

Wattle do it? - Wattle do's and don'ts

Information on wattles compiled by Rainer Rehwinkel

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This information sheet presents some do's and don'ts for those using wattles in farm and garden plantings. It supplements information in the article entitled "Wattles – the Heart and Soul of our Woodlands" by R. Rehwinkel, Mikla Lewis and Vanessa Cain, available at <https://youngdistrictlandcare.org> and <https://weddinlandcare.org>

These are things you can DO:

- Plant wattles at every opportunity.
- Use wattles in your garden.
- Employ wattles in windbreaks and other farm plantings.
- Mix wattles with local eucalypts – a ratio of 2 wattles to one eucalypt is suggested – and when the wattles have reached their "old-age" (which may be as much as 25 years), and then die, the gaps may ultimately be filled by their seedlings and seedlings of the eucalypts and other native species.
- Restore wattles to woodlands and other bush remnants if they are missing.
- Try to emulate the "natural" density of wattles that are found in these vegetation types – you can get a guide to this by looking at how wattles grow in reserves – particularly travelling stock reserves and roadside remnants (a 5 to 10 % cover of wattles is suggested as a guide).
- Plant wattles in groves rather than as scattered individuals.
- Always use the wattles that are found in your region – this is known as "local provenance".
- Always use the species of wattles that are found in particular vegetation types of your region – woodland wattles for woodlands, dry forest wattles for dry forest, and so on.
- Grow wattles from locally collected seeds – they are easy to collect and easy to grow.
- Encourage your local nursery to stock local species of wattles (and other natives, including eucalypts, other shrubs and wildflower species) for garden, farm and restoration plantings.
- Start your own nursery (either in your back yard or with the assistance of a group - Landcare, school, CWA, etc) so you can collect and grow your locally-indigenous species.

These are things you are encouraged to AVOID:

- For farm and restoration use, don't plant wattles that are not locally indigenous – they may invade your local bush remnants and may even hybridise with the local species. Invasive wattles can emerge in very dense stands and pose threats for a number of reasons:

- they may be from a climate that is more harsh than the one you have locally, so grow particularly well in the more benign environment;
- they may be free from the predators that attack them in their natural habitat, so produce many more seeds than the local species; and
- if the species you use hybridises with a closely related species in your locality, the hybrid progeny may have a competitive advantage (because of “hybrid vigour”) and may form what are known as ‘hybrid swarms’ that could out-compete the locally indigenous parent species in the remnant.
- Such invasive wattles will then not only displace the local wattle species, but take the place of other species in the bush remnant, including other trees, grasses and wildflowers.
- Don’t be afraid to collect and plant non-local species for *home garden use* if there is little risk of their progeny invading nearby bush remnants.
- If your garden backs onto a bush remnant, avoid using non-local species that may invade into the remnant.
- When collecting wattle seeds for your plantings or rehabilitation work, don’t collect seeds from just one wattle plant or a few growing together at one site; try to collect from the same species growing in larger groups and from several locations (populations) in the region. This is to ensure that there is genetic diversity of that species in your plantings. Genetic diversity is important for long-term vigour of populations, and by using a mix of sources for any individual species, your plants will have a greater chance of throwing viable seeds. This will then ensure that the progeny of the wattles that you have planted will grow vigorously in subsequent generations.
- In windbreaks and other farm plantings, don’t just use a mix of eucalypts: try mixing your eucalypts with some local wattles (in a ratio of 1 eucalypt plant to 2 or more wattle plants).
- Don’t forget to use the local species of wattles (and eucalypts and other species) that grow in the corresponding landform type to the one you are planting in. Landforms relate to the vegetation types that grow on them, with woodlands on the deeper, more fertile and moister soils on flats and footslopes, drier forests on upper slopes where the soil is poorer or shallower.

The approaches listed above will give results that have more ecological integrity and will “fit” in with your landscape. Each region has its own collection of plant species that give that region its distinctive “look and feel”. By using *local* species that are also fitted to the landscape position that they naturally grow in, you will be retaining this “sense of place”. The vegetation of Grenfell is quite different from that of Crookwell. By using species that are native to another region, you run the risk of importing the “look” of that region while at the same time diluting the distinctive look and character of your *local* region.

Furthermore, by using locally indigenous species, you will continue to provide habitat for the range of fauna species that are locally adapted to use those flora species. By using only local species, you may have a hand in promoting the use of local species that may not yet be in cultivation. And finally, you will be contributing to maintaining genetic diversity. Genetic diversity is very important to enable plants to adapt to changes. Clearly, this will be very important when we consider the threats posed by climate change.