



Promoting the enjoyment, knowledge and benefits of gardens and gardening

Open Gardens South Australia
Welcomes you to
The Skilly House Garden

Saturday 7th & Sunday 8th October, 2023

Skilly House Garden Notes

Nestled in a secluded valley in the Skilly Hills to the west of Auburn and Watervale in the Clare Valley is our Skilly House and Garden. At the end of Skillogalee Creek Road, surrounded by beautiful gums, Skilly House looks out west across the valley floor to the Skillogalee Creek, (a winter waterway), where a towering River Red Gum, at least 350 years old, on our adjacent property, captures attention with its ancient majesty.

Our garden, surrounding the house on about 1.5 acres on the eastern side of the roadway, has been a 23-year journey of trial and error, different ideas and concepts, successes, disappointments, frustrations and a real labour of love. While we have had many gardening ideas across our time here, not the least of which was the development of areas where our children could play and the family relax, central and consistent has been our vision to create an open park like environment which draws in, and maximises, our magnificent surrounding landscape.

Large swathes of kikuyu lawn have been planted from seed, to help mitigate fire risk, reduce dust and enhance that park-like feel. These lawned areas are interspersed with many different garden beds. They are filled with a diverse range of plantings that cope with the quite extreme ranges in temperature, tolerate the bore water used to irrigate the garden as we are not connected to the mains, and seem resistant, or at least not as palatable, to the varied wildlife that is drawn to our little oasis.

It is an unsurprising paradox that the very creatures that enhance the beauty of our little patch of paradise – the abundant bird life, kangaroos, and even the feral deer and rabbits, are also a constant threat to our garden. The Adelaide rosellas, blue winged parrots, galahs, white winged choughs, to name a few, are all delightful, but they can wreak havoc. Kangaroos also are drawn in great numbers to our garden as are the deer and a few rabbits. Yet we elected not to fence our garden and, while we have lost many plantings, (including young trees to the deer), to see such creatures in the garden is a joy to behold! To step out into morning mist to see a red deer with a full rack of antlers on our front lawn, or a kangaroo or two on the front verandah, or to see a rainbow gathering of rosellas and parrots on the lawns, and those funny raucous choughs scratching in the mulch of the garden beds goes a long way to compensate for any of their more destructive behaviours.

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 sloping aspect of the house block has required the building of retaining walls to develop flat areas. Local stone has been used to create the various walls on the southern side of the house and these were built on weekends and long service leave. The largest, on the southern flat lawn, was built some 20 years ago while the ones creating our campfire area were constructed about 12 years ago.

Now retired, Mark has concentrated on extending the garden on the northern aspect of the house with new pathways leading to the fruit trees, utilities area, compost bays, a new vegetable garden, and garden beds. The gabion cages that feature on this northern side have been filled with the stones unearthed while digging the new garden beds or extending the lawned area. Mark felt that the bone jarring impact of mattock on stone with almost every stroke, necessitated, as a consequence, the confining of said stones as a garden feature.

Our garden, set amidst gum trees, claret and golden ash, ornamental plums, grevilleas and others, is planted with vinca, gaura, nandina, salvia, lavender, poppies, lomandra, lirioppe, cordyline, diosma, alyogyne, roses, succulents and a multitude of other hardy survivors. Various pieces of garden art are also placed throughout to enhance the experience as are numerous seats to take in the different perspectives. Like all gardens it remains a work in progress and changes with the seasons, with the years and with our ideas.

We hope you enjoy our Skilly House Garden.

Mark and Jo Healy

Some Garden Facts

Average Annual Rainfall - 561ml

Bore Water – 1300ppm

Soil – Red/brown loam over heavy clay on stone and limestone. Rocks in abundance in the soil. All garden cuttings mulched/composted and dug back into beds. Gypsum/clay breaker used widely.

Temperature Range – Between -3°C in winter to 45°C in summer. Heavy frosts in winter and some strong hot northerly winds in summer cause problems.

Garden situation – Located towards the floor of the valley with quite high, steep hills to the east and west, means that we get significantly less direct sunlight hours.

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.