



Promoting the enjoyment, knowledge and benefits of gardens and gardening

Open Gardens South Australia Welcomes you to **Beneath The Scented Canopy**

Saturday 31st October & Sunday 1st November, 2026

I moved into Margaret St in 2000, standing in the yard as its new custodian. **The garden was a blank canvas** - with the kind of charm only a gardener could love: grass out the front, and a tiny pond where Bruno the fish lived under the frangipani's watch. In the backyard old dead fruit trees, concrete paths laid with forgotten intentions, the fig tree brooded quietly, pergolas sagged, a rusted rainwater tank leaked, and the lemon-scented gum towered above everything - the tree that has shaped every plan, every season, and every celebration.

When house-hunting, I would run straight to the backyard. The kitchen could be falling apart, the bathroom could be a disaster zone, but if the garden had potential, I was interested. Margaret St had potential - and I was overwhelmed by the choices. Luckily, fate handed me Sara Mitchell, my high-school friend turned **garden designer extraordinaire**. Sara helped us create the impressive bones of the garden: the flow, the rhythm, the sense of place. Even now, decades later, Sara's influence is still visible in the way the garden moves and many of the plantings.

I dreamt of a **scented secret garden** (a rambling expansive estate); with vegetables among flowers, herbs tangled with fruit trees, fences hidden and everything smelling like possibility. But the block size and gumtree had other ideas. The canopy's shade stretched long and wide, and many early dreams simply didn't get enough sunlight. Gardening, I learned, much to my dissatisfaction - is part fantasy, part compromise.

The gumtree has always been the garden's main character - a love-hate relationship that has lasted decades. In autumn/winter she casts deep shade - early spring, blossoms fall like snow while thousands of bees' hum through the air and underfoot. In December, bark sheds, revealing a fresh green-and-white trunk that slowly turns grey again. In summer she provides immense shade until the peak heat of the late afternoon sun. Gum nuts fall underfoot, and our swear words echo across the neighbourhood. Year round she drops branches great and small - only one SES call so far (touch wood). Paul is forever cleaning gutters, and we've had her professionally pruned numerous times; an expensive but necessary ritual. We've tended, negotiated with, loved, and cursed her, because she is as much a part of our story as any plant we've chosen.

The weeping apricot became the perfect counterbalance; lush green shade in summer, golden autumn colour, pink blooms in winter, and bulbs blooming beneath her in early spring. She is one of the garden's most successful elements.

And the soil- oh, the soil. The foundation and success of everything. We dug out truckloads so large they could qualify as geological features; we piled on manure and mulched with thick biscuits of pea straw soaked in Seasol. I've cursed at clay, celebrated worms, and carried bags of manure with the optimism of someone who believes in transformation. In recent years we've used lighter leaf litter and ground covers as mulch, allowing self-seeding delights to thrive rather than suffocate. Neutrog products, Seasol, dynamic lifter - these are my staples, always applied when rain is coming. I've trialled liquid fertilisers, but the fiddly application has sent me packing. And from the very beginning, our dripper system has quietly done its job. It has limped along faithfully for decades, bits replaced over the years, but still delivering water with quiet determination.

If the gum tree is the main character, **Paul has been the backbone of the garden**; with his practical skills, strength and patience. From laying the brick path more than 20 years ago to pruning, digging, sweeping like no other, keeping the whole place functioning - he is the steady force behind the scenes. He brings the kind of grounded practicality that balances my dreaming. The garden carries his fingerprints as much as mine.

I come from a **lineage of gardeners and farmers**. I grew up with hands and feet in the earth, the rhythm of seasons woven into everyday life - I feel it in my veins (and my waters). I'm always more at ease when I *feel* the garden rather than think about it. I spent hours beside Dad among vegetables, espaliered fruit trees, a grapevine pergola over our sandpit, chooks and lawn we played on. Mum championed my garden dreams with her native-plant

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knowledge and years with Trees for Life. Grandma's garden was magical; I was certain fairies lived there. Some plants in my own garden carry that nostalgia - the snowball bush from childhood flower-picking and the heliotrope where fairies hid beneath her blooms. And now, beneath the soil, dahlias quietly gather strength, ready to bloom for our daughter's wedding in March - a new chapter growing from old roots.

