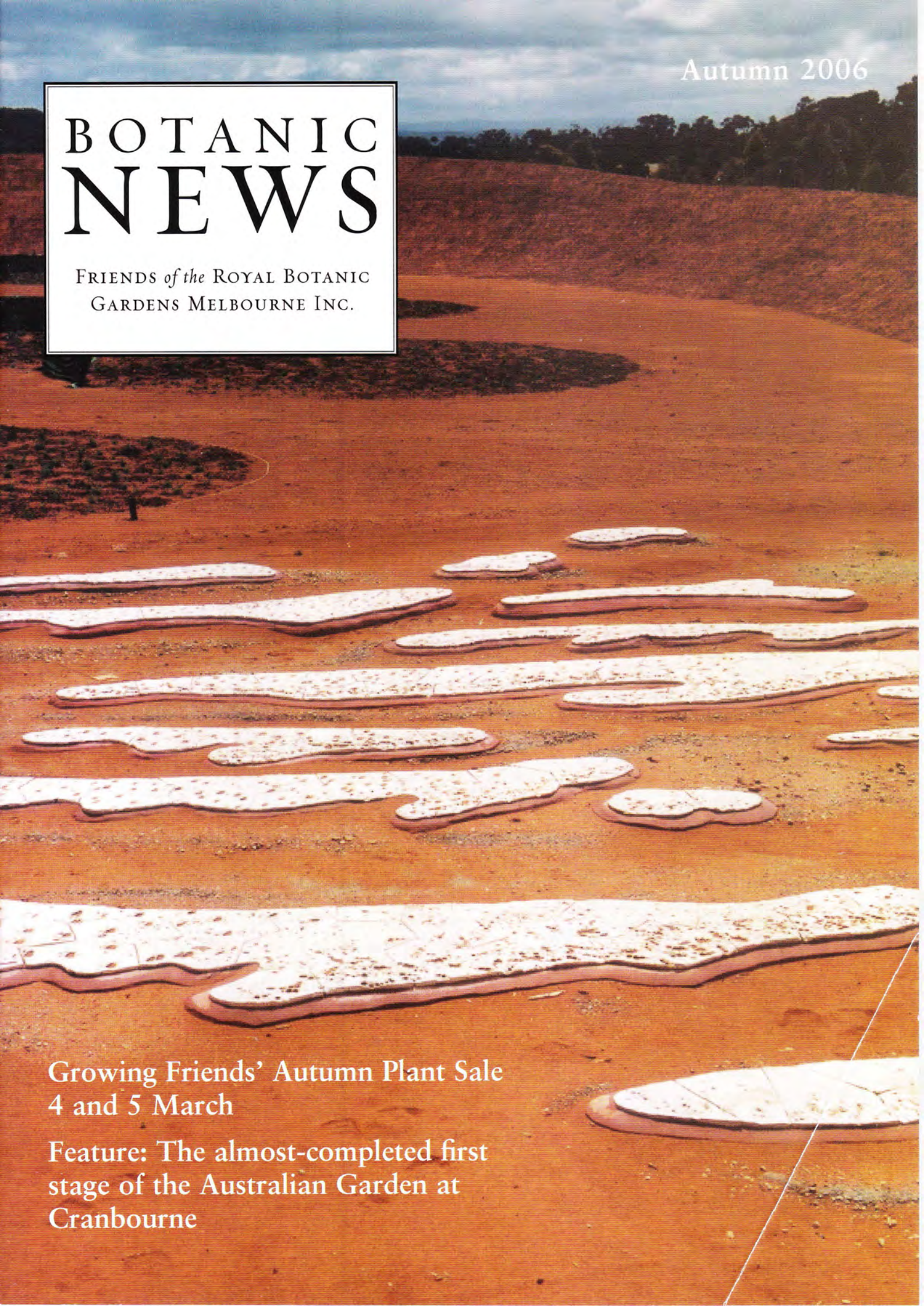


Autumn 2006

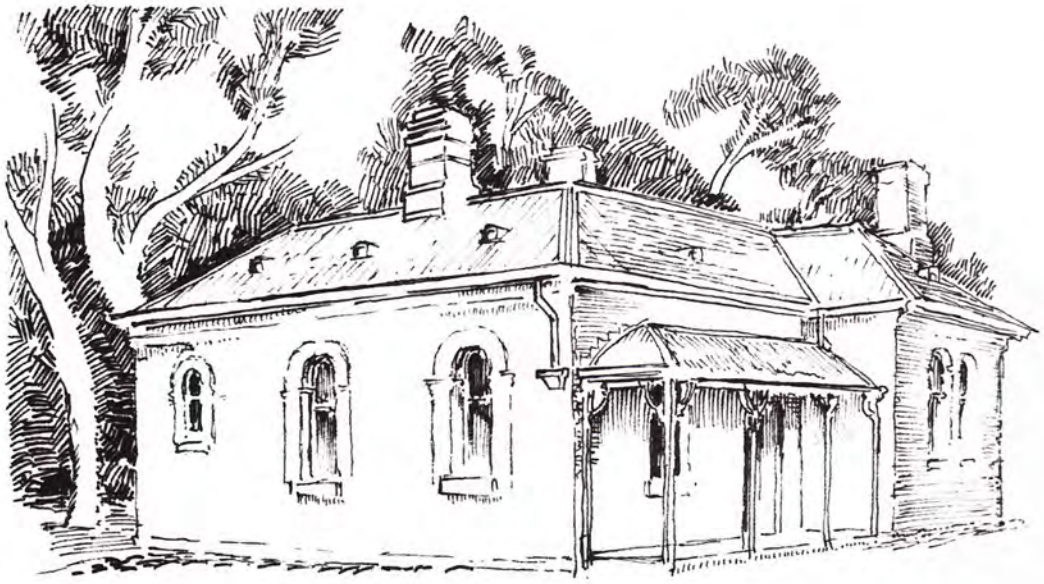
BOTANIC NEWS

FRIENDS *of the* ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS MELBOURNE INC.

Growing Friends' Autumn Plant Sale
4 and 5 March

Feature: The almost-completed first stage of the Australian Garden at Cranbourne

FROM THE PRESIDENT



There's nothing like a good party to bring to an end a wonderful year. The Friends' Christmas dinner held at the Alexandra Club was a splendid occasion. A record number of Members and their guests – 121 in all – attended. Longtime supporter of the Friends, Sarah Guest, was our after-dinner speaker. Her entertaining talk looked at the way in which flowers were portrayed in two art exhibitions involving flowers – *Everlasting: the Fashion of Flower and Textiles* at the NGV International and the exhibition of Margaret Preston's paintings and woodblocks at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia.

