



# Things I'm loving now

Franchesca Watson on her current favourite garden aesthetics

■ **Planting trees** It's really important that we plant trees whenever possible. They offer shade and cool for the future, creating the possibility of benevolent microclimates, shelter for all creatures, and comfort in our lives.

■ **Permeable surfaces** They are better for the ecology of our spaces in every way. I'm trying to use grass blocks, gravel and sand, permeable paving, and compactable clays and laterites. If not possible, I try to ensure controlled run-off into the garden, rather than out into the street where the water is wasted.

■ **Big textures and a tropical look** Abundance and abandon is sexy.

■ **Rock is back** But be careful how you use it. Natural is by far the best but is easier said than done. It's a talent to be able to place rock as it would occur in nature.

■ **Birdbaths** Shallow sloped edges help the smaller birds, and a couple of flattish stones is the middle of the bath make others happy. More will visit if there's cover planting close by that they can retreat to.

■ **Matte, textured leaves** I'm preferring these to shiny, reflecting leaves, which feel brittle, especially as hedges.

■ **Grasses** I can't get enough of them, particularly local varieties. My favourites are *Imperata cylindrica* and *Melinis nerviglumis*. If you're serious

about them, get the book *A Practical Grass Selection Guide* by Waltman Botha and Ivan van der Walt. I wish more varieties were available here commercially.

■ **Roses as groundcover** The latest ones to try are Lesotho Royal roses, which boast cerise-pink flowering clusters throughout the growing season. Fiery Sunstation is another tough-as-nails, profuse flowerer, with bright red blooms.

■ **Statement pots** Go for the largest you can accommodate to create a bold effect. For a timeless look, choose Italian-style terracotta pots, or trawl for something more edgy, like the range at Indigenus.

■ **Less is more when it comes to garden sculpture**

There's nothing better than a beautifully positioned, single piece for adding an exciting focal point to the garden.

■ **Bold, graphic topiary forms** Don't be afraid to use plants as architecture to form elements (anything other than lollipops). Clippable, evergreen plants can be waterwise too. Try the *Searsia* shrubs, *Rothmannia*, *Dodonaea* and even *Camellias* as alternatives to *Viburnums*.

■ **Leaves with bronze undersides** Try *Trichocladus ellipticus* and *Croton gratissimus*.

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CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT TROPICAL FOLIAGE IS TRENDING; A GOOD READ FOR ANYONE LOOKING TO LEARN MORE ABOUT GRASSES; PLACE YOUR BIRD BATH NEAR COVER; PALMS REALLY BRING HOME THE TROPICAL LOOK; THE LEAVES OF *TRICHOCLADUS ELLIPTICUS* HAVE LOVELY BRONZE UNDERSIDES