

# Flourish

Supporter News Autumn 2025



## ISSUE 19

Poetry in the Gardens

The Tudors and Connection to Place

Maryclare Los and Family in the Gardens

Meg Bentley: A Force of Nature



Royal  
Botanic  
Gardens  
Victoria



## Seeds of Hope

Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria commissioned award-winning Wiradjuri poet Dr Jeanine Leane to write four poems as part of the interpretation for the Australian Drylands collection. Presented on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong Country the work explores *Seeds of Hope* for the future.

The four poems – *Hope, Resilience, Change and Action* – invite visitors to reflect on the power of choices in shaping the future of the planet, plants and people.

“*Seeds of Hope* gave me the opportunity to reflect more and respond creatively to something that has been at the forefront of my mind – as I’m sure it has for others for many years now. And that is climate change, global warming and the need to care for Country around us,” Jeanine shares.

In creating words to “plant” into the Drylands Precinct, Jeanine felt inspired by the intricate connections between seeds and hope. “Seeds encapsulate what the future can be; they are a poignant symbol and reminder of how we can grow and change ourselves, and nurture and tend the future as it grows around us,” she says.

“Listening to Country first helped me to formulate words that would speak to the need for change, nurture and hope,” Jeanine reflects. “It was a privilege to have worked in collaboration with Scott Killeen from Kelp Creative and the Gardens team,” she says. “It is my hope that all those who wander through will pause and reflect on change, resilience, nurture, hope, and care for Country for the future.”

### COVER

Director and Chief Executive Chris Russell with Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria Chair Penny Fowler.

### ABOVE

Dr Jeanine Leane besides one of her poems in Melbourne Gardens.

# Welcome to Autumn Flourish

Dear supporters,

It has been a busy start to the year at the Gardens, with our summer marketing campaign showcasing our beautiful landscapes and experiences to new audiences. Our summer entertainment program included the return of Moonlight Cinema and the Australian Shakespeare Company, delighting audiences into the warm evenings, while children enjoyed Nature Play, Wind in the Willows and splashing under the fountains of The Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden.

I enjoyed connecting with many of you at the end of year supporter event, celebrating another successful year working together, and I look forward to continuing this work as we strive to champion the role of plants and botanic gardens for the wellbeing of people and the planet. Our work is guided by the strategic direction set in our *Corporate Plan 2025–2029*, which includes specific actions across our five pillars of Engagement, Knowledge, Place, Growth and Operations.

Some of the new and exciting projects underway include our world premiere of *Lightfall* at Cranbourne Gardens in the Autumn school holidays. We are excited to be partnering with our *Lightscape* partners Sony Music and Red Energy, along with the City of Casey, to transform the Australian Garden into a site-sensitive light and sound experience. All this on the back of *Lightscape's* success winning the Major Festivals and Events category at the Victorian Tourism Awards. I do hope you will be able to join us at *Lightfall* at Cranbourne from 6th to 20th April.

At Melbourne Gardens, finishing touches are being made to a significant renovation of what was formerly Jardin Tan. The Darling Group, who also operate the vibrant 'The Terrace' by Ornamental Lake, are bringing their culinary expertise to the new venue called 'The Observatory.'

With Melbourne–European styling, I'm so excited by the reinvigoration of one of our most prominent locations. See you at The Observatory very soon!

I am pleased to share that we have received funding from the Australian Government to restore native vegetation along the natural watercourse of Wylies Creek in the Southern Grasslands area at Cranbourne Gardens. The project will create a corridor for native species, improve water quality, and conserve threatened flora and fauna. Site monitoring and seed collection has commenced, with works and plantings expected to commence toward mid-next year.

As the climate continues to warm, more plants, fungi and algae are vulnerable to extinction. The Gardens has been increasing conservation efforts through seed banking and growing on-site back-up populations and we are seeking increased government support to amplify our efforts. In response to the bushfires over summer at the Grampians/Gariwerd, the science team continue to take urgent action to conserve local species, including collecting and storing seed in our Victorian Conservation Seedbank. It is important work – now more than ever.

