

## In My Garden

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I was very sorry to read the stories about gardens burned in the fires down on the coast. Gardens may not have economic value but they take years of effort, patience, creativity and love to create. Here in Reidsdale, on the western side of the Monga National Park, the Currowan Fire was stopped in the back paddocks of the cattle properties that adjoin the park. My adjacent property was spared. Even so, with the drought, the heat waves, the endless wind and the rabbits it was a very challenging



**A broad view of the garden and paddocks.**

**Whilst the garden looks reasonably happy, the distant pasture is decidedly not. What a difference rain has made.**

spring and summer in the garden.

We have had 3 dry years in this part of the Southern Tablelands. In December the Shoalhaven River stopped running and the Braidwood township ran out of water, with water being trucked in from Canberra.

In early November my dam ran dry leaving only my house tank and garden tank for the cows, the house and my gardens. By mid December my garden tank emptied and I was down to 15,000 litres in the house tank. A cow will drink 100 litres of water a day in hot weather. In late December I was forced to purchase 25,000 litres of water from Goulburn, but by then the Currowan Fire was burning on the ridges in the Monga Park above my property and I used all that water in 24 hours wetting down around the house.

With no mosquitoes the rabbit population exploded.

So where did this heat, wind, lack of water and rabbits leave my garden. Not surprisingly, with the exception of my **waratahs** (*Telopea mongaensis*, **Monga waratah** and *Telopea* ‘**Braidwood Brilliant**’, a cross between *Telopea speciosissima* and *T. mongaensis* produced at ANBG Canberra) which I put under shade cloth and continued to hand water weekly, I had to completely stop watering the garden.

In these conditions, amazingly, my garden largely held up.

There was no spring flush, no new growth and nothing flowered, but almost nothing died either. There were a few small tragedies: my two **Tasmanian pepperberrys**, *Tasmannia lanceolata*, one male and the other female died together on Jan 4, the hottest day ever recorded in Braidwood; a newly planted *Banksia grandis* was eviscerated on the same day; a group of Western Australian mallees which hadn't handled the frost, just faded away; the buds of a *Eucalyptus preissiana* which formed in March 2019 finally opened in November and then fell off two days later; some of my **correas**

which were relentlessly attacked by the rabbits with every leaf eaten off and the roots repeatedly dug out, turned into dead sticks; **yellow buttons**, *Chrysocephalum apiculatum*, **lemon heads**



*Calocephalus citreus*, and **winged everlasting**, *Ammobium alatum* all failed to flower. Overall, however, the garden survived with some plants looking as good as ever. In mid January two weeks after the fires passed, here in Reidsdale we struck lucky, with 2 thunderstorms totalling 70mm.

These storms caused quite bad erosion across my grass denuded paddocks but not my gardens which are heavily mulched. The tanks half filled and a puddle formed in the bottom of the dam. My plants woke up. A thin layer of green grass emerged across the paddocks. Then in early February came the big rain. We received 400mm in three days with another 100mm about a week later. For the first time since 2016 my dam entirely filled as did my 100,000 litre house tank and my smaller garden tank. Within 10 days the grass was eight inches high and brilliant green.

Since then, although we haven't received further rain, the wind has stopped blowing, the weather has turned mild and the rabbits have disappeared. With the soils almost saturated, during March and April all the plants in the garden have put on massive growth and the summer flowering plants have finally flowered.

**These photos show the remarkable recovery from a dry, brown landscape to a lush green carpet just days after the rain.**

On reflection my best performers in this summer of heat, wind, drought and rabbits were:

*Eremophila* 'Kalbarri Carpet', *Rhagodia spinenscens* and my *Eucalyptus macrocarpa*. However there were many other star performers, not from hot dry places, which seemed to thrive on a total absence of water while enduring multiple heatwaves and constant wind.

Of particular note were *Westringia*

'Wynyabbie Gem', *Grevillea australis*, *G. lanigera*, *G. arenaria*, *G. aquifolium*, and *G. juniperina*, *Micromyrtus ciliata* and most of the **acacias** including *A. baileyana*, *A. pravissima* and *A. covenyi*.



It's now early May and we have already had four frosts including a minus 5. The garden has a lot of fresh tender growth vulnerable to frost. I've started putting up some frost protection so we shall see how it goes.

For now, however, the garden is still looking beautiful.