

## GARDEN NOTES

### Sophorae

Welcome to Sophorae. Some people are driven to purchase a property because they fall in love with the house. Not so us! Instead we fell in love with the *Banksia integrifolia* that grows at a precarious angle, seemingly from under the front of the house. Our arborist estimates this matriarch to be over 100 years of age. Secondly, we love the court setting, its proximity to the beach and the open reserve that abuts the rear of the property. We have just recently discovered that this reserve is named! It's the Selina Williams Linear Park. Having green space and gardens to look out onto, back and front, offers us a bigger sense of space and a borrowed landscape to appreciate and enjoy.

Our block is an unconventional shape and is relatively small at approximately 610 square meters. The garden we inherited was nondescript and did not entice transition between inside and outside living. Much to the misgivings of our neighbours, the entire plant palette minus two big trees was removed. We commissioned some hard landscaping intended to stage vignettes of distinct garden areas that together made for a coherent garden design. Our intent was to repeat the curvature of several banks of windows in the house with the layout of the garden and to give a nod to the landscape often seen in the outback.

Our formal style was created using many types of paving, corten steel panels and sculpture, sentinel railway sleeper arcs, mounded beds and *Correa* cloud hedging. The mood has become 'more is more' and has given a relatively small garden many pockets of interest. Our garden is regularly visited by many species of birds and occasionally the court is visited by koalas, echidnas, and blue tongue lizards.

This has been a slow garden to cultivate. The hard landscaping was done about eight years ago and from there we have painted garden pictures with planting brushstrokes. We find it takes several years for plants to find their feet before showing any real signs of vigour and growth. Soil is almost pure sand and so needs constant replenishment with compost and mulch. In retrospect, using various grades of stone and rock as mulch to keep the soil cool and moist has served to compound some of these challenges. They do however serve us well in keeping weeds to a minimum.

Ours is largely a native garden built with the rigours of trial and error. There are several garden beds that have been planted and replanted several times over. There are also plants that we thought would do well that haven't. *Persoonias* are one such case in point. A *Persoonia arborea* planted in full sun in the reserve has struggled just as its relative *Persoonia chamaepitys*, a band of ground covers planted along the rocky ledges out the front, have also been challenged. A big winner has been the use of grafted grevilleas. As our mounded beds matured we felt the need to add height - another layer that could rise above the fray and create interest. At first it was *Grevillea 'Billy Bonkers'*, now, after about eight years of growth, it is a perfect umbrella with almost year-round pink racemes of bloom visited by the acrobatic honeyeaters. A wonderful source of nectar and circus performances. Since this discovery of the grafted grevillea - its root stock being the indestructible *Grevillea robusta* - we have added two more.

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*Grevillea 'Lasseter's Reef'* welcomes prospectors to the courtside garden with wonderful old gold blooms. *Grevillea 'Scarlet King'* crowns the rear garden mound holding court above the *Casuarina glauca* (also known as Shagpile and Cousin It), a well visited bird bowl and more carpeting of *Chrysocephalum apiculatum* and friends. So far, the temptation to top out more beds with other grafted beauties has been resisted. Sometimes more is less!

A recent new addition has been the planting of *Eucalyptus (lansdowneana) albopurpurea* 'Purple Patch' - a mallee form flowering gum. This small tree has been chosen to replace the very large old *Agonis flexuosa* that was retained from the original planting. We loved its willowy weeping habit but sadly it fell prey to *Armillaria*, the honey fungus and was humanely despatched by the arborist as it quietly and slowly expired. So another opportunity, once the grieving abated, to choose what we hope will become another favourite specimen.

We have guerrilla gardened in the rear reserve for some time, first a raised vegetable bed, then removal of the timber fence and replacement with reo to allow full advantage of the borrowed vista into the reserve. Recently, more native planting spills into the grassed slope that edges the walkway used by walkers, cyclists, bathers, surfers and of course their myriad dogs. What a pleasure this area brings with frequent encounters with neighbours and visitors and the very occasional koala. Another of Inverloch's byways that give us secret views into people's homes and lives whilst taking a shortcut to the water.

The temptation to experiment, or bend plants to our will has been satisfied in many ways. Our *Eucalyptus leucoxylon* – a serendipitous self-sown sapling in the court garden has been coppiced to create a mallee type form with lovely white legs. We have espaliered a heritage apple, fanned a *Brown Turkey fig*, and trained a *Lambrusco grape* over the BBQ round. There are *Correa* hedges and clouds and many plants that really do not like the South Gippsland winter and constant rain, mounded up and cosseted to try to achieve the ever-hopeful dream of having your cake and eating it too.

Like all gardens this is a constant work in progress and learning is never ending. It has been a joy to create more habitat, make garden outlooks from our home that bring delight, and to extend into the landscape and share its leafy and interesting natural benefits. Our court denizens and other practitioners revel in the weekly early morning Tai chi amidst our wonderful eucalypts and many feathered visitors and shared gardens. As you depart, the very observant may note that there is no *Acacia sophorae* within this garden, but it is indigenous and rampant in the wild parts of our reserve and the name Sophorae derives from our previous garden a mere 400 metres away.

Even closer, our neighbours at No 4 have kindly joined in this garden opening and you will be welcomed into their quirky artistic garden and find yourself with yet another vista of the reserve and how borrowed landscape gives depth and connection. There is more productive guerrilla gardening to see. This garden is blessed with an artistic owner who tries new ideas with exotics and natives, has lots of quirky ceramics and pots, succulents and two truly magnificent *Bougainvillea*. A riot of colour that frames the outdoor dining and the long view to the reserve. The perfect spot for our weekly post Tai chi tea ceremony!

***Sophorae and 4 Sylvia Court are 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.***