

Jen Engelhardt - April 2021



My earliest memories of any gardening experience are when living in Tranmere as a child and deciding to 'trim' back Dad's plant's hanging over the slate retaining walls he'd built. I recall his stern voice asking me to see him regarding any future pruning episodes! However, it didn't deter me and I was often found in the garden flossicking around or up in the trees just waiting for the day when I would turn the magical age of 10 and be allowed to mow the vast expanse of front lawn.

Our family move to Auchendarroch Mt Barker in my mid-teens gave a whole new meaning to the average family garden. Set over 5 acres+ of manicured lawns and gardens, Dad completed his Social Work degree and then decided to become the full-time gardener instead. As his gardening knowledge rapidly expanded so did ours, often unknowingly, as being teenagers we weren't terribly interested at this stage. However, the abundance of heritage roses that then grew there were breathtaking with Dad knew them all and Mum would

pick armfuls and place them in vases in our house section. Fond perfumed memories abound. My love of roses was born....

Upon branching out firstly into my own rental house in Mt Barker I slowly became interested in gardening, particularly growing some vegetables and proteas very successfully. An already established small Satsuma plum tree grew and thrived magnificently with some tender loving care and rewarded us with an abundance of fruit to share with family, friends and neighbours. Some already planted hydrangeas outside the lounge windows responded wonderfully to being cut back to almost stumps each year before bouncing back to 5'-6' high with huge heads of flowers. So much so, that people would often knock on the door requesting to cut some! The first sign of slightly green thumbs was appearing!

My next move was some 10 years later to Mannum on the Murray River where the soil and climate were poles apart from Mt Barker. Greeted with sandy soil and hot harsh weather with an annual rainfall of only 9.5", gardening became much more of a challenge. With only a small front yard to contend with but a large exposed backyard and a puppy that turned into a Houdini/wrecker of any tree, plant or lawn that was planted, any grand ideas that I was inspired to create were quickly demolished. Apart from a few evergreen Alders to provide much needed shade, some front lawn, hardy salvias and pelargoniums nothing else survived. After a couple of years, we moved into an old stone home requiring major renovations with no garden (yet) overlooking the river, minus the dog who went to live with my parents (by now living in Moculta in the Barossa)

Developing a garden was a huge undertaking as the block was steeply sloped and required extra retaining using limestone found on the property. I became quite proficient at lugging rocks from A to B to form

extra retaining walls though was later horrified to realise the brown snakes loved to live in them. I spent years bringing in extra soil, mulches, compost and pigeon poo to improve the retained areas as I planted out a myriad of roses, huge amounts of salvias, daisies, some jacarandas for shade plus a few fruit trees. By the time we sold it looked so different, so colourful and wonderful! I took many slips of these roses to experiment with growing my own as we moved to NSW.

A sea of green greeted me when my husband proudly showed me the weatherboard he'd bought in central NSW Condobolin, (his new workplace) but alas the front and backyards were wall to wall caltrop! What an experience as I dug huge swathes of it out, constantly walked over the areas with thongs to remove the burrs then set about planting kikuyu lawn in designated areas. Then daily patrols removing each new caltrop seedling until eventually the lawns were too thick to allow anything to penetrate! In between times, I set about planting my rose slip cuttings now bearing plentiful roots as well as other cuttings of salvias, hydrangeas, and other plants I'd been experimenting with, all with great success. With very hot Summers and wild dust storms then minus temperatures and hard frosts during Winter I wondered what would survive but was proud that all thrived and continued to do so after we left.

Back to Mannum for a few years and the harsh realities of anaerobic sandy soils, despite constant additions of organic matter and mulch didn't appear to improve in our windswept part of the world. Though I grew 100's of Trees for Life seedlings indigenous to our area, even with the constant weekly bucket waterings many of them struggled. In the drought years with sometimes 4" of annual rain it was the undoing of the garden and me.

Nearly 5 years ago we moved to Strathalbyn and this is where I believe I've finally found my 'happy' gardening place as the

climate is much kinder than most places I've lived before. The large Norfolk Island pine that resided in our front yard required removing after dropping many very large branches over time without warning, creating a danger. However, it has given me the opportunity to create a garden 'as I go' that doesn't have any fixed plans. As we have a very unusually shaped corner block it has allowed me to create odd shaped lawns and garden beds using rocks (lugged from my husband's shed block) and path edging from old red bricks rescued from our interior house alterations. I've lost count of the tonnes of gravel I've moved for the paths!

Before any of this began, I barrowed 5 tonnes of gypsum and tonnes of topsoil into the area as we have quite heavy clay here. Then the fun finally began just on 3 years ago as I installed underground watering systems, lay instant couch turf then planted out smoke bushes, brugmansias, gauras, buddlejas, crepe myrtles, crab apples, salvias, penstemons, swan bush, milk weed, lavenders, agastache, lilacs, jacarandas, magnolias (poor success) wisteria, statice and lots of bits shoved in between! There is no rhyme or reason to my garden and definitely no order as rhubarb, herbs and tomatoes randomly feature in the side rose garden! Formerly a rose garden overgrown with couch grass housing only a few straggly roses, it is now a joy to gaze at from our kitchen window with 28 roses. Of course, there are plenty of other roses bought and scattered throughout the garden as they are my greatest love, inspired by my Dad's love of them.

Though I grow a few vegies – mainly Tommy Toe tomatoes, radishes, spinach and cucumbers I'm waiting patiently for our potato bins to become Wicking Beds. However, my husband now aspires to turn to aquaculture instead so we will wait and see...

In the meantime, I look forward to gaining a lot more knowledge and inspiration from all of you here at Garden club!