

# Durie's out on how to make gardeners love the natives

A celebrity gardener prepares us for Chelsea, writes **Denise Gadd**.

JAMIE Durie can rest assured that when he's setting up his Australian garden at Chelsea in May it won't be as hot as yesterday when we met in the Treasury Gardens.

Traditionally Britain turns on cold and wet weather for the four-day event, the second oldest flower show in the world, starting in London on May 21.

Durie, a celebrity gardener and regular on Oprah Winfrey's show who divides his time between Sydney and New York, was chosen to design this year's exhibit for the Chelsea Flower Show by perennial contender for the coveted best-in-show garden, Monbulk nurseryman Wes Fleming.

For Durie this is a unique opportunity to portray native plants in a quintessential Australian garden setting.

"Wes wants to save the planet one backyard at a time, so the best way is to encourage people to fall in love with native plants again," he says.

The design features a wetland, large curved deck, fire pit,



layered stonework from the Kimberleys, textured walls and a 20-metre painting by Gabriella Possum Nungurrayi as the backdrop.

Native plantings include the spectacular Queensland bottle tree (*Brachychiton rupestris*), sheoaks (*Casuarina*), grass trees (*Xanthorrhoea*), a new white species of kangaroo paw — their first public appearance — and native grasses.

Many of the trees were hard to source in Europe.

"We had to find ones that were in pristine condition as you can't drop a leaf at Chelsea. We found the bottle trees and the sheoaks in a nursery in Rome and the big triple-headed

grass trees in Barcelona," he says. Many countries in Europe are experiencing drought so they are looking to Australia for "horticultural solutions" — hence the availability of many native species in cities like Rome.

While traditional English gardens are de rigeur at Chelsea, there is a move towards more contemporary, edgy designs reflective of their country of origin.

Durie believes exhibitors should fly the flag horticulturally and make no apology for it.

"I'm proud of my country and want to do something Australian.

"We were brought into the show because we specialise in Australian plants. It would be bloody boring if everyone was trying to be English. I think the judges want to be wowed and they see Australia as being extremely exotic so play to it."



Garden designer Jamie Durie in Melbourne yesterday. He will be setting up the Australian garden at Chelsea in May.