

GARDEN NOTES

WENSLEY FARM

Welcome to our much loved and lived in garden.

HISTORY OF OUR GARDEN

We came to Nayook in 1981 searching for a farm and an opportunity to garden and enjoy growing plants. We were confronted with some challenges – a run-down farm, an almost derelict farmhouse with a leaking roof and no mod-cons, signs of a once extensive garden that had been demolished by munching cattle, plus a new born baby. But we could see the potential of fertile volcanic soil and a reliable spring-fed water supply.

THE FARMHOUSE

We determined to restore the old 1907 farmhouse rather than pull it down as so many of the historic, original buildings in the district had already been lost.

HISTORIC RHODODENDRON TREES

The only remnants of the original gardens were the huge rhododendron trees at the front of the house (we believe them to be now well over 100 years old), plus a few old chewed shrubs that were taller than a cow! There was also a derelict tennis court. Everything else had to be planted - once the cattle were locked out.

We keep the trunks of the old rhododendrons pruned bare, to see the wonderful architecture.

BEGINNING THE GARDEN

We began to grow plants from seeds, propagate from cuttings, and lay out garden beds using hoses to draw shapes on the ground in the adjoining paddock.

Garden beds were prepared by laying newspaper, cardboard, plus the old hessian walls we pulled out the farmhouse. All were laid directly over the top of the grass. Then mulched with straw from the calf beds, cow manure added and watered well, and left to rot down while we grew some plants to fill the new beds. We worked from the house out.

Trees were planted using inexpensive tube stock. Cuttings were taken from old, long forgotten Camellia varieties down in the Toorong Valley. These now form the Camellia hedge beside the grove of silver birches. Slips and seeds were acquired from wherever available.

INSPIRATION FOR THE DESIGN OF THE GARDEN

The inspiration for the ground plan of the garden was to create a series of different spaces, each with their own character and colour scheme. These would be linked by winding paths of green grass and screened by banks of trees and shrubs. We wanted to create the feel that you had to explore to see the garden - we did not want to see it all at once.

We wanted the garden to be a haven of peace with quiet green, lush with flowers and perfume and alive with birdsong to complement the character of the old house. We also wanted to have a sense of imagination and secret hiding places for children.

However, our beloved birds and nature are a sharp-edged blessing.

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The King Parrots chew the buds off the Magnolias. The Bower Birds steal everything blue and raid the compost mercilessly. Possums love fresh young red foliage on the roses, and Wombats bulldozer all before them. Fortunately, we are less often afflicted with rabbits and nearby feral deer.

It was a day of celebration when the first tree was taller than us, and the Columnar Tulip Tree first bloomed (*Liriodendron tulipifera* 'Fastigiata'). Trees were planted to provide protection from prevailing winds – icy in the winter blowing across the snow on the Baw Baw Ranges and roasting hot from the north in summer.

EVER CHANGING NATURE OF THE GARDEN

As the trees grew, and the garden became more shaded, different flowers and plants had to be grown as underplanting. So, the garden is always changing and evolving, and the colour and planting schemes change as the light and shade changes. We enjoy this regular re-vamping very much.

Unusual and heritage flowers and rare and beautiful plants have always been our passion. We are unapologetic plant collectors - the more the merrier. We treasure plants for their flower colour and form, for their foliage colour and texture and for their hardy ability to grow quite trying conditions.

We experience heavy frosts, and even snow in winter plus searing hot northerly winds and longer periods of dry in summer. The shelter from the trees is essential to create a gentler micro-climate in the garden.

COUNTRY FARM PERENNIALS NURSERY

Our passion for plant collecting eventually meant we had far too many, and so Country Farm Perennials Nursery was born – sending plants by mail order to gardeners all over Australia.

SEEDSCAPE SEEDS

During the Covid pandemic delivery chains broke down, and it was no longer possible to safely deliver live plants all over Australia. So, we turned to delivering seeds instead - the seeds did not mind if the Postie was slow. [Seedscape Seeds](#) is now thriving and giving us much pleasure as we share with gardeners all over Australia.

The garden and plant collection now serves for seed collecting and trialling new plants. We also import seeds for new plant varieties from the best growers and gardens all over the world, via the good officers at Australia's Quarantine and Inspection Service and Australian Biosecurity.

THE VEGETABLE GARDEN

We have recently moved to a new vegetable garden, taking over a disused plant nursery area. The added warmth in raised beds and pots has greatly improved our harvest. We run a 3-bin compost system and return everything we can into the garden.

THE CUT FLOWER GARDEN

This move freed up the old formal vegetable beds. They have a new life as a dedicated "picking garden" growing cut flowers for the house. Here we can also trial new seed varieties to offer to our Flower Farmer customers.

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THE CITRUS ORCHARD

We grow a selection of cold-hardy citrus varieties and keep the trees trimmed low and rounded to protect them from the cold winds. We also have some new fruit trees to espalier. Easier to net and protect fruit from our marauding birds.

THE OLD TENNIS COURT

Senior residents in the district remember coming to Wensley Farm regularly to play tennis. But when we arrived all that was left was a broken tar surface. So, we ripped up the tar, covered with gravel and turned it into a nursery shade house. This gravel bed later became the foundation for our gravel garden to grow sun-loving perennials that need good drainage and drier conditions.

BIRD SCULPTURES IN THE GARDEN

We love structure in the garden as a contrast for the abundant plant growth. Hence the use of some formal clipped hedges, topiary specimens, and the garden sculptures. The sculptures are all by artists who are friends or locals and have the common theme of reflecting our favourite birds in the garden.

“Nayook” is thought to mean “the place of laughing birds” and there certainly are a lot of Kookaburras. as well as parrots. “Bunjil” the wedge tailed eagle can be seen soaring and hunting above our valley.

Please relax, enjoy our garden. Stay as long as you like.

All proceeds are for our local hospital Neerim District Health Service.

Open Gardens Victoria wish to acknowledge the Traditional custodians of this land 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

