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## *Interview With a Gardener*

*Produced By: Nathalie Brouard*



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# **Introduction**

Within this ebook are some of your unique garden stories.

Why are garden stories great?

Well, they inspire us, provide practical information that us gardeners love to hear and allow us to reflect and celebrate what we have learnt from our gardens.

We hope that you get as much enjoyment out of reading these stories as much as we and many of you already have.

If you would like to share your story, send us an email with GARDENWARE STORIES in the subject line and we will send you a short list of questions.

Every month we share a story on our blog – if that story is yours, you will receive a \$50 credit that can be used on our website.

Kind regards

***Nathalie Brouard***

# **Down To Earth: An Interview With A Gardener - Noel Burdette**

**Noel Burdette** loves plants. He is a horticulturist, garden writer and regular speaker at garden events. He runs the Spring Fields Garden Centre, which has a garden club that meets monthly.

Here he shares his garden story with us.



**First of all, how would you describe your garden? (What do you grow? What is your climate like?)**

I have a naturalistic style garden. I call it "Wildside." It is made up of various perennials, shrubs and ornamental grasses. I believe that a garden is not just for humans, but that it also has benefits for insects and the greater ecology around us.

## **How did you get started in gardening?**

(Growing up in Victoria) I was taught to gather and sow Calendula seeds from the age of five from my Grandmother and was encouraged to grow herbs in pots. I was always fascinated by the brightly coloured blooms of hibiscus and the sweet perfume of Jonquils.

To this day Jonquils are still my favourite perfumed flower, and Calendulas carry a special nostalgic charm for me.



## **What motivates you to get up and garden?**

I don't see myself as "the owner" of my garden. I feel that I am the caretaker of the natural environment within the boundaries of my property. As such, I owe it to the birds, the insects, the lizards and frogs (wildlife) to ensure that they have a clean, safe and healthy environment to live. That, plus each day I get so much pleasure from seeing young plants develop into maturity.

## **What were some of the unexpected hurdles in your garden? How did you deal with them?**

Gardeners face so many hurdles in their quest for creating their gardens, but for us the biggest hurdle was the flooding of the garden. In 2011, we saw our garden completely go under nearly 4 metres of water. Prior to that, several smaller floods in the lower parts of the garden saw hundreds of plants being washed away. The vegetable garden was lost and many fruiting trees had to be removed.

How did I deal with them? Each time we had the minor flooding in the garden, I was taught some lessons about where species of plants should be and where they shouldn't and how the soil reacted. The major flooding of 2011 was a different sort of experience... I waited to see which species would survive and which ones wouldn't.

This time may have taken longer to get through but it was worth it as the garden itself began to show me which areas to change. Interestingly enough, the devastation of the floods has opened up new opportunities to garden in different ways.

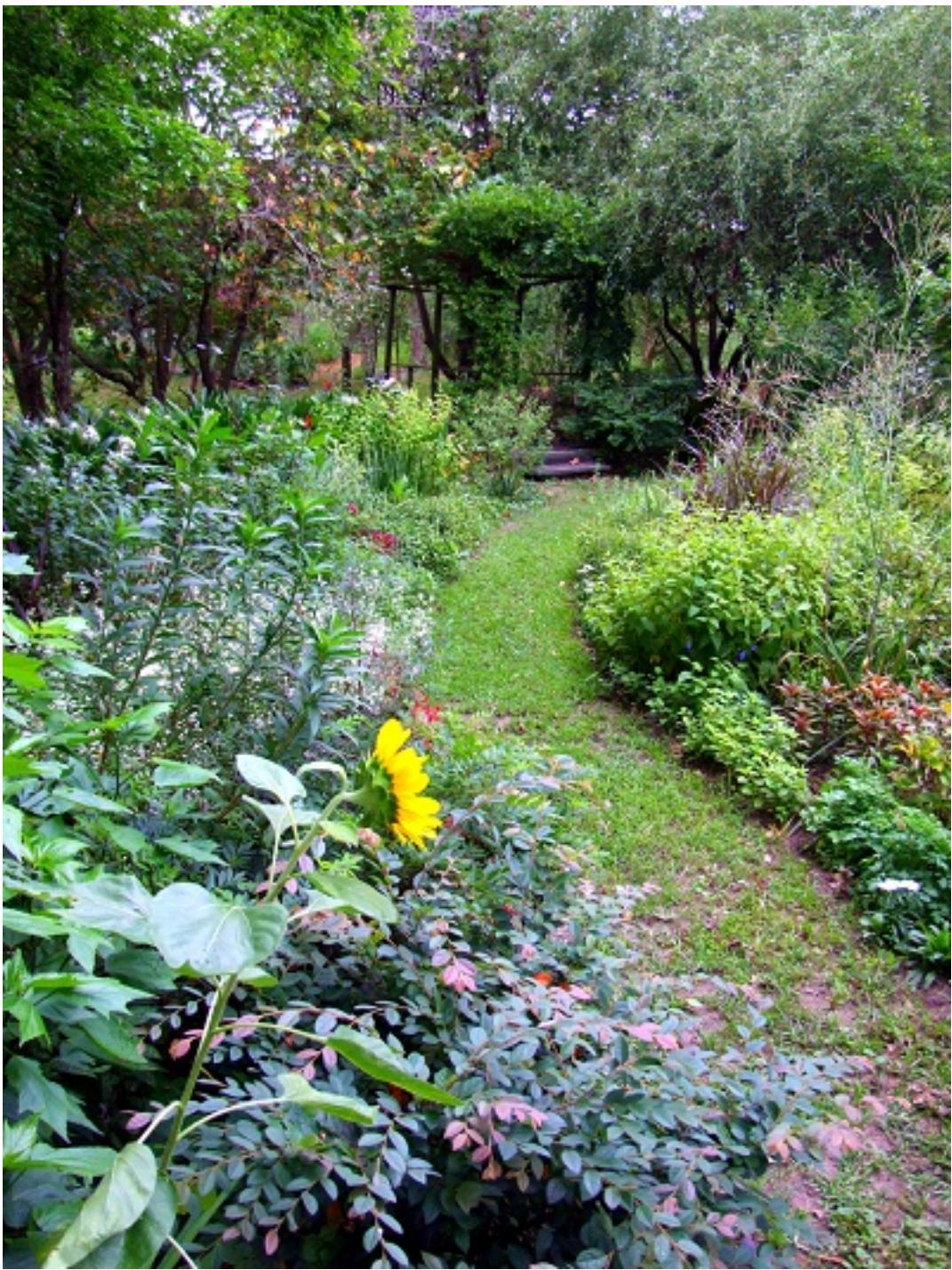


## **What were some of the unexpected benefits from gardening?**

I have always felt that gardening comes with its own rewards, so I suppose some of the "unexpected" benefits could be a greater appreciation of good, healthy soil and the connection between beneficial microbes, fungi and plants and how they all relate to us.

## **What has your garden taught you?**

I often view my garden as sanctuary for the mind, and as such it has taught me that if one is feeling stressed, or negative in some way, being in the surroundings of your garden is a wonderful way of releasing the tensions of the day. Even sitting somewhere with a hot cuppa and being surrounded by nature is enough to ease the mind.



### **If you were a fruit or vegetable, what would you be and why?**

Mmmmm.....let's see. I've often seen myself as a cool woodland flowering perennial such as Bluebell, as I'm not fond of the heat. But veg or fruit? Maybe I would say a Jerusalem artichoke! They grow tall and flower so beautifully that they attract pollinating and predatory insects alike. Their flowers also smell like milk chocolate! Also, during winter you can dig up the tubers and have a delicious treat to bake in the oven.

### **What advice would you have for first time gardeners?**

Advice? Every garden should have a healthy balance. 25% fruit and veg, 25% native plants, 25% exotic flowering shrubs and perennials and 25% space for children (and adults) to be in and actually enjoy the garden.

Avoid following what everyone else is doing in the street. Try and visit as many private open gardens as possible to get great ideas... and most importantly, get to know your local horticulturist who will guide you .



4 Comments

### Comments

1. Maurice says

Dear Noel

I have a dwarf grafted avocado (Wurtz) -one year old, on sunshine coast, planted in the garden.

The top part died but there is vigorous growth at the bottom. Will the plant bear fruit?  
Pleas advise

Maurice

Reply

- o Nathalie Brouard says

Hi Maurice

Sorry for the delay in the reply!

The best way to contact Noel with any garden questions is either through his website

<http://noel-burdette.com/>

or he is now doing a gardening show on radio between 6 – 7 am on Sat mornings on  
1116 4BC (Brisbane Radio) you can call on ph# 131332.

Jerry Coleby Williams is doing the Sunday mornings on this show as well.

