



# GARDEN DESIGN STUDY GROUP

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## Newsletter

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## Leader's Comments:

After a number of years of service, Geoff Lay has resigned as Study Group Coordinator and Jan Sked stepped in as interim Coordinator. Recently the ANPSA Council endorsed the appointment of Lesley and Neville Page as the new joint coordinators. Lesley and Neville have been long time Canberra members and Lesley is currently the Study Group Liaison for the region and Neville President of ANPS Canberra Region. They are both strong supporters of the Study Groups and I am sure will be very effective Coordinators. I would like to thank Geoff for all his years of work and Jan for being willing to step back into the job in the interim.

As this is the beginning of our fiscal year, it is time for those of you who haven't renewed to do so. If you have received a renewal form with this *Newsletter*, either by mail or email, it means my records show your membership is not current. We have decided to keep the dues at the same level as they have been for some years. The cost of printing the *Newsletter* has increased because we are doing it in colour with lots of pictures but we still have enough funds in reserve to cover us for some time. About half our members like to get the printed version and of course we send the printed version to the State Libraries as well as the National Library. We are still the beneficiaries of the kind donation of book royalties by Diana Snape and others for which we are very grateful.

Finally, I want to alert you all to the ANPSA Conference which will be held here in Canberra **15 to 20 November 2015**. The theme of the conference is "*Bush Capital / Garden City*" and will have interesting speakers and trips. The conference will be held at the Australian Institute of Sport which has excellent meeting facilities with lots of free parking. The program differs from previous conferences as we are planning to have speakers for half a day and then a bus trip for the other half for each of the 5 days. We are going to emphasise the Study Groups and are asking all the Leaders to make either a lecture presentation or a poster presentation on the activities of their Study Group. We hope to see many of you here in Canberra.

## Australian gardeners win at Hampton

**8 JULY, 2014 6:03AM** <http://www.news.com.au/world/breaking-news/aussie-gardeners-win-at-hampton/story-e6frfkui-1226981082040>

A team of Australian gardeners has created history by claiming Best in Show honours at the prestigious Hampton Court Flower Show in London. The Essence of Australia display which features more than 50 native plants was also awarded a gold medal at the Royal Horticultural Society event. Its designer, Chelsea Flower Show veteran, Melbourne's Jim Fogarty was humbled by the win.

"I'm genuinely surprised. It's a very Australian garden and I wasn't sure whether the British would take to it or whether it would be too confronting," he told AAP on Monday.

Tying in the garden landscapes of Victoria and the Northern Territory, the exhibit is peppered with red gravel and eucalyptus, while a timber-clad structure at the back of the garden echoes iconic rock

formations such as Uluru. A winding serpent-shaped deck inspired by the Aboriginal Dreamtime story of the Rainbow Serpent is a favourite for the designer.

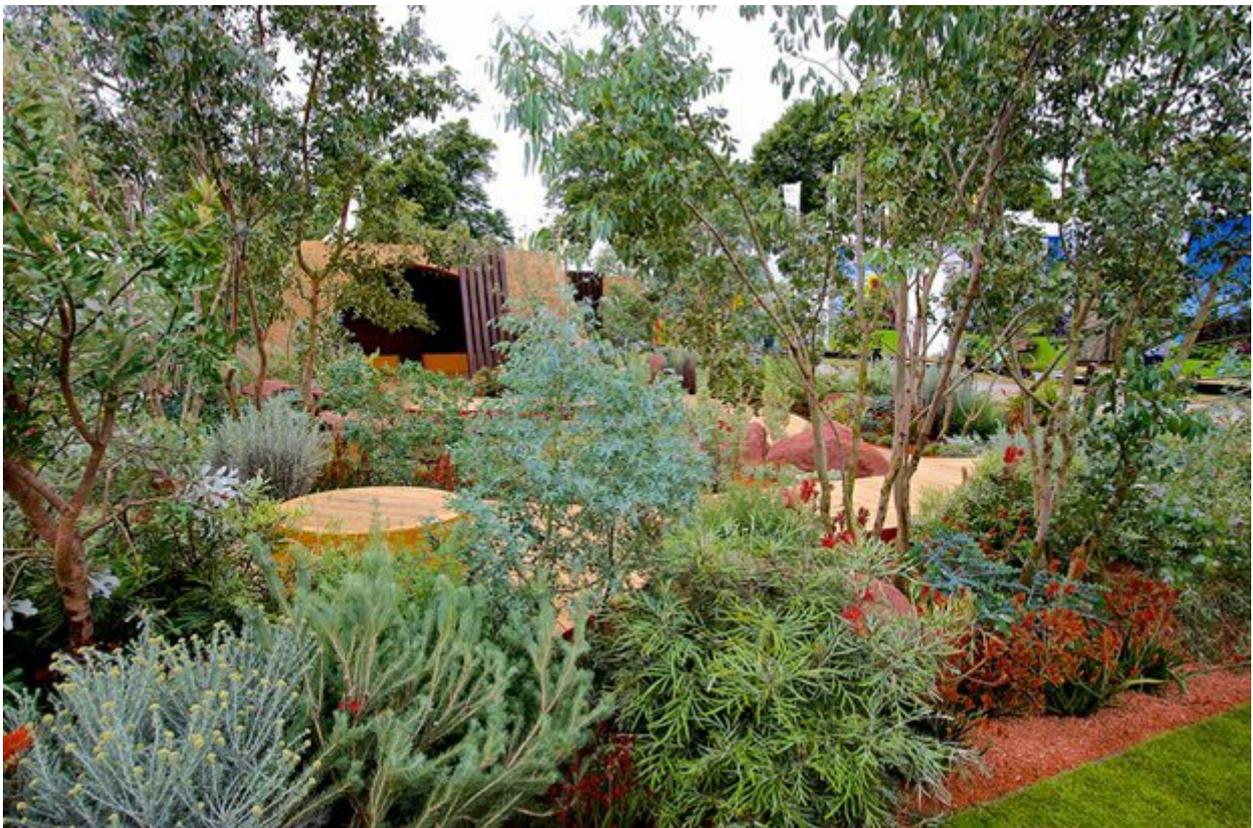
"The story of the serpent was closely linked to horticulture," he said. "When the serpent was angry it rained, and when it rained there were new plants.

