

Helping preserve a pristine coastline

■ Kim Courtenay

The fantastic opportunities to grow food through the northern dry season, and at the same time to nurture natural biodiversity and protect coastal ecosystems, will be highlighted at this weekend's North West Expo.

Presentations in the Living North West tent will outline how water harvesting, growing native plants and sustainable gardening practices can all play a role in preserving the pristine environment of Roebuck Bay.

Meanwhile, the effervescent presenter of the ABC's Gardening Australia, Costa Georgiadis, will apply his passion for organic gardening, recycling and all things natural and healthy to the soils and climate of the Kimberley. To top it off, the Broome Shire will again be giving away thousands of Kimberley native plants in their ongoing promotion of low-water gardens and growing plants that are tough and perfectly suited to local conditions.

Broome's Roebuck Bay is a wetland of international importance, it is National Heritage-listed and a registered Ramsar site. To help preserve its unique ecosystems the Roebuck Bay Working Group (RBWG) has instigated the Gardening the Roebuck Bay Friendly Way project.

At the expo they are enlisting the Society of Kimberley Indigenous Plants and Animals (SKIPAS) to promote the use of native plants and encourage garden designs that minimise pollutants and nutrients from entering our coastal waters.

During their regular meetings and propagation classes over recent years, SKIPAS has attracted an enthusiastic membership and propagated and planted a myriad of native plants. Last year they were awarded a WA Community Conservation Grant to travel into remote areas of the Kimberley, to collect seed and plant material from threatened species and use them to establish a "living seed bank" in Broome.

A clear message in their presentations with the RBWG at the expo will be that everyone can play a part in helping to preserve the beautiful natural environment and coastline of Broome, which is such a big part of the attraction of living here.

Phil Docherty, the founder and a driving force behind SKIPAS, will describe the fundamentals of setting up low-water native gardens and outline landscaping approaches that encourage rainwater to soak in rather than run off.

The timing of Costa's visit to Broome could not be better, with many home vegie gardeners currently setting up their patches for the prime growing season ahead.

Through his TV appearances



Carmel Leahy of SKIPAS with a tray of Jigal trees which will be given away at this weekend's North West Expo. Pictures: Kim Courtenay



The use of native plants will be highlighted

and travels Costa has done wonders in popularising the benefits of home-grown vegies, recycling and composting and demonstrating how easily anyone can get involved, especially children.

His amicable nature and philosophy on promoting



A jabiru strides across the seagrass beds of Roebuck Bay.

gardening as simple and fun has made him a big hit in schools around the country, and helped them set up gardens and environmental projects.

The Shire's massive plant giveaway will again be a wonderful opportunity for people who want to enjoy the benefits of



This turtle was stranded on the mudflats during a big tide.

growing native plants in their gardens.

Local native species such as Jigal trees are cyclone-resistant, require minimal water and are great for attracting birds.

■ Kim Courtenay is a horticulture lecturer at Kimberley Training Institute.