

Our Garden Paths...

Helen Connolly & Garry Skuse August 2023



My love for gardening: growing flowers and vegies, began at an early age as I was born and raised on a farm in the mid north of South Australia. We were self-sufficient. My mother and grandmother were avid gardeners, the latter always winning the flower awards at the annual show with her blooms and arrangements. I moved quite a lot in my early married life as I was married to a banker, but after a career change, was able to settle in our own home and the garden then became a priority. We developed and improved each garden, getting immense pleasure along the way as we worked towards owning a property at Bridgewater. Here was 15 acres to play in, two of them being garden. The paddocks held my pet cows, and the garden was a terraced front with camellias, rhododendrons and more. The back was sweeping lawns and garden beds. Several weddings were held there.

Life changed for me when my husband lost his battle with cancer and the three children left home. Just me now and I needed something smaller. I found a nice compact home in Stirling with plenty of ground and a garden that I could make happen as it was very basic. From a large dry stone retaining wall, to camellias under the trees, bulbs, roses, salvias, clivias and so much more. Also a large vegie garden. I had a great time.

After a few years I decided to join the bridge club at Strathalbyn, having always liked that town. The people were lovely and so friendly, and I really enjoyed my weekly visit. After 18 months or so, Garry (Skuse), a recently retired schoolteacher who lived here in Strathalbyn joined the club. We were both members and chatted over cards each week. One week he was looking for a partner to play with in Mount Barker and happened to ask me if I was available. "Yes" was the answer!! Gradually we chatted more, something shifted within me and I looked at him differently. Such a nice man.

Garry's mother – a farm girl from Cleve on the Eyre Peninsula, inspired his love of gardening. His mum established vegie gardens, grew many fruit trees and could always pick a posy of flowers when necessary. She always maintained that fruit and vegetables lovingly grown at home were superior in taste to store bought produce. Garry heartily concurs! Once Garry's children left home, he moved to a larger property in the Adelaide Hills which had an orchard, large vegetable garden, berry patch and extensive lawns. Over nearly a decade, he and his then partner further developed the property which included pruning, paving, fencing, composting, recycling, mulching, building stone walls and installing watering systems.

We have now been together over 5 years and a bit over 2 years ago we bought a house together in Sandergrrove Road. A lovely old house with a huge garden - just what I wanted. The garden was an overgrown tangle of vines. Garry chopped his way around and cleared them - a mighty job. As fast as he did that, I came behind him planting. We spend every moment we can in our garden and have transformed the back completely. It is such a joy to live here, and all the plants seem to thrive. We have a big selection of plants, trying to have something flowering in each season. We also propagate the cuttings – we cannot bear to throw any away.

I feel that I have come full circle with my life. Started in an old house and garden in the country and now I am back in a grand old house with a lovely garden in a country town and I couldn't be happier.