

## Chris Bourne - March 2011



Gardening has always been an interest of mine.

From my childhood days, being near my father as he tendered his small vegetable patch in the backyard of our Woodville house, I grew to like being in the garden, watching fruit ripen and eating our fresh tomatoes with a sprinkle of sugar on top.

My working life has taken me to country towns all around the state as a primary school teacher.

These spots included Yankalilla, Berri, Geranium, Woomera, Crystal Brook and Littlehampton.

I mostly lived in government houses and spent some time trying to make the garden look presentable and having a go at growing vegetables.

My first year at Littlehampton was in 1994 and there I met Joy and we married a couple of years later.

We bought a hillside block of one and a half acres at Blakiston, which is a few kilometres from Littlehampton.

The block had been used as irrigated pasture and had original farm shedding, one with the original brick floor.

A 50,000 litre tank, access to bore water, remnants of an old unused vegetable patch and rich soil, fertilised by cattle over a hundred years or so made Joy and I think we had hit the jackpot.

We built a house large enough for our blended family of six children.

I had already realized that I had married a gardening genius in Joy and we set to work, turning the hillside, cleared completely of all native vegetation into a garden bulging with new plantings.

Joy had a few cuttings from her previous house block in Bridgewater and so we started.

We had some sort of a rough drawing and we had to factor in the slope on the block as we built pathways and garden borders.

We took some long service leave and that gave us the time to collect the 80 tonnes of rocks, stone by stone from a rocky hillside on a farm near Mt. Barker summit.

We turned these into garden borders and so our new garden began to take shape.

We worked every spare moment, adding to our garden. We used the rain water from the roof to create natural ponds. Joy was an expert at creating garden rooms and we tried to create nooks and 'secret' havens where you could sit and be consumed by the plants surrounding you.

So over the next few years we saw our garden mature. We were at the plant nursery every week. The vegetable garden began to take shape and we had a never ending supply of cow manure to keep it looking its best.

I then decided to become a grape grower and planted 400 chardonnay vines.

I went to Urrbrae to learn about the finer points. I hand augured all the post holes and erected a Scott Henry trellising system. I learnt about downy and powdery mildew, copper sprays and how to get rid of the starlings that kept getting under the nets and finished up with a small crop of over two tonnes per year.

The garden grew in size and so did the time needed to keep it looking its smartest. We were now a yearly entrant in the Mt. Barker Show Garden Competition and in 2002 we found ourselves in the final dozen gardens in the national TV Better Homes and Gardens competition.

And then it happened!! By this time we had bought a stone cottage at Milang and turned it into our Bed & Breakfast, 'Ruby's Cottage' and we grew to like the look of Strathalbyn as a place to live.

On a Saturday in February 2005 we discovered that Hamilton House at 23 Commercial Road, Strathalbyn was for sale and three days later we signed up to buy it.

Immediately, the garden at Blakiston became history and we started the process to sell it.

We loved the charm of the stone house in Strathalbyn and the native garden created by Jenny and David Thomas and it soon became our new mission.

We have been here for nearly six years and Joy continues to find ways to add to our backyard.

We have a hen house always with about seven chooks, a veggie patch, a new propagation house and a garden that keeps changing, with Joy always wanting to put her latest idea into action.

Now I am retired, Joy keeps finding ways to occupy me with the latest garden job.

And so I have discovered that you never finish building a garden, there is always the next job and Joy and I love it that way!

Thanks for reading this.  
Chris Bourne.

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