

## GARDEN NOTES

### THE HAVEN

Hello and welcome to my garden! We moved to this property, which we rent from my parents, two years ago. Prior to that my parents lived here for six years. Luckily for me, my mother had already spent several years pulling out numerous overgrown shrubs, improving the soil, and planting the first fruit trees. Before moving here, we lived in an apartment with a small container garden comprised of a 3m<sup>2</sup> balcony and an external staircase with a pot on every step! We needed a truck to relocate my plant collection.

The very first thing I bought for this garden (or the house, for that matter) was a compost bin – compost is key! The next priority was to begin converting turf areas to garden beds. I did this through sheet mulching - smothering the turf with cardboard, and then gradually building up the soil profile through adding layers of organic material such as garden clippings, compost, and straw. I learned the hard way to be patient when trying to kill couch grass - too much wet organic matter will break the cardboard down too quickly and allow the grass to come through. Gardening is a lesson in patience!

I have a background in horticulture, with a particular interest in growing unusual edible plants, and plants that attract wildlife. I enjoy experimenting and pushing the boundaries of what can be grown in Melbourne. Among the standard fruit trees, you'll find less common species such as white sapote, jaboticaba, ice cream bean, macadamia, and pink fruited lime berry, though they are all quite young and not yet fruiting. I grow a variety of edible crops including multiple native edible species.

Although this is largely a productive garden, my priority is not to grow as much as food as possible. If it was, I'd just plant out the whole garden with potatoes! My garden is a space to experiment and enjoy being in, and I don't mind that this means it's a little less productive.

The front garden is a mixed bag and I'm personally not too fond of some of the plant choices, but I work with what's there and have enjoyed continuing my mother's work of adding bird attracting natives and cottage plants. I've also tucked a few edible plants in here including kiwiberry, passionfruit, and native orgenano (*Prostanthera rotundifolia*). Last winter a tomato self-seeded out here and produced ripe fruit during winter!

The rear (main) garden contains a variety of growing conditions and microclimates. It is partially shaded by some beautiful eucalypts which are loved by the many local bird species.

Entering through the side gate, to the left is a fernery/semi-shaded garden in its infancy, which connects to the pond area. The bromeliads next to the pond are an unexpected animal ally, housing southern brown tree frogs, skinks, and spiders. The verandah near the gate has been enclosed with cafe blinds thanks to my handy partner, and I use this space to raise seedlings and protect frost sensitive plants.

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The garden behind the pond is a bit of a lucky dip, with everything from fruiting trees and shrubs (including several guava varieties) to succulents and various natives including bulbine lily or native leek (*Bulbine bulbosa*), which has edible corms. The undercover area includes other native edibles such as river mint, lemon myrtle, cinnamon myrtle, and native ginger. A meyer lemon is also thriving here in almost full shade.

The main vegetable growing area is quite small, with a few raised beds and lots of pots. You won't find anything planted in rows here! I've set up a basic irrigation system which can be easily adjusted as I move my pots around.

The upper level of the garden is home to our two lovely chickens, and the experimental 'food forest' area. Many of the fruit trees were here when we arrived, and I constructed the garden beds around them using sheet mulching. Among the fruit trees I've planted various perennial edibles such as taro, pineapple sage, red veined sorrel, asparagus, and rhubarb. The gaps between these are filled with annual crops as well as flowers that attract pollinators and beneficial insects. I enjoy using this area to experiment with different species and to learn which plants grow well together. I often throw seeds around and just see what happens!

The area behind the pool is an attempt at creating a tropical feeling garden in very non-tropical conditions. These plants compete with the nearby eucalypts and other established trees for root space and soil nutrients, and also have to contend with fallen eucalypt leaves and salt/chlorine splash from the pool. Edible plants in this area include abyssinian banana (*Ensete ventricosum*), fruit salad plant (*Monstera deliciosa*), warrigal greens (*Tetragonia tetragonioides*), plus a tangelo, a blood orange, and a macadamia tree.

I have two hydroponic systems (from the company Mr Stacky), which produce a huge amount of food in a small area. I highly recommend these - they're almost foolproof, and a lot of fun.

We love spending time in the garden, not only gardening but watching the local animals - in particular the huge range of birds that visit. I share my gardening journey on Instagram ([@plant.nerd.melbourne](https://www.instagram.com/plant.nerd.melbourne)), where I love connecting with other gardeners, particularly those in similar climates.

***The Haven is located on the lands of the Wurundjeri people. Open Gardens Victoria wishes to acknowledge the Traditional custodians of this land 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](http://www.opengardensvictoria.org.au)

