

Tania Richardson - July 2021



I grew up on a family farm at Warrambo, between Wudinna and Lock on Eyre Peninsula: Mum grew lots of tough plants that were happy with little water and extremes of weather.

Dad nurtured vegies, strawberries and a few fruit trees; running Merino sheep and cropping cereals kept him very busy.

A paddock of peas one year was a treat to pick and eat, but the novelty soon wore off for my sister and I.

Mum's parents used to send half cases of stone fruits up from Port Lincoln; I remember once they were placed in the open porch to ripen and while we were out, a visitor left the house yard gate open - we returned to find pigs had managed to get out of their yard, wandered a fair distance to the house and enjoyed fruit and their time in Mum's garden.

Water is precious

The low rainfall and low mains pressure meant water was precious and cropping cereals on a barely-cleared soldier settler property had us very aware of hard work

with infrequent reward.

After leaving school, I shared houses in Port Lincoln for seven years, working in administration at several places, including front office of a primary school.

I have good memories of grandparents' gardens there that included a huge mulberry tree, stone fruits, roses, dahlias.

Once rentals were in my name, I became more interested in caring for gardens around me.

I joined Rural Youth to meet other young people and on my adventures around the state, one chap I saw sometimes, came from Woodchester.

Friendship grew into romance and eventually I applied for a front office admin position at Strathalbyn High School, arriving Jan. 1987.

A move to Woodchester

It was a big thing, moving away from all that was familiar, but through work, church, Rural Youth, netball and John's family, I came to know many people.

After we married, I moved to the Richardson family farm at Woodchester, living in a little old cottage.

John laid out instant turf and I enjoyed growing anything pretty that would survive the saline bore water and extremes in weather.

Being in a 'rain shadow' of the Hills, we are thankful for all rain received.

Joining Garden Club saw me make many more friends, all older than me, but I enjoyed learning from all the lovely members.

Twelve years ago, we were offered the homestead to live in, when John's parents moved into Strath.

Our son lives in the cottage, working with John breeding Poll Merino sheep and cropping cereals; he prefers lawn, for ease of maintenance.

'Dalveen'

'Dalveen' was established in 1853; furnishing it suitably and upgrading requirements to 21st century has taken a lot of doing. John is the fifth generation to live here,

but other interests meant there wasn't a lot of garden around.

I understand some garden beds were cleared to have more lawns. Some big eucalypts, ash, pines and pepper trees edge the yard and lawns help keep sanity in heights of summer.

The southern, cooler side of the house is very different to the northern, dryer side with what grows happily and a shadehouse lets me grow plants a little more tender, so that's been fun.

Space for tough plants

Having lots of space, I planned beds with hoses, sprayed out kikuyu, spread copious loads of aged sheep manure and again planted anything pretty and low cost to create interest wherever one looked.

There's a random mix of perennials, annuals, bulbs, fruit trees, succulents, native and exotic shrubs - it's all an experiment, so some things are happier than others.

Bore water of 4000ppm, high winds, high heat, a night-time 'tomp and chomp' by rams, destructive sulphur-crested cockatoos, chooks, rabbits, lambs, random support from family and my sporadic attention result in joy tempered with frustration.

Council's 'Best new garden'

In 2014 I was nominated to open through Open Gardens Australia, after winning Council's 'best new garden' competition; after lots of trepidation and family help, we were blessed with many visitors and compliments.

The gorgeous farm vista held attraction too, for both those with a rural history and those with none.

A brush with cancer

Immediately after, cancer was discovered and treatment had me struggling to look after myself, let alone family or garden.

Mum kindly came to the rescue again, joining family and friends to look after me, and tending housework and garden.

This big, old, farm house is rather different to her tidy little place and nothing is simple or easy here, so I'm always thankful for her assistance when she visits.

The garden became more untidy than I preferred and bookworm habits became a little out of hand... For a long time, I

couldn't dig, lift, bend, squat, carry, stretch, manage much at all, but slowly ability returned and it's now mainly fickle energy that sees me with dreams and kikuyu that takes advantage.

Oh, and I don't handle being outside when it's hot or cold, so that is a nuisance.

I'm back volunteering - Meals on Wheels, cancer support groups, church wedding verger, and farm life, catering for ram sale visitors and shearers, hosting our daughter's engagement party for 100 guests during COVID restrictions, sees life normalising.

Opening for St Andrews

The garden looks reasonable following the party, so I've decided to open it again, as a fundraiser toward St Andrew's Strathalbyn Uniting Church restoration costs.

If anyone would like to contribute plants for the stall, or anything from anyone down sizing, I'd be happy to help out: always gaps to fill!

We'll do this on October 9th and 10th, offering Devonshire teas, a plant stall and bags of aged sheep manure for purchase.

John might even whip up some rustic garden art for sale; pieces he's made for ours always attract comment.

There won't be roses, but there'll be plenty of pretties that cope in spite of conditions, and me!

Would love you to visit.