Reply

2. Neville Renshaw says

Hi Noel, Neville here- we met when you delivered the prize that Sue won , at Kallangur. I would like to say thank you for the book on Bees,a friend of mine is making some nests for me as shown in that booklet. The honey is just wonderful. The whole prize is great have not used the bee attractor, no flowers around at the moment. Thanks again for the prize. Hope I have used the correct site to write to you, I could not find another place to reply and say thanks Cheers Neville

Reply

- o Nathalie Brouard says

Hi Neville

I have passed on your message to Noel.

He was kind enough to do an interview for us a while back and this was it – so it's not a direct way to contact him.

I love honey and just reading about the wonderful honey that you have has made me think I'll make a piece of toast with honey for morning tea!

Have a fantastic day.

Reply

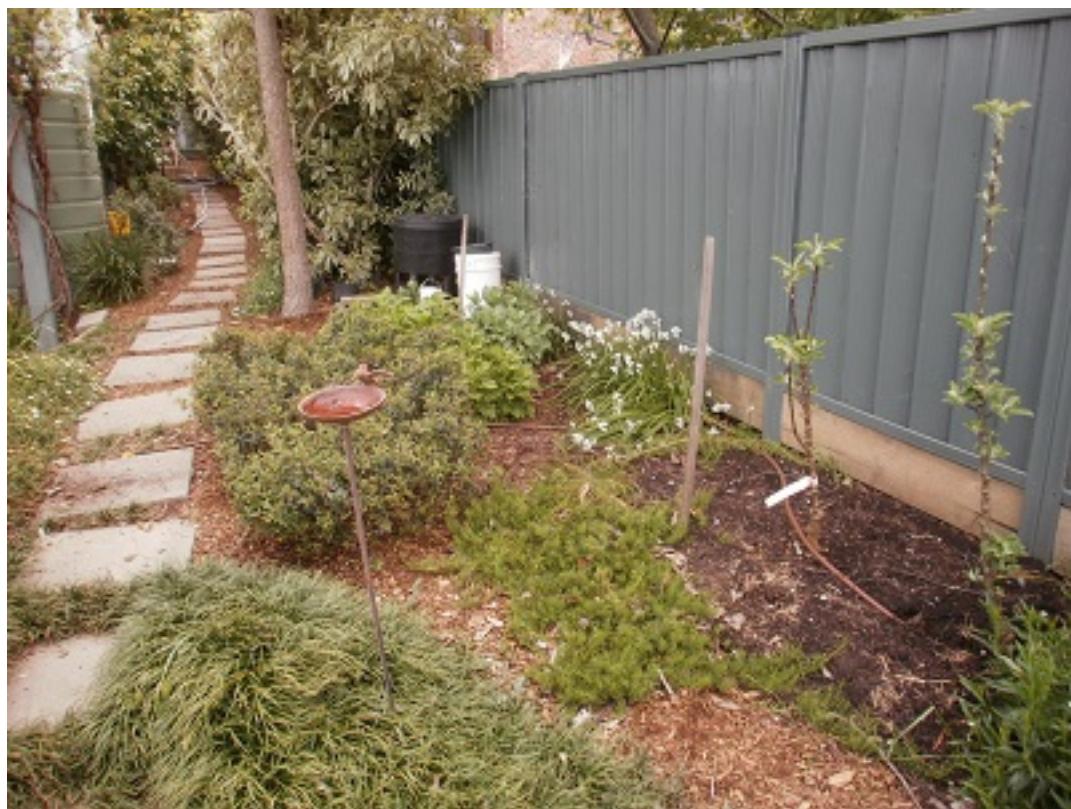
# **Down To Earth | Interview with a Gardener**

## **- Jackie Walkington**

Jackie Walkington has created a garden space that is inspired by diversity. She appreciates the peace that her garden offers her and over time has become an expert composter! Here is her garden story.

### **First of all how would you describe your garden? (What do you grow? What is your climate like? )**

I moved from Queensland to Canberra 11 years ago so of course I had to learn to garden in a very different climate. Canberra's seasons are extreme; temperatures vary from hot to very cold with regular frosts from late April to early September. I have experienced very dry periods as well as the occasional wet year. My garden is eclectic and personal. Most trees are deciduous. Bands of native plantings are juxtaposed with exotic species. The productive elements of fruit trees, vegetables and herbs are intermingled with perennials and bulbs. My garden is not too orderly, but rather an ever-changing pallet.





## How did you get started in gardening?

I recall my mother and father gardening when I was young, but my love of the natural and outdoor environment really took hold once I bought my first house.

## **What motivates you to get up and garden?**

I don't tend to be a still person. The lure of both planned and serendipitous activity once I step outside is irresistible. There is always something new and interesting.

## **What were some of the unexpected hurdles in your garden? How did you deal with them?**

Areas of poor soil and lots of trees were initial challenges. Over time I have become really good at composting and worm farming to improve the soil. I also had to make the tough decision to remove some trees – I really didn't need four plum trees!

## **What were some of the unexpected benefits from gardening?**

Gardening is the balance in my life; my peaceful escape from busy work commitments.

## **Is there a gardening moment that stands out for you?**

The first year in this garden, spring bulbs popped up all over the place adding colour and perfume. I had never had daffodils, jonquils, tulips etc before. I didn't know they were there!





### What has your garden taught you?

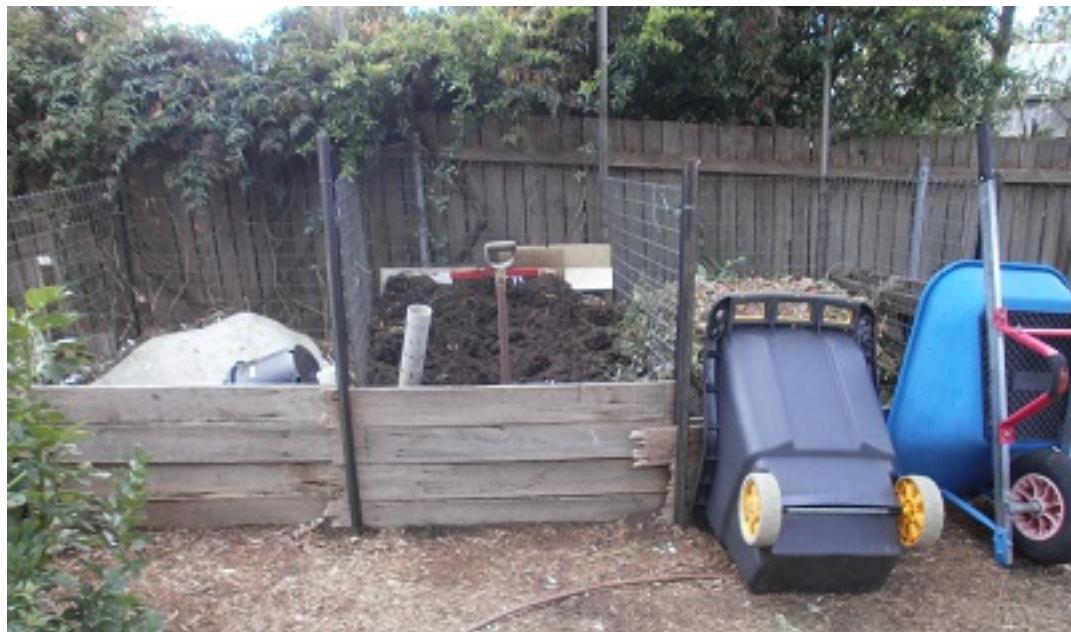
I have learned to not give up when things don't work. Amid many successes, there are plenty of failures that can be learned from. Success is so satisfying!

## **If you were a fruit or vegetable, what would you be?**

Rhubarb! Pests are not a problem; and they have long lives; growing in a rich compost soil; all that is needed is water.

## **What tips would you offer first time gardeners?**

Recycling, composting, worms etc have so much benefit for the garden and give you a warm feeling of being environmentally responsible. Every garden should have a compost bin, no matter how small it is.





