



Promoting the enjoyment, knowledge and benefits of gardens and gardening

Open Gardens South Australia Welcomes you to **Watendlath**

Saturday 12th & Sunday 13th October, 2024

Welcome to Watendlath. Watendlath is the name of a small ruin of about 4 stone cottages in the Lake District in England. We spent our honeymoon in nearby Rosthwaite and walked up to explore the ruins.

In 2013, we were living in Crafers in a two-storey house, on a sloping block which had been our home for 31 years, with an award-winning garden (LASA) which had also featured in the Open Garden scheme a few times. A broken ankle convinced us that a move to a flatter block was required, so after some searching, we found a five-acre block in Strathalbyn.

The block was a mess, covered in abandoned car tyres, metres and metres of odd fencing and a disused swimming pool. We also had a problem of hundreds of eucalypts that had self-seeded and been allowed to grow, and numerous larger trees and shrubs that were swamping the cottage in leaf litter and overhanging branches. The main house was old, asbestos-clad and unliveable. Our children thought we were mad, but we were convinced by the enormous shed, space for some of our rescued kangaroos and a transportable cottage we felt could be a possible BnB, but also somewhere to live while we built our dream home.

The first year was spent clearing unwanted rubbish, all the fencing which was often in layers of wire intertwined with barbed wire, grubbing out tree roots and getting the old house removed. As a long-time kangaroo carer, Diana also constructed a 2.5 acre enclosure for a few of her hand-raised kangaroos. The building of the enclosure really defined the space and made planning seem more manageable.

The most important part of the rebuild was to ensure we had a garden that could show off Michaels lovely stonework but would be easily accessed if not by steps, then an access path to get to the same destination. So we carefully took levels and instructed the builder on where to place our new house which we hoped would look as if it 'belonged' on a country block. This ensured we had an almost one metre cut around the front of the house so Michael could build an extensive Kanmantoo Bluestone wall on two sides behind the proposed lawns, and by sifting all the fill recovered we were able to save all the rocks with which he built over 100 metres of gabion walls.

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://opengardensa.org.au/>

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We wanted the garden to be peaceful and a place we could sit in and enjoy, hence a number of bench seats scattered around the lawn areas. We get a fair bit of wind, so the rear garden is divided up into a number of rooms by *Abelia grandiflora* hedges to protect the smaller and more delicate plantings. As you move away from the immediate house area the planting becomes more and more native to compensate for our low rainfall but also to make sure the birds and other critters have lots of reasons to make our garden their home.

As Diana is a long-time member of Fauna Rescue, we do have a large population of rescued Blue Tongue Lizards who live in the garden. Naturally there are also numerous Shingleback Lizards and two skink species also seen often. Apart from kangaroo joeys Diana also rescues escaped pet birds and gives them a permanent home if they are not claimed, hence the aviaries. However, finches have been a lifelong interest which started as a very young child.

Actual planting has been very difficult over the years as we have a huge rabbit population who don't take well to anything new. We have had to plant with protection around each plant, wait until it grows well, and then we found by leaving the protection on the stake but behind the plant, the rabbits didn't always notice change. However if they did, the plant would be eaten to the ground next day and the roots dug up, and we had to start all over again! So two years of growing all for nothing. Start with a different variety of plant and try again!

Planting scheme is mostly blue, apricot and grey with splashes of other soft colours occasionally. By the cottage it became a bit hotter with orange and yellow as well. We have done quite a bit of repeat planting which does give the garden a calmer feel.

Michael has created a very productive vegetable garden which keeps us supplied with vegetables and herbs all year round. A good size chook yard with a chook house built by Michael and his adult children also plays host to a productive composting system which uses waste products from the house and garden to maintain a sustainable system. The chickens love the compost bins and rather than scratch them out they sit in them to keep warm in winter!

Over the last 11 years, we have created an oasis in an otherwise quite dry landscape and a garden which not only feeds us but gives us, our grandchildren and two dogs, enormous pleasure.

The garden was featured on the ABC's Gardening Australia in May this year.