

**OPEN
GARDENS
VICTORIA**

ANNUAL REPORT

2023

September 2023

OVERVIEW

Our year at a glance



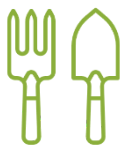
45

Garden openings



6

Online Events



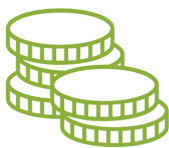
12

In person Events



Giving allocated 2023

- *University of Melbourne, Burnley Woody Meadow Project*
- *Cultivating Community, NFP*
- *Advance College, Rosebud*
- *Farmer Incubator, Bundoora*
- *Continuing support for community affected by Black Summer fires.*
- *Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show 2023 - Student Design Competition*



\$143,646.00

Income



7,438,853

OGV website hits



\$122,101.00

Operating costs








54,000 +

Social followers

1. Officers




The following persons were the officers of OGV as at 30 June 2023 or resigned during the year 1 July 2022 – 30 June 2023:

		Position	Date of Appointment
	Elizabeth Fazio	Chair, until 2/6/23.	Incorporation. Reappointed 16/8/17. Reappointed 19/8/20. Member of Governance Subcommittee. Resigned 21/6/23.
	David Epstein	Deputy Chair, until 22/6/23, appointed to fill a casual vacancy.	Appointed 18/5/22. Member of Governance Subcommittee. Resigned as Deputy Chair and appointed Chair on 22/6/23
	Karen White	Head of Giving Subcommittee. Appointed to fill a casual vacancy Deputy Chair 22/6/23.	Casual vacancy appointed 18/5/22. Member of Giving Subcommittee. Appointed 21/8/22 Member of Governance Subcommittee.
	Vivienne White	Secretary	Appointed 21/8/19. Member of Governance Subcommittee. Reappointed 14/9/22.
	Shane Sutton	Treasurer, appointed to fill casual vacancy 14/12/23.	Appointed Treasurer 22/6/23. Member of Governance Subcommittee.

		Position	Date of Appointment
	Peter Milsom	Treasurer, resigned 12/6/23	Casual vacancy 21/10/2015. Re-appointed 17 August 2017. Appointed Treasurer 15/8/18. Reappointed 18/8/21. Member of Governance Subcommittee.

2. Committee members

The following persons were Committee members as at 30 June 2023 or resigned during the year 1 July 2022 – 30 June 2023

		Date of Appointment
	Helen Diprose	Incorporation. Reappointed 15/8/18, 18/8/21 Member of Events Subcommittee.
	Lucy Gubbins	Appointed 21/8/19. Re-appointed 14/9/22. Member of Giving Subcommittee.
	Graham Read	Casual vacancy appointed 20/11/19. Head of Volunteers. Appointed 19/8/20. Resigned 21/6/23.

Date of Appointment



Robert McMillan

Casual vacancy appointed 16/10/19. Appointed 19/8/20.
Member of Governance Subcommittee.



Louise Brown

Casual vacancy appointed 16/6/21. Appointed 21/8/21.
Chair of Selection Subcommittee.



Annabel Reid

Casual vacancy appointed 16/6/21. Appointed 21/8/21.
Head of Events Subcommittee.



Cath Ewart

Casual vacancy appointed 15/8/22. Appointed Head of
Marketing and Communications Subcommittee 14/9/22.



Megan Pascoe

Casual vacancy appointed 16/10/19. Re-appointed 21/8/21.
Head of Giving. Resigned 14/9/22.

3. ANOTHER YEAR OF CHANGE

The past twelve months have been a time of change for Open Gardens Victoria as the community emerged fully from the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns and our gardening opening program normalised.

*Our digital activities continued to grow and we went through significant Committee of Management changes, most notably with the retirement of our long-standing and founding Chair, **Liz Fazio**.*

Liz's shoes are hard ones to fill. We owe her a great debt and many thanks for the work she has put in over some eight years bringing Open Gardens Victoria to life from the remnants of a sub-branch of the former Open Gardens Australia organisation.

