

Gardens often develop bit by bit over time, so that the structure of the garden (the trees and palms) is well established and the focal points have become devious. Bringing these elements together into a comfortable and cohesive garden often involves restraint in choosing plants to grow beneath this structure. We often select plants in a nursery based on their flowers or foliage as we see them in the pot. This is dangerous as many plants grow quite differently than we expect. It is better to spend time admiring gardens in the area, and look at the plants used and how they grow.

To create an easy maintenance landscape it is better to select fewer plant species, and amass plant areas. This is because individual plants of the same type compete well with each other; while a variety of plants lets some plants dominate by overshadowing and smothering the lower growing types. This often occurs where we run out of time to prune back the more vigorous plants and before we know it the garden looks messy and weeds begin to appear where plants have died out.

Tying the garden together is best done with groundcovers and shrubs. Create a boarder of one type of groundcover, and then a contrasting boarder of another type. It is then important to repeat these boarders around the garden to create a flow that leads you through. This technique can be used with the shrubs as well. Choosing plants in the tropics that don't need clipping or pruning will help reduce garden maintenance. Mondo Grass (*Ophiopogon japonicas*), Spiderlily (*Hymenocallis littoralis*) and Moses-in-a-cradle (*Tradscantia spathacea*) are great groundcovers. Shrubs that are great for mass planting are Gardenias, Ixora and Medinilla.