In November, Council members and Committee conveners were entertained by the Cranbourne Friends. This included being taken around the emerging Australian Garden. Its unique design is now apparent. The volunteer efforts of the Cranbourne Friends have contributed greatly to the Garden's development. The Australian Garden is due to open on 28 May but there will be several opportunities before then for Members to see what is happening and to be involved in the pre-opening preparation, so don't miss out. See pages 3, 5, 8, 11 for more information.

The Melbourne Friends have much to look forward to this year. The first big event will be the Growing Friends' Autumn Plant Sale on 4 and 5 March. It has been brought forward to this earlier date because of the Commonwealth Games. I urge you to take advantage of the opportunity to buy a wide range of skilfully propagated plants. Many of these are not available elsewhere, and all plants included in the sale meet the high standard set by the Royal Botanic Gardens to ensure the exclusion of any species with weed potential.

As always, the Activities Committee has been working very hard and efficiently to ensure that a wide range of interesting and enjoyable talks, tours, behind-the-scenes visits and other activities will be scheduled during the year. In November the Botanical Illustrators will, once again, hold their Exhibition, *The Art of Botanical Illustration* – always an exciting and very special event.

I would like to remind Members that, because of the Commonwealth Games, the Friends are not running any Botanical Illustration classes or other activities during March. Parking near the Friends' office may be difficult around the time of major events such as the Road Cycling Race and the Marathon.

On behalf of all Members, I would like to congratulate those of our number who were recognised in the Australia Day Honours List this year. Their achievements are rightly acknowledged.

The continuing support of our Members is vital in ensuring the success of the Friends into the future, and I look forward to seeing many of you during the year.

Irwin Newman

Pictured: Aspects of the Rockpool Waterway section of the Australian Garden at Cranbourne. Photos: Dr Angela Kirsner

FROM THE GARDENS AND HERBARIUM

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Front Cover: Ephemeral Lake sculpture dramatically realised on natural red sand.
Photo: Dr Angela Kirsner

Photo: Janusz Molinski

Herbarium-mounted specimen

Australian Garden

The coming year will bring various projects to fruition for the Royal Botanic Gardens, and the opening of the first stage of the Australian Garden at Cranbourne in May will be the highlight.

The Visitor Centre complex (pictured left), designed by Kerstin Thompson Architects, is extremely impressive. The selection of materials complements the surrounding landscape and overall design of the Garden. Construction is now complete, and the fitting out of the shop and café is well underway.

The Visitor Centre Café will be operated by well-known Melbourne restaurateur Andrew Blake and his catering company Blake's Feast.

Commonwealth Games

The exterior of Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne is to play an exciting role in the Commonwealth Games as the setting for the Road Cycle Race on 25 and 26 March. The race circuit runs along Birdwood Avenue, with the start and finish line at the Observatory Gate Precinct. This will restrict public access as the area will be reserved for spectators during these two days. However all other visitor entry Gates will be accessible and the Royal Botanic Gardens will operate normally throughout.

Australian Virtual Herbarium

The Australian Virtual Herbarium (AVH) project will finish at the end of June 2006. It has been extraordinarily successful and we are delighted with the achievements of the AVH team. Since the inception of the project in September 2001, the team has databased almost 440,000 herbarium specimens, bringing the total number of records on MELISR (the Herbarium database) to more than 740,000. Over the course of the project, the team has also verified over 90 per cent of the records that were entered prior to the project.

During 2005, the Herbarium volunteers reached a milestone by completing the mounting of the Australian component of the main Collection. The team will soon finish checking and entering the Australian Type Collection, before moving on to update the Herbarium's collection of 30,000 fungi.

This five-year project has been a collaboration between Australian capital city herbaria, and was funded by the State and Federal Governments. Its remarkable success would not have been possible without the input of those involved in curating specimens in preparation for data entry. Thanks to the combined efforts of the Herbarium volunteers, the William Buckland Foundation Mounting Project team and Herbarium curation staff, some 100,000 specimens have been mounted since 2001.

The wide-ranging benefits of the AVH project are evident from the steady increase in the usage of the AVH website: www.rbg.vic.gov.au/avh/

Requests for data through the website have increased two-fold over the last two years, with over 40,000 requests serviced in 2005 (an average of 3,400 per month).

Tourism Awards

The RBG won two major awards at the 2005 Victorian Tourism Awards held on 21 November 2005. The Gardens Shop won the Tourism Retailing Award for the second consecutive year, and The Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden won the New Tourism Destination Award. We are delighted with these achievements, particularly as it is most unusual for the one organisation to win two Tourism Awards in the same year. It is a great public acknowledgement of the skills and dedication of our staff, confirming that we are setting and achieving the highest standards for the experiences we provide for our visitors.

New RBG Products

In conjunction with RBG Sydney, we have been working for several years with Outback Plants Pty Ltd in developing a range of commercial garden products including plants, potting mix and fertilisers.

This is an exciting program for the two Gardens, allowing us to introduce proven garden plants and associated products and contributing to our goal of keeping the Gardens relevant to our communities.

The plants were first stocked in Victorian Bunnings stores in February, and the other products will be introduced into six selected Bunnings stores in March for a three-month trial. If successful

the potting mix and fertilisers will be expanded through the Bunnings network in Spring.

Royalties from sales of these products will help support the work of the Gardens by providing a potentially important new income stream.

An insert in this *Botanic News* provides information about the products. Please help both your garden and the Royal Botanic Gardens grow by purchasing these excellent products in a Bunnings store this Autumn!

Gardens Shop

Between now and April the Tourism award-winning Gardens Shop will sell a wide range of official Commonwealth Garmes merchandise, including placemats, mousepads, teatowels, playing cards, stationery, umbrellas and books relating to the big event – collectors welcome.

Philip Moors

Heliotrope arborescens 'Lord Roberts' *one of the plants whose sale will benefit the Gardens.*

Dermot Molloy's position at the RBG is Horticultural Technician, which involves full time propagation of plants for the RBG.