"I think our history and culture is fascinating, and I wanted to use a style of contemporary gardening that tells the story of our own indigenous culture," he said.

Sustainability was also a key feature of the display presented by the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne.

"Not one thing was shipped here, every plant was sourced from Europe and everything will be resourced and donated at the end," Mr Fogarty said.

It's now the second time an Australian has taken out top honours at a prestigious gardening event in the UK after Wes Fleming's team won Best in Show at the Chelsea Flower Show last year.



Essence of Australia Garden from rhs.org.uk

## **Trip to UK, France and Spain**

## **Ros and Ben Walcott, Canberra**

We travelled this May and June with Angus Stewart to visit gardens in the UK, France and Spain. We visited the Chelsea Flower Show in London and were greatly impressed again by the variety of plant material that was displayed and the superb standard of horticulture. We saw more Australian plants featured at Chelsea than at the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show in March. The RHS Hampton Court Flower Show is larger than Chelsea but doesn't seem to attract the same interest from Australian tour companies. To see some pictures of the gardens we saw, see our blog:

<http://walcottgardens.blogspot.com.au> (just copy this into your browser).

There are two parts to the blog so click on "older posts" at the end of the first group.

## **Snape Garden**

**Margaret James, Vic**

In the February 2013 issue of the *Newsletter*, Diana Snape wrote about leaving her garden:

Our garden has really become part of us so it will be hard to leave it behind but we have had 38 years of great pleasure and enjoyment from it. A total of literally thousands of visitors have seen it in those years when it has been in the Open Garden Scheme (in addition to our own friends and family) and many people have told us they have been influenced by it. It also inspired my writing articles for gardening magazines and the 'Age' newspaper for over 20 years.

Among those who enjoyed the garden were members of the Victoria GDSG who met there on numerous occasions. Those who would like to visit or revisit this significant garden can find an account online, complete with photographs, at <http://anpsa.org.au/design/snape.html>



Photo of the Snape garden by Simon Griffiths

## **Rowland Open Garden, 4-5 October 2014 Gordon and Marie Rowland, NSW**

The Rowlands will open their garden on the long weekend of Saturday 4 and Sunday 5 October 2014, from 10am to 4pm both days.

Open Gardens Australia proposes an entrance fee of \$8 for the general public, and \$6 for Australian Plants Society members. (Two thirds of takings goes to Open Gardens Australia, to cover insurance, publicity, and signage.)

The garden is an informal, naturalistic garden of mainly local/bioregional species, that blends with the surrounding Wallingat Forest. The Rowlands plan to include plant and book sales.

For more information about this beautiful garden, please see the article below.

## *habitat gardens*

In 2002, we sold our Sydney house of 19 years and bought 10 hectares (25 acres) of partly cleared wet-sclerophyll forest adjoining Wallingat National Park at Pacific Palms on the mid north coast of New South Wales. It was one big step towards the vision we shared: an eco-friendly house and garden in harmony with nature. We hired a local earthmover to upgrade the forest track to a driveway; excavate a lagoon/ wetlands and a safe spillway downstream from the wide swamp/slow-moving creek crossing the property; adjust creek entry from upstream to prevent run-off and siltation; and extend the treed knoll to create an island retreat for birds about 600mm above water level to escape flooding. We specified varying water depths, from 200mm for wading birds to six metres for diving birds, and as a retreat for native fish during periods of high temperatures and low water levels.



After browsing the Australian Institute of Architects' website ([www.architecture.com.au](http://www.architecture.com.au)) and speaking with several architects, we hired Sydney architect Kevin Snell, whose designs and eco-credentials stood out above the others. We discussed with him the house we had in mind: Modern, unpretentious, low-profile, functional, energy-efficient, independent of fashion, fads and the architecture of bygone eras and other cultures, bushfire safety features integral to the design, earthen/mud brick and weatherboard construction, with a Zincolume roof to reflect heat and plantation or recycled timber windows and doors, in visual harmony with the surrounding landscape, centrally located open-plan kitchen/dining/living area, opening to a wide verandah with overhang to screen summer sun and admit winter sun, orientation between 30° east and 15° west of

true north (depending on land contours) for maximum solar gain, passive solar design and through-flow ventilation to control temperature and reduce the need for active heating and cooling slow-combustion heater, underground rainwater tank and reed-bed waste-water system.

After completion of the lagoon and driveway in December 2003, we hired an eco-aware local builder, the Sugar Creek Building Company's Bruce Brown. Bruce's team laid the foundations in July 2004 and completed the house in March 2005. We have since revegetated with about 2000 local native trees and shrubs, mainly scattered along previously cleared sections of the north and south boundaries. These provide wildlife corridors into Wallingat National Park and screening from neighbouring properties.



