

Friends of Edgars Creek Focus



The advantages of native gardens

It is deeply regrettable that there are not a far greater number of native gardens in Melbourne's inner and outer suburbs. Apart from the fact that native gardens are so obviously in complete harmony with the Australian environment and are green and fabulous looking at any time of the year, they have other important attributes.

Firstly, once the plants are established they really do not need watering except in times of extreme heat, and even then, depending on the varieties planted, are usually drought resistant, so there is a massive saving of water and labour hours.

Secondly, native gardens attract native birds and insects and detract snails and other European garden pests. Honeyeaters and parrots delight in the fruits and seeds of native trees and shrubs and it is exciting to have native birds in one's garden as opposed to pigeons, doves and sparrows. Prior to planting my first native garden, sparrows were the only inhabitants amongst European plantings. It was therefore a complete surprise and absolute thrill to see wattlebirds and White-naped Honeyeaters move in as soon as the first trees became established. As the trees grew taller, Musk Lorikeets and brilliant Rainbow Lorikeets arrived with their noisy happy chatter. The sound of summer has since been etched on my brain as that of Musk Lorikeets.



Thirdly, native trees provide much needed shade in summer and shelter in winter, resisting strong winds and protecting buildings from the elements depending on the size of trees and thickness of plantings. Strong winds will lift right over a thickly planted group of trees, the trees taking the severe lashings that would otherwise have been given to the building. More importantly, trees and plants give out oxygen during the day and absorb environmental dust and pollution, allowing a more 'breathable' environment even in the direst concrete-paved suburbs.



I have selected photos of some local gardens to show their unique beauty. It is a complete mystery to me as to why the exotic English plant is still preferred by the majority of garden owners. Native flowers are more subtle, more sweet and subdued, and infinitely more rewarding in the Australian 'place'.

Although we had some prior knowledge before planting, we found a free little booklet on indigenous plants published by Moreland City Council to be a valuable guide in selecting plants that are 'at home' in Coburg North and surrounds.

Continued overleaf

New Friends of Edgars Creek Committee

The 2011 FoEC AGM was held on 26th February, highlighting the many achievements of 2010.

The 2011 elected committee is:

President: David Pavone.

Secretary/membership secretary: Robert Urquhart.

Treasurer: Anita Morgan.

Non-elected positions:

Immediate past-president: Stephen Northey.

Works manager: Robert "Robstock" Burnett.

Website management: Nathan Matthews.

Please refer to www.foec.org.au for details of exciting upcoming events, information about Edgars Creek and contact details.

Look out for invasive water hyacinth

Water hyacinth presents a serious threat to the environment and the economy, as it can double its biomass in a couple of weeks in ideal conditions.

Water hyacinth has distinguishable purple flower spikes and fleshy round leaves that sit on the water's surface while its long roots occupy the water below. The plants form a dense mass of vegetation that impedes light penetration and movement through the water. Decaying plant parts can also affect water quality.



Due to illegal trade in markets and garage sales, water hyacinth has been found across the state. For example, an infestation, which originated from Melbourne, was found in a Halls Gap pond in the Grampians, 240 kilometres away.

Metropolitan Melbourne has also had its share of reported infestations, with more

water hyacinth plants being removed from Hawthorn, Reservoir, Caulfield North and Keysborough. Meanwhile,

an infestation of water hyacinth, found by Department of Primary Industries (DPI) staff near Orbost in 1987, is still being treated

more than 20 years later. The ability for water hyacinth to survive and continue to re-emerge after repeated treatments shows the importance of regular monitoring by DPI, and continued vigilance.

Awareness, prevention and early detection are the best tools in the fight against this weed and will hopefully prevent water hyacinth invading key ecologically valuable water bodies. It is more important than ever to look out for this weed when visiting markets, garage sales, friends' backyards and waterways.

Please stay alert for this pretty, but invasive, weed and report any sightings to the DPI on 136 186.



Erin Cox Weed Alert Incursion Controller, DPI

The advantages of native gardens *(continued from page 5)*

At our home in Coburg North we have taken out a number of dark and gloomy European trees which failed to provide food for native birds, and in fact debilitated the soil drastically. We left the ground fallow and covered with native mulch for several months before we embarked on new planting. In order to try and avoid desecration when we no longer live here (as happened in a previous home), we have planted a shrubby low maintenance garden with lots of grasses that have proved extremely attractive. In two years this new garden has flourished, obviously 'at home' here. It possesses a rare and distinct beauty. The flowers bloom in various shades of blue, red, yellow and white and while not heavily perfumed, like roses and camellias, they are infinitely easier to look after and are far more comfortable in our harsh climate. They 'belong'.

The only eucalypts are two existing small trees, and our planting of four dwarf *Leucoxylo*ns to give background structure, provide extra shade to the south side of the house, and to attract parrots. These *Leucoxylo*ns will not grow to an excessive height



and can in fact be trimmed if necessary. In this way we hope that the next owners will keep the garden largely as is and not plant roses.

In the neighbouring streets there are several extraordinary examples of native gardens. One in particular stood out for its beautiful and interesting design, incorporating two ponds which are home to countless happy frogs. This garden has a particularly restful and private serenity, a magical world away from its suburban surroundings. All of the gardens that I looked at are extremely attractive and have provided a home for colourful native birds. They are all easily maintained.

In the context of this newsletter I am obviously preaching to the converted. But do tell anyone who is contemplating making a new garden, or even changing the old one, the real environmental benefits of saving water and the pleasure to be taken in the quiet beauty and 'rightness' of indigenous native plants.

Betty Snowden (edited)