

## THE MAY GARDEN – Mount Macedon Self Drive Tour

Most of the garden was planted in Winter 2016 after we finished building a new house for ourselves. The garden has a productive element (vegetables, fruit trees and vines) and an ornamental garden. The productive part requires supplementary irrigation, but by choice the ornamental element is designed to be rain-fed, with irrigation only during initial establishment, and only where needed. There is no irrigation system installed in it. This was part of my desire that the garden be designed and maintained as much as possible according to sustainability principles. The notes below relate to the ornamental area only.

The soil is mostly red-brown basaltic clay loam. It is reasonably well drained, but is shallow over weathered basalt, meaning that it can be quite dry in late summer. At the western end it grades into greyish, poorly-drained clay. The recent wet spring damaged some plants in that area but the majority of the garden was unaffected. In terms of soil preparation, there was no major soil treatment used before planting. I had some stockpiles of topsoil from the house site and these were spread over the new garden bed areas giving a slightly deeper topsoil than would have naturally been available. The main garden bed area had been protected from compaction during the building project and I had a contractor with a tracked excavator move the topsoil into place, which caused less soil damage than would have been done using a standard skid-steer loader. No organic matter was added to the beds beyond the mulch that was applied after planting.

Two designers contributed to the initially planted areas of the garden. Lisa Stafford (Lisa Stafford Garden Design) drew up a master plan for the garden, setting out the shape and location of the beds and recommending the two pergolas that allowed me to keep one row of old grapevines from the small vineyard that had occupied the site before we built the house. Melanie Husada (Poppy and the Bee) did the planting layout for the main garden bed, using a plant list that I had provided, and adding some extra thoughts of her own. The plant list developed from my experience of gardening in Kyneton from the early 1980s. Early on I had planted a lot of cool climate, high rainfall trees and shrubs, but these mostly turned out to be a complete waste of effort and I gradually realized that using plants that could tolerate our relatively dry summers was vital. At the same time, I had become interested in perennials and grasses (like a lot of other people) and grew and killed many of these as I gradually worked out what would work and what wouldn't. Any of you who know David Glenn's Lambley Nursery and garden will recognize the origin of many of the plants in my collection.

The plants I've used are not exclusively Mediterranean. Mine is what I would call a hybrid garden. It does contain truly Mediterranean species (eg lavender, *Celtica (Stipa) gigantea*, *Arbutus x andrachnoides*, various *Phlomis*), but also has plants from similar climates in other parts of the world (California (eg *Salvia* Celestial Blue, *Ceanothus*), southern Africa (eg *Kniphofia*), southern Australia (eg *Poa* Suggan Buggan, wallaby grasses), as well as plants from more temperate climates that have enough tolerance of water deficit to have earned a place in the garden (eg *Hyotelephium*, *Calamagrostis* Karl Foerster, *Miscanthus* cvs).

## GARDEN NOTES

Some of these latter choices may not prove useful in the longer term as predicted dryer summers become more common. The plant list is continually under review. Since I started gardening in the early 80s, the mean annual rainfall in Kyneton has reduced from 750 mm to about 640 mm, with noticeably dry years more common. Obviously though, this year's >1000 mm tests us out, and shows why we can't really claim a Mediterranean climate in this part of the world.

Over the winter of 2020 I planted up a new garden area to the east of the house. This has a different environment with substantial shade during part of the day and competition from two large trees. The suite of species here is slightly different but the no-irrigation approach still applies.

***The Macedon Ranges is located on the lands of the Dja Dja Wurrung, Taungurung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Peoples. Open Gardens Victoria wish to acknowledge the Traditional custodians and we pay respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging.***

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