



Windspiel Garden

Upper Sturt, Adelaide Hills

Welcome to Windspiel Garden (*German for “wind play” or “wind chime”*). We hope you’ll enjoy your visit and stay to linger and enjoy a morning or afternoon tea.

History The house was built in 1998 by my husband Daniel McMichael. Coming from Scotland he often dreamt about owning a holiday home, to be close to nature and away from the city and hustle and bustle. His dream came true when he found this block, approximately 2000m² in size which sits on a ridge surrounded by stringy barks. Serious landscaping didn’t start until 2008 when I met Daniel – guess where? At a garden party. After our wedding in 2009 we embraced the challenge of turning our garden ideas into reality.

2009 One of the first projects was to pave the driveway and northern side of the house. The lovely weeping birch was planted in front of the house. A Manchurian pear was planted where now the lawn is. I also planted a little seedling of tree euphorbia on the left side of the house at the end of the drive way. Although it is very easy to propagate by seed, it seems to be a very rare plant indeed, I’ve never seen one in a nursery.

2010 Our son Henry was born, once he was a few month old he joined me in the garden, strapped in his pram, while I was weeding and trying not to fall down the hill. After a year or so he learned some strange sounds indeed. It took me a while to realise that the gugu gagagaga was him trying to imitate the kookaburras.

2011 With the help of our friend Ben Ellickson (a landscape architect) we came up with a design and a plan on how to overcome the challenges of the steep, sloping land. Steps were built and terraces with retaining walls, more trees were planted and a lawn was laid. Along the outer edge we planted carpet roses in various colours.

2012 After much debate about where the vegetable garden should go, we agreed to have it at the bottom of the garden. One little advantage is that we get to chat with our nice neighbours. (We occasionally swap plants, produce or advice.)

2013 We created a winter creek that leads down to the pond, established a fern bed at the top of the creek, planted a lemon tree (*Eureka*) and moved the trampoline over the enviro cycle to hide it.

2014 The groundwork for the pond started, however we didn’t get to finish it until October 2016.

We planted a row of silver birches (*Betula utilis var. jacquemontii*) on the side of the creek.

Below the lawn a row of dwarf citrus trees was planted (*Imperial mandarin and Washington navel*),

In the top garden we planted a variety of succulents and mulched them with fine pebble stones. I was inspired by seeing this in the Adelaide Botanic Garden.

2015 We bought an ornate Victorian style iron gazebo which is now covered by a white flowering clematis. We first planted a wisteria’s to cover it but found it too heavy for the delicate looking structure.

2016 We planted an additional 60 shrubs along the boundaries of the top garden (callitris, dodonea, and woolly bush) to provide more screening from the road and neighbours.

Henry's long awaited cubby house was built. We wanted to create a natural looking play area that blends in well with the surrounding landscape.

We completed the pond and decking. Nothing like a bit of pressure from committing to an open garden.

2017: We built new compost bins to help us better recycle our garden waste.

Henry wanted a Japanese style garden around his cubby house so we planted some bamboo, grasses and box which he likes to prune.

2018 Top garden: The aim was to create a water wise garden that is less dependent on irrigation. We expanded and finetuned the succulent area. A quasi hedge of dwarf eucalypts (Baby Orange) was planted to separate the succulent garden from the rest.

2019 Top Garden: We built a dry creek to harness the storm water which used to run down the road. Using the stones from our garden we managed to save a bit of money and utilise what was already here.

2020 An era is coming to an end. We have decided to sell our lovely property and move to one in Mylor (with more land). There we intend to create another magical place, hopefully ready for garden openings in the near future.

Garden Philosophy Our aim was to create a beautiful and productive garden, a magical space for children and charming place for endless afternoon teas.

Considerations and Challenges

Poor Soil Several tonnes of good garden soil and compost were purchased to improve the rocky, clay soil. Gypsum was also added for better drainage.

Climate The climate is temperate, however it also displays characteristics of a Mediterranean climate. On rare occasion there are mild frosts. Summers get very hot and winters can bring a lot of rain.

Bushfire Risk A large, highly combustible Radiata pine tree close to the house was removed. Several deciduous trees were planted below the house (on the northern side) to create a bushfire barrier.

Privacy As a visual and sound barrier from traffic and neighbours, a variety of mainly native shrubs were planted along the boundary lines and roads.

The dreaded weeds In 2008, when I moved in, the garden had an amazing variety of weeds. Watsonia, gorse, periwinkle, ivy, blackberries and couch, just to name a few, grew in abundance. Many hours were spent weeding, until we reluctantly resorted to spraying with glyphosate. We don't spray the weeds any more. The odd ones that appear are pulled out by hand or burned off with a weed wand. Once we had the weeds under control the motto was "Mulching, Mulching and more Mulching". This made a huge difference not only in keeping weeds down, but also improving the soil quality. Yippee – we now have worms.

Pests and diseases

We have had a problem with cherry slugs on our ornamental pears and horizontal hawthorns. I've heard that wood ash dusted over them works, I will give that a try this summer.

We removed all of our Chinese elm trees because of an elm tree infestation.

Thank you also to our friends, the Stirling and Hills Garden Club and The Hills & Blackwood Circle of Friends. And a big thank you to our gardener, Graham Hill who works one day per week and has done a wonderful job in helping us over the past 8 years.

Daniel and Gisela McMichael