

# NOTES FROM MY GARDEN

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It has been one of those months.

So full of wonderful events. Firstly the elder of my two sisters, Trish, and her husband Rocke, arrived from Vancouver Island in late February. It is eleven and a half years since we have seen each other, so it was a time of great joy and lots of catching up. Then it was the wedding of my niece, Joanna, at Tutakaka in Northland. So further catching up with family and friends. All my family are in a state of shock; I actually left the Island for more than five minutes. It is always with great reluctance that I leave Waiheke, but there was no way I was going to miss the first wedding in my immediate family. Trish, my sister is, like me, a keen gardener, and as she lives, for the moment, in an apartment in Duncan on Vancouver Island, her opportunities to garden are limited. Being here at Woodside Bay has allowed her to satisfy all those pent up gardening frustrations. See the notes on THE PONDS and you will see what I mean.

I have also had other visitors from overseas, Maree from Australia, who has featured in earlier notes and Judy from England. Judy is, a keen gardener, and has an allotment garden in Twickenham, just outside London. Judy is a keen gardener and this allotment does some way to satisfying her gardening needs. This year Judy has planted many varieties of heritage fruit trees and is almost able to be self sufficient in vegetables, etc., for her table. Like Maree it was so good to share with Judy her joys and frustrations and to realize that we all have our crosses to bear, they may have different names, but deal with them we have to, and deal with them we do.

Other visitors this month have been my nephew, Hamish, and his partner Kirsti and son Hunter from Alberta in Canada and they report on their gardening problems. For example, having to wrap the cedar trees to protect them against the predations of the deer. The tree takes years to reach a reasonable height and in a few moments all that growth can be destroyed by the wild deer. Also they told stories about moose ambling down the street then coming onto your front lawn and sitting down right in the middle of your prize flower bed. I thought Fitzroy did enough damage when he chooses to sit in the bed of my prize, (he thinks they offset his beautiful blue eyes). But try and move a big bull moose, no thank you, that's nervous breakdown material.

## In the Garden this month

I have been clearing the beds of old crops as they mature, and roughly dig for Autumn fallow, if not wanted for immediate use. I have to decide now what new beds are to be made and will dig over and left rough for a bit. I am looking at new and old beds, which should periodically have a green crop dug in. If I decide to sow now, the recommended seed use is about an ounce per square metre of oats, mustard, barley, peas or lupins. Lupins are my choice as they produce nitrogen. I will then dig them in about August and dress with lime, ready for planting out later.

My main job throughout the garden is to remove all spent plants and prepare beds for planting out later. It is best to remove all debris in the garden so that there is nowhere for slugs, snails and other garden pests to hide and sally forth later to destroy all one's good work. I call this my 'house work: keeping a garden clean and tidy is an important key to successful plant raising. However, like my indoor house keeping, I am full of good intentions.....

## The kitchen garden

The first planting of courgettes have been removed, after succumbing to a bad dose of mildew and the second sowing caught the same malady, but still produces good courgettes. Earlier one of my fallow beds had been the recipient of a barrow load of compost from the heap, (such a satisfying operation), and I noticed a few weeks ago two self sown courgette plants growing happily. As usual, I meant to remove them and dig over the bed, but more pressing matters intervened. These two plants are now producing at a great rate the round courgette "Eight Ball" which was a F! hybrid seed from Egmont Seeds last year.

I have served these stuffed and baked, and they are a good way to introduce courgettes to those who maybe are not quite as keen on the taste as others. I recommend that you slice the top off and hollow out the seeds, etc., leaving a goodly thickness of flesh. Season this well with salt and pepper and maybe smoked paprika before filling with your choice, replace lid and bake in a hot oven. Serve with a good, thick, homemade, tasty, tomato and basil sauce.

The cucumbers are still producing well, and the later addition of the *Crystal Apple* variety was an inspired move as it gives a change of taste and texture to the table,

The tomatoes never recovered from the depredations of the pukekoes, so I have removed the last remains of the plants and have saved the green tomatoes for making the much admired **Governor's Sauce**.

My third planting of sweet corn is about ready, and I am guarding it with the same ruthlessness that the Beefeaters guard the Crown jewels.

One pleasant surprise is the success of the second sowing of dwarf beans. I have not seen such healthy beans for a long time and are bearing heavily, as are the peas alongside in the same bed. The climbing beans have finished, and as I said in my last notes, the *Shiny Fardenlosa* were a great success and I will not be planting *Scarlet runners* next year. I still have hopes of convincing young Margaret of the wisdom of letting me have some of her special climbing beans, purely in the interest of science, you understand.

