

A Time-saving Tip: Use plants to keep house walls clean.

Our increasingly busy lifestyles have made both low-maintenance gardens, and simple house-care, two of the most requested design features as a way of ensuring our weekend to-do lists are as short as possible! With wise plant selection and just a little initial input, we can combine garden and home design to create an easy-care solution. I was quite taken with how these neat, slim-line garden beds in two small retirement home complexes did just that. Here, they are used as attractive edges between grass and house or house and paving while protecting walls from soil splatter; a botanical version of the kitchen splashback! Plus, they protect the wall from grass stains and stones thrown up by the dreaded weed eater.

Succulents work well in these designs:

- Thick, sturdy leaves hold firm against the weight of the raindrops. They intercept in two beneficial ways; to shatter the falling drops into smaller units that hit the ground with less of an impact, and they catch the resultant soil splatter helping to keep walls clean.
- Most require very little management. It is simple to nip off a wayward stem without detracting from the overall shape of the plant.
- They tend to hold their shape, so there is little if any drooping foliage and fallen flower stem to neaten up after a rainfall.
- Succulents are water wise and drought hardy, and so cope well with the extra heat absorbed by and reflected back by the hard paving.

Other Pointers:

- Choose low-growing species to keep foliage below window sill level where an unobstructed view is needed.
- In the narrowest of spaces look for succulents with a neat, rounded or clumping form, and keep away from those that spread rapidly, like the vygie groundcovers. Mature width should fill that of the narrow bed.
- Plant densely to suppress weeds and for quick cover. Read our mulch article for further info on this point.
- Log roll edging keeps the lawn out of the bed and protects plants from the edge trimmer. Those that drape over and onto the lawn are easy to pinch back if necessary. Collect and propagate any bits 'browsed off' by the trimmer.
- An expanse of lawn and paving offers little protection to animals; these foliage edges provide cover under which they can scurry away from danger, and from the heat. Plus, pest will meet predator here, providing food for those higher up on the food chain, and keep garden pests at manageable levels for the gardener.

Now, if you could just get Fido to use the cat flap!