

GARDEN NOTES

COCKLE STREET GARDEN

46 COCKLE ST., O'CONNOR



4-5 OCTOBER 2025

HISTORY

I bought the house in May 2001 but didn't move in until February 2011, so the garden suffered from both the millennium drought and the neglect of tenants.

The block is 1060m² (approx 1/4 acre) and slopes away to the NE. Rocks from this block form garden edges, paths and terraces.

My garden has two main roles: native habitat and food production. I'm trying to achieve diversity in species, structure and density for fauna, especially birds, as well as pleasing colour and form.

FEATURES

The front garden

There was an established native garden in the front, although a large area had been invaded by over 30 large *Photinias* which I removed immediately, as well as the weedy lawn areas.

Several large trees and shrubs were here, including the enormous *Eucalyptus nicholii* on the street and the two large *Grevillea robusta* along the drive. Planting along this drive edge is difficult as the soil is compacted with roots and tends to be hydrophobic. I'm experimenting with local *Veronica* species, which seem to be doing well.

Other large trees in the front garden include two large *Casuarina cunninghamiana* near the pond and a Kashmir Cypress (*Cupressus cashmeriana*) which shades the west-facing corner of the house.

There are many smaller trees, shrubs and ground-covers. Favourites include *Eremophila*, *Banksia*, *Calothamnus quadrifidus*, *Prostanthera*, *Grevillea*, *Phebalium squamulosum*, *Thryptomene saxicola*, *Indigofera australis*, *Hardenbergia*, *Zieria prostrata*, *Rhodanthe anthemoides*, *Scaevola*, *Convolvulus* and *Brachyscome*. The large *Philotheca myoporoides* on the corner of the house was there in 2001.

My previous neighbour and I created a rock garden on our shared boundary above the pond, with shrubs slowly creating a screen. The *Xanthorrhoea* near the pond is about 18 years old and has been in the ground for over 10 years; it has only produced one flower spike, in late 2022. I live in hope! Fascinating fungi also appear at times, especially in the wood-chip mulch.

The pond was built in late 2023. In summer, the surface is covered with Rainbow Nardoo (*Marsilea mutica*) which disappears in winter. The other plants in the pond are Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) and Running Marsh Flower (*Villarsia reniformis*). I hope to encourage frogs, though the resident Eastern Long-necked Turtle (rescued from the street in December 2023) may prevent that.

The back garden

Most of the back garden was weedy 'lawn' with some trees: the large central *Callistemon*, the *Banksia serrata*, some *Hakeas* and the White Cedar (*Melia azedarach*) by the deck. There was (and still is) an edible fig in the back corner.

I installed two 10,000L tanks and built raised vegetable beds in the sunny back corner of the garden. Two additional tanks increased my water storage to 24,000L.

In 2016, I contracted landscape architects to create a better flow between the house, production areas and native beds. Lawn was replaced with beds and paving of old Canberra bricks or mulch. Plantings are either native or for food production.

The large Callistemon forms the division between native plantings and food production areas.

Until the very aggressive Noisy Miners arrived four years ago, many small birds bred here, including Spotted Pardalotes which bred for 5 years in their purpose-built brick & earth mound below the citrus bed. My most regular birds now are larger species, including Wattlebirds, Magpie-larks, Crested Pigeons, Satin Bowerbirds and various parrots and cockatoos, including Gang Gangs. Apart from invertebrates, other fauna include garden lizards, occasional Bluetongues and a Brown Snake (once only, passing through). Recently Choughs have discovered my garden and do considerable damage to any mulched areas (so to most beds).

Food garden

I rotate vegetable crops around about 8 beds, using organic principles. There are also areas for perennials such as asparagus, sorrel and herbs, and trellises for raspberries, a thornless blackberry and boysenberries which cover the back fence. Strawberries run as self-spreading ground-covers.

Just below the house is an experimental 'edible hedge' of Feijoas, Hazelnuts and Currants. Other fruit trees include: a fig, Fuyu persimmon, blueberries, Kalamata olive, pomegranate, Lapins Cherry, dwarf peach and nectarine, as well as a several citrus trees - a large Valencia orange, Tahitian lime, dwarf blood orange, dwarf Eureka lemon, Nagami cumquat, Calamondin cumquat, Makrut lime, a dwarf Ruby grapefruit and a mandarin (these last three are in pots).

I had 3 delightful Black Australorp chooks ('Rise', 'Ann', 'Shine') from late 2015 until December 2023. During those 8 years, much of my back garden was dissected by fencing to allow the chooks to explore and forage. Removing the chook fencing has improved access but I miss their pest management and soil improvement. An Isabella grape now grows on the last section of fencing. This winter I converted their chook-house into a greenhouse.

I feed myself for much of the year from my garden, and disperse excess produce amongst neighbours. Much joy comes from the birds that use the garden, and the plants that suddenly show their beauty.

TOILETS

Nearest public toilets at O'Connor shops

GARDEN OWNERS

Sally Stephens