

Michael and Rosemary Nelson - Sept 2017



Michael: I grew up on a two acre property on the outskirts of Woodside - my grandparents also lived on the property and they influenced me more than anyone with regard to gardening - the property was run as a mini farm-cow for milk, poultry for eggs and meat and a very productive vegetable garden.

Both grandparents worked in the vegetable garden, but flowers were my grandmother's domain.

I helped a bit, as kids do, planting, picking fruit, flowers and gathering vegetables.

Both grandparents were generous, giving away surplus vegetables and if someone wanted a flower cutting, grandmother (Nana) was happy to oblige.

I started an apprenticeship as a motor mechanic on leaving school and cars became more important than gardens.

Rosemary: My childhood years were spent in the Murray Mallee at Blackhill, a sheep and wheat farming community.

The very low rainfall, severe frosts, limestone and sandy soil made gardening a challenge, however, my mother coped well with gardening.

My Mother excelled at landscaping, lawn which was always green and lush, rockeries formed with Murray river cliff stone and honeysuckle hedges.

Trellises formed garden rooms - white gravel paths and large pots in which she planted conifers - rainwater was precious and only used for drinking and cooking, bore water was used on the garden.

In the flower garden petunias and geraniums grew well and a variety of annuals, my favourites were the sweet peas.

Vegetables were grown, lucerne to feed the hens, apricots and pears in the orchard. A large mulberry tree was enjoyed for climbing, the leaves for silk worms and the fruit for desserts and jam - straw-

berries were shared with sleepy lizards.

Michael: When Rosemary and I married we rented a house in Lobethal. Some years previously this house featured in House and Garden magazine and had a very nice garden to maintain (we were very fortunate to rent it).

My national service call up had been deferred because of my apprenticeship and we needed to move so we purchased a new Housing Trust home in Lobethal - some months later Rosemary moved in with the help of family - I was in the army.

After the army we set about creating a garden on black clay soil - soggy in winter, rock hard in summer - with the help of my grandfather - flowers, vegetables and poultry were the order of the day and coping with quite severe frosts.

While we were at Lobethal we helped my mother, grandmother and aunt move into a new house in Woodside and establish a garden - flowers, fruit trees and shrubs.

I had been working for the RAA in Adelaide for a few years so after 19 years at Lobethal we decided to move to Bridgewater.

Rosemary: We moved to Bridgewater, our two boys attended school at Heathfield High and our daughter studied graphic design in the city.

The garden covered half an acre and was on two levels - it had good structure and had been landscaped by the previous owner.

The block was covered with trees, the only flowering plants were two camellias.

Over the next twenty three years Michael removed many of the trees, mainly conifers and some eucalyptus, creating space for shrubs, roses and flowers - we kept some mature pinoaks, liquidambers and a flame tree. We had a very short season for vegetable growing.

Michael retired from work and we decided we needed less land and a flat block.

We purchased a quarter acre block in Strathalbyn and built a new home.

Michael: We moved into our new home in 2011, starting from scratch with a bare block and a somewhat different climate to Bridgewater.

We transferred some roses and bulbs from Bridgewater to start the garden.

Rosemary and I have a very good gardening relationship - Rosemary does plant selection and design and I do building, carting and digging - works really well.

We both enjoy the longer growing season and milder climate in Strathalbyn, however, we soon found shade was necessary for some plants to survive. You never really stop learning.

The vegetable garden is moving along nicely and the fruit trees supply our needs with some left over for family and friends.

We really enjoy living at Strathalbyn and particularly the garden club.

People are generous with their time, knowledge and plants (my grandmother would have loved that) and we feel a real sense of community.