

Summer Newsletter 2026



Christmas Cheer!

Welcome to the Summer / Christmas edition of our Newsletter. There has been good rainfall in many areas during our cooler than usual spring. The soaking rains were very welcome, and our gardens have benefited but some areas of the state are still dry and needing rain. Open Gardens SA now takes a short break from opening gardens in December and returns in January 2026 with Cherrywood garden in Stirling. Our big event for 2026 is the return of the popular Harvest Garden Festival in February – don't miss it!

Open Gardens SA wishes you and your loved ones a peaceful safe and happy Christmas holiday season and New Year.

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Summer Open Gardens

December 2025
December 06 – 07
Belltunga – Toorak Gardens

Open Gardens SA then takes a short break from opening gardens and returns in January 2026

January 09 – 25, 2026
Theatre in the Garden, *Pride and Prejudice*, three locations – Victor Harbor, Hahndorf, and Carrick Hill – **ALL PERFORMANCES SOLD OUT**

January 10 – 11
Cherrywood – Stirling

January 24 – 26 (3 Days)
Turlatina Wirra - Seacliff

February 14 – 15
Harvest Garden Festival – 14 garden locations in Adelaide, Adelaide Hills and Strathalbyn

See details of the full
program on our website:
<http://opengardensa.org.au/>



Open Gardens SA - Garden Owner Thankyou Function and End of Year Drinks



Our Annual Garden Owner Thankyou Function and End of Year Drinks was held in the evening of Sunday 07 December 2025, generously hosted at the home and beautiful garden of committee

member Rob Andrewaratha and partner Dave Simms in Eden Hills. The Open Gardens SA Committee invited garden owners to our Christmas get-together to thank them for their support and hard work in 2025.

New garden owners were also presented with an official commemorative plaque to display in their garden to recognise their hard work and generosity in opening their garden as part of our open garden program.

This annual event is a lovely way to celebrate the end of the year and our 11th successful season of open gardens. It was a beautiful evening and the guests enjoyed a delicious BBQ, a selection of wine, which was generously supplied by Howard Vineyard of Nairne, and the excellent company of other garden owners.

This event also provides the opportunity for our Chairperson to personally thank the garden owners for opening their gardens and becoming a part of the Open Gardens SA gardening “family”.



Botanical Drawing Workshop SOLD OUT

Another very successful OGSA special event was held on Saturday 25 October, at the SACWA Headquarters in Kent Town.

New Zealand artist Dr Tabatha Forbes shared her talents with a limited group of participants to create elegant botanical drawings inspired by the beautiful gardens of Adelaide.

Botanical Art is a beautiful classic art practice for those who love nature, gardening, botany, science and art!



The five-hour workshop was a guided introduction to the elegant tradition of botanical art, working with drawing simple plant forms, composition and pencil & pen drawing techniques.



And on Thursday 04 December, another fun event was held at the SACWA Headquarters with a practical **Christmas Wreath Workshop**.

Participants enjoyed the beauty of an Australian Christmas with a hands-on experience creating their own stunning native wreath to take home using seasonal flowers and botanicals. The workshop included all materials needed for the wreath along with a glass of wine and nibbles.

The Playford Trust / TAFE SA Awards 2025

For more information visit: <https://playfordtrust.com.au/>

2025 Awards Night – 06 November 2025.



Talent and commitment rewarded. Recipients of the 2025 Playford Trust TAFE Awards.

Meet the group of aspiring – and inspiring – TAFE students who received prestigious Playford Trust Awards at a special event at

TAFESA's city campus on Thursday 06 November. They're the cream of a crop chosen from more than 90 applicants – the highest number in the 26-year history of these awards.

Between them, these stars are studying everything from cyber security, IT and electrical engineering to agriculture, horticulture, ecosystem management and more.

Open Gardens SA provides funding for Awards in the *Environment, Conservation and Horticulture* category. This year we funded two Awards, and the very worthy recipients are:

Breanna Bitmead | Certificate II in Horticulture | Urrbrae Campus

Emma Robertson | Certificate III in Horticulture | Urrbrae Campus

Breanna Bitmead



“My interest in gardens stems from a passion for sustainability and the role plants play in supporting healthy ecosystems. Through both my Certificate 2 in Horticulture at TAFE and my degree in Wildlife Conservation, I have developed strong knowledge of ecology while gaining practical skills in garden care. I also continue to develop this

interest through my small gardening business where I apply what I learn into practice.

