

GARDEN NOTES

TRANQUILLITY

Hello from Margot Burrows and David Kotzman and welcome to our garden on Dja Dja Wurrung land. The name *Tranquillity* was given to the property by the original owners around 2010. David and I bought the property in 2018 and the name remains on the letterbox!

You will be experiencing this garden well into autumn, after the flush of summer flowering and vegetable production is over, and the garden prepares for winter. Our garden can be described as an approachable, unimposing, non-professional home garden, evolving and adapting as we learn about our gardening conditions and as we ourselves change. Margot is the principal gardener and David covers lawns, truffled oaks and infrastructure.

The original owners had a garden only around the house (the top half acre of the 1.5 acre property) but by the time we bought the property, the garden had lost some shape and form. Many of the initial plants (eg leucadendron, flax) we kept and enhanced. Other elements we changed. We replaced areas of scoria gravel with buffalo lawn, we removed several large clumps of flax to open up vistas and we relocated a group of *Xanthorrhoea* to the front garden after we installed the bush pole front fence.

The lower garden (one acre below the house and lawn areas) was completely empty of plants - just paddock grass - but it has lovely contours! This was our blank canvas and we started considering a design (aided by a short consultation with Michael McCoy) during 2020 (see photos on laminated garden map). Attracted to the property by the sustainable design of the strawbale and mudbrick house, we have continued this approach and have 'electrified everything' including the ride-on mower!

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Front Garden

On the left and right of the driveway, the planting is mainly Australian, South African and New Zealand species. The 'fence' is an irregular line of upright bush poles with native plants and rocks scattered between the poles. It gives a sense of boundary but remains open to 'see in' and allows kangaroos to pass through. The left side features several Tasmanian species pepperberry (*Tasmannia lanceolata*), *Telopea truncata*, *Nothofagus cunninghamii*). The right side (accessed from across the north lawn, see below) has NZ flax, several 'Baby Blue' (*Eucalyptus pulverulena*), snow gums, waratah, ornamental grasses (*Miscanthus sinensis*) and a group of grasstrees (*Xanthorrhoea johnsonii*).

North Side Garden

Follow the path in front of the house, turning at the small bed of Japanese wind flowers and hellebores and note the small perennial bed on the right. Framed by two dark red leafed maples (*Acer platanoides* 'crimson sentry') and two newly planted yellow leafed Chain of Hearts trees (*Cercis canadensis*), this is a spring and summer flowering collection including red dahlia, sedum, salvias, agastache, heuchera and geum. *Miscanthus* ornamental grasses feature in April.

From the deck, there is a north lawn ('Kakadu' buffalo) which replaced the original scoria gravel in 2022, and a feature Claret Ash tree (*Fraxinus oxycarpa*). Across the north lawn is a break in undulating hedge (*Escallonia ivityi*) allowing one-way access along the photinia

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hedge, past three Himalayan evergreen dogwoods and red maples to the right-side front garden, described above.

From the deck, you can also walk west towards the sculpture/fountain created by Peter Blizzard in 2004 and relocated from our previous home. At the fountain, on the right, you will see a newly planted 'Japanese' bed, so-called because of the number of Japanese maples (*Acer palmatum*) and peonies (spring flowering) which are indicated by the circular steel frames. Established ornamental pear trees offer autumn colour.

On the left, there is an ornamental grapevine covered alfresco area, with a variety of citrus plants in pots, including lemons, lime, yuzu and bergamot. In front of this area is a small lawn and a medium oak (unknown), clipped balls of pittosporum and apple blossom climber (*Clematis armandii*) covering a fence, underplanted with a low hebe hedge. Below the oak and clipped balls, is a small plantation of truffled Holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*): we are hoping for our first crop this winter! To access the lower garden, return to the deck, cross the north lawn to the stone steps leading into the large perennial borders which follow the natural contours of the land into the lower garden.

Lower Garden

This section of the property was started from scratch in 2020. As you enter the perennial borders from the stone steps, you see on the left several green Beech trees (*Fagus sylvatica*) under planted with clipped hebe balls to eventually form a 'wavey sea' effect. On the right, there is a stand of the upright grass Karl Foerster (*Calamagrostis*) and the more arching *Stipa gigantea* grasses marking the beginning of the perennial border walk. The border is planted with a variety of perennials including miscanthus and panicum grasses, sedum "Autumn Joy" and "Matrona", dark leaf red dahilas, achillea "Cloth of Gold", Phyllis Fancy salvia, eryngium "Tetra Petra", agastache "Nadine", echinops, veronicastrum, and, as low plants, golden oregano, lamb's ears, nepeta, society garlic, iris and euphorbia rigida.

Three quarters of the way down, Phyllis Fancy salvias and red dahilas create a bird-attracting circle set with a large water bowl. Three smoke bushes (*Cotinus coggygria* 'Grace') offer waving arms of dark red leaves turning orange in autumn.

On the right behind the perennial border there is a copse of "Jack White" birch trees, selected for their very white trunks, which will contrast with red-stemmed dogwood bushes at the rear of the border. The perennial borders end in an open space where a ginkgo tree has recently been relocated. A young hedge of escallonia "Red Knight" will eventually screen the utility area of the garden.

In the lower garden, you will notice mainly native plants on the left and exotics on the right. This design is intended to complement the plantings in the neighbouring gardens and to 'dissolve' the fence lines, adding to a sense of 'shared landscape'. The original plan was to create mass with dense plantings of blackwood trees (*Acacia melanoxylon*) but this species has not done well in open terrain with severe Trentham frosts (-6C is not uncommon!). Consequently, new species are being tried including several snowgums (eg Wolgon, Lacrimans), swamp gums (*E ovata*), she oaks and ironbarks (*E sideroxylon rosea*). Poa grasses (*labillardierei* and *sieberiana*) are interspersed.

On the western boundary, deodar cedars (*Cedrus deodara*) are planted to provide wind protection and a dark green screen to highlight the red autumn colour of three red maples (*Acer rubrum*) and the future planting of three yellow robinias. Take a moment to sit on the bench and look east towards the house to admire the garden plan in development.



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Walk across the “Great Void” (lowest natural contour of the site) towards the south boundary – you may notice a bank of Tableland Blue Bushes (*Acacia covenyi*) enveloping a farm gate!

Kitchen Garden

A terraced garden with fruit trees (morello cherry, pears, apricot, apple and plum) along with rhubarb, horseradish, artichokes and blueberries leads to the corro bed vegetable garden around the tank and greenhouse. Some berries are grown in the season including raspberries, blackberries, and currants. The vegetable growing season in this garden is mainly in spring and summer so most vegetable beds will rest over winter, including the asparagus bed.

Exit via the glass door between the house and the garage. Thank you for visiting!

“There is always something else to do. A gardener should have nine times as many lives as a cat.” Vita Sackville-West

Tranquillity is located on the lands of the Dja Dja Wurrung people. Open Gardens Victoria wish to acknowledge the Traditional custodians and we pay respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

These notes can be downloaded from the Open Gardens Victoria website:

www.opengardensvictoria.org.au