

INTRODUCTION

We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.

THE EARTH CHARTER

This book explores the way horticulture can make a real contribution to a more sustainable future.

Despite a growing environmental awareness that started in the 1960s, global environmental problems continue to escalate both in number and severity of impact. The urgency for effective management of our limited resources increases daily.

Our task is to harmonise human activity with the cycles of nature, upon which we all depend, working from the individual through to the global levels of human organisation. To do this we need to clearly establish and quantify the web of connections between human activity, resource depletion and environmental degradation.

In an increasingly urbanised world, parks and gardens are, for most of us, the main point of contact with nature: they have a vital role in helping us understand the principles that will guide our transition to a sustainable society.

The challenge

The Earth Charter is like a global mission statement reminding us that we have a duty of care to manage the planet not only for ourselves but also for those that depend on

us, including other organisms and future human generations.

Modern urban life has distanced us, literally and metaphorically, from the natural world that is our life support system. But with our attention increasingly drawn to global environmental problems like climate change (with its floods, fires and droughts), poverty, land degradation and biological extinctions our society is beginning to realise that securing an environmentally sustainable future will involve a transformation as socially significant as the Agricultural and Industrial Revolutions. A major part of this cultural change will be a period of environmental accounting, to identify connections between the environment and human resource consumption. Only this way can we establish effective pathways to a sustainable future.

It would be much better if such a momentous social transition were founded not on necessity, but on a genuine and heartfelt connection with, and concern for, the environment. For almost all of our evolutionary history we lived in direct contact with nature as small hunter-gatherer tribes. Now, globally, more than 50% of the world's population are city dwellers and in Australia this is a staggering 88%. Most of us have lost