



# WORLD OF COLOUR

Both inside the home and out, colour plays an essential role setting the tone and enhancing mood

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**C**alming, relaxing, aesthetically pleasing — these are all desirable attributes for a private outdoor space but how many of us realise just how critical a role colour plays in determining how we feel about a space? Colour theory, one of the key principles underpinning any good design, tells us that colour affects our moods and our perceptions, often in quite profound ways. The use and manipulation of colour is one of the most effective tools a landscape designer has at his or her disposal when trying to enhance or modify the atmosphere of an outdoor area.

## Effects created by colour

Colours can be defined as warm or cool. Warm colours are those you would associate with sunshine (red, orange, pink, yellow, brown) while cool colours are ones that you'd associate with an overcast day, the ocean or sky, or a field (grey, blue, green). Warm colours tend to stand out and arouse emotion; cool colours fade into the background and calm the senses.

Every colour comes in a variety of tones (running the gamut from light to dark), so if you want to create aesthetic unity, whether in a single space or across several different outdoor areas, you can use various tones of the one colour.

Red, for example, is a warm colour but it may be used in different tones to evoke different moods across the garden. In a courtyard where you want to encourage activity and motivate guests to mingle, you could include a bright-red feature wall. Or if a more restful, contemplative space is desired you could try painting a wall a softer pink or introducing a border of pink carpet roses or drifts of pink Japanese windflowers.

Choosing one tone but a variety of different colours — for example, dark brown with dark brownish-orange and dark brownish-red — is a very effective way to create a feeling of harmony. This is because colours of the same tone have the same amount of “light” in them so we perceive them as matching.



### The play of light and shade

Both natural and artificial light can affect how we comprehend a colour. Because of the intensity of the Australian sun, colours used outdoors appear brighter, so very dark colours can be used outside and their hue will be more obvious than in a dim room. On the other hand, very vibrant, bold colours can appear too bright and garish unless they're to be used somewhere like a playground. The effect is lessened in shaded areas, such as under a tree where the light is dappled.

The other thing to consider is that very light colour tones can appear washed out in bright

sunlight and when used over big areas, such as walls or paving, can create glare. Because of this effect, you should always check how a colour will look outside during daylight hours — never make your choice sitting indoors looking at colour charts or catalogues.

When choosing colours, it also pays to consider the reflections that will be cast in any adjacent bodies of water. The dance of reflected colour on the surface of a pond or swimming pool adds an extra dimension to a landscape.

### Australian landscape colours

When you hear the phrase “seasonal colour changes” you probably think of the autumn leaves of exotic deciduous trees. However, in the Australian landscape there are many different types of colour changes that can be enjoyed — and employed — depending on the time of the year.

Sydney red gums, for example, lose their outer layer of pale bark in summer, displaying the reddish orange of the layer of bark underneath. What's more, the intensity of the colour of the bark appears to change throughout the day as the angle of the sun shifts and the degree of brightness fluctuates.

Some other examples of the dynamic colours of the natural Australian landscape include vibrant green lichen, which grows on rocks and logs, ochre-coloured sand, the many species of wattle that flower at different periods of the year, wildflowers in their various colours and forms and native grasses with their subtle, natural colours and enticing foliage.

### Using landscaping materials

Elements that can be used to add colour to a garden include walls, screens, paving, gravel, ornaments, sculpture, planters, furniture, umbrellas, water features — even lighting. And don't forget the flowers, bark and foliage of plants. There's no shortage of hard or softscaping elements, not to mention items of

décor that can be used to help establish mood as well as give a garden aesthetic appeal and increased functionality. It's all about context and the way in which elements are combined and highlighted.

Metal elements with an iron oxide or rusted finish are very popular at the moment. The same applies to pots and planters in earthy tones with an aged patina. These can be used to create a rural or rustic look, or juxtaposed with more modern elements, such as a stark white or cream wall, to create a clearly contemporary look. To give a garden a Mediterranean or South American flavour, rendered walls in rich colours matched with brightly coloured pots is one way you could go.

### Colour accents and features

Interest can be created by placing a vividly coloured feature in an area of muted tones or by placing it against a backdrop of a contrasting colour. This has the effect of drawing the eye to specific features or areas of a garden rather than letting the eye wander aimlessly.

A statement can be made by matching colours throughout the design but this should be considered carefully as too much of one colour may overwhelm. A single neutral colour can have a calming and pacifying effect and may suit a landscape that is meant to be a relaxing space. Generally, it is better to achieve interest and impact by simply using colour accents.