Over the years, the garden has held fig, plum, peach, apple, citrus, and once an apricot. **I rely heavily on** cuttings that prove themselves such fairy crassula, snow in summer and blue fescue from Mum's garden. Salvias and self-seeders take centre stage; larkspur, sweet william, hollyhocks, parsley, valerian. And yet, my garden is also a graveyard of the plants that didn't make it: gardenias, leggy annuals with no blooms, geums, agastaches, penstemon, a raspberry, blueberry, fuchsias, stunted vegetables, the smoke bush and port wine magnolia that never settled, and beloved pets who rest quietly beneath the soil. They are part of the story too - reminders that gardens evolve, that not everything survives, and that love is sometimes expressed in the act of trying again.

In 2005, we were **married in the garden**. The ceremony took place in the circle, with friends gathered around the red brick path. In 2008, we extended the house and **lost a large section of the garden**.... the extended lawn, the blue and yellow garden bed, and a row of white Chinese lanterns that glowed like tiny lights in the evening. We farewelled the little old shed that was a hub for compost bins, terracotta pots, cuttings, tools, and a sandpit. I still grieve that loss, but the extension gave us a beautiful back room that looks out onto the garden every day, every season.

That same year, **our son was born**. The garden became his world: trampolines, slippery dips, swings from the gumtree, cubbies, imaginative play and his endless landscaping projects. During this season, the garden retained her beauty with the foundation plantings anchoring the garden: the covered fences, rose arch, the red-and-cream rose bed, the repeat flowering kiss-me-quick and purple spired salvia, nasturtiums, geraniums, seaside daisies and the dark purple agapanthus circling the base of the gum, blooming in summer when her bark is white and the garden feels luminous.

Tuscan Lane emerged down the narrow side of our house - a new place for succulents, terracotta, stacked red bricks....and Paul built me a potting bench. Under the fig tree **Contemplation Corner** arose, with a seat, creeping thyme underfoot and sweet peas and annuals at the side in steel tubs to lift the soil from competing roots. The left-hand narrow garden bed has never done well - fruit trees, soil re-dos, replanting, rethinking - it remains a battleground.

Out the front, I once resisted box hedges and standard roses but eventually saw their value in containing my garden's natural chaos. The Manchurian pear was planted early for shade. Paul dutifully dug it up and moved it countless times, trying to find the perfect spot. Once tradescantia tumbled over agaves, and a dark purple Buddleia hedge wove itself through red roses — wonderfully eclectic, but the upkeep never quite justified the limited show time. Inspired by English gardens, I'm now embracing the front yard's sunnier aspect. It has become my little nursery — a place to trial new combinations, raise seedlings before sending them to the backyard. There has never been enough space in any garden for all the roses I covet. My first love will always be velvety red blooms as seen across the front fence.... the kind that look painted in wine, and now soft pastel roses fill the triangle bed — my new pastel playground.

Our garden is full of **treasures** from markets, flower shows, Unley Plant Rescue, and gifts from friends. Everything has a story. Woven through all of this are my gardening **friends and family**. I'm a proud plot holder at the local community garden — a magical place where I gain tips, tricks, and connection with other gardeners. And especially Suzanne — my gardening confidante. We share seeds, cuttings, ideas, plant obsessions, and the kind of garden talk only true plant people understand. She is stitched into the story of this garden as surely as any plant.

And now, I find myself deliberating again — whether to remove the frangipani to create a sunnier space, open the front yard, to let the window breathe. This garden has never been about ease; it has been about experimentation, chaos, beauty, memory and love. They say gardens reflect their makers — if true, mine is a tapestry of contained chaos - compact, complex, ever-changing and unexpectedly powerful. It has grown with us, grown around us and it will continue....