

GARDEN NOTES

WINGSPREAD

When we first acquired this five and a half acre property in 2009, it consisted of the guest cottage and its original garden dating back some 60 years - the rest was pasture, fenced for agistment. We spent the next two years restoring the cottage and its garden and designing and building the main house.

Once the main house was completed, we used the local climate, history, and our love for the place as inspiration for the garden design. Wingspread is located 460 metres above sea level, on top of the Great Dividing Range. Here, winters are long, cold and wet, with the occasional snow fall. Summers are hot and dry, although often a few degrees cooler than Melbourne. Our elevation is perfect for the cool-climate rhododendrons that Toolangi is famous for, along with camellias and azaleas and deciduous trees such as maples, oaks, elms, tulip trees and ginkgos.

A key aspect of the garden design has been to enhance and complement the 'borrowed' views of rolling pastures, ploughed market gardens and fields and the enormous backdrop provided by the peaks of Mt Tanglefoot and Mt St Leonard and the Toolangi State Forest.

Planted ten years ago, the front boundary is distinguished by a vigorous hedge of thuja which provides great privacy and formality. The gravel driveway is around 150 metres in length and lined on both sides with 'Senkaki' Japanese maples. These were suggested to us by our neighbour for their year-round interest and colour - from the bright red bare branches in winter, through the lime green of spring, darkening over the summer before exploding into the most amazing orange in autumn. A great rock sculpture features in the centre of the turning circle.

The bones of the guest cottage garden are built around the rhododendrons that soar and billow to around 10 metres in height, and a few old-variety camellias. Both the rhododendrons and camellias put on the most dazzling display, with a mix of early and late flowering varieties ensuring colour around the guest cottage for months through late winter and spring.

We have added a conservatory and a pond to the north side of the guest cottage. Given the severity of winters in Toolangi, the conservatory has been the perfect spot for clivias. The tulip tree on the lawn nearby blooms each spring with the most gorgeous orange and green flowers – but you need to look hard to see them amongst the leaves. The garden along the front verandah comes into its own during summer, with the perennial display enjoying the dappled light from the row of crab apples and the mulberry, all which fruit prolifically.

Following the collapse of the old-retaining wall in the motor court in 2018, we recently completed the new stone wall in local Coldstream rock. We took the opportunity to open up and replant the gardens above the wall, and to improve the sightlines across this part of the garden.

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The main house was built during 2010 and 2011 by architect/builder Fasham and featured in *Grand Designs Australia* magazine in 2015. The gardens, whilst still young, have matured so much in the years since then. The new house was carefully sited next to two stunning Japanese maples (up to 50 years old) and between the three majestic mountain ash trees that date from early farming on this property. The maples anchor this section of the garden and are a favourite vantage point for the king parrots.

A copse of silver birches in the front lawn has been underplanted with (literally) thousands of fragrant jonquil bulbs. The original bulbs were a gift from Andrew's mum, and these have thrived and multiplied over the years. The park bench in this garden is a favourite spot for a drink on a summer afternoon. Below this is the 'figure 8' garden bed, anchored by a ginkgo and a forest pansy tree, both gifts from Keith's gran who is still a keen gardener in her nineties.

The entry to the front door of the house is over a timber bridge that spans the 'moat'. A few years back, we turned off the pool filtration and introduced water lilies, lotuses, irises and other pond plants, added some fish and turned it into a natural habitat. It wasn't long before the frogs moved in, and today it buzzes with aquatic life. A parterre garden planted with 450 Dutch box hedge plants and a couple of cast iron urns were added to complete the formal entry.

The garden around the pool is planted with daphnes, acacias, loropetalum and *Abelia x grandiflora* 'Kaleidoscope' providing year-round colour and continuing the sight lines from the house to the rest of the garden. A new mulch path through to a park bench gives us the opportunity to get right into the heart of this garden. A grand stone staircase, once again in local Coldstream rock, connects the main house and pool to the next section of the garden.

We always wanted a kitchen garden and began designing and planting it over six years ago. The kitchen garden consists of a veggie garden, cut-flower area, orchard and berry patch. In the orchard, we have peach trees, a nectarine, apricot, cherry, apple, pear and a few plum trees. In the berry patch we have blueberries, raspberries, thornless blackberries, silvanberries, young-berries, gooseberries, cape gooseberries, red and black currants, pomegranates and kiwi fruit.

Keith's family have always played tennis, so we decided to put in a tennis court - inspired by the fenceless tennis court at Dame Elisabeth Murdoch's Cruden Farm. The result is great - it feels like you are playing tennis right in the garden with a grass bowl at one end and a westringia hedge and silver birches at the other end. We positioned a pavilion at the high side of the grass bowl and planted nine tulip trees to surround the court. In line with the pavilion, we planted a formal avenue of hornbeams, underplanted with English box hedge.

Since the first time we opened back in October 2019, we have been expanding the gardens beyond the tennis court. We have extended the boundary gardens on both sides with an array of rhododendrons and magnolias and a couple of garden beds of azaleas, smoke bushes and escallonias. A new circular garden with *Floribunda* crab apples has been created and in time will be filled with perennials.



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We have also been busy planting a mini arboretum of trees including species such as monkey puzzle, Norfolk Island pine, Wollemi pine, copper beech, golden ash, oaks, elm and plane tree to name a few.

Our final phase of the garden later this year is to clean out the natural water course of blackberries and other weeds to improve the quality of the habitat. A glass orangery will also be built as an entertaining space and to also grow a variety of plants and vegetables we could not normally grow.

Water and rabbits are two challenges of maintaining an extensive country garden. We rely solely on capturing rainwater for our water supply and therefore we water the garden sparingly. Most garden beds will be watered in their first summer, and then only receive a drink when it's particularly hot and dry. Rabbits are a constant menace, digging some plants up and munching on them, roots and all. The trees are not immune with rabbits ringbarking the trunks. All newly planted trees now receive a collar of wire mesh, which we find acts as a deterrent.

When we bought Wingspread, we were two city boys who really did not know what we were doing. Our neighbours, Daryl and Marylou, have been an incredible support over the years sharing their amazing knowledge of plants and tools and what grows well in our climate and soil. They also recommended our gardener, Tony, to us and he has been assisting us one day a week for the last 4 years. We could not maintain a garden this size without Tony's expertise and help and it also enables us to not feel guilty for taking an afternoon or two off from working in the garden.

These gardens have been a true labour of love for us and we hope you enjoy your visit.

Wingspread is located on the lands of the Taungurung 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**