

Tropical

FEVER



A cheeky wrought iron kingfisher perches on the edge of a grindstone with its catch in its mouth.

Tropical gardens have always been synonymous with boldness, bright colours, dramatic foliage and more than a hint of the theatrical – use our garden plan to create your own tropical paradise

garden a modern twist, or perhaps a more naturalistic, earthy feel.

A garden with less plant variety and bigger massed plantings of the same plant will immediately have a sleek, modern look. On the other hand, random, varied and intensely layered planting makes for a more naturalistic experience.

A word of caution

In a tropical garden you more easily run the risk of compromising tranquillity, than in any other planting style.

You need to appropriately compensate for the fact that your base plant materials carry a lot more visual weight than in other planting styles. This calls for careful consideration and a good dose of restraint!

Having too many strong visual shapes in one space agitates the senses and does not allow any of the plants to be fully appreciated. The garden looks crowded, unruly and it makes it feel much smaller than it may be.

Valuable pointers to keep you on track

- Make a short list of your 'must have' plant varieties and be prepared to enjoy some of the 'nice to haves' in someone else's garden if you do not have sufficient space.
- Place the strongest form plants first and allow the rest of the planting to support



Tropical planting conveys a sense of escapism, a complete retreat into the heart of nature. It is no surprise then that the tropical planting style has remained a perennial favourite.

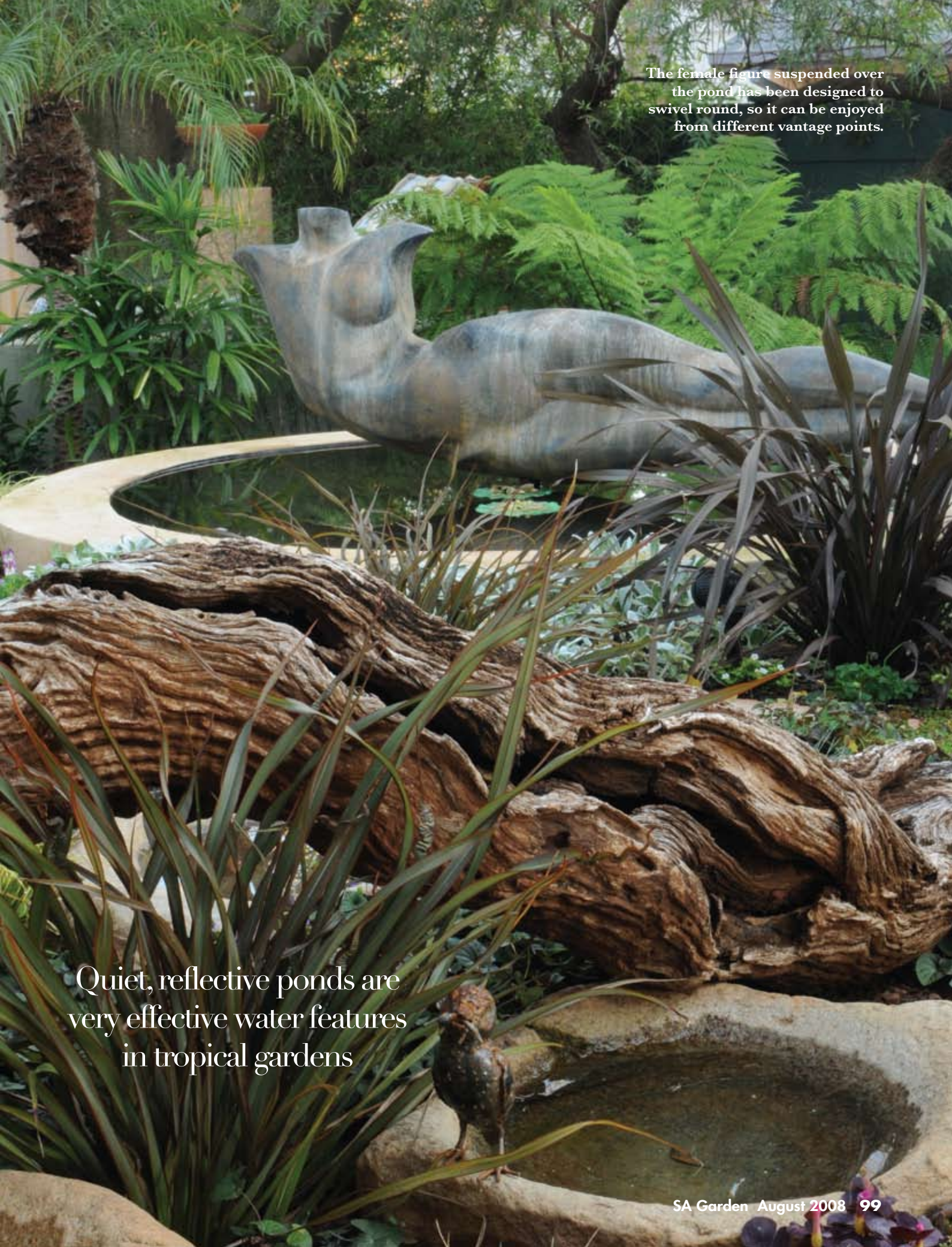
Essential elements in a tropical garden

The star performers in a tropical garden are plants with dramatic foliage, often large-leaved and with a distinctive shape and form. Colours are bright and bold, and the planting is very layered – exactly like in a tropical jungle!

