

GARDEN NOTES

JOAN'S GARDEN

51 DASH CRES, FADDEN



2-3 MARCH 2019

The house was three years old when we bought it in 1986 and the garden had been landscaped by the original owners. The front had a little semi-circular apron of lawn with a concrete mower strip dividing it from the garden beds which were covered with tanbark and a few native trees and shrubs. Similarly, the back had a nice lawn with concrete edging, a long narrow garden bed covered with black plastic and about 20 or so centimetres of river stones and, again, planted with native trees and shrubs. There were hakeas, a casuarina, a lemon scented gum, and other eucalypts. And in the lawn, two evergreen alders were well on their way. Boston Ivy grew on the front and back walls of the house. Powerlines and phone lines ran down the side of the property and along the length of the backyard fence.

As the trees in the backyard had all been planted under the low slung powerlines I gradually cut each one down except two hakeas and the alders. The shrubs struggled, look decidedly sad, collapsed and died. For three months I barrowed all the stones and made a pathway down the fenceline and filled in a big depression around the sideway of the house. When I removed the black plastic I discovered the roots of the shrubs had never put on any growth in the concrete-like compacted dirt. To begin to improve the soil I began regular forays to my mother's home in Griffith to scrounge leaves and anything I could dig into the garden. All the mower strips were broken up and replaced by bricks which provided the flexibility to change the shape of the beds at will. The concrete remained on site to shore up the backs of the beds.

I retained a few of the original trees and shrubs and began to accept cuttings and plants and anything I could scrounge from my mother's garden, friends and fetes. The first tree I bought was the crabapple *Malus lonsis*, followed by a Japanese maple for \$6 from Coles. Trees came and went. Friends offered a young silver birch which, in their garden at Chapman, blocked their view to Civic. Reluctantly I added it to the back yard. As it grew I had to saw off branches heading for the powerlines. But it is still there.

All around the house the shape of the beds constantly changed and more beds evolved. Tree ferns were planted on the SE side of the house and a small preformed pond installed. I dug out the hole for the bigger fishpond with my trusty auger and brought in big stones to edge it. (It has been emptied and relined twice because I inadvertently cut holes in the lining while cleaning out roots etc.) Much later the front lawn was dug up and forest litter used instead so I didn't have to bring the mower around through the garage for a three minute mow. There

was no planning just a desire to create privacy and to make the garden flow and appear bigger than it is. Twice I enlisted the help of a tree surgeon to clear the powerlines.

Composting was always one of my loves. Long drifts of prunings and branches shored up the back of garden beds as they grew higher with compost from bins and bags of sheep manure. I have four closed bins, a worm farm and the 'heap" which consists of bales of pea straw forming an enclosure for compost. It is all 'cold' composting and seeds survive to live another day, be that a good or bad thing. The new green bin takes some of the surplus prunings while my husband does the odd tip run.

Beautiful plants have grown over the years, plants with flowers, but as trees and shrubs have matured the competition is fierce in the soil, and where there was once a more ordered, colourful garden, it is now the survival of the fittest. Crepe Myrtles are hardy and provide colour in Summer. Autumn puts on a colourful display with maples, ornamental cherry and creepers strutting their stuff. Spring brings its own, more gentle colours with bulbs, irises, aquilegia and hellebores, etc.

Overall there are the weeds! Vinca Major, plain and variegated, inherited from the original owner and quite impossible to remove. Ivy also. But I love ivy and have added my own. Lilies. A nice hand-me-down but they proliferate in the garden. Clover. Another gift. Then there is the little green leafed plant which I bought at a fete which would envelop the whole garden if given the chance. It is dichondra-looking, and I have had it for 30 years! As a groundcover it is excellent. There are other common weeds and there are those plants that are just plain weedy. Learn to love your weeds is all I can say or you go dotty.

Pruning. My second love after composting. The success, or whatever you might like to call it, of coping with my garden, is pruning. Trees, shrubs, flowers, grasses, weeds, they all look so much more loved after a good prune.

A weakness for putting plants in pots is my third love. Or not. A little timid about planting in the garden, plant in a pot. Gardenias, begonias, orchids, bamboo, citrus, cliveas, etc, right down to pricked out seedlings growing in cracks between the pavers. Lots of work, but gardens are, aren't they?

The seasons are more of a challenge especially long, hot dry periods. My garden is definitely not waterwise and depends on tap water distributed by hand or sprinklers. Any attempt at a watering system has been thwarted by spading them in half.

It is a green garden, a shady garden, a much-loved garden, nurtured as a gift. It is Joan's garden.