

GARDEN NOTES

TUGURIUM

The first part of the garden was bought as a vacant burnt out block after the Ash Wednesday fires destroyed the original house in 1983. All that was on site were a few singed and scruffy Messmates (*Eucalyptus obliqua*) and a mass of seedling Blackwoods (*Acacia melanoxylon*).

There was absolutely no natural topsoil on the block, as the lack of any decent weeds was testament to. The ground flora consisted of a few tussock grasses and the odd sundew. Hardly an auspicious start for a keen gardener, but as I had no intention of gardening on it – being busy with a new nursery and looking after other people's gardens to make a living – it didn't seem to matter at the time. However things changed dramatically in 1988 when I met Craig and suddenly I had a keen accomplice and a second pair of hands to start things really happening.

The first and most important job, and the one that has been ongoing ever since, was soil preparation – or should I say soil creation – which started in the back corner where we dug as deeply into the clay as possible and incorporated vast quantities of organic matter and spent potting mix from my nursery.

Since the soil was created and the plants put in, mulching has become the biggest yearly task with often ten or more 10-metre truckloads delivered annually. A friend once said that we put the second storey on the house because the first one was disappearing under the mulch! Different types of mulch are sourced each time to add variety.

The garden developed in a fairly unstructured way as befitting the woodland style that seemed most appropriate for the site, and from the beginning as wide a range of plants as possible was planted due to me being a compulsive plant collector.

I believe that collectors often end up with collections and not gardens, but I wanted to have both. The way plants are put together in the garden is important in creating a cohesive whole. Fortunately I am not the type of collector who specialises in a particular group so there wasn't any chance that it would become top-heavy with too many similar-looking specimens. On the other hand, using different plants that have similar textures or looks, instead of repeating the same plant time and time again, has created a sense of continuity.

The house next door was bought in 1999 and it was very different from the original block as it had no big trees and lent itself to a more formal style, but it still had to tie in with the original garden. We installed a circular lawn to accommodate our small orchard, and had enough sun for a large and productive vegetable garden. It also had a sheltered narrow back garden where I was able to experiment with citrus trees that all and sundry said would be a disaster at Macedon. (How wrong they were!).

The final part of the garden was an unused section of road reserve that we purchased from the council in 2001 so we could dig a substantial pond. No garden has a soul without some water and this also allowed for compost pits, a clothes line, wood shed and 'Cluckingham Palace' for our very spoilt ducks and chickens.

Our garden is very much a reflection of our own likes and dislikes so we hope you like it. But if you don't, remember that it is your fault!

Stephen Ryan

These notes can be downloaded from the Open Gardens Victoria website
www.opengardensvictoria.org.au