

GARDEN NOTES

CLONTARF

Clontarf is the seventh garden we have had in Central Victoria; the first at Taradale over fifty years ago, then at Mount Macedon, Drummond, Malmsbury, Trentham, Tarnagulla (Beverly's original maternal family home) and now Castlemaine. All with somewhat neglected gardens around c.1862 houses, always in need of restoration, the garden was always the last project.

Given this, when we came here in 2007, I was aware of the challenges of hot dry summers, long periods of drought, cold wet winters, severe frost and permanent water restrictions. Clontarf was built in c.1862; a timber section at the back was built earlier, and received wisdom suggests that it was either a school or a general store. It was originally one room, later divided into three with a section demolished when the brick house was built. There is a two-room cellar and an underground water tank.

At the back of the house is a rather elegant little building, a *privé*, triple brick with a venting system for the underground space, which is about a meter and half deep, the floor is one slab of slate, the interior walls plastered to simulate stone blocks and a two seated lavatory. Also, there is a double storey stable building and I often think both the *privé* and stable are rather grand for the house.

We are lucky we also have a wonderful, borrowed landscape; the Botanical Gardens, Forrest Hall, an amazing stone wall once bounding the Pleasure Gardens and some fabulous old trees: three varieties of cedar, oaks, ash trees and three different old pencil pines, plus a very old wisteria on a collapsed pergola. Somehow, a trusted tradie I have known for a long time, managed to prop it and build a much larger structure under it. I had always wanted a loquat tree and there is a beautiful old one which one year gave some seedlings, now thriving, and not forgetting the magnificent ancient gums.

One of the first things we did was sink a bore, install four large water tanks, a worm farm and build a brick wall around what was to be a vegetable garden, and to provide protection from kangaroos. I also started planting trees.

Over the many years gardening in Central Victoria, I knew I wanted deciduous trees, Lombardy poplars, crab apples and ornamental pears and cherries, shade in summer, colour in winter and blossom in spring, which I planned to happen sequentially. The flowering apricots were a mistake, early frosts burnt the blossoms; I planted black wattles native to our area to block the road views.

I often think it wise when remaking a garden to look about and see what has survived long term and flourished and here fortunately they were all favourites: viburnum tinus, the Algerian or Winter iris, agapanthus, japonica, wild violets, a white African daisy; and like every old garden, we have bulbs, however I generally don't like daffodils and strangely none have appeared until this year - a surprise indeed - three clumps with multiple small trumpets.



GARDEN NOTES

There are masses of jonquils (not liked!), grape hyacinth, nerines and snowflakes.

In the first year here, I noticed a very pretty plant, which I had seen in the magazine Country Life, in those sensational borders that the English do so well. I discovered it was valerian, and I perhaps foolishly encouraged it, as now it is everywhere and I couldn't be happier! Similarly, whilst I wish it was not so, wild garlic or onion weed, so very pretty and fortunately easy to pull out.

I think ornamental water is essential hence there are small ponds and bird baths, as I enjoy the many visiting birds, some of which hang about whenever I appear with a fork, rake or spade - and who doesn't enjoy a frog symphony!

I have planted many bluebells, Bethlehem Stars and a few years ago, my neighbour, Gwen Davey, gave me a barrow full of red tulips, which this year have been spectacular. That said, I generally avoid show-stopper plants preferring cool colours, subtle foliage and a feeling of peace - even otherworldliness. I try to avoid an overly manicured look and encourage the illusion of effortless serenity, where you are enticed to ramble on; and to achieve this slice of paradise, those who know, understand just how much effort that consumes.

I hope you enjoy our garden and the tantalising vistas of Gwen Davey's beautiful Forrest Hall, next door, as much as we do, and please forgive my many planting mistakes, I don't claim it as any more than a suitable garden for the house it surrounds. I am not a good 'pulling outer' and please excuse my not bothering with correct botanical names. The proceeds raised from your visit go towards Open Gardens Victoria and we support Buda Historic House + Garden, an illustrious heritage garden.

Anthony Knight.

Clontarf is located on the lands of the Dja Dja Wurrung 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