In 2006, we turned our attention to the gardens, starting with the south-facing front entrance garden. After deep ripping the clay base, compacted during construction, we mixed the stockpiled clay-loam topsoil with grit, horse and chicken manure and worm castings, and then re-laid it. To screen the visitors' car parking area and provide a sense of enclosure, we then installed a timber fence and lined it with a natural, fire-resistant cladding product, Natureed. During the laying of the house foundations, a buried pipe and electric wiring were installed, running from the lagoon to beneath the house, the pipe emerging in the front entrance garden. From here we dug a dry creek bed that winds through the garden to the far end and around the house to the lagoon. It always looks attractive and serves as an effective means of above-ground drainage during periods of high rainfall. With the lagoon end of the pipe attached to a waterside pump, the flick of a kitchen switch brings water splashing into the creek from a hidden "spring". The water flows through the creek before returning to the lagoon. It's a favourite feature with visitors, particularly our grandchildren, Ben and Olivia. It also cools the air and brings colourful dragonflies and frogs — including tiny green tree frogs — and other wildlife. And it's an easy way to water nearby plants during establishment and prolonged dry periods.



After we'd spread a coarse mulch layer and lined the creek with crushed rock and pebbles, we installed our first garden plant, *Cyathea cooperi* (scaly tree fern) next to the creek. Since then, we've installed many more plants, with more to come during the next few years. To impart a relaxed ambience and sense of unity, and for ecological integrity, we plant mainly local and bio-regional species. These all thrive without chemical fungicides or insecticides and attract many native songbirds including birds that feed on insects. With such an abundance of insectivorous birds and frogs, we are seldom bothered by mosquitoes.

We're both passionate about uniting aesthetics with biodiversity and conservation and we seize every opportunity to promote a wider, deeper appreciation of local and regional natural heritage. Our aim is to leave a legacy of timeless beauty for our children, our children's children and future generations of Australians.

*Gordon Rowland is managing director of Indigenous Landscape Design Australia; Marie Rowland its researcher. For more information and photos on this project, and to view the garden plants list, visit their website: [www.ilda.com.au](http://www.ilda.com.au) green garden & home 65*



## Order, or disorder?

**Diana Snape Vic**

Most of us balance a desire for order in our lives with a yearning for some variety and adventure. Gardens, too, range from those that are highly pruned and controlled, all straight lines and circles, to some that look as though they know no geometry and have never seen a pair of secateurs. Most probably lie in between.

Nowadays, most new gardens are highly manicured and controlled. Firstly, I think this reflects our basic love of order. Many people like everything neat and tidy, all in place, no loose ends. Closely related is the feeling of being in control (of our garden, if not the rest of our lives!). Another factor is that maintenance of these gardens is straightforward and requires little thinking. Many people are time-poor and the maintenance is carried out by someone other than the garden owner, who may not really be interested in the garden at all. Alienation from nature is a real concern with the increasing urbanisation of the population.

Such gardens are in fashion too - if you're not really interested in plants, this is the garden for you. Not many different species of plants need be used. It's an easy style for landscape gardeners, even landscape architects, when they have limited knowledge of plants to use in their designs. This 'garden' is like green outdoor furniture. Of course it's possible to have a highly manicured garden of Australian plants. Most of us don't, because we're keen on the natural environment and its less ordered look. We prefer irregularity, asymmetry rather than symmetry, and we don't like plants looking too contrived and unnatural.

However nature IS ordered, according to its own rules. A natural landscape is ordered - by evolution, heredity and environmental factors. A plant will usually set seed in an area that's suitable for its growth. A seed will then grow and survive to maturity only if conditions are suitable for it (soil, amount of water, sun or shade, shelter). We become accustomed to how this all works out in a natural area. It looks 'right' to us, though it might look 'disordered' to others. Similarly I think any garden of Australian plants looks more 'right' to us because we recognise that its plants look more appropriate.

Formal gardens of Australian plants can look beautiful and may have many of the benefits of naturalistic ones. If they contain a variety of plant types, especially local ones (a selection from trees to groundcovers), they'll still provide habitat for many types of insects, birds and other animals. Pruning can improve the form of a plant too, give it longer life and encourage it to produce more flowers. However a formal garden is less likely to provide ideal conditions for every individual plant (eg at the far ends of a row), unless they are very tolerant species.

Designing a naturalistic or informal garden successfully is far more difficult than designing a formal one. There are a number of reasons for this. The first is, as in nature, the design evolves and is never 'finished'. We all know that the initial design becomes modified (modifies itself?) over time. This is the natural course of things in nature's 'order'. One plant grows apace while another dies, because its genes and its new conditions don't agree. In a garden, there are ongoing decisions for us to make.

Secondly, there's no easy formula for designing the layout of an informal or naturalistic garden. Using curves rather than straight lines is one useful rule but then we have to picture the garden in three dimensions (four, if we count time). To successfully balance areas, shapes, 'masses and voids' (or the solidity of plants and the spaces between them, or

between beds or groupings), is a real challenge. However it's also the fun of garden design. (I won't start on all the other aspects of design!)

An Australian garden can be informal, with plants from anywhere in Australia arranged in quite a formal way, treated as exotic plants are. Then again, we can have a highly naturalistic garden, trying to imitate the natural landscape of the surrounding area, using only plants indigenous to that area. Most of our gardens lie in between these two extremes, as we try to combine the best of both worlds - nature 'improved'?

Then there's plant selection. Nowadays there are just so many tempting plants to choose from. (Do we want a 'collector's garden', with as many as we can possibly fit in?) We make the choice as carefully as we can. The way plants are grouped in nature can guide how we put them together in gardens and it's obviously important to group those with similar requirements. While repetition of the same species of plant in a straight line looks unnatural, repetition of the same species scattered or grouped as in nature looks - well, natural.

Australian plants really can help us 'get it right'. They still have to obey nature's rules to flourish so, if we make a practical mistake with positioning our plants, they'll correct it one way or another. This helps give the garden a more natural 'structure'. However we design our gardens aesthetically, I think nature will try to help by ordering them, after her fashion.

That neat and tidy formal garden, with rows of single species of exotic plants, would be the most disordered of all in nature's eyes!

