypsum to each bush. The flower only lasts two days and then dies, but what emerges next is the bit kids love.

The dead flower produces a peg that grows down into the soil, and this is where the magic happens – the peanuts are born underground from the peg that dives into the soil. The other exciting thing is that you don't know what's attached until you dig the whole bush up about four months later.

Peanuts **MUST** be dried out fully before eating. You can do this either by turning the plants upside down and leaving them in the sun for a week, or roasting the nuts in the oven.

Any mouldy peanuts should be discarded immediately – they are toxic.

Pest watch

Do not use pest oil when temperatures are above 34 degrees.

Tomato russet mite will be feeding underneath leaves, stems and fruit on tomato, potato and eggplant bushes. Leaves will become dry, brown and papery. The stems become corky and crack and flowers drop before fruit formation. Powdered sulphur can be used in temperatures below 30 degrees, or rely on predatory mites to wage war against them.

Whitefly is the bane of every garden that grows kale, broccoli and cabbage. They arrive in their thousands because one female will lay up to 200 eggs. The parasitic wasp *Encarsia formosa*, ladybirds, hoverflies and lacewings hook into them and manage to keep the numbers at a manageable level. Yellow sticky strips placed near the plants also work, but may also catch the beneficials. If they are really driving you insane you can resort to spraying with Natrasoap or Eco-Oil if temperatures are below 34 degrees.

All regions

General care

- It's time to move those potted heat-sensitive plants into dappled light or shade. Pots dry out quickly in summer and you will need to water more regularly and apply a wetting agent and mulch to all pots to increase water-holding capacity.

- Check your watering times to ensure plants are receiving enough water and have not grown in front of sprayers, blocking the penetration of water to other plants.
- Remove suckers that are shooting below the graft level of trees. You can rub them off with your fingers or cut them off with a grafting knife.
- Deadhead roses to encourage new blooms and spend time squishing aphids while pruning.
- Spray new growth on roses with a homemade remedy against black spot and powdery mildew. In 1 litre of water, mix 1 teaspoon of bicarb of soda, 3 drops of dishwashing liquid and half a teaspoon of vegetable oil. This can be safely sprayed every few weeks to prevent disease and insects attacking new buds and leaves.
- Feed November lilies before they start dying down. This will ensure enough energy to produce next season's flowers. Once they have completely dried off, remove the dead stems.
- Start thinking about how you will spruce up the garden for the Christmas feasting. Fill up pots with flowering annuals, vegies, herbs and a mixed planting of perennials and annuals.

The edible garden

- Liquid-fertilise all vegies to get them growing fast before the real heat sets in.
- Reinvigorate vegie beds with compost and manure. Dig it into the top 5 cm of soil.

- Apply 1 handful of dolomite lime per square metre to all the vegie beds before planting out new crops.
- Keep building up straw around strawberry plants to keep the fruit off the soil. Feed fortnightly with high-quality liquid fertiliser.
- Spray young cucumber, melon, pumpkin, watermelon and zucchini seedlings with 1 part milk in 5 parts water every week to ward off powdery mildew. Use a small paintbrush to ensure good pollination between flowers (see cucurbit pollination, p. 209).
- Apply your fruit fly control methods (see pp. 172–7) to all your fruit trees and remember to top up traps with a fresh solution every week. Check to see exactly what you are catching in your traps, it will give you an idea of what lives in the garden.
- Clean out crossing and overcrowded branches on citrus trees to improve airflow and sunlight into the centre of the tree.

Natives

- Native groundcovers such as scaevola, brachyscome, kennedia and goodenia can be lightly pruned to encourage continued flowering throughout summer.

- Pot up an Australian native tree for Christmas. Choose a plant that's suitable for your climate and put it in a large pot that can be moved indoors over the Christmas season.

Lawn

- Lift the blades of the mower to a higher level to conserve water and prevent sun scorch. Lawns will need more regular mowing from this month on.
- If your lawn is being infested with weeds it could be a problem with the pH of the soil causing nutrient deficiencies. Spike the lawn with a fork to improve water penetration and drainage.

Pruning

- Finish pruning spring-flowering climbing roses. You can go pretty hard to encourage new flowering canes for next spring.
- Prune protea, leucospermum and banksia by a third. Apply a native slow-release fertiliser.

