Garden Notes - Children’s garden, Holt

We moved here twenty years ago in 1997. We were attracted by the large block, mature trees and its location beside the greenspace. We wanted a garden full of food plants, while creating a space that is attractive and functional for playing and relaxing in. We spend most days, while home, outdoors, even in the winter.

The garden has been continually evolving since we came. In the first ten years we built the smaller shed and the front and back decks and our chook run. The bigger shed/hobby room and the anti aviary, over the vegetable garden, came later.

Plantings in the garden have, by necessity, changed a lot too. Antony and I met while backpacking in Europe. There, we went to many grand gardens filled with magnificent perennial borders. We liked the idea of having our own border like that one day. When we first came here I was lucky enough to work at a specialist perennial nursery, “Alberts Garden”, in Pialligo. I became a real perennial enthusiast and filled our new garden with perennial beds which were lovely. Then followed five years of drought and severe water restrictions, which combined with the competition for water from all our beautiful big trees, meant we lost most of it. Only the really tough ones survived. Since then, through trial and error, we have created a garden that copes pretty well with dry conditions.

Ten years ago we had our first of three children. I soon had to learn to stop being precious about lawns being trashed and garden beds becoming play spaces. We built the big sand pit and brought in a couple of ute loads of clay loam soil to make a digging pile, which is now almost gone. The children seemed to prefer that to the sand. We have hung swings and climbing ropes in the trees and we have a slide off the deck. The children have built a cubby of sorts in our quince tree. There are materials at hand, from which, all kinds of temporary creations and cubbies have been built.

As the children grew older, they liked to have more space to play and ride bikes, so we spent more and more time in the green space beside us. I grew up on a farm with the freedom and space that gave children. We want, for our children, to have as close an experience as we can, so in this age of helicopter parenting, our compromise was to garden while they played (I believe children play better if left to themselves and they can see you doing some physical work). Thus, the park garden began. First, as something to do out there, I cleaned up the weeds around the logs and rocks where the mowers couldn’t reach. Next we planted the crab apple trees (Malus ioensis Plena) a few more each year. Gradually I planted bits and pieces, which were mostly cuttings from plants that had proved to be pretty tough. They need to cope with no irrigation and only a couple of emergency hand waterings in the summer.

We water our private gardens every second day in summer, using mains water, through dripper line, and much less often, if at all, in the cooler wetter months. Hand watering here is done from water tanks (2x5000L tanks and 2x2200L tanks). They empty all too soon. The trees keep getting bigger. Our Golden elm and the Oak tree’ joined hands, across the back yard, this summer. All this increasing shade means we can grow fewer and fewer sun loving plants. Our blue berries which loved the cherry bed for its morning sun and afternoon shade, are now shaded all day and will need moving this winter…. Where? Maybe the’ lawn’ will shrink a little more this year.

In the vegetable garden, the children all have their own garden bed. They are quite particular about what can be grown. Occasionally, as they have most of the rotating production area, I try to sneak in something despicable like a broad bean. Antony built the anti aviary for my birthday as flocks of bower birds ate everything off in winter. It has the added advantage of keeping most of the cabbage moths out.

Twice a year, in autumn and spring, we spend a couple of hours making big ‘hot compost’ heaps in 1m wide circles of wire rabbit netting. I find this works better than having a heap that is continually added to. By building it in one go (with layers of green material, dry dead material, animal manure, a little wood ash and some water), the heap gets really hot, and breaks down quickly to beautiful useful compost. Our food scraps go to the hens. If there is something they won’t eat, we bury it in the heap rather than having it stinking on top.

We have a lot of fruit trees and berries which have varying levels of productivity. (We were away for six months last year, meaning I missed the critical window to spray the stone fruit trees with copper to stop the leaf curl fungus. They got it so bad, I had to cut them back hard and we didn’t get fruit from them this year. I summer prune the fruit trees to help with fitting bird nets. It has the added advantage of being able to shape a tree more quickly, keep it compact, and achieve more low fruiting wood.

We are regularly visited by many big birds. Timing net rotation to keep the fruit is critical. They caught us out this year by eating the grapes and persimmons while they were still small and green. You live and learn, there’s always next year. We got a cracker crop of cherries!

We hope you enjoy visiting our garden.

Antony, Emma, Callum, Bonnie, and Laurie Kain.

Fruit plants In The Garden

Raspberries, Apricots, Quince, Apples, Pear, Nectarine, Peach, Plum, Black passionfruit, Banana Passionfruit, Mulberry, Kiwi vines, Figs, Lemons, Mandarin, Lime, Cumquats, Newberries, Cherries, Persimmons, Blue berries, Grape, Cherry guava, Kiwi berry, Strawberries, Elderberry, Pomegranate, And a very successful Asparagus bed.

Tough Plants In The Park Garden

French(w), English(su) and Italian(sp) Lavender, Perennial wallflowers(w&sp), Centranthus(s), Carpet Roses (sp,su,& au), Artemisia(wormwood), Stachys(lambs ears), Euphorbias(sp), Sedums(au), Salvias (su & au), Helleborus(w), Dutch Iris(sp), pigface(sp), Convolvulus(su & au), Euryops (Yellow Daisy)(su & au),