I hope to see you in the Gardens soon and look forward to achieving our vision together.



**Chris Russell**  
Director and Chief Executive,  
Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria

# Supporter Spotlight

## Maryclare Los: Cultivating moments of joy in the Gardens



### LEFT

Maryclare Los and her mother, Libby Fraser.

### OPPOSITE

Maryclare's daughters planting in the Fern Gully in 2015.

Maryclare and her husband Pieter have previously lived in New York and Amsterdam, where apartment living is the norm and access to public parks form part of your daily ritual. When the family moved back to Melbourne it felt 'just right' to continue living in an apartment knowing the beauty of Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria were nearby.

"The Gardens have been our backyard since the girls were very young," says Maryclare. "When the kids were younger, we would cook dinner and take it across to eat as a picnic under the incredible trees. The kids could run around and burn off some steam and we'd feel the benefit of getting out of the house. Even before Uber, we would order pizzas to be delivered to Gate D!" she recalls with a smile. "I remember the Children's Garden opening 20 years ago and how exciting it all was. We've spent countless summer days playing in those fountains," she says. The family's decision to support Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria through the Director's Circle is one that feels only natural as an extension of their deep appreciation and connection to the Melbourne Gardens.

Growing up, Maryclare recalls picnicking on Eucalyptus Lawn with family and friends. She affectionately remembers running down to Ornamental Lake to spot dozens of eels in the water. Attending Melbourne Girls Grammar School, the temptation to visit the Gardens was always present, especially whilst running cross-country laps around The Tan.

Maryclare laughs, "I used to walk The Tan, now I walk *inside* The Tan" – a distinction which has unquestionably elevated her daily morning walk. "It's so peaceful inside and there is so much to absorb. I don't know if it's because I'm getting older and no longer chasing after kids, but I love reading all the informative signage and learning interesting facts about the plants," says Maryclare. Seeing the different plant collections in Melbourne Gardens evolve



and grow over time feels momentous to Maryclare. "I remember Guilfoyle's Volcano being built", she recalls, "And I adore the new poetry sculptures within the Australian Drylands section".

Seeing the Garden's bustling with young people and being enjoyed by visitors from across the world is such a delight for Maryclare. "Just the other day, a gentleman from New York stopped to ask for directions. He was blown away by the fact that we have this accessible oasis available to us, right in the middle of the city," she explains. "The fact that the Gardens are free for all to enjoy is such a gift to Melbourne", she adds. "It's so important it remains so, to share the space as a resource for everyone to experience."

Maryclare's hope for the future is that her children's children will be able to share in the wonder of the Gardens and build their own memories here. Moments spent in the Gardens hold immense joy for Maryclare, remaining constant throughout her childhood and into parenthood as a place to discover and grow. "It is such a vital part of our lives", she says. "I hope to be enjoying and learning in these Gardens for many years to come".

# Events

## An End of Year party amongst friends

On a perfect early summer evening, we welcomed esteemed guests to the annual End of Year Event, held to celebrate our community of generous supporters and donors.

Held at the Alto Marquee on Dog Flat Lawn, guests were treated to a delicious menu by Curtis Stone Events, as well as a wonderful panel discussion chaired by Penny Fowler who presented alongside our *Director and Chief Executive* Chris Russell, supporter and *Gardening Australia* presenter Jane Edmanson, and Sally Fierenzi, the Garden's *Learning Innovations Program Officer*.

The discussion gave insight into Jane's first memories of the Gardens, where she visited the Gardens as a young girl with her family. We explored various Gardens' projects and partnerships including Growing Beyond Earth (a collaboration with Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden in Florida USA and La Trobe University's Plants for Space program), the continual

success of Raising Rarity supported by the Ian & Shirley Norman Foundation, and recognition of this year's milestones including the The Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden 20th Anniversary and the completion of Stage Two of the Australian Drylands Precinct.

