

Creating a Secret Garden

I love the idea of a secret garden. Reading 'The Secret Garden' by Frances Hodgson Burnett as a child provided me with a lifelong hankering for a secluded and private place to relax and dream in. The secret garden in the book is walled, locked and hidden with decades of neglected growth – just finding it at all was part of the intrigue. While this is not possible for most of us, creating a secret garden or nook within our gardens is, and having one is an absolute delight.

Start by looking at the realities of your site, such as drainage, winds, shade, trees, paths and buildings. Decide whether you are creating a nook or something larger. Make use of what is already there – for example, a shed or house wall could become a wall of your garden, a group of trees or a hedge could be incorporated, a view to the mountain could be something special to savour from your secret garden. Make sure your secret spot will be practical for looking after and enjoying, and a size to suit its role in your garden.

The big word is 'secret' but the most important words are planning and patience. You need to plan for elements of: discovery, entry and exit, total or partial enclosure, privacy, difference to other parts of the garden, expressions of the personality of its creator, provision for activity or relaxation, charm, function and change. Select plants and build structures to support these elements.

Discovery can be achieved by enclosure or by 'coming upon unexpectedly'. I have seen a beautiful secret garden in a narrow sideway between a house and a fence, where lattice with arches defined the entry and exit of the area. This little nook contained two metal chairs, blue and terracotta pots brimming with scented gardenias, violas and scarlet geraniums and a gargoyle with a laughing grimace. Hardenbergias were climbing up the lattice and wood chip mulch covered the ground. On the east side of the house, it received morning sun and afternoon shade. The functions were to create a private place to relax in and to enable movement from front to back yards.

My own secret garden is on a much larger scale, since I have plenty of space. It is enclosed with a circle of ornamental pears (Chanticleer for later autumn colour and coping with a windy site) and a hedge of wormwood. Eventually the trees will provide the enclosing aspect but, for now, the wormwood hedge, planted on an encircling mound for added height, does that job. An arch will provide the only entry. I have planted a lemon tree in a garden in front of the arch, to act as a blocker, which will hide



the entry in time. Roses, perennials and bulbs provide colour and perfume now and will be replaced by shade lovers in the future, when they will make this spot different to other parts of my sun filled garden. The functions are to create a more intimate, secret space in a large garden, to be an outdoor eating area and to provide dense shade for summer relaxation.

Have fun selecting garden furniture, whimsical items, sculptures, pots and plants to express your personality and the style you have chosen for your secret garden.

Happy gardening, Christine Windle, Garden Gate of Inverleigh Nursery, 0403 267 286
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Garden and Orchard Workshops for May and June 2017

Garden Design and Planning Workshop – Sunday May 14th, 2 – 4.30 pm, \$30

Empower yourself with some know how!

Garden design principles, garden visit to see design ideas in action, step by step guide for how to design and plan part, or all, of your own garden. Suitable for new and more established gardens.

10 Tips for a Successful Backyard Orchard – Saturday June 3rd, 2.30 – 4.30 pm, \$25

Orchard design, tree selection, preparation for planting, ongoing tasks, organic approach, orchard visit. This workshop is for people planning or developing a backyard orchard.

Pruning Fruit Trees Workshop – Sunday June 18th, 2 – 5 pm, \$35

Pruning theory & options, hands on guided pruning practice for vase style pruning in our orchard, afternoon tea, notes. Very practical, gain knowledge and skills.

Call Christine to book in for our workshops - 0403 267 286 Workshops held at Garden Gate of Inverleigh Nursery, Corner of Inverleigh – Winchelsea Rd & McCallum Rd, Inverleigh, 3321