

Lorraine & Geoff's Garden
93 Macfarland Place,
PEARCE



Open 24 —25 March 2018, 10 am to 4 pm

To wander through all the garden - leave the high heels at home!

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 management 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 racetrack. We made entries into the front garden from the steps, from the letterbox, and from the nature strip. The first two were practical, while the third frames a view of the park directly opposite.

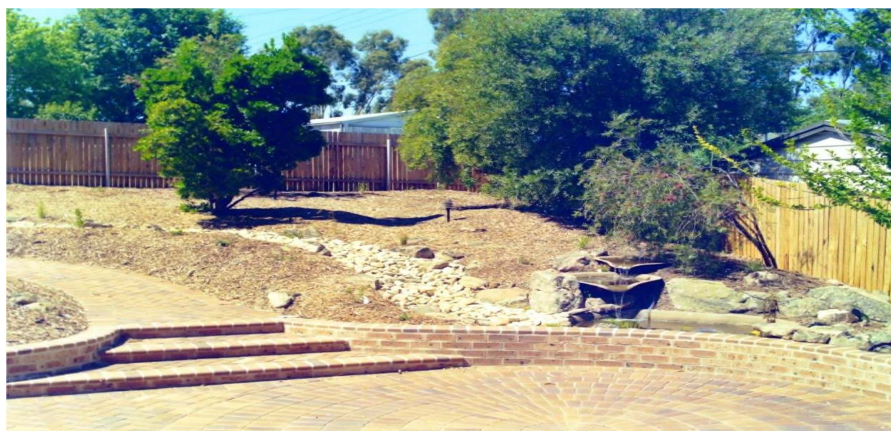
The back garden design was more exciting.



We decided to link the elements with five shallow ponds. Starting in the high north west corner, 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. Each pond has its own pump.

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 get another view.

Enter the back garden through the colorbond gate, 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.

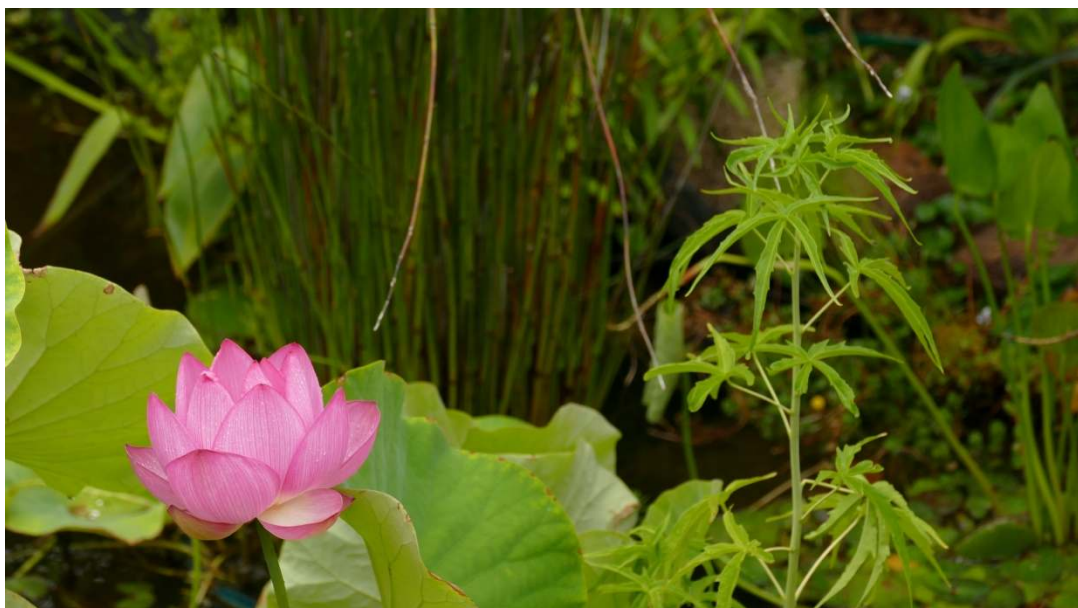
In the back garden we tried to make mini-vistas. From the paved entertaining area, look up along the curved pathway, or up along the dry watercourse, or through to the right of the Tasmanian Strawberry tree. Take the paved pathway then cross the watercourse to find two seating areas. Feel free to use them.

