

Els's Garden

3 Ramage Place, Flynn

Open 31 October and 1 November 2015



The garden is on a quarter acre, gently south-sloping with the house well down the block. The garden has a street frontage of 60 meters. The house was built for the view, not the climate: living rooms face south-west and look out over the Brindabellas.

The house was built in 1971 on pasture land. When we bought it in 1981 the garden was mainly couch-grass, with a very hard layer of clay just under the surface. There were some young street trees in the front (*Eucalyptus nicholii*, *Pistacia sinensis*), and some trees and shrubs (such as *Cercis canadensis* and *Betula pendula*) in beds with tanbark-on-plastic, as was the rage at that time. The back-yard had some trees (including *Gleditsia triacanthos* and *Acacia baileyana* under the power lines), with the ubiquitous clothes line parallel to the back-fence.

In the first five years we grew mainly vegetables in the back yard, on the east side of the house. We mowed the grass in the front and the back when it was (over)due. Watering happened almost exclusively in the vegetable patch. We planted Australian natives along the fence in the backyard (*Callistemon*, *Prostanthera*, *Hakea*), some of which are still growing today. When we returned to Canberra in the early 1990s, after 6 years of absence, we continued with that regime. Over the years we planted more Australian plants, especially along the back fence, including westringias, grevilleas, correas, and banksias.

Towards 2000 we decided that we wanted to make some changes to the garden. Because of the position of our house, the first winter sun we get in the living area is after midday, and the warmest place around our property in the morning is in the bottom of the backyard. That is the place where we already had constructed a patio, for sunny breakfast in late autumn and early spring. We decided that a pond would be a good idea around that area, and indulged in an approximately 10 meter long 'creek' snaking its way over the whole width of the backyard, delivering the water in the pond via three 'waterfalls'. This was a big project, which required moving the clothes-line, and including defined beds and pathways. Once that was done - 'why didn't we do this 20 years ago?' we asked ourselves - we turned our thoughts to the front garden.

Not much had happened there since the early 1980s. Over time, I had planted fruit trees and Australian native plants all over the front garden. However, around 2000 the fruit trees were chopped down and replaced in what has now become the 'orchard' – the area on the north-east corner in the front garden, just north of the vegetable patch in the backyard. The work in the front garden (north and west of the house) could begin.

Before we started, we decided on some main principles that would guide us. First of all we wanted a garden that we liked - a garden where we could grow many different Australian plants. Recently I counted over 200 species. One part of the garden – the north side – was designated to 'house' red, orange and yellow flowered plants, and on

the west-side we would have those that tended towards pink, lilac and purple. Blue and white, and to a (much) lesser extent yellow, could go anywhere. We kept mainly to this pattern, but there are some exceptions. We also wanted some privacy in the front yard. So the plants near the road are mainly between 1.5 and 2 meters high, and decreasing in height towards the house – with exceptions to make the landscape more interesting.

A second principle was that, although I enjoy gardening, I wanted to minimize the work. So one tactic was to grow plants that wouldn't grow much taller than the size I wanted. In that way, pruning would be kept to a minimum – mainly after the flowering stage. Another tactic was to grow lots of groundcovers between the bushes and trees - we prefer to prune rather than weed. For that purpose I use many different plants, but different grevilleas and *Myoporum parvifolium* are favourites. Others we include are *Ajuga*, *Brachyscome*, *Pelargonium*, *Dianella*, *Scaevola*, *Rhagodia*, *Gastrolobium sericeum* and *Hibbertia*. *Senecio linearifolius* I use as a 'filler': it grows fast, fills up an empty spot for the summer, dies down in the winter, and can easily be pulled out if the spot is needed for something else next year. In the nature strip we have resorted to *Phyla nodiflora*.

A third tactic was to go for heavy mulching. We use at least 15m³ of woodchips per year, sometimes spread once per year and other years topped up with another 10m³ - 15m³.

The location of paths was decided over time – according to where we found ourselves walking. All paths receive a darker mulch than the rest of the garden so that it is easy for anybody to see where to (not) walk.

A last important activity in our garden is the watering system. Although we have never watered much, we installed a reticulation system with drippers very early on. This was mainly used for small plants (one to two years old), when deemed to be needed – perhaps once per week in the summer. But since 2007 we also have a system of gravity-fed watering with rainwater from the roof.

And now, we feel we have things the way we like it, and sufficiently under control to not have to worry about the garden if/when we are away for a while, even in summer. We sold the lawn mower.

Other gardens opening soon:

Christine's Garden, 48 Weathers Street, Gowrie



Open 7 - 8 November 2015

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