OPEN GARDENS VICTORIA

# GARDEN NOTES

## CLEAR SPRINGS

The garden at Clear Springs is inspired by country gardens from all over the world, from the past and from the present, where aesthetics and sustainable food production go hand in hand. Much of the garden is turned over to food production, in the form of fruit and nut trees, vegetable and herb gardens, poultry runs and beehives. It is largely a handmade garden, made with locally sourced and recycled materials. Plants are mostly derived from cuttings, gifts and seeds over the past twenty years.

The ornamental parts of the garden are expected to survive with less attention and less water than the vegetable beds and plants are chosen for toughness. They are also chosen for how they can enhance the textural and structural composition of the garden beds as well as for how they fit into the colour scheme. Most of the garden beds are mixed borders, containing trees, shrubs, perennials and self-seeding annuals as well as bulbs.

It has been a great motivator, in the evolution of the garden, to see the ongoing revival of herbaceous perennials and grasses in the nursery industry. Much of the newer plantings at Clear Springs have been about improving and diversifying the mixed beds with hardy perennials that have been chosen for our climate by some wonderful nursery owners.

The beginning of your journey through the garden is through the main gate that is draped with Virginia Creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*). The paperbark hedge on either side of the drive is clipped twice a year, one time in summer and once in autumn and holds its form throughout the winter months. But before you take a good look at it, I would ask you to make a right hand turn into the citrus grove to the north of the gate. Here the duck house and its yard are usually festooned with passionfruit and golden hops. The Buddha's hand citron (*Citrus medica* var. *sarcodactylis*) at the centre of this garden is a great conversation piece. The peel can be candied, or the fruit used to perfume a room or the linen press.

From here you walk through the apple and plum orchard along the path of the long vista that terminates in the lichen encrusted teak bench in the olive grove. Old apple varieties like 'Pomme de Neige' (snow apple), Jonathon and Cox's Orange Pippin are grown here, pruned into vase shapes. As are the Prune d'Agen, Grand Duke and Mariposa plums opposite. The orchard ends with the eruption of two large crab apples, *M. floribunda* is to the south, a confection of blossom in the spring and developing a shapely trunk and branches after twenty years.

The vegetable garden or potager has developed over time. The high maintenance wormwood hedges that flanked two sides have been removed and partly replaced with box. The Miss Donnington lavender that grew beside the house in a hedge for more than twenty years became too tall and woody despite annual clipping and has

been replaced with the low growing Lavandula 'Hidcote'. The purple barberry and rugosa rose hedge to the north remains.

The potager is divided in four; within each quadrant is a different type of fruit tree underplanted with herbs and perennials. The fruit trees are a pomegranate, a crab apple (*Malus* 'Golden Hornet'), a quince (*Cydonia* 'Smerna') and a medlar (*Mespilus* 'Dutch'). There is a strong southern European flavour to the vegie patch, with artichokes, oregano and fennel growing abundantly.

Feel free to go down onto the verandah to view the garden as we do from the house, seeing the newer perennial planting that has replaced some of the vegetables. The pillar of field stones comes from the soil excavated from the little courtyard area next to the house.

The vista pathway continues through an open area and down the brick steps past the bay trees and into the olive grove. A new planting of evergreen feather grass (*Miscanthus transmorrisonensis*), featuring a young dragon tree (*Dracaena draco*) and a Persian shield plant (*Strobilanthes gossypinus*) can be seen to the left. The olive grove and the adjacent succulent beds and even the distant stone pines (*Pinus pinea*) have been planted on what was once a horse training area or menage. The levelling of this space has meant that much subsoil was exposed. It takes a lot of work to rebuild the soil here with annual applications of mulch and compost. The olive trees are mostly Frantoio and Manzanilla. There is a circular room in the corner of the olive grove where we often light a fire. This circle has been created by the indigenous Swamp Paperbark (*Melaleuca ericifolia*) that is not perturbed by the compacted soil at all.

To the south of the olive grove is an area I once called the Southern Hemisphere, because it is predominantly made up of plants from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. This is still the case, but I renamed it the wombat garden because it is a favourite place for wombats to graze in the cooler months. Much earthworks have been carried out by these chunky marsupials, so they deserve some of the credit. Much of this garden is made up of eucalypts and structural plants. In recent years, we have been extending the range of shrubs that will cope with the tough conditions: Correa, Crowea and Spyridium in the increasingly shady areas and members of the Proteaceae in the remaining sunny spots.

Before you leave this area make sure you take a moment to lean on the gate into the paddock, observe the three cork oaks (*Quercus suber*) and gaze down the Tarwin Valley. On a clear day we can see the gleaming towers of the Bald Hills wind farm.

Following the path between the double hedge, you will find yourself beneath a planting of maples and gingkos. This is the traditional ornamental garden with beds of viburnums, perennials, and some curious structural plants like the rice paper plant (*Tetrapanax papyrifer*), which is suckering happily beside the copper beech. In this garden, the backdrop of green is punctuated by an ongoing succession of flowery explosions.

Flowering shrubs, particularly viburnum, sasanqua camellia cultivars and one much loved Gordonia axillaris feature in this part of the garden.

The conditions at Clear Springs are ideal for growing a garden. The soil varies greatly, from stony buckshot through to deep red volcanic soil in places (which has excellent natural structure) and a heavier clay loam in others. The rainfall is high (averaging over a metre per year). The elevation is 240 metres (we have snow here from time to time). We have some frosts, none particularly harsh. The worst of the weeds we have to deal with are the usual little spurge that pops up anywhere it can and of course blackberries are happy to send out their treacherous canes if allowed to establish, hidden in the shrubbery.

Thank you for coming and we hope you enjoy your visit.

Matt and Adam

***Clear Springs Garden is located on the lands of the Gunaikurnai People. Open Gardens Victoria wishes to acknowledge the Traditional custodians of this land and we pay respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging.***