

GARDEN NOTES

MULLUM WATERS

About 30 years ago, we decided to build a house on a block where we could establish a bush garden. We were lucky to find a one-acre block in a sub-divided orchard adjoining the Mullum Mullum Creek in Melbourne's east, about 25km from the CBD. This was the start of a wonderful journey for us - creating a habitat garden along the creek.

The land was bare apart from an abundance of pasture grass weeds. The reserve along the creek to the north of our block was an almost impenetrable thicket of blackberry. We have never liked to use poisons, but our weeds were so extensive that it was necessary, especially in the case blackberry thicket. We then covered the ground in black plastic to smother any seedlings. Since then, we've rarely needed to poison weeds.

We built our house and started to establish the garden in 1988. Our philosophy was to give back to the local environment; extending the wildlife corridor along the creek. We were very lucky to find landscaper Doug Blythe who had a great passion for the indigenous plants of our area. He provided the garden design and selection of the local species, and he and his workers did the shaping and planting. Doug recommended putting a lake in the bottom section of our garden, near the boundary with the creek reserve. This has proved to be a wonderful attraction for water birds as well as a beautiful feature.

We generally used indigenous plants (Australian plants that occur naturally in our local area) particularly in areas further from our house. The early 1990s was a period of good rainfall and hence the plants, particularly the trees, established well. Everything had to be planted. The understorey has been more difficult. This is due to establishing near the trees, and also because the climate was drying. Luckily, many of the very small plants succumbed.

Tempted by the amazing variety and flowering splendour of Australian plants from further afield, we chose to plant some non-indigenous Australian plants close to the house – some in the ground and others in pots. We have a great passion for Australia's native plants and have been members of the Australian Plants Society (APS) since 1987. We have gained a considerable amount of knowledge, as well as much-valued friendships, through the wonderful people of the society.

We both have our favourite plants. Bill has a particular interest in acacias. We currently have over 70 different species in the garden – and there are always new ones to try. I (Sue) love correas and eremophilas in particular. Correas occur naturally in southern and eastern areas of Australia so most grow well for us. Eremophilas come from hot, dry inland areas. We've found some cope with Melbourne conditions but some are very difficult to grow.

We don't have a watering system. Originally, we had an enclosed fernery along the side of the house which had an automatic watering system, but we can't justify this use of water in such a dry environment. This 'fernery' has now been enclosed with cat-proof netting to provide a large cat run for our fur kids.



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Habitat gardening has become more popular recently – and we immediately recognised that is what we have been trying to do for so long! There is now a lot of information about the subject. AB Bishop's book *Habitat* is inspirational and has many practical tips. We have learnt that "mess is good" – we leave some areas covered in leaf litter and fallen logs. When a tree falls or dies, we often leave it in situ – these are often important habitat or bird-perching sites. We have been rewarded by noticing more and more species of animals living in or moving through our garden. We have had an echidna, a kangaroo (that jumped the fence from the creek reserve), probably over 60 bird species, reptiles, frogs and a staggering array of insects.

In 2017 we had the brilliant designer, Phillip Johnson, convert our swimming pool. He created a wonderful landscape with a pond by the house that spills into a creek running down through the garden. This then becomes two waterfalls emptying into a superb billabong.

The system is fed by water diverted from downpipes.

We find our garden both relaxing and incredibly rewarding. We feel that we have achieved our aim of providing a habitat for local fauna. Gardens are living, evolving systems. There is always something new to observe and we continue to learn. Our garden provides us with intellectual satisfaction as well as physical and spiritual benefits.

The mud map shows the layout of the garden including paths (note that the bridge will be closed if birds are nesting on the lake). There are also plant and book sales at the bottom of the driveway.

Thanks for coming and we hope that you enjoy your visit to Mullum Waters.

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