

Tom's Garden

22 Irene Avenue, Queanbeyan
Open 21 - 22 November 2015



Rose and I purchased our Queanbeyan block in about 1979. I prepared a broad garden plan as part of a CIT horticultural course. We always had a vague vision of a semi-wild garden with privacy, enjoyment and productivity.

My interest in gardening goes back to when I was a small boy in Tumut. My conservation interests go back 30 years. Gaining a CIT Horticultural Certificate in the 1980s made being a public servant more bearable but also led to involvement in landcare and environmental issues from the mid-1980s and also a love of plants, particularly our local native vegetation. I have worked as a part-time gardener for the last 13 years at a local Aged Persons housing facility. I also have a small bush block that has been rehabilitated to the local native vegetation.

The garden's development has been gradual, allowing constant re-appraisal. Once our children left, lawns and play areas gave way to shrub beds and a range of hard and soft surfaces. The vegetable bed developed on the sunny north section, with a very full winter garden these days. Fruit trees, vines and berries are mixed through the garden.

I am very interested in showing what is possible on an ordinary suburban rectangular block with a long driveway and large shed. Yet the garden provides many functions, including food production, plant raising, relaxation, privacy, convenience and a hint of quirkiness. All this in a semi-natural style, without clutter hopefully. I have aimed for all parts of the block to be easily accessible and have selected a range of hardy native and exotic plants to blend and hopefully provide interest to most. Plants include a growing collection of potted geraniums, mostly named. We collected a variety of plants going back 45 years, several with sentimental value and a large collection of long treasured potted plants.

The early spring garden, with bare branches and many plants in flower, is always very different from the garden in late November when plants have thickened and joined.

In spite of my environmental interests, I have found that large trees within the urban environment often create constant management and maintenance issues, particularly shading and root competition, so I give careful thought to their use and placement.

Sustainability in the garden came a bit later, along with solar hot water and power. The layout retains maximum stormwater on the block, including sinks, water ways and deep gravel along the sloping driveway. Worm farms are well established. Mulching and composting has been happening for 25 years and all kitchen organic material ends up in the garden. Composting includes cat litter from my indoor (mostly contented) cats and neighbours' lawn cuttings. Paving and bed construction materials are largely recycled. The garden also provides habitat for a wide variety of birds and other creatures.

Water tanks provide most of the garden requirements for water. The irrigation systems gradually disappeared, proving to be impractical. I have tried to include several small water elements that avoid mind numbing pond maintenance.

Our garden was runner-up for a Queanbeyan Community Waterwise Garden competition held in 2007.

Creating a garden has added greatly to our quality of life. A garden needs to change as we pass through life phases and we've been flexible in adapting the garden along the way. Since Rose died in 2010, I've continued to adapt the garden to my life and that includes remembering our time in the garden together.

Another garden open this weekend:

Woodburn Garden, 20 Mulga St, O'Connor



Open 21 – 22 November 2015

Other gardens opening soon:

Peter & Lyn's Garden, 1048 Old Cooma Rd,
Googong NSW

Open 28 – 29 November 2015

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