Environmentally friendly backyard planting
It's for the birds

Attracting birds to your garden

A) try to provide various "levels" in the garden.

1. Groundcovers and leaflitter provide shelter for insects, worms and grubs and thus insectivorous birds are visitors.
2. Indigenous shrubs, especially dense and prickly ones provide very important protected nesting sites.
3. Taller trees provide perches and safe nesting sites especially older trees with hollows.

B) plant a variety of "types" of species.

1. Fruit bearing species.
2. Nectar sources.
3. Seed bearing plants.
4. Insect attracting plants which then attract insect eating birds.

Plants that provide nest building materials.

C) try to plant a variety of species that flower at varying times of the year.

1. This will help keep the birds in your garden for longer periods ie., When one species stops flowering, another species is just beginning to flower.

2. This can be a difficult task if you are strictly planting indigenous species. Many of the locals don't flower over the autumn months. If planting non-locals make sure they are not environmental weeds.

3. Remember that living in town means that some of your neighbours are also planting to attract birds. Talk to the people next door about what they are planting. You might be able to work together in providing a wider range of plants or a larger area of various plant levels.

4. Also remember that there are an awful lot of native birds that are very happy living amongst-people. Magpies, currawongs, rosellas, bowerbirds, swallows, seagulls, noisy miners, thrushes, kookaburras, wattlebirds and ravens come to mind. You won't need to attract these birds, most of them are there already. So try to plant species that are specific in attracting the shy bird species. Many of the birds listed above are very territorial and aggressive towards other birds so prickly, dense shrubs would be a good start.

5. Of course, keeping your garden free of non native pests is also vital. Predators such as cats and dogs, birds such as sparrows, indian mynahs, and blackbirds are all very aggressive to-

wards native birds.

D) birds need plants: plants need birds.

1. Evolution is an amazing process. The saying goes " that only the strong survives" but in the plant world the saying should be "only the clever survives".

2. Plants have evolved with birds, insects and mammals in on the act. Many plants have nectar but some have a tubular flower which holds the nectar and thus only birds with long, hooked beaks can reach the nectar(the honeyeaters). However, as the birds beak enters the flower, sticky pollen which is also inside the tube attaches itself to the bird. After getting its fill of nectar the bird moves on to other flowers all the time picking up and depositing pollen. This process pollenates the plants and seed is formed.

3. Many plants indigenous to the otways and coast grow their seed in a succulent fruity capsule. The seed of many of these species will only germinate after they have gone through the gut of a bird and the digestion process removes chemicals in the fruit which inhibits germination. The birds eat the seeds, fly away, and later on the seed is deposited in a nice little pile of moist fertiliser just waiting to germinate. Some species are extremely difficult to germinate unless they go through this process- quite a challenge for plant growers (can you picture the keen seed collector chasing seagulls down the beach during late summer when the sea box seed is ripening!).

4. Some plants simply attract insects while the waiting "insectivorous" bird swoops down to eat its fill. Many butterflies and moths lay their eggs on the leaves of food plants. When the caterpillars hatch they begin to eat the leaves(or other parts of the plant). In forestry, horticulture and agriculture where monocultures tend to be grown, infestations of leaf eating insects can devastate crops. Normal populations of insect eating birds simply cannot control the massive amounts of insects and thus insecticides are used for their control. Unfortunately this leads to a boom/bust situation where the birds have food one minute and none the next. It can also lead to pesticide residues being picked up by the birds (and other predators) where the poison becomes more and more concentrated the higher up the food chain it goes. In the backyard, insects attacking your plants is a normal occurrence. If the insects aren't killing the plant maybe you can live with a few holes in the leaves at certain times of the year.

Getting your backyard to grow plants

A) natural features of your site- consider the following

1. Where does the prevailing wind come from and how strong is it?

2. If you live along the coast is the prevailing wind loaded with salt?

3. Is your soil boggy in the winter and/or concrete in the summer?

4. Is your soil sandy or clayey or somewhere in between?

5. Is your soil salty , acidic, alkaline?

6. Are you on top of a hill or deep down in a gully?

7. Is your site shaded or sunny?

8. Are there any existing plants growing on the site?

9. Are you in a high fire risk area?

B) unnatural features of your site-consider the following

1. Has the site been totally trashed due to the construction of your dwelling?

2. Are there powerlines above, or gas/ septic pipes buried in the ground?

3. Are there neighbours next door who have a two storey dwelling looking right down on your private space?

C) next step

1. Answer all the questions above as well as you can.Ask neighbours or local experts about wind or soil or acidity or whatever- just ask. Most people are very willing to help out a neighbour, after all you've got to live next door to each other.

2. What do you want from your backyard? Do you want to attract birds? Do you want a low maintenance garden? Do you want summer shade? Do you want winter light? Do you want to screen out the neighbours' noseying? Do you have an extremely small space (balcony even) but still want to attract "nature"?

3. Once you've wrapped yourself around the points mentioned above start talking to nurserypeople and reading plant books. You may also want to live there a while to get the feel of the place before making wrong (and sometimes costly) decisions. Take notes about the weather etc. Go for a walk and see what other people are having success with in their garden. If you are considering strictly indigenous (you brave person you) or at least mostly indigenous you may need to talk with nre staff or local indigenous plant growers. Many of the indigenous plants are not sold in retail nurseries and may be extremely difficult to source. Once you've found a nursery that grows these locals, order theplantswellinadvanceofwhenyouwantthem. A few indigenous plant growers will know your area well and will be able to provide you with a local plant list. Failing that talk to your shire's environment officer. They should have a local plant list for your area. Hopefully, they will also have a list of which plants not to grow- environmental weeds.

4. Many nurseries still sell environmental weeds some even sell declared noxious weeds. Environmental weeds are usually natives planted outside of their natural range and enjoy the new conditions so much that they can begin to outcompete the indigenous plant community. Unfortunately for gardeners these weeds usually grow quickly and strongly and seem to be able to withstand the most difficult climatic conditions. That's why they are weeds!

5. Since european settlement, the landscape has been altered almost beyond recognition. Trying to reintroduce the indigenous plant community back onto your property may not be as easy as it might seem. Consider a coastal situation where the first line of defence against the salt winds used to be a collection of hardy species growing on the coastaldunes. Astimewentonothersp ecies,somewhatlesssalttolerantusedtheprotectionofthefirstgroupof plants to get a foothold. As the distance from the sea increases the plants have less tolerance of the salt and grow more upright. Now, picture your garden without those "lines of defence". Getting less salt tolerant

plants established will be more difficult. A garden fence might help but can be expensive. You might consider establishing some of those hardy species and as time moves on trying some of the more delicate plants.

6. Every garden is different because there are so many variables involved. Please use these notes as a guide to the next step and the next and the next.