

THE GARDENS OF VILLA RAEDWARD

Welcome to the two acre (0.8 Ha) gardens of Villa Raedward. Like all gardens it is a “work in progress” however we hope you enjoy exploring it as it is today.

The gardens were first established by John and Sandra Annison in 2003 following the building of the Villa and Gatehouse. The Villa is a ‘poor man’s version’ of Villa Capra, a huge cardinal’s palace in Vicenza, Italy, built by the architect Andrea Palladio in the mid 1500’s. When we bought it, the site was a horse paddock with just the gums and a border of cypress at the rear, since removed when they became diseased. It now has over 200 trees plus the hedges and many shrubs. The initial intent was to follow a Mediterranean theme to suit both the climate and the style of the Villa however other influences over the years have modified this, one of the main being our travels to various parts of the world and our love of gardens there. This has resulted in a number of ‘souvenirs’ becoming part of the garden. The gardens may be divided into 11 areas as detailed below.

The Driveway For the mathematically inclined, the concrete inserts in the cobbled driveway lead down in a Fibonacci sequence (1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21,34). The lower area is bordered by lavender and cistus bushes leading to the cypress hedges, agapanthus, stone pines, rhododendrons, camellias, with a trimmed box hedge surrounding the Westringia at the rear of the Gatehouse. The Gatehouse is a 4 ½ Star accredited, self-contained accommodation for visitors to the Yarra valley.

The Main Lawn and Pear Walk in front of the Gatehouse offer views over the garden to the Yarra Valley. The pears are ‘Bradford’ and are marked by marble statues of the Four Seasons (Spring with the garland of roses, Summer the wheat sheaf and sickle, Autumn the grapes and Winter with a shawl around her). The Fountain in the centre of the lawn forms an axis with a duplicate, but dry urn at the end of the Pear Walk. The pears remind us of the Tuileries in Paris and the gardens of the palace in Vienna, albeit on a much smaller scale, while the fountain and statues remind us of our travels in Italy. The pears are pruned each winter using a purpose-built ‘Siege machine’ modelled on a huge version seen in Vienna. The Oleanders alongside the Walk are ‘souvenirs’ of a visit to Sicily. The path from the Gatehouse out to the fountain is slightly tapered making it appear longer than it actually is and the view from the fountain back to the Gatehouse shorter.

The Dam Walk is a narrow, dead-end path affording a view of the Villa and over the Valley. Sadly the dam has been taken over by blow-in cumbungi or bullrushes which are virtually impossible to remove, however, they attract a number of birds and provide habitat for frogs. There are also waterlilies and lotus in the water and the dam wall is planted in a variety of shrubs including dietes, abelia, salvia and hellebores. Along the northern boundary the original row of pencil pines has succumbed to the fungal infection affecting cypress in the region and have been replaced with Fastigiated oaks. The hedge between the dam and main lawn is comprised of book pines (Thuja).

GARDEN NOTES

The Conifer Garden at the end of the Pear walk comprises a variety of conifers including a swamp cypress (*Taxodium distichum*), black pine (*Pinus thunbergia*), junipers and others as well as a drift of white bearded iris while the urn holds a prostrate rosemary.

The Lavender and Magnolia bed is marked by the stairs leading up from the main lawn which are flanked by two Irish Yew. The magnolias are 'Little Gem'. The retaining wall is softened by the addition of prostrate rosemary. The hedge at the back of this bed is Lilly Pilly (*Syzygium smithii*). The path from the fountain up through the lavender/magnolia bed is one of the major axes of the garden running through the house to the centre of the gazebo at the rear. It leads to the forecourt in front of the villa and a London Plane tree surrounded by a clipped box hedge with white roses inside.

The Oak Corner is behind the Pear walk, past the statue of Spring. The many oaks in the garden include English, Pin, Holm, Cork, Turkish, and Fastigiated varieties. The tea trees on the embankment are Kunzeas native to Wilson's Promontory.

The Shade Garden. Coming up from the Oak Corner and behind the 'Japanese Garden' and bordering the Small Lawn, the Shade Garden gets its name from the canopy provided through the sunny months by the mulberry, elm (*Ulmus parvifolia* van Houtte), Judas Tree (*Cercis siliquastrum*), smoke bush (*Cotinus coggygria*), and nearby oak. The floor of this garden is planted with oriental lilies, gold dust plants, hydrangeas, abutilon, hellebores and a holly as well as variety of other bulbs and shade-loving plants. The table opposite was built using two extra plinths given that came with the Four Seasons statues and some surplus marble tiles. The succulent bowl is never watered by us.

