

GARDEN NOTES

THE LIVING BLOCK

85 COSTELLO CIRCUIT, CALWELL



28TH- 29TH MARCH 26

HISTORY

Set on a generous 1180m² block in Calwell, Southern Canberra, this garden surrounds one of the suburb's original display homes — a house that has been in the Benjamin family for many years. Six years ago, after returning from a long period of living abroad, the family came home to a property that had been rented for over a decade and largely left to its own devices. The block was overgrown with weeds and privet trees and flooded regularly at the sign of any rain. Starting out as a non-gardener, having only ever cared for a few potted plants in a small courtyard.

What followed was a steep learning curve and a true labour of love. The garden has been transformed into a productive, wildlife-friendly space where beauty and function grow side by side. It blends cottage-garden charm with abundant edible planting, evolving gradually through trial, error, and plenty of experimentation.

The gardening style has been shaped largely by learning through doing. Without any formal training or a fixed design plan, influences have come from observation, google images, books, visits to other open gardens.

Over time, the design has evolved from fairly simple, practical beginnings into something more layered and immersive. Early efforts focused on reclaiming the block and establishing productive elements like fruit trees and vegetables. As confidence grew, ornamental planting, wildlife habitat and garden “rooms” began to take shape. The result is a garden that feels relaxed and organic rather than rigidly designed, where plants are allowed to mingle and surprise.

Canberra's climate presented its challenges, with hot summers, cold, frosty winters, short growing season and periods of drought. Learning what works in this environment, dealing with pests, and balancing productivity with aesthetics has taken time. Mistakes have been part of the process, but each one has informed the next stage of the garden's development.

What sets this garden apart is its scale, diversity, and sense of discovery. It is unusual in the street and the wider region for combining a large productive orchard, extensive edible planting, water features, wildlife habitat and family spaces within a suburban setting.

To open the garden to the public to share what is possible — especially for people who don't consider themselves "gardeners." This garden wasn't created by an expert, but by someone willing to learn, experiment, and persist. I hope visitors leave feeling inspired, encouraged, and perhaps a little more confident about trying something new in their own gardens.

What makes the garden special is not just how it looks now, but what it represents — growth, resilience, and the joy of learning something entirely new from the ground up.

FEATURES

Wander through a landscape alive with birds, insects and frogs, explore the tranquil pond and fern gully, and enjoy the sound of water features tucked throughout this garden. An orchard of more than 20 fruit trees anchors the space, supported by a greenhouse, berry beds, a flourishing herb garden and a productive vegetable patch. Friendly chickens complete the backyard ecosystem.

Seasonal colour is provided by Japanese maples, hydrangeas, zinnias, dahlias, fuchsias, hellebores and many other flowering plants, all interwoven in a lush, informal cottage style. There are multiple seating areas to pause and enjoy the garden, along with a welcoming children's playground that reflects the garden's role as a family space.

OPEN DAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Bake Sale: Enjoy a homemade treat and a drink in one of the garden's cosy nooks.
- Plant Stall: Take home a little piece of the garden.
- Kids' Activities: Fun for younger visitors throughout the day.

TOILETS

The nearest public toilet is at the Calwell Shopping Centre, which is a short, 5-minute walk from the house.

GARDEN OWNERS

Nck & Mel Benjamin