

The Friends of the Geelong Botanic Gardens Report for Financial Year 2023-24

President: Denise Feldman

Our Mission

The Friends support and promote the Geelong Botanic Gardens and Eastern Park through:

- Volunteers who assist in maintaining the plantings in the Gardens
- Guides who support and inform visitors to the Gardens
- A nursery for propagation of plants and for revenue raising with sales to the public
- The Botanic Art School
- Library
- The Jubaea newsletter sent quarterly to all Friends and other interested persons
- An annual program of events, encouraging visitors to come to the Garden.
- The Gift Fund which provides financial support for projects and programs initiated by the Geelong Botanic Gardens.
- Subscriptions, volunteering activities, events, and the Friends' nursery, which provide major sources of funds for the Friends and therefore for the Gardens. These funds have more flexibility than the Gift Fund.

Volunteers in the Geelong Botanic Gardens

Listed below is the approximate number of volunteer hours @ \$46.62 per hour in this financial year. (This does not include all volunteering, only that which was done in the Geelong Botanic Gardens).

• Weeders 408 hours	\$19,020
• Perennial border 822 hours	\$42,797
• Rose Growers 660 hours`	\$30,769
• Guides and tours 347hours	\$16,177
Total hours, 2,237 hours	Total value \$108,763

*Based on November 2020 to November 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures, volunteers are worth **\$46.62 per hour** (if you look at what you probably would have to pay for replacing their services with paid staff). These are the figures an organisation can include in project budgeting and grant applications. It does not include the cost of administration.*

Challenges this Financial Year

- The Friends now have two licences with the City of Greater Geelong: one for the building and another for the Nursery. The content of these was significantly different this year. It took several months of negotiations to finalise these licences and to reach an agreement that the Friends felt able to sign. The agreement will provide a working document for commencing future licence negotiations.

- Ensuring that all aspects of the Friends governance meet the highest standards, enabling us to maintain our independence and autonomy.
- Liaising effectively with the changing landscape of the City of Geelong restructure.
- Maintaining volunteer enthusiasm for all FGBG programs while dealing with change.
- With uncertainty around the continuation of the propagation and sale of plants to provide an income for the Friends we have focused on catering and hosting horticultural groups as another source of revenue.
- Compromising and negotiating on issues which do not significantly affect the day-to-day operation of the Friends.

Friends' Plant Nursery

Joint Coordinators: Liz Bennetto and Judy Fyfe

The Growers have had a busy and eventful year. The year began with the Geelong Botanic Gardens then Coordinator, Ashley Filipovski's plan to review the Friends' Nursery and to create a master plan for its development. All volunteer groups participated in brainstorming, planning ideas for the Nursery, and a planning group was convened to address their suggestions. Three main areas were identified as needing improvement:

- Working facilities for Growers
- Making the nursery attractive for customers
- Finding new methods for marketing and sales.
-

The planning group met regularly under Ashley's guidance and their recommendations were put together to form a Master Plan for the Friends' Nursery. After Ashley's unexpected departure, planning was steered by Renee and Tristan.

The year 2023 has brought many changes:

- The Nursery Coordinator, Leanne Barnes resigned in December 2022 and Liz Bennetto and Judy Fyfe stepped up as joint interim Coordinators of the Nursery. There was much discussion before the role was formally defined. The Growers' team members agreed to help by taking on new responsibilities.
- Kellee Reissinger was appointed the Geelong Botanic Gardens Coordinator and is developing new collection management policies which will lead to changes to plant collections in the Gardens and to the redevelopment of the whole space to enable accreditation of the Geelong Botanic Garden nursery. This will mean changes to stock offered by the Friends' Nursery.
- There have been new regulations about routines and processes, new work areas, changes to pot sizes and propagation methods and to the species offered for sale. Problems with propagation facilities have been discouraging for our propagators. Mixed messages about working conditions and permitted activities have sometimes made life difficult in the Nursery.
- Recent problems with a large *Brachychiton populneus* in the Nursery have made movement between working areas difficult for volunteers.

Nursery coordinators have tried to remain positive and to encourage working together to overcome difficulties. The Growers have been very supportive of each other and have tolerated changing conditions and directions.

