

Lorraine & Geoff's Garden
93 Macfarland Place,
PEARCE



Open 12 —13 March 2016

We came to Pearce in 1984, and spent several years tidying up. By the early 1990s the back yard was two large patches of scrappy grass, separated by a low breeze block wall and broken concrete slabs that defined the "entertainment area". The front yard was more scrappy grass, relieved by the large magnolia tree that is still there.



In 1994 we began an extensive revision of the gardens. Our house faces west, not ideal from the energy conservation point of view but we do look out onto a park, and we wanted to keep that view. The front garden is almost level thanks to a retaining wall along the drive. We imported soil to create a racetrack shaped low mound around the magnolia tree, which much improved the soil for our new plants. Pavers edged the inside of the racetrack. We made entries into the front garden from the steps, and near the letterbox, and from the nature strip. The first two were practical, while the third framed a link to the park directly opposite.



The back garden design was more exciting.

Our block slopes from the north west corner down to the south east. Looking out the back are two bedrooms that are few feet above ground level, and a kitchen and dining room at "first floor" level. The kitchen windows were high in the wall: they gave an excellent view of the eastern sky but none of the garden. To see our back garden we had to sit outside in a mosquito wire and aluminium "sun room" perched on a concrete slab "deck" outside the dining room.

We decided to link the elements with five shallow ponds. Starting in the high north west three ponds linked by a rocky watercourse follow the fall of the land to the central entertaining area. The spa deck sits between the third and fourth ponds. It is raised a little to suggest that water flows under the deck from pond to pond.

A second rocky watercourse runs from the south side of the house into the fifth pond which is at the low south east corner of the block.

The five ponds are separate. No water runs down the rocky watercourses except during heavy rain.

We wanted to minimise straight lines, so we paved the entertainment area in a circular pattern, with a wall at a convenient height for sitting. The curves in walls and pathways soften the brickwork and complement the curves in the ponds. Plants have come and gone, but the structure of the garden remains.



Lots of soil was imported to shape the garden and improve growing conditions (and the weeds that came with the soil surely loved growing!). We seem to recall the initial planting of the back garden used 71 plants, which seemed like a lot at the time.

We tried to avoid making the garden entirely visible from any one spot. It was more difficult to do in the smaller, flatter front garden although the alignment of the three entrances with the central magnolia encourage looking at various angles — and the dense planting makes you venture onto the nature strip if you want to see everything on offer. When you enter the back garden through the colorbond gate you have the choice of the straight paved path to the left of the callistemon or more cross country to the right. Follow the paved pathway and at the corner of the house either turn left into the entertaining area or go half right down to the bottom corner between the fourth and fifth ponds.

In the back garden we tried to make mini-vistas. From the paved entertaining area, look up along the curved pathway, or up along the dry watercourse, or through to the right of the Tasmanian Strawberry. Take the pathway then cross the watercourse to find three seating areas. Feel free to use them, but please be careful getting on/off the hammock and don't let children bounce on it or on the hanging chair.

There are a couple more mini-vistas that you really see only from the two bedrooms.

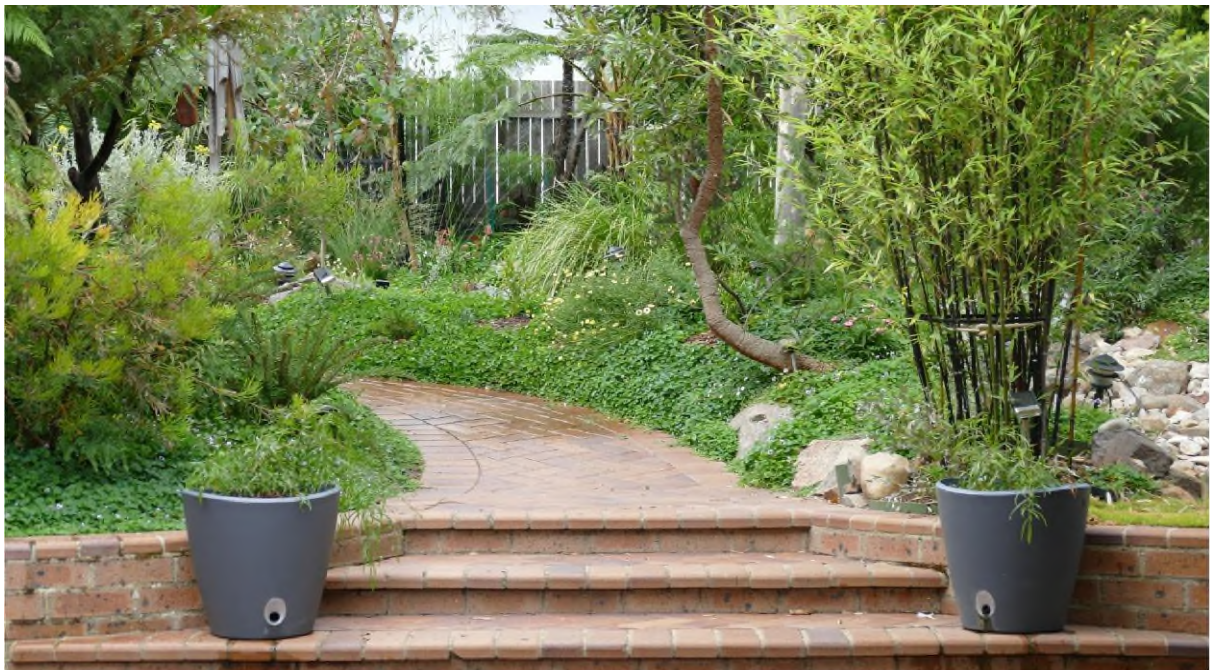
We added the sun/garden room recently to increase our enjoyment of our garden. You are welcome to go up and have a look but please don't take your drinks or food into the garden room. There is no entry to the rest of the house.

We have lived in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand at various times, so we have tried to make a garden in which natives predominate, but with Asian touches. The Chinese palm that forms a background for the

highest pond was an early choice: it survives Canberra winters with ease — it also has large thorns that try to eat anyone foolish enough to prune or trim it.

There are four types of bamboo in the back garden. Along the fences or the back wall they provide elegant height and coverage. The black bamboo between the curved steps and the second pond is a recent addition. We think it is a lovely plant. All bamboos are of the clumping variety.

Most of the exotic vegetation is in the front garden: the magnolia and conifer trees, along with camellias, daphne, and azalea. There are also natives such as grevillea, callistemon, hakea, crowea, correa and many flowers. Exotics in the back yard include the bamboos, three lotus pots and the Chinese palm. The "Tasmanian strawberry" (it seems to have many common names) has been there forever, as have the camellia on the house's south east corner and some of the nearby fuchsias. We love looking at the many shapes, colours and shades created by the variety of plants.



The south wall is also where you will find perhaps our favourite, the large tree fern that overhangs the paved path. It was about three feet high when we arrived in 1984.

The masses of low, green steppable ground cover that you see in both front and back gardens have been a great success. In the early years after the revisions, we used mulch or forest litter etc. to protect the plants and to mark pathways. However, that gave the garden too many dry, brown areas for our taste. The steppable ground covers are all natives, dichondras, native violets, pratia and Babies' Tears. Their greens and various flowers now unify our garden with an almost lush, flower meadow underlay that is wholly Australian.

We are very happy to share our garden with the lizards, the bees and butterflies, the honey eaters, the magpies and currawongs, and particularly with the various parrots that trim the two conifers in the front garden while they eat the white nuts.