

GARDEN NOTES

PILLANS GARDEN

30 ASPEN RISE, JERRABOMBERRA



OPEN
GARDENS
CANBERRA

12-13 NOVEMBER
2022

HISTORY

In 2001 we bought a 4500 m² block in Jerrabomberra, backing on to grassy woodland on two sides. At the time, we were looking to buy a commuter block out of town, but this block is a great compromise. Our block, at the top of a cul-de-sac, is one of the highest in Jerrabomberra – the house straddles the 714 m contour, just a few metres too high for adequate mains water pressure which means we pump from a holding tank under the house. At the outset, we wanted to build a house and garden that would blend into the semi-rural setting, so we opted for an all-native garden, with no lawn. Fortunately, there were a number of mature eucalypts on the block and these have not only provided shade and overhead cover but also provided a seamless link to the surrounding bush.

Our house, which is constructed of concrete blocks and makes extensive use of corrugated steel (both inside and out), has a colour scheme that mimics the surrounding eucalypts in shades of green, grey and mauve. Large timber decks provide a link between house and garden. The house was completed in April 2003 and the garden begun later that year. Initially, we toyed with the purist approach of allowing the native vegetation on the block to regenerate, supplemented by plantings of strictly local species. However, as a practical compromise we decided to develop the front half of the block and allow regeneration to take its course on the rest.

The magnitude of the job was daunting, so we approached garden designer, Marcia Voce, for inspiration. Although we did not follow Marcia's design closely, it gave us the insight and confidence to proceed with an overall concept in mind. Nor did we try to do the whole thing at once – apart from anything else, we didn't have the money for a "backyard blitz"; we also wanted to experience our block before making any major landscaping decisions. Apart from two feature stone walls and the long, exposed aggregate concrete driveway, we have done all the landscaping ourselves.

The soils on our sloping, west-facing block are mostly typical hill soils – dry, shallow and stony. Only on the lowest part of the block are the soils of moderate depth – we call this our "rainforest gully" because a grove of *Eucalyptus bridgesiana* (Apple Box) provides good shade and natural water seepage means somewhat higher soil moisture. True to its name, we have planted a range of rainforest and moisture-loving plants in this part of the garden, including several Lilly Pilly's (*Acmena smithii*; *Syzygium* spp.), most of which have flowered. Our "rainforest gully" is a dry rainforest gully in contrast to the wet rainforest gully at the Australian National Botanic Gardens in Canberra. We have tried to choose species with glossy, dark green leaves that are drought and cold-tolerant but which give a rainforest feel. A particular success is *Acacia binervata* (Two-veined Hickory), with a coastal habitat, north from Narooma, but which thrives with overhead cover of our eucalypts and is one of few plants in our garden that keeps growing through winter.

Garden watering is a mix of drip irrigation and hand-watering. About one third of the garden is watered from two rainwater tanks (9000 and 2000 litres) and the rest is from town water. Runoff is channeled along pebble-

lined drainage lines, into a series of small, linked ponds, allowing slow infiltration. Only in the heaviest rainstorms (once or twice a year), do the ponds overflow and with further development we will capture this, too. Contour ditches also assist infiltration and reduce runoff on steeper parts of the block.

A wide range of bird species frequent our garden and the number is increasing as the garden develops. Thankfully, Indian mynas are rare, despite being common just a few hundred metres down the road in more urban parts of the suburb. It seems that aggressive local residents, such as magpies and wattlebirds, are more than a match for the hated mynas in our garden and surrounds. Some nectar feeding birds, such as Noisy Friarbirds and Red Wattlebirds, are a bit savage on young grevilleas, but we still love them. Kangaroos and wallabies are regular visitors, particularly in summer, when our ponds are welcome watering holes. Possums, echidnas and wombats are rarely sighted, though the distinctive-shaped calling cards of the latter are regularly noted. Living adjacent to grassy woodland, and with large eucalypts very close to the house, makes us acutely aware of the fire risk, so we are part of a local Community Fire Unit.

PLANTINGS

Our total plant inventory is just over 1000 individual species, including more than 70 acacia species and more than 70 grevillea species, which makes for a spectacular spring display. We have obtained our plants from a wide variety of local, regional and far-flung sources. For example, we bought a Queensland bottle tree (*Brachychiton rupestris*) in Roma, a silver mulga (*Acacia argyrophylla*) in Port Augusta, a kauri (*Agathis robusta*) in Bellingen and an unusual WA eucalypt (*E. formanii*) in Mildura. All are doing well.

We like the challenge of trying to grow plants that are not normally grown in the Canberra region, including: Gynea Lily (*Doryanthes excelsa*), Queensland Firewheel Tree (*Stenocarpus sinuatus*), Tree Waratah (*Alloxylon flammeum*) and the Illawarra Flame Tree (*Brachychiton acerifolius*), all of which are rainforest or coastal plants that will have spectacular red flowers if they reach maturity. Recent additions include two mature (3 m high) specimens of *Macrozamia moorei*, a spectacular cycad from Queensland.

Being a geologist, Brad is well aware of the geological history of plants in Australia, particularly the ancient links to the giant southern continent of Gondwana, when Australia, India, New Zealand, South America and Africa were all joined to Antarctica. Consequently, a few plants from the other Gondwana land masses, all of which Brad has visited in the course of his work, have been included in our garden. Our way of re-uniting Gondwana!

GARDEN OWNERS

Brad and Sue Pillans