



**OPEN
GARDENS
VICTORIA**

ANNUAL REPORT 2020



Open Gardens Victoria Incorporated

A0090703V

2020 Annual Report

This is the Fifth Annual Report of Open Gardens Victoria Incorporated ('OGV') and covers the period from 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020.

Open Gardens Victoria (OGV) is a volunteer run, not-for-profit organisation that opens private gardens to the public and organises gardening and horticultural themed events for the benefit of the Victorian public.

Our activities are funded by levying a small charge to attendees and participants and by 'Friends of OGV' members who pay a \$30 per annum subscription fee.

Officers

The following persons were the officers of OGV as at 30 June 2020 or resigned during the year 1 July 2019 – 30 June 2020:

| | | Position | Date of Appointment |
|---|-----------------|--------------|---|
|  | Elizabeth Fazio | Chair | Incorporation. Reappointed 16/8/17. Member of Executive and Governance Committee and Member of Marketing and Communications sub-committee. |
|  | Jason Chongue | Deputy Chair | Appointed 15/8/18. Appointed Deputy Chair 21/8/19. Member of Events sub-committee \. |
|  | Vivienne White | Secretary | Appointed 21/8/19. Member of Executive and Governance Committee. |
|  | Peter Milsom | Treasurer | Casual vacancy 21/10/2015. Re-appointed 17 August 2017. Appointed Treasurer 15/8/18. Member of Executive and Governance Committee. |

Committee members

The following persons were Committee members as at 30 June 2019 or resigned during the year 1 July 2018 – 30 June 2019:

| | | Date of Appointment |
|---|-----------------|---|
|  | Helen Diprose | Incorporation. Reappointed 15/8/18 Member of Events sub-committee. |
|  | Helena Buxton | Incorporation. Reappointed 17/8/16. Reappointed 21/8/19 Chair of Events sub-committee. |
|  | Lucy Gubbins | Appointed 21/8/19. |
|  | Graham Read | Casual vacancy appointed 20/11/19. Head of Volunteers. |
|  | Stephen Read | Appointed 16/8/17. Member of Events sub-committee. |
|  | Robert McMillan | Casual vacancy appointed 16/10/19 Member of Executive and Governance Committee. |
|  | Megan Pascoe | Casual vacancy appointed 16/10/19. Head of Giving. |

1. Strengthening OGV

2019/20 has seen a continued focus on actioning the Strategic Plan adopted by the Committee in September 2017. Unfortunately, like all other organisations around the world, our plans and our program have been severely impacted by Covid-19. We have been unable to hold public facing events since early March and are unable to predict when they can recommence. In the meanwhile, we are strengthening the structure and processes of the organisation.

Committee Expertise

An audit of Committee skills in 2019 recognised the need for new members to build expertise in the areas of Volunteering and Giving. During the year we were fortunate to recruit Graham Read as Head of Volunteering and Megan Pascoe as Head of Giving.

Graham has had many roles in senior management in Europe and the UK and is a member and former President Of Port Melbourne Rotary. Megan has a background in communications and event management. As Festival Producer of the annual Mornington Peninsula Film Festival and the Broken Hill Perfect Light Film Festival, Megan has substantial experience of sponsorship and philanthropic partnerships.

Rob McMillan also joined the Committee during the year. With company director experience, AICD training and as director of a policy and infrastructure advisory firm, Rob brings welcome skills in policy formulation and governance expertise.

The OPEN GARDENS VICTORIA INC ORGANISATIONAL CHART is attached to this Report as Appendix A.

OGV's sub-committees are now well-established. We are very fortunate to have a skilled band of committed volunteers who put much time and effort to increasing the organisation's public profile and delivering a program which is much appreciated by the general public. The ideas and work of the sub-committee continues to be the backbone of the organisation and the importance of the contribution of these members cannot be overstated. Like all voluntary organisations, each sub-committee and indeed the General Committee struggles to recruit new members. Succession planning is a challenge. Income from our activities has again proven sufficient to fund the services of an administrative assistant for approximately 10 hours per week, ensuring timely loading of garden opening details onto the website and keeping online information up to date.