Beginning with an objective of promoting the *"Love of Gardens"*, and a theme of *"Inspiring Passion"*, Liz and her co-conspirators worked hard in the early months of 2015, and have continued to do so over the years. Liz stayed the course as Chair until the middle of this year and two other founding members remain on the Committee of Management.

Steered by Liz, OGV was Incorporated on 17 April 2015. The pace at which she worked would have left many breathless. Starting with \$15,000.00 seed money (provided by the former OGA), Liz and her colleagues completed the set up needed in a ten day period. And what they established was no cardboard replica of the preceding Open Gardens Australia.

Open Gardens Victoria did things differently and tried new approaches from the beginning. Liz established broader engagement, including working with "3000 Acres" on opening small inner-city gardens and with the Global Gardens of Peace, and not being afraid to embrace the internet. OGV now has a great social media following with **40,000+** Instagram followers, **12,000+** Facebook supports and nearly **10,000** unique visitors to our website each month.

Addressing our OGV Strategy Day earlier this year, Liz's focus remained on the future, on ambitions Open Gardens Victoria could set for itself and on the importance of organisational succession. As she prepared to handover the Chair's role, Liz emphasised her belief that is important to have new faces, new energy, new ideas so that OGV continues to move forward well. And she set us some challenges, saying there is a need to educate people on the differences in gardens, on more recent gardening trends, such as those set by Piet Oudulf, on differences in presentation and to open eyes to new ideas.

Other Organisational Changes

Liz was right to remind us to keep an eye on organisational succession, hers was not the only departure the OGV Committee of Management this year as others moved on and had to balance other things in their lives. I am not the only one taking on additional responsibilities or a new role on the Committee of Management.

In late 2022, Megan Pascoe moved on from the Head of Giving role and was replaced by Karen White, who has now also become Deputy Chair. At a similar time, Cath Ewart joined the Committee of Management as Head of Marketing and Communications Subcommittee. Later in the year the inimitable Peter Milsom began to shift out of state and transitioned out of running OGV's IT and

Finances, being replaced by Annabelle Fisher assisting us with IT matters and Shane Sutton joining the Committee of Management as our new Treasurer. Shane has already rolled his sleeves up and successfully managed OGV's shift to a new Xero accounting platform.

The changes continued in 2023, when Graham Read stepped back as Head of Volunteers to accommodate other responsibilities he manages outside of OGV. Fortunately, though, we did not lose his services entirely as he continues to help us on our work with the Melbourne international Flower and Garden Show as well as offer occasional assistance as we transition to a new Head of Volunteers.

On behalf of the Committee of Management, I thank, again, Liz, Peter, Megan and Graham for all the time, effort and thought they put into developing OGV to what it is today. We know we have not lost any of them entirely, but we do miss them.

Subcommittees and Governance

Subcommittees are the life and blood of Open Gardens Victoria because we are largely dependent on volunteer contributions and they are where we gather our specialist volunteers. The Committee of Management changes mentioned earlier have flowed on to the Subcommittees but we see more work to do on the succession front to build our skill base.

Over the next year we plan to look at recruiting someone with legal expertise to the Committee of Management and a person who can bring us horticultural industry expertise. In addition, we may move to reintegrate responsibility for governance matters back with the Deputy Chair role when our current Head of Governance, Robert McMillan, ends his term shortly after the AGM.

4. PROGRAMS & EVENTS

Traditional openings

OGV's selectors have been very active. They identified and assessed a wide range of gardens opened in various areas, of various sizes. All in all, 45 gardens were opened. In addition OGV continued to explore several formats of expert and celebrity partnerships.

New selectors have been recruited, but more are needed, and training sessions undertaken. Training and the position descriptions are being reworked, and the Selection Committee has been developing a Strategic Plan.

Highlights have included:

- Working with Jo Ferguson
- Partnerships with Global Gardens of Peace
- The three Footscray productive gardens
- Circulating garden stories
- Opening East Gippsland gardens, notwithstanding weather challenges.
- The Park on Park opening

Online programs and In-person events

12 in-person and 6 online events were held over the year. There have been a few partnerships, however this area tends to be a bit haphazard at times and occurs mainly through contacts. Open Garden Gardens Victoria generally has a core of 6 volunteers who organise the events and online programs.

