

Colin Wakelin - May 2011



My interest in gardening began in childhood, when I explored my grandfather's wonderful, rambling garden, while pretending I was in the jungles of South America. He had half an acre of land, virtually two house blocks, facing onto what is now Belair Road at Hawthorn and much of it was under cultivation. His interest was predominantly ornamentals, though he also planted a few vegetables.

Dad also grew vegetables for the family. He gave each child a plot in the back yard for their personal use. I planted Easter lilies, some hyacinths and pansies and waited with excitement for them to grow. But the pansies didn't germinate so that was my first disappointment. Mum also had a love of plants and Dad was soon set to work building a small shade house in which she grew a large variety of succulents and ferns. She also loved floral art and Ikebana, but never developed an interest in Bonsai. Later in life she learnt to paint and did some wonderful watercolours of Sturt's Desert Pea and other still life, pieces that we treasure now.

When I left school I joined the Postmaster General's Department (PMG) as a trainee technician. That didn't leave a lot of time for gardening. Eventually I was posted to Alice Springs for 12 months. The beauty of Australia's inland was memorable and I was attracted to the desert plants. This spurred my interest in Australian native plants.

Following my time in the Red Centre, I was drafted into the Army as a National Serviceman and was subsequently posted to Papua New Guinea. I'll never forget the experience: it was an entirely different culture and I needed to learn a bit of Pidgin English. I spent 12 months in the tropics and tolerate humidity quite well.

On my return to Adelaide, I got married and had the chance to buy a house in Clapham and establish my own garden. I planted Australian native trees as well as some vegetables. Sadly, this relationship ended in divorce and I moved to Torrens Park where I lived in a house with an already established small garden that limited what I could do. At this stage I joined Trees for Life and had a lot of fun growing seedlings for landholders. I also volunteered with

The Friends of Brownhill Creek Reserve and spent many rewarding hours removing pest plants (mostly olives) from the natural waterway and replacing them with indigenous species.

Years later, I met Glennis. We married and now have a blended family: her three daughters and my son and daughter. With their respective partners we are now the proud grandparents of 13 grandchildren and we are expecting our first great-grandchild this year. Glennis' father was an avid gardener who grew his own fruit trees and vegetables and kept chooks, so she supports my interest in gardening. I now get a lot of pleasure watching my son set up his garden and grow vegetables for his family. He planned it all meticulously and it is thriving with sweet corn, pumpkin, zucchini, tomatoes, capsicum and strawberries, all in a very small plot. It is a credit to him.

Before we settled in the Adelaide Hills, Glennis and I took a trip overseas and sent regular postcards to the family so the grandchildren could follow our route through the UK and Europe. The Shetland Islands and St Petersburg in Russia were two highlights of the trip, as well as the famous Kew Gardens, where we saw plants grown from seed brought back to England by the famed botanist, Joseph Banks, who sailed with Captain Cook.

Immediately on our return, we bought a property in Aldgate that was heavily vegetated with Stringybark trees and some exotic shrubs like camellias, rhododendrons, holly, viburnum, wisteria, ferns and palm trees. I loved that garden and spent most of my spare time outdoors, grubbing out gorse and other invasive weeds. My hope was to return the surrounding woodland to its natural state but didn't quite achieve it. During this time I retired from Telstra and spent a year studying horticulture through TAFE. As part of the program I did some vineyard pruning and that was hard work, producing b***** great blisters. Afterwards, I became a self-employed gardener, setting up and maintaining garden beds for others and doing lots of hedging and planting, mainly in the Adelaide Hills. One thing I am not fond of is lawn mowing, which is why our current garden has only two small patches.

Some years down the track, Glennis and I sold the house at Aldgate, bought a caravan and travelled around Australia for two years. This was a wonderful experience for both of us (and no, we didn't get sick of being together all the time). Apart from indulging in the glorious landscape, it was an education to experience the diverse climate and the variety of plants in Australia: the lush growth of the tropics contrasted with the hardy desert plants that survive in extreme conditions. Our travels also taught us that you need few possessions to live in contentment.

We also discovered the joys of regional towns and their sense of community, so when we returned to Adelaide we decided to live in Strathalbyn, a town we always liked. It was a decision we've never regretted. We downsized from two acres to ¼ acre but our block has all we need: seven fruit trees, two large vegetable plots and room to grow some roses and other ornamentals in the space we use for leisure where Bridie, our Staffy cross, feels at home and buries lots of bones. In Aldgate we experienced a much higher rainfall than Strathalbyn enjoys, and very little sun under the constant shade of the Stringybarks.

It's a big plus for Strathalbyn to be able to grow our own vegetables and I've adapted my gardening practices to suit.

A taste of the Strathalbyn Garden Club's 13th May 2011 Mystery Garden Trip



▪ **Right -
Adelaide
Himeji Garen**

▪ **Left - 'The
year of
calendar
Hemeji
Garden**

▪ **Right -
Parrot tulip
Newman's
Nursery**

▪ **Right -
Tickletank wasn't all about
gardens - Irene talks faires
with Pat, Margaret, Tracy,
Yvette, Carolyn, Joy and Sue.**

▪ **Below Left - Maureen's front garden**
▪ **Below Centre - The president's plot at the
Wynn Vale Community Garden**



▪ **Below - Roger and others
were very interested in
Irene's home heating.**



▪ **School's in at the Adelaide Himeji Garden 'garden of imagination' teahouse**