*Jackie Walkington  
Weetangera, ACT,*



# **Down To Earth | Interview with a Gardener**

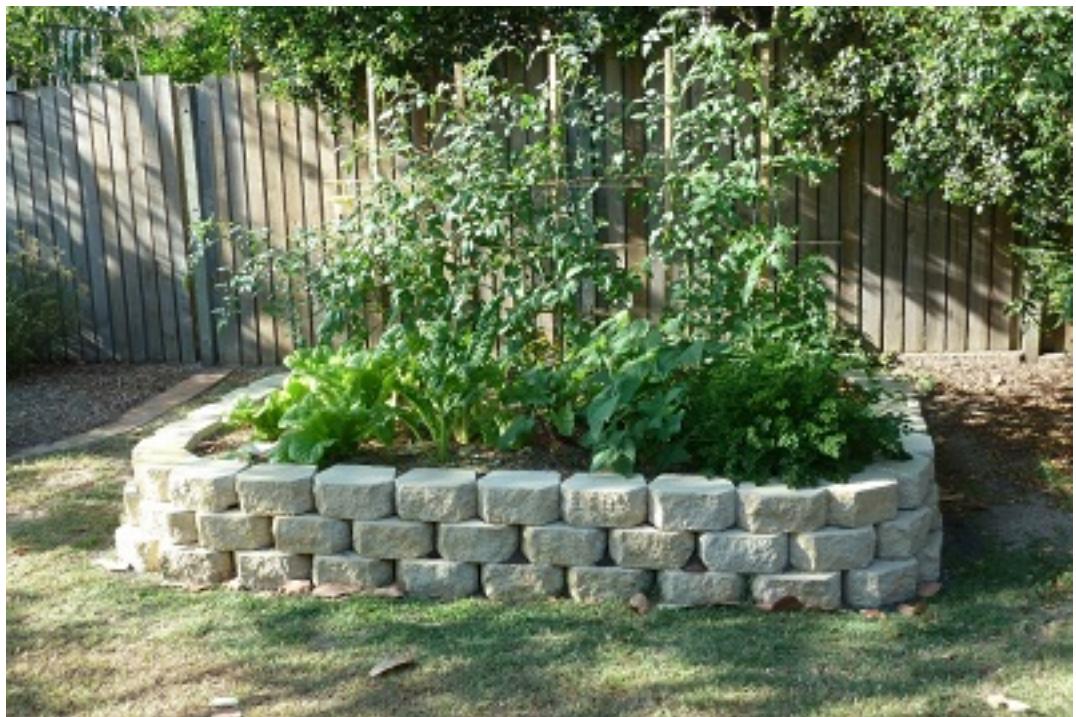
## **- Anne Roffey**

Through the process of observation and learning Anne's garden has evolved over the last 19 years. She loves the serenity her garden gives her and that it has become a haven for wildlife.

### **First of all how would you describe your garden?**

I live in Brisbane in a subtropical climate, which can be fairly dry at times. I am very interested in natives, and have tried to incorporate as many natives in the different areas around my yard as possible. Although I do have exotics as well, there is no hard and fast rule! I also have a vegetable garden and fruit trees, and keep chickens.





## How did you get started in gardening?

When I married we built our first house, and I started the gardens there. I tended to copy the plants I had seen in my parent's gardens at first, the ones I had grown up with. But when we built and moved into our second house, my husband said I should put a little more planning into the gardens, so I went to the library and borrowed some books. We planned the gardens around our 837m<sup>2</sup> block according to how much water they received – on one side we had a retaining wall and the neighbours would water every single day, so this became our rainforest

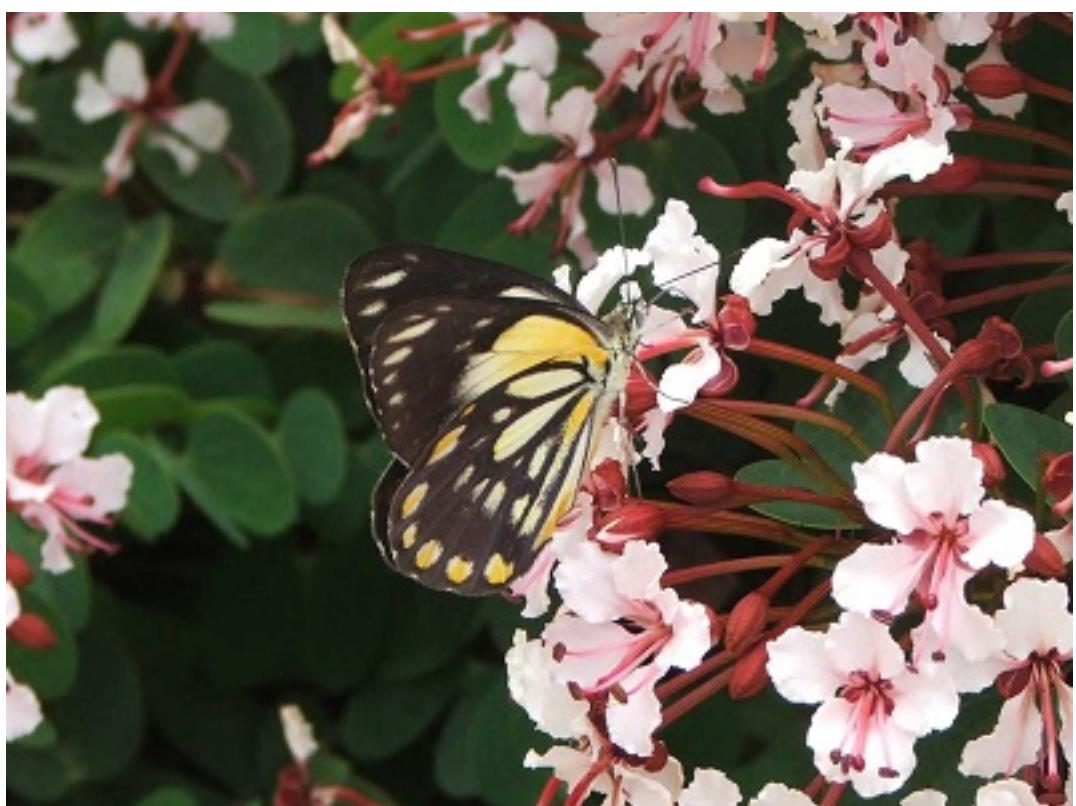
garden, whilst on the opposite side it was quite dry so we planted a dry native garden. We have now lived here for 19 years, and I am hoping to plant more gardens in the grassed areas which our children used to play on (they are now busy studying at university).





### **What motivates you to get up and garden?**

I need no motivation to get up and garden, it is pure pleasure! The only restraint on the amount I garden is time – I like to get my chores done first so that I can enjoy myself completely!





**What were some of the unexpected hurdles in your garden?  
How did you deal with them?**

The drought in Brisbane from 2002 to 2009, followed by the extremely wet weather of 2010-2013! I didn't lose too many plants, but some of them were quite

stressed. We have also had to deal with drainage problems around our yard, as we receive runoff from a few neighbours who are higher than us. We have installed Ag pipe and built a lot of raised garden beds in areas that receive runoff to avoid damage. This also helps our plants grow; although we have lovely sandy loam for soil, underneath we have clay.

### **What were some of the unexpected benefits from gardening?**

I would have to say the physical and mental benefits – I can go out into the garden feeling really stressed or tired, and it makes me feel better so quickly. It is the best pick-me-up around!!! Seeing the birds and animals that visit my garden every day makes me proud of the small contribution I am making to the bigger picture.





### **Is there a gardening moment that stands out for you?**

I had planted a Eucalyptus 'Ptychocarpa', which usually has a single stemmed trunk (or so I thought!). I pruned the young plant hoping to encourage bushiness, and all these other stems started growing. After ringing the nursery I had bought it from, I was informed it is also a mallee, which means it can have many stems. It has grown into the most beautiful tree, whose flowers feed many birds and also ringtail possums and flying foxes.



### **What has your garden taught you?**

Patience, and to work with nature – you can't control the weather!

### **If you were a fruit or vegetable, what would you be?**

My husband always calls me his pumpkin (a term of endearment, I think!), and my son (when he was 4 years old) used to call me "a beautiful red strawberry in a garden of weeds"! Is there such a thing as a cross between a pumpkin and strawberry?

## **What tips would you offer first time gardeners?**

Look around the area you live in and see what grows best. Read books, watch gardening shows, join a gardening club and talk to your local nurseryperson about what you would like to achieve in your garden.





4 Comments

## Comments

1. john sharp says

I had no idea this garden was so beautiful, and I've been in it a number of times. The use of natives is the secret to good gardening in most areas, and Ann has made full use of them as we can see in the photos. The vegetable garden is doing very well, and the home grown labourers deserve a pat on the back. Please keep the furry critters down there where they can't eat my tomatoes!! Great Stuff

### Reply

- o Nathalie Brouard says

Hi John, I've enjoyed hearing about everyone's gardens as well...and yes, the furry critters can stay in Anne's garden 😊 Have a great weekend!

2. Ilonka Clynk says

Ann has certainly done a amazing job on her property. Congratulations Ann. Will have to take up your good advise and watch more garden shows and get advise from the experts. Sadly Ann lives a bit too far away to be able to advise me of some good idea's .

3. Stavroula Jacka says

thank you for sharing your garden with us. I live in central Tasmania and have all my vegetables in "prison" to protect them from possums and wallabies.