We have continued to engage the services of a communications expert to assist with preparation of media releases and make contact with various publications who promote OGV openings and events. We have increased the amount of paid assistance to update databases and format and distribute newsletters. A considerable investment has been made to pay for assistance with social media activities which have become crucial during the Covid-19 period when delivery of face to face activities has not been possible. Paid assistance ensures that the workload of volunteers does not become unmanageable.

Refining Our Objectives

After 4 years of operations OGV has refined the purpose and objectives set at the time of our establishment. During the year the Committee restated these as:

‘Open Gardens Victoria aims to inspire more people to embrace gardens and gardening as an active ingredient in a good life and a greener community.

Our objectives are:

1. To be connected to big issues – the environment, food, community and wellness.
2. To be a respected voice within the gardening and horticultural community.
3. To appeal to and reach a broad audience, breaking down barriers to gardening.
4. To promote gardening as a valuable form of creative expression and an important part of our culture.’



Consistent with these objectives, OGV remains committed to broadening our reach. In 2019, OGV rolled out the Green City initiative to encourage young people and new gardeners to get into gardening, even if they live in small urban spaces. The program aims to highlight the community benefits of gardens and gardening so that we can 'green' our cities, build communities and create a better quality of life.

Our message is that although urban life means many people are occupying smaller spaces, that doesn't mean they can't garden. Indoor spaces, balconies, courtyards, nature strips, roofs and community plots are all areas with potential for growing plants and food.

2. Programs

Traditional Openings

Autumn 2019 saw one of the most successful seasons of our traditional openings to date. Regional and metropolitan gardens opened across the state from Tylden to the Mornington Peninsula and South Gippsland. Perhaps the highlight was the opening of Edna Walling's Bickleigh Vale for a single day in October. There was a festive atmosphere with over 2,000 garden lovers making the most of this rare opening.

It is difficult to present an accurate picture of development this financial year as there has been no activity since early March. At that time it looked as though OGV was on track for its most popular program since establishment in 2015. Well over 20,000 visitors had come through the gates and a full program of openings lay ahead. Due to Covid-19 all public openings and events, including the Melbourne International Flower and Garden show have been cancelled.

Green City Activity

In 2019 OGV partnered with *3000acres* to open a series of productive gardens in the inner city under a grant from the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation. The program reached not only those who attended in person but also over 20,000 visitors online through a virtual tour series. Another program of openings with *3000acres* was scheduled for autumn 2020 when productive gardens are

at their peak. Unfortunately, this period coincided with the first Covid-19 lockdown and the openings were cancelled. We are hopeful that we will be able to run them at the same time in 2021.

OGV continues to work with indoor plant expert Jason Chongue, who has been very successful not only in encouraging young people to add greenery to their homes, but in promoting the benefits of greening the work environment to many businesses.

While these activities are of universal appeal, there is no doubt they are connecting a new, younger audience with OGV.

Online Programs

Responding to the challenge of keeping in touch with our followers and bringing plants and gardens to them in a time of lockdowns, OGV has created a new suite of social media and website content.

Instagram Live Garden Tours

The highlight has been the introduction of a fortnightly virtual garden tour series called “A Walk in the Garden”. These **live videos** feature landscape designer and OGV Committee member Stephen Read, as he chats with garden owners for 30 minutes while they walk through their gardens. Viewers can pose questions via the Q&A feed. Each of the videos has been watched by close to 3000 viewers. This program has been one of the outstanding positives for OGV from Covid-19 times and will become a permanent part of the OGV program.

Other new initiatives include:

- Virtual tours of gardens, including gardens postponed from the autumn season;
- Tutorials on gardening techniques and what to do in the garden;
- The plant of the week providing information and photos of a plant at its peak;
- The monthly theme - this encourages people to send in photos for posting on social media and the web;
- A monthly competition, judged by a different, well respected expert in the particular horticultural topic. To date these have been nature strip gardens, creating an indoor oasis and small gardens. These have attracted media attention and many entries. Photos for the entries have been providing great content for social media and have spawned an article on the topic for the News tab on our website.

All of these initiatives have been set up as separate tiles on the ‘What’s On’ tab on the OGV website where open gardens were previously listed.

