

GARDEN NOTES

THE NATURALISTIC GARDEN

TURNER



NOVEMBER 2025

DESIGN AND PLANTING

After moving to Turner in late 2022, we sought the help of landscape architect Dinah Meagher of Canberra Gardens to redesign the rear garden. Dinah worked with us to develop a design that works so well with this long, narrow and oddly shaped garden. The design retained some paving, a large hedge and the olive and fig trees. We moved away from any concept of garden rooms: we love that the whole of the rear garden can be taken in from almost any point, with the 'spine path' down the middle and stepping stones through the larger bed inviting you to travel through the garden and look at the individual plants. The straight lines of the hard landscaping provide some formality to what is otherwise a very informal garden.

Landscaping was completed in April 2024 and plants that I had been collecting and caring for in pots for some time, several making the trip with me from Melbourne, were planted out.

As you move through the garden you will see that most of my plants are herbaceous perennials, the majority having a dormancy period over winter. My aim was to have a garden in bloom from spring until winter, with each plant having its time to shine before interest moves on to another area. In winter, the 'skeletons' of the sleeping plants, the grasses and olives continue to provide some interest. I particularly wanted to have a garden where small birds and insects could find shelter and food for much of the year.

I resisted the temptation to plant large deciduous trees, so that the sun loving perennials could thrive. With some exceptions, I have plants that should, once established, be able to cope with minimal watering and not be too fussed by Canberra's tricky gardening climate.

I plant things closely. I saw a comment recently that this is a mistake made by novice gardeners who forget that plants grow up. This is very true, but plants have peak periods and ongoing interest can be obtained by planting varieties that love to mix and mingle or that dutifully die back after flowering, making way for the next wave of flowers to push through. I'm getting better at this and, if all else fails, I have a good pair of secateurs and a spade to deal with the mistakes. A garden is never finished.

Some of the plants that you will see in my back garden are phlomis; salvia; scabious; echinacea; kniphofia; achillea; nepeta; geranium; geum; grasses; santolina and lavender; sangusorbia; persicaria; iris and much more! I am hoping that my *Salvia canariensis* is in flower for you: a spectacular beauty. The hedge is a *pittosporum* that provides a wall of light green and protection for small birds. Behind the bench seat at the far end of the garden, there is a hopeful planting of some woodland plants including *dysosma* and *hosta*. I have labelled many of the plants to help you identify them and forgotten the names of many more!

The front garden is hard: two large Chinese elms suck moisture out of the garden and, while providing shade to part of the bed, do not stop the strong afternoon sun challenging those plants close to the driveway. I have kept the planting quite low in the front garden, with more emphasis on foliage shape and colour, and have found that *heucheras*, *epimediums*, lovely old *aquilegias*, *Parma violets* and oak leaf *hydrangeas* and *hellebores* are quite successful here. Leading to the front door, side beds of *Pachysandra terminalis* and the winter flowering *Sarcococca confusa* (sweet box) provide low growing, year round, green foliage.

Along the side of the driveway, *oregano*, *thyme* and the fabulous blue flowering 'Mozart' *rosemary*, will take whatever the sun cares to throw at them and provide me with flavour for the kitchen. A recently planted row of golden pencil pines will, in years to come, provide vertical interest.

Entering through the driveway gates you will see a number of pots planted with box. These are a very few of the many box hedging plants that were removed when we reworked the garden. I am slowly reshaping these into topiary balls. On the other side of the house, there is a retained bed of established *camellias* and the sun tolerant *Hydrangea paniculata*. The small courtyard in this area is where I have a potting table. I also have a potted garden here which provides colour and changes with the seasons.

INFLUENCES AND SOURCING PLANTS FOR THE GARDEN

It is hard to categorise my garden: naturalistic, cottage, Mediterranean? The strongest influence on my planting for this garden has been the new naturalist movement where planting is informal and uncontrolled, intended to be wild. It is, ultimately, a garden filled with plants that I love and that are a magnet for birds and insects. Many people influence my current garden choices - my Instagram feed is full of inspiration! Some of the key names, however, are James Hitchmough and Piet Oudolf for naturalistic gardening and Olivier Filippi for Mediterranean planting. I buy most of my plants from online nurseries or seed suppliers where hard to get plants can be found. These nurseries include the following.

Lambley Nursery, Ascot, Victoria; The Diggers Club, Victoria; Woodbridge Nursery in Woodbridge, Tasmania; Perennialle Plants in Canowindra, NSW; Woodside Plants and Design, Gloucester, NSW; New Wave Perennials, Derwent Valley, Tasmania; Tonkins Bulbs and Perennials, Kalorama, Victoria; Clover Hill Rare Plants, Katoomba, NSW.

Additionally, I love the plants available through Antique Perennials in Kinglake, Victoria. Greengold Nursery in Nicholls stock many of these.

TOILETS

Public toilets are located opposite the O'Connor shops in Sargood Street, O'Connor: a three minute drive or thirteen minute walk.

GARDEN OWNER

Susan