# **Down To Earth | Interview with a Gardener**

## **- Matt Neville**

Through the process of creating his suburban oasis Matt Neville discovered an interest in gardening – so much so that he developed garden withdrawals while living in a big city!

Here is Matt's garden story.

### **First of all how would you describe your garden?**

We live on a suburban block in Brisbane and it's our first home. In our garden we grow vegetables, fruit, Orchids and Natives. Our Vegetable patch has eight beds of various sizes and heights and continues to expand. I'm hooked on growing my vegies from seed and I'm learning heaps about germinating seed. I've had lots of success with Tomato, Eggplant, Peas, Beans, Chilli, Pumpkin and I've recently started to grow root vegetables. I've also had some cracking luck growing Ginger, Turmeric and Galangal.

When my wife and I bought the property there was a sensational mango tree in the backyard (would a Brisbane backyard be complete without one?) but since then we've managed to squeeze in a Paw-Paw, Banana, Figs, Cumquat, Passion-fruit and Native Finger Lime.



My other great interest is growing Natives and my curiosity germinating seed has expanded to include Natives. Some are trickier than others but I'm learning and getting better with practice. I think that Natives are great companions for our vegies and it was very exciting this year to discover Native bees in our garden. The front yard is strictly Natives except for a large pot with Malay Dwarf Bamboo which is my wife's sole act of defiance against a front aspect full of Natives.



Growing Orchids started as my wife's interest but I'm starting to get the Orchid bug. We've found a local grower who has given us lots of great advice and we have a small shade house with an expanding collection. We've just enjoyed the first display of flowers and we both got kick out of our early success with Orchids.

### **How did you get started in gardening?**

I guess it was moving into our first home that got me started. At the time, we didn't have much money and 'whipping the garden into shape' seemed like something I could do to improve things. I wanted to make my mark on our new home without spending lots of money. That was six years ago now and it's still a work in progress... one day I'll get the garden 'into shape'.

### **What motivates you to get up and garden?**

Gardening is a part of every day. I have a good work mate who is really into gardening too and we spend most lunch breaks talking vegies, sharing tips or discussing a weekend project passed or planned. Most of our work mates think we're a bit mad but we're both obsessed with seed, compost, worm farms and all things gardening. Late at night I like to finish the day with a gardening book or magazine. It's a great way to get ideas and to stimulate new plans for the garden. But most of all, it's the garden which motivates me. There's nothing better than seeing a seedling emerge, the progress of plants or picking fresh things to cook and eat.



Recently, I spent a few months working overseas in a big metropolitan city and living in a small apartment. The first few weeks were OK and the pictures of our garden, sent by my wife, were enough. However, towards the end of my time I was experiencing serious gardening withdrawals. I desperately missed digging in my

soil, sowing seeds, pruning and even dare I say it... weeding! I seriously contemplated buying a seedling tray, a mix and a packet of seeds to grow on the small apartment balcony. If I'd stayed any longer I may have developed uncontrollable shakes.

Ultimately, it's harder for me to stay out of the garden than it is to get out and get into it. There's always something to do or a new addition and new ideas are constantly stimulated as the garden develops or as the seasons change.

### **What were some of the unexpected hurdles in your garden? How did you deal with them?**

The most difficult hurdle has been the loss of plants from attempting to grow them in the wrong position. At first, it was the usual novice mistake of trying to grow plants in unsuitable spots. Then, it took me a while to understand my garden and how positions change during the different seasons. While a plant may prosper in a position in one season there is no guarantee that it will suit that spot in another. I now have a good understanding of my garden but I continue to observe it and learn. These days I'm much better at plant selection and savvy at making the different situations work in my favour.





## **What were some of the unexpected benefits from gardening?**

Patience. Germinating seed and growing plants does not happen instantly and that's a good thing in our modern world. My work life and personal life are full of instant 'things' and it's good to have something that you have to plan, takes time and demands patience. Observation is a big part of gardening and I always marvel at how clever plants can be in the way they grow or adapt to their environment but you've got to be patient and pay attention to see these marvels.

## **Is there a gardening moment that stands out for you?**

I grow mostly Eucalyptus, Acacia, Melaleuca and Banksia and it always makes me pause when a Native is bursting with flowers. Natives seem so transient and there's always a magic moment when their blooms are at their peak. The exception is the Acacia Fimbriata (Brisbane Wattle) which produces a mass of seed pods during summer. When they begin to burst in the hot afternoon sun the Galahs descend to pick the seed. It's always good fun to watch a goofy Galah hang upside down from a branch while squabbling with a mate and trying to pluck seed from an Acacia pod.



## **What has your garden taught you?**

I've learnt a lot about the food we eat by growing vegetables and fruit. I think it's a good thing to know a bit more than most of us do about what we eat. These days when my wife and I travel overseas on holiday I'm not just interested in what people cook and eat but how they grow it too. Once you've had a go at growing edibles you become a lot more interested in how all food is produced. Sometime in the future I'd love to keep my own chooks and learn more about the eggs we eat.



## If you were a fruit or vegetable, what would you be?

Eggplant. I have lots of good memories eating Eggplant on overseas holidays and it grows so well during Brisbane summers. I'm more a summer person myself and I'm not so keen on cold weather, a bit like Eggplant really. My wife and I love to grill Eggplant with fish or meat, serve with rice and an Asian salad. Grilling and eating alfresco on a summer evening out in the backyard is a great weekend recharge. It's also a perfect way to sit back and admire your efforts after a hard day of labour in the garden.

## What tips would you offer first time gardeners?

Start. That's it! Everything you need to know you'll learn as you go along. All gardeners experience failures but that's why we keep compost bins. It's simple, just get started.

My advice on vegetables is to choose vegies that have a better taste or texture than market bought produce. Snow Peas grown at home have a better texture, corn is so much sweeter and, as everyone says, home grown tomatoes have an amazing flavour.

My advice on growing Natives and Indigenous plants is to do your homework first. So many attractive Natives come from Western Australia and just won't perform in subtropical Brisbane. Know your plant and consider the suitability of your local conditions when making your plant selections.

Finally, my advice on growing Orchids is to find someone who can provide you with good advice. A few tips and a little bit of guidance really helps when getting started with Orchids.

3 Comments

### Comments

1. Stavroula Jacka says

Thank you Matt for the lovely story about your garden.  
I've always wanted to grow a tropical garden but never will. I garden in central Tasmania and your story was a great little foray into tropical gardening for me. Happy weeding and growing,  
Stavroula

Reply

2. Kerry says

This is a great story, full of Matt's personality and stunning photos! Well done to Matt and his wife.

Reply

3. Sandra Smith says

Hi Matt,

THANK YOU THANKYOU,

What an inspiring Gardener you are, I too am a rank amateur living in Outback NSW, where we are suffering an extreme drought, so gardening is a real challenge, I have resorted to container gardening, and am slowly gaining some moderate success. Many Thanks once again for your fantastic story and photos, gives me the incentive to try new things. Lots of continuing pleasure and positive results to you.

Reply

## ***Down To Earth | Interview with a Gardener - Kerry Battersby***

Kerry Battersby from Laidley, Queensland has created her patch of paradise in a relatively short amount of time. Her garden also played an important part in her recovery from lymphatic cancer. Here is Kerry's garden story.

### **First of all how would you describe your garden? (What do you grow? What is your climate like? )**

We live in the Lockyer Valley, QLD, known as the 'salad bowl' of Australia. Our climate is temperate, subject to light frosts in winter and flooding rains in summer, our soil is poor, on the acidic side, and needs compost and conditioning. We moved here 4 years ago, to a garden with good bones but a mix match of plants. The local farmers markets provide an array of plants and we think the previous owners purchased 'one of everything' for the garden. We started an orchard and vegetable patch on the 1.5 acre plot, and maintain the cottage-style and native gardens around the house.



## **How did you get started in gardening?**

We bought a house and the garden came with it. We need space and dislike suburbia, but as we both work full time, we need the plot to be a manageable size, so my husband cuts the grass weekly on his ride-on mower and I work the garden beds.

## **What motivates you to get up and garden?**

I love the activity of creating a space, digging and watching the plants and weeds (!) grow. There is a freedom and vitality – it's a true therapy to work in the garden. I play music on my headset as I work and within minutes I can be dancing in rhythm with the music in the garden. I feel great during and afterwards, I have accomplished a task to satisfy my Type A personality, and released my creativity at the same time.

## **What were some of the unexpected hurdles in your garden? How did you deal with them?**

A distinct lack of money to spend on improvements, so we did a lot by hand. My must-have tool is the mattock which is a family heirloom, it belonged to my maternal grandmother and I am sure she is watching over me as I enjoy gardening as much as she did.