On average between 9 to 12 social media posts reflecting the new content have been posted on both Instagram and Facebook each week since April. Our followers have increased by 1,800 on Instagram from mid-May to mid-July and by 211 on Facebook for the same timeframe. The social media content is updated weekly to encourage cross platform visitation and allow users not active on social media access to the content.

Other Activity

Other OGV activities in 2019/20 included:

- a fascinating talk on the challenges of garden design by Lisa Ellis;
- a coach tour of the Surf Coast focussed on sustainable gardening and local habitat;
- workshops on composting, keeping chickens in the inner city and balcony gardening
- the annual Friends Christmas get together.

Given there has been no activity since early March 2020, we can look at the full 2019 calendar year instead to gain insight into the scale of OGV's programs. This paints a promising picture, with an encouraging balance of activity across the state.

| General Openings | Green City with 3000acres | Workshops | Coach Tour |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|------------|
| Rural 16 | Metropolitan and inner city 23 | Regional 2 | Regional 1 |
| Metropolitan 16 | | Inner City 2 | |
| Metropolitan Fringe 4 | | Metropolitan 2 | |

3. Developing Policy

Work continued during 2019/20 to roll out a comprehensive suite of policies to guide OGV's ongoing operations. For the immediate future, in accordance with government requirements, a Covid-19 safety plan has been put in place cover OGV's activities once members and volunteers re engage with each other and the public in person.

New Policies include:

- A comprehensive Fire Policy to provide procedures for assessing whether openings and events should go ahead at various levels of fire ratings, along with the consequent actions and communications required;
- A Volunteer Policy, currently being finalised. In the meanwhile, standard briefing material for volunteers has been developed, and volunteer procedures documented;
- A Giving Policy to support the refined OGV objectives. Giving will be divided equally between Education (e.g. Scholarships), Wellness (e.g. Sensory gardens), Innovation (e.g. Research of gardening techniques, new practices in gardening), Community (e.g. Community gardens) and Sustainability (e.g. Bushfires, climate change). A new online application process is being established, while proposals can also be initiated at Committee level. A Giving sub-committee will be established to streamline the process.

4. Communication

- **Website** www.opengardensvictoria.org.au

The website continues to be the primary means by which OGV communicates with its public and has become absolutely crucial with the social isolation enforced by Covid-19. The primary reason for visiting the site most years has been for information on when and where garden are opening and to

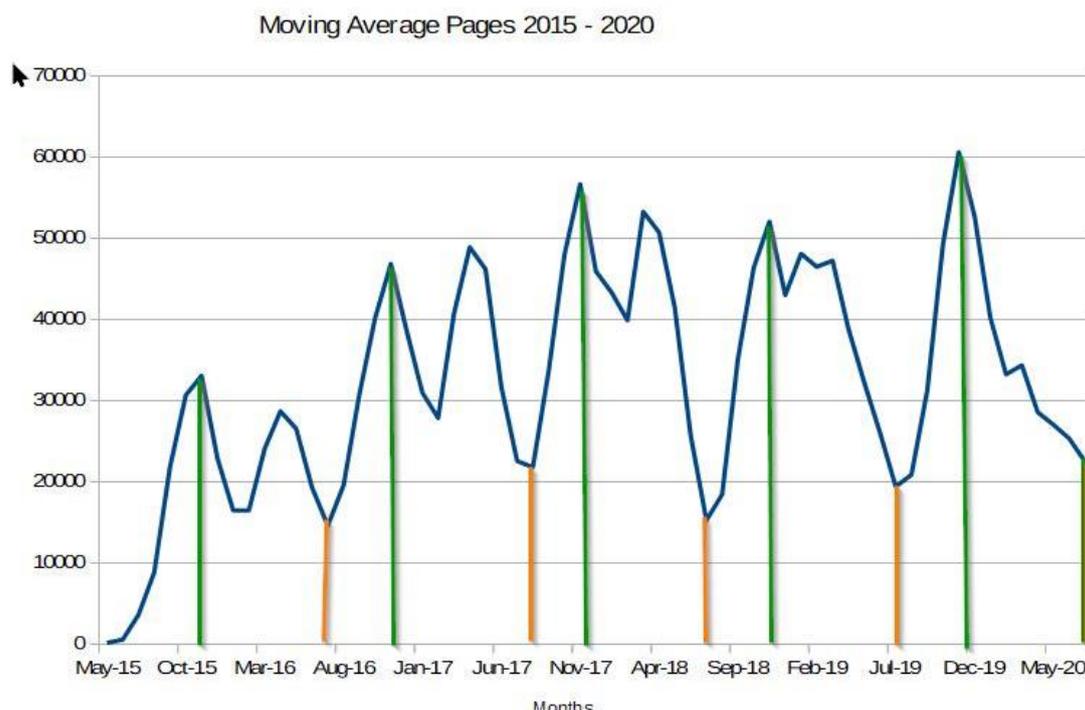
book for events.

