



Promoting the enjoyment, knowledge and benefits of gardens and gardening

Open Gardens South Australia

Welcomes you to

The Brooker Garden

Saturday 5th & Sunday 6th October, 2024

Welcome to our country garden! This is primarily a productive vegetable garden where we aim for self-sufficiency in organically grown vegetables and some fruits, with ornamental plantings as well; especially roses, some natives and Mediterranean plants and bulbs. It shows what can be produced in a country garden in an area with cold winter nights and very heavy frost sometimes well into spring; low unreliable rainfall, and very hot summers with town bore water for irrigation.

We bought the property and self-built the traditional style country house in 2001. We commenced the garden straight away. My interest in vegetable growing started about 25 years ago as a cost saving measure and because of the better flavour of our own produce without using toxic chemicals. A friend had a mowing and gardening round and dropped off lawn cuttings and prunings which we used as mulch and for composting along with horse manure, and soil was constantly improved over the years with this organic matter. Initially there were two long in ground vegetable growing garden beds running along the east side of the house. Worms left over from a fishing trip were placed in the soil and have multiplied greatly, breaking down organics and improving soil structure and fertility. The natural soil in the garden is silty and clay was added to help with water retention.

The first raised beds were of timber construction and established just before COVID. These were a success but as timber had doubled in price during COVID, subsequent beds have been of galvanised iron. Soil in the beds is purchased sandy loam, with our own compost and organic waste and some purchased compost incorporated. Continual soil improvement involves adding cow and horse manure, compost and digging in green manure. The soil is now rich, loose and holds water well. Organic fertilisers are sometimes added.

Raised beds have the advantage of being easier to work (less bending) and soil, mulch and water stays in the beds and does not run off as it did with beds at ground level. Barley straw is used as mulch to retain soil moisture and to lightly cover frost susceptible crops on nights when frost is predicted well into spring. The mulch also improves soil as it breaks down.

Crops grown through winter into spring include potatoes, carrots, peas, celery, onions, garlic, silver beet, cabbages, and beetroot and in warmer months tomatoes, capsicums, peanuts, Chinese cabbage, butternut and Kent pumpkins, cucumbers, strawberries and beans, though in extreme heat some of these burn, so some years summer crops are not so successful right through the summer. Recently smaller raised beds for vegetables and large containers for dwarf fruit trees (apricots and citrus) have been established at the back of the house. At the southern end of the large raised bed vegetable garden, are in ground apple trees, 'Fuji' and 'Pink Lady', which produce fruit but can burn in the years with extreme heat. The compost heap is next to the apple trees.

A large number of roses of many varieties have been planted alongside the house to separate it from the vegetable garden. Roses have also been planted in the front garden, along with spring flowering bulbs, especially freesias, chrysanthemums and some native plants. The roses are growing well and in bud and will hopefully be flowering at their peak when the garden is open. The garden at the

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eastern side of the house is bordered with freesias and has some native plants including a quandong tree in fruit, also lavender. Hens are kept in the north-eastern corner of the garden. Pineapples in pots are an interesting novelty addition on the eastern veranda, but foliage was burnt by frost this year. Most plants we have wanted to grow have done well with the exception of dahlias.

A few tips that may be useful.

- We spread out plastic sheeting held down with bricks over weed areas to solarise and kill weeds without resorting to chemicals.
- When you see cucumbers, pumpkins etc affected by mildew, remove mildew affected leaves promptly which will keep plants growing and producing for longer than if mildew is allowed to take over.
- Soft green waste can be directly dug into vegetable beds rather than composting it first, but harder stems etc are best composted.

Our garden is not a “show garden” but we hope you find your visit interesting and worthwhile and enjoy seeing what can be grown organically in our area with both frost and extreme heat and bore water to contend with. Thank you for visiting.

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.