Wednesday morning meetings provide the opportunity for valuable discussion. We appreciate Growers' willingness to share in decision making and responsibilities; a great team effort has been needed and has made our work much more rewarding.

On the positive side, weekly sales have consistently risen, with sales up to \$500 recorded, though the cold winter has deterred some customers recently. Friends' Nursery has had several successful Saturday sales during the year, and we are planning a series of Spring Sales to coincide with the Geelong Nature Festival and the GBG Open Day.

A trolley of plants is prepared for the Guides' Discovery Table each month, resulting in some sales. We now have a system for recording plants sold. This enables us to decide on what are the popular plants and to complete reports for the Geelong Botanic Gardens Coordinator. We also record where customers live and how they hear about the nursery. This will assist with marketing.

Growers look forward to continuing to work together to promote Geelong Botanic Garden Plants, to raise funds for the Friends and to enjoy volunteering at the Friends' Nursery.

Botanic Art

Coordinator: Pammi Pryor

This year we produced the first Geelong Botanic Gardens School of Botanic Art Calendar/ Diary. This was much admired and a success financially.

Each term 20 classes are held. We continue to have 4 tutors. The reputation of the school brings students from as far as Swan Hill, Melbourne and Melton for classes.

Our Biennial Exhibition, *Inspired by Nature, Bloom*, will be held at the Waterfront Gallery, Alfred Deakin Ministerial Library, Deakin University Waterfront Campus, for the month of November 2023. The exhibition will feature botanic works by both tutors and students of the Geelong School of Botanic Art.

All works will be for sale.

Weeding Group

Coordinator: Peter Jablonsky

The weeders have been kept busy every week working at all sites in the gardens. There are always weeds proliferating everywhere and it has been a challenge to keep on top of it. Due to the amazing commitment and hard work of the team we rise to the challenge every week!!

We have welcomed some new members and now have eight enthusiastic members dedicated to the removal of all weeds. The team share wonderful humour, happiness and recipes each week. We are always searching for the perfect lemon tart recipe, so would welcome new members with expertise in this area (please share the perfect tart recipe with the Catering Group when you find it).

Perennial Border

Team Leader: Jan Cheyne

Our team of ten volunteers continue to nurture the Perennial Border through the seasons. It will soon be coming into its new spring growth.

We continue to tinker with colour and texture, so that there is always something new and interesting to see.

This year we plan to extend into the north which is very shady and therefore challenging, so researching plants that will survive in that environment is taking time.

The Gardens staff is very supportive of this venture, and are nurturing plants for us in their nursery, and in time, when we have more stock, will clear the area for us. We're very excited!

Heritage Rose Growers

Team Leader: Margaret Ward

With great attention and care, this dedicated group again looked after the Heritage Rose Collection. The challenge this year has been adjusting to the Occupational Health and Safety requirements which are to ensure the wellbeing of the team. No longer are stools from home, or battery-operated secateurs allowed. Instead, the GBG horticulture staff now undertake the more challenging tasks. Rosslyn Jablonski has written an excellent booklet, ***The Heritage Rose Collection in the Geelong Botanic Gardens***. The booklet is a collaboration with long standing members of the Rose Growers and discusses rose care using the combined knowledge they have gathered over approximately 25 years, The booklet features photos of each rose in the Gardens with descriptions and explanatory notes of the care needed for each dedicated species. This will be of great benefit to the next generation of Heritage Rose Volunteers.

On Monday 6 November the Friends are holding a Rose Lovers Day at the GBG. The booklet will be launched at this event.

Guides

Coordinator: Gwen Anderson

Over the past 12 months we have seen plenty of activities for the guides.

- We have enjoyed a Professional Development session every 2 months.
- We all have Working with Children Checks
- We have had 3 more guides update their First Aid Training
- We have been involved in the Winter series of lectures.

Despite low attendances for our walks, we contributed 788 hours volunteering in some way towards the Gardens.

- We have spent 347 hours 29 minutes guiding visitors in the Gardens
- We have raised \$1024.40 for the Friends through donations and booked walks.
- We have taken 1027 visitors on tours through the Gardens
- We have spoken to 227 people who have visited the Discovery Table.

