



Short story competition

2026
A grandfriend's garden



Georgie Keatinge with Bidgee, Mamma's new pup, Skye Keatinge

Judges' comments

John Maurer, chair of the panel

In conjunction with AGHS's annual conference in Orange, grade six students in the district were invited to write a short story of no more than 500 words on the influence of a grandparent/ grand friend and their garden on the writer.

Entries were judged by AGHS member John Maurer, Robyn Oates and Meg Probyn. The panel was impressed by the quality of many of the entries, both in their use of expression and metaphor.

The winning entry, published here, was **A year in Mamma's garden by Georgie Keatinge**. This articulate entry is written from an original perspective and shows detailed observation of seasonal variation and colour. This is also reflected in the tone of the writing. The entry is beautifully written and is a most enjoyable read.

The stories by the three runners up can be read on the AGHS website:

Lily by Skye Bayliss is about the influence of Skye's grandmother on how she thinks about plants and weeds. The story makes clever use of conversational style and demonstrates a depth of knowledge about the lily – the plant and its symbolism – as well as how grief is expressed.

Ma ma's Garden by Henry Blacklow displays knowledge of plant care for a variety of both garden and indoor plants. Here is a child learning to love gardening by helping his grandmother.

Reconnection by Olivia Eltham focuses on working with her nan on a neglected and overgrown garden. Olivia shows understanding of her nana's grief and how loss can become something positive from caring, in this case, for a particular red rose.

The competition was generously supported by the Millthorpe Garden Nursery and two AGHS members, who prefer to remain anonymous.

Tax-deductible donations to the Nina Crone Writing Fund will assist the Society to continue this initiative.

Please go to <https://www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au/funding/nina-crone-writing-fund/>

A year in Mamma's garden Georgie Keatinge, age 11, Cumnock Public School



Autumn

The autumn leaves are falling, the season coming to an end. A carpet dotted with red, orange and yellow. The eccentric Jack Russell bounds through the piles of leaves the small children are clearing away at last. The final warm rays die and the frost is near.

Winter

The birds have arrived, hundreds of them from the mountains. Red robins with their fiery feathers, currawongs with their beady eyes and mopoke owls with their soft cry. The bulbs are poking out, the ferny stems bend at an angle, giving them an artistic look and from my fencepost I can see some colour pushing up from the frosty ground. White, yellow, blue, purple, pink, green. I can see the old lady with kind eyes pruning the roses, humming a little tune softly. Winter is the time of cutting back.



Spring

Spring, an explosion of colour, the farm is alive with smell and noise. The newborns peeping as if to say, 'I'm alive!', the bees buzzing, the birds chattering and the sky alight. The onions and garlic are flourishing and the veggie garden thriving. Every now and then, a black and white silhouette swoops in to deliver a sharp cry, 'Hey, watch it!' The garden smells like a fresh perfume wafting on the breeze, fragrances of every smell filling the air: flowers, trees, last week's rain and the undies hanging on the clothesline. The golden elm is flowering and is a sight to behold, the blossoms catching every eye. But to be honest I prefer blue.



Summer

I'm looking for shade and take shelter under the great claret ash tree. The days are getting longer as the days get hotter. Kids run through sprinklers in their swimmers and only stop to stuff their faces when they pass the strawberry patch. Summer is a time for homemade things and jars are filled to the brim with biscuits, chutney and jams of all flavours – strawberry, blackberry, boysenberry, blueberry and marmalade. The cockatoos squark and chatter as goannas run up trunks in search of eggs, and a light breeze winds its way around the golden elm. It's so good in summer.

As the sun gets lower, I fly back to my bower. I rearrange my blue treasures making sure no unwelcome visitors have popped in. Suddenly a khaki flash catches my eye and a female steps out from the undergrowth. I look for my most precious ornament, a cyan bottle cap. I pick it up and start my dance, puffing out my feathers, tucking in my legs, I start to buzz!

All photos Georgie Keatinge