

CHAPTER 10

COURTYARDS, BALCONIES AND WINDOW BOXES

Courtyards, balconies and window boxes are to-day's equivalent of the quarter acre block and can give as much pleasure. I find a great emphasis in modern day horticultural practice, as espoused by the many television and magazine experts, on the design of the courtyard as a geometric space containing a low growing box hedge, a mandatory water feature, several large leaved, non-flowering and often nondescript, plants and several terra cotta, or better still expensive ceramic, urns containing some sort of feature plant. All of this quite obviously intended to be 'easy care' gardening, so that the lucky owners can have time to enjoy their inner-city living. 'Low maintenance' seems to be the modern mantra for to-day's gardener! Gone are the joys of 'mucking about with plants', to paraphrase Toad of Toad Hall, no more the joy of getting one's hands dirty by delving into nature's storehouse, no longer the sheer pleasure of buying a plant and putting it in the garden or better still of growing a plant from seed or cutting. Let someone else plan it, and do it, and leave it forever in its sterile state, never to be touched by the owner's hands.

That's not for me - my garden, be it a five hectare estate, a minute courtyard in the inner city, or indeed a balcony of tubs or a simple window box must be a living, breathing entity subject to many changes as the seasons come and go, a cool and restful place filled with colour, a magnet for the myriad birds and insects which inhabit our land, a peaceful place in which one can find a few moments of solitude to refresh the mind and body and soul. Above all, it should be a place created by oneself, reflecting one's character and outlook; indeed one's very attitude to life itself. Claude Monet, the great impressionist painter, commenting upon his famous garden at Giverny, is reported to have said: *'my garden is a slow work, pursued with love, and I don't deny that I'm proud of it'*. A garden, be it ever so small, should indeed evoke such sentiments in all who create one.

No matter the size of your courtyard it can be turned into such an oasis as I envisage, a place filled with greenery and colour, *a work pursued with love*. Begonias have a part to play in such a place, indeed they can be the main attraction if you so desire, but first things first, and first in my opinion is a suitable environment. Is your courtyard too hot in summer? If so, shade is required, and first option is a tree or trees, perhaps deciduous if the area is cold in winter to let in the welcome winter sunshine, or evergreen if your year round climate makes that the ideal. Whatever the location of your courtyard, a tree (or trees) is usually most desirable. Consult your nursery experts as to the best for your requirements. Living in Sydney