We have been patiently waiting for the Tea House to reopen as we believe not having this facility has impacted on the numbers of visitors to the gardens.

We need new guides to boost the number of walks offered and hope our advertising for volunteers has some impact.

***Guided Walk Statistics – next page.**

Guided Walk Statistics:

Guided Walk Statistics August 2022-July 2023 Month	Guided Walk Nos. & Number of Visitors to D/Table	Roving	Money Collected Donation & Booked Walks	Guide Hours	Extra Hours- Monthly Plant in Focus; Monthly Garden Highlights; Monthly Discovery Table (D/T) Preparation; Personal Development Education; Rostered, Booked Walks and Monthly Themed Walk Preparation & Research; Education U3A, briefing new Guides & new Friends members; Administration-Rosters, Statistics, Agendas, Meetings, Catering Guided Walks – Rostered on Wednesday & Sunday, Booked Walks readily accommodated.
August 2022	44 45 D/T visitors	20	\$5	24hrs 5mins	Extra Hrs: 77hrs 25mins
September 2022	159 6 D/T visitors	8	\$517 Booked Walks	35hrs 50mins	Extra Hrs: 88hrs 5mins
October 2022	211 10 D/T visitors	41	\$688 Booked Walks	38hrs 15mins	Extra Hrs: 70hrs 10mins
November 2022	54 10 D/T visitors	26	\$108 Booked Walks	23hrs 30mins	Extra Hrs: 63hrs
December 2022	43 10 D/T visitors	80	\$108 Booked Walks	19hrs 25mins	Extra Hrs : 35hrs 40mins
January 2023	26 17 D/T visitors	383	Nil	30hrs	Extra Hrs: 61hrs
February 2023	109 15 D/T Visitors	135	Nil	29hrs 35mins	Extra Hrs: 48hrs 20mins
March 2023	77 39 D/T visitors	42	\$306 Booked Walks	34hrs 35mins	Extra Hrs: 69hrs 20mins
April 2023	89 16 D/T visitors	37	\$184 Booked Walks	32hrs 10mins	Extra Hrs: 81hrs 15mins
May 2023	168 25 D/T visitors	24	\$162 Booked Walks	38hrs	Extra Hrs: 81hrs 5mins

Library Report

Team Leader: Luanne Thornton

- Library volunteers have been going through the archive cupboard and disposing of lots of unneeded material from years gone by. It is careful work as there are important items that need to be kept for various reasons. These items have been added to the Friends Library archive.
- The Friends History timeline continues to be kept up to date. A list of headings has been developed by Dale Gordon which will help with the organization of the material. It is the main project at the moment. It highlights nearly 40 years of Friends' contribution to the Geelong Botanic Gardens, telling a story that includes a snapshot of the activities undertaken as part of our interaction with the Gardens. Most of the information has now been collected and we are at the editing stage. Already it covers approximately 50 pages.

Each year Friends and the public donate horticulture books to the library. Those in poor condition or which are already held in the Library are sold to raise money for the Friends.

The catalogue is kept up to date with new purchases and donations as they are received. The library is used by the Guides to research presentations, tours, and to highlight a *plant of the month* each month. It is also used by the School of Botanic Art and the Growers as a resource for their programs. There are 3 volunteers currently in our little team. Library volunteers do a range of tasks pertaining to the libraries and the Friends' history.

Meralyn Roberts, who was the previous librarian and has volunteered for over 20 years has stepped back due to ill health, but her contribution has been impressive, from her photo and newspaper cutting books and collections, as well as the setting up the library catalogue and the embroidering a picture of the 21st Century Garden now displayed on the wall near the library.

Events, Fund Raising and Catering

Coordinator: Allison Martland

The Events Program for 2022/23 was once again diverse, catering for a range of interests and budgets, with most events open to the public and members.