Dermot began his working life as an apprentice nurseryman at Acorn Nursery (which won the Medium Garden Centre of the Year in 2005) in Surrey Hills in 1986. The apprenticeship included formal training at Oakleigh Horticultural College (now Holmesglen TAFE). Prior to commencing the apprenticeship, he successfully completed his final HSC equivalent year at Oakleigh Technical College after attending St Leo's College in Box Hill.

While growing up, Dermot watched his parents tend their vegetable patch and large garden and began tending his own small garden. Through this interest, Dermot became involved with a neighbour across the road who had a 'real children's garden'. This garden contained perfumed plants, twisting paths, steps up and down and shrubs to hide behind. The neighbour shared material with Dermot and taught him some of the finer details of growing one's own as is common among enthusiastic gardeners. An interest in specific details was developed, including knowing the botanical names of plants as well as their common names. In short, Dermot was hooked.

After graduation, the urge to take some time for himself saw Dermot take a year's sabbatical, travelling to Asia, Ireland, England and Europe, including Greece where he worked for six months doing

Photo: David Robbins

construction and landscaping. On his return, he began a landscape design business (Coolquay Garden Design), starting with garden maintenance and lawn mowing, gradually taking on more complex aspects of design, including paving and building retaining walls. Five years of such hard and generally poorly-paid work was enough, so he closed the business in favour of steady paid employment at a Hawthorn nursery for a year. From there, he became Head Gardener at Invergowrie in Hawthorn, the first Premier of Victoria's residence, later a domestic science school for girls and now a heritage-listed building with three acres of garden to appreciate and care for. Here Dermot worked 45 hours a week, gaining huge job satisfaction, but again finding himself burning out so after five years, and spurred on by a wish to learn more about his craft, he applied for a horticultural technician's job at the Royal Botanic Gardens.

Propagation involves taking material from all over the Gardens and growing plants for internal and external clients, which provides a marvellous overview of the whole site. Part of his job is as Curator of the Nursery Cycad collection and his professional activities include membership of the Cycad Society and the International Plant Propagation Society. In both cases he finds the sharing of knowledge and expertise exciting and invaluable both for personal interest and job expertise.

Dermot has initiated a scheme in the nursery – growing commemorative trees for important visitors to plant, with the possibility that one will be planted during the Commonwealth Games. He is also working towards industry accreditation for the RBG nursery, feeling that guaranteed plant quality is very important for the future of the Gardens.

Having now fully landscaped his own garden, Dermot's passion for plants is still strong and sees him looking forward to a home with a bigger garden to work in, while continuing his lifetime interest in golf and travel.

Meg Miller

The Australian Garden Opens

It has been a decade in the making, so it will be with great excitement that the Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne opens the gates to the Australian Garden on Sunday 28 May 2006.

The Premier will officially declare the Australian Garden open, then a program of tours, entertainment and activities will be available for all visitors on the day. For this day only, entry will be free.

This new garden, unique in Australia. will range across 22 hectares,with a fresh new plant design enabling visitors to marvel at the diversity of Australia's plants and landscapes. The first eleven hectares of this garden will display 100,000 plants.

The inspiration for the Australian Garden derives from a desire to awaken Australians and international visitors to the remarkable plants of this continent, their adaptation to a diversity of conditions and their beauty and usefulness as plants for the home garden. Underpinning this is an interpretive philosophy that seeks to explore our relationship with the Australian landscape and our changing understanding of the continent in which we live.

The landscape design takes visitors on a journey from the red heart of the continent, following the ephemeral passage of water, to landscapes that are more familiar to those living on the eastern seabord of the continent. Water, and its presence and absence, is a powerful theme within the landscape design.

Two impressive sculptures are already in the first eleven hectares and we plan to install more works that will support the stories of the Australian Garden. Visitors will not miss the remarkable *Escarpment Wall* sculpture, which follows the passage of the Rockpool Waterway. Created by Greg Clark, this sculpture is nearly 100 metres long. *Ephemeral Lake,* a sculpture by Mark Stoner and Edwina Kearney, is made up of low relief, liquid-shaped ceramic plates on the ground. In a highly dramatic representation, this sculpture introduces the story of water in this arid continent.

The five Exhibition Gardens highlight ways visitors can use Australian plants in their own gardens. The designers were selected as part of a national design competition. Each garden represents a theme: the diversity of Australian plants; water conservation; the future garden; the home garden; and the children's backyard garden. All the plants displayed are available in local Australian plant nurseries.

The remarkable Red Sand Garden will make every visitor pause to marvel at its vastness and the striking contrast between the rich red sand and the grey foliage of inner Australia. The beautiful trees in Eucalypt Walk invite visitors to meander amongst their trunks and to smell their scents.

Visit the Australian Garden when it first opens, but make sure that you return. This is the first time since the 1870s that a public garden of this scale and quality has been created in Victoria. Imagine how the Lady Loch oak tree in the RBG Melbourne looked when it was planted in 1889, and then imagine the view your great-grandchildren will have of the trees in the Eucalypt Walk. This is your chance to see a great garden grow.

Essential information:

Entry price for adults is $9. Children aged 0 to 15 years, free entry. Concession $6.75.

Groups of ten people or more pay only $6.75 each.

Except for Christmas Day, the Australian Garden is open daily from 9.00am to 5.00pm. There will be seasonal extensions to these hours.

A complete list of programs is available at www.rbg.vic.gov.au/australian_garden

For bookings, call 5990 2245.

Eleanor Bridger, Manager, Marketing and Communication

Centre: Escarpment Wall and Rockpool Waterway
Photo: Janusz Molinski

Top left: Chrysocephalum Border on Dry River Bed
Bottom right: Xanthorrhoea (Victorian grass trees)
Photos: Dr Angela Kirsner

GROWING FRIENDS

Hydrangea aspera ssp sargentiana

Are you ready? Our next Plant Sale is on Saturday 4 and Sunday 5 March. Through the searing heat of summer the Growing Friends have been carefully nurturing another great range of plants in preparation for this Autumn Sale weekend. A number of favourites will be available again in typically limited quantities together with some rarely seen and interesting treasures. The Catalogue will be on sale from 9.15am on Saturday 4 March.

