



GARDEN NOTES

VIEW STREET GARDEN

The property 'Bokhara' on the Yarra River has a wonderfully rural feel yet it is only seven kilometres from the CBD. The house was supposedly built by a local butcher, Alfred Pridham, in 1892. At the turn of the century Bokhara was purchased by a Collingwood tobacco merchant, David Keir, and he is accredited with building the tower to the north of the house around 1910. After Keir's death in the thirties the place was sold to James McNabb. Many stories – mostly unconfirmed – surround both McNabb and the tower; reputedly the tower was a 'husband's retreat' and at one time used for offcourse betting.

The house was in a dilapidated state when purchased in 1979 by a group of ex-Melbourne Uni friends who formed the Melbourne Country Club – they repaired the buildings and constructed the tennis courts and the dam. When we purchased the property in 1994 there was little existing garden – there was a sloping lawn around the house with a few young Zelkova trees and the cypress hedge was only 1.4m high (the hedge is now sadly diseased and scheduled for removal). Considerable earthworks were initially carried out before landscaper Simon Rigg began constructing the stone walls that terrace the hillside. Annie James, Sue Smart and myself then commenced the planting. For the last few years Matt Crehan has been looking after the garden. Thanks to Matt and also to Anna Murphy as well as Phil and the Crafted Landscapes team for their help with preparing the garden for this weekend.

I quite like my garden to look a bit wild – my home garden is the place where I'm free to experiment with colour, with combining flowers and foliage. In the interest of saving time and labour in this large garden we are attempting to reduce the amount of pruning it requires. This has meant gradually replacing herbaceous perennials with evergreens that provide year-round foliage, colour and texture and don't need too much attention. Native plants and plants from climates similar to Melbourne's – from California, the Mediterranean and South Africa, for example – that can deal with a south-facing position and clay soil are of particular interest to me. The South African cabbage tree or cussonia is one of my favourite plants and there a few different species dotted through the beds.

A number of food plants grow throughout the garden including strawberry guava, fig, olive, medlar, persimmon and pomegranate trees with asparagus, raspberries and garlic grown on the riverflat and herbs, salad greens and citrus next to the house. Here, adjoining the herb garden, the metal gate is designed by myself and created by sculptor Paul Allen. This small productive area is watered with rainwater stored in a polytank below the house. The main garden however, is watered with dam water (with the dam being fed by Alphington Park's stormwater drain and runoff from the Park's hill, the water is polluted).

The main garden features numerous purple-foliaged plants including cotinus, *Sambucus nigra* 'Black Lace', berberis, leucadendron, loropetalum, *Eucalyptus* 'Vintage Red' and *Canna* 'Constitution' which has lovely smoky-purple-grey leaves. In the central bed I've used lots of purple, orange and yellow-flowered plants as I love this high-energy colour combination. The bed at the bottom of the ornamental garden is rarely, if ever, irrigated and here I am experimenting with combining a number of dry tolerant species. Australian natives here include: eremophilas, *Senna artemisioides*, *Eucalyptus orbifolia*, *E.* 'Nullabor Lime', *Xanthorrhoea glauca* and kangaroo paws.

The performance space area around the kikuyu lawn used to be a carpark when the property was previously a country club. It is now used for community events, music and other gatherings. The plants in the surrounding garden beds comprise *Poa labillardieri*, *Chrysocephalum apiculatum*, *C. semipapposum* and *Wahlenbergia stricta*. *Eucalyptus* 'Moon Lagoon' and other types of silver eucalypts are being grown for their beautiful juvenile foliage – the silver gums near the lower fence are *Eucalyptus pulverulenta* 'Baby Blue'. The bronze horse and woman was created by artist Shona Nunan in 2002.

Below the lawn we are endeavouring to re-establish vegetation endemic to the specific billabong, riverflat and riverbank zones of this area. Initially this was done in conjunction with efforts next door in Alphington Park Wetlands by SAFCA (South Alphington and Fairfield Civic Ass.) and City of Yarra. Matt works steadily at managing the endless weeds and planting tubestock. *Galium aparine*, *Ehrharta erecta* and the aquatic parrots feather are some of the weeds we battle most. Victorian Indigenous Nurseries Co-Op in Fairfield has provided the plant stock here since we began.

No green waste leaves the property – all garden prunings and food waste is piled in a compost bay down on the riverflat until the annual winter visit of a large tractor with flail mulcher. What is, by then, usually around 18 cubic metres of mess will ultimately be transformed into 9 cubic metres of beautiful compost! This compost is used on the 3 big vegetable garden beds and the raspberry bed.

Wildlife at 1 View Street includes birds such as white-faced herons, ibis, wood ducks, crested pigeons and red-rumped grass parrots. Pardalotes, powerful owls, Nankeen night herons, a brown falcon and sacred kingfishers have also been sighted. There are common brown tree frogs, eels, blue tongue lizards and tiger snakes. It is worth taking a walk in Alphington Park to look at the wetland revegetation and the old swimming pool constructed on the riverbank that was built in the 1920s.

I hope you enjoy the garden,

Kate Herd

