

## Maria Maxwell - January 2011



My love of plants and gardening possibly began at a very early age. My Italian heritage having instilled a natural interest to culinary foods and fresh home grown produce.

As a toddler, I wandered the large fruit and veggie garden off my grandparents dairy farm at Jervois, picking little posies of violets and nasturtiums, that were permitted to grow between the garlic, sage, rosemary and essential herbs.

Grape picking at Langhorne Creek, wine making in my grandfather's cellar, olives picked through the Adelaide Hills and processed in my father's cellar, producing the best virgin oil.

Born in Broken Hill, my parents moved to Adelaide during the war as life had become very difficult in Broken Hill during this time. The living conditions and job prospects were better in the city. At the age of 10, my family moved back to Broken Hill, in fact Silverton, 20 kms south, to a large poultry farm of 10,000 chooks.

There my father grew lucerne for the chooks and every fruit tree and vegetable possible in sandy soils, we grew asparagus and even had fruiting date palms. Father dried peaches, figs and apricots.

At the local school we were encouraged to grow a veggie patch and sunflowers and marigolds. Our very dedicated teacher also took us on walking excursions to the surrounding bush land, where we collected plants and seed pods, whilst boiling the billy for tea and enjoying a packed lunch surrounded by acacias and Sturt Desert Peas. I really enjoyed Botany, more so learning about our native species which we used for pencil drawings.

At the age of 17, I was fortunate enough to obtain a hair-dressing apprenticeship and also worked in Adelaide and Darwin. My first love was to be an 'Air Hostess', but as I was only 5ft 2", I had to forget that option. For a short time in 1957 I was chosen to compete in the 'Miss Silver City Quest', to raise money in the 'Miss Australia Quest' for the Spastic Centre, however, the offer of marriage and a consequent move to Darwin was to put this on hold.

In 1964 we moved to Adelaide where my husband was to manage his first Woolworths Store. After the birth of our third son, we were moved to Mt Gambier for three years with our adopted daughter arriving in May of 1970.

We came back to Adelaide that year with the plan to extend our home at Rostrevor to accommodate our new addition, however, we were to build a new home only metres away and enjoy it for four years.

The lure of our own Supermarket led us to purchase 'Foodland' Strathalbyn in 1974. Reluctant to leave our lovely new home and established garden, we moved to 'Langmead', Milang in January 1975 where with four children, a large old stone home and a half acre block and assisting in the Supermarket, left little time for a veggie patch or garden.

At the end of 1978, my marriage over, I moved to Norwood and a beautiful old blue stone, which had little room for gardening, due to many established trees.

My love of roses led to many potted plants, moving with the seasons. The garden became an 'enchanted garden' according to my grandchildren, with my attempt to grow all my favourites.

Hidden at the rear of my property was a fruiting avocado, which belonged to my back neighbours, however, they were never aware of it, so I made sure I picked them, as it branched over my garage.

The Norwood garden would be a valuable asset when I sold my home in spring 2007, ironically the white wisteria flowered for the first time then, but I could not transplant it, as I had done with many other plants. The most difficult, a three metre high strelitzia, which I was determined to take with me, being such a slow growing plant.

After digging around the roots for two days, we had to attach a rope from the plant to the tow of my car and pull it out - getting it onto my son's trailer another poser and then its transfer to a convenient dry pond at my son's home in Strathalbyn until ready for my new garden. It has survived, not totally, as we have had to divide it, but it has flowered and helps to screen my rain water tanks.

I loved getting outside in the fresh air, having had an inside full time position as Ward Clerk at the Royal Adelaide Hospital for 26 years. The new owners of Norwood brought in a Bobcat and removed the garden completely to extend and build a residence and consulting room, the home itself saved, due to local Heritage listing - I would have removed more plants had I known their intentions.

September 2007 was a memorable day, given the keys to my lovely new home at 'Hampden Park', with absolutely no garden or tree, so carting of soil, mulch and gravel began, my eagerness to create a garden. By Christmas that year, my front garden was up and flourishing. My love of European manicured gardens and English cottage plants were my aspiration and to some extent has been created.

The potted roses are out of their pots and thriving, plus many more that have been added.

This winter I have had great success with camellias and azaleas and am looking forward to rhododendrons and peonies opening. My flowering cherry is almost open and crab apple, lilac and spring flowering plants are about to bloom. The espaliered apple will be a challenge, but the persimmon is thriving. Strathalbyn has been very rewarding in the garden stakes and the veggie garden is enjoyed by all the family and friends.

My cast iron gazebo is completely covered with white Banksia rose, a cosy spot to sit and sip and admire my endeavours. The large pergola area is sheltered and enclosed and provides a 'garden room', sunny and warm for reading and admiring 'Mother Nature' at her best.

Retirement finally arrived in December 2008, having just enjoyed a two month tour of Europe, UK and Scotland, admiring the beautiful manicured palace and castle gardens, contrasting with the very quaint cottage gardens of England, Scotland and Wales.

Time to smell my roses at last and being a member of the Strathalbyn Garden Club enables me to keep learning about this wonderful interest and meeting new friends with like feelings - the City girl has returned to the Country and she is loving it!