



PLANT FORM & SHAPE

All plant species generally present a particular shape if you stand back to analyse them. A common, widely recognised shape is a rounded shape, with branchlets radiating from a nucleus in a seemingly random way. Many plants, particularly conifers, have a vertical or pyramid habit, callitris species usually fit this form. The third obvious form is with those plants such as *rulingia* and many *micromyrtus* whose branches spread horizontally making the plant wider than high. Another common form is the inverted triangle where the triangle is perched on one corner, similar to what is referred to as vase shape. Weeping shapes such as *Melaleuca nodosa* (Prickly Leaved Paperbark) and *Acacia leprosa* (Cinnamon Wattle) are many and popular, though too often people mix them with discordant shapes such as tall and linear or pyramidal. Vertical strap-type species are a most useful form, encompassing grasses, lilies, sedges, rushes and many more; in fact these are the broadest range of plants.

In conditions where the plant is forced to grow slowly due to its aspect, degree of sun and proximity to other plants, a compact or some-

times more erect plant is produced with shorter branchlets. Where the plant grows quickly it will produce an open, softer looking form that may not be as tolerant of extremes in climate. The speed of growth, the health of the plant, the amount of sun or heat and proximity of other plants, all affect form and shape.

Insect attack and early pruning by secateurs or animals can affect the pattern of some species forever – positively or negatively. For example, plants like *crowea* will produce more flower, but *callitris* won't regenerate from older wood. The same species may have extreme contrasts in forms: *Banksia integrifolia*, for example, can produce a huge spreading tree, a medium bush or a low spreading plant like a prostrate tree or can have large or small foliage. These varieties of species crop up constantly in nurseries so be careful about which variety or sub-species you purchase (see *Provenance and Genetic Variation*, p. 43).

Being able to predict a plant's density of growth is another consideration in making the perfect garden, but predicting is usually no more than an educated guess. (With plants one