



Promoting the enjoyment, knowledge and benefits of gardens and gardening

Open Gardens South Australia

Welcomes you to

The Slate Garden

Saturday 14th & Sunday 15th September, 2019 4 Matthews Street, Willunga

The Slate Garden is located on one of the original half-acre blocks (2,000 sq m.) first surveyed in 1839, at the time of the official settlement of Willunga. Our extensive use of slate is part of our homage to Willunga's heritage. You can also see this salute to tradition in the post and rail fence at the front, the use of herbs and other cottage plants, and our ruin (more on that later).

We purchased this block when it was part of a large paddock and the only plants were the two (still existing) grey box gums, some grass and lots of Paterson's Curse (Salvation Jane). One of the first things we needed to do was build a retaining wall to halt the erosion of soil at the back of the house. The use of slate from the local quarries two kilometres away was used to create a slate courtyard, which led to more slate walls, then a seat, a fernery and so on.

Our other priority was to improve the soil. Perhaps this is a bit deceptive, as the truth is we did not have much soil – only about a centimetre's worth. After the application of many tons of cottage compost, we now have a thriving, wormy medium in which to grow things.

When you enter the *Slate Garden* from St Matthews Street, you may notice that the verge is covered with plants. We made the decision to plant the verge to displace weeds and if our local council needs to dig up the verge, they may do so without angst. Life is too short for mowing, so we have no lawn. Instead, we have a number of paths winding through the garden, with the odd seat for relaxation.

Most of our garden is extremely hardy. We use succulents for their variety of foliage shapes, bouganvillea, geraniums and pelargoniums for colour, and Australian natives because we love them. One interesting feature of the front garden is the ruin. Paddy had always loved coming across ruins from colonial times in the bush, with naturalised plants mixing with natives. Thus we decided to build our own ruin and try to achieve a similar ambiance.

We avoid pesticides and chemicals wherever possible and we are actively encouraging the birds and other wildlife. Lavender loves the climate here, and prolifically self-seeds. We have a lot of bees, and when the lavender flowers are heavy with oil, we enjoy the sight of parrots rolling around the tops of the plants. You will see the odd rock pile to encourage lizards, and, of course, they love the slate. The dry creek bed sometimes runs when the rain is persistent, and the tiny wetland is enjoyed by birds and insects. We have two water tanks to augment the rainfall. We do not have irrigation, as we tried using it in a previous garden, and spent most of our lives trying to find blockages. Now we prefer plants that can exist without regular additional watering. Most of the time our water consumption is equivalent to two people living in an apartment.

Open Gardens South Australia Inc: is a not for profit organisation opening private gardens to the general public. The purpose of Open Gardens SA is to educate and promote the enjoyment, knowledge and benefits of gardens and gardening in South Australia and to build strong public support for the development of gardens.

Web page: <http://opengardensa.org.au/>

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We have two vegie patches, which are fenced to keep out the rabbits. The fences are high so that we can roll shadecloth over them in the summer and still have access the vegie patches without having to grovel on the ground. We have busy lives, so vegetable and fruit growing is a small pleasure rather than a big commitment. Our little Fuji apple tree gives us a small number of extremely sweet apples, the mulberries make some lovely pies, and the figs are enjoyed during wetter years. Last summer, not even the parrots would eat the figs.

The garden beds are bordered by sleepers, slate or tree branches to delimit the paths from the beds. Over the years we have become more committed to sustainability, and now look for the local options, which need less transportation. The principles that underlie *The Slate Garden* are:

- to garden in harmony with the microclimate rather than fighting against it.
- to encourage wildlife and minimise the use of chemicals which may be harmful.
- we believe in gardening to live well, not living to garden well.

The proceeds from *The Slate Garden* Open Day go to the Willunga Branch of the National Trust of South Australia.

Open Gardens South Australia is aiming to significantly reduce its impact on the environment and we hope you support us in this endeavour. Please return your garden notes as you leave so they can be reused and recycled.

The gardens that open for us are chosen to reflect a great diversity of styles and may even challenge the conventional view of what constitutes a garden. While aspects of a garden may not be to your taste, we urge you to celebrate this diversity. Please remember you are visiting a private home and show respect and sensitivity for the owners who have so generously shared their garden with you. Thank you.