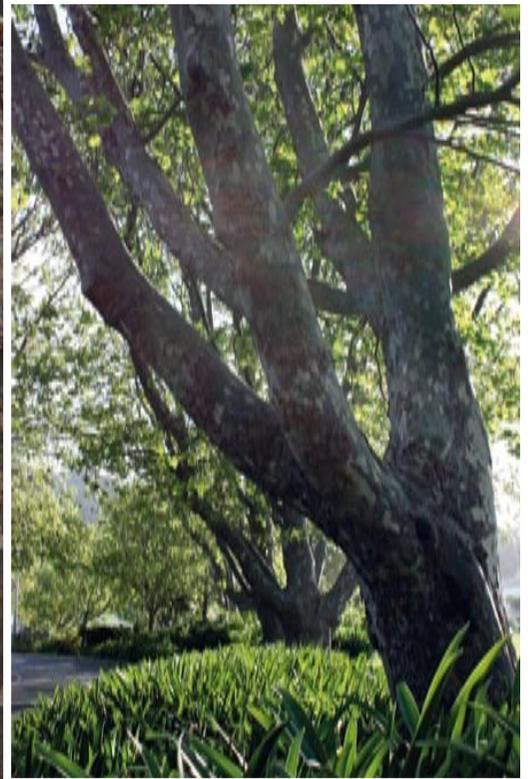


# OUTER LIMITS



**Franchesca Watson on how to keep roadside verges looking good by using striking fuss-free plants**

handsome plant with thorns that keep people and neighbourhood dogs off it. It is relatively slow growing, mine took nearly three years to look perfect, but this is actually an advantage as it only needs trimming once a year.

*Hedera helix* 'Montgomery' (large-leafed green ivy) is also a great ground cover – smart, elegant and easy. Its water requirements are moderate, mine gets watered every five days and trimmed

**IN THE YEARS** since roadside verges have become our responsibility if we want them to look like anything, I have become somewhat of an expert. They're rather important, being the first impression of your home, not to mention affecting the whole streetscape and the visual tone of your neighbourhood. Scruffy and tired doesn't really do it for anyone. We are generally lucky that many of our roads in South Africa have magnificent street trees, often indigenous, although I personally don't think that this should be the first criterion – rather the trees should be selected for their ability to withstand pollution, constant root disturbance as the services are dug up yet again and the ability to be pruned (generally badly) to allow for overhead lines.

So what to do with the ground under the trees? This can be shady because of the trees and most of us won't want to use too much water in keeping it looking good. I have found *Carissa* 'Green Carpet' to be a marvellous solution – it's indigenous, grows in the shade or sun, doesn't need a lot of water once established and is a

*Sunny verges can look great planted with the many succulent ground covers available and won't need much watering*

twice a year. It does need to be stopped from climbing up trees and walls though.

Another great local alternative for shade or sun is *Dietes*, either *grandiflora* or *bicolor*; it's also water wise – it will look good and flower if watered once a week. You do, however, need a lot of plants to cover the ground – between seven to 12 per square metre – otherwise you will wait and be weeding forever.

Sunny verges can look great planted with the many succulent ground covers available and won't need much watering. They will need a bit of tidying up a couple of times per year though.

Many of us are moving away from lawns as these need regular watering and mowing to keep them looking great. However, if you want to park on your verge you will need lawn or the fast-becoming ubiquitous gravel. I detest this gravel that is overtaking our gardens and verges in the name of low-maintenance. It looks so dry

and unnatural, and is hard to keep free of weeds without harmful pesticides. I have found stone paving (largish natural stones laid flat into the ground with ground covers in between) a much better-looking alternative. A tufted grass between it is nicer than a runner grass that grows all over the stones, but anything is better than gravel in my book.

Ways to keep cars off your verges vary from strategically placed rocks (natural looking please, not regimented in a line or painted white) to bollards. Keep in mind though that people often need to walk on the verges, especially if you live on a thoroughfare through your suburb. Provision of a pathway at the edge will make everyone happy and your plants won't get trampled. Another practical consideration is using a drip-irrigation system if you have suitable soil conditions or pop-up sprinklers that won't get vandalised so easily.

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