This program is an important part of the fundraising that is necessary for not-for profit, fully self-funded organisations such as Friends. The program also fulfills several of the Friends' purposes, as listed in the Statement of Purposes in our Rules of Incorporation:

- to encourage the community to support and appreciate Geelong Botanic Gardens
- to provide for information, education, interpretation, public programs, and activities
- to promote and increase membership and conduct activities for the benefit of members
- to carry out appropriate activities that raise funds for the Association, the Geelong Botanic Gardens and Eastern Park

Although annual financial contributions to Geelong Botanic Gardens projects are funded mainly from public donations to the Gift Fund, the Friends do support some Geelong Botanic Gardens projects from their own funds, including from funds raised from events.

Many thanks to our dedicated Events Team, including the very talented Catering Team, for all the planning and hard work it takes to consistently offer an engaging program of such a high standard.

This financial year Friends general funds provided:

- \$3000 to fund GBG staff to attend professional development at the International Congress of Botanic Gardens in Melbourne
- Catering morning tea for the Alexandra Club.
- The 2022 AGM guest speaker Tracey Carter from Geelong Tourism
- The On-line Winter Lectures series, featuring ten guest speakers. This attracted 40 members and guests, helping people to remain connected and learning over the cold winter months.
- Our popular annual Cooking Demonstration and Lunch featuring fresh winter produce
- Coach Tours and Self-drive Tours taking members and guests to a local Succulents Garden and Nursery; to the Historic Geelong Paper Mill tour; to magnificent gardens and nurseries in the Yarra Valley; a train trip to Melbourne University Systems Garden and a tour of the hidden gardens at Parliament House
- Garden Openings for the Friends included: a wonderful coastal garden as part of the Open Gardens Victoria Scheme, hosted by the Friends; four amazing gardens in the Leopold and Barwon Heads district for our annual Through the Garden Gates.
- Supper with a Movie nights are always popular – “Dare to be Wild” at The Hub proved a successful change of venue for the Friends.
- The Friends welcomed sixty senior members of the public for morning tea and guided tour of the GBG, as part of Seniors Week festivities.

- The Events Team catered for 85 members of the International Plant Propagation Society, providing a 3-course dinner, as part of their conference held in Geelong.
- A High Tea and a guided walk to welcome new members is held every 6 months. We also held a thank you afternoon tea for retiring volunteers.
- The annual Friends' Christmas Picnic featured a plant auction and our first Trivia Quiz.
- The annual Winter Lunch was held at Truffleduck Receptions with guest speaker John Arnott, presenting *Cultivating Conservation: The Emergence of Conservation in Botanic Gardens*.

Wadawurrung Connection Project

Coordinator: Liz Bennetto

This project aims to establish a strong connection between Geelong Botanic Gardens and the Wadawurrung community by working collaboratively to develop community awareness of Wadawurrung culture, with emphasis on their use of plants for food, medicine and materials, their conservation of resources and their methods of land care.

This will be done through establishing enhanced plantings, signage, walking trails and community education. A large sign at the entrance to the Gardens will acknowledge the Wadawurrung people and interpretive signage will explain their use of plants. Guided walks will be held regularly, and self-guided walks will be made available on-line via the website and printed in hard copy. Celebrations of the project will be held with the Wadawurrung community and the general community.

Wadawurrung approval has already been sought for the project via meetings with the Traditional Owners. They will be involved in confirming detailed action plans, and by consulting on plant selection, signage, and interpretation. They will assist with selecting appropriate plants, providing correct Wadawurrung names for plant labels, advising on interpretation of culture, approving promotional materials, and celebrating the Wadawurrung culture through ceremony and publications.

In 2022 we applied for a First Nations Cultural Heritage Grant to support the project. We were successful in obtaining a grant for \$23,000. Over the next few months, we will be working together with the GBG team and the Wadawurrung community to make this project a reality. We aim to make Geelong Botanic Gardens a recognized destination for community education on Wadawurrung culture, particularly on plant use and conservation.

The Gift Fund

The principal object of the Trustee (Friends) is to conserve, protect and enhance the Geelong Botanic Gardens and to encourage support and appreciation of the Gardens by the community. (Trust Deed, November 1996)

This year the Gift Fund policy was reviewed and clarified.