Our end of year party is always a wonderful opportunity to catch up with old friends, meet new ones and share in the world-class achievements of Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria.

**"We are incredibly fortunate to have such a dedicated group of donors and supporters who share our vision for a greener, more sustainable future. Your support allows this organisation to make a positive and lasting impact on our environment and our city."**

**– Penny Fowler, Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria Chair**





**LEFT**  
*Manager Biodiversity Services  
 Alastair Robinson and Jan Ryan.*



**RIGHT**  
*Amanda McCall and Linda Prowse.*

**RIGHT**  
*Elizabeth Brown and Rosie Coulthard.*

**OPPOSITE**  
*Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria Chair  
 Penny Fowler, Jane Edmansson, Director  
 and Chief Executive Chris Russell and Learning  
 Innovations Program Officer Sally Fierenzi.*



# Rick and Liz Tudor

## Recognising and honouring place and connection

Rick and Liz Tudor feel a strong sense of place at Melbourne Gardens, having shared many memorable moments with family, colleagues and students here. They honour the Gardens' history as the traditional land of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people and recognise its importance for healing of Country, reconciliation and future connections.

The Tudors co-founded the Melbourne Indigenous Transition School (MITS) to provide pathways to greater opportunity and choices for Indigenous students and their families. Liz explains, "Rick and I have a very deep commitment to First Nations people, championing their aspirations for the future." Liz values the Gardens as a place of personal and cultural significance, recalling how her family have enjoyed visiting for generations. She notes, "It's important to acknowledge that this was somebody else's place before it was ours to experience, and that tension must be respected as part of truth-telling."

As scientists, Rick and Liz find great joy in sharing the fascination of the natural world with others. Rick, an educator and former principal at Trinity Grammar, studied botany with a focus on the palaeontology of algae. Through his postgraduate studies, he became very close with former Gardens' Director, Dr David Churchill, who was also his university supervisor. Some of Rick's research, including a collection of algae diatoms, is housed in the National Herbarium of Victoria.

Liz has taught veterinary science at the University of Melbourne for over 20 years. Once a year, she takes her veterinary students through the Melbourne Gardens for a toxic plant class, saying to them, 'It's part science and largely wellbeing.' Throughout their careers, the Tudors have contributed to innovative education, recently sharing in the wonder of the Gardens with their MITS students through the Aboriginal Heritage Tour. "We've sat with the students, with the First Nations leaders and teachers on that tour, and it's incredibly empowering. It's lovely to see their pride and to hear their knowledge" recalls Liz. The sharing of stories, such as the snake grasses that were used to make whistles for safety, forms part of the ongoing connection to Country and reconciliation.

The Tudors appreciate how areas of the Gardens, such as the Fern Gully and Sensory Garden, have been greatly enriched by philanthropy. "People can see their funds are being used to enhance the beauty of the Gardens and the capacity for people to engage with their surroundings," says Liz. Both Liz and Rick treasure the 'infused enjoyment' of being in nature. Liz, a keen birdwatcher, appreciates how the Gardens provide sanctuary not only for visitors but for wildlife too. Rick reflects, "The Birrarung was a place of well-being for First Nations people for thousands of years. It was an area where families gathered, collected food, and found peace." He sees a modern parallel, as people today visit the Gardens for contemplation and well-being.

### OPPOSITE ABOVE

Rick and Liz exploring the Sensory Garden with their granddaughter.

### OPPOSITE MIDDLE

Liz and her granddaughter recreate a family photograph taken over 100 years ago.



**“We hope the kids see wonder in the natural world and to have time to see it. If you’re rushing, you don’t see the special little coloured stone or the big leaf or the tiny insect.”**

— Liz Tudor

The sense of well-being derived from walking through the Gardens is something the Tudors hope to pass on to their grandchildren. “To wander with no agenda and find things is incredibly enriching and influential on the little ones,” Rick recalls time spent exploring with his granddaughter, as well as time to himself on his daily dog walk. “Because we use and love the Gardens, we want to contribute to what we enjoy,” says Liz. Rick adds, “The Gardens are not just a botanical masterpiece, there is a peace about the Gardens, which is a regenerating peace. It helps to rebuild you.”

