
Fetherston Gardens has now entered its 10th year of care under the watchful eye of the Fetherston Gardens Friends (FGF). Our goals of restoration, regeneration and renewal persist, as we continue to maintain, develop, clear, mulch, and plant new trees, shrubs and bulbs in this unique park and garden.

Our commitment to maintaining these beautiful gardens hasn't wavered over the last 12 months, despite a challenging year of drought, smoke and the Covid 19 Pandemic. Issues with reduced operation of the irrigation systems meant the survival of new plantings in the Gardens required hours of watering by volunteers using hand-held hoses and sprinklers outside of working-bee days. Some plants were lost, but this is a natural occurrence in gardens in the ACT during dry times.

Fetherston Gardens is now part of a new network of volunteer groups in the ACT, run through Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS) with Urban Parks and Places (UPP). We have attended network meetings, which have discussed how the UPP Coordinators can support our volunteers by providing signage, equipment and advice, as well as by organising assistance from employees of TCCS and deliveries of materials such as woodchip and plants. We thank both Allan McLean and Brian Kemp for their enthusiasm and support in coordinating activities and services for urban park volunteers.

Fetherston Gardens was also fortunate to have the TCCS local parks crew work in the Gardens for a couple of weeks earlier this year. They undertook pruning, creating new pathways, upgrading the entrance through Heysen Street, general tree trimming and park maintenance. Under the direction of Francesco Mazzoli, the TCCS crew also cleared ivy, blackberry, tree suckers, large privet shrubs and old lattice in the Secret Garden area.

Volunteers

Our volunteer numbers decreased in the hot summer months, and early Covid 19 restrictions kept volunteer numbers below average. As Covid 19 restrictions posed a concern for the regular upkeep of the Gardens, a number of Committee members decided to meet weekly on Wednesdays to care for the Gardens and connect with each other. The main focus of this work was in the lower Woodland Garden, where conversation and gardening could be enjoyed while keeping distant from each other.

A surprising outcome of these additional sessions was that our volunteer base grew, with increased interest in, and support for, the Gardens by a number of our local community members who found volunteering a great activity and consequently joined us on Wednesdays. We were also delighted to see one positive effect of the Covid restrictions was that the Gardens were heavily used by people for exercise, play, quiet time and even for work.

Concerns

One continuing issue for park users has been the number of dog owners who allow their dogs to run off-leash and that some people leave plastic bags. General rubbish removal is also a problem in busy garden usage times. We saw an increase in dumping of garbage around the perimeter of the Gardens.

Unfortunately, we have also seen an increase in the theft of plants, mainly of the newer trees, stolen during the autumn. We aim to replace these when stock becomes available.

The Committee, with support from UPP, undertook a letterbox drop along Heysen Street and the housing development on Fetherston Ridge. We asked local residents to keep a watchful eye on the Gardens and to report any issues. This was successful, with people reporting issues such as damaged trees to the appropriate bodies.

Recent Activities

Some activities include:

- Negotiating the provision of toilet facilities through our connection with Village Building Company (who are awaiting ACT Government approval for their development application);

- CIT Horticulture students attending the Gardens for practical class lessons, excursions and volunteering;
- Successful grant funding for new tools and equipment to support our volunteers and their activities;
- Receipt of a grant from UPP to transform the Secret Garden area into a children's garden area. This project will continue until the end of 2020;
- Installation of Floriade's "Reimagined" community display. FGF received 350 bulbs and 400 annuals to create a mini-Floriade in the lower Woodland Garden. Volunteers and children joined in to undertake the planting. These plantings were supplemented with an additional 200 bulbs and 100 annuals from FGF fundraising.

Plantings

The Gardens' replanting program has recommenced following more regular rain. We continue to seek out old varieties of plants to replace what has died and we are safeguarding those we can.

The Weston Creek Rotary Tree Walk had two losses from the 30 trees planted. Replanting of those is underway. Remaining trees are looking healthy, and in years to come will be a delightful autumn feature in Fetherston Gardens.

We were also the lucky recipient of 94 new plants from TCCS Yarralumla Nursery. These have all been planted and are looking very healthy.

Finally

FGF has continued to be a volunteer group of dedicated, committed people who want to see the Gardens maintained for our community. It is a pleasure to work alongside such wonderful people. Thank you to all of our volunteers for your dedication and willingness to participate in our garden activities.

The Fetherston Gardens committee of seven has the welfare of Fetherston Gardens at heart. They bring their talents and time, and together we have a happy, productive committee that focuses on our community and our goals. I want to thank everyone personally for your enthusiastic support for the Gardens—Thank You to the FGF committee, Mal, Rosemary, Gina, Paulene, Louise and Antonia; and Thank You also to Chris Goodrich, who has maintained our paths over many years.

We also thank the Weston Creek Community Council again this year for their backing of our many projects.

I thank you all for your support and encouragement of our ventures in Fetherston Gardens. I believe Tony Fetherston would surely approve of the ongoing love for his garden. Sadly, this year we grieved the loss of Janet Lawrence, Tony's daughter, who delighted in visiting and in being deeply connected to us and our regeneration project. I know she approved of our work, and her legacy lives on.

As we think over our 10 years of volunteering in Fetherston Gardens and reflect on that first handful of ivy removed, may we always strive to maintain this very unique garden in Canberra for all to enjoy.

Lesley Pattinson

Fetherston Gardens Friends - Convenor

5 August 2020