

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q Whose idea was it to develop the Gardens?

A. Three local scientists from CSIRO approached the Develop Mildura Council with the idea. It was taken up by the Chairman, Ms Kaye Gambetta, who convened a meeting. It was agreed to proceed and Ms Gambetta became the President of the committee of management.

Q. Who designed the Gardens?

A. The original donation of \$10,000 by the late C.D. Lanyon on behalf of the R.D. Elliot Trust. This enabled John Wrigley, an acknowledged authority on Botanic Gardens, to draw up a master plan and make recommendations.

Q. How much land is involved?

A. 152 hectares (350 acres) altogether, but only 44 hectares (122 acres) are being developed in this first stage.

Q. How was it acquired?

A. The land was part of a sheep grazing property leased from the Western Lands Department of NSW, by the McLeod brothers, Orm and Rod. They relinquished their lease in favour of the Botanic Gardens, at no cost, as a donation to the community.

Q. Who operated the Gardens?

A. It is one of the few independent gardens in Australia. It is operated by a committee of management, which relies on donations of money and “in kind” services from individuals, businesses and service clubs. The two local councils, Wentworth and Mildura are very supportive, also Parks Victoria and the state government of NSW. Although the two councils have no management role, they are represented on committee.

Q. How many staff work at the Gardens.

A. There are 6 permanent staff members. Other labour is provided from time to time by Government Training Programs and TAFE students doing practical work modules. There are many volunteers from the “Friends of AIBG” as well as retired tradesmen who give their time to assist in the on going tasks of developing a botanic garden.

Q. Why have exotic plants in the Gardens?

A. We intend creating a garden of international standard using world’s best practice. So we wish to display plants from all over the world, although our emphasis will be on inland Australian dry land area plants and endangered species.

Q. How are the plants watered?

A. Our own electric pump on part of our river frontage lease provides water under pressure, on demand. Each plant on the southern slope has its own dripper system and a computer controls the watering. On the northern slope, only dry land plants will be displayed and water will only be provided during times of prolonged drought. Water is available in this section via turf valves 50 metres x 100 metres apart.

Q. How many plants have been planted?

A. About 14000 so far, (first planting April 1991). The information on all the plants is recorded on a computer.

Q. Where do the plants come from?

A. Practically all the plants have been propagated by Lois Smith a committee member, and proprietor of a local nursery, at no cost to the gardens.

Q. How many different birds frequent the Gardens?

A. 38 different species have been identified as the result of one visit only by the Bird Observers Club. If survey visits were extended to all seasons, we would expect to identify many more. Water birds will appear with the recent addition of lakes and streams.

Q. How did the rose garden originate?

A. The South Mildura Rotary Club was responsible for the concept, and took it up as a project to raise the required funds. The combined Apex clubs did the forming work, the garden was designed by Lois Smith, the bud wood supplied by David Ruston of Renmark, and Julie Jackson of Gawler Roses did all the grafting. There are 1624 rose bushes in the formal part.

Q. What do you spray the roses with?

A. Rubigan for mildew, Pirimor for aphids, Mancozeb for black spot, Dipel for grubs plus wetters. Triforine alternates with Mancozeb. A spray is applied every three weeks.

Q. How much water do the roses get?

A. We water the rose bushes every second day during the summer. We aim to replace the water used by evapotranspiration.

Q. How do the plants get nourished?

A. Fertiliser is added to the water used for irrigation (fertigation) on a regular basis. It consists of Nitrogen as urea, Phosphorus as monoammonium phosphate and Potassium as potassium nitrate.

Q. How do you control rabbits?

A. The Gardens are enclosed in a rabbit and kangaroo proof fence. Poisoning (1080), fumigating and ripping of burrows provide further control, and use of tree guards around plants most attractive to the rabbits.

Q. How did the Garnpang homestead get to the Gardens?

A. The Richardson family donated the old building to the Mildura Historical Society. The Rotary Club of south Mildura dismantled it at Garnpang Station, brought the pieces back and rebuilt it on site at the Gardens. The two bedrooms and kitchen were not rebuilt.

Q. Where did the windmill come from?

A. It was donated by Mrs McDermaid, a Gol Gol settler.

Q. What is the story about the train?

A. We purchased the train from Orange World, a local citrus property, with the help of Bidgee Finance - a local finance company.

Q. What is the big flag sticking out of the ground doing?

A. This area was badly degraded by a high salt water table. We planted salt tolerant plants to lower this water table and this flag, which was installed is monitored by the NSW Department of Agriculture, indicates the level of the underground water. The perched water table has fallen from just below the soil surface to zero at 2 metres (6 feet).

Q. Why are all the weeds still present?

A. We do not wish to disturb the fragile soil. The weeds hold everything together and prevent the soil from blowing away until such time as the area is planted up. It looks untidy at present, but it is an interim measure that is necessary.

Q. Where does the mulch come from?

A. Two sources, Merbein Saw Mills and from de-stemming process at the neighbouring wineries.

Q. What are the pegs with blue tops sticking out of the ground?

A. The Gardens has a grid system in place, so that all parts can be identified on a plan. The grid is on 50 metre squares. Peg L30 is significant as it relates to the National grid, so we have a place on official maps of Australia.

Q. Why don't you charge an admission fee?

A. The Gardens are presently in the early stages of development, and as such, do not provide the requisites of a Botanic Garden, so a fee is not justified. Donations are welcome.

Q. What species of Mallee grow naturally in this area?

A. Eucalyptus Dumosa, Eucalyptus gracilis and Eucalyptus oleosa.

Q. What are the three plant pots sitting together upside down for?

A. Underneath are three tubes, one going down 30cm into the earth, another going down 60cm and the third 90cm. Using an electronic device called a tensiometer, the content of the soil at those levels is recorded every day. We can monitor for the best results that no plants are stressed by lack of water and no excess water is left to create a perched water table.

Q. What is the material on the path around Garnpang?

A. Gypsum, a form of Calcium Carbonate mined locally. The raw material used to make Plaster of Paris. Also used for breaking up heavy clay soils and for binding loose soils in the garden. We use it because it is readily available, reasonably attractive and inexpensive.

Q. What is the origin of the Bush Chapel?

A. The Bush Chapel was the brain-child of the Friends of the AIBG to acknowledge the early input of one of the CSIRO scientists who promoted the original concept of a botanic garden in the district. The chapel is used for weddings, namings and church services. It also doubles as a class room for visiting school children.