On occasion events are repeated, frequently to meet demand, but the Events Subcommittee always aims to come up with different ideas, to offer audiences a wide choice.

Friends of OGV

Friends receive two-for-the-price-of-one entry to two open gardens and a discount card applicable to their first purchase at some of Melbourne and regional Victoria's most prominent garden centres, both suburban and regional. This helps us continue to open gardens and give back to the gardening community through our Giving Program.

Student Pass

This year we launched our new OGV Student Pass for tertiary students. Students pay \$25 for the year and can visit as many OGV garden openings as they want.

5. COMMUNICATION

In 2022/23, the Marketing Communications team continued to provide marketing and communication support for garden openings, events and key programs including the MIFGS Student design competition and Giving program. Throughout the year, we also worked on improving governance and processes that support these key functions and enhancing our channels to ensure communication is clear, timely and accessible.

Highlights of the year were:

- providing marketing and communications support for 45 garden openings and 12 events, creating approximately **2,150 posts** and stories for the year
- establishment of PR/Media role to build awareness for Garden Openings
- supporting the Giving Program and MIFGS initiative
- inclusion of Acknowledgement of Country on website footer and traditional custodians acknowledged in the description of each garden.

OGV WEBSITE HITS: 7,438,853

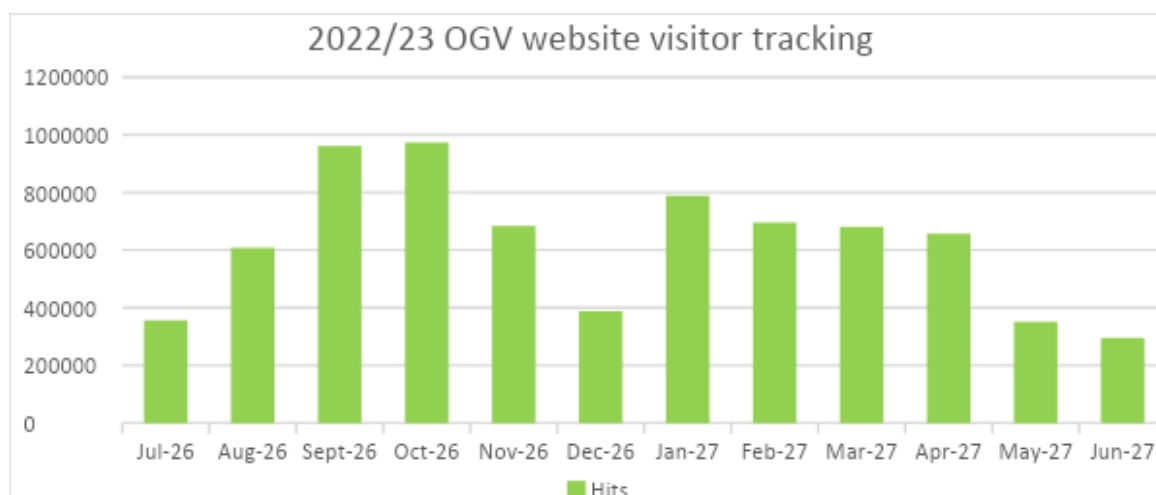
INSTAGRAM FOLLOWERS: 41,791

Website

Our website is an important channel for promoting upcoming garden openings, news about initiatives such as the Giving program, past openings and opportunities for engagement with OGV. Garden Opening information was enhanced this year with an acknowledgment of the traditional custodians of the land for each opening and risk icons relevant to each opening. We also included a pop-up encouraging first-time visitors to the site to sign up for our newsletter.

Where possible, content for garden openings and events was published on the website six weeks prior to the event.

We averaged just under **10,000** unique visitors to our website each month (**117,636** unique visitors for the year) and **584,531** page visits for the year. Average hits per month is **620,000** and we recorded **7.4 million hits** for the year.



