

Cloverdale

Cloverdale is a working farm that annually rotates cereal crops of wheat, barley and this year, canola. We do see an occasional snake and spectacular spider, so please take care. The dam is very steep and deep in parts so please keep a safe distance and watch little ones closely.

It was 1981 that we had the good fortune to buy the property, then build and move into our home in 1983. There were pre-European settlement river red gums throughout the farm, the age of which has been assessed at approximately 400 years. On the house site, there were only two of these ancient trees at either end of the original dam. One has since died and has become a regular perch for the congregations of ibis and remains an important part of the garden. The rest of the area was open paddock and you can get a sense of this when walking around the lawn area. Everything else you now see we have planted over the years.

The avenue of golden elms was planted in 1984. Getting them established in those early years was a struggle as there was no protection from the winds. Now they are very happy and since extending the dam in 2004 we no longer need to water them as their clever roots reach the water.

The garden has evolved over the years as time and inspiration have allowed. Many of our first plantings didn't survive and were replaced by those that did. The fence has been moved four times further into the paddock, despite grumbles of losing "...my best cropping ground".

In 2004 we extended the dam from behind the house to run alongside the driveway. We then planted over 4000 native trees and grasses on the paddock side of what then became a significant waterway. The ground was sprayed for weeds, deep ripped then planted with various local native tube stock. Although this was during a drought, most survived and we call this our forest. It gives us protection from the northerly winds and has made a huge difference to our garden.

In 2014 we planted a further 200 native trees and shrubs in the "sheep paddock" out the front, as well as a few fruit trees. There is no rhyme or reason to our garden. The plant choices are mine and I just planted the things that I liked and that would survive!

Many plants originated from friends' gardens and as we walk around our garden, seeing them brings back many happy memories of times gone by. The weeping willows for example were cuttings from my mother's neighbour. It is hard to believe that they started life as cuttings in a bucket of water! We often have whistling kites sitting in their branches. The trees are magnificent in autumn when their leaves are golden.

The garden, dam and forest attract many birds that are a joy to watch. Over summer we usually have a couple of families of water hens raising their young. We watch them fossicking and feeding off the lawn with the chicks growing before our eyes. We also play host to the odd lone pelican and often a few swans, both birds paddle majestically around the house.

GARDEN NOTES

There is colour in the garden most of the year. In late winter and spring bulbs provide a welcome burst of colour under the elms as you approach the house. At this time of year, the wisteria have just finished flowering and have handed the show over to the blooming irises and roses. We call the garden on the right as you approach the house “the tennis court block” as that was its original designation. It didn’t quite become that, instead it unfolded into a meandering garden full of “pieces and bits” (as my father would say).

The sedums started off as three plants bought at a garden show and over the years they have been divided and divided again to give beautiful contrast and colour with their foliage and flowers. Catmint lines the paths in this part of the garden and after their haircut each June, magically come back to life in spring.

There are a few native frangipanis scattered throughout the garden and their scent is just magic. I have memories of our childhood garden that was full of roses that my grandfather loved and tended. This is where my love of roses began and the inspiration of what you see now. We have a small vegetable garden just off the kitchen and a chicken coop in the small fruit tree orchard, in memory of my mother, who loved fresh eggs. There is a bay tree planted close by that supplies the family with bay leaves and helps shade the chickens in summer and then flavours them when we make stock!

Last year we had a storm with very strong winds, the like of which we had never experienced. Quite a bit of damage was done to the garden and we lost half of a willow tree. We are waiting to see how it recovers, it is looking a little lopsided at the moment.

I have always had an appreciation of plants and gardens and enjoy creating different spaces within my garden. We hope you enjoy your time at Cloverdale.

Connie and Julian Menegazzo

Cloverdale is located on the lands of the Bunurong people. Open Gardens Victoria wish to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians and we pay respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

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