

Heather's Haven

I have always loved flowers. My parents were gardeners, so I grew up amongst the Roses, Daffodils and vegetable gardens that feed the family all year round in New Zealand.

I came to Darwin in 1984. I loved the tropical plants such as Palms, Orchids and Hibiscus. I thought they were so exotic, and I couldn't wait to start gardening. To begin with, it was a challenge - I quickly gave up on vegetables! I had to virtually forget what I knew about gardening and learn all over again about tropical gardening. I quickly discovered that watering once a fortnight wasn't enough and that the garden needed fertilizer, a little but often and that the garden changes quickly due to the rapid growth of some plants.

I have added paths throughout the garden so I can attend to weeding without tripping over. I have had the experience of retrieving the secateurs out of the pond after accidentally falling in!

We bought the block in Gunn in 1999 and built the house 2001. I potted up cuttings from my old garden in Darwin River, so I had an assortment of plants to start with.

My garden is small, mostly in full sun with a few shady areas under the house and in the pool area. I was a slow learner to begin with as I killed many orchids and shade loving plants with my interpretation of shade. Eventually, after trial and error, my garden grew!





I share my garden with possums, bandicoots, frogs, lizards, and chickens. When the cane toads arrived, my garden went deathly quiet with no green tree frogs to be seen and the tata lizards disappeared. The cane toad numbers have since decreased in my garden and the tata lizards and the green tree frogs are once again quite plentiful. The possums sleep in the trees in the park and come up onto the veranda once it gets dark for a snack of rolled oats and veg.

The chickens are another story; they don't bother the plants much, but they love to scratch in the garden for bugs. My theory is to make sure they are well fed before they get out into the garden in the late afternoon. This entails feeding them fresh baby spinach leaves, fresh corn on the cob, left over cat food and top of the range scratching mix. They line up for a small bowl of fresh meat when I feed the cats in the cattery in the evening. They really are obsessed with scratching and if a plant is in their way, they just scratch it out, so replanting is an ongoing job. Despite the scratching, they are a joy to have around and they reward me with fresh eggs daily and free fertilizer. When I clean out the chicken enclosure, the straw and chicken manure go straight onto garden – no double handling!

I don't use pesticides because of the wildlife, I use organic fertilizers and the garden is mulched at the beginning of the dry season with double grind mulch enriched with manure from Shoal Bay dump. All kitchen waste that can't be eaten by a chook or possum is composted.

At the beginning of every dry season, I pull out any flowering plants that look straggly and replace them with new plants or cuttings.

As the seasons change, so does my garden and that's beauty of a tropical cottage garden.



Heather's Haven is supporting the Cat Association NT