



This page: Under the jacaranda, a shady place to paint on a sunny day. Opposite page, left: Globe artichokes, delicious to eat and a visual standout in the garden. Right: Evening primrose flower their hearts out in the orchard.



STORY **LYNELLE JOHNSON** PHOTOGRAPHY **NICKY GORDON & NIKKI WRIGHT**

# The Yellow House

IF YOU ARE CURIOUS ABOUT UNUSUAL, OLD-FASHIONED PERENNIALS AND RARE CULINARY AND MEDICINAL HERBS, YELLOW HOUSE GARDEN IN NOWRA IS THE PLACE TO GO.







Clockwise from top left: Strawberry plants border the path in the orchard and provide the bower bird's favourite snack; a vibrant, lipstick pink, hollyhock; plant propagation is a never-ending task; the rainwater tank and an old silver birch gives shade to hellebores and hydrangeas; an exuberant dancing woman brings a smile; the prolific kitchen garden provides lots of vegetables all year round; an ancient chair by the front perennial border; painting on a sunny day. Opposite page, top: Sister Luisa, Truffle and Pearly Gates, some of Mims rare Croad Langshan hens. Below: Mim gives a tour of her garden.







"Smell this! Taste that! It's amazing!" says Mim Burkett. I've been touring Mim and Neville Burkett's Yellow House Garden in Nowra for over an hour and still haven't reached the end of its riches. This is pretty impressive considering it is, after all, a suburban block. However, this is no ordinary garden. Yellow House Garden, named after the classic weatherboard Nowra cottage the Burketts renovated and painted yellow, is a treasure trove of rare plants – and endangered chooks.

I'm invited to taste and smell my way around long-forgotten herbs, both medicinal and edible, and other rare beauties with Mim, a naturopath, passionate gardener and slow food enthusiast and Neville, a heritage architect.

Some of these plants I have heard of: salvia, buddleia, chicory (great in salads and good for the liver); some I had no idea existed: garderober, a type of wormwood to keep moths away and scented leaf pelargoniums in rose, peppermint, chocolate and even nutmeg.

My senses are in overdrive as I try to catalogue the flavours and smells: "reminiscent of this, not quite lemon but with something else"; "smells like an old house, reminds me of my grandmother". In fact, "reminds me of grandmother" is a good place to start as Mim explains that plants go in and out of fashion and the reason she is growing these plants is to preserve them beyond the whims of fashion.

"I appreciate rare perennials and I love to grow plants that are difficult to propagate, because I enjoy the challenge. Now I have people who love plants say: 'I've been looking for that for ages,'" Mim says.

Surprisingly, the garden is only three years old. Tonnes of concrete and a pagoda had to be removed to transform this garden into the lush and productive block it is today.

"The soil here is pretty impoverished," says Mim, with photos showing 10 days of concrete removal – 73 tonnes in total.

An Indian hawthorn at the front of the house remains, its white spring blossom a favourite haunt of bees and the Burketts also



#### **Yellow House Garden is open by appointment**

20 Jervis Street Nowra. Ph: 4421 8681

Visit [yellowhouseheritageperennials.com.au](http://yellowhouseheritageperennials.com.au) to order rare plants

#### **Collectors Plant Fair**

Heritage Perennials will be attending the Collectors Plant Fair, 13–14 April at the historic Hawkesbury Race Club, Claredon (between Richmond and Windsor). For more information visit: [www.collectorsplantfair.com.au](http://www.collectorsplantfair.com.au)





learned to love the 90-year-old jacarandas. Their main task, after clearing the site, was to establish a kitchen garden and then an orchard, which now has figs, limes, peaches, Lisbon and Eureka lemons among others.

The rare plants spread around the back and sides of the house, including a substantial nursery section and a chicken pen containing critically endangered Croad Langshan hens. I'm told there are only 200 breeding hens left.

As I stroll around the garden, I wonder how a dish would taste with mastic thyme, pizza thyme or Tuscan blue rosemary or if I could use the coriander flowers in salads (Mim says you can). She shows me angelica, a natural sweetener and one of the original flavours used in gin and, then, real culinary lemongrass – not the hybrid East Indian lemongrass sold in nurseries (who knew?). She points out feverfew that's used for migraines, and salad burnet – a refrigerant plant with strengthening and cooling properties.

The Burketts manage all this by organic principles with no chemicals at all. Their passion for collecting, conserving and distributing rare and endangered plants has led to the garden being part of Open Gardens Australia – it takes two pages to describe all the plants on this plot. They host plant sale days that attract a diverse crowd from passionate gardeners to one elderly lady who, wanting to re-create her grandmother's garden, carried off around 400 plants.

Driven by a passion for sustainability, community and a willingness to share, Yellow House Garden give away their chokos on a table out the front with around 200 being snapped up by locals. According to Mim, the fabulous thing was that other neighbours started to bring their chokos to give away as well. "New bags of chokos kept appearing on the table," she says. (For those of you who think chokos should be given away, the cooking tip is: treat chokos like zucchini.)

"I think there is a new wave where people want to grow their own food and share it," says Mim. ■





Opposite page, top: the silver white leaves of the medicinal plant *salvia apiana*.

Bottom: bronze fennel features in many spots in the garden. This page, clockwise from top left: rosemary, evening primrose, echium and golden elderberry in the blue, white and yellow border; Penstemon sour grapes is a showy perennial in the border; veggie garden and nursery area by the potting shed; curry leaf tree – an essential ingredient in many curries; the rustic gate to the orchard; a banksia rose scrambles over the walls, its blossoms mimic the house colour; a wooden duck sculpture oversees the nursery area; silver, mauves and shades of pink predominate in the border along the front path.

