

Graceburn

Welcome to “Graceburn”, our home since 2006, which sits on five acres on the outskirts of Drysdale.

We would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land, the Wadawurrung, and pay our respects to their elders, past and present. Also, to acknowledge our gardening ancestors who fostered a joy of gardening and an expectation of developing and maintaining country gardens since the 1870’s.

Justin and I arrived here to a well fenced horse property, a firm driveway, and some 25-year-old Tuarts and Sugar Gums on the perimeter of the house yard. The paddocks were mostly treeless and the garden sparse, exposed to strong winds and had limited shade.

Over the years, we have planted predominantly locally indigenous plants, with sprinklings of Australian natives and numerous cut flower species, both native and exotic. Our orchard of 80 fruit trees are under planted with other productive and edible plants.

The soil here is sandy loam, over a yellow ironstone clay. We get salty coastal winds and approximately 550mm rain annually. Plants need to be hardy. Local indigenous plants have always been readily available through the Bellarine Landcare Nursery and have been the obvious choice for cost effective, efficient revegetation. Indigenous plants give the best opportunity for survival and attract wildlife back into our garden. Mulching is critical for establishment and repeated every 3-5 years. We water plants in the first year or two until they are settled, but after that they are on their own - the exception being the fruit trees which are on an automated watering system utilising converted worm farm waste water.

We are always striving to make our garden a better place for us, and to create habitat for the local wildlife; improve the microclimate, reduce the wind, provide shade, aesthetics, and to develop an enticing environment for children. Also developing a level of self-sufficiency with chooks, edible plants, fruit, vegetables, herbs, bush tucker and bees. We are constantly delighted by the bevy of small birds: wrens, thornbills, grey fantails and more frequently, recently eastern spinebills, pardalotes and red browed finches which forage through the garden. The passing of the egrets and pelicans and the noisy feeding of the yellow-tailed black cockatoo always give a moment to pause and appreciate. Last year one Covid gift was the discovery of baby blue tongue lizards in our front yard.

Thus a new impetus to provide dense tussock like understorey in many of our beds that has occurred over the last 12 months.

Our first step in creating the garden was to bolster the plantings on the roadside to buffer the traffic, and then plantings along the other fence lines to slow the winds and screen the neighbours. We also transitioned much of the house garden to indigenous species.



GARDEN NOTES

We have learnt by trial and error which plants did well in which locations and have built our knowledge year by year.

In 2014, returning from Beijing and with three children, we collaboratively designed and invested in a 17m freshwater pool by Natural Swim pools in association with Sam Cox. Being a freshwater pool, we love the way it brings biodiversity into the backyard and is a year round landscape feature. We love the dragonflies, have learnt a lot about aquatic bugs and enjoy spotting the small native fish. Rusty pool gates by local metal sculpturer: Justin Zahra (& Kate). Plantings are mixed indigenous and native. Bird Art & Weather vain: Justin Grace.

In 2015 we built the rammed earth pool pavilion, workshop and outdoor area by Earthstone: Rob Brown. This has dramatically enhanced our outdoor lifestyle and significantly moderated our backyard microclimate. Even on 35–40-degree days the outdoor area maintains a comfortable temperature. Dropper chandelier: Kate Lockhart. Timber benches and daybed: Justin Grace.

We have always appreciated trees as renewable material for building, furniture, and firewood. So, over the last five years we have become a little more focussed on planting in the paddocks a range of “timber trees” like Spotted Gums; Ironbark along the east driveway, Drooping Sheoaks along Hutchinson Court, inter planting of Blackwoods, Black Sheoaks, Drooping Sheoaks and Silky Oaks where ever we can fit them. We prune side branches and double leaders into straight trees as inspired by Rowan Reid and the Australian Master Tree Growers. I wonder if we will be brave enough to cut them down in 20 years time!

We hope you have seen something that inspires you and moves you towards finding your own path towards a more sustainable life. We encourage you to do what you can....start. Do what you can with your skills and resources and seek out people to help and share knowledge and skills. We started with a Landcare membership, five horse paddocks, a couple of chooks, six fruit trees and a Landcare grant, 15 years ago. Now, we think we have something special in which we enjoy sharing with our friends, family and community and thrive in every day.

Please be aware of bees and the beehives and watch your step due to uneven ground.

Please supervise children around water. Please do not let children enter the pool area without supervision. There is a small farm dam in the paddock down in the SW corner of the property.

Thanks for joining us today

Kate Lockhart and Justin Grace

These notes can be downloaded from the Open Gardens Victoria website:

www.opengardensvictoria.org.au