Many commonly grown plants are now known to be potentially invasive. The Growing Friends, with the help of the National Herbarium and Royal Botanic Gardens, are now focussing only on plants assessed as posing no threat to our highly-valued natural environment. With so many declared weeds still available in nurseries, markets, hardware stores and supermarkets, it is very difficult for home gardeners to know what can safely be planted. Valuable information is available in the Resource and Information pack (with emphasis on Victoria) of the Royal Botanic Gardens Weed Working Group, written by Roger Spencer. This excellent guide is available on the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne website, www.rbg.vic.gov.au

Because our Sale is earlier due to parking restrictions during the Commonwealth Games, we're keeping our fingers crossed that the plants on offer will show their full glory on cue. A very interesting range of Hydrangea varieties will be available, including *H. quercifolia* (oak-shaped leaves turning bronze-purple in autumn); *H.* 'Mme Emile Mouillere' (white mophead flowers that age to pink-tinged); *H. paniculata* 'Grandiflora' (large, pure white pear-shaped trusses); *H. luteo-venosa* (a small, compact shrub with clusters of creamy flowers); *H. paniculata* 'Floribunda' (a beauty that is late blooming and ideal for pots); *H. sargentiana* (small, pale purple flowers). In limited quantities, the Sale will include *Spiraea japonica* 'Golden Princess' (clusters of soft cerise flowers), *Dicliptera suberecta* (a useful groundcover with orange/coral tubular flowers), *Abelia grandiflora* 'Francis Mason' (changing leaf tones to golden-edged with white flowers), *Ceratostigma willmottianum* (an evergreen with clusters of deep blue phlox-like flowers with red autumn foliage) and *Eucomis comosa,* including the dark-leafed form. This striking bulb from the Hyacinthaceae family has strap-like very dark deciduous foliage and a thick, dense spike of reddish brown flowers overtopped by tufts of small bracts. Those Friends passing the Perennial Border on their visits to the Gardens will recognise and appreciate its qualities. It creates a striking and noteworthy border.

We'll have an abundance of outstanding Australian natives, a wealth of interesting bulbs, a profusion of enticing succulents, a distinguished medley of rare Vireya Rhododendrons, a tempting choice of hanging baskets, a fascinating array of camellias, a tantalizing selection of perennials, an alluring mix of iris, a beguiling assortment of shrubs, a developing variety of herbs and a remarkable collection of sarracenias. It's the ideal season to be planting. Crikey – save some time and put your gumboots on now.

Pamela Eames, Convener

Hydrangea paniculata 'Floribunda'

Photo: Wendy Henderson

Unique Opportunity

RARE RESURRECTION PLANTS FOR SALE

The Friends are fortunate to have been offered the donation of a small number of plants of two desiccation-tolerant flowering plants for sale. The plants are *Xerophyta villosa* (pictured) and *Xerophyta tricophylla*. If they dry out over Summer, the seemingly dead leaves recover a few days after the plants are rehydrated.

They are about 30 years old and with their remarkable properties, their rarity in Australia and their striking appearance, it is felt that the asking price of only $95 per plant is very generous. Plants should be kept in a glasshouse over the winter months and a Growth Guide will be supplied on purchase.

The plants can be obtained by contacting the Friends' office on 9650 6398.

GROWING FRIENDS

Meet a Growing Friend

GILLIAN KIRK

Photo: Meg Miller

The only person I remember meeting when I attended the morning tea for new Friends back in1989 was a smiling person standing quietly back from the crowd. This was Gillian Kirk. I asked if she knew how I could become involved with the Growing Friends group and she told me where and when – there was no dreaded waiting list in those days. Imagine my surprise to discover that the very same unassuming person I had met was the Convenor of the Growing Friends and at the same time was also the Convenor of the RBG Voluntary Guides.

Gillian says she has no formal horticultural training, but a lifetime interest in plants and nature, first encouraged by her father and then continued in her marriage to a man with similar interests. They learned through a lifetime of observation and reading.

In early 1988 the RBG Melbourne already belonged to the International Seed Exchange. Botanists from various herbaria around the world collected seed from their natural environment. From published lists of these seeds other members of the Exchange could order as required to plant and hopefully increase the member garden's collection. In Melbourne the seeds were planted in pots in the RBG nursery, but viability of the seeds was uncertain and at times there was a gross over-supply of seedlings.

Talks between the RBG and the Friends resulted in Gillian offering to start a scheme to grow on these excess plants and sell them, yielding a financial return to help the Gardens. Thus, together with the efforts of Dale McDonnell, Lydia Bartlett and others, the Growing Friends was born.

The scheme involved close co-operation with the RBG Nursery Manager, Josie Vaganiance, who helped with pots, soil, trolleys and demonstrations on how to prick out tiny leafed seedlings. A small group worked behind the Astronomer's Residence and then wheeled trolley loads of tubes of tiny plants all the way out along Birdwood Avenue, through F Gate and past the Perennial Border to the back of Gardens House. We could not go through the Gardens House garden as it was the residence of the Director at the time, Dr David Churchill. There was no watering system, so Gillian and her husband Neil came every day to hand-water the plants and remove fallen leaves and possum droppings, as the plants were stored under large trees.

The first plant sale was only six months later and an astounding $14,000 was the result! This was surely proof that the investment and hard work were worthwhile and the concept of the Growing Friends could be successful. A shade house and fence went up in a corner of the Observatory site, but the automatic watering system wasn't installed until well into 1989, so the daily hand watering continued – a mammoth task. Gillian has said that it was hard and exhausting work but that there were 'lots of joys' and 'you get something out only if you put in'.

Although there were people at the initial meeting and working group who contributed with knowledge, ideas and vision, I know that if the Friends had not had Gillian with her tenacity, persistence and perseverance the Growing Friends would not be the successful group it is today.

Sharon Beaman

Ed: *Part of this article is the address Sharon delivered when Gillian was awarded Life Membership of the Friends.*

Gillian has said that it was hard and exhausting work but that there were 'lots of joys' and 'you get something out only if you put in'.

Volunteering for Aust. Garden Working Day

Where: Australian Garden, Cranbourne
What: Preparing for Garden opening
When: Wednesday 29 March
from 9.30am to 3.00pm
RSVP by Monday 20 March to
Melissa Larcombe, 9252 2357,
or email:
Melissa.Larcombe@rbg.vic.gov.au

Most of the planting will be completed and growing by then, so volunteers will contribute by helping with preparation. Tasks may include weeding, tidying up, mulching – basically a working bee doing anything that may be helpful.

Come along and enjoy the opportunity to see, and be a part of, the creation of the Australian Garden.