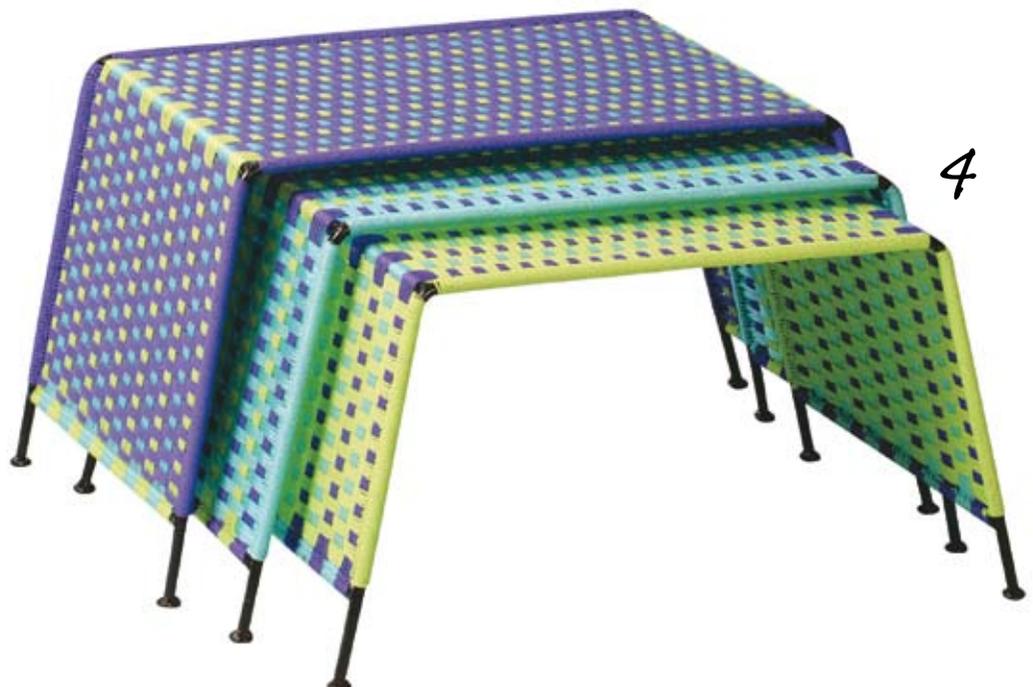
For some, choosing colours can be a daunting experience because it is so hard to picture what the colours will end up looking like. However, avoiding colour altogether only results in a boring landscape that does nothing to attract you outdoors. A “safe” way to go about using colour is to use neutral base colours for things like paving, walls and furniture, keep the background green (with lawn and hedging plants or trees) then add single colour embellishments (or accents) for things like sculptures and pots. →

**1.** Red is a warm, advancing colour ideal for a feature wall or for large areas where you really want to make something seem a little bit nearer.

**2.** Blue and green are cool colours so can be used together when you want to create a calming effect or establish a relaxed mood in an outdoor space.

**3.** One of the ways designers use colour to good effect is to lead the eye towards a focal point such as a sculpture. Garden design by Garden Symphony.

**4.** These funky Imandeco tables show how you can create a co-ordinated look by repeating colours. For more information: [www.imandeco.com.au](http://www.imandeco.com.au)



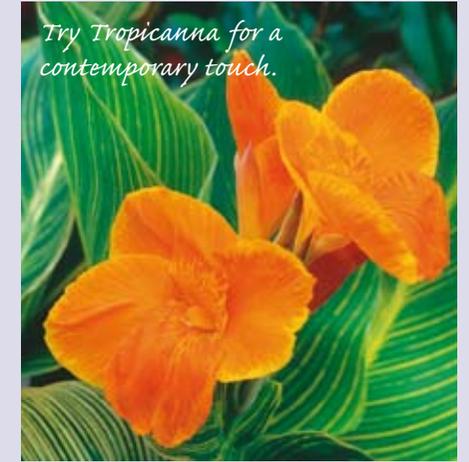


*"It's all about context and the way in which elements are combined"*

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## THREE GARDEN STYLES

- **Contemporary:** Bright accent colours; contrasting colours and textures; natural or dark base colours; graded tones; coloured foliage.
- **Bush garden:** Silver/grey and green foliage; colourful flowers; natural colours and textures (timber, stone, sand, gravel); splashes of colour; seasonal colour.
- **Formal:** Classic neutral-toned hard surfaces; green foliage used as the "canvas" with blacks and whites; use of a single colour for contrast; shade and light.



*Try Tropicanna for a contemporary touch.*

### Integrating landscape colour

Complement the colour of your house as well as its architecture when choosing colours for the landscape. A brightly coloured contemporary landscape won't suit a Federation-style house so you need to be realistic. If a more subdued colour scheme will better complement your home, remember that

doesn't mean it has to be boring or that it can't have a modern feel.

Other things to consider when choosing colours for your landscape include your existing vegetation, the colours of surrounding buildings, and borrowed views of your neighbour's garden and the streetscape, as each of these elements will have an impact on how the colours in your garden will look.

And a final word on tying together backyards and front gardens. While each may have a different landscape style, you can blend through the canny use of colour. One simple way to do this is to use the same paving material or garden edging in both landscapes. See how easy it is? So get colouring! ■

**5.** Green foliage is always the perfect backdrop in a landscape, but add some punch with a colour accent. Garden design by Secret Gardens of Sydney.

**6.** For maximum contrast, combine warm and cool colours as these Emu Re-Trowé chairs do so well. For more information: [www.kezu.com.au](http://www.kezu.com.au)

### TRICK OF THE TRADE

To make something appear closer, say a far wall, use one of the warm colours (such as red, orange, pink and yellow). Not surprisingly, warm colours are known as "advancing" colours. If you want to make a wall or a structure seem further away in a small space, thus opening up an area, you can use one of the cool colours (such as grey, blue and green). The same effect can be achieved with the use of coloured foliage, using different tones or layers of colour, or artworks or outdoor furniture.

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](http://www.aildm.com.au).



*Cool colours (silver/grey, green) open up a space.*



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