

## GARDEN NOTES

### RED GUMS

Welcome to Red Gums! We hope you enjoy our garden as much as we do.

When we first moved here in June 1998, we had no intentions of creating a garden such as you see now. Our gardening experience was limited to a suburban garden and our knowledge of native plants was minimal. However, we both have been interested in gardens and we love being in the Australian bush, so it was little wonder that we were gradually seduced by the old red gums in our 'front yard' to create an Australian native garden. We also believed that land should be utilised, not lie fallow, and as we were not interested in grazing animals or growing grapes and olives, we decided to plant trees and shrubs to create an environment where native animals and birds could find refuge.

We read many books, visited many gardens, and found the garden philosophy that we were looking for in Gordon and Gwen Ford's 'The Natural Australian Garden'. This led us to meeting with Gwen, then with Sam Cox (who had been Gordon's protégé), and our discussions with them gave us a better idea of the landscaping which would be involved to make the garden fit with the scale of the property. It also helped us to decide to go with all native plants. There were two main reasons for this – firstly, exotic plants provided nothing for native birds, and secondly, the water factor. We did not intend watering 2.5 ha. of garden.

Sam Cox started the works in the beginning of November 2000 and continued through to early February 2001. This included:

- Extending the front patio to more than double its original size, landscaping with rocks, mulching and planting, and finishing with Castlemaine slate;
- Stripping earth from the areas in front of the house, around the ponds and the east side of the driveway, mulching and planting;
- Excavating an area north-west of the house and building an underground wine cellar with another patio area covered with Castlemaine slate, as well as landscaping with rocks, mulching and planting; and
- Removing nearly all the trees and shrubs immediately behind the house, excavating, landscaping with rocks, building the vegetable garden beds, mulching and planting.

Further plantings in the paddocks behind the house and the creation of an orchard and extra vegetable gardens by Winsome and myself, plus some more rock landscaping by Sam, has resulted in what you see today.

What we have tried to create is an informal garden of exclusively Australian plants, with open areas to complement the planted areas and rock work – balancing mass and void. The basic concept is to have an upper storey of trees, with a middle storey of smaller trees and medium size shrubs, and a lower storey of ground covers and small shrubs. There are informal tracks, which wind through the trees so that one can get the feeling of the 'bush'.



With the plantings, we have tried to harmonise the textures, colours and structures of the plants so that the overall impression is one of being pleasing to the eye. There are areas of interest with concentrations of casuarinas, acacias, eucalypts and grasses in the rear gardens. The area around the beautiful old Moreton Bay Fig has been left clear to highlight the tree itself.

At the front, under the red gums and along the driveway, we have used predominantly plants that are indigenous to the Bellarine Peninsula to encourage the smaller birds that can help to keep the larger trees healthy by eating unwelcome grubs and insects.

The ponds are located in an old creek bed, which has been dry for many years, but during very heavy rains the creek runs and the area under the red gums becomes flooded. The bird life has increased dramatically in the last few years with over 70 species of native bird identified – non-migratory and migratory – and the frogs have returned. We hear four different types of frog calls, including the Pobblebonk and the marsh frog.

Overall, we wanted a garden that was peaceful, a pleasure to spend time in, soothed the soul, one which did not demand constant attention and most importantly, a garden which would complement those beautiful old red gums. We think we are on the right track. After 20 years this garden is now well established, but it is still a work in progress with replacement of storm damaged and some older plants and creation of some new areas. The character of the garden changes throughout the year and also from year to year, and in another few years the extra height of the trees and growth of the newer bushes will give it a different dimension again.

To permanently protect the future of the remnant red gums, we applied for and were granted a covenant by Trust for Nature in 2019. The covenant covers the 0.9 ha in the front of the property which contains all the red gums.

Maintenance of the garden is not difficult. Mowing of the lawns is mostly along clear lines without many trees to negotiate (except under the old red gums). The mulch keeps the moisture in the ground and keeps down the weeds (some spot spraying and hand weeding is done through the year). Watering is at a minimum. We have no in-built watering systems except in the orchard (which uses water from our 58,000-litre tank) and all the natives have to exist on natural rainfall. We have done some hand watering of new plants during difficult periods, but once they were established they have been left to fend for themselves.

The fact that this garden has been established during 10 years of almost drought conditions in the early 2000's is a testimony to the hardiness of native plants.

Please take your time and enjoy the garden. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

***Winsome and Ron Vernieux***

Please note:

A list of plants is also available, detailing the species that have been established throughout this garden.