



## WELL STRUCTURED

*Even the smallest patch of green can make a style statement with considered use of structuring, the cornerstone of garden design*

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PHOTOGRAPH: RICARDO LABOUGLE

As Cape Town, along with many other parts of the country, finds itself in the grip of a severe drought, my mantra more than ever is: 'Structure, structure, structure.'

Designing a garden is a layering process. The plants are really just one of the final layers. I often describe the planting phase to clients as the 'colouring-in' or 'fluff' of a garden. The lines laid down to define the overall space form the structure. Structural elements include hardscaping such as decking, lawn edging and pathways, but most important is the relationship of these with one another and with the whole.

Principles such as balance and proportion come into play in these relationships. If the plants suffer, a well-designed garden should weather the conditions by retaining its structure: all parts relating to the whole need to be working together.

There's a misconception that a structured garden is a formal, symmetrical one. However, structure is as important in a curvilinear, free-flowing garden. Where we need to be clever is in our use of plants as structural elements – hedges, for example. Plants to use are hardy varieties that can withstand tough conditions. In SA, we're spoilt for choice with our indigenous selection. I call these plants 'hard workers', as they very rarely let us down and – apart from providing green colour and texture to a garden, as most plants do – they work extra-hard in fulfilling their structural role.

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Indigenous plants to employ in a structured garden: *Searsia crenata* (previously known as *Rhus crenata*); *Carissa macrocarpa*; *Plumbago auriculata*; *Tarchonanthus*. Exotic varieties from Mediterranean climates, such as *Murraya exotica* and *Viburnum tinus*