

## Step 4

# Maintain

Care for the trees and plants to maintain the garden's health and enjoy its many benefits.

### Key considerations:

- Watering
- Pruning
- Weeding
- Mulching

### This section includes:

- A checklist of key maintenance tasks to undertake throughout the year to keep your garden healthy





# Maintain checklist

## Care for the trees and plants to maintain the garden's health and enjoy its many benefits.

### Water your garden efficiently to maintain a green, healthy and cooling garden.

- Water your plants deeply and less often to encourage deep and resilient root systems and help trees and plants become more heat and drought tolerant.
- Water the drip zone, the area directly below the outer foliage of the tree or plant, rather than the trunk. This will target the feeder roots that take up the water.
- Avoid quick, light and frequent watering of gardens as this encourages roots to grow up towards the drying topsoil and cause plants to become stressed and wilt.
- Water in the cool of the morning, especially in summer. This will reduce evaporation loss and allow the water to percolate into the soil to the roots.
- Generally, water new plants deeply twice a week for the first month, then once a week for the next month. This frequency will need to increase during hot, dry periods.
- If you've planted local species, or trees and plants that are adapted to Adelaide's natural rainfall patterns, you may only need to water during particularly hot periods in summer or long periods without rain, once plants are established.

#### For further information visit:

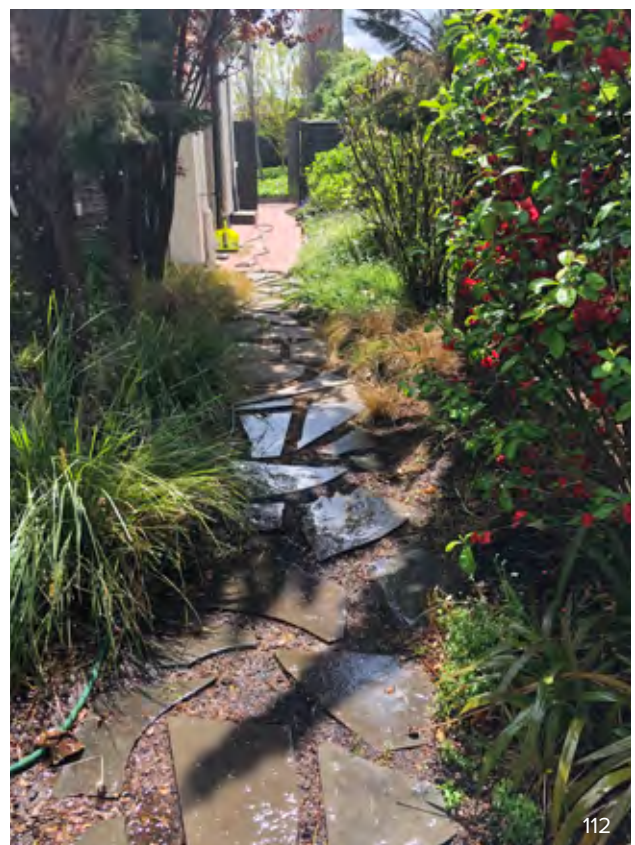
- [Watering Wisdom, Gardening Australia](#)
- [Smart Watering, Gardening Australia](#)
- [In your garden, SA Water](#)
- [Consider Native Plants, SA Water](#)

### Re-mulch your garden to suppress weeds and help conserve water.

- Top up the mulch in garden beds in late winter or early spring to help conserve water during summer.
- Organic mulches such as straw-based and bark will break down over time and add organic matter into the soil to improve structure and drainage.
- Inorganic mulches including gravel, scoria and pebbles don't break down, will require less topping up and can look effective. However, in an exposed location they may get too hot and stress plants by raising the soil temperature.

#### For further information visit:

- [How to Mulch, Gardening Australia](#)



## Maintain healthy soil and fertilise your plants to provide their required levels of nutrients and encourage growth, flowering and fruiting

- Most plants will benefit from adding animal manures, compost or worm castings to the top soil in spring to improve the soil and encourage new leaf growth.
- Australian native and indigenous plants will benefit from a feed of an organic based fertiliser (blood and bone, pelletised chicken manure) in spring and autumn. Avoid manufactured and chemical fertilisers high in phosphorous.
- Most plants only use fertiliser in times of high growth. A light application of slow release fertiliser in spring and autumn will keep the majority plants happy throughout the year.

### For further information visit:

- [Feeding Your Plants, Sustainable Gardening Australia](#)
- [Fertiliser dos and don'ts, Gardening Australia](#)
- [Maintaining Natives, Gardening Australia](#)

## Ensure irrigation and stormwater systems are well installed and maintained

In areas of heavy clay soils, movement of the ground is most variable and noticeable when rapid changes between wet and dry weather occurs.

- Help mitigate this effect by providing a consistent ground moisture condition, through watering trees in drier weather, and providing appropriate drainage for stormwater.
- Ensure irrigation systems do not cause overwatering of the soil. When this occurs at a localised portion of the site, it can cause the building structure to settle or heave unevenly to drier parts of the site and leads to framing movements and possibly cracks appearing, particularly to masonry structures.
- Regularly check any irrigation systems so that there are no leaks or breakages which may cause a sudden variation to the site's soil condition.

## Prune trees and plants to promote healthy and neat growth

- Deadhead flowering shrubs regularly to direct the plant's energy into growing flowers and foliage.
- Most Australian native and indigenous plants flower from winter into early spring. Tip prune just after their flowering period to maximise growth and help create a dense and bushy plant to withstand the oncoming summer heat.
- Trim plants you want to form a hedge or keep a consistent size or shape twice a season to create a compact and dense form. Prune out thicker internal stems every two or three years to promote new growth in the middle of the plant.
- Annual pruning of young trees helps to maintain their shape, strength and structure as they mature. Remove weak branches, suckers and double leaders and thin out lateral branches. Research your tree species to better understand pruning requirements. Generally, prune deciduous trees in winter to promote vigorous new growth. Enhance flowering trees by pruning after their flowers have faded.
- If major pruning is required, undertake this when the plant is dormant - for deciduous plants this is in winter, for many natives this is in summer.
- For large trees, always seek advice from a qualified arborist to ensure the health of the tree and your safety.
- Regular inspection of the trees is recommended to check for the extent and reach of roots. Where tree roots may be at risk of damaging buildings or structures, the root can be trimmed (if required) and dammed with root barriers to prevent further growth.

### For further information visit:

- [Pruning 101, Gardening Australia](#)
- [Pruning Natives, Gardening Australia](#)
- [The Fantastic Guide to Tree Pruning, Fantastic Gardeners Blog](#)
- [How to Prune Young Shade Trees, Arbor Day Foundation](#)