## Australian Native Vines and Climbers

Ros Walcott, Canberra

Photos by Ben Walcott, Canberra

Climbers represent a different aspect of garden design from shrubs, trees and groundcovers. They can cover a wall, climb through another plants, hide an ugly structure or create a free standing feature as the star of the show. We have many excellent climbers in our native palette of plants. Some are extremely vigorous, like *Kennedia nigricans* or *Clematis aristata*, while others are much less aggressive, depending on your climate, like *Billardiera longifolia* in our garden, and stay in the area you have planted them.

When I visited Cranbourne I was excited to see an area designated for climbers only. These huge structures for vigorous climbers form a very different garden picture. They provide scope for a dazzling display during the flowering period. Cranbourne demonstrates some very interesting ways to bring climbers out from the background. One of their innovative methods of growth is a tall cylinder of mesh which allows the climber to get plenty of air circulation and sun, and yet allows it to stand freely on its own. I couldn't wait to try this method in my garden and planted *Marianthus granulatus* (also known as *Billardiera granulatus*) at the base of a tube of chicken wire mesh. The vine has grown well – see photo below – and I plan to use this method again. Many vines flower so prolifically that they have earned pride of place in the garden.

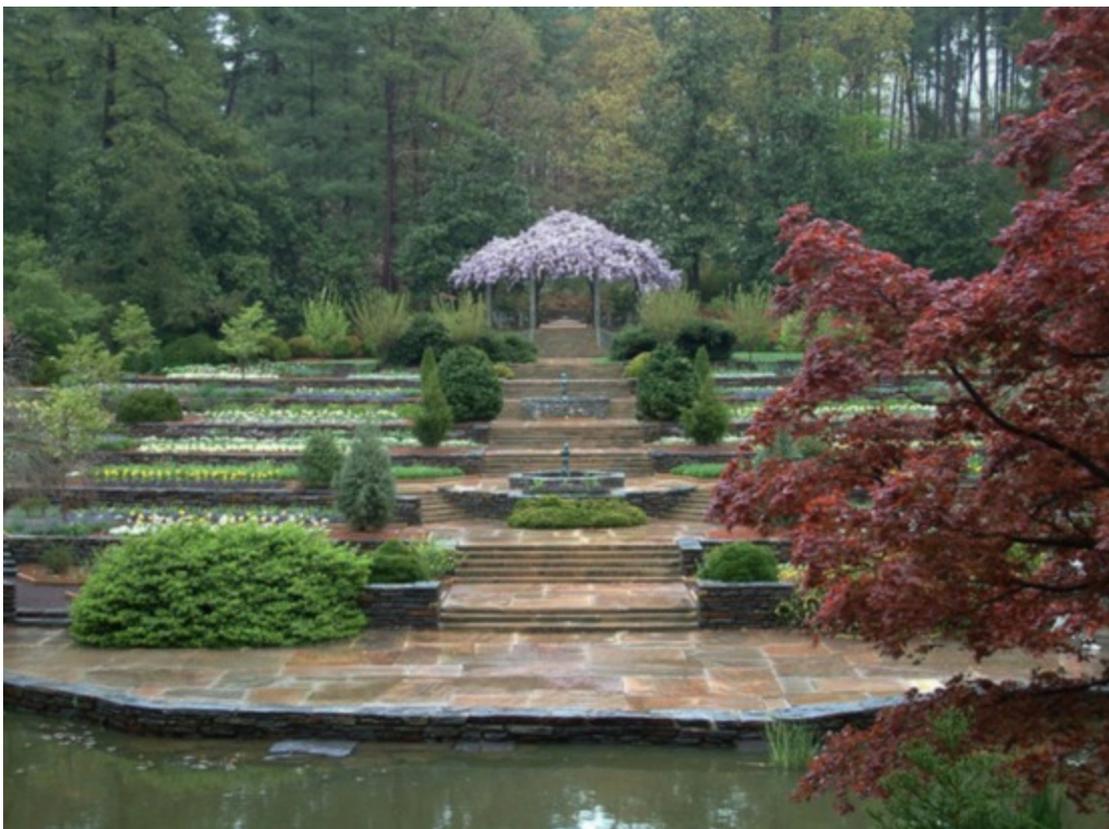


We have grown Gum Vine (*Aphanopetalum resinosum*) on a structure circling the base of Lemon Scented Gum (*Eucalyptus citriodora*). We were originally doubtful that the plant would withstand our frosts and did not pay much attention to the trellis on which we are growing the vine. We could have been much more artistic in our choice of structure and the result would have been more satisfactory. The beautiful shiny leaves of this plant deserve a better display (see previous page).

I don't think that we are inventive enough in Australia in our use of climbers in the garden. European gardens especially have a huge variety of attractive structures on which they grow climbers, trellises, walls, pyramids, enclosures and small supports to create walls for a garden.

The worst feature of climbers is that you soon run out of structures on which to drape them. You then begin to envy those old English gardens with so many ancient walls which are suitable for climbers. We grew many clematis on the walls of our house on Long Island. As light climbers they were grown on strips of wire mesh that could be detached from the walls for the frequent painting needed for a coastal home. When we built our present house in Canberra I was instructed by Ben never even to think of having climbers on the walls of the house. He found them annoying from a maintenance point of view, but I think they were worth the trouble. Of course, you do have to be very careful if you allow vines to grow on the actual wall of the house as they can become invasive and threaten the structure. It is better to have them grow on a detachable base of some kind.

I once saw (at least thirty years ago) a perfect use of one of the most vigorous vines of all, wisteria. It was in the 'crown jewel of Duke University', Sarah P. Duke Gardens in North Carolina. They had created a magnificent arbour from heavy steel to withstand the vine and placed it in the middle of expansive low plantings. The beautiful shape of the top of the gazebo was a froth of purple and flowers dripped down all around the structure. All it needed for maintenance each year was a firm pruning. The vigour of the vine could not destroy the structure as it was isolated from other areas and the vine benefitted from full sun. When I looked at the Duke University website, there was a contemporary photo of this wisteria as beautiful as ever. It is worth remembering this treatment if you have a very vigorous native vine.