Social Media

Our social media channels are a vital platform for communicating with current and potential stakeholders. Our posts and stories promoted garden openings and events, competitions, our giving program and MIFGS initiative, garden tips and photos from followers.

The quality of photos provided for garden openings and by followers for seasonal competitions enabled us to develop appealing, engaging content.

We continued to build our followers and reach through tagging industry profiles and sharing content. This was most effective during MIFGS when cross-tagging and sharing content saw some posts reach up to **10,000** profiles not currently following the OGV account.

Our Instagram followers grew to **41.8 thousand** accounts, **up 8.3 per cent** on last year. Our top post for the year reached around **17,000 accounts** and we averaged **34** posts and **89** stories each month.

Our Facebook following grew to **12.7 thousand** accounts, **up 11.7 per cent** on last year. Each post reached around **9,000** accounts and we posted an average of **38** times each month.

Newsletter

Our newsletter was sent out to around **5,500 subscribers**, each month for the full year. The newsletter included details of upcoming garden openings and events, news stories such as our giving program and MIFGS competition, tips, kids corner information and plant of the month.

Our average open rate for the year was **57.9 per cent**. We also sent our subscribers targeted emails focusing on specific garden openings, promoting our giving program and offerings such as the Friends card and encouraging participation in our competitions.

PR and media coverage

This was the first full year that we have had a PR and Media specialist on board to support our openings, events and initiatives. This has resulted in **84 pieces** of media coverage across print, TV, radio and other digital channels.

Considerable time has been put into developing media lists covering mainstream, industry, local and regional media and groups such as gardening clubs and community pages on Facebook. These contacts have been used effectively to distribute messages about openings and events and will continue to provide value into the future.

Media coverage during the year included local media such as the *Ballarat Times*, *Mountain Monthly* and the *Lilydale Star Mail*, industry media such as the *Horticultural Journal of Australia*, traditional media including *The Age* and *Weekly Times*, *ABC Radio*, *Gardening Australia* and other media including *The Design Files*.

A highlight for the year was having the *Gardening Australia* team film a story on our MIFGS student competition winner at the OGV stand at MIFGS.

Program support

We supported our Giving program and the MIFGS Student Competition with marketing and communication content on our website, social media platforms, newsletter and printed materials. Both programs were supported with an integrated communication plan, covering all channels, as well as targeted media and direct email to sector contacts.

Significant media and PR support was provided for the MIFGS initiative, resulting in very positive coverage, including *Gardening Australia* (TV and print), *ABC radio*, *The Age*, *Horticulture Journal* and various social media accounts. The Giving program was supported with a media release to announce the recipients and stories will be developed as each project gets underway.

Other communication activities

We continued to work closely with other sub-committees to improve processes and streamline the activities that support garden openings. We reduced the quantity of printed materials provided for each garden opening and introduced QR codes for garden notes, to be more sustainable and cost efficient.

We offered a short survey to subscribers to gather feedback about our offering and to gauge ideas for future openings. This information will help inform planning for the seasons ahead.

We developed a new student pass in readiness for the 2023/24 season and bolstered the number of nurseries supporting the Friends program.

6. VOLUNTEERS AND FRIENDS

As mentioned earlier, our dedicated Head of Volunteers, Graham Read, has stepped back from the role, although he continues to assist us generously in a number of other ways.

We are in the process of recruiting a replacement for Graham but have also chosen to more closely integrated our garden selection and opening management processes with how Open Gardens Victoria organises volunteer contributions.

Thanks are extended to Graham for the time and effort that he has contributed to this role, and also for his having continued in the role beyond that initially agreed, something which has been very much appreciated.

7. OUR GIVING PROGRAM

Our Giving Subcommittee allocates identified surplus OGV funds to community groups to promote and expand the benefits of garden related opportunities across the state, especially to groups that may otherwise have access to such chances.

With the resignation of Megan Pascoe as Head of Giving shortly into the new financial year, the role was taken up by Karen White, a newly appointed member of OGV board and this subcommittee. The committee for this year comprised Lucy Gubbins, Rob McMillan and Karen.

