

GARDEN NOTES

FROG HILL

Welcome to Frog Hill. This welcoming home and its country garden were once part of a dairy farm that shared its boundary with nearby Freshwater Creek. The creek lends its name to the neighbourhood and is the environmental spine that runs through properties in the district. Remnant vegetation that lines the creek and the surrounding roadways are reminders of the shape of the landscape prior to farming in the region. Dominated by *Allocasuarina verticillata* (Drooping Sheoak) it is interspersed with Australia's national emblem, *Acacia pycnantha* the 'Golden Wattle' and River Red Gums, *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*. Bogans Lane is named after a local farming family.

Jenny and David Conron purchased Frog Hill around 12 years ago and set about making a garden. The house is surrounded by two and a half hectares, and what they inherited was a small country garden comprising hardy daisies and roses. Many of the trees were established by the previous owner and their size and form have determined the structure of the garden. To the rear of the property is a large windrow of cypress. These trees create a microclimate and enclose a small orchard. This is where it began.

Prior to living at Freshwater Creek, Jenny had nurtured a garden at Macedon where the seasons are pronounced and the rainfall is generous. At Frog Hill the seasons are more temperate but the rainfall can be challenging. This region of south-west Victoria sits in the 'Otway rain shadow' – extending from Winchelsea through Geelong and across the Bellarine Peninsula. An experienced cold climate gardener, Jenny discovered a new suite of plants that could be grown at Freshwater Creek. Soon after arriving in the district she joined the Friends of Geelong Botanic Gardens (FGBG) and immediately linked to a network of enthusiastic gardeners with a pool of local plant knowledge. Training as a guide at the FGBG she learnt much from the plantings at the gardens. Being part of the Friends also meant the ever-present temptation of plants propagated by the Growing Friends. Many of the species growing at Frog Hill originated from the FGBG.

Of particular interest in Jenny and David's garden are the salvias. Originating from South Africa and Mexico, salvias are incredibly hardy and drought resistant – making them well adapted to the climate in this part of Australia. The species are varied and flower all year round. The winter varieties begin in late autumn and will continue into early summer, while summer varieties commence in spring and will continue to late autumn. With Jenny's careful planning, a splash of salvia colour can be found at Frog Hill year-round.

And here is the bonus. With salvias come the nectar feeding small birds – flocks of honeyeaters (particularly New Holland Honeyeaters) are regular visitors. Jenny's garden is home to three families of Blue Wren, New Holland Honeyeaters, Wattle Birds and a pair of Australian Thrushes.

Another plant species of interest in Jenny's garden are pelargoniums (often known as geraniums) and like the salvias these originate from the collection at the Geelong Botanic Gardens. The tapestry of planting around the house at Frog Hill is intermixed with hardy perennials and romantic roses that complement the salvia and the pelargonium collection. Species are selected for their hardiness and ability to grow in dry country farm conditions. The garden offers a series of microclimates from full sun to dappled shade but all are required to cope with long periods of dry.



The most recent change to Jenny and David's garden is the renovation of an old pond inherited from the previous owners. Water has been removed to help with summer mosquito control and old shrubs and a number of trees have been shaped and cleared. Recently installed, the planting is robust and designed for foliage contrast and dry shade. It will take a number of seasons to establish.

Westward at the rear of the house the garden narrows and leads through a small gateway to the productive garden. Here a variety of plots have been set aside for vegetables, fruit and flowers. Since working on the garden, David and Jenny have added to the orchard and keep fruit trees pruned at a lower height that enables each tree to be easily netted during its fruiting period. Amongst the trees are delicious apples, apricots, nectarine and growing in the berry house are the most scrumptious New Zealand pink peaches. The enclosed berry house ensures that birds are kept at bay and the abundant crop of fruit is harvested and goes straight to the house where 18kg of fruit is frozen or transformed into preserves.

The vegetable patch offers picking through the seasons. Late October is mid-spring and the patch is being prepared for summer planting. The chicken house provides manure for the garden and a constant stream of eggs for the house. The species of fowl are Lavender Auracana (laying blue eggs) and Rhode Island Reds. Foxes are about and are a constant worry. Closing up each night is vital.

On the south side of the garden is 'The Owl' looking out over the landscape toward the Otways. This is a new addition and is underplanted with *Leucospermum reflexum* 'So Exquisite'. The sculpture was made by Justin Zahra from Drysdale and it pays homage to Jenny's father who was a filmmaker with a cheeky sense of humour. Scattered about the garden are flashes of blue: pots, seats, frogs, garden stakes and sculpture. These pieces are playfully placed to add accent to the nearby planting.

Saturday visitors will meet Kylie Treble from 'A Place of Wonder' and author of Connect. Kylie is committed to sustainability and runs workshops to educate people on how to get the most from your house and garden. Kylie will be chatting to visitors with an occasional demonstration and selling signed copies of her produce and cooking book.

You will also have a chance to meet Chris Tournier, a local horticulturalist and nursery owner from Cottage Farm Perennials. Chris will have a plant stall with lots of favourites on offer from Jenny's garden.

Refreshments are being supplied by the Birregurra CWA. Choose a spot on the verandah or in the garden, sit and linger with a cup of tea, cake or sandwich and enjoy a little piece of country hospitality at Frog Hill.