

## BROOKDALE FARM

This garden was originally part of a 3.9 ha *Trust for Nature* property, the 'James Land', managed by the Burnley Campus as the *Emerald Environmental Horticulture Annexe*. For 17 years we were caretakers of the Annexe, undertaking fencing, weed control, nursery growing and revegetation works; before purchasing a small section in 2008 (0.9 hectares) when the trust sold the property as seven lots. We renamed the garden 'Brookdale Farm' to acknowledge the original name of the James land.

The garden is on a sloping and north-facing site and drops 60 metres in elevation from Charman Avenue to the fern gully. The design is based around rich and diverse plant combinations, productive plants, recycled-reused-repurposed materials; only the kitchen garden is regularly irrigated. Many of the beds have a focus on colour, texture and form, with successional materials used to create year-long interest. Durability, robustness and low water use are key plant selection criteria. We have a keen interest in plants and cultivation experiences help to inform our learnings around plant use. Luckily, we both like gardening, as maintaining the garden is equivalent to at least one full time position!

### 1. Entry and top borders

The front of the property is dominated by Australian plants with Gum Vine (*Aphanopetalum resinosum*) on the fences. The main entry is framed by recycled Corton steel and a 'doorway' of Italian Alders (*Alnus cordata*). To the left on entry is the dry border, established 2005, and dominated by succulents, grasses and flowering perennials; plus a few trees, notably *Brachychiton australis* (Broad-leaved Bottle Tree), *Cussonia spicata* (Cabbage Tree), *Dracaena draco* (Dragon Tree) and a pleached *Fraxinus pennsylvanica*. The garden studio has a display of *Global Gardens of Peace*.

### 2. Rockery and driveway

A rockery, using a mix of Australian shrubs, climbers and perennials, is located at the top of the driveway. Lower down, a mix of *Eucalyptus pulverulenta* (Silver-leaved Heart Gum) and *Cotinus* 'Grace' (Smokebush) are planted, the *Cotinus* is pollarded annually, and the *Eucalyptus* coppiced triennially.

### 3. Espaliers

The flat area here has espaliers of apples and pears, surrounded by a hedge of *Rhagodia spinescens* (Spiny Saltbush).

### 4. Orchard

The orchard area includes rows of plums ('Satsuma', 'Mariposa'), blueberries ('Blue Rose'), gooseberries, currants (red and black) and raspberries ('Chilliwack'). There is a block of citrus including lemon ('Lisbon'), lime ('Tahitian'), lemonade, oranges ('Mediterranean Sweet', 'Blood'), mandarin ('Imperial') and grapefruit ('Ruby'). We also grow early potatoes in the wire 'baskets' amongst the citrus.

## GARDEN NOTES

### 5. Middle and lower borders

The middle and lower borders, adjoining the espaliers, turf circle and kitchen garden, were established 2006-2010 and are dominated by flowering and foliage materials. The large *Doryanthes palmeri* (Giant Spear Lily), taller grasses and perennials (e.g. *Miscanthus* 'Zebrinus', *Solidago canadensis*) provide the main structure in these beds.

### 6. Kitchen Garden

This space contains a circular and central bed of asparagus with surrounding beds and baths planted with vegetables, herbs and flowers. The perimeter plants include a roughly espaliered Chinese quince (*Cydonia sinensis*), Giant Miscanthus (*Miscanthus x giganteus*), pollarded *Bocconia arborea* and sunflowers. Alongside the old poly tunnel hoops are a range of newly planted (Sep 2021) climbing plants. The fence adjoining the parking area is made from recycled gates and bed frames. The hardwood sawdust pathways here are topped every 2-3 years.

### 7. Lawn Circle

The lawn circle, completed in June 2021, replaced the grass spiral (*Calamagrostis* 'Karl Foerster') located in this space. The steel retaining walls, steps and turf (Bermuda Couch 'TifTuf') were installed by *Canterbury Landscapes*. Surrounding the lawn are beds of perennials and sunflowers, planted from Sep 2021 to Feb 2022. The upper bed has a focus on hot colours, while the lower bed has a focus on cooler colours, but it's very much a work in progress!

### 8. House Garden

This is the oldest part of the garden with some of the trees dating from the 1920's; the most significant being the large Algerian Oak (*Quercus canariensis*). Other trees here include the common Lilly Pilly (*Syzygium smithii*), Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*) River Birch (*Betula nigra*) and Dogwood (*Cornus florida*). There are also many spring-flowering and autumn foliage shrubs, such as camellias, rhododendrons, maples and hydrangeas and a 'winter garden' including hellebores, ajugas, liriopes, clivias, plectranthus closer to the house. At the front of the house is a 'variegated garden', dominated by dwarf variegated bamboo (*Pleioblastus fortunei*).