Over recent years additions to the website such as developments of the News tab have provided extra reasons for visiting, to read the articles published each month. This site keeps visitors in touch with things that are happening in the garden world, particularly where these are related to our strategic themes. It also highlights openings of particular interest and allows us to give an insight into the impact of our giving program. Just some of the pictorial articles published are:

- Burnley students' travelling scholarship trips;
- Therapeutic gardens we have funded;
- Recipes for seasonal produce;
- Edna Walling's Bickleigh Vale;
- Coastal Gardens;
- The benefits of gardening in the time of Covid-19.

These articles not only to increase visitation to the OGV website but increase OGV's profile as a respected voice in the horticultural community.

With 5 years history of Web statistics to call on now, there is a definite pattern to the access of our web site by our garden followers. High seasons in December and Low seasons in July - August. The 'highs' of over 50,000 are approximately 2-3 times the 'lows', so the dramatic seasonality is confirmed. It's interesting to see the effect of the other season – 'Covid'. All open gardens have been postponed since March 2020 and we could expect the web audience to postpone as well. That has proven not to be the case. So far the audience for the website has not diminished. Increases in the audience are not expanding at the same rate as last year, or the year before, but they are still growing. We believe this likely to be due to the increased social media activity leading visitors to the website, especially from garden visits on Instagram. There may also be some "checking back" reflected in recent website stats as the Victorian restrictions were due to come to an end.



- **Instagram and Facebook**

OGV's remarkable social media presence continues to grow. The number of Instagram followers is now a substantial 25,300. Every garden opening, event and competition is promoted on Instagram and these are often picked up by our followers and reposted to others.

The increased social media focus during the Covid-19 period since April has given OGV an opportunity to gauge which material is favoured by our users. Page likes and engagement have fluctuated as we endeavour to explore what content works most effectively. For example, weekly page engagement fluctuated from as low as 27 followers engaging to as high as 608 depending on the post. Overall post engagement has fluctuated from as low as 16 followers engaging in a post to as high as 925 depending on the content.

The total number of people who have liked our Facebook page overall from April to end of June sits consistently around 7,000. Videos posted to Instagram over the 3-month period April to June have reached as many as 7,517 unique users.

Feedback online indicates that our followers greatly appreciate the efforts OGV is making to provide gardening content in new ways.

- **Newsletter**

The monthly newsletter is also achieving an increased presence each year. It is now sent to more than 4000 garden lovers each month. Again, feedback indicates readers appreciate the content and the contact.

- **Other Media**

While we continue to enjoy strong support from some areas of the media, neither ABC Radio Melbourne nor 3AW wish to publicise our regular openings, despite our experience that when they do, their listeners appreciate the information. Once a calendar of openings is possible again, we propose to publish short 5-10-minute virtual tours of upcoming gardens online. With the huge reach of our social media, we expect these will be a worthy substitute for the radio interviews.

Meanwhile, Megan Backhouse includes our gardens and events in her Plotlines column in the Age and our gardens are sometimes featured in The Australian's weekend supplement and The Planthunter online magazine. Material is also published by a variety of print and online magazines such as Australian House and Garden, Country Style, Mornington Peninsula Magazine, Surf Coast magazine and other regional publications.

Building Community

This operates at many levels.

