

# A Gardener's City

## Canberra's Garden Heritage

Produced by the AGHS ACT/Monaro/Riverina Branch  
in conjunction with The Production Hub

Canberra is a garden, but according to members of the ACT/Monaro/Riverina Branch of the Australian Garden History Society, it's true in the broadest sense. In a film commissioned by the Society and launched recently at the National Botanic Gardens, landscape historian Professor Ken Taylor describes Canberra as "a vision" with all the elements of the grand created landscape - vistas, water, enclosed and open spaces and blurred boundaries with the wider surroundings.

Part funding from the ACT government's heritage fund and the AGHS, and donations from a number of sponsors, including the Dame Elizabeth Murdoch Trust, have made the film possible.

The documentary film, hosted by garden writer, photographer and historian Trisha Dixon and written by Brian Voce, traces Canberra's development from "a windswept degraded limestone plain" to the richly diversified embodiment of Walter Burley Griffin's vision. But while Lindsay Pryor, Charles Westin and many other famous Canberra gardeners are important staging posts in the story, the film also traces some very personal stories. There's Horrie Cleaver, the taxi driver whose vegetable growing skills were legendary, and Jim Munday, who spent 46 years with Parks and Gardens and remembers Lindsay Pryor as "the greatest man I ever met". And Pam Greave, whose father Tom made it his life's mission to give Canberra gardeners a workable schedule for growing successful vegetables. Historic homesteads like Woden, where Edna Walling worked her magic, are also part of our heritage.

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The legacy of the Yarralumla Nursery is also a strong theme: perhaps uniquely in Australia, the city's gardening history can be traced through the plants given out via the nursery's free distribution scheme. Dr Dianne Firth of the University of Canberra points out that the huge deciduous trees of the inner suburbs and the eucalypts of the newer outer suburbs form part of an integrated tapestry.

Present issues with water availability, cluster development and demographic changes in inner suburban areas are also addressed. While climatic challenges confront latter day gardeners, there's plenty of hope for the future, much of it derived from the lessons of the past: Mediterranean planting schemes, the legacy of Banks and Pryor's planting experiments and Canberrans dedication to their gardens all testify to the city's future as an urban forest and a national garden.

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