**The Melssen Rose Garden**

**History**

This garden is in memory of my Father who, with my Mother, came to Australia in 1956 from the Netherlands and made a family; he loved roses and Chopin.

When I started the garden in spring 2007 we were still living with the effects of the drought and the front area consisted of: patchy grass, the rosemary bush; rose bed at the top of the driveway and rose bed at top of the steps. Similarly, the back area consisted of: overgrown vegie patch; overgrown shrubs; decrepit wooden fences along the back and the southern side. The only garden paths were the existing concrete paths at the front and back and the path to the rotary clothes line. I replaced the fences with Colorbond, as it is low maintenance and introduced crushed granite paths at the front and side.

**General Principles**

Minimise town water use: the garden had to be watered from the tanks as much as possible. The 10,000 litre tank waters the front gardens and the remaining 6,200 litre tanks water some of the back garden, using irrigation.

Minimise water loss: mulch everywhere, use ground covers (lemon thyme, erigeron, snow in summer) and check the irrigation regularly.

Improve the soil: the sugar cane mulch breaks down and improves the soil.

Minimise weeding: again, the mulch and ground covers are vital to this, as well as vigilance and, as far as possible, removing a weed when I see it.

Use bulbs: beautiful, colourful, scented, multiply (free plants); stagger the flowering periods with good bulb selection and placement eg hyacinths are followed by tulips, which are followed by the Dutch irises etc.

Sensible plant selection: disease resistant (Iceberg roses); scented and repeat flowering roses.

Elderly proofing: can be maintained by 1 person as she ages.

**Types of roses**

The garden has approximately 100 roses, and includes: climbers; standards; weeping standards; floribunda bush (Jane McGrath); carpet; shrub; David Austin; hybrid tea (Firefighter, Queen Elizabeth). The most heavily scented rose is Double Delight, a climbing hybrid tea. This is followed by the David Austin roses. One of the David Austins, is the world’s most popular yellow rose and is called Graham Thomas. Some roses are linked to charities eg the tiny pink Jane McGrath and the yellow Golden Celebration for Catherine Hamlin’s fistula hospital in Ethiopia. Two of the Peace climbers were developed in 1902 and went on to form part of the stronger American bred Peace rose developed at the end of WW II. All rose names are available from my garden book/journal.

**Maintenance**

I never lift the bulbs to store in the fridge or elsewhere; division happens by accident. The roses are pruned in the winter, after which I spray them for black spot (lime sulphur, followed by white oil) and aphids (pyrethrum). This is followed with a program of fertilising every 8 to 10 weeks (Sudden Impact). Every few years: dig in some mushroom compost. Spring is the busiest time with all the dead heading as well as the harvesting of the roses for my vases – just glorious, really. On average, an hour per day is enough to keep the garden beautiful and bountiful. For 1 person it is not worth running the vegie garden anymore and it will gradually become a flower bed.