#### RIGHT

Liz’s father Keith Gray, pictured with his mother Elizabeth beside the Ornamental Lake, 1921.



# Urban Rivers

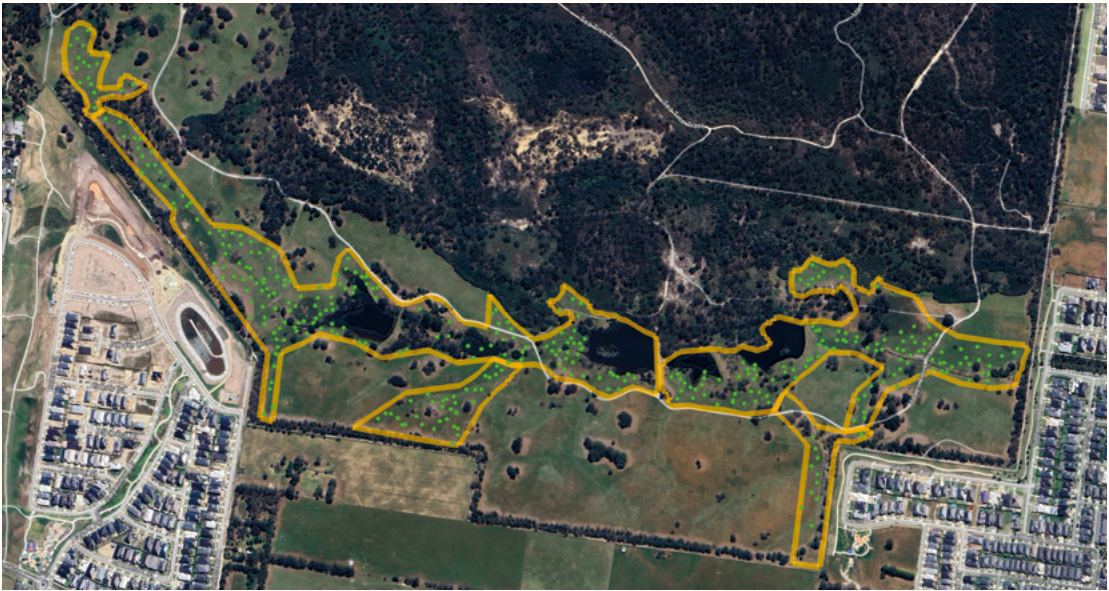
## Wylies Creek Restoration at Cranbourne Gardens

Commencing this year, the Wylies Creek and Ecological Corridor Restoration Project will re-establish native vegetation along the natural ephemeral watercourse of Wylies Creek in the Southern Grasslands area of Cranbourne Gardens.

Surrounded by new residential development, the site has increased in importance in recent years as a vital habitat for several native species and plants. The three-year project will support the conservation of species such as the

Southern Brown Bandicoot, Growling Grass Frog, Australasian Bittern and Latham's Snipe. Endangered indigenous flora and canopy trees such as *Xerochrysum palustre*, *Coronidium gunnianum*, *Craspediacaenans* and *Senecio psilocarpus* will be re-introduced to the area as part of the project's impressive planting plan. Across the proposed 30-hectare zone, hundreds of canopy trees will significantly increase foraging supply sources, benefiting many migratory species currently utilising the watercourse.





#### OPPOSITE

Wylies Creek watercourse.

#### ABOVE

Wylies Creek project map.

Royal Botanic Garden Victoria's *Project Manager of Environmental Systems* Ricardo Simao explains,

**"This project will enable us to create a 3 km corridor that will restore vegetation at all levels – from aquatic biota to rushes, grasses, sedges and ground covers, understory and canopy."**

Notably, the precinct will be a place for nearby residents and Cranbourne Gardens visitors to learn about the importance of conservation and the direct links to increasing local biodiversity.

