



HELEN YOUNG

Bring it on

THIS GARDEN WAS MADE WITH THE FUTURE IN MIND

A decade ago, when South Australia was in the throes of a bad drought, "everyone was talking about trying to future-proof their gardens", says Virginia Kennett. While interest in gardens that can adapt to a changing climate and require less water has grown since then, the Adelaide garden designer was an early adopter of the concept.

At Netherby in the city's south, Kennett created this climate-friendly garden in 2011 for a plant enthusiast who wanted an engaging family space. The client loved the result, but after her death four years ago the property was sold. In a neat twist, the new owners turned out to be friends of Kennett's who bought the house because of its garden, unaware that she had designed it.

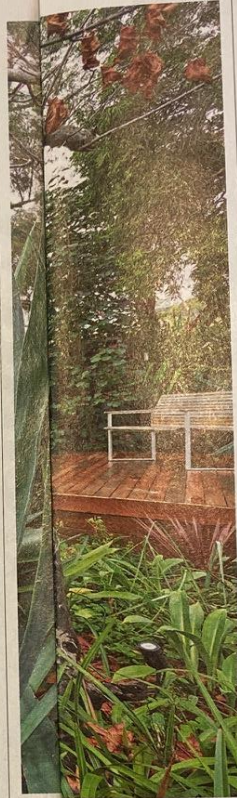
Unusually, the house is set at the back of the block, so that most of the garden area is in the front. "There was no relationship between the house and the garden when I first saw it," says Kennett. "To resolve this we built a large, split-level timber deck to one side for living and entertaining, which

then steps down into the garden." Low retaining walls were designed to create a series of linked, usable spaces from the sloping site.

Around this "more civilised" part of the garden, she says, there is a "wilder" area that is more loosely planted and invites wandering. Informal sleeper steps with bush mulch lead to the firepit area, enclosed by low stone walls. "It's a great area for children to play," says Kennett.

In keeping with sustainability ethics, "we wanted to work around the existing large trees and shrubs. I'm a believer in valuing plants that are thriving and looking after them," she says. "And it makes you more creative."

To the large liquidambar and eucalypts that already provided shade, Kennett added plants with strong structure. Plants such as tree aloe (*A. barberae*) provide a vertical element, contrasting against clipped, silvery domes of saltbush (*Rhagodia spinescens*) and germander (*Teucrium fruticans*). Foliage texture comes from agaves, yuccas and grasses, while statuesque honey bush (*Melianthus major*) is one of Kennett's favourites



ccas



Pho Sam

for its blue-grey, textured foliage and flowers. "My friend calls the garden 'Fifty Shades of Green'," she laughs. "But there's always a lot of interest in terms of form."

The garden was already private, courtesy of a huge, original hedge of olives along the front boundary. When the new owners took over it had become overgrown and unwieldy, so they asked hedging expert Kurt Wilkinson to restore it. "He cut it back super hard and I had to reassure my friends it would come good," Kennett recalls. "It bounced back beautifully."

The new owners love the garden, she adds. "They're both keen gardeners who, being retired, can put time into it." The design is unchanged, but new plants are being added to attract small birds such as honeyeaters.

For anyone interested in climate-compatible gardening, Kennett recommends the Mediterranean Garden Society (mediterraneangardensociety.org): "They're a fantastically supportive group of people who would love to get more young people involved." The society has branches in South Australia, WA and Victoria.

