

GARDEN NOTES

JOAN'S GARDEN

51 DASH CRES, FADDEN



7-8 NOVEMBER 2026

The house was three years old when we bought it in 1986 and the garden had been landscaped by the original owners. The front had a little semi-circular apron of lawn with a concrete mower strip dividing it from the garden beds which were covered with tanbark and a few native trees and shrubs. Similarly, the back had a nice lawn with concrete edging, a long narrow garden bed covered with black plastic and about 20 or so centimetres of river stones and, again, planted with native trees and shrubs. And in the lawn, two evergreen alders were well on their way. Boston ivy grew on the front and back walls of the house.

As the trees in the backyard had all been planted under low slung powerlines I gradually cut each one down except for two hakeas and the alders. The shrubs struggled, looked decidedly sad, collapsed and died. For three months I barrowed all the stones and made a pathway down the fenceline and filled in a big depression around the sideway of the house. When I removed the black plastic I discovered the roots of the shrubs had never put on any growth in the concrete-like compacted dirt. To begin to improve the soil I began regular forays to my mother's home in Griffith to gather leaves and anything I could dig into the garden. All the mower strips were broken up and replaced by bricks which provided flexibility to change the shape of the beds at will. I retained a few of the original trees and shrubs and began to accept cuttings and plants and anything I could scrounge from my mother's garden, friends and fetes. The first tree I bought was the crabapple *Malus ioensis*, followed by a Japanese maple for \$6 from Coles.

All around the house the shape of the beds constantly changed and more beds evolved. Tree ferns were planted on the SE side of the house and a small preformed pond installed. I dug out the hole for the bigger fishpond with my trusty auger and brought in big stones to edge it. Much later the front lawn was dug up and forest litter used instead so I didn't have to bring the mower around through the garage for a three-minute mow. There was no planning, just a desire to create privacy and to make the garden flow and appear bigger than it was.

Composting was always one of my loves. Long drifts of pruning and branches shored up the back of garden beds as they grew higher with compost from bins and bags of sheep manure. I have four closed bins, a worm farm and the 'heap' which consists of bales of pea straw forming an enclosure for the compost. It is all 'cold' composting and seeds survive to live another day, be that a good or bad thing! The green bin now takes some of the surplus prunings, while my husband does the odd tip run.

Beautiful plants have grown over the years, plants with flowers, but as trees and shrubs matured the competition was fierce in the soil, and it became survival of the fittest in the once more ordered, colourful garden. Crepe myrtles are hardy and provide colour in summer. Autumn puts on a bright display with maples, ornamental cherries and creepers strutting their stuff. Spring brings its own more gentle colours with bulbs, irises, aquilegia and hellebores.

Overall, there are weeds! Vinca major, plain and variegated, inherited from the original owner and quite impossible to remove. Ivy also, but I love ivy and have added my own. Clover, another gift! Then there is the little green leafed plant which I bought at a fete which would envelop the whole garden if given the chance. As a groundcover it is excellent. There are common weeds and there are those plants that are just plain weedy. Learn to love your weeds is all I can say or you go dotty!

Pruning-my second love after composting. The success, or whatever you might like to call it, of coping with my garden is pruning. Trees, shrubs, flowers, grasses, weeds all look so much more loved after a good prune. A weakness for putting plants in pots is my third love. A little timid about planting in the garden? Plant in a pot. Gardenias, begonias, orchids, citrus and clivias, right down to pricked out seedlings growing in cracks in the pavers. Lots of work, but gardens are, aren't they?

And so we move on from 2019 (when my garden first opened in autumn) to 2026 during which time the garden has aged, as has the gardener! After forty years in the making, not only has it matured but also the wilfulness of nature has taken charge. Roots of trees and shrubs have knitted patterns beneath the surface of the beds making them more difficult to cultivate, while invasive weedy plants have defied all odds and steadily threaded their way into all the corners of the garden. However, standing back to survey the garden the result is quite a pleasing vista of lush green. Blue flowered salvias spread their tubers despite so many being dug up and are warmly welcomed by the bees. Bulbs emerge faithfully during winter although not many flower because they lie undisturbed for too long. Camellias bring winter colour. The roses have passed their best years but are pruned and fed in hope.

Now the garden is left to nature, and a snip here and a cut there stops it intruding into the open space that allows access to and shaping of the once imagined 'design'. It is a green garden, a shady garden, a much-loved garden, nurtured as a gift. It is Joan's garden.

Joan O'Loughlin

Nearest public toilets: Erindale or Chisholm shops