I aspire to grow my career in the garden sector by building a service that combines conservation with education. I want to inspire others to value garden for their beauty as well as the biodiversity they can actively support. This means encouraging the planting of native species whilst promoting diverse vegetable gardens that allow people to become more self-sustained and connected to the land. By sharing what I know, leading by example and continuing to study and expand my skills, I hope to show people that gardens can be both sustainable and empowering.”

Emma Robertson



“Gardening has been a lifelong passion, and I feel fortunate to now work in a field I truly love. My interest in horticulture continues to grow through formal study, professional development and community involvement.

I am currently completing the Certificate III in Horticulture and regularly participate in short courses through the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program. I stay up to date through gardening magazines (Gardening Australia, Organic Gardener, PIP), podcasts, and memberships with Open Gardens SA, the Rare Fruit Society and the Diggers Club.

In my role as Garden Specialist at KPS, I established the “Green Team” a popular recess/lunch volunteer program that gives students hands-on gardening experience. The garden is also integrated into our STEM program, with science and mathematical applications taking place in an outdoor setting.

Gardening is not just my work, it's my passion purpose and future.”

Harvest Garden Festival Returns in 2026

**SATURDAY 14th FEBRUARY and SUNDAY 15th
FEBRUARY 2026, 10.00 AM to 4:30 PM**

The **Harvest Garden Festival** returns for its second edition, offering a weekend of inspiration, learning, and a focus on home-grown food. The Harvest Garden Festival is dedicated entirely to edible gardening. We're celebrating the growing trend of producing homegrown nutritious food.

Held over one weekend, the festival invites visitors to explore a curated selection of 14 gardens across Adelaide, the Hills and in Strathalbyn. The gardens vary in size and style. Large gardens produce substantial quantities of fruit, nuts, and vegetables, while others showcase ingenious ways to get the most out of smaller spaces.

Visitors will see different approaches to productive gardening, including vertical frames, netted and enclosed patches, a vast range of wicking beds, specific irrigation systems, and espaliered fruit trees.

Some gardens have developed naturally over the years, while others have been carefully planned and constructed according to the owners' vision, reflecting a balance of design, function, and productivity.



Parkhyrst – Aberfoyle Park



Gribble Garden – Aldgate



*Tuck Street Food Forest – Mt
Torrens*



Watendlath - Strathalbyn

Proudly supported by **GROlife** SALIFE **helloSA** **HOWARD** **Food On The Table**

Jamie McIlwain from Open Gardens SA says the festival emphasises knowledge sharing.

"Garden owners will be on hand to discuss composting, soil care, seed saving, and other techniques that support productive growing," said Jamie. "There'll be talks, demonstrations, and informal conversations that provide practical insights into food production, sustainability, and self-sufficiency."

For experienced gardeners and newcomers alike, it offers the opportunity to explore a variety of gardens, learn from different approaches, and take ideas back to their own spaces. From fruit, nuts, and vegetables to seasonal plantings and from structural features to practical solutions, each garden demonstrates ways to achieve productive, manageable, and well-designed home gardens. Whether it's a dedicated patch or integrating productive plants throughout your whole garden, there are countless ideas and solutions for growing your own food.

Celebrating creativity, community, and practical gardening, the proceeds from this event will be donated to **Food On The Table**, supporting this amazing organisation to provide nutritious meals to people in need here in South Australia.

The Harvest Garden Festival runs from 10am-4.30pm on Saturday, February 14 and Sunday, February 15, 2026.

Visitors can attend any four gardens participating in the festival for \$25 or visit all the gardens with an all-garden pass

for \$50. Garden addresses will be provided to ticket buyers and released to the public closer to the festival dates.

For more information about the Harvest Garden Festival or to book tickets, visit harvestgardenfestival.org.au Tickets can be purchased online or at the gardens.



OGSA Recommends....

We recommend you always check our website to confirm garden opening details prior to visiting. The website is an up-to-date, reliable and informative site which lists each open garden with a description of the garden, address (including a map), photographs, the availability of refreshments etc. The official Garden Notes written by the garden owner are also provided which you can read in advance or print and take a copy with you for your garden visit. Importantly, our website will always list any late additions or cancellations to our garden opening program.

