

Bentwood

We feel like the house found us in the March of 2000, slightly abandoned and sitting in a paddock full of weeds, rubbish and dumped cars. Most would have driven past in horror, or fulfilled the real estate agent's advertisement of a new home site, however, we fell completely head over heels in love. Much younger and therefore much more energetic, we were fortunate enough to have help from family to cart away in excess of 22 tandem trailer loads of rubbish. Back then, we shared a drive with the house next door, the original paddock boundary was where the crepe myrtles are planted, a stagnant dam with no catchment was just below the house and huge old pine trees bordered the fence line down Ingram Road, removed in October 2009. We cleaned it up enough to rent it for what ended up being five years while we lived overseas. We came back in May 2005, with a newborn baby, three dogs and too much furniture and have gardened consistently since.

Our garden has been influenced from garden visiting both here and abroad, but also driven by limited water supply, drought and awareness of fire risk. The garden still gets very little supplementary water, instead we have built on the quality of the soil and plant choice, although occasionally we do get suckered in to buying something that we can't resist but know probably won't survive. The original trees on the front lawn include the beautiful Mulberry, Magnolia Grandiflora and Eucalyptus Nicholi.

One of our first jobs was to realign the driveway to enter off Ingram Road and re fence the boundaries. The soil was extremely compacted across the front of the house and southern boundary fence line but over time, with adding compost, leaves and straw to the soil, it has allowed us to plant quite thickly there. The old wooden structure is a tank stand, which was in use until 1962, when a storm blew the tank onto the roof of the house. Originally the property was approximately 400 acres, stretching to Killara Road and to the Stringybark Creek from which water was pumped for the house. The house itself was built, we think, in around 1920, then the front was added in the 1940s, then we have added to it twice over the past 16 years.

We filled in the dam behind the house in 2008, flattening out the space. The rock walling was completed in 2010 and is the only landscaping completed by someone other than ourselves. The trees around the amphitheatre were also planted at this time, to frame the view, but also to give privacy and add some summer shade to what can be a dry, windy spot. These include Acer October Glory, Malus Sugar Plum, Crataegus Paul's Scarlet, Pyrus Capital and our favourite, Carpinus Betulus Fastigiata.

GARDEN NOTES

The area on top of the rock wall and steps was grass until about three years ago when we had to remove birches from where the extension was being built, so we put them there. Some of them are wonky from growing too close to the house, but we don't mind! We also have used hedging as a way of giving the garden year round structure, using plants such as Ligustrum, Bay, Olives, Teucrium and Pomegranate. We were inspired after visiting Stuart Rattle's garden, Musk Farm.

We like quirky random things, and don't like to see such things thrown away. The tall gates at the front of the house leading onto the front lawn area came from a friend's property in Kinglake - all that was left from when the fires went through. We have been collecting stink pipes for many years and you can see the result in the first bed in the driveway, collectively making garden art (in our opinion!). The little garden shelter sitting below the tanks is made from the roof of the pantry from the original house next door, our neighbours kindly allowing us to take before it was demolished. The garden isn't fussy, it is pretty robust with two large dogs charging through, and over the years, cricket, football and golf balls bouncing their way around.

In the paddock is another project, a micro flower farm in its infancy. Feel free to have a wander, but please don't pick anything! Enter via the gate in the corner. We don't net the orchard area, we share the produce with the birds and our boxer, George, who spends fruit season helping himself to the produce. The birds get the top, George the bottom, and we get what is left in the middle! As for the name of the property, we found the old sign in the gutter, Bentwood Park, which we shortened!

Our garden gives us great pleasure and we hope you enjoy wandering around. We have fabulous views, something we didn't even realise when we bought the place, looking to Christmas Hills, Yarra Glen and across to Mt St Leonard in Toolangi. We do sit down more and enjoy it! The hedges and salvias are a haven for small birds and we delight in watching them splash around in all the water bowls dotted around the garden.

These notes can be downloaded from the Open Gardens Victoria website:
www.opengardensvictoria.org.au