

Making Changes in the Garden – Through the Garden Gate

This year we moved a young peach tree for the third time. I can almost hear you say how crazy that is and, of course, you are right. This is no way to treat a fruit tree if you want a crop any time soon. So what is going on with all this changing around? Simply that gardening is a learning experience and each time we make a decision the variables, including our knowledge, have changed a bit.

It is big help to have a sense of overall design and the purposes for the different sections of your garden. That big picture generally remains reasonably constant. That means that you know where the winds come from to place your windbreaks, that paths and tracks are practical and that you view your garden from the windows and verandahs of your home to provide vistas as well as viewing the house from the garden. That said, a gardener needs to be flexible and prepared for the garden to evolve and become what is needed now and in the future.

So let's look at our recent changes. The peach tree was planted beside an old nectarine that had been cut down because it had had its day. The following year, the old tree revived and went on to bear the most delicious fruit. The peach was replanted in another spot in the orchard which, a year later, seemed to be just the right place for our greenhouse. Out the peach came and in it went in a garden nearby. After more thought, we opted for a bigger greenhouse in a different place, leaving the orchard spot vacant. But why move the tree back there? Well, the rest of the plants in its garden are natives and they don't have the same watering and feeding needs as a fruit tree. Clearly more thought and planning would have prevented two of the moves but, ultimately, we have been able to adapt to new circumstances and understanding of plant needs and have not stressed over making changes.

Other changes this year have been to the shape of several gardens to facilitate mowing and to the various combinations of plants in our gardens so that like needs plants are growing together. These changes, although they are work now, will make future gardening maintenance much easier

Then there are the changes that come from the heart. I have gone back on my pledge to have no roses in our gardens at the nursery, made because of my abysmal record of pruning and caring for them in our garden at home. Roses are hardy and I love them so I simply must have some. Appropriately for a gardener, I plan to 'turn over a new leaf'. I am starting with four ready to plant roses but I also have lots of cuttings from my friends' roses coming along. Thinking about where to plant them brings us back to the need for forward planning for change.

At home, a once loved sandpit is never played in now. Could it become the home of some succulents which thrive in spots which drain very well? Could it be cleaned out, filled with compost and become a raised bed for vegies? Should we keep it as a sandpit, put a cover on it to keep it clean for visiting children, maybe sit some pot plants on top? Decisions, decisions, decisions. One of the great things about gardening is that we get to make them ourselves. And we get to change them when the need or inspiration arises.

For people like me who seem to change their minds a lot in the garden, it can help to impose the 'one month' rule. You get inspired and have a great idea, but if it involves a lot of work and/or money, you think about it for a month before going ahead. Personally, I hate the 'one month rule'

and always want to jump straight into a new and exciting garden project. I do, however, see its advantages and at least it is not as bad as the 'one year rule', which some people live by.

Change is part of the nature of a garden and is something to enjoy. It brings with it opportunities for creativity, problem solving, exercising autonomy and putting new learning into practice. It keeps you interested, involved and excited – wonderful feelings for anyone and all to be gained from gardening, be the scale large or small.

Until next time, happy gardening.

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