

GARDEN NOTES

JEWEL BOX

27 RAYMOND ST., AINSLIE



HISTORY

My wife Lynlea and I have gardened together across a number of gardens in Canberra over the past 45 years. Each of these gardens we have renovated or designed and planted from scratch.

We downsized from a very large garden in Red Hill and moved to Ainslie in December 2020. The block is average size for the suburb, approximately 850 square metres. The first 6 months was spent removing grasses and flax and contracting hard landscaping works, which included installing the front paths, new paving in the rear for steady footing and grandchildren's trikes, and replacing the driveway where tree roots were emerging. Feature rocks and a large pot were part of the front landscaping plan to provide contrast and interest. Planting in the front commenced in late Autumn 2021 with the rear plantings some months later. In Spring 2021 the tallest plants were the daffodils! Hard to believe now. Solar lights provide light and safe access to the front door in the dark.

New soil, an irrigation system fed by an underground water tank in the back garden, and lawns (from turf) formed part of the soft landscaping works. After research we chose Canturf Canberra Blend turf. So far it has been resilient to heat and frost and is a deep green all year. It does require work to maintain—annual coring, and fertilization every 6-8 weeks. Our experience is that the PH needs to be right; achieved in our garden by regular dolomite. So far, no scarab, thank goodness. We were so pleased with the appearance and resilience of the lawn planted at the front that we replaced the back lawn with the same, ensuring consistency across the garden and a green contrast all year round.

From our experience the quality of the soil in which plants are grown makes a huge difference. We removed all the existing shrubs in the front and most in the rear, leaving some down the northern side and some of the nandinas in the rear to create structure for the new. Soil was Black Gold from Bruce Works. This has been supplemented by mulch, our own compost (from grass clippings and mulched garden prunings), and commercial fertilisers. We have been rewarded and surprised at the growth of trees planted less than 2 years ago: some have more than doubled in size, particularly the silver birch and Pyrus Capital, a fastidious variety of ornamental pear.

We have learned from experience that large trees are voracious in terms of nutrient uptake and water. To provide colour ground plantings have been supplemented by pots, where plantings are changed in Spring and Autumn providing variety and pleasure. Pots also enable colour and variety where soil is shallow, for example under hedges or large trees.

A site for a vegetable garden was discovered under some old scrubby natives which had long passed their prime. We are learning what is suitable to a small plot and how to design a planting schedule over the year. Winter greens have been enjoyed: for the summer tomatoes, lettuce and salad greens, peas and beans. A few

calendula mean flowers all year and the attraction of bees and pollinators. A herb garden (also in pots) has flourished near the back door, with easy access to the kitchen.

The back hedges provide privacy and a sense of enclosure to the garden, which at the rear is a series of smaller zones—courtyard, pathway, opening into the rear. The design of the garden and layout was Clive's and came from plants he enjoys growing and some we brought with us from our previous garden. Clive delights in variety and texture, with side-by-side contrasts. He also enjoys planning bulb and annuals selection season by season. We have had opportunity to visit some of the world's finest private gardens on garden tours, where Lynlea learned mulching and Clive learned how to succession plant bulbs so that blooming has longevity in the garden from early spring and into mid-summer. Lynlea loves colour and something—annual or perennial—flowers somewhere in the garden all year. Clive loves begonias—their variety, profusion of colour and exuberance.

The result can be dazzling, and always changing. In part the garden has become a jewel box garden, with a rich variety of colour and form set within more formal structure. We are still learning about hedge maintenance. Pruning once a month during the growing season appears to be the way to go.

Though we plant many bulbs for spring (tulips, daffodils and particularly new varieties of ranunculus) they tend to be ephemeral. Petunias, salvias, pansies, polyanthus, impatiens are resilient and flower for months. To see plants flourish, new annuals opening up, surprising combinations of textures and colours brings delight and wonder. You may spot some animals in hiding, items to be found and appreciated by young grandchildren.

Ours is a garden to be lived in by real people: tea at various tables, family meals and diverse celebrations on the raised patio, a place for recreation and imagination to flourish. There are no mistakes in gardening: gardeners we met on our travels were proud of the empty pots at the bottom of their garden which testify to what didn't work. We have lost a few plants along the way (not many) where the sun was too strong or the water too little. It is always a learning journey.

Part of our pleasure has been the pleasure the garden has brought to neighbours in the street: interesting conversations with passers-by are a regular occurrence. And best of all the delight of children and the hope that they too might be inspired to be gardeners themselves.

FEATURES

Ours is a small, jewel box garden and demonstrates what can be possible in a few years. The garden will continue to evolve. It is, now planting and mulching is established, an easy-care garden, consistent with a lifestyle which includes travel and time away, as well as creating spaces of pleasure as we age in place.

GARDEN OWNERS

We hope you enjoy your visit. Part of your contribution will support the work of the Conflict Resolution Service, doing significant work to hold vulnerable families together. Clive and Lynlea Rodger.