

The Family Garden

This garden is a family garden; a garden to immerse ourselves in, to work in and to relax and experience deep peace and joy. Gardens are transient, nothing stays the same year to year and it is the experience of impermanence that reminds us to have gratitude for this moment and excitement for what the future may bring. But as much as we plan, things may not go according to plan, but other times, plans work out better than expected. It is the surprises like a self-seeded cone flower that often bring the most delight!

Before we began making this garden, I asked my partner Simon what is it in gardens that would fill your heart with joy? For him it was seeing bees on flowers. When he was a young boy at boarding school he was given a beehive and a veggie garden. Those were important for Simon. He has always been interested in self-sufficiency.

For me I think I was brought up by mother nature. Dust and insect filled light, indigenous plants, especially native grasses, make me happy. To feel one with an ecosystem which has evolved over a long time, undisturbed by humans, gives me a great sense of joy and peace.

It is like coming home. As a child, holidays were spent running barefoot in summer or in gumboots in winter at Merricks beach which was wild and untouched. The light was diffuse, the roads were made of soft dust, it was bushy, lawns were mown native grasses and there were echidnas, snakes, blue tongue lizards and koalas. We went tadpoling, mushrooming and blackberry picking, got sunburnt, dumped in the shore break on our surf mats and hung out in gangs as teenagers with our windsurfers, and star gazing at night.

Both our sons are now immersing themselves in horticulture and landscaping as well. Rupert has collected Oak trees and Araucarias and planted an arboretum in the paddock. Tucker has a collection of dwarf conifers which reflect his love of Japan.

This family garden is a combination of these feelings. I studied native grasslands at Burnley and see the garden as a grassland matrix. A grassland of taller grasses, native and exotic that move in the wind. Interspersed among the grasses emerges the cone flowers, Russian sage, hyssops and other gorgeous perennials which blur into each other, creating a dreamy whimsical fantasy grassland which envelopes and holds you in the space. Colour is most important as it merges with textures of foliage of more understated plants such as the grasses and shrubs. Clipped forms give a feeling of care and provide structure when the perennials are dormant. There are pockets of natives and pockets of natives merging and blending into each other. We know when we see pardalotes, fantails and scrub wren moving in that this is our measure of success.

If you are creating a garden for yourself, I would encourage you to look back at your memories. Where did you feel most whole? Where did you go when you were sad? What plants or plant communities give you a sense of joy? What are your favourite colours? Try to bring elements of that into your garden, it is important.



GARDEN NOTES

Research the indigenous plants of your area, learn about the soil and what sort of community would have occurred there. Imagine what it was like and those that lived here before us. Walk the neighbourhood and see what plants do well. Walk in any natural areas near your place. Do a PH test and improve your soil all the time. Growing plants feels good.

Jo Ferguson

The Family Garden is located on the lands of the Bunurong people. Open Gardens Victoria wish to acknowledge the Traditional custodians 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**