<http://opengardensa.org.au/>

OGSA 2026 Summer Calendar

Entry Fee \$10 per Adult, Limited Concessions available, Under 18 free. We encourage visitors to bring cash as EFTPOS facilities may not always be available.

DECEMBER 2025

06 – 07 December

Belltunga – 132 Grant Avenue, Toorak Gardens

Open Gardens SA then takes a short break from opening gardens and returns in January 2026.

JANUARY 2026

09 – 25, January

Theatre in the Garden, Pride and Prejudice, three locations – Victor Harbor, Hahndorf, and Carrick Hill. **ALL PERFORMANCES ARE SOLD OUT.**

10 - 11 January

Cherrywood - 13 Ethel Street, Stirling

24, 25 & 26 January

Turlatina Wirra - 80 Myrtle Road, Seacliff

FEBRUARY 2026

14 – 15 February

Harvest Garden Festival – 14 gardens located in Adelaide, the Adelaide Hills and Strathalbyn.



Belltunga – Toorak Gardens



Theatre in the Garden, Pride and Prejudice - Victor Harbor, Hahndorf, and Carrick Hill – **SOLD OUT**



Cherrywood - Stirling



Turlatina Wirra – Seacliff



Harvest Garden Festival – 14 gardens located in Adelaide, the Adelaide Hills and Strathalbyn



Plant Profile: The Tower of Jewels and Pride of Madeira.

Article and Photos by Trevor Nottle.

A recent trip to the lower SE brought to mind the astonishing flowering plants of the Canary Islands, in particular the several species of *Echium* that are so striking and easy to grow. Almost every gardener would know the short lived shrubby plant known as Pride of Madeira, or *Echium candicans*, with its short spires of a myriad of small bright blue flowers. Similar is *Echium* cv 'Heronswood Pink' in which variety the hundreds of tiny flowers are a fine pale pink. In the same colour group is *Echium virescens* should a substitute variety be needed.

Much brighter in colour is *Echium wildpretii* which to my mind would come under the classification of a hot pink. A striking plant that would need careful consideration as a companion plant in any planting plan. Seeds and plants are available but need some searching for – and both sell out quickly.

There are others, as my trip to Mt Gambier showed. I was attracted by the sight of a towering white Tower of Jewels, *Echium simplex*, flowering in solitary splendour at St Mary's winery and garden near Penola. At around 15 ft high it makes a bold statement. It is a short lived perennial evergreen that builds up to flowering over a period of 4-5 years.



Photo: *Echium simplex* at St Mary's winery, Penola

After flowering it scatters its seeds and collapses into a black skeleton which is hardly an attractive sight and best cut down. But do wait awhile so its seeds can fall to the ground. A stepladder would be needed to collect seeds from the plant before they fall and that is not a job for an older gardener. Ours flowered and died but regenerated by dozens of seedlings which in

due course produced more towers and more flowers; this time pale blue which suggested to me that the plants are promiscuous and readily hybridise with other species – our neighbours have several shrubs of *Echium candicans*.

At Caroline Hills vineyard a different Tower of Jewels was abundant and created a perfect forest of towering stems with dark blue flowers. Hazarding a guess at what this plant was I'd plump for *Echium pininana*. Together they looked magnificent

dominating significant panoramas across the garden. Close up they towered overhead to the extent they were awe inspiring. But as ever mindful of the ephemeral nature of beauty, I did wonder how they would look at the end of their season, and what replacement could adequately cover the gaps. Essential planning I should think, before giving in to an urge for mass plantings of such amazing giants.



Photo: *Echium pininana* at Caroline Hills winery, OB Flat, Mt Gambier.

To preserve the purity of the colour it would be best to grow only one variety in an average sized garden, or if the garden is large keep each variety well apart, very well apart. Otherwise, if the original colour is wanted it is necessary to buy plants or seeds from the nurseries that specialise in country garden perennials.



*Wishing you and your loved ones
a very Merry Christmas. Open
Gardens SA looks forward to
sharing many more beautiful
gardens with you in 2026!*



How To Write a Book – Part Two

It's often said that we all have one book in us, so we asked well known and respected horticultural author, Trevor Nottle for some advice! Here is the second instalment...

By Trevor Nottle.