Planting and cuttings

- Investigate shade trees to plant around your house to cool things down for summer. Visit a tree nursery and select the tree that best suits the area.

- Lift spring-flowering bulbs like hyacinth, tulip and daffodil when the foliage has completely died down (unless you live in high-frost areas). Roll them in sulphur dust and store until autumn next year. (See more on pp. 58–63.)
- Take tip cuttings of anything in your garden that you love and want more of. Try everything – you will have some losses and some wins.

Tropical/Subtropical

Edible garden tasks

- Sow Asian greens, basil, capsicum, chilli, choko, cucumber, eggplant, ginger, lettuce, melon, okra, parsley, pumpkin, rosella, snake beans, spring onion, sweet corn, sweet potato, tomato.
- Banana bunches will start to bulk up and ripening will begin. Feed and flood them every 3 days. (See more on pp. 27–9.)
- Plant a choko vine around the chook pen or over a fence. They grow rapidly and hide untidy areas while shading and feeding the chooks at the same time.
- Spray pawpaw trees with a copper-based spray to control black spot.
- Prune back mango, guava and rambutan trees once they have finished fruiting.
- Keep an eye on pineapples that are ripening. Don't leave them too long on the plant and check for pests.

General garden tasks

- Spray cycads for caterpillar attack with Dipel or Success. Remember to get underneath the fronds.
- Get all the brightly coloured foliated plants into the ground now it's warming up and the wet season will soon arrive. Croton, ornamental ginger and heliconia can be grown from cuttings or pieces of root.
- Get the compost heap fully activated by adding comfrey and manures to speed up the process. (See more on pp. 25–7.)
- Weeds will start appearing with great enthusiasm. Better to control them now before they seed, even if you just whipper-snip off the heads before they set seed.
- Check to see potted plants are receiving enough moisture. Even though the days are getting more humid, it is still hot and dry.
- Plant out leafy greens in dappled shade from this point on throughout summer or they will bolt to seed. Water in well with a liquid seaweed solution and liquid fertiliser.
- Feed all garden beds with a high potassium fertiliser and seaweed tonic for healthy, disease-free growth.
- Prune wisteria to the fat flowering buds. Wispy long tendrils can be cut right back to the base of the plant.

Temperate/Mediterranean

Edible garden tasks

- Sow Asian greens, basil, beetroot, broccoli, capsicum, carrot, chilli, chives, coriander, cucumber, eggplant, Florence fennel, French beans, leek, lettuce, melon, okra, onion, parsley, potato, pumpkin, radicchio, rocket, spring onion, squash, strawberry, swede, sweet corn, sweet potato, tomato, zucchini.
- Put shadecloth up over vegie gardens now to protect them from the scorching heat. Only use a 30 per cent shadecloth – any more than that and your vegies won't get enough sun.
- Top up mulch on all vegie beds and around fruit trees to prevent evaporation.
- Liquid-fertilise all your vegies to get them growing without stress. You can add seaweed solution at the same time.
- Apply dolomite lime to all fruit trees to alleviate problems with calcium deficiency.
- Place shadecloth screens around the trunks of young fruit trees to protect them from sunburn.
- Apply a wetting agent to hard, dry soils and top with mulch.
- Sow climbing and bush beans directly into ground that has been previously limed and given a good dressing of blood and bone. Allow room for the stakes and don't overcrowd them. Four stakes

tied together gives ample room for them to grow. Keep picking pods as they grow – the more you pick, the more you get.

- Keep layering soil and hay up potato stalks. Drench with a liquid fertiliser mixed with seaweed solution.
- Check that passionfruit vines are getting water to the whole root system. Fertilise and trim back growth that is strangling other plants.
- Put a shadecloth or umbrella over rhubarb plants to keep the leaves from collapsing. Mound up with aged sheep manure and hay.
- Harvest eggplant, cucumber and zucchini when they are young. They will be sweeter and have much more flavour.
- Keep as much foliage on capsicums as possible to protect the fruit from sunburn.

General garden tasks

- Use early mornings or evenings to plant out new shrubs or trees. Make sure the planting hole is wet and remember to mulch. Give new plantings a deep watering every two days for the first week.
- Top up mulch around pots to ensure moisture is retained throughout the entire pot and there is minimal evaporation.
- Soak seedlings in a bucket of seaweed solution before planting into the garden. This will help with transplant shock and keep them moist.

