

guide notes-1920s gardens

To inform homeowners about the front garden styles of original homes in Colonel Light Gardens.

COLONEL LIGHT GARDENS HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

As Colonel Light Gardens is a State Heritage Area, property owners require development approval before undertaking work which would change the exterior appearance of their home. Please contact Mitcham Council for advice.

Apart from this requirement, there is no obligation to follow the advice provided in this guide note.



HOUSES AND GARDENS IN COLONEL LIGHT GARDENS

Colonel Light Gardens' houses were largely built between 1921 and 1927. During the 1920s the bungalow was the popular style; although it predominates in Colonel Light Gardens, the Tudor became fashionable towards the end of the decade and so it is also represented.

Colonel Light Gardens' houses were either constructed privately or under the Labor Government's Thousand Homes Scheme (1924) on blocks which were generous by today's standards. The setback of the house from the street was deliberate and allowed the homeowner space to establish a front garden both as a showcase and an attractive frame for the house.

Gardens were quickly established by new homeowners who were proud of their home and their garden suburb. As the Garden Suburb Commissioner explained in his 1926 Annual Report:

The unique fact that every resident is the owner of the property occupied...—is reflected in the care bestowed on the homes and gardens; practically every resident is effecting improvements so far as time and means permits. The front gardens indicate constant attention, and considering the very short time that has elapsed since possession was obtained, the development has been phenomenal. There is a healthy emulation apparent in the beautification of the surroundings, a condition not usually manifest in districts where rented properties are the rule.

CONSERVATION PHILOSOPHY

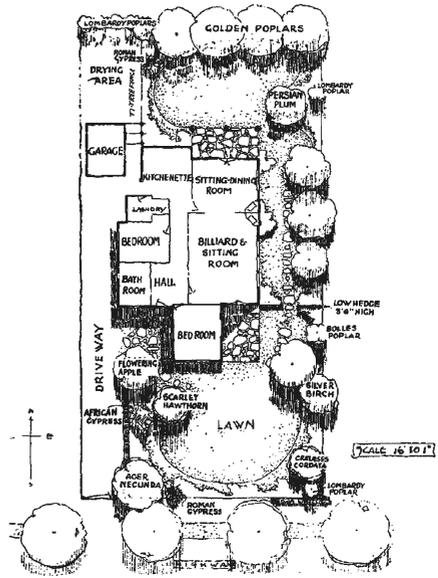
The general garden suburb philosophy of architectural harmony but not uniformity was equally applicable to the front gardens. In the founding years, Colonel Light Gardens' residents generally established front gardens that were in keeping with their neighbours'. As with house styles, they choose garden layouts, species of plants and fencing materials that reflected the popular fashion and avoided any 'jarring note' in the streetscape.

The January 1926 Australian Home Beautiful magazine published a feature article on Colonel Light Gardens that commented on the developing private gardens:

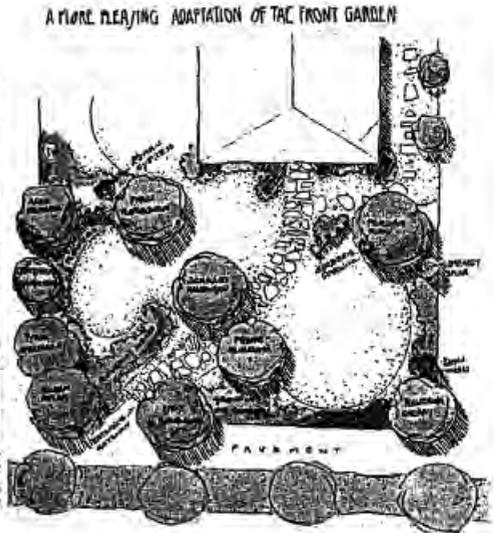
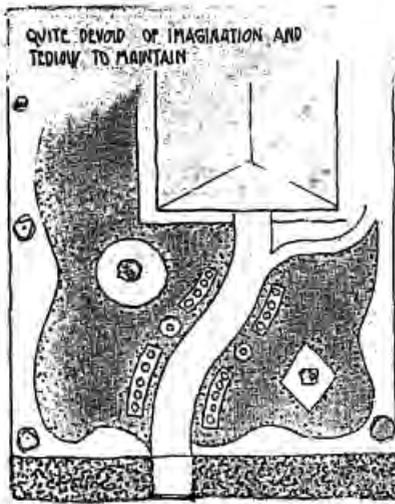
In addition to the planting of tree avenues, there is provision for lawns and flower plots in the front of these houses, and decorative effects are contemplated in every direction. To these colourful vistas, of course, residents themselves are contributing by neat home gardens, showing what can be done by mixing a little brains and industry in the layout possible on a 50 and 60 feet allotment.

AUSTRALIAN GARDEN DESIGN IN THE 1920s

One of Australia's great landscape designers was Edna Walling. During the 1920s she wrote monthly articles on gardening for the Australian Home Beautiful aimed at assisting the 'small house' gardener to design and establish gardens on house blocks similar in size to those found in Colonel Light Gardens. Edna Walling advocated an informal approach to landscape design, using trees, shrubs and groundcovers.



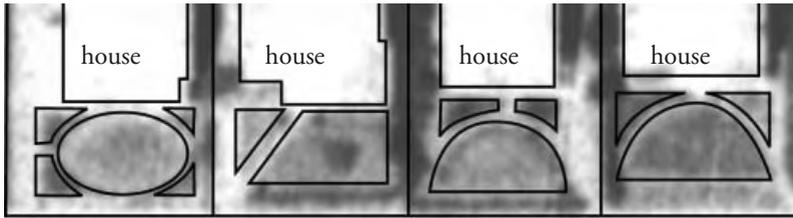
(right and below) Edna Walling designs, Australian Home Beautiful 1926.