For further details including what to wear, what to bring, lunch arrangements and time restrictions, please contact Melissa Larcombe, Executive Assistant in the Office of the Director, on 9252 2357 or email:
Melissa.Larcombe@rbg.vic.gov.au

Photo: Janusz Molinski

ACTIVITIES

The Australian Garden at Cranbourne

SELF DRIVE DAY TRIP

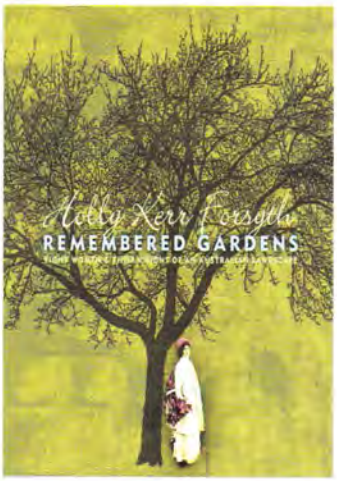
Sunday 19 March,10.30am sharp
COST: $8 Friends $5
RSVP by Wednesday 15 March
on enclosed booking form
The walk will be between one and two kilometres and unsuitable for wheelchairs, as not all pathways will be completed.
Please wear comfortable walking shoes and bring drinks

The Friends of Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne have invited us to morning tea and a tour of the 'soon to be officially opened' Australian Garden.

The tours will be conducted in small groups and will conclude at approximately 12.10pm. We will then move to the Stringybark Picnic Area for lunch, where there are toilet and barbecue facilities, but limited seating. BYO everything for lunch.

Take the Monash Freeway/ South Gippsland Highway through Cranbourne to the Ballarto Road exit and drive to the entrance to the RBG. (Melway Map 134, A10). Drive approx 800m, turn right at T-intersection, follow the signs to Administration Offices and park there.

* In the event of a TOTAL FIRE BAN, the whole excursion will be cancelled.



Remembered Gardens

ILLUSTRATED TALK

by Holly Kerr Forsyth
in conjunction with Australian Garden History Society
Tuesday 4 April at 6.00 for 6.30pm
Mueller Hall, National Herbarium
Cost: $20 Friends and AGHS $15
RSVP by Thursday 30 March
on enclosed booking form

Please join us for a glass of wine and savouries before the talk.
There will be signed copies of the book for sale

Holly Kerr Forsyth is a well-known gardening commentator who has been writing a garden page for *The Weekend Australian* for the past eight years. She is a qualified horticulturalist and garden designer, and an avid gardener.

Remembered Gardens is the story of eight women, including Elizabeth Macarthur and Edna Walling, whose passion for their gardens and gardening has shaped our relationship with the Australian landscape. A meticulous researcher, Holly brings to life these women's experiences. Their challenging and sometimes tragic stories are set against the backdrop of their gardens, which provided them with sanctuary and a way to express themselves in this often hostile environment.

Remembered Gardens is a joyful commemoration of more than two hundred years of gardening in Australia, and of the role of women in establishing our rich gardening heritage.

Autumn Weekday Insiders' Walk

THE LAKES AND LONG ISLAND

Wednesday 19 April at 10.30am
Meet at Gate Lodge (opp. Shrine)
Cost: $10 MEMBERS ONLY
NUMBERS LIMITED
RSVP by Friday 14 April
on enclosed booking form

Join us for morning tea and a brief information session at Gate Lodge before the walk.

This walk will follow the paths that circumnavigate the two main lakes in the Gardens.

First we will pass the colourful Perennial Border on the way to visit Long Island to check on the development of this fascinating natural part of the Lake which has been replanted to display the native vegetation characteristic of the lower Yarra wetlands before European settlement. We will then follow the shady paths past the Southern Chinese Collection, pass around near the tearooms, across bridges, taking in the magnificent vistas of Guilfoyle's landscape. What would it be like without the water?

We will return up the hill to Gate Lodge, pausing to view the magnificent Autumn tints along the way.

ACTIVITIES

Melbourne's Lanes

ILLUSTRATED TALK

by Weston Bate
Thursday 27 April
at 10.00am for 10.30am
Mueller Hall, National Herbarium
Cost: $20 Friends $15
RSVP by Monday 24 April
on enclosed booking form

Please join us for morning tea before the talk

Last year the Friends took a ramble through some of Melbourne's lanes, and were overwhelmed with the enthusiastic response. As a result we have invited Professor Weston Bate OAM 1997, Past President of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria and prize-winning author on Australian history, to speak to us on the topic.

Weston Bate is one of the finest historians of Melbourne, and his book *Essential but Unplanned* is a thorough history of Melbourne's lanes and alleys, with wonderful photographs and maps. He researches meticulously, writes in an entertaining manner and allows readers to draw their own conclusions.

This promises to be a highly informative talk. *Essential but Unplanned* is currently out of print, but can be found in many local libraries.

Autumn Fit Friends Ramble

MELBOURNE'S LANES – PART 2

Thursday 4 May
at 10.00am sharp
Meet at Federation Square
outside Melbourne Visitors' Centre
cnr Flinders and Swanston Streets
Cost: $15 Friends $10
RSVP by Friday 28 April
on enclosed booking form

Last year's Melbourne Lanes Ramble encompassed several of the historic and fascinating lanes abounding in the CBD.

Professor Weston Bate is to speak to us on the subject in late April (see above for details), and we are delighted to now put on the second half of the Melbourne Lanes Ramble, through lanes not covered in our first walk.

This will be a long walk and morning tea will be taken at a suitable watering hole.

Please wear appropriate clothing, good walking shoes and bring a water bottle. As always, be able to keep up a good walking pace.

Autumn Weekend Insiders' Walk

LOOK BOTH WAYS AT OUR MARVELLOUS MELBOURNE GARDENS

Sunday 7 May
at 10.30am
Meet at H Gate in Alexandra Avenue
Cost: $10 MEMBERS ONLY
NUMBERS LIMITED
RSVP by Friday 28 April
on enclosed booking form

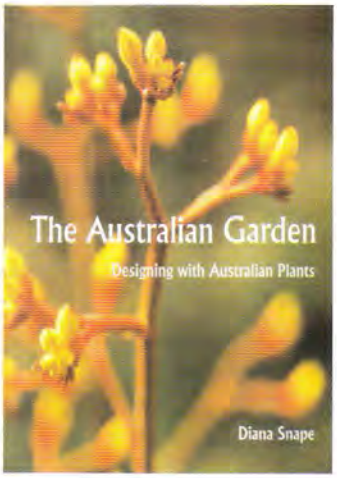
During this walk we will be shown historic photographs taken circa 1900 after the Director William Guilfoyle had made major changes to create a very fine garden in the English Landscape tradition.