Having set up your publicity campaign a return to the writing task is almost a refreshing change from the minutiae of public relations and publicity seeking. In time you will reach the point where you have said that which you wanted to say about your subject. You may think that your task has come to its natural end. It has not.

At this point a willing reader – not you – can be a great asset for your text now requires some independent feedback, feedback that is free from your own feelings of ownership and bias. More often than not this job is delegated to a close relative or friend. A quick look at other books will show that wives or partners are the most likely to accept such a thankless role.

Giving feedback can be risky; after all who is the writer of this book; you, the author, or the reader telling you how your book has affected them? Now is not the time to develop a serious case of defensiveness, depression or over-reaction. No book is ever perfect that's for certain but always remember that the chief motivation is 'don't get it right, just get it writ' to quote James Thurber, the great American humourist. Who knows how many authors fret away so much time making their text perfect that their book is never finished. Remember too, that you are not writing great literature: you are no Guiseppe Tomas di Lampedusa striving for perfection when he wrote *IL GATOPARDO* (The Leopard). Your book is about gardening and your experience of it, not earth shattering revolution and the decline of a noble family. In between Lampedusa and a 'plant your cabbages in January' kind of literary stolidity there is room for your book and how you garden, your ideas and thoughts, your failures and successes, your enthusiasms and hates. Never be afraid of revealing to your readers that you are

a real person. Ask your reader about how personal your book is and how your experiences can lighten your book.

Should you falter on this point about exposing yourself to your readers take a few moments to read Christopher Lloyd on stealing a fuchsia cutting from a public garden in the UK which was published in *Country Life* around 1988. There is even a term for it nowadays – prop-lifting. If Lloyd can admit his foible, so can you too but try not to put your foot in it by writing about anything that might backfire on you. Lloyd was almost black-listed by his readership as a result of his confession of plant lust. He was saved from ignominy by his reputation as a great gardener.



In writing about Lloyd I have disregarded my own first rule about citing the writing of others: ALWAYS CHECK YOUR FACTS AND QUOTES. The tale of Lloyd's transgression and how he used his aged mother as a decoy while he snaffled the object of his desire is a

Classic but I have mislaid the book in which he revealed his petty crime and so can't check it out. A further attempt to verify the facts with an English garden writer came to nought as he couldn't lay his hands on his copy of the book. I tell the tale anyway. It is too good a demonstration of authorly revelation to leave out.

At last, your book is finished, though not entirely your own work since your reader's feedback has been absorbed, discussed and included and you have made a few concessions to their suggestions and questions.

How To Write a Book – Part Three – will be completed in our Autumn 2026 Newsletter.



Christmas Gift Ideas!

This time last year we shared some Christmas gift ideas for anyone struggling to find that ideal gift for a loved family member, special friend or your favourite neighbour. Many people are experiencing cost of living pressures and the gift ideas we suggested are still relevant and appropriate. Christmas can be stressful, both emotionally and financially. So here we have a few new gift ideas....

Tickets to an Open Gardens SA special event.

Event tickets are the perfect gift for that hard to shop for friend or relative (or yourself!) Tickets can be purchased online for our fabulous **Harvest Garden Festival**.

In February 2026, *Open Gardens SA* are excited to bring you our second **Harvest Garden Festival**. Held on the weekend of the 14 and 15 February 2026, tickets are \$25 for a 4-garden pass or \$50 for an all-garden pass to visit all 14 participating gardens. Tickets can be purchased through our website.



Skin Care and Sun Protection Products.



Good skin care and sun protection is very important, and most people appreciate good quality products. The range of products is almost endless – hand creams, sunscreen (essential in our climate) and specialised soaps are just a few to consider. Or why not the gift of a wide brimmed hat or garden gloves with an extra-long cuff to provide additional sun protection?

Nesting Boxes.

Looking to attract birds or other wildlife into the garden, or simply concerned by possums in the roof? Consider the gift of habitat for the birds or nocturnal wildlife – including possums or micro-bats. A number of “Men’s Shed” groups construct nesting boxes for a very reasonable purchase price and are a great way to support local organisations as well as native birds and other wildlife. Local fauna rescue groups may have suitable suggestions for appropriate habitat options.



Windchimes.



