

GARDEN NOTES
YELLOW BOX
447 SPRING RANGE
ROAD, SPRING RANGE



6 AND 7 MAY
2023

HISTORY AND FEATURES

'Yellow Box' is a 45 acre property, 23kms from the centre of Canberra, with views to the Brindabellas and Spring Range. The property was purchased in 1992; a vacant block, formerly a sheep property, with nothing but a few large old eucalypts. Planting of the boundaries began then, mainly with eucalypts, acacias, casuarinas and melaleucas.

The house (also a yellow box!) was moved to the site in 1996, and the house garden has been developed from scratch over the last 27 years, including the dry stone walls, perhaps my most challenging undertaking. The house garden is perhaps some 2 ½ acres, and along with the property boundary plantings, is almost exclusively Australian native.

Beyond the house garden there are two smaller areas - one to fence off some native heath of hibbertia, melichrus, egg and bacon pea flower, hovea, and kangaroo grass, and now planted with Callitris and Melia; and one which is a small patch for university friends from the early 1960s.

Apart from watering new plants until established, the garden receives little water, as I feel it is inappropriate to put down a bore to draw ground water for a 'hobby farm'. This can be a problem in really hot and windy summers; and losses do occur, as well as in severe winter frosts. There were considerable losses in the drought of 2019/20, and again after the heavy rains which followed, necessitating lots of rearrangement and replacement.

The most successful and reliable plants in the home garden include callistemons, correas (of which some do too well), banksias, eriostemons (philotheca), some grevilleas, crowea, calytrix, kunzea, micromyrtus, sollya, melaleuca, homoranthus, astartea, melia, thomasia, cryptandra, phebalium, leionema, prostanthera. Saltbush (rhagodia) is particularly suitable, but proves invasive in the wrong place (and the rabbits love to make a home under it). Some eremophilas are fortunately surviving, but even the grafted ones are having problems. My Western Australian mallees are very difficult, and are in constant need of replacement.

There was no early plan for the garden, it took shape as and when some particular area needed attention, and it is still a work-in-progress. The area in the front of the house has not been overplanted so as not to restrict the view of the mountains. The most recent plantings have been designed to create a walkway down the hill to the east towards the lower paddocks, to develop a 'natural' area under the large gonicalyx gums, and to plant up the area on the left-hand side of the drive approaching the house. The latter has been done principally with seedlings which have just popped up somewhere in the garden.

The new walkway (down the hill on the eastern side) resulted from a gift of several mallees, and the need to find a place for them. So one side of the walk is largely mallee, and the other

is now mixed. This mixed area was initially designed to be grevilleas, but these did not appreciate the heavy rains following the drought and have had to be replaced.

Personally the garden gives me a great deal of pleasure, despite the hard work, and the birds are a constant delight – wrens, finches, honeyeaters, shrike thrushes, parrots, magpies, and willy wagtails, thornbills, rufous whistler, grey fantails, and a pair of European goldfinches. Though it does take quite a bit of water to keep their bird baths full!

I have offered to have the garden open in the hope that visitors may enjoy what has been done with natives in what is a fairly harsh environment, and that those unfamiliar with natives may be inspired to plant more in their own bailiwick.

Anyone with a particular interest in eucalyptus may wish to explore some of the boundary plantings, provided the long grasses have fallen over. There is also the option to wander down through the 'south' gate to the 'UNI patch', also through a gate on the northern side down the hill through a 'bush' area, or down the western side hill to the Callitris patch.

GARDEN OWNERS

BERYL CUTHBERTSON