The photographs give an accurate picture of what he did and it will be fascinating to see what remains today and what changes have occurred as time has gone by. Fashions in horticultural style and plants change, and today there are fewer beds in lawns and fewer decorative ornaments. The surrounding skyline has filled out and many of the young trees in the photographs are now large and mature specimens.

This informative walk will be led by a great admirer of Guilfoyle's vision and the hard work of subsequent directors and gardening staff.

NB: The walk will start at 'H' Gate in Alexandra Avenue.

ACTIVITIES



The Australian Garden: Designing with Australian Plants

ILLUSTRATED TALK

by Diana Snape
Wednesday 17 May
at 10.00am for 10.30am
Mueller Hall, National Herbarium
Cost: $20 Friends $15
RSVP by Friday 12 May
on enclosed booking form

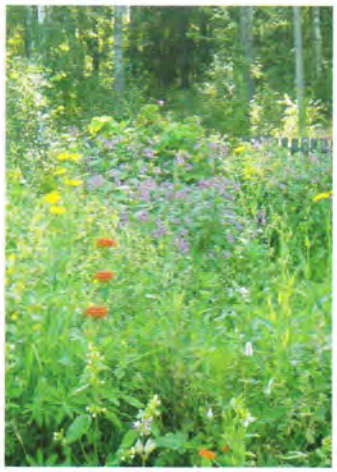
Please join us for morning tea before the talk.

Diana Snape is passionate about the garden she and her husband, Brian, created over a thirty year period and which is still evolving.

Diana declares "our garden celebrates nature's charms and strengths". Drawing on inspiration from the Australian landscape and the versatility of Australian plants in the design of gardens, she emphasises the need to work in partnership, not in conflict, with nature. There is a need to recognise and accept what the Australian environment has to offer.

This same belief and enthusiasm underlies the purpose and presentation of her book: to show how Australian plants can be used in all gardening situations and to challenge the reader to try to incorporate some of the ideas into their own gardens.

There will be signed copies of the book for sale.



Autumn 'Talking Plants' Morning

FROM PET TO PEST: INVASIVE PLANTS IN THE HOME GARDEN

Friday 19 May
at 10.00am
Meet at Domain House
on Dallas Brooks Drive
Cost: $10 Friends $8
RSVP by Monday 15 May
on enclosed booking form
Morning tea will be served

The Autumn 'Talking Plants' theme will be 'Garden Nasties: From Pet to Pest' or 'Where Did this Come From?'

We all face the problem of unwanted and alien plants in our gardens. Share your bewilderment and irritation with our knowledgeable person who has learned the hard way.

Bring samples of plant invaders from your garden to help us be alert, but no longer alarmed, about invasive plants.

The morning will be held in Domain House and will be an informal gathering of Friends with a common interest in plants and gardening. Following this, there will be the opportunity to visit the Growing Friends Nursery – which does NOT propagate any 'Garden Nasties'.

Melbourne Friends Overseas Travel

TOUR SUGGESTIONS

Recently the Friends' Overseas Travel Committee was formed as a sub-group of the Activities Committee.

We are delighted to be able to ask for your input in planning an overseas Garden Tour for 2007/08. In order for us to initiate an appropriate tour, we require your expression of interest.

To assist us in developing a program, please contact the Friends' office for a questionnaire. Email us at friends@frbgmelb.org.au or tick the special box on the enclosed booking form – be sure to include your contact details on the form.

We envisage a tour of approximately 14 days in duration, enabling private travel before or afterwards.

It goes without saying that we would work with a reputable travel company specialising in this type of tour.

ILLUSTRATORS

VIP Viewing of Progress at the Australian Garden, RBG Cranbourne

A GUIDED WALK

with Philip Moors, RBG Director
Tuesday 7 March
at 10.00 for 10.30am
Meet at the Australian Garden carpark (enter Main Gate, Melways 133K10, and follow the signs)
Cost $25. Funds support the development of the Australian Garden
Open to Members and Non-Members
Bookings essential by 2 March with Kirsty Hamilton 03 9827 0843 or kirstyhamilton@ozemail.com.au
Morning tea will be served following the tour.

Last October Philip Moors and guides showed a small group around the enormous worksite that's becoming the RBG's Australian Garden and shared some of the inside stories behind this magnificent new garden. There was an immediate demand for a repeat visit in the autumn for those who had missed out, and here it is.

Come for a preview of the red expanse of the Sand Garden, the cascades in the Rockpool Waterway, and the dramatic 80m-long Escarpment Wall sculpture, the newly planted Exhibition Gardens, and the impressive Visitor Centre. The Australian Garden displays and celebrates our continent's remarkable plantlife.

Wear sturdy shoes that can take a bit of mud. After the tour and tea, you can picnic at the Stringybark Picnic Area, visit Trig Point look-out, or walk through the bushlands and heathlands for excellent plant and bird spotting and maybe you'll encounter some koalas, echidnas or bandicoots.

Classes

Term 2 will start in the week beginning Monday 10 April 2006

Classes will be held on Tuesday evenings and in the daytime on Mondays, Wednesdays (two sessions) Fridays and Saturdays.
2.5hr classes: $245 (incl GST)
Friends $205 (incl GST)
3hr classes: $280 (incl GST)
Friends $240 (incl GST)

For further information on classes contact the Friends' office on 9650 6398.

Botanical Illustrators Meetings

Due to the Commonwealth Games, there will be no access to the Whirling Room during March. After discussion with the artists, we have decided to meet at different venues on two weeks and will work at home for the other two weeks .

Tuesday 14 March at 10.00am at Basaltica Waterwise Garden, North Altona. Melways 5H, J4. Enter through Gate 3, 21-43 Barnes Road, Altona North on the premises of the CRT Group, (phone 9290 1705)

Helene Wild has a gallery at Basaltica, with a large air-conditioned room where we can paint. Kitchen and toilets available. BYO lunch.

Wednesday 22 March, 10.30am. Visit to Cranbourne Gardens. Melways 134 A10.
Turn right at Ballarto Road to Gardens, drive down Stringy Bark Drive and then first turn right down to depot.

We will meet some members of the newly-formed Cranbourne Illustrators' Group who are meeting every fourth Wednesday in the Eucalyptus Room. BYO lunch.