## **What were some of the unexpected benefits from gardening?**

Joy.



## **Is there a gardening moment that stands out for you?**

My diagnosis of lymphatic cancer in 2012 and our decision to treat it with detox and nutrition, meant I spent 3 months developing the vege patch from scratch. I dug out

the beds with my grand-mothers mattock, and because we needed leafy greens in a hurry bought seedlings from the local farmers market, planted, watered and cropped the plants within weeks. I was growing six varieties of lettuce, kale, rocket zucchini and spinach and opting for this treatment instead of hospital poisons. It's not the prettiest vege patch, but it worked! The patch struggles in summer with the heat, and I have since purchased three Gardenware Easy Tunnels with incredible results, and am saving up to purchase more.



### **What has your garden taught you?**

To live in harmony with nature's days and seasons.

### **If you were a fruit or vegetable, what would you be?**

Beetroot – it's my favourite colour – and it's a blood cleanser for cancer sufferers.

### **What tips would you offer first time gardeners?**

Watch your garden for the first year, see what grows best, then make tough decisions – remove what doesn't work and create a garden you can utilise and enjoy.



## **Down to Earth | Interview with a Gardener**

### **- Trudi Staeheli**

Trudi Staeheli has a gorgeous garden oasis located in the Currumbin Valley. She also shares some of her garden experience in the form of a beautifully written diary entry.



#### **First of all how would you describe your garden?**

My garden is a “plants woman’s” garden, as I like diversity. Leans towards the cottage garden. It is not a manicured garden with lawns. I also grow a wild garden with native and exotic bushes and trees as wildlife refuge and for butterflies and bees. I grow many bulbs, my forte are Hippeastrums which I grow from seed and I also like cottage Gladioli. A big part of my garden is dedicated to Bromeliads.

My vegetable garden is very important. It provides the vegetables I use in the kitchen. I also grow an extensive orchard with many different varieties of Mangoes and other tropical fruit, Rollinia, Sapote, Persimmon and many more. Also Pecan nuts, quinces and tropical apples, pears and so much more. It is a little like a garden of Eden! My garden is 1 ¼ acres in the Currumbin Valley, which is sub tropical so there is no frosts where I am.



### **How did you get started in gardening?**

My mother had a big garden. I always liked plants and planting something. I gardened all my life and was lucky to have a garden where ever I lived in the world. I am 75 now and hope to garden for another 25 years.

### **What motivates you to get up and garden?**

I am an early riser and I do not have a special motivation to go out, there is always something interesting to see in my garden. I like also photography and the morning light is a great time to snap some pictures.



**What were some of the unexpected hurdles in your garden?  
How did you deal with them?**

My biggest hurdle was when I moved from a cold climate garden to a subtropical garden. It was a big learning curve, everything was different. I learned from books and garden magazines, as the Internet was not available. It was not just the climate – The plants and planting time was different. The climate was also much drier at certain times and wetter at others than I was used to. I wanted to know so I learned as I gardened.

**What were some of the unexpected benefits from gardening?**

There are so many benefits actually nothing was unexpected.

## Is there a gardening moment that stands out for you?



This entry is from my diary, Under a Hotter Sun in 1974 when I lived on a grazing property in Northern NSW.

*Planting a vegetable garden, one is very much in the hands of the gods!*

*In autumn when the sun retreats its fierceness and spreads out a golden mellow light, is the time for new plantings.*

*Most vegetables do very well over winter. Some have a standstill in the coldest month like July and August. All year round vegetables are growing; harvested and planted again, it is an ongoing job.*

*Herbs do well, mostly all of them all year round. Basil seeds itself. Lavender and Rosemary bushes are planted in the vegetable garden for use and for beauty Italian and curly Parsley and in autumn Coriander self seeds. A big bush of Lemongrass its long sharp leaves gracefully weeping waiting to be used in cooking and for cool drinks.*

*I had a very hard job to prepare the garden beds for my autumn and winter plantings. The soil had become hard and compact over the hottest summer month from the rain pelting down, compacting the soil. The unrelenting heat of the sun baked my poor garden beds so hard, it was ready to cut clay bricks from it.*

*After a lot of sweat and hard work the soil became crumbly again and spread with my coveted cow pads I had collected. Then came the easy and nice task of planting the tiny vegetable seedlings.*

*Lettuce, the snails liked the tender leaves just as much as we did. Cabbages and Broccoli, the beloved food of the larvae of the white butterfly. Beans were most of the time trouble free, if the weather was not to wet. Actually with everything I planted I was challenged by a myriad of insects, birds, possums everybody wanted a slice of my plantings.*

*I had to learn to share, which is hard when you rely on the vegetables or fruit planted. Very seldom I lost everything and then mostly because there was a bad hailstorm. Hailstorms were rampant in this flat land area.*

*I was scanning the sky when I saw the ominous band of blue-green clouds settling like a bruise. When the cattle started lowing and collected to wander up into the bush I was sure something was up.*

*I have experienced one very devastating hailstorm. The vegetable garden looked at its best. The beans were ready to harvest. Tomatoes, Capsicum and eggplants were already showing off their beautiful colours lacquer red and deep purple, plump and shiny in between the foliage. Melons were filling out, everything was at its peak looking healthy and perfect. The sky was now shrouded with boiling blue green and black clouds. Then came the hailstorm, jagged lumps of ice. Big as tennis balls were falling from the sky hitting the tin roof of the house with a noise not imaginable. It did not relent until all the trees and shrubs were stripped of leaves twigs and flowers. The vegetable garden was devastated, everything was smashed and pulped. It is quite strange the reaction one feels seeing all the devastation of ones work happening in such a short time.*

*Then the sun emerged, it slashed through the clouds and eerily a beautiful rainbow stretched its colours along the horizon.*

### **What has your garden taught you?**

Never give up. If someone says this won't grow here, try it anyway.



**If you were a fruit or vegetable, what would you be?**

I would like to be a Banana!

### **What tips would you offer first time gardeners?**

If something does not grow the first time it will the second time . Never give up, the results are amazing.



1 Comment

#### **Comments**

1. Maree says

I relate to most of your comments so well. Love that photo of the melon (with pips)! Got to have pips its a law! Sadly being hard to fine any now.

[Reply](#)

# **Down to Earth | Interview with a Gardener**

## **- Helen Holmes**

### **My Garden by Helen Holmes**

#### **First of all how would you describe your garden?**

I live in the dry tropics near Townsville. This means we have about nine months of dry weather (with lovely warm winters) and three months of wet season (with high temps and high humidity) On arriving here twelve years ago the property had lots of mango trees and a few gums – and that was it. We now have a wide variety of fruit trees, endeavour to grow as much veg as possible and then preserve the produce in jams and chutneys. We also have chickens and ducks and work on a closed-loop system so that everything possible is used. Paper is shredded for chook bedding which then goes on the vegies and fruit trees. Cardboard is scrounged from everywhere and is laid down as mulch.

I love growing unusual plants and now that we run a small bed and breakfast a tour of the garden is often a highlight for guests



#### **How did you get started in gardening?**

I'm not sure where my gardening genes come from – I grew up with a tiny backyard in southern England and neither my parents nor grandparents were keen gardeners.

However as soon as I had a garden of my own (even though it was rented) I started veg gardening. We now live on acreage in the beautiful tropics – I couldn't think of a bigger contrast to my first little garden.

### **What motivates you to get up and garden?**

I don't need much motivation at all. The easiest thing in the world is to go out into the garden, even if I'm just pottering around, pulling up the odd weed here and there – I love it.

### **What were some of the unexpected hurdles in your garden? How did you deal with them?**

The weather was and still is the main hurdle. Plants have to live through such extremes of dry and wet and humidity. Every plant needs a water supply for at least two years. Although I quickly found that the local native trees and shrubs were the best to grow. To cope with this I am turning towards tropical veg for summer and I'm setting up wicking beds to try and ease the problems. There were also issues with wildlife eating the produce – fencing the veg patch and growing things in hanging baskets around the house has pretty much solved that problem.



### **What were some of the unexpected benefits from gardening?**

The extra wildlife that now live around the house. Lots of native plants bring in native birds while resident green tree frogs enjoy the extra tree cover. Getting the balance right between keeping things tidy and fire-safe while leaving plenty of wild areas is one of the secrets to a good garden here.

### **Is there a gardening moment that stands out for you?**

While working in the veg patch I heard a noise and was delighted to see our resident wallaby matriarch and baby sorting through the weeds I had thrown over the fence. She carried on eating contentedly a few metres away while I went back to my work – magic!

### **What has your garden taught you?**

Whatever time and effort you manage to put in you will reap four-fold. You might not get all the crops you hoped for but the personal benefits of exercise, fresh air and the feeling of achievement when it does go right make up for that.