Plants which most clearly set a tropical tone include palms, cycads, tree ferns, ferns, *Philodendrons*, *Bromeliads* and other bold shapes and forms.

Linking the garden with the house

The choice of ornamentation in the garden will most often be the strongest link with the architecture of your home – by choosing wisely, you will be able to give the



The female figure suspended over the pond has been designed to swivel round, so it can be enjoyed from different vantage points.

Quiet, reflective ponds are very effective water features in tropical gardens



this cast of star performers. For example, it is highly effective to underplant a cycad with a ground cover or low growing ornamental grass in a contrasting colour; to allow the cycad to display without visual competition, while still layering interest and colour:

- Overall foliage size should be reduced proportionally in relation to the size of the garden.
- Use very bright colours sparingly in small spaces to avoid having the space appear even smaller.
- Since tropical gardens are largely 'foliage driven', it is important to use these plants

to also facilitate additional colour. As flower colour tends to be bright, there cannot be too much of it.

Design considerations for this month's garden

A focal point consisting of a *Cycas revoluta*, an elegant piece of old driftwood and three authentic grindstones greet you as you enter the garden. The cycad has been underplanted with mainly *Acorus gramineus* 'Golden Edge' and *Viola riviniana*.

The backdrop to the cycad includes denser planting, but the foreground has deliberately been kept uncluttered to allow

the feature plant pride of place.

The ground pattern consists of two overlapping circles, one being an elegant circular water feature with a modern sculpture of a female form restfully suspended over it; and the other an inviting patch of shade lawn. The choice of circles in the ground pattern lends spaciousness to the area.

The water feature is bold in its very simplicity, but it fails to overpower as the water movement is barely perceptible – an interesting counterbalance to the impact of the female figure and the dramatic planting.

Cobbled edging keeps the circular shape



100 SA Garden August 2008





The star performers in a tropical garden are plants with dramatic foliage

garden.

Much attention has been devoted to foliage interest to support a design which has deliberately limited strong shapes. Grey lamb's ears nestle next to yellow-green *Bacopa* and adjoins the burgundy beauty of *Phormium rubra* 'Nana'.

The gracefully arching sword like leaves of *Phormium* 'Yellow Wave' adjoins red *Nandina pygmaea* and the delicate beauty of *Asparagus virgatus*.

Colour

Holy bamboo (*Nandina domestica*) and *Nandina pygmaea* provide seasonal interest with their fiery red leaves. A pink camellia blooms in winter and azaleas provide a

splendid seasonal display.

The spiky mound of grey *Festuca* grass contrasts beautifully with golden-yellow *Acorus* grass. Purple-leaved *Viola riviniana* completes the picture of contrasts.

The garden successfully produces the element of tranquillity which is so highly valued in a fast-paced modern society. It also offers richly layered detail which stimulates a sense of exploration and anticipation. An evergreen framework, rich in colour and interest, make it a very appropriate choice for gardeners whose lifestyles cannot support a high maintenance garden. This is a garden to savour, to immerse yourself in and simply soak up its soothing benefits!

of the lawn true, emphasises the ground pattern and also makes maintenance very convenient.

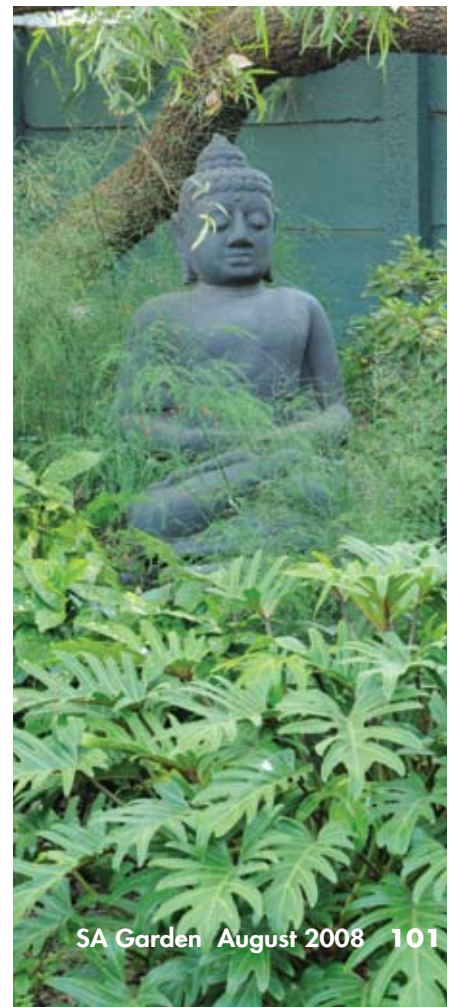
Stepping stones provide functional access through the garden. Creeping mint adds to the sensory experience, as its fragrance is released when stepped on. A small sandstone bench in a shady nook calls for a quiet moment with a cup of tea.