The community is involved in many garden openings. Volunteers help out on the day by manning the gates and helping direct visitors. The CFA, local primary schools and the like often become involved, using the opening as an opportunity to earn money for their organisation by offering refreshments

or running a plant stall. Where the charity is to receive the gate takings its members often volunteer at the opening. Thus a garden opening may contribute to the social capital of the area as well as supporting a charity and offering the wider community a chance to meet with fellow enthusiasts.

OGV encourages garden lovers to support OGV and link into a network of fellow garden lovers by becoming a Friend. The continued practical assistance and support of the Friends of OGV has been much appreciated and valued. In 2019-20, 80 people took up membership.

Donations to Charity

Each year OGV applies part of its operating surplus to benefit charities and organisations which have a connection with horticultural activities. Significant donations this financial year are:

- \$7,500 to Alkira to develop a new therapeutic garden.
- A planned further \$10,000 to the University of Melbourne for bursaries to assist the studies of students enrolled in studies in Urban Horticulture at Burnley. These are being reframed as the previous grant was for travel, which is currently not feasible.
- \$5000 to support the continued publication of The Planthunter, encouraging people to include horticulture and gardens in their lives.
- \$1000 to Friends of Bishopscourt to help with running costs following loss of expected income when their opening with OGV was cancelled due to Covid 19.

We have also continued to donate funds throughout the year in conjunction with our openings and events. Thus all profits (over \$10,000) from the opening of Sunnymede and Minter Gully Drive will be donated to support bushfire recovery. We are currently working with the Diggers Club, the Nursery Growers Industry of Victoria and the East Gippsland shire council on a plan to provide horticultural support to Seafarm were donated to Cabrini hospital as a tribute to the late David Wilkinson, a previous Chair of fire ravaged communities, made donations to that organisation.

During the course of the year, many garden owners donated their share of the gate takings to charity.

Some of the charities to benefit via donations from OGV and garden owners this year are:

| | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Alkira | Melba Opera Trust |
| Anglesea CFA | Nepean Historical Society Museum |
| Asylum Seeker Resource Centre | Olinda CFA |
| Burwood Heights Primary School | Parkinsons Victoria |
| Cabrini Hospital | The Planthunter |
| Duneira Garden Trust | Port Phillip Eco Centre |
| Geelong Animal Welfare Society | Prostate Cancer Foundation Australia |
| Groomed to Go | Rotary Brighton |
| Guide Dogs Australia | Save -a -Dog |
| Karwarra Australian Plant Garden | Transit Soup Kitchen & Food Support |

During the course of the 2019/20 financial year more than \$80,000 will have been raised for charity as a result of OGV activities.

Finances

The Financial Statements presented by the Treasurer show that as at 30 June 2020 OGV had an operating surplus of \$45,837 before making donations of \$13,500, and \$32,337 after donations. Full details of the finances are contained in the Financial Statements.

Looking Ahead

In the coming year OGV will look to connect people with gardens and gardening in whatever way we can within the limitations imposed by Covid-19 restrictions. Whether this be through physical or virtual openings or through online gardening and horticultural content, OGV will continue to bring the Green City theme to life, emphasising the two-way contribution of gardens and gardening:

- Helping to reinforce the livability of our urban areas and adding to the quality of life of Victorians through a focus on the environment, sustainable gardening and fewer miles food production;
- Emphasising the well-documented health and wellness benefits of gardening especially during the current Covid-19 period.

We are in the process of recruiting new Selectors where there are gaps in our geographical network to enable us to open gardens across the State. We will look to collaborate with different communities to bring clusters of openings.

Once restrictions are lifted we expect to deliver a very full program of openings as we reschedule many gardens which were forced to postpone their opening. Pleasingly most of the garden owners impacted are keen to open whenever next possible. This will include a series of productive openings with *3000 acres*.

OGV recruits volunteers at Committee and sub-committee levels and to assist at openings and events throughout the year to ensure that as our program grows, so too does the capacity to deliver high quality openings and events. There will be a focus on succession planning in the coming year as several committee members who have been an integral part of the organisation since its foundation will near the end of their terms.

We will continue to seek partners who we can include in both our public facing activities and our giving program.



Elizabeth Fazio
Chair
17 August 2020

