

## Denise Thomson - September 2016



**Denise Thomson - profile of a new Strathalbyn gardener**

I must admit to being a little surprised when asked to submit my profile - me a resident of Strathalbyn for only 15 months!

But then I thought - why not. I have been a gardener for most of my adult life, and even as a child can remember following my dad around the garden 'helping' to weed and cut the edges of the lawn with hand shears.

I guess you could say he instilled in me my love of gardens and nature in both the plant and animal world.

The gardens I have created have been many and varied - the first was at Athelstone, all native plants competing with eucalypt trees.

Then Kensington Park, a bit of a mixture there, but still a strong showing of native vegetation - my next effort was at Maylands, a much smaller garden as I now had a part-time job as a library assistant at a private school for girls, plus two sprouting teenagers to care for as well!

There was a bit of a hiatus for a few years - a broken relationship, children leaving the nest, really more time for surviving than gardening; then I purchased my first home on my own.

A little attached house with a pocket-handkerchief sized garden at the front and a slightly larger one out back. Well, it wasn't long before they were unrecognizable as the original landscaped garden.

Climbing roses over every piece of available fence space, passion fruit over the garden shed, vegies and mini fruit trees out the back - a rose arbor and bird-bath in a keyhole garden in the front - my own little piece of paradise.

Then in 1995 I went to Japan for a school trip (with 15 teenage girls - and I survived!) and after seeing the gorgeous, peaceful gardens so lovingly designed by the Japanese I just knew I needed more space to create a tranquil haven.

By this time I had a wonderful, caring and understanding man in my life (but not a gardener) and he happily indulged me in my wish for more space.

Together we purchased a house on half an acre of land at Bridgewater (really the side of a hill), and it was here that I really went crazy.

The block was on four tiers with, thankfully, all the hard work of retaining walls established, but it was covered in blackberry and ivy.

We bought a heavy-duty mulcher and a brush cutter and spent the first 12 to 18 months clearing the noxious weeds.

I must add it was in this area that my partner, Bob, came into his own. He always said that he was the 'Mexican', meaning manual worker, of the team.

Once cleared, I set to planting perennials and shrubs - no lawn or fiddling around with annuals for me.

The block had 25 established trees on it, all eucalypt and acacia - I ruined three forks as every time I went to dig a hole for another plant I would end up with about ¼ ton of rock!

Bob built a deck that cantilevered out over the garden and we would sit there as if in the tree-tops, watching the magnificent bird life and resident koala.

Truly, our own piece of heaven on earth.

However, it was not to be; my dear Bob was diagnosed with mesothelioma in November 2014, and as the disease progressed we both knew that the property was going to become a liability for me - I could not possibly cope with everything.

We found just what we wanted here in Strathalbyn, the same sized house, but with a much smaller garden.

But this was not to be either. Tragically Bob died in hospital on June 1st 2015 just four days after I moved here to Strathalbyn.

So now I had another garden to create - in 15 months I have planted about 100 new plants, added at least 30 bags of mushroom compost, bags of cow manure, lime, blood and bone, bark chips - really anything that will help with the clay soil.

Now I hope to sit back and watch it all grow, with just a bit of modification here and there.

No gardener ever has a 'finished' garden.

In the meantime I go out choral singing twice a week - I belong to the Alexandrina Singers in Strathalbyn and also sing with the Adelaide Harmony Choir at Kent Town, where I have been a member for 12 years - I am also their music librarian, which keeps me busy as we have 95 singers.

Being Grannie to a very active 4-year-old boy, Henry in Melbourne and a new 4-month-old grand daughter Sanne in Auckland, I try to keep fit by daily walking my dog Max and going to weekly Pilates and aquarobics classes.

Travel is always on the agenda with all my family either living inter-state or overseas - my daughter and her husband are in Montreal Canada, my son and his family in Auckland, New Zealand and my stepdaughter and son-in-law live in Melbourne.

In closing my little profile I must say how glad I am that Bob and I chose the house in Strathalbyn.

Everyone I have met has been so friendly - even the teenagers say "Hello" to me!

If I didn't have to go to Kent Town once a week to sing I would never leave my house and garden in this beautiful town.