

The Importance of Plants in the Landscape

Andrew Laidlaw

Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, Birdwood Avenue, Melbourne, Victoria 3004,
Australia

andrew.laidlaw@rbg.vic.gov.au

Keywords: Royal Botanic Gardens, landscape design, garden design

Summary

Gardens can connect a diversity of people to sense of place. This paper describes several design projects from the Royal Botanic

Gardens in Victoria. They include a children's garden, the Guilfoyle's Volcano, the Fern Gully, the Arid garden, White oak area, the Sensory garden and other projects.

INTRODUCTION

Plants have a connection to health and well-being related to humanitarian work. These include aspects related to:

- United Nations now see built green space as part of the matrix to rebuilding community Goal 11.7: “By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities” (UN 2020)
- Nature-assisted therapy (gardens to natural areas) have been found to be effective for managing PTSD (Kreski,2016; Poulsen et al, 2016)
- Parks and gardens are renowned for social interaction – with cohesive forces supporting individuals/community resilience (Seltenrich 2015)
- Children with access to safe, stimulating (unstructured) environments have greater capacity for healthy physical and psychosocial development (Moore, 2014)

Design Work

My main work is and has been designing gardens in the Royal Botanic Gardens (RBG) Melbourne and for Global Gardens of Peace over the last 25 years. In both these organisations it is always a team approach and requires the design to be built through a strong design process that starts with a consultative approach with all the main stakeholders and responds to the prevailing environmental conditions. Plants are a key component to all my work, plants bring life, change and seasonality and connection to nature. Every plant life starts with propagation. Propagators are the quiet achievers

and often remain invisible to the process. Their ability to grow interesting and healthy plants is the starting point to all my work.

Dermot’s passion for his work and his skill in the RBG has made a huge difference to my work and the work of many horticulturalists.

Project and Plant Selection

We take the business of plants and projects very seriously at RBG. We have a series of planning documents that guide our process.

- Landscape Master Plan 2020-2040
- Landscape succession
- Living collections document

Plant selection

- We are transitioning our landscape to be more climate resilient.
- We are actively changing the plant palette
- we use plants that are suitable for the prevailing conditions
- Always looking at new and interesting plants that preform and are non-invasive.
- We propagate over 90% of all our plants.
- We try and collect wild species with known providence
- We try and conserve rare and threaten plants
- Everything is documented

Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria Landscape Projects

TIPCG (Kids Garden RBG) 2004

A garden designed to connect children to nature through their play, a garden where children can find secret places, and are free to run and create.

The garden is made up of a series of plant rooms; Bamboo Forest, Rainforest Garden, Snow Gum Gorge, Grass Maze etc, in all these gardens plants do all the work (**Fig. 1**).



Figure 1. Kids garden at the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria in Melbourne

Guilfoyle's Volcano 2010

A garden designed to exhibit succulent and arid plants in a dramatic design that reinvents Guilfoyle's original Volcano theme.

A series of bold foliage plants that are repeated around the main cone creating a bold statement (**Fig. 2**).



Figure 2. A garden designed to exhibit succulent and arid plants in a dramatic design at Melbourne's Royal Botanic Gardens with a theme of volcano: Before (top left), after (top right), display of colour on the banks of the volcano (bottom).

Fern Gully 2016-2020

A garden designed to provide cooling and solace where the temperature can drop by 5 degrees. Visitors can easily move through the space on an elevated steel boardwalk

and discover quiet meditative spaces that allows them to be wrapped by plants and connect to nature (Fig. 3).



Figure 3. Fern gully at the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria provides visitors with space for solace and meditation in a cooling environment.

Arid Garden 2020

A garden designed as a parterre garden for visitors to wander and explore the amazing arid plants and to learn about the story of

the Field collection. This garden uses native wildflowers to bring colour and drama in late winter (**Fig. 4**).



Figure 4. Arid garden in Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria was designed as a parterre garden. Top – general view of the garden, Bottom – stunning display of native Australian arid plants

White Oak 2021

A garden designed to allow a 165-year-old oak tree to continue to give as a meeting place after it fell apart in 2020. With the limbs arranged around the main trunk as

they fell, the new garden is providing a new meeting place (**Fig. 5**).



Figure 5. The fate of the White Oak at Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria; this 165-year-old oak tree was given a second lease of life after it collapsed in 2020, as a meeting place for the visitors

Sensory Garden 2021 - A garden designed to provide a series of horticultural sensory experiences (**Fig 6**).



Figure 6. Sensory garden provides visitors an opportunity to stimulate all the five senses: sight, smell, touch, sound and taste. Through this they become more aware of the surroundings, leading to mindfulness

Drylands 2023

A garden that looks at a new palette of Australian plants that have been selected for their climate match and their ability to adapt to their environment.

GGOP LANDSCAPE PROJECTS

Calming Garden in Alfred hospital 2020

Two small gardens created in the physic ward at the Alfred hospital, that allows patients access to green spaces.

Gaza Garden in Palestine 2013-2023

A children's garden in the Gaza strip, a place for children and their families to experience some joy.

Ventilation Accommodation Support Service (VASS) garden in Thornbury 2023

A food forest garden for a vulnerable community in the inner-north suburb of Thornbury in Melbourne, where the clients will be able to sit out in the garden with their family.



Figure 7. Species and features used in Ventilation Accommodation Support Service (VASS) garden in Thornbury, a Melbourne suburb.

Acknowledgements

For the Wadawurrung people: Connecting to the deeper history of place is all our responsibility.

LITERATURE CITED

Kreski, B. (2016). Healing and empowering veterans in a botanic garden. *Journal of Museum Education*, 41(2), pp.110-115.

Moore, R.. (2014). Nature play and learning places. *Creating and managing places where children engage with nature*. Raleigh, NC: Natural Learning Initiative and Reston, VA: National Wildlife Federation. Poulsen, D.V., Stigsdotter, U.K., Djernis, D., Sidenius, U. (2016) 'Everything just seems much more right in nature': How veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder experience nature-based activities in a forest therapy garden. *Health Psychology Open* 3(1).

doi:10.1177/2055102916637090

Seltenrich, N. (2015). Just what the doctor ordered: Using parks to improve children's health, *Environment Health Perspectives*, 123 (10).

<https://doi.org/10.1289/ehp.123-A254>

United Nations. (2020) United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal11> (Accessed 1st August 2023).