



Down to earth

NIGEL RUCK

Blocking out noise

The sound of traffic can be most disruptive to our otherwise peaceful lives, especially if it happens to be right on your doorstep. So here's a few tips to quieten things.

I lived near a busy road in Manly for many years. It was a great spot and although you do get used to the traffic noise it's still there humming away. Anyone who lives on a main road will know the feeling no doubt, likewise if you're near a freeway or train line. I think for this week, however, I won't mention airplanes.

There are several ways that noise pollution can be greatly reduced. One method that my old neighbours used was to bang up a solid 1.8m-high double-brick wall, rendered on both sides for good measure. The added security was a nice bonus.

It should be noted, however, that such a project comes at a cost. It might not be too bad if you have a reasonably narrow street frontage but for wide blocks a wall like this really adds up.

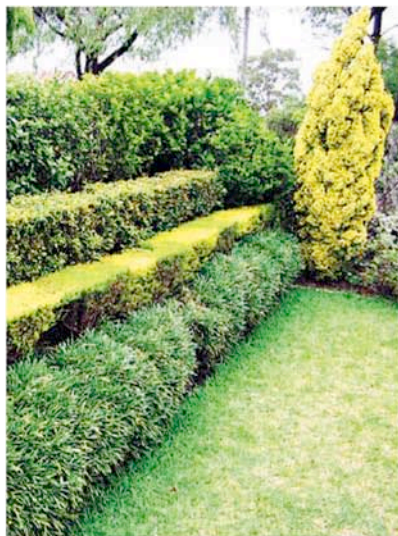
Other considerations, never to be underestimated, are the council rules and regulations that govern the style of wall you may or may not be allowed to build. Always check these.

A far cheaper yet still effective option is to build a timber fence. Make it a lap and cap one for extra sound-proofing but again check council rules.

An old design trick to add some spice and character to timber fences is to paint them. It's easy to do with any colour at your finger tips.

Should a fence or wall not be an option or to your liking then a hedge may well be, and with the right species you can block out a lot of noise.

Choosing plants with a dense growth habit is important as is keeping them well maintained and healthy to ensure the dense growth stays intact.

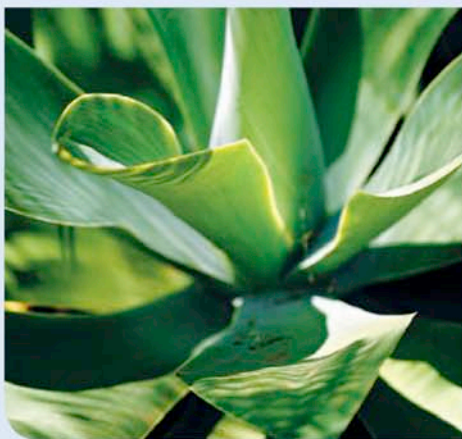


Certain varieties of conifers such as cupressus and thuja are excellent for hedges as are Leyland cypress, but these, like many other conifers, can get very tall. This means they need to be well maintained and pruned to a sensible height. In other words, it emphasises the need to choose the right species in the first place.

Lilypilly, murraya, camellia, photinia, buxus and many more all make fine hedges. Your best bet is to visit a good nursery and see what tickles your fancy and suits your garden. Don't be afraid to double hedge either with two different heights of hedges for maximum effect. And if you have a really noisy spot, build that wall or fence and have the double hedge.

On a final note, creating an embankment of mounded soil works brilliantly to block out noise if you have the room. By doing that, you can then put in your hedging and screening plants gaining an instant height advantage too. You'll see this used quite a lot in front of commercial premises where the space is available and in the suburbs rather than the CBD.

Q&A Agave blackened by frost



Q I have several mature potted agaves. One unfortunately one was affected badly by a recent frost. Most of the leaves are now black and limp. Is there anything I can do to save it? And why was only one affected? All of them are out in the open.

A I have no idea why only one was affected, but all is not lost. Remove all the damaged leaves except for the very top leaves that will open up probably in spring. A splash of a seaweed tonic should also help.