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

Originally the kitchen windows were high in the back 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 added a much bigger sun/garden room and opened up some windows recently to increase our enjoyment of the 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 tried to make a garden in which natives predominate, including eucalypts, grevillea, callistemon, hakea, crowea, correa and many flowers. However, we have planted quite a few exotics. In the front garden you will see the magnolia and conifer trees, along with camellias, daphne, and azalea.

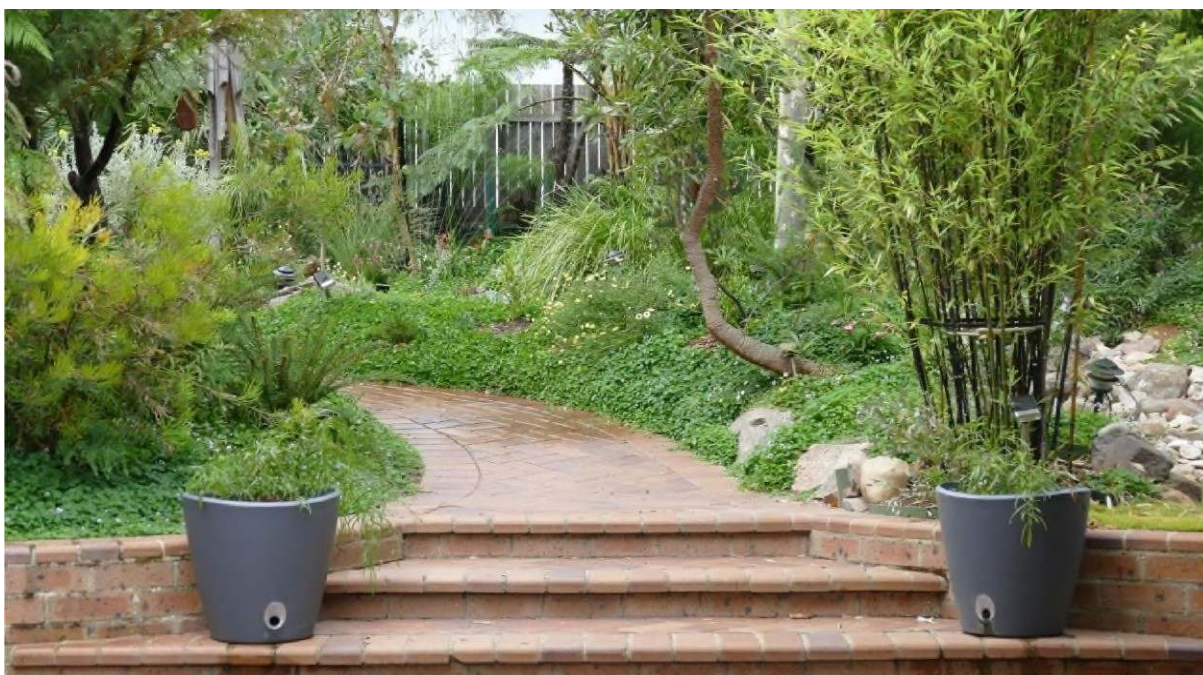
We have lived in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand at various times, so we wanted to have Asian touches, mostly seen in the back yard where you will find bamboo, three lotus pots and a Chinese palm.



