

Sophie Thomson shares why gardens are important.



I love Google Earth and enjoy checking out the world near where I live. When it comes to gardening, Google Earth allows you to look at your property, a perspective property or even a general view of properties in your area and look at what outdoor space is allocated to garden and what is not. With medium to higher density building development springing up all over Adelaide, larger houses on the same or smaller sized blocks are far more common. Of the space not taken up by the house, add in the shedding and hard surfaces such as paving or concrete and often these account for up to 90% of the block. Although at first it may seem ideal for those wanting a low-maintenance garden, this lack of green space can have a number of detrimental effects. Here are a few to contemplate:

HEATING AND COOLING

Hard, reflective surfaces are significantly hotter in summer than areas of garden, acting as a heat bank to absorb and store heat only to radiate it back out when the sun goes down. The temperature difference between lawn and paving can be up to 15 degrees. Put simply, on a 35 degree day the ambient air temperature above paving could then be 45 degrees, requiring extra air conditioning inside the house to make up for this. Google Earth also allows you to look at tree plantings. As I have often mentioned, trees in gardens play a significant role in cooling the air and when appropriate deciduous trees or vines are placed on the northern side of a house, they can play valuable roles – cooling the air in summer and letting the precious winter sun in to warm the home in winter. Compare old established areas with newer estates and you will see evidence that domestic tree planting has dropped by 10% over the last 10 years.

DECREASED WILDLIFE

With reduced areas for garden and also a minimalistic planting scheme which is very popular in new developments, there is little room left for biodiversity. What does this mean? In simple terms there is nowhere for the birds, insects and other creatures to feed and live. For more information visit [backyards for wildlife](#).

GREEN FOR HEALTH

There have been many studies over recent years that highlight the inherent need to interact with nature. A lack of this can result in all sorts of physical, emotional and psychological problems. An Australian study by Beyond Blue, shows clear associations between close proximity to green spaces and reduced depression, anxiety and other health problems. Deakin University's Dr Mardie Townsend who contributed to the report says: "People in Adelaide who perceived their neighbourhoods as very green were shown to have up to 1.6 times greater odds of physical and mental health, when compared to those who perceive their neighbourhoods as less green."

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Other tips from Sophie Thomson on Gardening can be found on the AdelaideNow website – below is a selection:

- [Tips for a water-wise garden](#)
- [Starting Out](#)
- [Where to start](#)