



Promoting the enjoyment, knowledge and benefits of gardens and gardening

Open Gardens South Australia

Welcomes you to

Crabapple Cottage

Saturday 25th & Sunday 26th October, 2025

Passionate about living in a sustainable way, I wanted to build a house of low embodied energy. The type of house I chose to build was a straw bale house, built with straw bales instead of bricks. (Bricks use a large amount of energy in their production, i.e. high embodied energy, not good for the warming planet.) The straw bale walls have amazingly effective insulation and are half metre thick - when the house is past its use by date the walls can be composted!

My house was completed in 2007 and then it was time for the fun part and a garden based on organic principles was a must. I had initially sought the help of professionals to design my garden but no design I was presented with suited me so when a friend said you don't need a professional designer; you can do it yourself, that's what I did!

Most of the bones of my garden, i.e. the paths, patio, driveway and walls were made of natural or recycled materials. Organic matter increases the water holding capacity of the soil so to reduce the amount of water I will need to use this summer I have incorporated plenty of my own home-made compost and worm castings to the soil.

My front garden was originally level with the footpath. I wanted to create an illusion of the garden being lower than the footpath. To create this, I built up the footpath near the pedestrian gate so you would step down onto the circular path giving more interest. Low drystone walls either side of this gate complete the illusion.

As the house has a cottagey look and because the front garden is only 5 metres deep, I thought a cottage style garden would suit it best and I love the unplanned natural look that you can get away with in this style of garden. Plus, I love lots of different flowering plants and that style of garden allows me to have them! I feel as long as there is harmony in the colour scheme it will work and not be too busy.

The garden has a circular stone path featuring a large urn which I fill with colourful annuals - this year I planted blue pansies and white alyssum. To either side of the gate are low drystone walls to create interest and provide an area where plants can cascade over the edge. My colour theme is blues, purples, mauves, pinks and whites. It contains perennials such as geraniums, miniature cyclamen, catmint, seaside daisies, hollyhocks, campanula, alyssum, asters, hellebores, foxgloves, delphiniums, blue marguerite daisy, cornflowers, poppies, mini agapanthus, scabiosa and many plants grown from cuttings or self-sown - who doesn't like freebies! Also bulbs such as nerines, bearded iris, bluebells, star flowers and snowdrops, many of which naturalise so more free plants - yay! This great diversity of plants helps attract beneficial insects, which in turn reduce the need for pesticides. There are many David Austin shrub roses, plus the climbing roses over the arch including Nahema (an exquisitely perfumed pale pink) and Pierre de Ronsard, and because Pierre is so stunning, I put his identical twin on the verandah post.

The feature tree is a beautiful, graceful weeping elm which, I think, looks at its most stunning when it is bare in winter. My crabapple (*Malus ionensis plena*) is taking its time to grow as it was previously competing with a large duranta, now gone. I have two sweet-smelling gardenias, kept in large pots as they prefer acid soil.

Open Gardens South Australia Inc: is a not for profit organisation opening private gardens to the general public. The purpose of Open Gardens SA is to educate and promote the enjoyment, knowledge and benefits of gardens and gardening in South Australia and to build strong public support for the development of gardens.

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The nature strip has been planted with hardy lavender, iceberg roses, white variegated bougainvillea which seems to flower constantly, pinks, seaside daisies, society garlic, sea lavender, blue convolvulus, white and purple iris with pansies planted near the front fence.

From the front garden, you can walk to the right to the narrow north facing side garden. This garden contains predominantly white and green which is so calming to the senses. The beds are bordered by a small hedge and white flowers include iris, snowflakes, campanula, mini cyclamen, variegated plectranthus, hellebores and a pot is planted with white primula and alyssum.

Unfortunately, a number of the original Dutch box in the hedge died and I decided to change to the hardier mini euonymus. The trees, chosen with the narrow aspect in mind, include a lovely white flowering pear tree (Southwood Dancer), a fastigiate silver birch, three glorious Japanese maples and a kaffir lime tree.

There is a small goldfish pond providing the sound of flowing water to the kitchen and family room, again very soothing. Backing the pond is a screen planted in a diamond pattern with perfumed star jasmine. Two bug hotels also hang on the screen which provide a place for the native blue-banded bees (or other insects) to lay their eggs.

Behind the house is the veggie garden and here, apart from a small area where I grow lettuce and spring onions, the strawberries have taken hold - so much so that last summer I picked 35 kg of fruit, much of which I have made into the jam I am selling today. My lemon and lime trees border the veggie area and along with my Poormans orange near the patio, supply an abundance of fruit for marmalade making. Covering the veggie garden is a framework of 19mm water pipes over which I drape shade cloth to provide sun protection in the heat of summer.

Here too are my compost bins and heap, a worm farm, a frog pond containing water plants and my 'pobble-bonk' frogs. Since I have had the frogs, I have seen a diminishing number of slugs and snails! My two rainwater tanks really help with keeping my two ponds topped up as well as providing water for irrigation.

On the south side is my entertainment area shaded with an ornate iron-work pergola, a great place to gaze at the pond and enjoy lunch in the warmer weather. The patio is surrounded by more weeping elms (in retrospect not a good choice since the introduction of the awful elm leaf beetles). Then continuing there is my little patch of lawn, bordered by another predominantly blue and white garden and then more fruit trees!

This year, after seeing tomatoes planted into bales of straw at another open garden, I researched how to prepare the bales and am trying the idea myself. At the end of the tomato season the remaining straw will have partly broken down and will make wonderful mulch.

Then there is my gum tree - I try to forget it's there! It is a significant tree and it does give nice shade in summer and provides a home for wildlife but on the downside it almost constantly drops flowers, leaves, bark and gumnuts which foul my rainwater and create an enormous amount of work - aarghh!

I get so much joy (and produce!) from my garden and from observing nature at work. I hope you enjoy it too!