

Coliban Springs

We are quintessential tree-changers. We created a garden from scratch in 2006 having bought 209 acres of rural land in beautiful central Victoria in 2004. The rolling hills, magnificent red gums and fantastic local wineries attracted us to this place after retirement. Although the warm summers were part of the attraction, they were also a huge challenge in the last years of the millennial drought.

The property has four paddocks stretching between Coliban Park Road to the west and the Coliban River which forms its eastern boundary. We built a house in the second paddock, enlarged the existing dam and erected a fence around approximately five acres of land.

There were two main criteria that drove the planting - drought tolerance and bird attraction. Phil Stray from *'Crafted Landscapes'* and Kate Herd helped us design the garden immediately surrounding the house. From the start we aspired to a naturalistic rather than a formal garden. We favoured soft flowing "wafty" plantings that curve and sway, rather than the slinky hard-edged lines of a traditional garden. We wanted the garden to feel as though it was a more concentrated version of the surrounding landscape, so that the eye would see no formal finishing line to the planted area. Paths were made to curve, in keeping with this theme, and the gravel was chosen to match the natural granitic sand. It was hoped that the visitor would feel as if they were walking along dry creek beds to find various viewing and sitting spots around the garden.

Now in its sixteenth year, having survived intense drought, flooding, rabbits, hares, kangaroos and locusts, the garden has matured and is full of birdlife. We are intensely aware of the effect global warming is going to have on the garden and have planted succulents for the first time. Originally we concentrated on native plantings, which still form the backbone of the garden, but we have added other non-native drought tolerant plants to add colour and texture.

Since we last opened the garden in 2017, there have been a number of major changes. Following the demise of a large red gum above the house, we planted an area shaded by ornamental vines which friends laughingly dubbed "The Parthenon". It is a great relaxation and entertainment area which features a fishpond at its centre. In another previously mown area, infested by cape weed, and guarded by two ancient "sentinel" red gums, we have terraced the hill and planted white roses towards a pergola, soon to be covered with white wisteria. It would make a lovely wedding setting.

The garden has a number of quiet spots for sitting and contemplating. A particular favourite is "Beryl's Deck" which overlooks the lake with glimpses of the campaign tent. This tent looks back at the house across the water and is a great shady spot for a picnic. We have tried to make little interesting discoveries for visitors around all the corners. These include sculptures, the hammock strewn rose arbour, a raised bed kitchen garden, a BMX track through salt bushes, a large chicken enclosure and a children's area with cubby house and swings.



GARDEN NOTES

Behind the casuarina copse is a xanthorrhoea plantation, the grass trees having been grown from the seeds of the first seeding spike from a purchased plant.

Most of the plants in the garden have been grown from seeds and cuttings from plants that have survived the various onslaughts - a cost effective way of filling five acres of garden!

We hope you enjoy our garden as much as we do.

Kathy Hall & Rod Gibson

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