

ABC Gardening AUSTRALIA



TV show
7.30pm
Friday

December 2022

**COSTA and
THE TEAM**
CELEBRATE
SUMMERTIME

Fresh ideas
FOR YOUR
festive table

plus

TOP JOBS
FOR SUMMER
PROPAGATE
RHIPSALIS
CULTIVATE
CAPSICUMS

**Nature's
gifts**
from the garden



• GROW A LIVING CHRISTMAS TREE • PERFECT PLANTS FOR GIVING

• THE SCHOOL GARDEN CHANGING KIDS' LIVES • AFRICAN VIOLET REVIVAL



GARDEN

blooms *with a* view

What began as a lockdown journal for flower farmer and florist Helen Leighton has evolved into a book celebrating rural living and floral design. Here is a snapshot of her life on Riverdale Farm near Albany, Western Australia

GARDEN

I was pretty much low at first sight back in 2004 when we set eyes on Riverdale, a picturesque 100-acre property alongside the Kalbar River, on the south coast of Western Australia, traditional lands of the Menang Boongar people. It had a reliable water source, excellent soils and a stunning location.

For 38 years, my husband, Jim, and I have been passionate about creating a garden on this land, growing flowers for designing, and tending to a productive orchard and vineyard. In addition, we run a herd of Murray Grey cattle, and Jim is a keen gardener.

When we moved here, we were so eager to embrace country life and finally create the garden of our dreams. But before we could turn our minds to the garden, we needed to tackle the house. Both the house and the nearby cottage needed a hefty dose of creative thinking and a lot of hard work. So, in 2006, we embarked on a significant renovation – the brief was to bring in more light and create a strong connection with the landscape.

With the renovation complete, we gave our full attention to the garden. This would

be a chance to incorporate a wide range of plants – those we had previously loved growing and new varieties we had always wanted to try. It was also a wonderful opportunity to put my studies in garden design and experience to good use on our own property. After lots of sketches and drawing, the design finally began to take shape. We sought to create spaces within the garden that mirrored viewpoints to the broader landscape. I was keen for a garden with plantings from Mediterranean climates that would also complement the property's native bush background.

In the early stages, form and function were key considerations, together with myrmecodia and coral. Chris Dumack, a local stonemason, brought my drawings to life with granite terracing and steps – the granite is widely sourced on our property and was the obvious choice for establishing a sense of place. We also used silvery grey weathered timbers and rusted steel for screens and climbing frames. These materials reflect the man (red gum) indigenous to the area.

On the granite terracing to the north of the house we planted hardy Mediterranean

perennials in shades of purple and grey, combined with pale pink David Austin roses 'Heritage', 'Clark Rose', 'Evelyn' and 'The Anwick Rose'. Salvias feature prominently, with my favourites including Mexican bush sage, germander sage, wild sage, and varieties such as 'African Sky', 'Kerrie', 'Soliva Accubata' and 'Indigo Spirit'. Other plants in the terraces include rosemary, cistus, erythronium, cistus, bakula, scabiosa and heliopsis. Old Tee roses are planted in front of the shed, and the roses climbing on the shed are some of David's roses 'Tatiana' and 'Pap Gedeon'.

On the south side of the house is a natural bush area with carefully chosen plantings. A windbreak installed on the eastern side of the

GARDENS EVOLVE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH NATURE AND, AT THE SAME TIME, ARE INTENSELY PERSONAL CREATIONS.



PREVIOUS PAGE

Helps obscure the view from the north-facing terrace, which looks towards the Perangup National Park and down to the Kalbar River valley, while the pale flowers let her breathe.

LEFT

The wire back to the house from the north-west side encompasses grapevines, French lavender planted among the natural granite rock tops, and the Quercus Asota rose garden, bordered by cactus.



THIS PAGE, FROM TOP

The formal kitchen garden is full of vegetables and herbs, including basil, French tarragon, artichokes, broad beans, lentils, leeks, thyme, chives, parsley, edible flowers and seedlings. Delphiniums are grown to perfection in the nearby cut flower garden. Many of these seedlings destined for the cut flower garden are germinated from seed.

GARDEN

house gives the garden added protection. She attracts bees, native shrubs and trees. At the same time, offering an abundance of inspiration and materials for floral design. The greenhouse are generous with their blooms, along with the raised plantings of kangaroo paw. Both benefit from regular deadheading to ensure an ongoing supply of flowers. Beds and native beds live from.

Our David Austin rose garden took form in 2009 in four panel-shaped garden beds with a round bed at the centre. The beds are bordered with bamboo, and the roses are underpinned with perlite, mainly hardy salvia. That same year we also established a formal kitchen garden and developed an extensive cutting garden for roses, oregano and other annual and perennial flowers such as geraniums, scabiosa, agapanthus and daisies. This garden is watered via a subsurface drip irrigation system. Water is pumped into a holding tank from a rock

bed, which sits from ground swells. All the garden beds are heavily mulched with pea straw over winter, which assists in maintaining soil moisture levels, providing nutrients to the garden as it decomposes. The beds do spread peas for a month or so after application, but these are easily pulled out. The mulch increases earthworm and soil microbial activity and is an excellent weed suppression strategy.

We have around 250 rose plants – a mix of David Austin, Oldblaze and Hybrid Tea. Anemone and perennials are propagated from seed. The shade of a large north tree is the perfect environment for germinating and growing our seedlings before they are transplanted to the cut flower patch.

NURTURING A GARDEN BRINGS MANY REWARDS – PHYSICALLY, EMOTIONALLY AND SPIRITUALLY.

We are truly self-sufficient with water. It is harvested from the roofs of the house and sheds, and held in a collection of tanks with a 300,000L capacity. Seedlings are watered twice daily. While many plantings will not reach maturity in our lifetime, it is not legacy and one we hope will be appreciated well into the future.

Our garden provides a chance for us to protect and enhance the biodiversity on our property. Along with the natural bush behind the house, it supports an abundance of wildlife. We also share our garden with birds, bees, frogs and insects, not to forget the kangaroos that often pass through. They all add spirit, life, movement and soul to Riverdale. **✪**



THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Helen puts the finishing touches on a beautiful table set for a spring gathering of family and friends. Her mother made her floral design a fresh, theatrical aesthetic, with eucalyptus, geranium and acacia. Klinger on a grapevine pruned from the late's grape vine vineyard. Jim and Helen Leighton surrounded by native paper daisies.

OPPOSITE

The cut flower garden, full of daisies, snapdragons and kangaroo paw, where flowers are grown to be used in the family's floral designs.



This is an edited extract from *Garden Gathered: Floral Design and Rural Life at Riverdale Farm* by Helen Leighton, \$29.95, published by The Flower Press.