The front of a seat /shelter in the gardens of the Chateau Villandry in France



The back of the same seat showing its dual purpose, a place to sit and an arbour

Let us look again at our vines and climbers and use them more in our gardens for their beauty and versatility. I would be interested to see any photos that you have of successful vine plantings.

Angus Stewart's top ten climbers are:

*Pandorea jasminoides* 'Funky Bellz'

*Pandorea pandorana* 'Snowbells'

*Kennedia nigricans* Black Coral Pea

*Tecomanthe hillii* 'Edna Walling Island Belle'

*Clematis* 'Southern Stars'

*Hardenbergia* 'Edna Walling Snow White'

*Pandorea pandorana* 'Golden Showers'

*Hibbertia scandens* Climbing Guinea Flower or Snake Vine

*Sollya* 'Edna Walling Blue Bells'

*Kennedia becxiana* Cape Arid Climber

(Angus Stewart *500 Plants – Great Australian favourites for your garden*, Allen and Unwin, 2012, p.65)

The climbers that have performed best in our garden are

*Pandorea jasminoides* 'Pink Magic'

*Pandorea pandorana* 'Lemon Bells'

*Pandorea jasminoides* 'Lady Di'

*Billardiera longifolia* Purple Apple Berry

*Clematis aristata*

*Clematis leptophylla*

*Sollya heterophylla* blue and pink

*Aphanopetalum resinosum* Gum Vine

Vines for cool climates recommended by the ANBG (<http://www.anbg.gov.au/climbers/>)

Other lists available: temperate, tropical, arid, seaside and indoor

*Aphanopetalum resinosum* Gum Vine

*Marianthus bicolor* Painted Billardiera

*Marianthus candida*

*Billardiera cymosa* Sweet Apple Berry

*Billardiera lehmanniana* Coorup

*Billardiera longiflora* Purple Apple Berry

*Billardiera ringens* Chapman River Climber

*Billardiera scandens* Common Apple Berry

*Clematis aristata* Austral Clematis

*Clematis microphylla* Small Leaved Clematis

*Desmodium varians* Slender Tick Trefoil

*Eustrephus latifolius* Wombat Berry

*Geitonoplesium cymosum* Scrambling Lily

*Glycine clandestina* Twining Glycine

*Hardenbergia violacea* Sarsparilla

*Pandorea pandorana* Wonga Wonga Vine

*Muehlenbeckia gunnii*

*Muehlenbeckia adpressa*

*Sollya heterophylla* Blue-bell Creeper

## Japanese Gardens

Bev Hanson, Vic

Travelling through Japan has been a wonderful experience. Gardens were of course high on my agenda and John did not complain when I suggested a visit to yet another one.. There are the large and very beautiful public gardens and then there are the delightful small ones, perhaps around a shrine or private residence. All are very labour intensive with trees and shrubs manipulated into artistic shapes with regular pruning.

There are three gardens regarded as Japan's best public gardens. We visited two of these. One was in Okayama, the Korakuen-meia garden. The other was in Kanazawa on the west coast, the Kenrokuen garden.. The first had extensive lawn areas with little change in level and without the surprise of garden rooms. The latter I could not stop taking photos with so many interesting vistas as well as the small intimate spaces.

The Kenroken garden was developed in 18<sup>th</sup> century around the Kanazawa Castle with water diverted to form waterways and lakes throughout the 11.4 hectare site. It was constructed on the highest part of Kanazawa so has magnificent views over the town and throughout .Some of the trees are now centuries old and much effort spent looking after them, especially in winter when a large maypole type structure is used to prevent tree boughs from breaking with the weight of snow.



Everywhere is the sound of water with rivers, waterfalls and wonderful reflections in the ponded areas.. Workers daily tend the moss gardens, removing weeds and any fallen leaves. Even the azaleas are pruned into artistic shapes and dead flowers removed regularly. All in all it is a huge maintenance job throughout but what a masterpiece of garden design!

The Japanese are masters of garden design in creating small and large gardens from whom we can learn much.





## Report of Melbourne garden visit June 15

Diana Snape, Vic

We visited the garden of Lynh and Gordon Barfield who, since the property was bought in 1999, have created a beautiful garden on a quite difficult site. The sloping land provides an attractive outlook but required a lot of terracing. However, in this process, it also allowed the ground to be sculpted for much greater interest. A friendly local supplier supplied many large rocks - some very large - to help. A small pool nestles between a few of these. A set of steps in the back garden give an indication of the considerable changes in level.

The soil is heavy clay and initial introduction of fill proved unsatisfactory. Lynh says the addition of mulch over the years has been slow to improve the condition of the soil but is now being more effective. Another problem faced is the need to protect plants (especially small plants) from rabbits. Wire guards are currently used for this. One challenge is the possible threat of bush fires in summer. Some deciduous trees and shrubs have been included in the garden, mainly for this reason but also for the foliage colour in autumn. A curved path to the entrance is bordered to the west by a garden that includes deciduous trees, while between path and house are some deciduous shrubs. In autumn, their leaves make a lovely contrast with the silver-grey foliage of plants on either side of the path, including *Plectranthus argentatus* and *Lasiopetalum behrii*. Lynh is a keen pruner and suitable shrubs such as westringias and *Babingtonia* / *Baeckea virgata* are kept well pruned. This gives a slightly more formal look, especially to the area around the house. The combination of pruned and naturally shaped shrubs (eg *Thryptomene baeckeacea*) is very pleasing. Foliage shapes and colours are nicely blended too.