Another outstanding success this year has been the Aubergines. We have used them in the kitchen, we have given them away by the bag full and still they continue to produce. At the moment there are 19 on four plants in various stages of maturity. We did make Baba Ganoush using some of the excess. This was delicious on crackers with our evening glass of that that cheers taken on the veranda watching the setting sun go down behind the big pohutakawa. I don't know what I did right, but I will try and replicate it next year, but only planting maybe two plants.

Suggestions for the kitchen garden that can be sown now.

Broad beans	onions	beet	parsley	carrot
Peas	cabbage	parsnip	cauliflower	potato
Cress	radish	herbs	shallots	spinach
Kohl rabi	lettuce	turnips	mustard	Swedes

Peas should only be sown in frost free areas, and most of us are lucky here on Waiheke not to suffer from that problem. Mind you, that is a two edged sword, as a good frost can clear the garden of a great many of the pests that plague us. As I said earlier the peas I planted last month are doing well and I should be picking them later this week. I will keep you posted as to the progress of the crop.

I will be sowing my first broad beans this week in a bed that has been fallow for a few months. (thanks to the pukekoes for pulling out the previously planted silver beet.)

The salad bed is still producing succulent lettuces. Remember that lettuce can be sown all year round. Alongside the salad bed this year is the celery bed, the first seedlings have been planted out. I read recently that salt around the celery plants prevents rust. So I am going to try the old trick with seaweed in the bed. This has been so effective with the fruit trees in the orchard, particularly with the quinces.

I will be dividing the number 1 Rhubarb bed this year, so let me know if you want some roots. These are the *Victoria* variety which have been so successful for me. There wont be many, but first in first served.

### The decorative garden

March is the best month to sow sweet peas - I have many self sown seedlings up all ready. These seedlings are very well mannered as they have emerged just where I want them to: at the base of the frames. I must admit that many times self sown seedlings know best where to grow. It is lucky that I had, for once, prepared the ground earlier this month with a good dressing of compost and dolomite lime. Sweet peas respond well to deeply dug and well manured soil that has been treated with a little lime.

This is one of the busiest times if the year. As the summer annuals finish, clear away and dig deeply in preparation for replanting . Real gardening weather is now coming on. Make good sowings of all the leading hardy annuals and perennials, as this is undoubtedly the best season to plant. Care should be taken to keep these new plantings free from vermin and slugs, snails and woodlice which can eat all your new plantings in one nights eating frenzy. Plant cinerarias in shady beds where severe frosts are not experienced, stocks in sunny positions. Plant out pansies, daisies, dianthus, marguerite, carnations, nemesia or any of the hardy annuals mentioned in the following list that I work from. I certainly don't plant all these, but I use this list as an 'aide memoire'

#### Cutting garden planting suggestions

##### Sow in trays for planting out later

Aquilegia	Lobelia
Canterbury Bells	Nemesia
Carnation	Nemophila
Cineraria	Pansy
Delphinium	Pentstamon
Dimorphotheca	Phacelia
Forget-me-not	Polyanthus
Freesia	Schizanthus
Gaillardia	statice
Geum	Sweet Sultan
Godetia	Verbena
Gypsophlia	Viola

##### Sow in open ground

Alyssum	Larkspur
Antirrhinum	Linaria
Calendula	Linum (Flax)
Calliposis	Lupins
Candytuft	Mignonette
Cornflower	Nasturtium
Clarkia	Poppy
Dianthus	Scabious
Eschscholtzia	Stock
Helichrysum	Sweet Pea
Holly Hock	Virginian Stock
Wallflower	

Plants of seeds sown in January should be transplanted into the open as soon as they are well rooted so as to establish themselves before the onset of the winter weather.

The season of flowers will be extended if seedpods are removed.

Overhaul the rock garden and clean up the pockets. Straggly plants should be cut back with shears: the cuttings of rock plants usually root readily at this season if inserted in sandy soil.

The hardier lilies should be ripening off, this is the time to transplant liliiums where necessary. I have been potting up my seedlings of the *Lilium Regale* for planting out later and to increase my stock.

Take cuttings of roses and other hardy shrubs if you wish to propagate in this manner.

The green house is becoming full of cuttings taken to preserve and increase my stock of plants. Carnations that I had previously layered and are well rooted and will be transferred to permanent beds.

It is planned that the cutting garden will have a good display of flowers for cutting, including beds of anemones and ranunculus, which are a long time favourite

This year there will be a monitorium on the ordering of roses. I think we have enough to cope with at the moment. However next year.....

My older variety of roses will have been pruned before the end of the month. The more modern varieties will be left until the end of July. As the older varieties flower on old wood, pruning now will give the roses a chance to produce flowering canes which can mature over winter and produce more flowers in the spring. Don't feed now until the spring. However, a dressing of potash will strengthen the new stems.

Stop deadheading roses now and let them produce their hips, which always add a spot of interest to the winter garden.

