

Shirley Pitman - August 2021



A move to the Hills

I grew up on a ¼ acre block in Ascot Park, Adelaide with my parents and three siblings - I was the only one keen on gardening.

My father (Dad) grew fruit trees and vegetables and Mum had her flower garden.

We always had a dog, chooks, pigeons and ferrets.

Mum and Dad preserved fruit, made jams and dried apricots.

From as soon as I could walk I helped Dad in the vegie garden.

Dad gave me a little plot to grow some plants - I soon filled my space and quietly dug it a bit bigger as I gardened.

I would overhear Dad say to Mum, "that patch of hers seems to be getting bigger."

Growing the garden

I would wander around to the neighbours' gardens getting bits and pieces of different plants to take home and plant in my garden - I continued to love my garden, much more than school. When a horse left a deposit in the street, I was first out to gather the manure for my garden.

The first fern house

As a teenager my 'boyfriend' offered to build me a fern-house.

I asked Dad if he could and was told it had to be "down the back of the vegie garden."

Having finished it, Dad said that if he thought it would end up that good he could have built it nearer the house.

A few years later I married my 'boyfriend' and we bought a ½ acre block at Salisbury Heights.

Before we built the house we set out the orchard and planted fruit trees and vines.

We carried water cans in our little car to water our precious trees.

After we had moved into our new house for just a year, my husband (Ross) was offered a 'short-term' position in Kalgoorlie during the mining exploration boom times.

We ended up staying for four years - three in Perth.

With two young children and living in rental properties, my gardening was limited to growing some vegies, native orchids and a few potted ferns.

We enjoyed many road trips to see the amazing wildflowers of Western Australia.

Returning to rebuild

When we returned to Adelaide our 'new' house and garden had been somewhat trashed by the tenants that we let the house to during our time way.

Ross built me two glasshouses and a large orchid and Bromeliad shade-house - I quickly filled all three as well as growing vegetables.

I also had a large in-ground fish pond with many goldfish and an extensive colourful cottage garden.

The pond also grew in size each time Ross was away travelling for work.

Beau the turkey

We always had a dog, chooks and ducks, and a cantankerous turkey called 'Beau', more commonly called 'Beau the b.....d'.

On washing days, he would grab the trouser legs and towels under the clothes line and twist them round-and-round.

Worse still, he would sing and dance about and then lash out with his feet, once tearing my jeans.

On one occasion he chased me to the back door, which, to his immense amusement, my son had locked so that I could not escape the angry turkey.

We preserved fruit and made jams and marmalade, as well as drying apricots and pears. Ross kept four beehives for pollination and honey production.

The Open Garden scheme

In more recent years we were encouraged to 'open' our garden under the Australian Open Garden scheme.

We did this for three years in a row and were delighted with the comments from visitors complimenting us on the diversity of plants, fruits and nuts.



Metre long parsnip.

As well as the stone fruits, citrus, berries and vines Ross was interested in subtropical fruits and successfully grew avocados, bananas, custard apples, coffee, dragon fruit, guavas, longans, white sapote and Macadamia nuts.

We had 50 happy years there starting from a bare patch to a green and colourful shaded oasis where our three children grew up, thrived and eventually left home. All are interested in growing plants.

A move to the Hills

Two years ago we decided it was time

to slow down and move to a smaller 702 square metre property in Mount Barker.

I managed to sell hundreds of my potted plants before we moved, sufficient to buy a new glass house.

We still managed to bring many van loads of potted fruit trees and my ferns, orchids and begonias, quickly filling our new patch.

My new smaller glasshouse and even smaller shade-house are completely full and I have started growing vegetables again.

We have yet to plant out our fruit trees.

The natural heavy clay soil, higher rainfall and heavy frosts are challenging and caused us to reconsider the plants we grow.

Many tons of loam and garden soil have been used to improve our chances of success.

Settling in and planting up

We are enjoying life in Mount Barker and living in our architecturally styled and very comfortable new home, with its central courtyard garden.

I cannot wait to plant it out with Japanese maples, begonias, cliveas, ferns and hellebores and to install a large fishpond.

At every opportunity I am in the garden - my happy place!

To fill in my spare time and to meet new people I have joined the Strathalbyn Garden Club and what a lovely friendly club it is.



A shaded area at the Pitman home.