"Restoring the area will enable the community to make new connections with this precious green space. In addition, there will be carbon sequestration benefits that ultimately benefit the whole community," adds Ricardo.

Important discussions have begun with Bunurong Land Council to undertake a cultural heritage assessment of the project. The initiative offers an opportunity to open conversations focused on increasing biodiversity and supporting the healing of Country and fostering stronger conservation partnerships across the area.

The Wylies Creek and Ecological Corridor Restoration Project is funded by the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust under the Urban Rivers and Catchments Program, with the support of Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria.



## Meg Bentley

### A remarkable contributor

An avid gardener with a passion for Salvias, Meg Bentley is also a highly regarded mentor and educator in the Garden's community. She has contributed to various projects across the Gardens, recently supporting apprenticeships and field trip opportunities for Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria staff to collect new and rare plants for the Living Collections. Her generous spirit demonstrates a mission to foster connection and learning through plants.

At her home in Gruyere, amongst the bushland of the Yarra Valley, Meg tends to a beautiful rambling garden. Grasses

grow for birds to weave their nests, and fences were removed so wildlife can freely roam. "My garden is more wildlife than decorative, plant-wise", she admits. This is where Meg has hosted famous morning teas for Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria staff, sharing plant knowledge and cuttings from her expansive salvia collection.

Volunteering "on and off" at Melbourne Gardens for over 20 years, Meg holds the title of "The first and last volunteer horticulturist – a special exception," she smiles. "Since my husband passed away, I now come to the Gardens weekly".

These days, Meg looks after all the Lamiaceae across Melbourne Gardens – salvia, lavender, plectranthus, thyme, coleus. “With plants you never stop learning, to get your hands in this soil is very special,” she says. From her time interacting with ‘the horties’, an affectionate name for the Gardens’ Horticulture team, Meg knows firsthand how important apprenticeships are to the future of our landscapes and plant conservation. “Everyone plays their part in the garden, which is vital. You take one person out, and you’ve got a hole,” she says. Supporting the Apprenticeship programs at the Gardens is one of many ways in which Meg contributes. “For young people to have the opportunity to develop knowledge and build their experience and career in this garden is invaluable,” says Meg.

Meg’s connection to the Gardens is testament to her profound generosity and passion for sharing plant knowledge, not only with the Horticulture team, but all those who have the privilege of crossing her path. Meg fondly recalls time spent in the Sensory Garden – a project she helped bring to life. “You get the chance to meet so many different people who love to talk about the variety of plants,” says Meg. “They’ve seen how the garden started and how the plants are happily progressing. It’s a wonderful community conversation place”. In an age where most people walking the Tan will have earbuds in or be on their phones, Meg reflects, “the people you see walking around the Gardens – they’re always attentive to what’s going on around them – it’s a sensory experience and it’s always such a pleasure to witness those appreciating it”.

Meg is making the final updates to a pamphlet on salvias she created in 1998 and revised in 2004.



This update brings 70 new salvias into the fold, a task affectionately referred to as her ‘PhD’ from dear friend and fellow Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria *Horticulturalist*, Terry Smyth. Meg encourages more people to learn about salvias, a remarkable endeavour to make plant knowledge accessible.

**“Meg’s kindness, measured approach, capability and knowledge sharing is exemplary.”**

**– Clare Hart, Acting Executive Director Melbourne Gardens Horticulture**

Meg’s support and impact are far reaching at the Gardens, and her legacy will continue through her heartfelt bequest. Her hope for the future lies in the gift she leaves, directed towards continuing the urgent conservation work achieved through the Global Collection program. In her lifetime, Meg has grown over 400 species and cultivars of *Salvia*, though not all have survived the challenges faced in our warming climate. “To record specimens into the database, before things are damaged and lost forever, that is so important,” Meg says. “And to ensure the Gardens can continue to update and maintain the National Herbarium.” She adds, “Mind you, I don’t plan on going anywhere anytime soon!”