### **If you were a fruit or vegetable, what would you be?**

I'm a fairly practical person so I think I'll choose the rosella – the leaves can be eaten like spinach (an acquired taste!) the flowers and red stems are attractive but are quite prickly if handled the wrong way. Finally, the rosella 'fruit' can be used for tea, syrup or jam. It's useful at all stages of its life and besides, my Rosella and Lemon Myrtle Jam is legendary.

### **What tips would you offer first time gardeners?**

Just do it! Start with something small but useful like herbs – even if it's only a couple of pots on the window ledge give it a go. To start an ornamental garden walk around your neighbourhood and see what other people are growing successfully. If you don't know what a plant is maybe knock on the door and ask – keen gardeners are usually happy to share their knowledge and often will share cuttings too!





# **Down To Earth | Interview with a Gardener**

## **- Elaine Johnston**

**My Garden by Elaine Johnston**

### **First of all how would you describe your garden?**

My garden is a relatively small cottage-type garden with vegetables scattered in between flowers and trees.

I live in a cool climate and at the moment many bulbs are in flower, such as tulips, bluebells, freesias, ranunculi, daffodils, orchids, snowdrops, tritonia, alstromeria and iris. My Meyer lemon is very productive and the orange blossoms on the Murraya Paniculata tree are about to burst into flower.

I am also growing roses, alyssum, kalanchoe, Californian poppies, hydrangeas, fuchsias, tuberous begonia and many cacti, just to mention a few. In between I have planted rhubarb, broad beans and many garlic bulbs. At the last count I had over 200 pots to water, so it is impossible to detail all plants, as I would be writing a book instead of a story.

My vegetable plot has more garlic, snow peas, onions, tomatoes, silver beet, N.Z. spinach, pak choy, wombok cabbages, purple cauliflower, potatoes, carrots, dwarf beans and I have just finished bottling beetroot chutney, as I had a great crop of beetroot.



## **How did you get started in gardening?**

My father was a very keen gardener, so I guess I followed in his footsteps.

## **What motivates you to get up and garden?**

I don't need any motivation to go out into the garden, as I just love every minute of it. Every day I inspect my plants and try to do an hour's work to keep them happy

## **What were some of the unexpected hurdles in your garden? How did you deal with them?**

At first, the lawn was very difficult for me to mow with my hand-mower, so I dug it all out, laid down papers and replaced it with red mulch. Other problems are the citrus gore wasp on my lemon tree, which I cut off, put in a plastic bag and place in the normal rubbish to help keep numbers down. Also the dreaded onion weed and oxalis are a headache, and the only thing to do is to dig them out and try to get as many bulbs as possible.

## **What were some of the unexpected benefits from gardening?**

I did not know any of my neighbours until I started gardening and because I am always out there working I have made numerous friends. It is also wonderful to eat your fresh produce and share it with other people. Another benefit of being in the garden is your health. It keeps your body very active as long as you are sensible and bend your knees whilst lifting and keep your back straight at all times. Last of all I adore watching all the birds, as they dig for food or suck nectar from the trees.



## **Is there a gardening moment that stands out for you?**

One unforgettable day was when a small child was admiring my goldfish, slipped, and almost fell into my pond which was located in the front garden. Fortunately I grabbed him by the jumper before he hit the water. To avoid any more accidents, I relocated the fish and turned the pond into a garden bed. He is now at secondary college and reminds me of the day I saved him from drowning.

## **What has your garden taught you?**

I have learnt a great deal over the years. When I buy plants or receive cuttings from friends I always do research on them to find out what it is that makes them happy and healthy.

## **If you were a fruit or vegetable, what would you be?**

If I was reincarnated as a fruit or vegetable, I would come back as a strawberry because everybody would love me. My strawberries are planted in holes in plumbing pipes and look very attractive when they hang over the edge in bunches.



## **What tips would you offer first time gardeners?**

My tips for gardening would be first of all to buy good quality tools for your work, as cheaper ones never last and don't do a great job.

Cut off spent flowers to keep them producing and cut back perennials after flowering.

A compost bin is very necessary for good soil as well as a worm farm and I always mulch the garden with sugar cane mulch.

You cannot put plants in and think that they will look after themselves, as they need lots of TLC. Therefore – LOVE YOUR PLANTS.

# **Down to Earth | Interview with a Gardener**

## **- Johanna Phillips**

**My Garden by Johanna Phillips.**

**First of all how would you describe your garden?**

The greatest delight around my home is my garden. I live in a small village in the central west area. The climate has perfect weather for flowers and vegetables alike. Summer and Spring time the flowers are at their best and the new life in the trees and shrubs are beyond compare.





### **How did you get started in gardening?**

I was always attracted to gardening from the time I had my first pot with some marigold seeds. These flowers produce such a magnificent show no matter what the season. I still include them in my flower beds each year. The orange and yellow colours stand out amongst the green so well.

### **What motivates you to get up and garden?**

I love to get up into the garden early in the morning with coffee in hand and it is then that I decide what needs doing each day. Whether weeding or planting a plant that the person down the road gave me or I picked up on my travels to town there is always a reason for gardening.

### **What were some of the unexpected hurdles in your garden? How did you deal with them?**

Tulips come up in Spring and Irises as well as succulents with their flowers abound as well as the African daisies and Roses. So many flowers to list. Trial and error is the way to go and if it does not survive another variety will go in its' place.





The ground was not exactly flower and vegie friendly but I bought heaps of horse and cow manure and after digging this and some home compost in I ended up with a reasonable starting soil. Over the years the soil has become easier to plant in. The onion weed is a never ending job to get rid of. Never give up as you do win in the end – that is my motto!

### **What were some of the unexpected benefits from gardening?**

Planting melaleuca bushes and viburnum shrubs have been so beneficial to attracting the birds to my garden, Rosellas and Superb Parrots abound through the

year. Willy Wagtails have their nests in the trees and actually allow me to photograph them throughout the time of eggs to hatchlings. Such a sheer delight to behold. Top notch pigeons nest in my melaleuca bushes. The blue wrens nest in the shrubs close to the house for protection. What more could you wish for.





**What has your garden taught you?**

Gardening has taught me to have patience as some plants appear quicker than others. Green thumb or not anyone can achieve lots whether it be pots or a specially prepared patch.

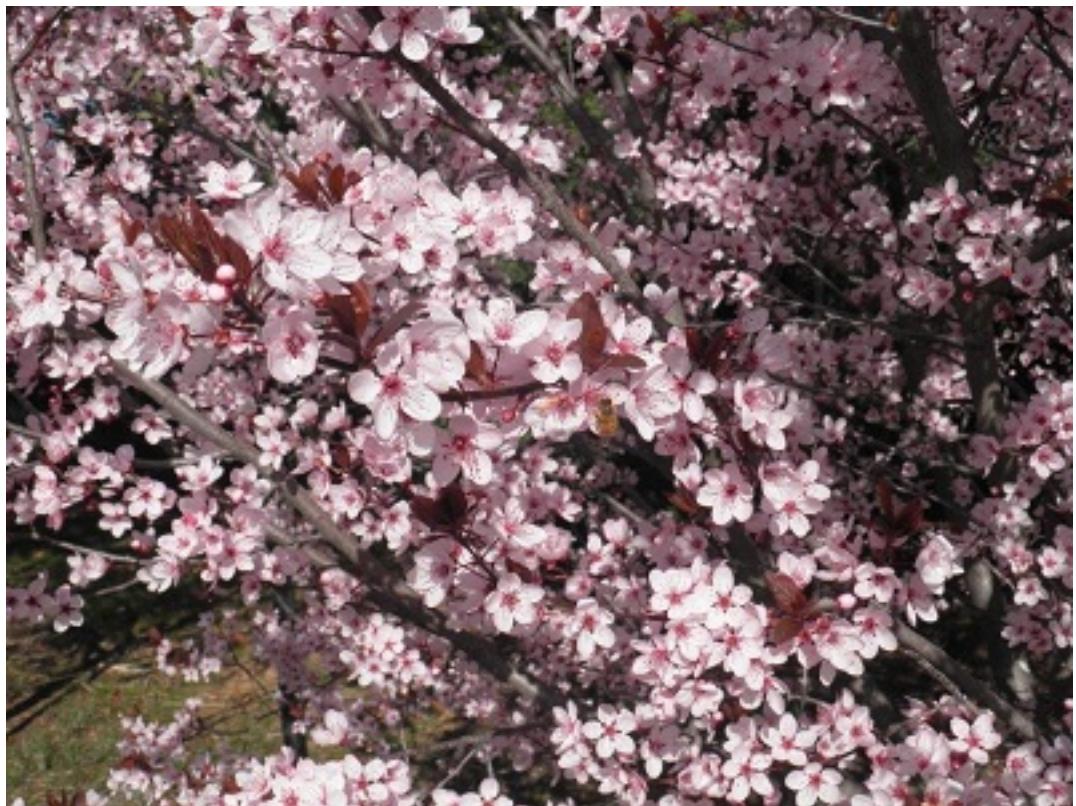
### **If you were a fruit or vegetable, what would you be?**

Vegetables are also something I love to grow and especially to pick and eat. 'Cos' is an easy to grow lettuce, carrots will always come up as do spring onions. Winter vegetables like cauliflower and Broccoli are great and very beneficial to your health. I think if I had to be a vegetable I think Broccoli, as it has been thought to have anti-cancer properties and with so much of this around us, be sure to have it on your dinner plate occasionally.



