



Promoting the enjoyment, knowledge and benefits of gardens and gardening

Open Gardens South Australia

Welcomes you to

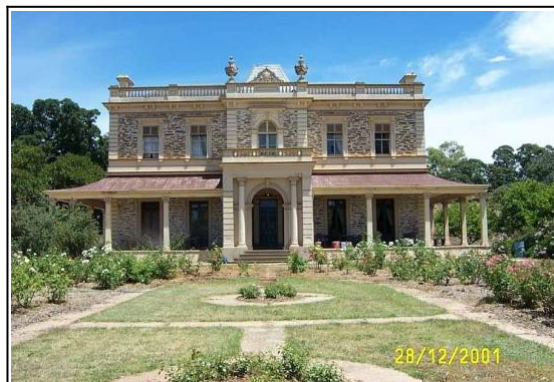
Para Para

Saturday 19th & Sunday 20th September, 2026

The Gardens at Para Para – A Story of Resilience

When we first arrived at Para Para in the summer of **2001**, the gardens had clearly seen better days. Rather than rushing to change everything, we spent time simply watching and learning how the garden responded through the seasons. It proved to be one of the best decisions we could have made.

The ornamental garden was dominated by around **360 roses**. They were tired and neglected, but with some hard pruning, generous feeding and more than **80 bales of pea straw mulch**, they rewarded us with one of the most spectacular displays imaginable. During spring we picked armfuls of roses every day.



Sadly, the display never lasted long. Almost every year, the first hot northerly winds, usually arriving in early October, would sweep across the north paddock and destroy every bloom almost overnight. Summer became a battle simply to keep the roses alive. With limited water, we quickly learned we could only give them enough to survive.

Then came the **Millennium Drought**.

Normally, Para Para receives around **380 mm of annual rainfall**, but during the height of the drought we recorded only **108 mm** in an entire year. Water restrictions were introduced across South Australia, and despite our best efforts, we lost the majority of the rose collection.



At the same time, I was raising four children under the age of eight. The roses demanded more water, time and attention than I could realistically give. It was time to rethink the garden.

Instead of looking at modern gardening trends, I found myself asking what my grandmother and great-grandmother would have planted long before automatic irrigation systems. They relied on rainfall, buckets of washing-up water and plants that could cope with South Australia's harsh climate.

The answer was **lavender**.

I've often joked that I have more of a black thumb than a green one, but one autumn I decided to try propagating



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.

Web page: <http://opengardenssa.org.au/>

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Lavandula dentata (French Lavender). Armed with little more than determination and a collection of YouTube videos, I struck thirty cuttings.

To my amazement, every one of them grew.

Any plant that thrives on a little neglect quickly became a favourite!

From then on, taking cuttings became an annual tradition. Every autumn I propagated more plants, and whenever I discovered a new lavender variety, I took cuttings of that too. My goal was simple—to gradually replace the old rose beds with plants better suited to our environment.

By **2022**, I had propagated and planted more than **700 lavender plants**, establishing the **Jubilee Garden**, including the three circular garden beds, and extending new plantings along the southern side of the driveway.

Standing back to admire what we had achieved, I found myself asking another question:

"What next?"

The answer seemed almost ridiculous at first—plant a lavender field.

Water has always been the limiting factor at Para Para. Without it, nothing survives. Fortunately, the north paddock already had an irrigation system left behind from an earlier attempt to establish trees.

In **2023**, we planted our first row of **Lavandula X intermedia 'Grosso'**, followed in **2024** by **Lavandula angustifolia 'Egerton Blue'**.

Unfortunately, nature had other plans.

Almost as soon as we finished planting, another drought began. From **June 2023** onwards, rainfall virtually disappeared for nearly two years. By the end of that period, the ground was harder and drier than we had ever seen it. Even mature olive trees—renowned for their drought tolerance—began to die, and groundwater levels fell dramatically.

When the rain finally arrived in **July 2025**, it arrived with a vengeance. After two years of almost nothing, we received around **100 mm in a single weekend**.

Overnight, our challenge changed from keeping plants alive to making sure they weren't sitting in waterlogged soil.

The drought claimed many of our **Stoechas**, **Intermedia** and **Angustifolia** lavenders, but as with every setback at Para Para, it taught us another lesson about gardening in a challenging climate.



Another constant battle has been the rabbits.

One year they managed to eat an entire crop of lavender flowers overnight. Since then, we've tried almost everything. As you wander through the gardens today, you'll notice many plants protected by rings of **plastic gutter guard**. It may not be glamorous, but it is one of the simplest and most cost-effective ways we've found to discourage hungry rabbits. We've also discovered that plants growing in raised beds or behind timber and stone edging suffer far less damage than those planted in open ground.

The gardens continue to evolve.

We are currently establishing a **native walk** to the north-east of the curved driveway and developing the **Pink Native Garden** near the magnificent Bunya Pine.

While much of what you see today reflects the past twenty-five years of restoration, some of the estate's most significant plantings date back more than 160 years. The majestic **Moreton Bay Figs**, **Bunya Pine**, many of the conifers and several of the aloe plantings are attributed to **Richard Schomburgk**, who lived in Gawler before becoming Director of the Adelaide Botanic Garden in 1865. His influence can still be seen throughout the grounds.

Historically, Para Para extended across **300 acres** and was a productive working estate. Large orchards, vegetable gardens and berry plantations supplied the household kitchens. Some of the fruits and berries once grown here are illustrated on the panels in the dining room, offering a glimpse into the estate's rich horticultural past.



Like the house itself, the gardens at Para Para are never truly finished. They continue to evolve with every season, every success and every setback. We hope that as you explore the grounds today, you not only enjoy the beauty of the gardens but also appreciate the story of resilience, adaptation and restoration that lies behind every path, every lavender plant and every tree.