

Bella's Retreat

OPEN GARDENS NT – 2 Shady Court, Leanyer, Darwin, 27 & 28 April 2019

Helen and Clayton welcome you to our Open Garden – **Bella's Retreat**. We thought we would honour our garden after our first puppy Bella who brought us so much joy, love and laughter throughout her life. Bella was an energetic non-stop little furry ball who would run around all day throughout the now-established gardens chasing lizards ... of course she would never kill or eat them, she just wanted to play chasie.

Before Bella was around, when we moved here in October 1999 – coming up to 20 years ago – the property basically looked like a congested jungle without too much 'tlc' and a delivery of 50 bales of hay by the previous owners who simply spread it willy-nilly throughout the back and front garden areas ... and with the nylon string cut and left hoping to grow, there was a fair bit of sweat and effort needed. From memory we removed about 28 trees including coconuts, carpentarias, fishtails and some hardened bark type trees. As you read on you will identify the transformation that has happened over the years. Please check out the slide show presentation on the television while you are having a tea/coffee or refreshments.

Tucked away in the northern suburb of Leanyer, our hidden paradise is a sanctuary and ongoing labour of love for myself (that being me – Helen) Clayton only contributes when he has to and he is the absolute whipper snipper pro. There is no shortage of adjectives to describe this flourishing tropical haven, although enticing and enchanting do spring to mind. The lush garden appears never ending due to the design layout that ensures you never see the entire landscape in a single glance. The series of individual garden spaces are linked by sweeping, curved lawns leading you from one space to the next. The garden beds themselves are vibrant with tropical plants, exotic in texture, shape, colour and fragrance. The effect is both stimulating and tranquil at the same time. The extensive selection of plant species offers variety in height and creates great depth and visual interest. Many of the plants are foliage plants so there is always lots of colour no matter what time of year. The mix of water features, paving, pebbles, stepping stones and lush lawns is reminiscent of the tropical landscapes of South-East Asia. We hope our garden takes you on a journey, not only physically as you meander through it, but mentally as it conjures up images of travels to exotic tropical wonderlands.

As you walk through the garden you will see we have a love of tropical plants that are easy to grow here in Darwin and notice a couple of our favourite selected plants reappear through the garden such as the Lipsticks (Sealing Wax palms) and Birds Nest ferns (*Asplenium Australasicum*).

The front of the garden was to have a semi-formal feel, with *Duranta* as the hedge, and palms in the backdrop with other foliage. However, these plants have changed over the years with all the Golden Canes dying out and being replaced with Lipsticks. The Peace Lilies continue to spread out around the fish pond with the Gardenias, Crotons and Ixoras giving that infill of foliage and colour.

At the corner of the house (right side) is a *Tibouchina* (Carola Lyn) which has stunning purple flowers – unfortunately with the Lipsticks getting so big, it is not getting enough sun to flower. As you walk through to the right of the house this area is mainly shaded with filtered sun; this area I find as a little secret garden and still being a work in progress. It received significant damage in the last two cyclones but managed to keep all the main plants.

This opens out into a lawn area and layered gardens using the two *Radermacheras* (Summerscent) with their rich evergreen leaves and scented flowers, the Crotons for colour and

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Mondo Grass to edge the gardens. To the left, the area behind the pool is complimented by Lipsticks, and Spider Lilies line the fence within the fenced pool area. Behind the Lipsticks is my humble veggie garden and fruit trees, unfortunately not much to show due to a very late start this year. Venturing to the middle and still to the left of the house the Snowflake Hibiscus is surrounded by *Cuphea hyssopifolia* with a couple of Gardenias. You will then come across a very shady area with a mixture of tropical foliage plants along with a number of hanging pots under the house at each side.

As with most gardens it takes time and continues to evolve. We found the Shoal Bay Mulch products (going back several years) – we used and got the best results from the double grind with manure. We started off with at least 20sq metres to do the original gardens three times a year and we are now down to a trailer load of mulch twice a year, the idea being to make the gardens self-mulching with the plants we have in. As you will see the plants seem to love it as some of these Lipsticks are only around ten years old.

Points of interest:

- The pots on the back stairs which currently have potted flowers for a splash of colour for the wet, have evolved from roses (lasting 2-3 years), to various bulbs with lovely flowers, to tomato plants in the dry – they are due to go in soon. They seem to get just the right amount of sun.
- The Spider Lilies by the fence of the pool, I have taken over 600 bulbs out ... and yes more need to come out.
- The Orchids under the stairs – we have put some photos up of the flowers as we currently don't have any in bloom. The Orchid in the old New Guinea Palm seems to love this spot as it flowers so well.
- The veggie garden is only in its second year; it was originally where Clayton's new 'Man Shed' is and Helen's garden potting / plant area outside.
- We have many Bird's Nest Ferns in the garden as we love the foliage and they give that real tropical feel.
- The three dwarf fruit trees at the back in pots (near the veggie garden) are Lemon / Lemonade (currently has fruit on it) and Lime (just finished fruiting).
- There are three water features ... the front having fish, the back being Nava's cool-down pond and another under the house that has birds coming in now and then to have their daily bath.
- The front and back lawns were palm root-bound, and the middle back area has a 65,000 litre pool.

We are supporting the RSPCA this weekend. (They provide animal adoptions, rescue and rehabilitate, animal welfare/rescue, lost and found, education, care, safety and welfare.)

Their volunteers are available to speak with you about their wonderful work. They will also be selling refreshments in the way of scones, assorted cakes, tea, coffee and cool drinks

There are also some plants from the garden for sale.

Bella and Poochie are no longer with us but Asha (Bella's daughter) and Nava enjoy the garden now.

Have a wonderful day

Helen