The gift for that hard to buy for friend or relative. Windchimes can create pleasant, soothing sounds in outdoor spaces. They are used for relaxation, meditation, and promoting a sense of calm and well-being. Historically, they had religious and spiritual significance, like warding off evil spirits or signalling natural events. They are available in many garden centres or consider a home crafted version for that unique personal touch!

A Bunch of Flowers.



Fresh flowers from the garden are a thoughtful gift – personal, fragrant and a delightful addition to the home. An inexpensive gift that could include a suitable vase - again, visit the Opp Shops to source a pretty vase or vintage jug at a bargain price!

Garden Centre Gift Voucher.

If you are still not sure of that “perfect” gift, there is always the

option of a Gift Voucher from a favourite garden centre or nursery. The dollar value of the voucher is as much or little as you choose and it gives the recipient the opportunity to select their own gift. It's a good idea to present the voucher in a suitable Christmas Card and it's sure to be much appreciated!



Friar Park - George Harrison's true passion.

Information sourced from History Nerds HQ's Facebook post. Further reading can be found in an article in Country Life Magazine – online at

<https://www.countrylife.co.uk/gardens/country-gardens-and-gardening-tips/george-harrisons-garden-how-the-beatle-and-his-wife-turned-a-tangled-jungle-into-a-magnificent-garden-263387>

While the world knew him as a Beatle, George Harrison's true passion was dirt under his fingernails. He spent decades restoring 30 acres of Victorian gardens—and found more peace there than he ever found on stage.

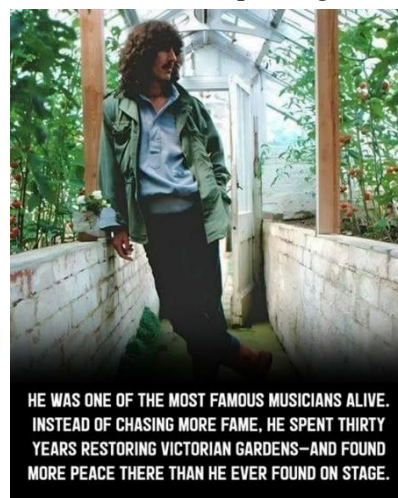
In 1970, George Harrison made a decision that confused almost everyone. At 27 years old, he was one of the most famous musicians on earth. The Beatles had just broken up. He could have done anything—toured the world, lived in luxury, chased more fame. Instead, he bought a crumbling Victorian mansion with 30 acres of wilderness and decided to become a gardener.

Friar Park in Henley-on-Thames, England, wasn't just run-down. It was a disaster. The Gothic mansion had grass growing up through the floorboards. The once-spectacular gardens—designed in the 1890s by eccentric lawyer Sir Frank Crisp—had been abandoned for decades. Trees choked out pathways. Brambles buried grottoes. Glass from collapsed greenhouses littered the ground.

George's sister-in-law Irene took one look and said: "My God! What's he done? Look at it!" But George saw something no one else did. Where others saw ruin, he saw possibility. Where others saw work, he saw peace.

He hired a team of ten gardeners and got to work. Not supervising—actually working. Digging. Planting. Pruning. Getting covered in dirt from dawn until midnight.

His son Dhani would later remember: "My earliest memory of my dad is probably of him somewhere in a garden covered in dirt... He'd garden at night-time until midnight. He'd be out there squinting



HE WAS ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS MUSICIANS ALIVE. INSTEAD OF CHASING MORE FAME, HE SPENT THIRTY YEARS RESTORING VICTORIAN GARDENS—AND FOUND MORE PEACE THERE THAN HE EVER FOUND ON STAGE.

because he could see, at midnight, the moonlight and shadows, and that was his way of not seeing the weeds or imperfections that would plague him during the day."

This wasn't a hobby. This was how George Harrison chose to spend his life.

The estate included caves, underground passages, grottos, and a four-acre Alpine rock garden topped with a scale replica of the Matterhorn. There were garden gnomes everywhere—relics from Crisp's eccentric design. George photographed himself among them for his 1970 album *All Things Must Pass*, turning the garden into the backdrop for his post-Beatles rebirth.

But while that album sold millions, George's attention was already elsewhere. The music industry wanted more albums, more tours, more George Harrison.

He wanted to plant trees.