### **What tips would you offer first time gardeners?**

My tips to first time gardeners is to have patience and try different types of flowers and shrubs as these are what attracts the birds to your gardens. The reward is never ending.





# **Down to Earth | Interview with a Gardener**

## **- Rhea Ng**

### **My Garden by Rhea Ng**

#### **First of all how would you describe your garden?**

My garden is geared towards productivity, so all the plants are edible in some way. It's even better if they fulfill some other function as well, such as acting as a windbreak, providing shade, providing groundcover or providing mulch. I also work very long hours, so the plants have to be productive in terms of my time- no fussy plants! I live on the Gold Coast where the climate is subtropical.



#### **How did you get started in gardening?**

I was a garden virgin when I arrived 5 years ago from New Zealand to set up a cancer service at the local hospital. The house we bought came with an established citrus patch and rainwater tanks. I was quickly seduced by the climate, which is frost-free and has daytime temperatures above 20 degrees year round, and I was also inspired by my neighbours, who are self-sufficient for most veges. Very soon I had put raised beds around the rainwater tanks and was astounded at how productive the garden was, even when I had a pathetic germination rate and frequently forgot to water.

## **What motivates you to get up and garden?**

My job is physically and psychologically demanding, and any doctor who works with cancer would be lying if they didn't admit to bringing some of those demands home. The garden is my therapy. I would much rather take my stress and turn it into veges for my family, than take it out any other way. When I get really worked up, I grab a pitchfork and can get a whole raised garden bed turned over in half an hour!



## **What were some of the unexpected hurdles in your garden? How did you deal with them?**

Coming from New Zealand, I had taken the rainfall for granted, but on the Gold Coast we can go for 4 or 5 months without any decent rain. I learn very early to monitor the rainfall and top-up with irrigation as required. Since we moved in, I have doubled the rainwater storage capacity in order to cope better with periods of drought.

## **What were some of the unexpected benefits from gardening?**

The kids spend a lot less time in front of the TV and computer. They come out to see what Mummy is doing and often end up getting involved with the watering, planting, and weeding. But I haven't let them prune yet because they are too little and might chop a finger off!

There is also so much fun in the garden- I give them a stick or a trowel and they will chase butterflies, or whack bushes, or run along the fence making noise, or dig holes

for mudpies, or build forts with my prunings, or.....!! These are such simple childhood pleasures, but they get forgotten in our busy, modern lives.



### **Is there a gardening moment that stands out for you?**

The first year, because I was a garden virgin I put the trellis against the fence and planted 16 cucumber plants because the packet said to plant them 30cm apart and my germination rate until then was only 50%. Of course, now I know that I only need 2 plants to keep the family fed! Those plants took over the trellis, went over

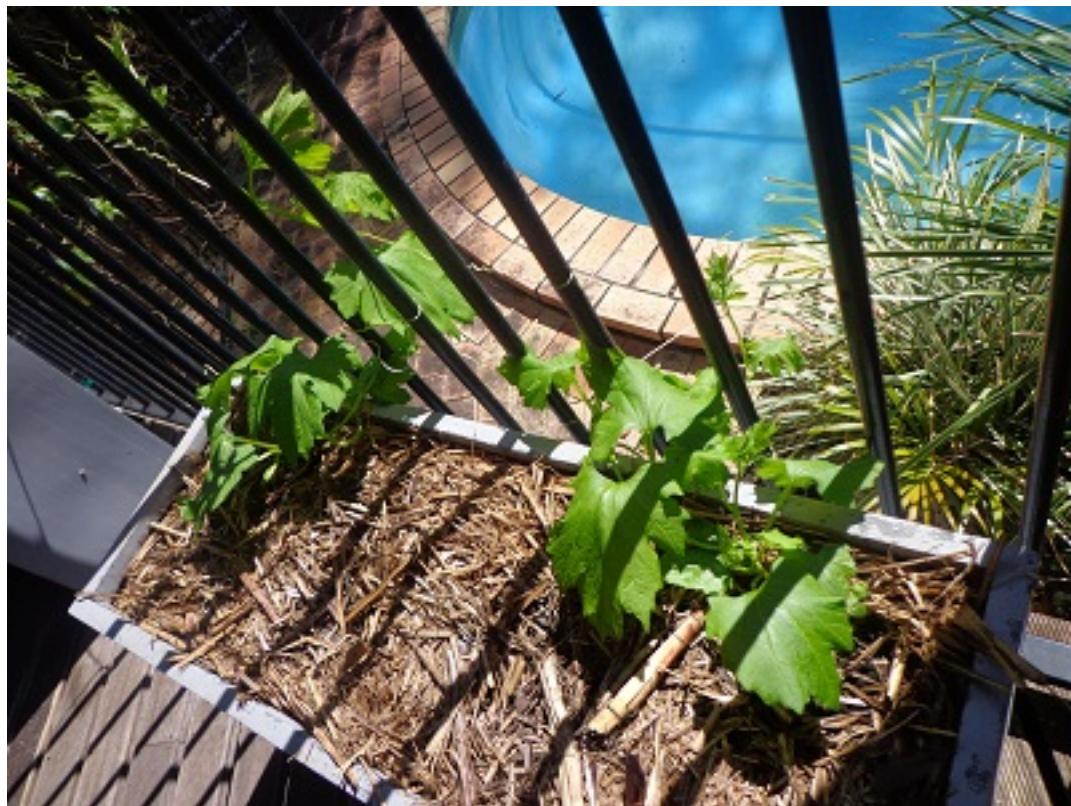
the fence and onto the neighbour's lawn, and kept my family, the neighbours, and the nursing staff in cucumbers for months.

### **What has your garden taught you?**

Keep trying, and even if you don't get what you want, there might still be unexpected benefits. Did the leafy greens get water stress and bolt? Let them flower and collect the seed. Did a bed lie fallow for so long that it's now all weedy? Pull out the definite 'weeds' and be surprised at the number of 'volunteer' plants (I think that's got something to do with letting things set seed.)

### **If you were a fruit or vegetable, what would you be?**

A Chinese bittermelon- a tough plant, with fruit that is very bitter but also very good for your health. (Added bonus- the possums hate it. I can keep the possums off most of my garden by 'book-ending' it with bitter melon plants).



### **What tips would you offer first time gardeners?**

Just start. The garden is the ultimate lover- it rewards you even when you forget about it sometimes.



# **Down to Earth | Interview with a Gardener**

## **- Amanda Davis**

**My Garden by Amanda Davis**

### **First of all how would you describe your garden?**

We are located in the western area of Northern Rivers making us a clash of Sub-tropical temperate. Our garden is young at 6 years of age and takes up six acres of land that started as a cattle plain. My husband and I garden differently, so there are a number of areas: I have a secret forest in the making whilst he has an open parkland. In our house yard there is an Asian inspired garden, cottage court yard, rose garden, tropical garden and of course an orchard and vegetable patch.



### **How did you get started in gardening?**

All my grandparents gardened, as did my husbands, so it was a natural progression.

### **What motivates you to get up and garden?**

The variety of birds and wildlife, including the bees and butterflies. The sun, the wind and the chance of a thunderstorm all give the feeling of freedom.

### **What were some of the unexpected hurdles in your garden? How did you deal with them?**

The climate has been the largest hurdle. Things that we expected to grow didn't and so we had to try new ideas.

### **What were some of the unexpected benefits from gardening?**

Mainly the health benefits, keeping a sane mind and surviving emotional swings.

### **Is there a gardening moment that stands out for you?**

I planted a Judas tree that looked dead for a very long time so I ran over it on the mower. Next rain out comes a shoot and another and now it is a lovely shrub size tree!

### **What has your garden taught you?**

The garden teaches me patience, waiting for a cutting to take or a seed to develop or a bud to open. It also teaches us give and take, as we often have to sit down and work out where and what to do next.