The ordinary suburban cottage garden and a suggestion for a more ambitious lay-out.

GARDEN DESIGN IN COLONEL LIGHT GARDENS

Fortunately many early aerial and ground level photos survive to document the garden designs adopted by the first generation of homeowners in Colonel Light Gardens; these photographic sources indicate the preference for simple geometric designs for front garden beds and lawns. They also indicate that the beds were usually planted with ornamental flowers and shrubs—trees generally featured in the back gardens reserved for vegetables, fruit trees, a patch of lawn and a fowl house.



Section of a 1936 aerial photograph of Colonel Light Gardens. The four highlighted blocks indicate the typical front garden design used throughout the suburb.



Photos taken in the late 1920s of adjacent homes featuring gravel paths and driveways, circular garden beds, and standard roses. The open character of the crimped wire front fence allows the front garden and home to be viewed from the street and the public and private spaces to merge, creating a park-like effect.

Right, one of the Thousand Homes, showing the crimped wire fence and the garden in the early stages of development.



Left, gravel path and driveway, triangular garden bed and standard roses forming a border to the lawned area in the front garden of a privately built home.

Right, one of the Thousand Homes with crimped wire fence, gravel path and driveway and a simple geometric design for the garden beds and lawned area.



PLANTS

Colonel Light Gardens' residents chose plants according to their preference and from what was available at the time. The (South) Australian Homes and Gardens, 1925 to 1928, provides an extensive list of recommended plants of the period; many of these were planted in Colonel Light Gardens. They include:-

Bulbs: agapanthus, belladonna lilies, daffodils, dahlias, freesias, gladioli, hippeastrums, hyacinths, iris, ranunculi and sparaxis.

Annuals: asters, aquilegias, alyssum, cosmos, gerberas, marigold, nasturtiums, nicotiana, pansies, petunias, polyanthus, primula, snap dragon, stocks, sunflowers, sweet peas, violas, wallflowers, and zinnias.

Herbaceous and Perennials: chrysanthemums, delphiniums, gazanias, perennial phlox, shasta daisy, verbena, pelargonium and geraniums and salvia.

Shrubs: bird of paradise, butterfly bush, cotoneaster, crepe myrtle, daphne, hibiscus, hydrangeas, japonica, lantana, oleander, pittosporum, poinsettias, roses (bush and standard, often Lorraine-Lee, Royal Mail, Coachman, Yellow Texas, Peace and Mrs Minerva).

Hedges: coprosma, cypress, plumbago, viburnum (laurustinus)

Climbers: bougainvillea, jasmine, wisteria (Japanese and Chinese)

Trees: conifers, crab apple, crepe myrtle, prunus, silver birch.

For a comprehensive list of shrubs and trees typically planted in Adelaide gardens in the 1920s see **Gardens in South Australia 1840-1940** (details in Further Reading)



Above and left, a maturing
Colonel Light Gardens garden.

FENCES

All houses built under the Thousand Homes Scheme were supplied with a fence of crimped wire attached to wooden posts and rails. Early photographs record that this style of fence was also commonly used for the privately built homes. Well-maintained low hedges were often grown inside the fence using the crimped wire for support.

The low open style fences allowed for the 'merging of the public and private spaces' to 'create a park-like effect'.

Timber picket, brush, brick, cast aluminium and masonry with metal panels were not typical of the period. As Colonel Light Gardens is a State Heritage Area, fences require planning approval and homeowners contemplating new fencing must contact the City of Mitcham to obtain the necessary approval.



Left and below, street scenes showing the low crimped wire fences, some low front hedges, serving to create a harmonious streetscape and a park-like effect.



PATHS

Light-coloured gravel was the most common path and driveway material. Compacted cinders were also used. Slate was sometimes laid as stepping stones in the lawn or in 'crazy pave' style. Garden beds and lawned areas were edged with hardwood strips or stones.

GARDEN FURNITURE

During the 1920s the **Australian Home Beautiful** published a monthly project for the 'small house carpenter'. As well as interior woodwork projects there were fully dimensioned drawings and instructions for garden furniture. These projects included: a wooden wheelbarrow, a greenhouse, garden alcove, outdoor table, trellis fence, garden gates, pergola, a summer house, and how to build window boxes and garden frames.

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These photos showcase the early garden designs and plantings used by homeowners in Colonel Light Gardens.

FURTHER READING

Christine Garnaut, **Colonel Light Gardens: Model Garden Suburb**, Crossing Press, Sydney, 1999.*

David Jones and Pauline Payne, **Gardens in South Australia 1849-1940**, Department for Environment, Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs and the City of Adelaide, Adelaide, 1998.*

(South) Australian Homes and Gardens (Available from the State Library of South Australia).

Australian Home Beautiful 1924-1929 (Available from the State Library of South Australia).

Peter Cuffley, **Australian Houses of the '20's and 30's**, Five Mile Press, Fitzroy, Vic. 1989.*

Robert Freestone, **Model Communities**, Thomas Nelson, Melbourne, 1989.*

* available for borrowing from the Mitcham Library.

Further information is also available from the Colonel Light Gardens Historical Society Inc. Photographs of Colonel Light Gardens are held in the City of Mitcham Local History Centre, Room 5, 242 Belair Rd, Lower Mitcham.

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