Funded projects this year:

- The Gardens staff requested bench seats for the Conservatory so that visitors can sit in comfort when enjoying the conservatory.
- The refurbishment of the largest pond in the fern garden. This has been approved.

The Friends, through Australian Taxation law, are required to expend a specified percentage of held funds annually.

The Gift Fund is significant for the Friends. It allows people who have an attachment to the Gardens to donate in a legally protected manner. Trust donations have gift deductibility status.

Occupational Health and Safety {OHS}

Coordinators: Charles Pond and Ian Martland

Fortunately, no physical injuries have been incurred this year to date.

Any queries concerning acceptable working procedures have been dealt with in a timely manner, facilitated by easy and open access to Gardens' staff. Communication channels with Gardens' staff remain open and are operating effectively.

Ian Martland has agreed to be the OHS representative for volunteers in the following groups; Growers (nursery), Perennial Border and Rose Growers.

The required 3 monthly OHS meetings have been timetabled to be held immediately following Wednesday morning tea. Volunteers and group coordinators are given several weeks' notice so any nagging minor or major issues can be aired. Attendance has been good, attendees have spoken freely and any issues raised have been dealt with effectively.

Joint Activities with the Friends and the Geelong Botanic Gardens

Geelong City provides venues for Friends activities for minimal cost under licence.

The following collaborative projects have received grants:

- The Wadawurung Connection
- Restoration of the Traill Fountain.
- Jointly hosting Horticultural Tour Groups: Friends provided catering and guided tours
- Sponsoring professional development for Geelong Botanic Gardens Horticulturalists e.g., BGANZ Conference. These opportunities are not funded from the Trust, but from everyday fundraising by the Friends.
- Providing Volunteers for the gardens: Tour Guides, Perennial Border, Heritage Roses and Weeders Volunteers.
- The Gardens staff provide cutting material for the Growers to propagate in the nursery
- Plants in the nursery are available to the Gardens' staff.
- The Friends and Geelong Botanic Gardens share goods and chattels.

The Traill Fountain

- In 2022 the Friends were notified of their success in obtaining a grant of \$35,000 from the Living Heritage Program, Heritage Victoria to conserve the Traill Fountain,
- In late 2022 it became evident that the condition of the fountain was worse than was determined in the conservationists' report for the grant application. Pieces of the structure had fallen off. Following consultation with Heritage Victoria, Geelong City and the Friends it was agreed to prepare a variation to the grant. The purpose of the grant was officially changed to gain permission for the grant funds to be used to reevaluate the fountain from a structural engineers' perspective. The cost of the conservation will now be greater than the grant.
- The City of Greater Geelong has committed to fund the additional amount for conservation in the 2023-24 budget.

Special Guests this year

- Lance Mann and his wife provided information about the bequest of his uncle. John Mann.
- Chris Dance reviewed the 21st Century Garden and shared his original renderings.
- Councillors Anthony Aitken encouraged volunteers at the Volunteers Lunch
- Belinda Maloney visited for morning tea.
- Jane Edmanson had dinner with Allison, Rose and Denise and talked about possible shared ventures.
- John Arnott spoke at our Winter Lunch.

Organisational Strengthening

Changes have been implemented to strengthen the Friends organisation

- Occupational health and safety meetings now held 3 monthly.
- Coordinators meetings are held twice yearly.
- Review and update of existing policies and identification of gaps is being addressed.
- Key finance persons are now police checked

Professional Affiliations

- Botanic Gardens of Australia and New Zealand
- Australian Association of Friends of Botanic Gardens
- Volunteering Geelong
- Gardens Club of Australia
- Tourism Geelong

Challenges moving forward

- That Friends remain a relevant, viable and productive organisation able to continue its primary purpose of supporting the Geelong Botanic Gardens and Eastern Park into the future.
- That the Friends continue to engage a vibrant membership to achieve our vision
- And most importantly, that Friends can continue to offer the programs and volunteering at the Gardens that have been our practice for nearly 40 years.

To the Committee members, Volunteers and Staff:

My sincere thanks for your contribution. Without you all doing what you do, no matter how small, the Friends would not continue and be the positive benefit to the Geelong Botanic Gardens and Community that it is.