The pond is fringed on the one side with tactile lamb's ears (*Stachys byzantina*) – the enjoyment of the soft, hairy leaves is right at hand as you pass alongside it.

An orange jasmine (*Murraya exotica*) lollipop provides just sufficient height to enclose this section and to make this corner cosy, intimate and also distinct from the rest of the garden.

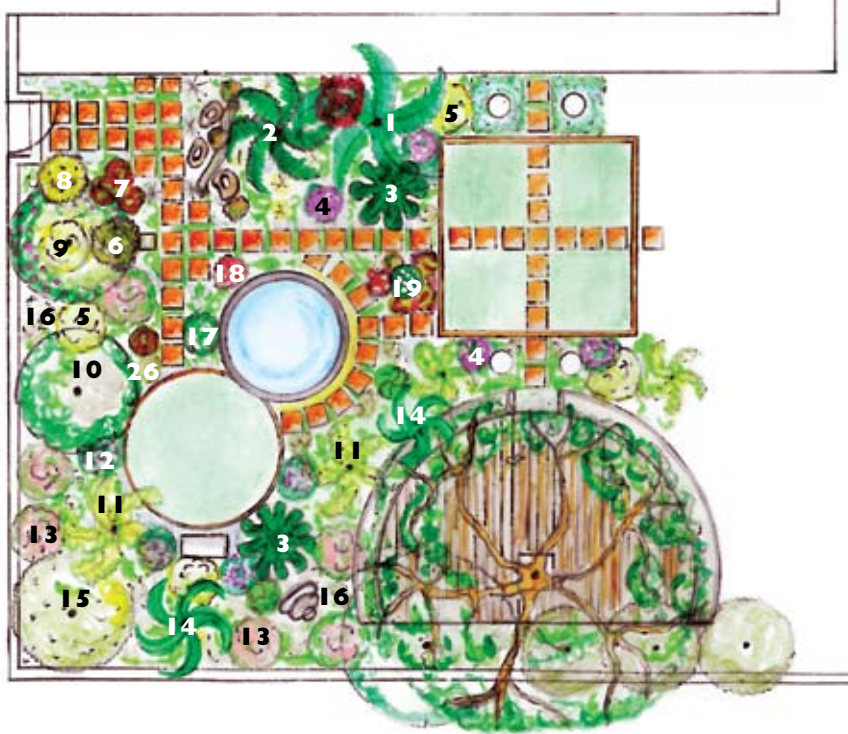
Shapes

The strongest architectural shapes in the garden are the *Cycas revoluta* and *Philodendron xanadu*. This restraint contributes to a more stylized feel. The large *Dicksonia antarctica* ferns become secondary focal points in this context, firmly establishing a lush, relaxed feel in the



Plant list

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|---|--|
| 1 Cocos palm (<i>Syagrus romanzoffiana</i>) | 11 <i>Dicksonia antarctica</i> |
| 2 <i>Cycas revoluta</i> | 12 <i>Plectranthus</i> 'Mona Lavender' |
| 3 <i>Philodendron xanadu</i> | 13 Azalea (<i>Rhododendron</i> sp) |
| 4 <i>Heliotropium arborescens</i> | 14 <i>Phoenix roebelenii</i> |
| 5 <i>Microlepia</i> sp | 15 <i>Bambusa vulgaris</i> |
| 6 <i>Juncus patens</i> | 16 <i>Asparagus virgatus</i> |
| 7 <i>Nandina pygmaea</i> | 17 <i>Aspidistra eliator</i> |
| 8 <i>Phormium</i> 'Yellow Wave' | 18 <i>Phormium rubrum</i> |
| 9 <i>Camellia japonica</i> | 'Nana' |
| 10 <i>Rhaphiolepis delacourri</i> | 19 Orange jasmine |
| 'Kruschenia' | (<i>Murraya exotica</i>) |



Under planting:

- 1 *Festuca glauca*
- 2 *Parahebe catarractae*
- 3 *Carex hachijoensis* 'Evergold'
- 4 *Stachys bizantina*
- 5 *Bacopa* copia
- 6 *Acorus gramineus* 'Golden Edge'
- 7 *Lamium maculatum*

Top tip

The most common planting error in tropical gardens is the overuse of bold foliage shapes and sizes. Allow these architectural shapes pride of place – do not crowd them or have too many in one space.

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FYNBOS FESTIVAL

6 – 7 SEPTEMBER

Horticultural specialist, Nico Thuynsma, will host a talk on growing Proteas and Ericas successfully on the Highveld. Saturday 6 September at 11am. Free, but booking essential.

ALSO IN SEPTEMBER:

AN EXHIBITION OF BOTANICAL ART AND A THEME WEEK ON CONTAINER GARDENING WITH INDIGENOUS PLANTS. WATCH PRESS FOR DETAILS.



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