Hopefully, we may have a tour of the new Australian Garden, but this will depend on the work being done at the time. Otherwise we'll walk in another part of the Gardens.

For more information, ring Judy Jarman on 9870 7236.

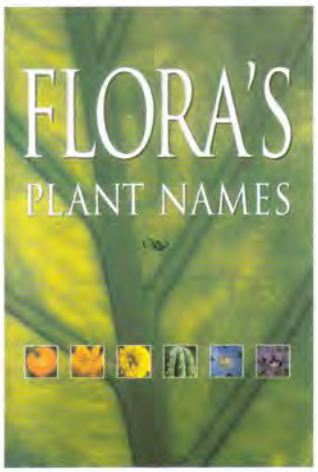
Whirlybirds

The new year for the Whirlybirds has begun with a flourish of enthusiasm, and interesting activities have been planned for March while the Commonwealth Games are in progress. We will resume on 11 April.

If you too are an enthusiastic botanical artist Friend and would like to join the group on Tuesdays, contact Sandra Sanger on 9598 9532 for further information.

Sandra Sanger at work in the Whirling Room. Photo: Judy Jarman

BOOK REVIEW



Bloomings Books, (2003)
RRP $24.95

We all know many plants only by their common names. They are usually evocative names and provide information about the plant in question.

Plant common names, however, can vary by district or country and are therefore unreliable as plant identifiers. To be confident we know which plant we are talking about we need to know its botanical name.

This Australian dictionary of common names – part of the Flora franchise – is very useful for finding the name and consequently a good resource when doing research about a particular plant at a nursery, in a catalogue or on the internet. The common name provided is Australian, and therefore will correspond with the botanical name of the researched plant.

The book provides the botanical name for more than 20,000 plants listed by their common names. Its format allows a search by both the standard and inverted form of the name.

Terri Kay

For many years, staff working in the National Herbarium of Victoria have patiently responded to the innocent enquiries of the visiting public who have sought to clarify for themselves its real purpose. The common question "Is that where the herbs are kept?" is greeted appropriately with the polite response: "No". Usually that is the end of the matter – the visitor moves on to their next point of interest and the staff member returns to counting the hairs on the calyx, or similar pursuits.

Sometimes however, the motive for the herb question is far stronger; it is not merely an apparently innocent stab at the mysterious function of the National Herbarium of Victoria, but is in fact driven by a deep interest in .... herbs. Yes, these folk are serious about their herbs, and they won't rest until they have located the epicentre of the Gardens' herb population.

Fortunately, the RBG Melbourne has a long tradition of collection and display of culinary and medicinal herbs. Our collection was established by Director William Guilfoyle in 1881 as a Medicinal Garden. This area, located to the north-east of the Oak Lawn towards the top end of the Fern Gully, was originally planted with a series of species believed to be of pharmaceutical or medicinal value. The area supporting this theme of planting grew over the ensuing 20 years; by all accounts the number of beds had doubled, and there were around 500 plants on display.

The medicinal beds played a role as the source of plants for hospital uses, and in that sense were perpetuating one of the oldest roles of botanic gardens. Indeed the oldest botanic garden in the world (according to my sources, who will remain unnamed) at Padua in northern Italy (established 1542) retains the style and layout which belies its original role as a reference set of plants of pharmaceutical value. As an aside, it also contains plants with poisonous properties, such as the Yew (*Taxus baccata*).

I was told an interesting tale in 1999 by the Director of the Padua Botanic Garden, Professore Cappelletti. According to Prof. Cappelletti, Napoleon and his cohorts, while on one of their all-conquering jaunts into the region, stopped over in Padua one night. Seeking a secure lock-up for their valuable horses, their eyes lit up at the sight of the Padua Botanic Garden, with its circular perimeter wall. They took a Gallic disinterest in the advice of the Garden's Director regarding the presence of Yew in the garden, and the effects that this may have on the horses. The next morning, surprise surprise, many of the horses were dead.

Yew wood was traditionally used for longbows, because of its hardness and resistance to softening by water, and was also a sacred tree favoured by the Druids. As a hedging plant it is second to none, having the capacity to keep producing new shoots for hundreds of years. I understand that it also produces taxol, which is the basis of a significant cancer treatment drug.

I was rather taken by one of the rules of the Padua BG as engraved into one of the stone gate columns at the entry. The precise wording of the Latin now escapes me, but the gist of the rule was that 'Visitors must not distract the Curator'. The penalty for breaching this quite reasonable rule was fairly severe, perhaps involving inprisonment or removal of one of the less important body parts. Things were more straightforward back then, weren't they?

Back to the RBG Melbourne: over the decades the medicinal beds had faded into the general landscape, and successive directors had overlaid their own ideas on planting in the area. 'General shrubbery' had proliferated. By the early 1980s, however, there was something of a resurgence in the growing and use of culinary and medicinal herbs. With the support of the Herb Society of Victoria, a new Herb Garden was designed for the RBG, to be located in the area which had been the site of Guilfoyle's medicinal beds.

The circular segmented design, completed by our Landscape Architect of the time John Dyke (who now works in northern England, but has an unnerving habit of appearing at my office door with no warning every couple of years for a chat) is somewhat reminiscent of the Elizabethan 'knot' gardens of the sixteenth century in Britain. The bricks were donated by Robertson Stock Bricks, and the project was supported by the Friends of the RBG Melbourne. At the opening of the new Herb Garden in 1986, the design lacked its central feature – the bronze armillary sundial, which was designed and constructed by Frits Massee and installed in 1987.

There are some things you may not know about the current Herb Garden. For one, the herb collection is maintained organically – without the use of herbicides. Curator Renee Wierzbicki is conversant in the application of non-chemical treatments to achieve the necessary controls and plant benefits. The results speak for themselves!

A second point which surprises many is that the Herb Garden has interest throughout

the whole year – not just the spring-summer blush of growth and flowering. There are many plants which really step into the spotlight in the cooler months, for example various members of the Asteraceae such as *Tagetes tenuifolia*, with its bright yellow-orange flowers of a peculiarly passionfruit-like fragrance.

In winter the Daphne and Wintersweet also present a charming nose – and there are few nicer places to be on a cool sunny winter's day, than soaking up the weak warmth of the winter rays in the cosiness of the Herb Garden, while bracing one's spirits with the ever-reliable cup of tea.

