

## Wendy and Gavin Kingfisher Haven – Virginia

We fell in love with this block the first time we drove down the driveway. 13 years ago, we took over a mature established block filled with Mahoganies, Fishtail Palms, Golden Canes, Black Wattle and too numerous to mention Carpentaria palms interspersed with other Native trees. There were lots of large trees but very few understory plants. The back of the block had been left as virgin scrub.

We didn't make any major changes for at least a year, concentrating on addressing the white ant infestations and removing multiple trailer loads of palm fronds which had built up. Our record was 17 loads in one weekend. We lost a lot of trees to white ants and fungus in the first 2 to 3 years.

We began reshaping the garden by removing all the Oleander and Carpentaria's from the right hand side of the driveway. We have only recently begun adding plants to that area. Oleander is pretty stubborn and we still get an occasional one pop up.

Most of our garden beds have evolved because we had truckloads of beautiful red woodchip as a result of cutting out several large mahoganies which were potentially dangerous or a bit too close to the house.

The only real formality of our gardens is that in particular areas I've focused on a loose theme such as the cycad garden at the front of the block and the Bromeliad garden under the flame tree at the back of the house. We also started a Cane grove, which hasn't quite turned out the same as my imagination predicted.

My other focus is that the plants attract birds, butterfly's and wildlife. I also plant as many natives as I can. There are so many plants out there to grow though, why would we stick to just a select few? I like to walk around our gardens and see different plants and aspects. It is home to many possums and a family of bandicoots.

My attempts at creating full native only garden beds have not quite worked out. The feature plant in my native garden on the right hand fence line turned out to be from South Africa. Well, they looked native!

The circular garden in front of the house was full of fishtails and Carpentaria's. We thinned it out so we could see more of the block as it felt like we were living in the suburbs. I call that my pointy garden as the theme seems to have evolved that the majority of plants a long leafed or stemmed.

The growth around the house was and still is, right up to the house. On the left there is a large area of Fishtails, Carpentaria's, various other palms and Black Wattle. We successfully relocated the Sandpaper Cycads. This was a snake pit full of palm fronds which we didn't touch for 18 months as it seemed such a massive job to do anything with it. We gradually cleaned it out, dumped a few trailer loads of chip in there and it has now evolved into what I call my Secret Garden.

A hard lesson in this area is Carpentaria's have fine roots which get into your pots and strangle plants. Now my plants are either sitting on large pavers or off the ground completely so the plants survive. It is densely shaded so it is still an ongoing experiment.

No rural garden is without its stories of the resident Orange Footed Scrub Fowl or Bush chooks as they are affectionately (or not) called. There is a reasonably large mound in the bush land area which was dormant for the first few years. They have only just reactivated it in the past 3 to 4.

Our first encounter after 3 weeks away was a shock. We came back to a mound on our doorstep so to speak on the right of Gav's Bar and Grill. I thought it was cute at first but once I read up on how big it would become and how many years they would work it, we started the battle of removal. 3 years later we won the battle only by

filling the garden bed with Carpentaria Seed Pods. Messy but effective as they can't get in and under them to scratch and dig.

Several years later though they got their revenge and established another mound on the left of the deck. There was a lot of undergrowth here so it wasn't noticed until well established. It is now in clear view because they have done such a good clean up of the surrounds. We have a truce, and there have been multiple baby bush chooks hatch from this mound.

There has not been a major fire in this area for well over 30 years and our virgin bush in the back 2 acres is full of mature trees and multiple native cycads. In September when the humidity rises this area comes alive with the bright lime green new growth of the cycad and is one of my favourite sights in the garden.

There are 2 major weeds in this bushland though that we are constantly battling to eradicate. Snake weed and Curry Bush. Gav focused on the Curry Bush; I have been working on the Snake Weed. Until this year we were doing well but unless it is constantly addressed the weed soon takes over again.

During WW2, the 17 mile as it was known then was home to many army personnel as they dispersed further inland after the bombings. An area mid way to the creek has buried broken beer bottles and other scrap from that period. They are stamped with 1945 and US Army.

Directly behind the house is a large old tree with hollows, which has been for many years the home of a family of Kingfishers. At present the hollow is home to a very large beehive. This is the second time the bees have taken over the nest so I am hoping they will move on soon so our Kingfishers come back to nest.

We hope that you enjoy our garden and you get a sense of the peace and tranquillity it provides to us both every time we come down that winding driveway.