Curved garden beds border lawns at each level, with these separate areas connected by steps or slopes. Throughout the garden, there are a variety of different trees and shrubs. *Acacia fimbriata* is well positioned near the entrance and special plants include *Hakea francisciana*, chamelauciums and a number of acacias, grevilleas and eremophilas. Some lovely shrubs are unusual or quite difficult to grow, such as *Diplolaena grandiflora* and *Eremophila cuneifolia*, past its full flowering then but with sepals as attractive as petals. *Grevillea filifolia* cascades over rocks at the bottom pond.

At the meeting, we discussed some of the issues Lynh raised. (Individual members also made suggestions privately as we walked round the garden, before and after the meeting.) One question was the introduction of groundcover plants to fill the spaces between newly planted, slow-growing shrubs until they mature. Daisies are an obvious choice as a temporary filler but rabbits find them too appealing. The smaller lomandras and grasses such as poas were suggested. (*Themeda* 'Mingo' would be another.) Repetition of successful existing plants is always a good idea and Lynh already has prostrate western banksias and grevilleas, for example. We talked about sourcing plants. Although Kurunga has a great range of plants for sale and Victoria is well off for nurseries compared with other States, many plants are still very hard to find in nurseries. Cuttings from other APS members' gardens are a good source. A license is necessary to collect cuttings from National Parks or, in some States, any natural area.

Lynh wondered about underplanting for a difficult area on the western side of the garden which is quite shady and dry but which has a (dry) rainforest look. The shrub layer in a dry rainforest is somewhat limited and not readily available here. Suggestions for understory included small syzygiums (which probably need too much water), zamias and grass-trees. Although both the latter are slow-growing, some grass-trees from South Australia are somewhat quicker. Suggestions from other members please?

After the discussion of Lyhn and Gordon's garden (please see report above), a number of members took GDSG bookmarks to give to nurseries selling Australian plants and other suitable organisations. The bookmarks will be available to customers as advertisement for both the GDSG and ANPSA.

Therese Scales reported that progress has finally been made with respect to the rejuvenation of the Ellis Stones Memorial Garden, with Melbourne University confirming that the project will be going ahead this year and that Bev Hanson will be involved. We thanked Therese and her husband Peter for the work they have done in bringing this about. As Ellis Stones was a pioneer in landscaping with Australian plants, the GDSG is helping support this project.

Margaret James has completed her report on the garden of Brian and Diana Snape. This is Margaret's second completed report (no-one else has yet finished a formal record) - a great effort and a wonderful achievement. The report is now on the GDSG website and the link is <http://anpsa.org.au/design/snape.html>, (see also p. )

In the May newsletter, Neil Marriott describes a very exciting development proceeding in western Victoria, near the Grampians. Normally we hear the word 'development' and shudder but this one, on the contrary, is truly visionary. WAMA stands for Wildlife Art Museum of Australia and the website is [www.wama.net.au](http://www.wama.net.au) . In the future this museum, with its associated botanic garden and natural bush with wetland, will become a magnet for visitors from other Australia States and overseas. All members were very enthusiastic about the prospect of visiting the site, to see the natural area and where planting has already been carried out. We agreed we'd like to go there in spring, in conjunction with visiting the Grampians Wildflower Show (please see next page).

We thanked Lyhn and Gordon for their hospitality (and Lyhn for her delicious cake).





These two photographs of Lyhn and Gordon's garden were taken by Michael Cook

### **Next meeting**

August 10 at Barbara Rooks' garden, 1 Sunrise Hill Road, Montrose, on the corner of Currawong Road and at the foot of the Dandenong Ranges National Park (Melway 52C9). The arrangements will be as usual - 1pm for a BYO picnic lunch, or 2pm for the garden visit and meeting.

The following meeting will be very special. It will be held in the first weekend of October in the Grampians and will involve staying at least overnight, probably at Halls Gap (or else Stawell). On Saturday October 4 and Sunday 5, the Grampians APS Wildflower Show will be at Pomonal and the Grampians Wildflower Show will be at Halls Gap. We'll also visit a private garden. **The highlight will be a conducted visit to WAMA on Monday October 6**, with Neil Marriot leading us. It will be during school holidays and it would be advisable to book accommodation early. **All Victorian members are welcome of course - please let me know if you are interested in coming - at [dsnape3@bigpond.com](mailto:dsnape3@bigpond.com) or by phone on 9836 3916 - so I can let you know arrangements.**

## **GDSG Canberra Garden Visit – Murrumbateman Dave Herald and Margaret Streamer, Canberra**

May 13 was a beautiful day for a visit by approximately two dozen members of the Day Activities Group of ANPS - Canberra Region and the Garden Design Study Group – a clear, sunny day with no wind.



Our house as seen from the driveway.

Our home is in Merryville Estate, just to the west of Murrumbateman village. We have a 2-acre block which adjoins one of the 5 'commons' in the estate. The area used to be sheep paddocks and when we moved in some 3 years ago, the previous owners had done almost nothing on the block, giving us a 'blank canvas' to work with. Weatherwise the winters seem not as cold as Canberra, and the maximums in summer are not quite as hot. The downside is the relentless wind.

The soil is generally light clay which is quite friable unless really dried out. The top layer is mainly a light-brown friable clay, but deeper down are areas of red clay (which can get rock-solid when very dry), and a powdery white clay. A seam of rock outcrops runs across part of the block, and there were also quite a few iceberg rocks which have now been dug out. Apart from the rock seam, there are no rocks within 0.5m of the surface. The soil responds very well to applications of mulch from the Murrumbateman or Yass tips.

Each lot on the estate is provided with bore water for the garden. This reliable and inexpensive water supply is a huge asset and we have maximised its use with drip irrigation to the garden beds.



