

Acacia Ridge

We moved into this property in December 1999. The acre had a large stand of self-sown gum trees and the undergrowth was a few tufts of wispy grass in dry depleted soil that billowed as dust when mowed. The rest of the property had old, dry and dusty natives well past their prime. When the pick hit the ground, it rebounded from the rock-hard shale and clay and 1 cm of topsoil!

Over a period of seven years I tackled a section at a time, adding bluestone retaining walls and steps, paths, garden beds, and two ponds. The soil was broken up with picks and where possible we used a bobcat with a ripping hook. We then incorporated compost and mulched annually with truckloads of mulch and compost.

In November 2007, my domestic status changed with my daughters and me leaving the family home for three and half years. In 2011 we returned to a garden that hadn't been touched in all that time. It was unrecognisable, derelict, choked with blackberries, sticky weed, thistles and deep-rooted weeds up to a metre high. Many plants had been lost or were beyond saving.

11 years on, working one section at a time, the garden is now a joy.

Being on a sloping block, it is made up of several microclimates, which lends to having fun with diverse planting and the creation of many garden rooms.

A west facing bank sizzled with the hot afternoon sun, and I attempted to theme this garden into a Gravel Mediterranean style dry garden. It is planted with varieties of Phlomis, Sonchus, Euphorbias, Echiiums, Sedum. It also features Acacia Acinacea with various bulbs, including species tulips popping up through the gravel. The area has become more shaded over time with a Blueberry Ash and Brachychiton Bella Pink now a substantial size. In a shaded section, I have a variety of Prostranthera.

The south side of the house is planted as a woodland, featuring maples, camellias, heuchera, Stachyrus Praecox, lilac, berberis, Daphnes, Philadelphus, Viburnums, Osmanthus, Cercis Canadensis, Brachychiton, Plectranthus and Epimedium groundcovers, Eleocarpus grandis, Mahonia and Wintersweet.

Then in a full sun area, we have my fun perennial gardens, one in pastels and one in hot colours which peak in summer. Buddleja Alternifolia, Iris, daffodils and allium give interest in the spring, which then give way to softer summer colour, featuring Achillea, Bergamot, Eupatorium, Agastache, Verbena, Phlox, Catmint, Echinacea, salvias, grasses etc. etc.

To the rear of this garden, I have a large bank of Plectranthus, which provides a stunning backdrop in early autumn.



GARDEN NOTES

Looking down the property from the house, the right side of the property has far better soil and conditions compared to the left. I was brought up on a beautiful property in the Strzelecki Ranges, and this has had quite an influence on me.

In this section of the garden, I wanted to create the ambience of entering into lush bushland, and have established a fern gully and forest effect incorporating plants such as *Toona Ciliata*, *Prostranthera*, *Correas*, *Indigofera*, Blueberry ashes, lemon and aniseed Myrtles, Firewheel trees, *Grevillea shiressi*, Acacias, *Cordylines*, Hazels, *Pomaderris*, Cherry Ballart, Native *Frangipani*, *Livistonia Australis*, Mahonia, the Giant Honeysuckle, and tree ferns.

I have several *Brachychitons*, and Blueberry Ash (*Elaeocarpus Reticulatus*) and they do so well. However, I am not a purist and I plant exotic and native plants together, providing it works.

In the centre, is a natural style pond, and just 3 years ago, Phillip Johnston added a new stream and billabong which overflows into the existing pond, then into a bog. This is fed through reticulated water being captured from the downpipes and piped into the stream.

The planting in this area is native, with quite a few WA grafted plants supplied by Phillip Vaughan and they are surviving well. The several varieties of *Eremophila* thrive.

Moving to the left side of the property which gets the hot midday and afternoon sun, there is a gravel Australian wildflower "meadow." This area features *Xanthorrhoea australis*. A Macadamia tree, which dates to the original owners, thrives.

Originally there was only one little pocket of good soil, which is protected from the afternoon sun, and I can grow plants such as fuchsia, dogwood, camellias, and *Corylus Crazy Filbert*. However, with years of mulching and using soil breakers, I can now plunge a spade into the soil in most garden beds.

Quite a lot of the garden, especially the bushland area, is left to fend for itself and only receives light pruning and annual mulching and fertilising. I work full time, so don't have the time to coddle plants and they need to be reasonably self-sufficient.

I like a garden to "be in" – to contemplate and listen to and watch the birds. It is very much a garden for wildlife.

I hope you enjoy the garden as much as we do.

Coral

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www.opengardensvictoria.org.au