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 several types of bamboo in the back garden. Along the fences or the back wall they provide elegant height and coverage. Since our 2016 Open Garden we have moved a tall-ish variety from the back fence, where it got too close to power lines, to a side fence where it helps screen a neighbouring block. We replaced it with Himalayan Weeping Bamboo which is still growing to its full height and, we think, is more graceful and nicer to look at. The black bamboo between the curved steps and the second pond is also a lovely plant. Both the Himalayan and black bamboos dance and sway when the wind blows. All bamboos are of the clumping variety.

Other exotics in the back garden include the "Tasmanian Strawberry" (it seems to have many common names) which has been there forever, as have the camellia on the house's south east corner and some of the nearby fuchsias. An ancient lemon tree lives on the boundary between front and back gardens.



As you came into the back garden you will have ducked under perhaps our favourite plant, 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. Most of the steppable ground covers are natives, dichondras, native violets, pratia and Baby's' Tears. Their various greens and flowers now unify our garden with an almost lush, flower meadow underlay that is almost wholly Australian.

Other changes since 2016

Since our 2016 Open Day we have removed the tall conifer near the letter box. While it thrived, it constrained growth of the plants around it. The small callistemon that had been in its shade rapidly tripled its height and produced a profusion of blooms that continue to delight (sorry about the photos –the conifer is in front of the magnolia in the left hand image) .



The area beneath the other two large conifers down the side of the drive was pretty much a desert in 2016. In 2017 Lorraine removed most of the lowest branches to let some light in, dug the pine needles in with a good dose of a soil wetting product, planted the area with native violets and baby's tears and watered it regularly. It has now been transformed from dark gloomy desert to shady lush green oasis.

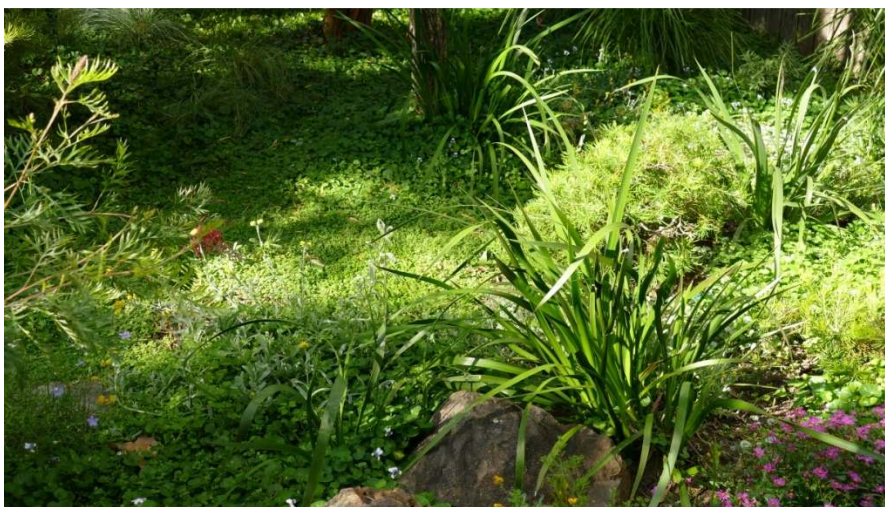


Visits to gardens in Victoria and NSW have led to some changes in our garden. We have long been a fan of proteas and were impressed by the way the gardens at Mount Tomah combined their proteas with an underplanting of osteospermum daisies. As a result, our new proteas are also growing out of a sea of daisies!



The outdoor display gardens at the 2016 Melbourne International Flower & Garden Show showed the great effects that can be achieved from mass planting of a single variety, and from dense planting of several varieties. However, trying to implement some of the plant combinations that we saw at the Show has shown us how difficult it can be to achieve and maintain a dense planting regime for native plants.

After seeing the range of native flowers available in the tube stock in Cool Country Natives at Pialligo, Lorraine was inspired to experiment with a random planting of native flowering plants in two areas of the garden - a large area in the north east corner of the back garden a smaller area almost opposite the big, leaning tree fern at the side of the house and. Both are works in progress.



Four ponds now have low wattage pumps. The fifth has a solar powered pump.