The "Japanese Garden" is not a Japanese garden, it is however, inspired by our garden tour of Japan with Botanica and built to take advantage of a relatively private and enclosed part of the grounds. The bamboo is a non-invasive variety. The viburnum (*Viburnum plicatum?*), weeping cherry, camellias, magnolia, silver birches and Japanese maple bring flowers and shade for the peony roses and azaleas growing underneath. The bench, fence and entrance designs were inspired by things we saw during our tour, however, the over-planting, spacing, steel path edging and other aspects might make a polite Japanese gardener exclaim, "This is very nice – we have nothing like this in Japan!"

The Pergola-Colonnade-Gazebo perennial garden was primarily inspired by a Botanica tour to many gardens in the UK, especially the Laburnum walk in a garden in Scotland. We are trying to grow the laburnum up and over the pergola so that in spring the yellow racemes will make a bright curtain over the path. The perennial garden is a work in progress as we find out what looks and grows best where and move plants accordingly during winter. The fountain in the middle of the walk is simply a \$15 boulder from a local supplier with a hole through it sitting on top of a grated, standard drainage pit with no outlets. A small pump in the pit powered by the solar panel on top of the pergola operates when the sun shines. Some geotextile with pebbles over the top stops debris contaminating the water in the pit. The gazebo incorporates a wood-fired oven and barbeque and is a lovely place to enjoy the garden during warmer months.

GARDEN NOTES

The Pergola-Colonnade-Gazebo axis runs at a 45° angle to the gazebo-fountain axis coming up from the main lawn. It also connects to another axis running from the centre of the pergola, through the house to the statue of the “Spirit of the Orchard”. These three axes combined form a figure ‘4’ when seen from above.

The Vegetable Garden is an octagon of 20 raised beds with a dovecote in the centre. Tank water is used as much as possible to water the vegetables. Summer harvesting includes raspberries, strawberries, eggplants, zucchini, tomatoes, silverbeet, corn, asparagus, rhubarb, beans, pumpkin, cucumber, celery, melons, and passionfruit as well as various herbs. Winter is almost as abundant. The shed sports Boston Ivy (*Parthenocissus tricuspidata*) reminiscent of time spent in the Cotswolds.

The Orchard has a variety of fruit trees including apples, pear, plum, quince, cherries, apricot, nectarine, peach, pomegranate, persimmon, medlar, nashi pear, feijoa, figs, almonds and hazelnuts to complement the lemon and cumquat trees dotted about the property. We harvest and eat or preserve a lot of the fruits starting with Mulberrys in November and finishing with Quince and olives in May. We make our own mulberry, apricot, raspberry, strawberry, cherry, quince and cumquat jams, dry apples, plums, apricots and pears and bottle plums, nectarines, cherries, apples and peaches. We also harvest hazelnuts and almonds and preserve olives. The trees behind the bin enclosure and next to the cymbidium orchard house are carob and, while edible, we don’t do anything with the pods. The statue, the “Spirit of the Orchard” is a souvenir of Vietnam imported from Da Nang along with the two urns on either side of the stairs up from the main lawn. At the back of the orchard are a row of coppiced olive trees being grown to form a fruiting hedge to screen the compost bins. With a large area of lawn plus a large vegetable garden and many deciduous trees, the compost bins are always well-filled. The bird-netting system ensures fruit are protected when ripening but the lawn is unobstructed the rest of the year when the poles are removed. A bay laurel hedge screens the orchard and shelters the collection of rugosa roses in the corner.

The garden ensures we are well attuned to the seasons with seasonal tasks such as raking the autumn leaves, pruning in winter, planting the summer vegetables in spring and mowing lawns, watering and harvesting fruits over the summer before tapering-off again in the autumn. We also love the other seasonal life in the garden with the Kookaburras in spring and autumn, the black parrots and sulphur-crested cockatoos who raid the garden and stone pines in summer, the frogs throughout the garden that reach their peak chorus in December and the blue-tongue lizards who keep our garden free of snails.

Please enjoy wandering through the garden.

These notes can be downloaded from the Open Gardens Victoria website:
www.opengardensvictoria.org.au