#### OPPOSITE

Meg hosts members of ‘the horties’ at her home.

#### ABOVE

Meg Bentley at work in the Melbourne Gardens.

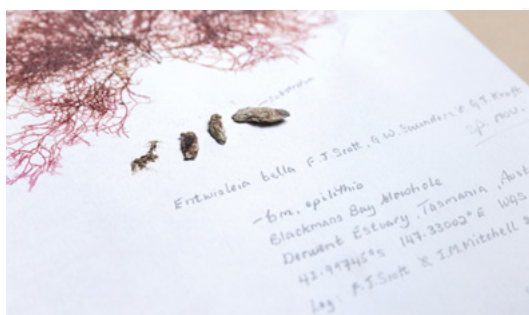
# Priority Projects

## Future focus for the Gardens



### Creating the next generation of environmental leaders

Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria is offering a unique opportunity to build the skills and knowledge of the next generation of environmentalists by connecting emerging horticulturists and arborists with our world-class team of experts. Our apprenticeship program will uniquely provide training that responds to the fight against climate change through the use of innovative landscape succession tools developed by the Gardens.



### Preserving the Global Collection

The National Herbarium of Victoria is home to the State Botanical Collection, a rich resource of more than 1.5 million dried plant, fungi and algae specimens that provides invaluable information to scientists, land managers and historians around the world. Sadly, this precious collection is valued at \$154 million is at risk of deterioration. However, supporting the Global Collections team will help the Gardens to preserve and create an everlasting digital resource for the wellbeing of the planet.

## Protecting Cranbourne from Fire

With large expanses of bushland within Cranbourne Gardens and housing development surrounding the site, it is imperative that Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria has appropriate fire protection equipment to ensure the safety of staff and visitors to the Gardens along with the surrounding community. Cranbourne Gardens also has reciprocal arrangements with local partners such as City of Casey, Frankston Council and Healesville Council to attend each other's burns and has also been called on to assist the Country Fire Association in times of significant bushfires. Currently the fire management equipment is over 30 years old and in urgent need of replacement. A fire response system, including two fire trucks, is a cost-effective preventive measure that can save millions of dollars in potential damages.



## Introducing shade to the Ian Potter Lakeside Precinct

The beautiful green lawns at the Ian Potter Lakeside Precinct are the perfect spot to picnic, play and take in the sweeping views of the lake. The Cranbourne Gardens team hope to introduce mature trees to create shade in this special location to enhance the experience of our visitors.



If you'd like some more information on any of these projects, please reach out to the Philanthropy team on 03 9252 2383, or [philanthropy@rbg.vic.gov.au](mailto:philanthropy@rbg.vic.gov.au)



For Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria to be the best possible custodians of our unique natural heritage, we need to continue to uncover plant knowledge and save the rarest Australian flora and fauna from extinction.

**It is through the generosity of our donors that the Gardens continue our efforts in world-class science and horticultural research, landscape development and public programs.**

Show your support today by making a fully tax-deductible donation.



**YES,** I would like to support the Garden’s vision of a world that values the beauty, wonder and importance of nature.

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All donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible

**Generous supporters shared with us their recollections of the past and hopes for the future vision of Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria during our last Appeal.**

"It is always a great pleasure to simply wander and imagine the forethought of William Guilfoyle while taking in the sights and sounds of the Gardens. Thank you." – Peter Beck

"I have such a deep connection to the Gardens, and I have ensured that my Will nominates the Gardens as a recipient of a part of my Estate. Love it!" – Megan Dwyer

"Now 96, the Gardens have been an important part of my life. I have wonderful memories of my mother taking my brother and I to the gardens during school holidays." – Nancy James

"Thanks for maintaining this beautiful place of gathering and respite in our growing city" – Debra Tegoni



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ISSN – 2652 – 4325