While you're there, you may find yourself sharing the space with some of the various fauna which also enjoy the surroundings. Birds such as Eastern Spinebills feed on the nectar of flowers, and others dine on the plethora of small insects which also abound in this healthy local habitat. Frogs, too, call the Herb Garden home. Your visit may also have coincided with one of the many school groups that come into the Herb Garden. In this case, your moment may not be completely serene, but you will have the pleasure of experiencing plant interactions of a different sort ... and at greater volume. Notably, contained within the hugely popular Harry Potter stories are some interesting plant applications, demonstrated in the students' Herbology classes. Suddenly, herbs are 'cool'.

Those who know their herbs (as Renee does) can tell you chapter and verse about the many and varied uses of all the culinary and medicinal herbs. While you or I might reach for a sticking plaster and some antiseptic salve to treat a minor wound, the herb folk would be picking some sprigs of this and that, mashing them up into a paste, and applying a poultice. Give it 48 hours and 'hey presto!' the damage has disappeared. Of course, this does rather rely on knowing one plant from another, as Napoleon found out to his horses' disadvantage.

A quick scan of any herbal reference worth its salt will give you chapter and verse on the many uses of almost any plant. I particularly enjoy *A Modern Herbal* by Mrs M. Grieve, FRHS, first published in 1931.

Within this book's covers you will find that (amongst others) the many plants which we know as weeds in our gardens have, in fact, many beneficial uses. Thistles, Dock, Ivy, Nettles ... even Deadly Nightshade has a lighter side! I'm now viewing the home garden in a far more positive light. It's a veritable treasure chest of valuable medicinal herbs, not a rampant weed patch! It's all a question of perspective.

In the book I have been delighted to find such gems of information as the definition of Myrrh (listed as *Commiphora myrrha*). It is apparently a gum resin from the stem of the plant. The plant itself is known to grow in an area of the Red Sea coast which is so hot and dry, that it is known by the locals as 'Tehama', meaning 'hell'. Sounds lovely. Myrrh is still a common ingredient of tooth powders and other oral treatments.

There is much to be learned from the Herb Garden and its plants. It is a beautiful place to sit quietly and to contemplate nature. I particularly appreciate the commemorative seat located at the south side of the circle, which bears an inscription in memory of a regular Herb Garden visitor who chose this place to sit and complete *The Times* crossword. Such is the salubrious nature of the Herb Garden atmosphere.

I think I might consider drawing on the cryptic crossword-solving powers of the local Herb Garden air this year. If this endeavour fails, then I'm sure I've read about a herb-based poultice specifically for this purpose.

Richard Barley

Facing page: The bronze armillary Herb Garden sundial. Photo: Jennifer Marshall.

Below left: Borago officinalis Above: Calendula officinalis Photos: Renee Wierzbicki

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Would you consider helping promote the Friends in the wider community and/or the media? If so, please ring the Friends' office on 9650 6398. Help spread the word!

Bird Song in the RBG Melbourne

For those entering the RBG from Park Street the 'tink' of the Bell Miners makes for a charming welcome. Inside, there is a surprising variety of bird calls throughout the Gardens: some raucous, like the Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, the Ravens or the Hobbies; some distinctive but not particularly musical, such as the Kookaburra, the Eastern Spinebill, the various waterbirds or the Pied Currawong.

A few can be regarded as fine songsters. The Grey Butcherbirds living around the Oak Lawn have a beautiful, far-reaching call. The Magpies, occasional visitors, are rightly renowned for their 'carolling' calls from atop taller trees; the Eastern Rosellas have a quiet, tender song and the Brown Thornbills play their own pleasant tune. The Willie Wagtails have strong and tuneful calls, as do the Reed-Warblers from Spring to Autumn around the Lake.

All of these birds are native species. Yet the best voice of all (for this listener) is an exotic bird, introduced to the RBG in 1857 from Europe: the Song Thrush. Although brought to many parts of Australia in the 19th Century, it has only survived around Melbourne, the Bellarine Peninsula and Mount Macedon. It seems to have had less negative impact on the native bird population and the environment than most other introduced species.

A brown backed bird, whitish-buff underneath with distinctive arrow-shaped markings, the Song Thrush resembles the female Blackbird. It is an inconspicuous bird, slightly smaller than the Blackbird, although its morning feeding habits are much the same and it also favours the lawn areas. It is easily confused with the Blackbird although it tends to stay closer to shrubbery and will quickly hop off to shelter if it perceives any threat.

There are perhaps a dozen or more families in the RBG, with their own defined territories, seemingly spaced about a hundred metres or so apart. For example, one family lives near D Gate, another near B Gate, then A Gate, then the Clematis Pavilion.

> Its 'singing season' lasts from May to December, from courtship to breeding

But it is the quality of its song that makes this Thrush most distinctive. Its 'singing season' lasts from May to December, from courtship to breeding. During that time its song is loud, clear and with substantial variety. Generally perched on a branch four to six metres above ground, the bird's song is embellished by mimicry of other species such as the Blackbird, Spinebill or Brown Thornbill. Its colouring sometimes makes it difficult to spot, even from a few metres away, although it makes no attempt to hide itself. It also seems to have the capacity to 'throw' its voice, so it is sometimes difficult to find its precise location.

If you are wandering the Gardens and hear a strong, musical and continuing bird call, it is almost certain to be the Song Thrush (pictured above). Stop and listen; you will be well rewarded.

Tony Delves

Ellen McCulloch OAM

The bird-watching community was saddened to hear of Ellen's death. Her contribution to the knowledge and conservation of birds was considerable. She was the author of *Birds in your Garden* and numerous articles on bird conservation in newspapers and magazines.

Ellen was a most active member of the Bird Observers Club of Australia, was secretary for seven years and a Life Member of the Club. She was also a Member of the Friends of the RBG for many years.

In 1997 Ellen convened a survey of the Superb Blue Wrens in the RBG. This survey noted the changes to the wren population and location of their territories in the Gardens.

It would appear that the bird population (with a few exceptions) has declined in the Gardens in the last year and this includes the wrens. Some bird observers are taking special note of wren population and their territories.

The dedication and work Ellen put into the last survey is being carried on.

David Plant

Photo: Gael Trusler

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Bulleen Art and Garden
6 Manningham Rd West, Bulleen
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1280 Malvern Rd, Malvern
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Terrace Tea Rooms & Reception Centre, Royal Botanic Gardens
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