### 9. Wild Wood

The Wild Wood, in the northern part of the garden, extends down the gully, and can become a raging watercourse during storms! There is a collection of older trees here, including *Cedrus deodara* (Deodar), *Fagus sylvatica* 'Atropurpurea' (Copper Beech), *Platanus xacerifolia* (London Plane) and *Pseudotsuga menziesii* (Douglas fir).

## GARDEN NOTES

### 10. Fern Gully

Located in the steepest area of the garden, this area includes a natural spring and some remnant vegetation. We are slowly working to remove weeds and revegetate this area, but the wandering trad, ivy, holly and blackberry are relentless! There are some wonderful older *Alsophila australis* (Rough Tree Ferns) in the gully and some adjoining exotic trees approaching 80-90 years of age, including *Abies pinsapo* (Spanish Fir), *Cedrus atlantica* (Atlas Cedar) and *Castanea sativa* (Sweet Chestnut).

### 10. The Terraces

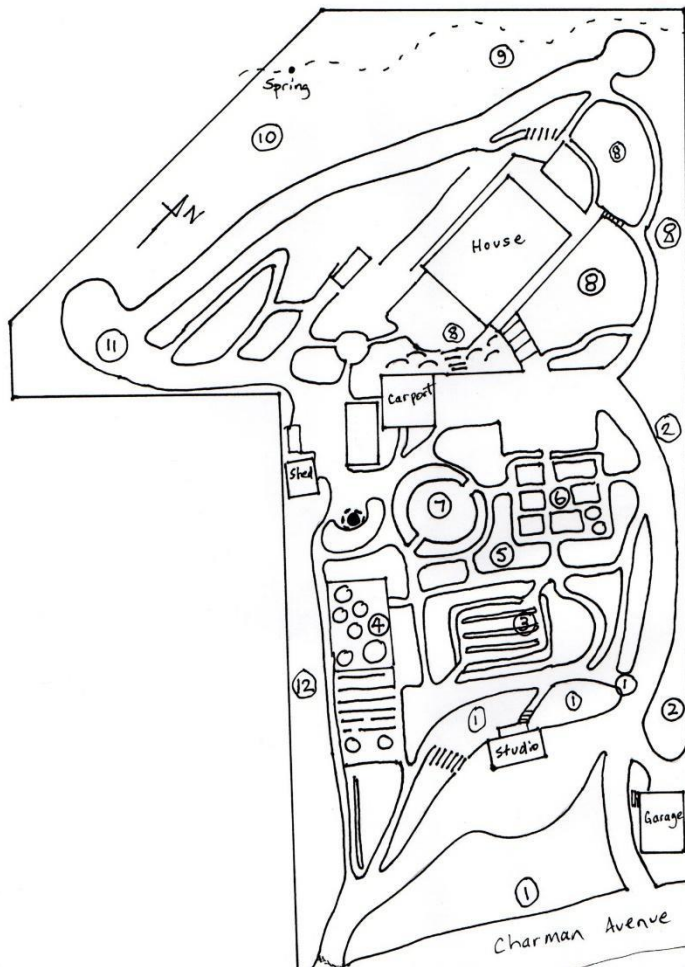
In 2019 we carved three terraces into what was a poorly graded slope to improve access, maintenance and usability. A reed bed in the upper terrace, installed 2021, treats grey and black water from the house. In Sept 2021, 100 Lavandin (*Lavandula x intermedia* 'Grosso') were planted in the upper terrace. Future plantings include woody meadows and espaliers.

### 11. Long border

The 'Long Border' (50 x 3 m) was started in 2015 after the removal of a row of significant but dying *Cryptomeria japonica* (Japanese Cedar). The design of this mixed border was meant to focus on yellow and blue, with lots of foliage and grasses to provide structure and seasonality. But I'm not sure it's quite worked out that way! There are lots of plants here, many repeated, plus an inverted chaff cutter and home-made garden shed at the northern end.

***John and Michelle Rayner, March 2022***

## GARDEN NOTES



**These notes can be downloaded from the Open Gardens Victoria website:**  
[www.opengardensvictoria.org.au](http://www.opengardensvictoria.org.au)