### **If you were a fruit or vegetable, what would you be?**

I would be a nut.

### **What tips would you offer first time gardeners?**

Start small and simple, and persevere.





# **Down to Earth: Interview with a Gardener - Margaret Casey**

**Margaret Casey** lives in Melbourne. She has recently retired and is enjoying the extra time she has to play in her garden and share it with her grandchildren.

## **First of all how would you describe your garden?**

My garden is a broken into areas of native, ornamental and edible. Even though I live in the warm temperate part of Victoria, I have developed a micro-climate in my courtyard where I am able to grow various orchid species along with some subtropical heliconia and costus species which is a delight. I have a productive veggie garden where I spend most of my time and a native garden in the front filled with colour which attracts beautiful native birds and other fauna.



## **How did you get started in gardening?**

When my son was a baby I longed to spend time outside with him and I would potter in the garden and watch him explore, and one thing led to another. I established a fernery to enjoy from my kitchen window and he would keenly watch me and join in trying his hand at planting and digging. As my love of growing things developed, so did his and we spent even more time in the garden. He is now a horticulturist and I am an avid veggie gardener.

## **What motivates you to get up and garden?**

To go out each morning and check what has grown, fruited, changed or been under attack in the garden is a joy. Even weeding now is something I enjoy, as it gives me precious time to switch off and just 'be' in my garden and enjoy it for what it is. To be privileged to be sharing my garden with the wildlife that lives there, along with the obvious fitness benefits, is a real gift.

## **What were some of the unexpected hurdles in your garden? How did you deal with them?**

Drought and the heat of Black Saturday set my garden back somewhat. I lost so many plants that were scorched in the heat that I installed 3 new water tanks to add to the existing ones and planted more shade trees for my micro-climate area. Four years on, and the garden is thriving. The tree ferns are lush, sheltered by the native frangipanis that have grown to also protect my pond, fish and precious plants.



### **What were some of the unexpected benefits from gardening?**

To see the waste I throw away turn into the precious black compost that enriches my garden and then to watch my grandchildren sow some seeds in that soil and then enjoy eating the produce that those seeds provide is precious. To share that cycle of use and reuse with them is terrific.



### **Is there a gardening moment that stands out for you?**

When what I thought was a Gymea Lily when I planted it 10 years earlier, flowered and actually turned out to be a Spear Lily with the most spectacular 1 metre long flower that eventually almost touched the pool it was so heavy. That was a surprise worth the 10 year wait!



### **What has your garden taught you?**

For me my garden is my sanctuary. It is the place where I can relax even when working physically hard, and then enjoy the rewards of that labour either by imbibing the beauty or living off the produce and sharing it with others.

### **If you were a fruit or vegetable, what would you be?**

Oh that's a hard one. Probably a pumpkin. Rich in colour, robust, able to store for ages and use in so many wonderful ways, warms up the winter time, and loves to wander at will through the garden.

### **What tips would you offer first time gardeners?**

Be patient, start small and enjoy what you do. Eventually the waiting for seeds to sprout, flowers to form and open, communing with nature etc, is all worth the wait, and the enjoyment is immense.

# **Down to Earth: Interview with a Gardener - Jenny Jones**

**Jenny Jones** has spent many years creating her garden sanctuary. Tucked away on a quiet suburban street, her garden is a haven for wildlife and a great relaxing spot where family get together.

Here she shares her garden story with us.

## **First of all how would you describe your garden?**

My garden is old fashioned, private and shady, with big deciduous trees in the front and back. The Liquid Ambers create shade in the summer and plenty of light in the winter after the autumn leaves fall. In the temperate climate of Melbourne, Agapanthus, Hydrangeas, Hellebores (Christmas Roses), Daphne, Gardenias, Camellias and Azaleas thrive. On the deck, where I can catch more sun, I love to grow spring bulbs, summer lilies, orchids, cyclamens and herbs.





### **How did you get started in gardening?**

I started gardening as a child with my Mother who was a passionate gardener. She grew up in the country so was used to growing all the vegetables and numerous fruit trees, which fed the family. Much of the produce, especially the fruit, was shared with neighbours and friends. Each of the four children in our family had our own little garden with flowers and vegetables. The garden beds were constructed of many terraces stretching down to the Boulevard, in Heidelberg, near the Yarra River.

### **What motivates you to get up and garden?**

When the sun is shining, I feel like heading out to my garden to water, weed, pot up new bulbs, trim back the spent hydrangeas, chop back the ivy and jasmine, plus pick flowers for the house, such as the Daphne in spring.



**What were some of the unexpected hurdles in your garden?  
How did you deal with them?**

During some wild weather from time to time there have been large branches falling from the trees. With the help of some strong men they were dragged from the pool and removed. When an old house next door was demolished and a new one built, the fence was removed, destroying my 20 feet of ivy and jasmine and the nesting area for the wild teal ducks that had returned each year in spring for 25 years. I have since replanted a fast growing green creeper which is starting to cover new fence to regain privacy. Just last week a pair of ducks returned for a swim and searching for a nesting spot.



**What were some of the unexpected benefits from gardening?**

Each season brings new surprises that pop up and flower. Wandering in the garden and sitting with friends and family on the deck and relaxing together. There is also enough space for children to kick a football and swing on the trees. As I live close to a large park I have lots of native birds visiting my trees. This winter a tawny frog mouth owl stayed in the Liquid Amber for a couple of weeks.



### **Is there a gardening moment that stands out for you?**

For years I tried to grow peonies on my deck without success. After a stint in hospital I returned to the most beautiful deep pink peonies blooming, to welcome me home. It was such a joyful surprise.

### **What has your garden taught you?**

Patience! If something doesn't work, try something else.

**If you were a fruit or vegetable, what would you be?**

A Peace rose.

**What tips would you offer first time gardeners?**

Try to grow a little something that will bloom in each season and with fragrance, so there is always some colour and perfume to bring happiness.

## ***Down to Earth: Interview with a Gardener - Muriel Sellars***

**Muriel Sellars** is a family day care educator, who happened to win Family Day Care Educator of the year for Queensland 2012 and I'm proud to say she has looked after my three young ones.

I love the fact that she instills a love of nature and gardening in the children she looks after.

Here is her garden story.

**First of all how would you describe your garden? (What do you grow? What is your climate like? )**



I grow fruit and vegetables in a permaculture garden. I live in a sub-tropical climate.



I live in the country and have a small acreage where I grow grassy hay to mulch my garden. I keep chooks to do the hard work of spreading the mulch, scratching and weeding to prepare for planting.

In an ideal world where I had as much time as I wanted to garden, I could easily have enough and more veggies for my family and friends. The area I use is about 10metres square. I have divided it into 8 separate gardens.

The chooks are let out into 1 area at a time so that they kill all the weeds and finish off any leftover garden plants. While they are doing this they are also fertilizing the area with their droppings. I leave them there for 4-6 weeks and each day they get new mulch to process [get all seeds and break up the hay]. This keeps them busy and happy and as a side benefit they lay eggs.



### **How did you get started in gardening?**

I am the daughter of a farmer and as a child we learned that we ate if we grew food so we took great delight in producing food for our own table. As an adult I have always enjoyed the satisfaction of growing my own fruit and vegetables. Sometimes I go for some time not getting a chance to garden but I always go back to it .

### **What motivates you to get up and garden?**

I am a Family day care educator and I enjoy teaching the children in my care the delights of gardening.



**What were some of the unexpected hurdles in your garden?  
How did you deal with them?**

I made the fences 4 ft high and some of the chooks can fly that high. It is most distressing when the chooks think they are doing you a favour when they dig out the precious seedlings that have not long been planted. I have decided that large chooks i.e. Rhode Island Reds are the best type of chook to keep as they are too heavy for their wings to support them.

**What has your garden taught you?**

That I need time to myself and there is no better way to reconnect and ground myself than gardening



### **What do you feel your garden can teach the children you look after?**

They can learn so much it's hard to know where to start' The lesson I try to teach them is to learn which insects and animals are our friends. As most children are fascinated by [even when they don't want to touch] insects and small animals this is a lesson that is fun to teach and there is so much to learn.

I also think it is important that the children learn where our food comes from. Lots of children don't understand that food is grown and doesn't magically arrive on the shelves in shops. In a permaculture garden the chooks lay eggs so they also have the joy of collecting them and we often come back and make them into lunch. Food

straight from the garden tastes so much better and especially when there has been some involvement in the growing process.



**If you were a fruit or vegetable, what would you be?**

A Shaddock [Sweet and round ]

**What advice would you offer first time gardeners?**

Grow in your veggie garden what you put into your grocery trolley in the fruit and vegetable aisle.



Would you like to share your garden story with us? We would love to hear it! Please contact us for more information.