Applications for grants opened at the beginning of September and closed mid-October 2022. The grant attracted significant interest and many applications were received from a broad range of organisations and bodies. The committee applied a comprehensive set of evaluation criteria to each application ultimately recommending several applications to the full board.

Successful applications for 2022/23 were:

University of Melbourne, Burnley Woody Meadow Project

This grant of \$8000.00 is to fund the installation of a Woody Meadow on the Burnley campus and will be co-funded by the University. Woody Meadows are diverse, layered plantings of shrubs, managed by coppicing to create low maintenance plantings with high visual appeal. Designed in a naturalistic style using Australian plants, Woody Meadows have a wilder aesthetic, greater biodiversity and a more varied and longer display than traditional plantings.

Cultivating Community, NFP

Cultivating community have been funded of \$9500.00 to provide four series of five one-hour workshops to designated groups, introducing participants to cultural food growing skills, composting and green waste management, seasonal food sowing, harvest and supply chains. The target audiences include young people who are Deaf, under and unemployed people living within public and social housing, migrant and refugee groups and will be accessed through established links with other providers including the Vic College of the Deaf,

migrant and refugee support services and neighbourhood groups connected to the collaborative garden locations.

Advance College, Rosebud

At the new Rosebud campus of this college, the funds of \$7870.00 will support installation of a landscaped garden, a multi-sensory and indigenous garden and sensory walk with paths, seating and signage. Each of the build and plant elements will foster accessibility, health and purpose to provide maximum stimulation to the student population through all five senses. A focus on native species to encourage habitat for wildlife and support the character of the Mornington Peninsula and Bunurong land will be foundational.

Farmer Incubator, Bundoora

Farmer Incubator, Bundoora were granted \$4,750.00 to run a series of educational workshops at the market garden site, soon to be established at Bundoora.

These workshops will target a range of experience levels from horticultural enthusiasts to intermediate market gardeners, both growing and servicing the needs of the community of participants. A variety of topics will introduce participants to the steps and decision-making process required to establish a garden. Tickets to these workshops will be heavily subsidised to facilitate access to as many interested people as possible.

Other Giving

Continuing support for community affected by Black Summer fires.

Additionally, a grant of \$5500 was made to the Lakes Entrance Garden Club, with funds raised some years ago to support victims of the 2020 bushfires, to further support their assistance to many local people who lost property and gardens during the fires.

Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show 2023

The Giving Subcommittee also oversaw the development and selection process for a Student Design Competition to create a strong horticultural presence for OGV at the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show.

We were fortunate to receive a number of quality applications, and ultimately provided a grant of \$10,000 to Emma Shepherd-Simms a student of horticulture at the University of Melbourne.

Emma's design, 'A Place for Us' was constructed by an all-female team and exceeded all expectations, attracting broad acclaim and ultimately being awarded the MIFGS prize for the Best Display.

Sincere thanks to all those who participated in the subcommittee for 2022/23 over what was a very demanding and successful year.

9. Finance

The Financial Statements presented by the Treasurer show that, as at 30 June 2023, Open Gardens Victoria had an **operating surplus of \$21,145.00** and **net assets of \$110,764.00**. Full details of the finances are contained in the Financial Statements circulated with 2023 Annual General Meeting papers.

10. Looking Ahead

In the coming year ahead we will:

- Continue to recruit and train new Selectors where there are gaps in our geographical network
- Continue regional collaborations linking with regional open garden weekends where we can
- Where possible, explore new themes for opening gardens and holding related events in addition to our standard program of openings and events
- Continue to pursue partnerships and collaboration with other groups planning garden openings , encouraging discussion of horticultural issues, making grants and raising funds and the profile of our organisation
- Continue to improve the efficiency of our database and organisational records
- Thank our volunteers by providing more opportunities for social interaction
- Continue to develop the Friends of OGV program
- Continue to focus on succession planning to ensure a smooth transition as committee and subcommittee members retire.

David Epstein

David Epstein, FAICD - Chair

13/9/2023