

GARDEN NOTES

‘THE BAKER GARDEN’ - 20 WELLS GARDENS, GRIFFITH

BACKGROUND AND DESIGN APPROACH

We moved to 20 Wells Garden in 2010, 16 years ago, and established a new garden from scratch, as the whole block was very overgrown with ivy, vinca, honeysuckle plus two huge Plane trees under the power line and an aged Hawthorn with rot in the trunk. We had all of that cleared so we could start again. The only ‘inheritances’ were the pale green wooden trellis across the back of the garden and the open-sided shed now used as a potting shed.

Since arriving in Australia in 1970 we have established three new gardens, and for the previous two we used a garden designer. However, this time we designed and established the garden ourselves, although the stone walls and paved areas were put in by contractors to our layout.

The block has an area of 970 m² and the footprint of the house and hard areas cover about 350m², leaving a garden area of 550m². We decided not to have a lawn, but instead we water, fertilise and mow the grass on the nature strip.

Our design brief was for a low maintenance garden which could be left to largely look after itself for periods of several weeks at a time. We have therefore used pine bark as mulch throughout the whole garden area. Watering is by individual drippers or by dripper pipe, with timer-controlled sprinklers watering the vegetable beds. We decided not to have flower beds in the conventional sense and instead chose shrubs, plants and bulbs which would involve less work and maintenance and give year-round colour as well as a coordinated colour palette.

We are currently both 80 years old and do the garden work ourselves with the occasional assistance of a paid gardener. Hence the emphasis on a low maintenance garden.

Recent modifications to make the garden safer for us and even lower maintenance include removing hedges, replacing stepping stones with a proper path and adding a railing to the steps.

PRINCIPAL GARDEN AREAS

The front garden contains flowering shrubs, perennials, bulbs and roses in shades of pink, purple, blue and white. Trees include a *Magnolia x soulangeana*, *Malus ioensis* ‘Plena’, and a mauve Crepe Myrtle. The stepping-stones through the garden are a children’s favourite. Two snails made from strap iron are an interesting feature. Shrubs include Correas, *Sasangua camellias* ‘White Ribbon’ and ‘Mine-no-Yuki’ and a beautiful deep pink double Syrian Hibiscus propagated from an old country house in central NSW. Something is almost always in flower!

The small patio area near the front door is a serene space with several sculptures (including a guard dog) clipped shrubs, a Seville Orange, a ‘Meyer’ Lemon and a Tahitian Lime tree, plus a Cycad near the front door.

The back garden in front of the painted wooden trellis is defined by paved paths and features a bird bath purchased in Tasmania and several sculptures – including a group of ceramic chooks! One raised bed is full of hot colours whereas the other is silver and gold. Water is provided for the birds by three other containers. Trees we planted are *Malus floribunda*, *Prunus serrulata* ‘Prentice Dancer’, and a white Crepe Myrtle ‘Natchez’. There are many bulbs planted to flower in most seasons. David Austin roses are a favourite, plus several other fragrant roses. There is

a large collection of Bearded Iris which put on a show in October. The shady part of the garden has a collection of Hellebores plus *Bergenia*, *Camellia sasangua* 'Yuletide' and 'Paradise Vanessa', peonies and lilies.

We replaced the vigorous *Viburnum tinus* hedge with a trellis for a Banksia rose and with a row of *Camellia sasangua*.

The vegetable garden behind the painted wooden trellis has five 2m x 1m raised garden beds, about 0.5m high and watered by five 180° sprinklers, set in a maintenance free paved area. Three compost bins used in rotation serve the vegetable garden and take all our green kitchen waste, leaves and other garden waste.

The open-sided roofed area (there when we bought the house) serves as a potting area. Next to it are two citrus trees - a Blood Orange and a Mandarin, planted because Liz is a keen jam and marmalade maker. There is also a '*Black Genoa*' Fig, which when fruiting has a fine net fitted to protect the fruit from bees, birds and flying foxes. There are also three Blueberry bushes, which usually crop heavily and are visited regularly by the birds!

The back fence is capped by a wooden trellis, with wire supports for espaliering fruit trees. The trellis and fruit trees replace a vigorous pittosporum hedge which was removed because it added little value and there was a lot of work involved in trimming it. The fruit trees are a Josephine pear; a Moorpark apricot, a white peach, 2 navel oranges and a cumquat.

The verandahs round the house have a range of potted plants, either on the ground or on tiered wooden benches.

THE GREENHOUSE

We built the greenhouse in 2021 from a Sproutwell kit and Liz uses it for propagation and to store frost tender plants in the winter.

SCULPTURES

Scattered throughout the garden is an eclectic collection of sculptures, ranging from works by established artists such as Greg Johns, Michael Le Grand and Patricia Lawrence, through to works by students from the ANU's School of Art and Design. A recent addition is a sandstone slab with an inscription carved by Ian Marr and taken from a plaque in the Snowhill Garden in the UK.

BIRDS IN THE GARDEN

In recent years the following birds have visited the garden for food and water:

A pair of Satin Bower Birds; Currawong; Magpie; Magpie Lark; King Parrot; Rainbow Lorikeet; Eastern Rosella; Crimson Rosella; Scrub Wren; Superb Fairy Wren; Silver Eye; Striated Pardalote; Red Wattle Bird; Eastern Spinebill; Crested Pigeon; Koel; Crow; and Indian Myna Bird. Fruit Bats visit for ripe figs, plus Brushtail Possums raid the vegetable garden regularly.

The garden was featured on pages 4 & 5 of the Spring 2022 edition of 'Our Gardens'.

John and Liz Baker, October 2026