

GARDEN NOTES

YALLAROO GARDENS

(Indigenous Australian for Beautiful Flowers)

Welcome to Yallaroo Gardens. We moved onto our one-acre property at Christmas 2010 with the intention of developing a predominantly native garden. It was a very different setting to the eight-acre garden property with a huge garden that we had downsized from. We were very enthusiastic and arrived with approximately 1,000 home-grown plants, mainly natives, in pots and tubes. There were garden beds around the house and along the driveway near the house, but at that stage they were somewhat neglected.

The long driveway featured large agapanthus clumps encircling silver birch trees along its length. At the front was a well-constructed tennis court that has been greatly appreciated by our young grandchildren. At the end of the first month, two cypress hedges, numerous large cypresses around the garden and nine enormous wind-break cypress trees along the back fence had been removed. We have retained two lovely magnolias, several fuchsias, tree ferns, some gardenias along with one lilly pilli. Today the long driveway's length is filled with beds full of colourful plants including correas, eremophilas, hibbertias, dampieras and several large signature *Brachychiton rupestris* trees.

We tidied the garden beds and removed plants that would not fit into our garden plans, including rampant dianellas, cordylines, onion weed, forget-me-nots and agapanthus. The area was flat and wind prone. The soil type was of a fine, grey sandy loam that later proved to have a high winter water table. We enthusiastically set about marking out new garden beds, some of which we raised and then embarked on the task of establishing our 1,000 plants before winter set in. Two 10,000 litre tanks were also installed alongside an existing tank of the same capacity.

Over the first winter the high water table caused almost half of our new plantings to perish, which was somewhat disheartening. It was clear that we needed to put in drainage lines, so we set about digging numerous lines around the garden. Next spring thirteen ten cubic metre loads of extra soil were brought in to create mounds across the garden – this being achieved with the use of a trusty barrow, a long-handled shovel and lots of man and woman power. Progressive plantings during that spring and over the following years have almost filled the entire garden.

In the first couple of years, garden ponds were dug, rocks were brought in to add to the garden landscaping and the bridge was built. Other features, such as mulched and log edged pathways, have been incorporated as the garden progressed – for enthusiastic gardeners a garden is never static but ever evolving.

Bob is an enthusiastic propagator so a high percentage of our plantings have been made possible using his expertise, our hothouse and bottom heat facilities. The general plan evolved quickly, resulting in an established garden featuring a huge range of predominantly smaller-growing native plants. We are also correa fanatics and grow an amazing variety of them. Another special love we share is grevilleas of which there are many in the garden, including a number of stunning tall standards. The front garden contains many well-grown plants, including leptospermum and doryanthes. It feels a little like walking through the bush as you wind your way through the paths, which are now covered with soft mulch. Closer to the house, the garden has a quite formal elegance. There is a fernery, and many kinds of zygocacti plus more ferns in pots edge the house.

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www.opengardensvictoria.org.au



We find it most rewarding to experiment and push the boundaries of possibilities in one's own back yard, such as when we were able to succeed with cutting grown eremophilas that are indigenous to the arid interior of Australia near Alice Springs. Because we propagate many plants from cuttings it is possible to use a highly experimental approach to planting. We generally consider the needs of plants before planting, for example plants from Western Australia will be placed in garden locations that best replicate those from where they originated. Numerous plant collections have been developed, including correas, leschenaultias, eremophilas and epacris; these add to the challenge, interest and botanical value of the garden.

Surrounding the house are beds that include a diverse range of native and non-native plants. To our eyes, these beds blend in well with the predominantly native species throughout the garden. The garden evokes the feel of the bush in some parts; in others, formal elegance. Every inch of ground has been developed whether for floral display or for productive food growing.

The rear garden features a large covered orchard where peach, figs, apples, cherries, plums and apricots thrive. Other fruiting trees outside the enclosure include macadamia, orange, lemon and loquat. Adjacent is a vegetable garden that provides organic food for the table across all seasons. There is also a vine-covered colonnaded walkway and a private courtyard garden. The hothouse has proved most valuable to kick-start spring seedlings, including tomatoes, zucchinis, sweet corn and even fruiting pineapples.

The ponds: The fish in our three garden ponds keep the mosquito larvae under control. The waterfall area is of particular attraction to a wide variety of bird species.

Watering of plants: There is no fixed watering system. Our current tanks are almost sufficient for our watering needs. All watering is achieved by use of hoses and watering cans.

Plant labels: We use permanent labels to name as many plants as possible, which allows us and visitors to accurately identify plants at a later stage. This is crucial where there are multiple variations of the one species, for example 50 variations of *Correa pulchella*.

Garden mulch: 200 cubic metres of eucalyptus-based mulch have been barrowed around the garden. In ordering the mulch we stipulate that we do not want cypress or pine mulch as we believe it is not suitable for native plants.

We have a strong interest in the environment and see the native plantings as a means of encouraging wildlife back into the area. To us, the Australian flora has a special beauty and uniqueness and an amazingly diverse range of plants. Our desire is that you enjoy the garden and perhaps be inspired with ideas that you can incorporate into your own garden.

Dot and Bob O'Neill