

La Trobe's Cottage Garden News

Autumn Update – March 2013



Sunflower in front of the Cottage

Summer has been kind to most of the garden this year but not to our only sunflower or bees. On the Thursday in early January when the temperature hit over 40C, we were worried that the garden would be burnt to a crisp but when we checked it the next day to our surprise we found that our sun flower (the only one the snails hadn't eaten) was in very good shape, in fact thriving. But unfortunately we discovered in February that the kernels were hollow, meaning that they hadn't been pollinated by the bees. When it is really hot or cold, the bees stay home and therefore the pollen isn't transferred from the male anther to the female stigma, so no seeds develop. We were very disappointed because we had hoped to sow some seed for next summer and also to sell some to raise money for the garden.

Our Christmas Carols evening went off without a hitch, although we did think the Cottage was on fire at one stage, when the new sprinkler system in the Domain kicked in. What looked like smoke was actually water spray and thank goodness the sprinklers were on half circles or everyone would have been soaked. But luckily that didn't happen as Sam from Citywide saw what was happening. Sprinkler systems can be controlled by satellites these days, so he sent a message that bounced up to the satellite and thankfully the sprinklers were turned off.

What's Happening in the Garden at the Cottage?

The Elm bed is finally looking established. The lavender flowered beautifully, the plumbago is hanging out the fence creating the appearance of a rough and tumble garden and after the summer weather everything will need a good cut-back. Some odd things have happened this season, one of them being the sweet peas that have flowered right through summer. They aren't supposed to be heat lovers, so normally finish flowering in spring, but ours have been blooming away.

Another odd thing was the *Glycine latrobeana* under the *Eremophila maculate* (Turkey bush) developed a flower. We thought they were dormant over summer, so were very excited about the flower, only to be disappointed that it seemed to start rotting. The water system is to blame because in the wild the ground would be dry, however because the watering comes on every second day it is too wet.



Sweet Peas flowering

The succulents along the back of the cottage are amazing. From having no roots and then being dumped on by rain regularly in 2012 (due to the cottage not having gutters) they have thrived. We have planted four heritage roses, *Rosa 'Arthur de Sansal'*, along the back of the cottage, as depicted

in Helen Botham's book *La Trobe's Jolimont – a walk round my garden*, page 39. It won't quite be the same, as we are not absolutely sure if they are roses in the drawing, but it is our interpretation.



Our Hollyhock

We have also been collecting seed from plants like English marigolds, hollyhocks, fox gloves and nasturtiums that self seed and have sold quite a number of packets to raise money for the garden.

Snails have been troublesome this year, but the old method of hurling them over the fence and hoping the magpies get them seems to work fairly well. We are going to have to devise a better strategy next summer, however, to ensure that we get more than one sun flower plant.



A Spider in her web

We found this spider making herself at home in the garden. She had spun her web between two roses along the veranda by the back door of the dining room. She is gorgeous and we decided to leave her there in the hope that she would catch unauthorised insects such as white fly or aphids.

The apples have survived summer reasonably well. We think they were attacked by Cherry Pea Slug, which is a horrible grub that is black and slimy. It skeletonised the leaves (the clue that it was Cherry Pear Slug) so we decided to band the stems, using a tape that is sticky and catches anything that crawls up or down the tree. It was a horrible job, as it was very fiddly and sticky. Apples are notorious for getting fruit fly and codling moth, so we thought it was important to do this. Our Ribston Pippin decided to flower at the odd time of February and consequently four apples have formed. Because they have formed so late in the season, we do not think they will develop into anything but we are leaving them to see what happens.



Malus 'Pomme de Neige'



Malus 'Ribston Pippin' apples forming

Mention in Garden Despatches

We would like to thank Rick from Citywide and volunteer guide Neville for their help at the working bee in early March when the temperature was above 33C, in humid conditions. There were jobs that needed to be done. The creepers around the veranda posts had gone wild and we were surprised not to find a volunteer who had gone missing when opening the shutters. We then attacked the Elm bed. Rick cut back the succulent ground cover *Aptenia cordifolia* (Baby sun rose) that had invaded areas it shouldn't have, while Neville finished pruning the lavender and cut back the *Iris unguicularis* (Californian Iris). We also did a couple of jobs that had been on the agenda for a while, including cutting down the possum damaged *Cordyline australis* (New Zealand Cabbage tree) to the ground. It will regrow.

Finally, other exciting news is that our *Camellia japonica* 'Anemoniflora' that we had ordered from the Growing Friends of the Botanic Gardens have struck and are in the Friends' care until they are big enough to survive on their own in our garden.



Leonotis leonurus Lions ears



Pelargonium inquinans



Acacia acinacea syn.
Acacia latrobei
Gold-dust wattle