Our Wollemi Pine, with one side of the artificial canyon visible on the left

We recently installed our own 'Stone Henge' from rocks excavated by our neighbour for his in-ground water tank. We have planted ground covers and low shrubs in the foreground and some kangaroo paws and a grass tree close to the rocks for some thermal and wind protection. We've planted a *Eucalyptus kitsoniana* and other cascading shrubs as a backdrop to the rocks.



Stone Henge - Murrumbateman style. Most of the plants are still very small. The Kangaroo paws are visible next to the large rocks at the rear, and the *Xanthorrhoea johnsonii* is at the right.



A view of one of the commons from our garden. The Banksia is flowering for the second time.

Our next big effort is to remove the Canturf, planted by the previous owners, from the western side of the house. This grass struggles in the heat each summer and is most unappealing. We were inspired by the ‘tapestry hedge’ shown in a recent GDSG Newsletter and hope to do something similar. Our criteria are:

- Shrubs that can be regularly pruned to shape,
- Contrasting foliage colour,
- Wind and heat tolerant,
- Fire resistant or retardant as the plants will be planted reasonably close to the house,
- Fast growing – we’re retired and would like to see the fruits of our labour before the inevitable happens.

Our visitors bombarded us with ideas and advice on what to plant over morning tea. We were on a high – now all we need to do is dig the holes and plant in spring. Many thanks to Ingrid Adler for giving us cuttings at the following meeting.

A second, but easier area to deal with, is a long triangular plot adjacent to our newer neighbour. The area is currently fringed by plants along the fence line and roadway but is difficult to mow because of its shape. We were going to mass plant here, but thanks to the Walcotts, we are now thinking of tear-drop shaped garden beds filled with delicate plants needing wind protection. This won’t help the mowing but it will certainly have more appeal than at present!

Acknowledgement and thanks to Lucinda Royston for some of the photos.

### A day in the country

When the coordinator of our Society's Daytime Activity Group Bill Willis suggested a visit to our property I just about fell off my chair. I couldn't imagine what our place would have to offer especially as the Garden Design Study Group would be visiting as well. I suggested Bill visit us prior to the event to determine the suitability of including us on his calendar. And so he did and couldn't stop waxing lyrical about our place. He considers our place to be quite special, living as we are in a virtual unspoilt bushblock. We therefore welcomed about 18 members from the ANPS-Canberra region to our place in the country on a glorious sunny day in June.

My husband Ron and I live on 50 hectares on the eastern side of Sutton Road north of Queanbeyan. Our house is passive-solar designed nestling down the slope about 1.5 km in from the front gate. We are not connected to the electricity grid, being totally energy self-sufficient using photovoltaics with a deep cycle battery bank and generator back-up.

The lie of the land is undulating with many trees and the occasional patch of open ground. Elevation is about 730 metres dropping down to the Yass River on the eastern side of the property. We began recording rainfall halfway through 2006 and since then, as with most of Australia, we saw huge differences in yearly averages. Our lowest year was 2007 recording 400mm while in 2010 we recorded our highest to date, coming in at 949mm.



We bought our block in 1988 and over the years have spent many a week or two camping with family and friends. We eventually began building our house as owner-builders in 2006, finally moving here to live at Christmas time 2007. But the house wasn't finished, so we moved into our gypsy camp — a motley collection of huts and caravans about a third of a kilometre from the house site. In retrospect, our decision to build nearly 20 years after buying gave us time to get to know our property very well. In fact, we changed our minds twice before finally settling on the current house site.

We're very happy with our choice. There are substantial tree stands to the west of the site providing some relief from summer heat but it is quite open to the north. This is important to us because our dream for years has been to build a passive solar designed house and solar gain from the north is integral to the efficiency of the house's level of comfort.

When we finally decided on the house site, we attempted to build a vegetable garden. The key word is 'attempted'. Using a tractor and a three-point linkage ripper, Ron proceeded to break up the chosen patch of ground. It all went well until the ripper, instead of riding over one of the many iceberg rocks, managed to hook underneath and successfully managed to pull the back end out of the tractor. It could have been worse, the tractor could have rolled, but thankfully that didn't happen. Thus endeth the vegie patch. And it was many years before I attempted to plant again.

Our so-called soil is very difficult to work with, comprised mainly of shale, some clay and many rocks, above and below ground. Before establishing the current small patch of garden near the house, I have planted dozens of trees and shrubs in the surrounding bush with varying degrees of success. The ground is so hard I invariably use a crow bar to dig each hole, always shaping a well to provide a reservoir to retain any rain that may fall.



Looking north from the house

As mentioned previously, the house is on a slope, the degree being about 1:8. In 2012 we installed a retaining wall on the higher south side of the house using Wee Jasper basalt. The stonemason filled in behind the wall with much rubble not knowing that I had planned a garden there. There's that word 'planned'. After six years we still didn't have a garden, concentrating on building the house instead. But we have always had a simple plan in mind and now the beginnings were about to be realised.

Once the stonemason had left, we pulled out quite a large amount of rubble and back-filled with a mix of mulch and clay. The clay was a donation some years ago from a building site in town. The mulch was from the leaves and branches of fallen trees on the block. Planting was easy due to the deep soil we had placed behind the retaining wall. I've had about a 75% success rate since those first plantings in October 2012.



Some have taken off beautifully like the two *Acacia cognata* 'Copper Tips' on either side of the front steps, the *Correa reflexa* (Kangaroo Island), *Prostanthera incisa*, *P. melissifolia* and *P. rotundiflora* as well as the strappy *Dianella brevipedunculata*, *D. tasmanica*, *Lomandra longifolia* and *Thelionema grande*. One of the two kangaroo paws *Anigozanthos flavidus* (red) has fared better than the other. And my *Eremophila calorhabdos* I'm particularly pleased with. It flowered well in the first year then proceeded to look very leggy and most unattractive. For some inexplicable reason I happened to read the identification tag dangling from the plant and noticed it suggested to prune regularly. So out came my secateurs and I hacked into it, cutting back quite hard. And lo and behold, the new growth looks luxurious. Every plant has been hand-watered, those beyond the house by watering can. While we have two dams and a bore, to date our water use is solely from 185,000 litres of stored rain water.