In interviews throughout the 1970s, George repeatedly tried to explain his shift in priorities. People didn't understand. You're a Beatle, they'd say. Why are you talking about flowers?

Because flowers, George discovered, didn't answer back. They didn't demand anything. They just grew, quietly, beautifully, in their own time.

Gardening became his meditation. His spiritual practice. His escape from the chaos of fame.

By 1980, when he published his autobiography *I Me Mine* (dedicated "to gardeners everywhere"), George's philosophy was clear: "I'm really quite simple. I don't want to be in the business full time, because I'm a gardener. I plant flowers and watch them grow. I don't go out to clubs. I don't party. I stay at home and watch the river flow."

The river he was watching was the Thames, flowing past Friar Park's grounds. While his former bandmates dealt with lawsuits, fame, and the pressure to remain relevant, George was restoring Victorian topiary, identifying rare maples, and learning the Latin names of Alpine plants.



An aerial view of Friar Park, home of the late musician George Harrison. (Photograph by David Goddard/Getty Images).

He became obsessed. When a local nurseryman mentioned business was slow, George bought one plant of every tree and shrub in the nursery. When an expert offered him 800 different maple varieties, he bought them all.

His wife Olivia later said he'd remind her: "It's not my garden, Liv." He saw his role as custodian, not owner. The garden didn't belong to him—he belonged to it.

George's brothers Peter and Harry worked as groundskeepers. His son grew up thinking his father was a professional gardener, not a rock star. Dhani recalls George spending most of his time working slowly, methodically, in the dirt—not for applause, not for recognition, just for the work itself.

"To get him in the studio was very hard," Dhani remembered. "He wasn't doing it for anybody else."

This drove the music industry crazy. Here was George Harrison—the man who wrote "Here Comes The Sun" and "Something"—and he'd rather prune roses than record albums.

But George had learned something most people never do: success doesn't require more. Sometimes it requires less. He'd been a Beatle. He'd experienced fame at levels few humans ever reach. He'd screamed into stadiums, conquered charts, changed culture.

And he'd found it all empty compared to the satisfaction of restoring a garden.

The transformation of Friar Park took decades. George and Olivia brought back topiary gardens with yews shaped like peacocks and spirals. They restored the Alpine rock garden, the grottos, the sundial garden where Crisp had placed philosophical inscriptions on every pedestal.

They didn't do it for visitors—after John Lennon's murder in 1980, the gates were locked permanently. They did it because the work itself was the point.

In interviews, journalists would visit and find it bizarre. A Rolling Stone writer in 1987 called gardening "a decidedly un-rock-star-ish pastime." George didn't care. He'd watched the Beatles implode under the pressure of being Beatles. He'd seen what fame did to people. He'd learned that the things the world told you to want—recognition, applause, legacy—were traps.

Real peace, he discovered, came from dirt under your

fingernails and watching something grow.

George Harrison died in 2001 at age 58. He spent his final years at Friar Park, in the gardens he'd spent 30 years restoring.



The paths in the topiary at George Harrison's garden at Friar Park copied those of the long-lost Labyrinth at Versailles, with sundials in place of fountains. (Image credit: Clive Nichols)

Today, those gardens are considered masterpieces—some of the finest topiary and Victorian landscaping in Europe. Olivia still maintains them. The estate remains closed to the public, a private sanctuary just as George intended.



An Edwardian postcard printed by Sir Frank Crisp, from a collection at Friar Park. (Image credit: Harrison Family)

But his influence extends beyond Friar Park. He donated property to the Hare Krishna movement, where they created "A Garden for

George." In 2008, a memorial garden at the Chelsea Flower Show celebrated his life through four garden sections representing different stages of his journey.

Because George Harrison understood something profound: you don't find yourself by becoming famous. You find yourself by getting quiet enough to hear what actually matters.

While millions knew him as the "quiet Beatle," George found his voice in silence. In soil. In the patient work of nurturing life.

He could have spent his post-Beatles years chasing relevance, fighting for recognition, demanding his place in history.

Instead, he planted 800 varieties of maples and watched them grow.

The world wanted a rock star. George Harrison chose to be a gardener. And in making that choice, he became something rarer than famous—he became free.



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and Instagram*





Best Wishes for a Happy New Year.

Open Gardens South Australia 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.

Promoting the enjoyment, knowledge and benefits of gardens and gardening.

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