

Creating a biodiversity oasis

EARTH FIRST

by Peter West, ECCO

Owning a small to medium sized rural-residential lifestyle block can provide many opportunities. For Peter and Michelle Worsley, revegetating their 50 acre rural block in north orange has become their hobby and passion.

Peter and Michelle commenced a revegetation program across their block in 1995 with 15km of direct seeding using locally collected native seed, followed by mass planting of tube stock. In total, 35 acres have now been replanted with the assistance of the Natural Heritage Trust following the removal of an orchard.

Since starting, they have also developed a drought hardy native garden around their home, and have watched their rural block become a biodiversity oasis. Their hard work and interest has provided them with endless pleasure, ongoing educational opportunities for their children, and a quiet retreat to relax.

Their block now hosts a large variety of plants including eucalypts, wattles, bottlebrush, leptospermums, and assorted casuarina's. Sugar gliders and brush-tailed possums now nest in the hollows of many older trees, and Echidna's regularly forage through their garden. Eastern grey kangaroo's, swamp wallaby's, and wallaroo's are also frequently seen grazing in the morning, and a small dam built near their house contains turtles, freshwater yabbies, frogs, dragon flies, and many waterbirds, including buff-banded rails.

Their house garden also hosts many bird attracting banksia's, grevillea's, acacia's and correa's. These plants attract large flocks of superb parrots each summer, as well as honeyeaters, king parrots, eastern and crimson rosella's, superb fairy wrens, eastern spinebills, lorikeets, and dawn calling Kookaburra's throughout the year.

The placement of rocks, logs and small water ponds around their garden provide habitat for a number of frogs including Perons tree frogs, whistling tree frogs, eastern froglets, marsh frogs, and the iconic Eastern Banjo frog whose characteristic 'bonk' calls resonate a chorus throughout summer.

While a pleasure to admire, many creatures also provide a valuable service to the Worsley's, with their resident blue-tongue lizards and Cunningham skinks eating garden snails, and tawny frogmouths that catch unwanted rodents around the vegetable garden.

For the Worsley family, growing up with nature at their doorstep has been a rewarding and fulfilling experience, with never a dull moment. Their children have loved growing up with an outdoors lifestyle, learning about all things natural. From watching birds fledge in spring, catching yabbies in their dam, to planting trees and shrubs in their garden, they have developed a healthy respect for all things natural, even creepy crawly insects.

The next step in their home project will involve importing logs back into the gully to prevent erosion, and developing a wetland as a water filter with sedges and reeds.

How to develop you own biodiversity oasis?

- Grow locally occurring native plant species as they will attract local birds, insects, frogs and possums.
- Fence off remnant vegetation and gulleys/creeks from grazing stock
- Plant drought-hardy native trees and shrubs that produce bird attracting flowers such as grevillea's, banksia's, bottlebrush, correa's, hardenbergia's, and acacia's.
- Provide a permanent water source for birds, frogs, insects and turtles.
- Provide plenty of ground cover as shelter for ground dwelling animals using grasses, rocks and logs.
- Retain tree hollows as well as dead and fallen timber for habitat.
- Protect understorey plants from being grazed or trampled by stock
- Establish native grasses for seed collecting birds.

For more information

- <http://www.publish.csiro.au/pid/3547.htm>
- http://www.ruralresidentialliving.com.au/printer_friendly/printer12.pdf

Green dates for the calendar

World Environment Day – June 5