

Williamstown Primary School
Our gardens
Alison Timms

In 2013 Williamstown PS was thrilled to be chosen as a finalist in the Victorian School Garden Awards. These gardens have been designed and installed by students over the past eight years to be waterwise, sustainable and on a similar scale to a domestic garden. Each small garden area is unique. If you would like to find out more about our gardens, let's go for a walk - read on!



We start our walk at the Bird Sanctuary, one of the four earliest gardens, designed in 2005 and installed in 2006. The class which designed the two beds of this garden discovered that birds like shrubby, dense plantings to hide from predators, and chose the original plants from the Gould League's list of 10 Best Bird Attracting Plants. The flowers also attract butterflies and other insects, which is great for the Grade 1/2 Minibeasts Walks, and the grasses provide nesting material in spring. Last Green Day, 3/4S replaced the under-storey plantings of one of the garden beds; it had gradually become a casual seating area for young humans instead of birds!

Now walk across to the peppercorn trees. Maybe you know someone whose name is on these pavers? The Peppercorn trees around you were only a metre high in 2007 when they were planted – look at them now! With the Memorial Casuarinas they provide dense shade and great play opportunities.

Now walk across to the peppercorn



Up the ramp is another small shady garden: the Reflective shade Garden, which is also paved with personalized pavers. The Casuarinas have grown remarkably fast to provide shade for this area and the Golden Rain trees extend their reach over the zigzag seating, installed in 2008 with a grant from Nestle. The water tanks behind the wire fence provide water for the student toilets as well as the gardens.

The Garden ahead, inside the smart new Electra Street fence, is the Indigenous Grassland Garden. This is the most complex of our garden areas, entirely designed

and installed by students; who even hand-made the rocks you see around the dry creek bed. It is looking very established, natural and bushy now, as the plume grasses and taller stipas send up their flowering stalks. In late winter this garden is full of the pink, yellow, blue and white flowers of the native geraniums, bulbine lilies, vanilla lilies, flax lilies and basalt daisies which are growing here. This garden is a wonderful resource for the 3/4



Integrated Unit 'I am Australian'.

Next we followed the Stepping Stone Path to the Italian Garden. This is another of the earliest Garden areas at Williamstown Primary. It has four Herb beds planted with Italian herbs, a Rosemary hedge, and along the fence: an Olive Grove. The bird bath in the centre was designed and constructed by students at the school, linking with the mosaic entry gates and decorative wall in other parts of the school. This garden is often used for plein-aire painting and its herbs are used in Italian cooking. The Garden Club recently pickled our first Olive Crop, and if they are successful there will be an opportunity to buy a jar of W.P.S Olives in a few weeks.

Crossing the driveway now, you come to two small, linked gardens which were established in 2009. The first is the Pelican Gate Garden, planted by 3/4 students in 2009, who grew these daisies from cuttings. The gravel path by the office door leads to our Corner Grassland Garden, planted by Prep classes on 2 successive Green Days a few years ago. This is one of two Gardens within W.P.S. grounds which are planted with the original vegetation of our local area, to provide habitat and preserve biodiversity (the other is the Indigenous Grassland Garden). Recent rain has helped it to develop into a lovely soft planting. On the way back you pass a Melbourne Water Rainwater Garden, which was installed to divert stormwater into the garden.

Next we walked around the Admin Building and down the steps to the Vegie Garden and Maths Garden, which use the same space. We grow a mixture of seasonal vegetables, and last Friday we sold some of our cabbages and Russian red Kale; but our major crop is the Jerusalem Artichokes which are just starting to reappear after last Autumn's harvest. In a few weeks, they will be tall enough to run between, along the path through the garden beds. Harvesting them is one of the most enjoyable Garden Activities of the year for the younger grades.





Next we walked through our newest garden, the Parker Street Garden, which has been designed to be a play-space similar to the Childrens' Garden at the RMBG. It is temporarily fenced off to allow the establishment of the plantings.

We are heading back to the Oval now, where the helicopter is waiting! On the way is a small, empty garden near the Prep classrooms. Prep classes have enjoyed growing succulents to take home in past years – this year we have grown cuttings together to create a garden bed here in this very hot, exposed location. We are planning to buy some large pots to give extra height, and are using a selection of succulents to co-ordinate with the Red-Brick building in red, cream and yellow colours.

So here we are at the final garden – the Grade 5/6 Woodland Walk between the Grade 6 Classrooms and the Oval fence. It is not quite complete, needing some

small pebbles in the false creek beds, and hopefully some seating. It relies on decorative, textural features for its effectiveness: The brick and mulch path, natural leaf mulch under the trees, stepping stones and hand-made rocks; with textural planting on the fences (maidenhair creeper and curly fishbone fern), and barrels of tough, shade-loving plants. The design was built up from entries in 2011's Green Day competition, and the garden installed during last year. We hope you enjoyed walking around the gardens as much as the Judges obviously did.

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