- Roses will need fertilising little and often from now on. Make sure water is getting to the whole root zone and the mulch is sufficient to minimise evaporation.
- Plant your crinum, nerine, lycoris and pineapple lily bulbs.
- Pot up flowering natives that you adore but which won't grow in your soil type. Only use native potting mix and native slow-release fertiliser.
- The NSW Christmas bush (*Ceratopetalum gummiferum*) will be in bud and you will need to ensure it gets enough water for abundant flowering. Do not fertilise the bush until flowering has finished. Give it a light prune and then feed with a native fertiliser.
- The WA Christmas Tree (*Nuytsia floribunda*) will be looking magnificent. For those lucky enough to be able to purchase one from a nursery, they are hemiparasitic and need to be planted with an acacia.
- Lightly prune bougainvillea vines (wearing armoured gloves) to encourage summer flowering.
- Give lavender plants a light prune every four weeks. Liquid-fertilise to keep consistent flowering.
- Non-repeat spring-flowering roses can still be pruned before the heat sets in. Remove some of the stems entirely to produce new watershoots for the next season's flowers.

- Go hard at pruning grasses to keep the fresh new growth coming. This can be done with shears or a whipper-snipper. Don't waste the prunings – use them as a mulch.

Cool/Cold

Edible garden tasks

- Sow Asian greens, basil, beetroot, broccoli, carrot, capsicum, chilli, chives, coriander, cucumber, eggplant, endive, Florence fennel, French beans, ginger, leek, lettuce, melon, parsley, parsnip, peas, potato, pumpkin, radicchio, radish, rocket, rosella, silverbeet, spring onion, squash, strawberry, sweet corn, tomato, zucchini.
- Cabbage white butterfly caterpillars can be controlled by spraying Dipel or Success. (See also p. 95.)
- Make sure berry bushes are receiving enough water to develop fruit.
- Grapevines will be putting on masses of growth. Feed them with a granular fertiliser and keep plenty of airflow between canes to prevent downy and powdery mildew from developing on the fruit.
- Apply a mulch around all fruit trees and ensure the water penetrates through the mulch into the ground. Keep mulch away from the trunk of trees.
- Protect all stone fruit from fruit fly with traps, splash baits and netting (see pp. 172–7).

- Prune flowering peaches and cherries to encourage flowering wood for next season. Remove any branches that didn't flower this year. Apply a granular fertiliser after pruning and mulch.
- Thin out stone fruit if it is overcrowded. You will get larger and healthier peaches and nectarines.
- Control summer weeds around fruit trees – they will take nutrients. Slash them down and leave on the ground to put back what they took out.
- Mulberry trees will be flowering or fruiting, depending on the variety. Pick the fruit every day – you won't be able to eat them all but they freeze well and make divine jam. Leave fertilising and pruning until after fruiting.

General garden tasks

- The mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) is bursting into flower and would have to be one of the most spectacular flowering shrubs for cooler climates.
- Transplant irises after they have finished flowering. Tag them before they die down to identify their colours.
- Plant out summer- and autumn-flowering bulbs like hippeastrums, belladonnas and tuberoses.
- Plant out ornamental onions and cleome for colourful summer flowers.
- Prune back all the spring-flowering shrubs such as lilac, westringia, philadelphus, acacia, deciduous viburnum, forsythia and clematis. Most can be

pruned by a third, otherwise just remove the oldest stems to ground level to keep new stems emerging.

- Cut back protea and leucospermum to keep them compact and improve flowering. After pruning give them a handful of native slow-release fertiliser to encourage side growth.
- Fill in gaps of bare lawn with runners to get them established in the warm weather. Add some compost to the soil before planting and water daily until it is established. Use a lawn-starter fertiliser a week after laying to encourage root growth.
- Lift and divide nerine bulbs once the clumps get so large they are popping out of their pot or from the ground. They will probably sulk for the first year after division, but will reward you with fabulous flowering from the second year.
- Plant the hardwood cuttings you took from your roses, jasmine and honeysuckle plants back in May (see p. 93).
- Lightly prune lavender bushes to get a ripper flowering season.
- Keep planting natives while the soil is warm. Make sure the holes are prepared with compost and a native slow-release fertiliser. Water once or twice a week for their first summer.
- Allow potted cyclamens to dry out and leave in a dry place so they become totally dormant.