Still I had more seedlings waiting to be planted out. There was a patch of dirt between the house and the garage but it hadn't been dug up beforehand and I found it extremely difficult to dig holes. Even using the crow bar hardly made a difference. What to do? The space was too small to bring the tractor in so Ron then employed our trusty jack hammer. It was the only way we could break up the dirt. I refuse to call it soil. Out of about 15 plants, I've lost three. So far, so good. Then we moved around to the northern side of the house and planted about half a dozen plants including a prolific *Brachyscome multifida* and *Correa* 'Federation Belle'.

While many of the plants are coming along nicely, quite a few I would call sullen. They haven't died but they haven't flourished either. Our visitors said that plants often do that, namely just sit for a few years and then take off and never look back. So I shall remain patient.

Our biggest challenge in developing a garden is the fauna. The kangaroos generally don't bother us, but the swamp wallabies are little terrors eating just about everything in their path. We also have rabbits, hares and shingle back lizards. Yes, I've seen with my very own eyes a shingle back wander along and eat every flower in its reach. It can be soul-destroying to see the damage all these delightful animals can do. Our answer was to set



up plant guards and even a temporary wire net fence until they become established. It doesn't look pretty, but I have no option. By spring I thought we had triumphed. At one of the ANPS plant sales I bought two *Xerochrysum bracteatum*. After flowering, they self-seeded numerous times and were going to look magnificent, that is until the choughs came along. These birds live in large family communities and pecked away at the mulch pulling up just about every new baby plant. Perhaps I need to install some bird-netting as well.

Along the south side we intend to pave with Wee Jasper basalt flagstones informally spaced amongst Bungendore Grey river gravel. I think this is better than hard paving as it will allow rainwater to soak into the soil rather than become damaging run-off.

At the north-west corner of the house the ground drops away quite steeply. Ingrid Adler suggested extending out and smoothing the slope to 1:3 angle. Then place rocks randomly interspersing with shrubs eg *Einadia*. Instead of formal steps Ingrid suggested placing some of the flatter-faced rocks randomly on a bed of sand and concrete them into position to use as stepping stones.

We have three Wollemi pines in pots on the northern side under the eaves. They are not looking healthy, mostly pale with just the tops a glossy green. Fran Middleton suggested that they have probably exhausted their soil and are grabbing nutrients from the lower leaves. Repotting them may be all that they need to regain their health.

To the north we also intend to build two pergolas with movable slats that we will arrange to exclude the sun or not depending on the season. Because we've yet to build the pergolas we've not developed any gardens except for half a dozen plants on a retaining wall. Local grower, Iris Philp suggested we needn't worry too much about formal gardens. Our garden is the 120 acres of natural bushland surrounding our house providing a tapestry of varying shades of green vistas.

We broke for lunch and enjoyed a magnificent feast with everyone bringing some food to share. Afterwards when most had gone home we led the remainder for a walk down to the Yass River, then across the property up to the highest point where there are 360 degree

views including south to the Brindabellas. This was our original house site but it didn't take us long to realise how inhospitable the conditions would be if we lived in such an exposed position. Even on the sunny still day that it was we noticed a cool breeze up on the hill.

The trees on the property are mainly the indigenous *Eucalyptus mannifera* and *E. macrorhyncha* with some *E. bridgesiana* and *E. rossii* amongst others. *E. mannifera* has the unfortunate common name of Brittle Gum but I love this tree. It has a most attractive bark. Currently the colour is a powdery whitish grey which glows in the moonlight but by summer the bark goes through a range of colours from grey through pink to reddish purple. Acacias tend more on the western slopes of the property and include mainly *Acacia dealbata* but also *A. parramattensis* and the low growing *A. gunnii*.

The predominant shrubs are Cassinia including *C. hewsoniae* and *Kunzea ericoides*. While the *Kunzea* has a short flowering time, when it does flower it is very pretty with prolific white flowers. The grass *Rytidosperma pallidum* (previously known as *Joycea pallida*) commonly known as Red-anther Wallaby Grass is one of my favourite grasses because of its long graceful leaves and red anthers when in seed. An unfortunate fact is that our neighbours on both sides have large stands of *Pinus radiata* which relentlessly self-seed onto our land — the only major blight on our property.

Everyone seemed to enjoy the visit. It was a delight to have native plant enthusiasts visit our property. They were very encouraging providing a number of ideas to develop our rural sanctuary. Our house is still not finished but there's no urgency. We have great plans for the building and are prepared to wait until we are able to complete each stage rather than make cheap compromises. We said goodbye to our visitors basking in a warm glow



Some of the visitors discussing a new garden bed near the house. Photo by Bill Willis

## **Treasurer's Report**

### **Fiscal year 2013 – 2014:**

#### **Income:**

Subscriptions:	\$ 849.00
Royalties:	\$ 194.00
Interest:	<u>\$ 470.08</u>
Total income:	\$ 1513.48

#### **Expenses:**

Printing and postage:	\$ 1347.90
Indexing:	<u>\$ 264.00</u>
Total expenses:	\$ 1611.90

#### **Cash on hand:**

Account 285385	\$ 8,563.18
Account 181703	\$ 472.76

#### **Term Deposit:**

Due 19 July 2014	\$ 23,811.05 (will accrue interest of \$ 463.30)
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**Total Value of all deposits:                   \$ 32,846.99**

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