

GARDEN NOTES

'MY THERAPY'

13 GEERILONG GARDENS, REID



5-6 OCTOBER 2024

HISTORY

The garden has evolved a lot over the time we've lived here. When we moved into Geerilong Gardens in 1999, the house had been rented and the garden largely consisted of hardy plants that survived on little care. An old carport (in front of where the new shed is) was held up by a massive ivy. There was no back deck, and the wisteria didn't extend down the western side of the house. The backyard was mostly lawn (weeds) and the front courtyard was paved in brick. Greg decided on a Japanese theme for the front courtyard, with a water feature. While Greg has adopted the courtyards as his responsibility, I have taken on the challenge of the rest of the gardens, helped by Mark Cumberland's initial landscaping of the Geerilong Gardens front garden.

I thought that natives would go well in the front perimeter gardens – which has proved true for the Geerilong Gardens side, but not so true for the Currong Street plantings. I finally 'discovered' salvia for the bed outside the western courtyard gate – which has thankfully thrived on shallow soil (the mound was made from 1970's builder's rubble) and intense late afternoon summer heat. The plantings under the large Liquidambar tree fronting our block are still a challenge, because of the deep shade. Let me know if you have any ideas!

The backyard garden is still evolving - it's my play zone. The huge Chinese Elm (self-sown on the fence line before we moved in) has its roots in the compost heaps and is consequently much larger than many Chinese Elms. It provides wonderful summer shade, but that shade also limits what will grow well under it. Winter iris (all originating from a clump removed to make way for the wheelie bins) throughout the garden provide welcome splashes of cheerful blue/purple during grey winter days, when there's not much other colour.

You'll note the compost area is extensive, with several 'garden' compost piles and 2 'kitchen' bins. I hate 'throwing out' compostable material, even in the green bin. If you're interested in an entertaining read about the history and joys of composting, I highly recommend Margaret Simon's *Resurrection in a Bucket. The Rich and Fertile Story of Compost*. I use the composted mulch on the garden, but haven't perfected the art of killing off weed seeds in the compost.

There are, of course, challenges. Now that we no longer have a resident dog, possums are more inclined to dine on vegetable plants and even plum tree leaves. The wisteria provides wonderful blossom and shade against the western sun, but needs to be constantly trimmed to

keep it out of the roof. While Canberra has recently experienced a run of mild summers, I vividly remember the preceding drought and try to always choose plants that will survive the next one. The invasive arum lilies have spread throughout the garden since the last drought, and the ivy and couch grass keep creeping in from the sidelines. Plane tree leaves from the Geerilong Gardens street trees blanket the garden in autumn.

I feel very privileged to have a garden to live in, work in and play with. We can see garden from every window in the house. I've headed these notes 'My Therapy' because the garden, and gardening, is always therapeutic for me. Whether it's thinking about which plants will combine for a pleasing (artistic) effect, getting my hands in the soil, inhaling the scent of 'sweet' compost, or watching vegetable seeds turn into plants, it connects me to the basic rhythms of life and the seasons. I love watching birds in the garden. Magpies and Peewees are often checking for worms, a family of Wattle Birds spends hours feeding from the Grevillea near the back deck, Eastern and Crimson Rosellas bathe in the courtyard rill, King Parrots frequent the Chinese Elm in autumn, and little blue wrens and honeyeaters flitter amongst the denser foliage. Except on very cold days, bees are constant visitors to the lavender, rosemary and grevilia.

A garden is always evolving. I do hope you enjoy visiting this one.

TOILETS

The closest public toilets are at Campbell shops.

GARDEN OWNERS

Vivien Holmes

Greg Roche (the courtyards)