

## 🌿 Tea Gardens Homestead – Open Garden 2025 🌿

Step into the history and beauty of Tea Gardens Homestead, one of Canberra's oldest residential homes. Nestled on a peaceful half-acre in Ngunnawal, the homestead overlooks the 4th hole of Gungahlin Lakes Golf Club. Originally built circa 1865, it has undergone significant renovations, with major extensions in the 1950s and 1965, shaping it into the home it is today.

### A Garden Reimagined

We purchased the home in April 2020, at the start of the lockdowns. At the time, the land had suffered from drought, leaving only a few trees in the front and a back garden overrun with periwinkle, dead grass, and blackberry bushes. Since then, we have planted around 55 trees and over 1,000 plants, transforming the once barren space into a lush, vibrant landscape.

The transformation of the top section of the back garden began in November 2021, with the first plantings taking root in December. What started as a simple vision for a fence, vegetable garden with raised garden beds and gravel firepit area quickly evolved into something much greater, thanks to the design expertise of our friend Craig from Fine Finish Projects.

We hadn't originally budgeted for plants, but an opportunity arose to purchase 867 plants at cost price. At the time, neither Tim nor I were experienced gardeners—we had no idea what most of the plants looked like or how big they would grow! We found ourselves Googling each plant, figuring out sizes and placements as we went along.

Together, Tim and I planted every single tree and plant by hand. Some didn't survive, while others thrived beyond our expectations. We even gifted some plants to friends. It was a challenging summer—hot days made it difficult to keep everything alive—but we learned so much through the process.

Craig's design incorporated beautiful portal windows and a sunken Sydney sandstone firepit, inspiring us to expand the space further. During excavation, we uncovered original red brick Canberra edging, which turned out to be part of the original driveway gutters from when the back garden was the grand front entrance of the homestead. With the original grates and plumbing still intact, we embraced this historic feature, which you can now see lining the bottom of the red brick steps leading up to the arched door.

The Back garden has multiple fences and rooms in an attempt to contain one of our dogs.

### The Vineyard & Garden Evolution

In July 2024, we began work on the lower garden, now affectionately called "the vineyard." The original sloped section was too steep to use or mow, so we levelled the space to create a more functional area and added a driveway for access. During excavation, we relocated a group of dahlias, only to discover that accidentally dividing the tubers led to unexpected blooms popping up all over the place—including throughout the gravel stairs!

## A Flourishing Front Garden

The front garden has been a slow and steady labor of love. Unlike the carefully designed back garden, the front has no strict plan—just a collection of plants and trees we've gathered mostly from the half-price section over time. Little by little, we've filled the space, creating a charming and ever-evolving garden.

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### Join Us in the Garden

We're thrilled to open our garden to visitors in 2025 and share the story of its transformation. Whether you're passionate about history, garden design, or simply enjoy a beautiful outdoor space, we'd love to welcome you to Tea Gardens Homestead.

📍 Location: 10 Yirawala Street, Ngunnawal, ACT

📅 Date: 12th & 13th of April

☕ Come enjoy scones, tea, coffee, and a BBQ, take a stroll through history, and experience a garden built with heart.

🌱 All profits will go towards raising money for the Children's Cancer Institute (CCIA).

📱 Follow our journey on Instagram @ tea-gardens-homestead for updates! 🌸❤️

History of

### ***Tea Gardens Homestead***

Anthony and Catherine Rolfe arrived in Sydney on the *Harbinger* on 12 February 1849 with five children and lived temporarily with his brother William in Canberra. They selected Portion 123, 320 acres in the Parish of Goorooyaroo at a land sale in Queanbeyan on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1857 and quickly took up residence, calling their property 'Tea Gardens'.<sup>61</sup>

This area of the Creek had been on a grant to absentee landowner Captain James Morrisett and used to be home to larger birds such as the wild turkey or bustard and brolgas. The brush turkey, emu and wedge tailed eagle were also common in Ginninderra in the early days of settlement <sup>62</sup>.

Tea Gardens homestead was built of local red brick in the 1860s, possibly replacing an earlier slab or pise temporary building.<sup>63</sup>

In 1858 the Rolfes increased their land holdings with further purchases of blocks.

Anthony Rolfe died first, then Catherine ended her days in the house by 1876 <sup>64</sup>. Their daughter Martha must have looked after her mother; she married John Ryan in 1868 and they lived at Tea Gardens for forty years until 1916 until the land was acquired for the Federal Capital. Their son Edward lived on there until it was bought by Norman Coulton in the 1950s and built a larger house around the four original brick rooms in the centre of the building.<sup>65</sup>

The property was then acquired by Finlay MacDiarmid in 1964, and renamed it 'Ginninderra Park' with subsequent Lessees been T&M Thoroughbreds (1978-1981) and Smith and Whittaker from 1981-1991 who ran the property as "Badon Lodge" riding school, .<sup>66</sup>

The riding school also had a large stable with a half-round raised mid-section and many nails and saddle trees with pony names written beside them. The area which is now the golf course was once a horse-riding track for training horses.

In 1994 the property was granted a new lease as a residential property in the suburb of Ngunnawal, owned by Norman Knowles (dec).

In 2020, Jess and I purchased the property from Norman's estate.

This historic house looks much as it did when it was the riding school; it is on the ACT Heritage Register and can still be seen at 10 Yirawala Street, Ngunnawal.

The large stables have gone; there used to be nails and pegs in the wooden internal beams for the saddles and bridles, each with the name of a pony. We have found some of these nails and many horseshoes while working in the garden.

<sup>59</sup> Gillespie LL, 1991, Canberra 1820 - 1913, Commonwealth of Australia, p 41

<sup>60</sup> Gillespie LL, 1992, Ginninderra Forerunner to Canberra, The Wizard, Canberra Local History Series, p 14

<sup>61</sup> Gillespie LL, 1992, Ginninderra Forerunner to Canberra, The Wizard, Canberra Local History Series P 14

<sup>62</sup> Gillespie, LL; Sept 1978, If Ginninderra Creek could speak' in Canberra Historical Journal, CDHS, New Series 2, p

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<sup>63</sup> Gillespie LL, 1992, Ginninderra Forerunner to Canberra, The Wizard, Canberra Local History Series p 14

<sup>64</sup> ibid

<sup>65</sup> ibid

<sup>66</sup> Gillespie, LL; Sept 1978, If Ginninderra Creek could speak' in Canberra Historical Journal, CDHS, New Series 2, pp