

Pet-friendly gardens

Having happy pets and an attractive garden is possible ...
it just takes a little planning

Words: Jacki Brown

These days, there are many ways to spoil your pampered pooches and the numerous critters we humans like to keep as pets. Designer pet clothing, toys, furniture and food products give pets almost as much luxury as their owners. Whether you're a diehard pet enthusiast or just think of your pets as a natural extension of your family, you probably want to give your companions a comfortable and happy lifestyle.

As many pets spend a good amount of their time in the great outdoors, what better way to show them you care than to give them an outdoor space they can really sink their teeth into?

A pet-friendly landscape doesn't have to feature dug-up lawns, large ugly fences and deposits on the lawn. A well-designed landscape can incorporate your pets' needs along with all the other functional uses you want from your landscape.

Take an integrated approach

With a considered landscape design, the needs of different pets can be integrated into a healthy and beautiful landscape that pets and their owners can both enjoy. In fact, you might like to combine different types of pets to create a mini-ecosystem.

There are several essentials to responsible pet ownership, which includes providing a place for them to eat and drink (providing clean water is essential), a shady place to rest, secure fences and gates to keep them in and a careful approach to planting to ensure there are no pet-toxic plants they can get to. Puppies tend to taste anything at ground level and, while chickens, ducks or geese can be employed in the garden to eat snails and grubs, they will also eat the garden plants if left to roam for too long.

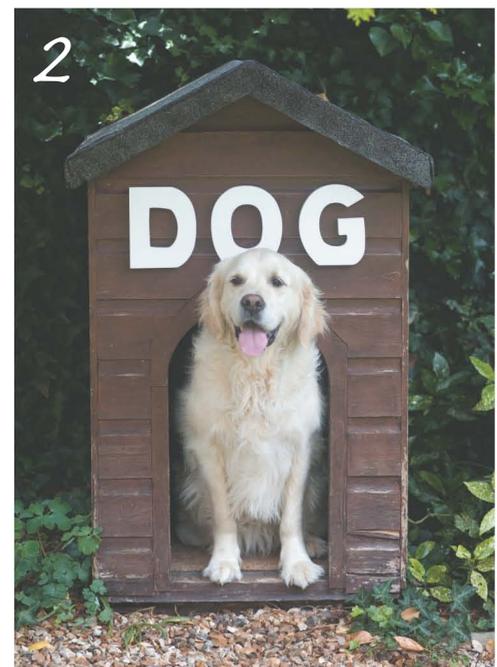
To create a garden that will keep your pets safe, happy and healthy, here are a few things to consider.

Exercise and entertainment

- Some pets like somewhere high to sit and be "king of the castle".
- Allow enough space for the particular type of animal and the individual pet's temperament.
- Allow a "dog run" between fences and garden plants, with a mulch or gravel surface so Fido can run up and down inspecting his territory to his heart's content.
- Consider a cat run so the family feline has a safe enclosure with room to move.
- Cat scratching posts will prevent trees and

plants from being damaged.

- Birds should only be kept in large cages so they can move around and get exercise. The display cages used in pet shops are much too small for permanent living.



- Azaleas (the leaves)
- Bulbs (jonquils, daffodils, tulips etc)
- Cycad palms (all parts)
- Datura (flowers and leaves)
- Foxglove (all parts)
- Oleander (all parts)
- Poinsettia (the leaves)
- Rhododendron (the leaves)
- Wandering jew (all parts)
- Yesterday, today and tomorrow (all parts, especially berries)

- Add new toys to cages or yards to entertain birds, cats, dogs and other pets.
- Create an “obstacle course” for a dog to keep his interest piqued.

Comfort and protection

- Weather protection is imperative. Does your pet have a warm, comfortable spot to sit? Do they have a shaded area to retreat to in the heat of the day? Somewhere to go to get out of the rain?
- Locate pet enclosures in a comfortable microclimate — not in the hottest west-facing corner and not on the chilly south-facing side — where they can be seen and enjoyed, as well as accessed for cleaning and feeding. Provide some sort of cover from the wind and weather.

A place for business

- Designate an area of the garden covered by mulch to toilet train the dog.
- If you have a children’s sandpit in the backyard, make a sandpit cover to keep cats out. If it’s made out of timber it can double as a deck or seat.
- Compost pet poo and use it as plant food (but not for edible plants or natives). Don’t use pet droppings after a worming treatment as it will kill garden worms, too.
- Some plants, such as mondo grass, can be killed by dog wee, so be careful about which plants you use where dogs frequently “go”.

Security and safety

- Enclosures such as fences, runs and coops protect your pet from danger and predators, as well as protecting other animals. Enclosures can be screened using landscape

1. Dogs adore an expanse of lawn and things to explore. They also need secure fencing so they can’t escape.

2. Pets need shelter from the elements. Put kennels and pet enclosures in a shady part of the garden.

3. Chickens are becoming much more popular as pets. Give them a safe, secure and attractive place to roost.

screens made of timber, trellis, metal or climbing plants.

