

Art Studio Garden

48 Brereton Street

Queanbeyan West

Open 30 April – 1 May 2016



Every year, my family and I open our gates to the public for the Queanbeyan City Council Arts Trail. This year we are opening the garden on its own merits, although it is never separate from our creative endeavours. Our Art Studio Garden is positioned at the foothills of Mt Jerrabomberra where we enjoy sweeping views to the north and east, mostly over the city of Queanbeyan. The rectangular garden is roughly 100m long by 20m wide and situated on a fairly steep slope. To combat the challenge of water retention on a slope we developed our garden in terraces, with rocky swales, which has ensured year-round crops. Most of the rocks were already on the block and a generous neighbour also donated some.

When we moved into our house 8 years ago, we began with virtually a blank slate of compacted clay, fallen trees and rust-infested weeds in the yard. In heavy rain, we would watch water pour down the slope unimpeded. It was not possible for us to push a wheelbarrow from the bottom of the driveway to the back fence without experiencing a puncture or three! It took around 18 months for us to eradicate the offending thorns, broken glass and rusted metal. Every hole that we dug to receive a tree brought us a treasure trove of rusted car parts, machinery, broken glass, syringes and cutlery. One of the first lessons we taught our children on the block was correct identification of dangerous spiders, scorpions and snakes. Imagine ... only minutes drive from Parliament House!!

After a campaign of mending fences to keep out kangaroos and dogs off leashes in adjoining Bicentennial Park, we set about building vegetable beds and compost bins. I saw out two pregnancies with a crowbar in hand! It used to take my husband around 5 hours to tame the waist-high grass with a whipper snipper (he could not mow because of the hidden hazards)! Truckloads of mulch and years later, we now tend more than 70 productive trees scattered across the property including heritage apples and a hard-to-find pistachio pair. Shaded arbours, and a sunken pond provide respite for wildlife, particularly native birds, in the heat of summer. I also built a greenhouse close to the house that enables us to winter tender plants and continue propagating in frost.

One of the most memorable milestones for our garden was the introduction of chickens. It signified the point at which the garden was sufficiently civilised to safely support the next stage of our permaculture design. What started as a tiny house for tiny pullets has expanded to a significant covered pen. We have hatched two clutches of hens (Australorpe and Silver Laced Wyandotte), seen roosters come and go, and given many egg cartons of free-range treasure to friends, family and visitors.

A single income and three young children meant that we had to carefully watch our budget and monitor water usage while establishing the garden. We employed a system of barrels and gravity fed drippers as we were planting. We used sunken soft drink bottles to deeply water the plants with grey water, which we used to carry by hand from the house, until we treated ourselves to a pump.

Over the years, we have scrounged recycled fencing and building materials from neighbours and the Green Shed and turned these into a miscellany of practical infrastructure - garden sheds, a playhouse for the children, a man cave, a shade house, and an outhouse. Meanwhile, grafting, cuttings and seedlings have all passed from our kitchen window to the pergola and then out into the yard. They have in turn made it to local schools, fetes and most recently to the Queanbeyan Uniting Church where we helped develop a community garden.

Some gardeners are sticklers for plans and structure. Some gardeners enjoy a rambling wander in heritage wonders. We enjoy a garden full of stories. We have carried some of these stories and plants with us for more than 35 years to remind us of people, places and life lessons. For instance there is a bonsai liquidambar that sowed itself at the foot of its parent in my childhood home. My father planted the parent as a tribute to Tolstoy. Also from my childhood home is a self sown Manzanillo olive. My husband and I shared our first kiss under the graceful boughs of the parent tree! We also have a couple of towering pencil pines, once only tiny threads in a footpath outside the Melbourne flat we used to inhabit. We have also planted our garden with medicinal plants and plants with ancient symbolism- scholars will recognise bay laurel for truth, pomegranates for fertility, rosemary for remembrance, acanthus for eternal life At every step it is possible to find our roots and wings.

At its heart, our garden is inspired by creative urge. It is not fussy or boastful. It is a garden that is still coming to be and despite significant struggles, it succeeds in feeding our hearts and bellies. Those with an interest in arts and gardening will appreciate the connections between our work (whether sculpting, woodwork or craft), our family, and our immediate natural environment. There are numerous humorous sculptures and installations around the garden including oversized nests, birdhouses and quirky signs. We hope that visitors will be inspired, as we were, to have the courage to build from scratch with little more than love and perseverance.

		
Visit other gardens open in Queanbeyan this weekend	Entry fee	Hours of opening
Kathleen: 21 Downey Street Karabah	\$8 adult	10am – 4pm
Railway Park Community Garden cnr Henderson Road and Crest Road	Free	10am – 1pm
Queanbeyan Sensory Garden in Ray Morton Park off Waniassa Street or Trinculo Place	Free	12 – 4pm
And our last garden for the season - open 30 April – 1 May		
Carol's Hillside Oasis: 109 O'Connor Circuit Calwell ACT	\$8 adult	10am – 4pm