

GARDEN NOTES TRUDY'S PERMACULTURE GARDEN



HISTORY AND FEATURES

The garden is on a block of approximately 600 m² of heavy clay soil with a fairly open corner position and exposed to the hot westerly winds and western sun. About 12 years ago I started to transform the previously established cottage garden and lawns to make it more protected, productive and sustainable.

The initial steps required lots of hard work not just to rip up lawn and cultivate the soil but also to remove considerable roots from street trees, which had invaded the entire garden. Soil improvement never ends however! Leaves are collected from the street trees every autumn and mixed in while all kitchen scraps and similar are composted in the usual bin system. All conventional but effective and free! For wind protection a hedge was planted of mostly native species, Banksias, Hakeas and Grevilleas. Some roses and Camelia Sasanquas were left in their original positions and continue to produce beautiful flowers.

Productivity comes from a wide mixture of trees, bushes, vines, veggie patches and herbs. Varieties were selected to try to provide a steady supply of produce over the seasons and to thrive in the harsh Canberra climate. To find this combination took plenty of time and research, mainly in Louis Glowinski's "The Complete Book of Fruit Growing in Australia" and also "Growing Fruit in Australia" by Baxter and Tankard.

Fruit and nut tree planting started about 8 to 10 years ago and include cherry (Stella and Lapin self fertile varieties), apricot (Trevat early and Moorepark late), nectarine, peach, plums, fig (black Turkish), mulberry (black), pear (three way), nashi (three way graft), apple (two way Gala/Red Delicious) and a dwarf Pink Lady. The nuts are almonds (self fertile Peerless). The Pomegranate is a Russian Rosavaya and there is a dwarf (non-astringent) Persimmon. These deciduous species provide summer shade and winter sun near the house, while the evergreen loquats and Feijoa are the boundary hedge for shade from the western sun and protection from wind. The olives in the back and front corner thrive even in harsh conditions and provide shade.

The courtyard had been wall-to-wall concrete tiled but was partially unpaved to evolve into a frost free haven for productive and fragrant citrus with Meyer lemons, Tahitian lime, Washington Navel orange, Satsuma mandarin (seedless and apparently the most frost tolerant), a limequat (a lime / cumquat cross that is also reasonably frost tolerant) and red and yellow cherry/strawberry guavas. Japanese Silk trees (Albizia) provide more shade in the courtyard and by the rear driveway.

The vines on the wire frame are white and black seedless table grapes and also sited to provide summer shade to the courtyard. Berries include strawberries, red currant, gooseberry, Jostaberry (a blackcurrant / gooseberry cross), Goji berry and blueberries.

I have a supply of veggies in all seasons. One of the most useful tips for all round year productivity is to under plant crops that otherwise suffer in the heat or frost. Spinach and most salad greens can be picked almost any time. The start of a good veggie garden is a selection of peas and beans. Healthy for you and they improve the soil as a free bonus! Broad beans, snow peas, sugar snap peas are autumn planted for spring while climbing and bush beans are ready in summer. You can't have too many legumes!

Summer also yields sweet corn, pumpkin, tomato, capsicum, zucchinis, radish, carrot, beetroot, ginger, potatoes, yacoon (apple of the earth), rhubarb, asparagus and more.

Herbs include coriander, lemon balm, lemongrass, basil, sage, oregano, thymes, parsley, chives, rosemary, many under planted to extend their seasons, and in the shady and moister areas around the side and back of the house are several varieties of mint.

There are flowers integrated throughout the garden for all year round colour, perfume, companion planting, bee activity and biodiversity. The climbers on the wall frames are mainly star jasmine, a superb plant for Canberra with fragrant flowers that looks lush despite its low water requirement and frost tolerance. Other house wall plants are Potato vine and Banksia rose while on the fence are Pandorea Jasminoides (Bower of Beauty) and Clematis.

All rainwater is now diverted from the drains where it was previously wasted. Some water is directed immediately into the garden beds while collection is into 7000 l of tanks. The tank water is mainly used for deep soaking the trees in summer and hand watering seedlings. I bored 30-40 cm deep holes with a post hole tool and lined them with rural drainage pipe. These holes are filled with water as needed to keep soil moist at deeper levels. All my household water is recycled into the garden.

I have tried to integrate the environmental aspects of the garden so that it is sustainable itself and also contributes to a sustainable lifestyle. The overall process is that described by Permaculture books: an integrated, evolving system with consciously designed landscapes found in nature, while yielding an abundance of food. The Permaculture vision is based on ecological principles like observation and interaction, sustainability, use of renewable resources, produce no waste etc.

Other practices include seeds saved each season for the next year's crop and low impact control of pests (home made mixes of soap, veggie oil, bicarbonate of soda, garlic etc). Birds are kept out with nets on simple frames made from poly pipe on steel tube support posts easily hammered into the soil.

Ultimately the garden not only produces food but also happiness, it teaches me patience, respect for the environment and keeps me close to the rhythms of nature.

GARDEN OWNER: TRUDY YOGINI