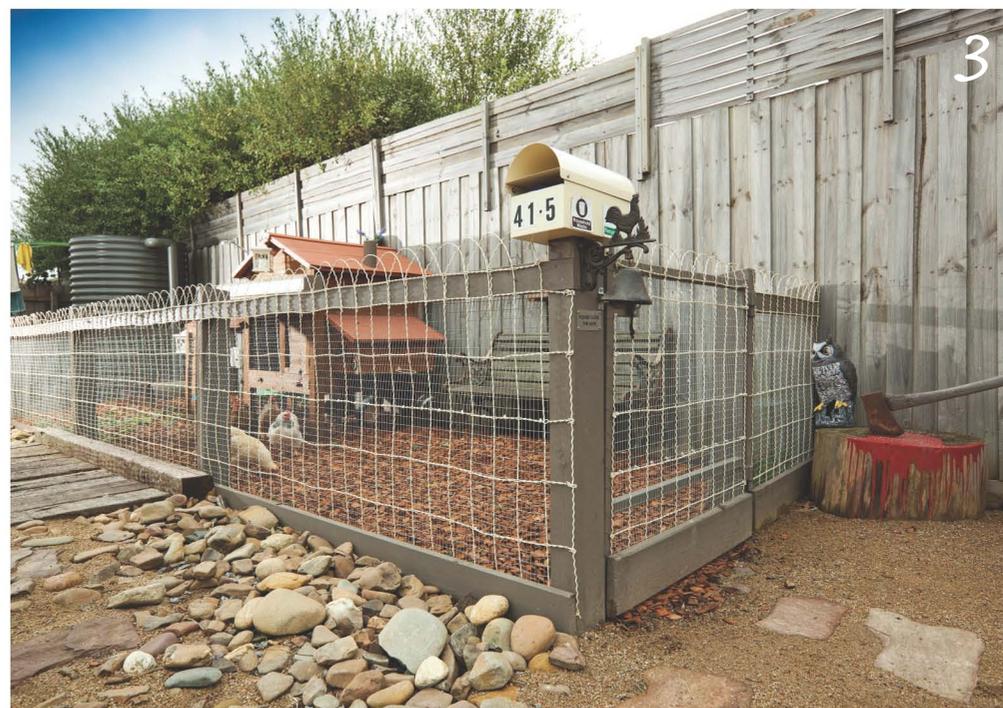
- Avoid using snail bait where animals have access. This also applies to fertilisers and other chemicals you might use in the garden.
- There are specially designed fences to keep cats in or out using rolling bars as a fence capping so that cats can’t get a grip along the top of a fence.
- A well-designed pond provides shelter for fish and frogs. For frogs, lizards and other wildlife, avoid steep sides to the pond so they can access the water easily. Use overhanging plants and rocks so the visiting wildlife feel protected.
- Ensure that dogs are adequately contained in your yard. Consider the size of the dog, its tendency to dig or jump fences and

area and any other special element your pet might need. Then you’ll be well on your way to petscaping your yard.

All pets require maintenance — it’s a labour of love that can take a lot of time, effort and money — but what wouldn’t you do for the little critters? Careful design can make your pet landscape as low-maintenance as possible so that you and Bugalugs can spend more of your time having fun.

Responsible pet ownership

To take the fun out of pets for just a moment — have you thought about the “triple bottom line” of pets? There are social, environmental and financial costs of pet ownership. Are there any negative effects of your animals on other animals? For example, does your pet



whether they’ll be left at home alone for long periods. The smaller the yard and the longer time spent alone, the more entertainment and comfort they will need to avoid them getting bored or lonely and trying to escape.

The design challenges

It can be challenging to integrate “pet stuff” into an attractive garden. The disused areas where no one goes might seem like a good place to put pets, but if you never go there, you won’t get enjoyment out of them. It’s best to use those areas for storage or the pet loo.

When putting together your petscape, avoid the storage-yard look of having too many ready-made structures. Include some creative reused objects or tailor-made features such as logs, sculpture or timber sleepers to tie together the necessary cages or runs. Soften the view of enclosures with plants.

Sketch up a layout and give areas for functional needs of pets such as a feeding area, toilet area, sleeping spot, shade, bathing

terrorise the neighbourhood pets or native wildlife? What about the neighbours — is your pet aggressive or loud, causing disturbance to your local community? Think about ways you can improve your pets’ environment to improve their behavior.

Pets may have an environmental impact — chemicals in shampoos and pet poo add to nutrient run-off into local waterways and some pets scare off native wildlife. Be careful where you dispose of pet poo and bathwater and avoid letting pets roam where native animals live.

Weigh up the financial expense of improving your landscape to benefit your pets. Will you suffer less stress and worry about unhappy or escapee pets as well as save on vet bills by having healthier pets? ■

This article was prepared by Jacki Brown and the team at ecodesign on behalf of the Australian Institute of Landscape Designers & Managers (AILDM). If you would like to find an AILDM member in your area, visit the website: www.aildm.com.au.