### **Spring Bulbs**

Now is the time to plant flowering spring bulbs. I have placed my order and received the Bulbs from Taupaki Bulbs and this year I will be planting mainly in pots so that I can provide Madam spring bulbs, in flower, when and where she wants them. I have some very beautiful Chinese blue and white antique pots, which I have planted with the heavily scented *Freesia Burtonii* and some white pots with the blue *Freesia Amadeus*; again, another scented variety. Another pot, terracotta, sink shaped, will be planted with miniature daffodils *tete-a-tete*. Next year, along with the other bulbs planted in pots, they will be planted out in the garden.

### **Bulb planting suggestions**

Anemones,	Babianas	Crocus	Cyclamen	Daffodils	Ixias
Lachenalia	Muscari	Ornithogalum	Freesia	Ranunculus	
Scillas	Spanish iris	Snowflakes	Spraxias	Tritonias	Tulips
Watsonias					

### **The orchard**

The Citrus trees have received an Autumn dressing of manure to enable them to develop better crops. I have been working on clearing around the fruit trees to keep them weed free and provide no hiding place for disease and attacking insects.

I continue my battle against the pukekoes; their latest targets are the quinces and granny smith apples. Now quinces are my great culinary love and anything that comes between me and them is apt to feel the wrath of Neil. One tree had 8 beautiful fruit, perfect specimens of their genus. Within hours there were none. The remaining fruiting tree is now well wrapped in bird netting to ensure at least some fruit for the quince paste and quince pies.

The granny smith once well laden, is now a sorry mess of broken branches and littered about with apple cores. This tree was too big to wrap or protect in any way. I spent many wasted hours patrolling with my 'long handled shovel' to no avail; the 'blue peril' kept out of spitting distance and just waited until I gave up in disgust and then moved in for the feast.

### **The Ponds**

Now this is a new area, new to you all, as I have not talked about them before because I was ashamed of the state of them: overgrown, stagnant, dark, gloomy, and in places particularly horrid.

At least that is what they were like until last week and the determination of my sister Trish. As I mentioned in the introduction to this letter, Trish is here visiting from Vancouver island, and is temporarily without a garden to expend her considerable energies on. Also Trish is recovering from a particularly long and nasty fight with breast cancer, the treatment of which has had some debilitating, but temporary, side effects. I tell you this because the garden has given Trish the peace and tranquillity she needs to complete her recovery. The need also to be in the garden and get her hands into the soil again has been very strong, so one day last week she started in the corner of the middle pond intending to spend a little time weeding and clearing. But she is not my sister for nothing.

Now, a week later, we have three rather beautiful ponds, visible from many points in the estate and a real asset, rather than the foetid and mosquito plagued pools of muddy water of their previous existence. This happy outcome was not achieved easily. We called on all the weapons of mass destruction at our disposal; scrub cutter, ride on mower, push

mower, axes, chain saws, you name it, we had it. The effect was achieved at great cost to our personal appearance, cut, bruised, scratched, covered in mud from head to toe - what fun - and no-one to tell us off for being dirty and tearing our clothes. It was like being back at Man-o-War Bay as children, building huts in the swamp. I was initially working elsewhere, but had to go and check to see what she was up to. Within minutes I was, in boots and all. We worked well together, and it was so good having someone to work with and alongside. Whoops of joy greeted another few square inches of ground gained, and frequent stops to admire our progress. But let's also be honest; the frequent stops were needed to get our breath back and to straighten bent backs, both of us are no longer as young as we were at Man-o-War Bay. We constructed a bridge, built a rill, planted plants, raked, hacked, hoed and built large heaps of rubbish to burn when conditions are right. We both had a great fear that sometime during the process we would encounter the resident giant eel, and any untoward movement in the water caused a quick retreat from the pond edge. However he was not encountered, but the fear was there. It was a labour of love, and a great healing process, but Oh, dear! are we tired and sore.

There is a long way to go before we can say we have finished the start, but one day, someone will start the finish, but that is a long way ahead.

Hopefully, the ponds will become a regular part of the garden notes because I see them becoming an area of great beauty and interest.....plans, plans, plans.

### **General interest**

I find that phrases are bandied about by garden centres etc., without any real understanding of what they mean and in many cases the original meanings are lost in the mists of time but are still used with a different understanding today. For example, I found the following information in an old Yates garden guide (1955) which makes things clearer for me and may be of use to you also:

#### *The real meaning of "Early" and "Late" as used in gardening*

These gardening terms refer to the time a crop takes to mature and not to the time it may be sown during the season, i.e., an early variety of potatoes will mature in twelve weeks, while a main crop or late variety will take from sixteen to twenty weeks. Therefore, an early sort is often more suitable for late season sowing to mature before adverse conditions set in