



Promoting the enjoyment, knowledge and benefits of gardens and gardening

Open Gardens South Australia

Welcomes you to HECTOR'S PATCH

Saturday 17 and Sunday 18 February 2018 35A Kings Street, Mile End

Welcome to Hector's Patch.

Philosophy

For me, my garden is a sanctuary, a place to potter, where I can relax by working with the soil and plants, and indulge a passion for propagation and plant collecting. A garden should be home to wild creatures, birds, insects, lizards and other native animals and it should be productive. There is nothing nicer than eating a meal entirely sourced from the garden. The garden is also a place for fun, mosaics, paintings, found objects and sculptural pieces add a bit of interest.

This is not a "designer" garden but a living space where creativity, productivity and wildlife co-exist.

The Development of the Garden

The garden has developed over the past twenty years. An unloved single fronted maisonette with a very long but boring back garden was slowly brought back to life. The only original feature to remain in the garden is an old Frangipani tree which survived being squashed ten years ago when a large lemon scented gum fell on the house in a storm.

When first laid out twenty years ago, a series of three garden rooms were planned, ornamental, vegetable & fruit and indigenous & utility. However, over time as the garden has changed this has blurred somewhat.

A screen of large indigenous trees was established on the southern boundary, ensuring northern light for the veggie patch. These and other natives in the garden are great habitat for native birds. I have even seen Barn Owls and found their pellets (undigested fur and bones) underneath the tree.

Two years ago, the back garden was enlarged by connecting the two properties. The design is intended to mirror the original half but also stay separated should the two gardens need to part in the future. The addition of next doors back garden has created some follies along the way as new paths connect the two. A garden is a living entity, it changes over the years and not everything goes to plan.

Front garden.

All of the plants here (except the original frangipani) are native with many being indigenous to the Adelaide region. Native Wallaby grasses shelter seasonal displays of wildflowers which are dormant in summer. Tufts of snow grass, several local Lomandra species and the Morning Flag Iris (*Orthrosanthus multiflorus*) line the brick path while correas, eremophilas, acacias, grevilleas and melaleucas provide screening from the road.

Vegetable garden

The raised beds sit on a bed of bricks with a root barrier to stop tree roots invading from underneath. This was a lesson I learnt in the first iteration of raised beds. The vegetables suffered too much competition from hungry roots. The soil is a mixture of natural garden soil, compost and manures. One of the biggest challenges in a small vegetable garden is crop rotation. In the past I have had issues with root knot nematode which thrive on the solanum (tomato) and cucurbit (zucchini) families. They proliferate when similar crops are grown in the same location year after year. Once established nematodes are almost impossible to eradicate. However, I have found growing crops of bio-fumigant mustard in winter, African marigolds in summer and rocket all year round helps to deter them.

A more recent challenge has come from possums who moved into the garden only four years ago. While it is lovely to see a mother and baby in the gum tree at night, it is less appealing to find a whole crop of fruit or vegetables decimated overnight. However, possums have rights too, I try to cover crops with nets and have had recent success

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with a home-made garlic spray to stop browsing on foliage of the apple and apricot trees. Some crops like sweet corn are simply impossible to grow with possums. Root vegetables are fairly safe!

Dogs

The garden name “Hector’s Patch” pays tribute to the garden’s chief digger, a large, enthusiastic Airedale Terrier who together with his smaller co-conspirator, Macey, determines what lives, is dug up or run over during ‘mad half hour’. Raised vegetable beds allow separation of dogs and edibles and a large collection of pots also prevent delicate plants from becoming “road kill”. The dogs love to explore, play chase and find cool or sunny spots to make nests. A dog behaviour specialist once told me my garden was a great environment for dogs as there are lots of opportunities for exploration and environmental enrichment, quite different to the normal concept of an uninteresting lawn, a territory that can be seen in one glance.

Environment

The garden contains three rainwater tanks, which are all connected to the house and garden. Despite only being 7,000 L capacity they save an enormous amount of water as they are continuously refilled and used during the wet months of the year. The house runs exclusively on rainwater for almost six months a year. This compensates for the additional mains water used during summer for the garden.

I try to avoid growing any environmental weeds, species that escape the garden and invade bushland and waterways. Although Mile End is not exactly bushland it is important to be aware of how your garden can impact the wider environment. One exception is the succulent collection, succulents can become bush and sand dune invaders, but this is mostly by dumping of garden clippings. Any waste from the garden is either composted on site or disposed to green waste bin where it is thoroughly composted.

Two compost systems are used. Compost bins for kitchen waste, layered with dry garden material to keep it aerated, and two larger open compost bays for general garden prunings. I try to add animal manure to these to improve the composting process.

Key species

- Native Cherry (*Exocarpos cupressiformis*) – a sapling is establishing well, this species is a semi-root parasite and attaches to the roots of other plants. It has edible “cherry-like” fruit in summer.
- *Acacia merinthophora* – by the front gate. Note the zig zag formation of the branchlets.
- Blackwood Wattle (*Acacia melanoxylon*) – This lovely shade tree is indigenous to the Adelaide Hills. It is a long lived wattle and is the source of the prized Blackwood timber used for furniture.
- Palmer Lily – (*Dorantes palmeri*) this east coast native has taken 18 years to produce a flower spike which was 4m tall and covered by large red flame-like flowers, followed by spectacular seed pods.
- New Zealand Lancewood (*Pseudopanax crassifolius*) – this NZ native has hard, spiky downward pointing juvenile leaves until it is 3m tall when it changes completely to softer upward pointing leaves, one theory is this was a protection mechanism against browsing of the now extinct Moa.
- Bottle tree (*Brachychiton rupestris*). The stately tree from Qld is slowly forming a characteristic bottle trunk.
- Cycads – several unusual cycads are found in pots in the garden, from the stately *Cycas thouarsii*, graceful *Dioon edule* to the smaller growing species (*Encephalartos sp* and *Zamia integrifolia*).
- Sweet Apple Berry (*Billardiera cymosa*) – a lovely local native climber with soft lilac flowers in spring.
- Espalier apples – now 20 years old the Gala and Granny Smith trees bear well if the possums give them a chance.

Mark Ellis 2018

Open Gardens South Australia is aiming to significantly reduce its impact on the environment and we hope you support us in this endeavour. Please return your garden notes as you leave so they can be reused and recycled.

The gardens that open for us are chosen to reflect a great diversity of styles and may even challenge the conventional view of what constitutes a garden. While aspects of a garden may not be to your taste, we urge you to celebrate this diversity. Please remember you are visiting a private home and show respect and sensitivity for the owners who have so generously shared their garden with you. Thank you.