



EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
with Tim Goom

Turn down the volume!

Your garden should be your haven from the hustle and bustle of life, a place of tranquillity where it is easy to relax. Your property can be easily protected from many tangible things with fencing and landscaping- but a major detractor from the enjoyment of your outdoor spaces can be noise.

It may be that your garden is adjacent to a busy street with lots of traffic noise, or that the sounds of your neighbours outdoor entertaining can overwhelm your own outdoor space: pets, machinery, nearby construction- there are many forms of noise pollution which can encroach on the enjoyment of your outdoors. Often the source of the noise cannot be removed (unless it's a loud all night party with thudding bass blaring from a stereo- which may justify a call to noise control!) but there are materials and landscaping techniques which will help minimise unwelcome noise. Generally, these involve absorption, deflection or masking of the noise.

- **Materials:** Certain materials will be much better at minimising unwanted volume. Solid block walls will deflect noise far better than a timber fence and will work to protect noise prone areas. Some materials like Acoustifence can be retrofitted to an existing timber fence and are manufactured to not only create a barrier to the noise but also absorb rather than reflect the noise back in to the environment. Don't forget, the higher the wall- the better the barrier to the noise. Creating a natural solid barrier by landscaping mounds of soil works well to reduce noise- grassed knolls can provide aesthetic interest and contrast to an otherwise flat section.
- **Techniques:** Hard surfaces such as concrete and asphalt will bounce noise around the property. Soft ground and planting won't amplify ground sound to the same extent. Doubling up by using both a concrete block wall and then plantings (such as a hedge or leafy shrubs) in a soil bed alongside the wall will work together to both deflect and absorb sounds.



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The trees which work best to absorb sound will have many branches and thick fleshy leaves. Lawns are a wonderful weapon in the arsenal against unwanted noise- the larger rough surface will work to help dissipate decibels.

- **Camouflage:** A combination of solid walls and savvy planting will help minimise noise- but another approach is to introduce new and pleasant sounds in to the space. The soothing sound of running water in a fountain or water feature will permeate the space with a sense of peacefulness. Water features which have water flowing down a pot in to a covered area at the base tend to be the most maintenance efficient. Install an outdoor sound system to introduce the sounds you actually want to hear! Such speakers may play more than just your favourite tunes, there is a current trend towards discreetly placing speakers in gardens that play nature sounds. This will have the added advantage of attracting wildlife. We shouldn't forget the soothing sounds your plants can add to your outdoor space in a breeze- the rustle of large leafy trees, flax and bamboo can all help mask problem noise.

Decreasing outside noise pollution helps preserve your garden as a sanctuary. Whether you are landscaping a new area from scratch or just refreshing an existing space, be sure to advise your landscape architect of any noise problems you have. It may only be a periodic problem which might not be apparent at any site visit so make sure you mention it. Our team at Goom Landscapes will be happy to discuss how best to protect your property from unwanted noise.

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