



GARDEN PARTY
(above, from left)
No garden is the same with this renovated area that includes seating, water features, grass and a mix of natives; a well-fed lawn is a garden highlight; (below inset) spring is the perfect time to prepare the garden in anticipation of the hot summer months to come.

NEALE'S OBJECTS OF DESIRE

Green room

1. **CANE-LINE** chair, \$2744, clickonfurniture.com.au
2. **FREEDOM** planters, from \$22, freedom.com.au
3. **MAY GIBBS BY ECOLOGY** gardening tools, \$49.95 a set, and gloves, \$16.95, maygibbs.org



THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Everything you know about gardening might be wrong

I suspect there is a direct correlation between my sudden urge to write an outdoor column and the fact that I have recently acquired a couple of acres. In London many years ago, I lovingly tended a tiny, aromatic herb garden with an old French *miroir* resting against an ivy-clad wall. And in Australia, I've raised cacti, succulents, jasmine, frangipani and an impressive number of agaves and cycads. If you can terracotta-pot it, I've done it.

"The best time to water your lawn and plants is early morning"

But now we have some land and a ride-on mower. We're talking to our neighbours about dams and native seedlings, and just writing those words fills me with a mix of excitement, anticipation... and anxiety. Small wonder then, that in devouring every useful column inch my not-so-green thumbs can find, a recent post by Queensland-based horticulturist Adam Woodhams (adamwoodhams.com.au) caught my eye. And in an unusually warm spring, with

summer on the horizon, it seemed like a good idea to share. Apparently my summer evenings, hosepipe in hand, were all in vain. Evening is not the best time to water, as watering after a long, hot day can cause excessive evaporation. The best time to water your lawn and plants is early morning, when the soil has cooled overnight. Nor is summer sunshine a one-size-fits-all formula for success. Potted plants in particular have different needs depending on species, and Woodhams recommends wheeled dollies to move larger plants in and out of the sun, avoiding potentially damaging extremes of temperature. His advice may be ripe for summer, but I had to ask Woodhams what we can be doing right now - in spring - to prepare our gardens for the hot months ahead. "Spring is the time for a few simple tasks that will have your lawn and garden summer-proofed and looking healthy," he explains. "The first thing is to feed the lawn with a quality, slow-release fertiliser to improve its tolerance to harsh summer conditions and resistance to weeds. Then spread a soil wetter to



ensure that any rain or water soaks deep into the soil instead of running off."

And like most garden gurus in my experience, Woodhams recommends a good layer of garden mulch (at least 4cm thick), although as an ambassador for Victa he also advises switching your mower to mulch-mowing mode to turn clippings into superfine mulch that is then blown back onto the turf. Pass me the ride-on manual. ★ Neale Whitaker is co-host of *Foxtel's Love It Or List It Australia* on *Lifestyle*, and a judge on *Nine Network's The Block*.