Community benefit of Bulleen Art and Garden

Introduction to Bulleen Art and Garden for NELP EES Submission 3/9/19

Presented by Paul McMorran, CEO of Bulleen Art and Garden and Darren Wong, Principle of Planology.

First opening its doors back in 1967, the Bulleen Nursery, now Bulleen Art and Garden, or colloquially BAAG, has inspired and has been a destination of keen gardeners and horticulturalists for over 5 decades. BAAG is nestled alongside adjacent parklands and the Yarra River within the Valley of the Arts.

The business has been in the current family ownership for 37 years, during which time the socially conscious business has grown and flourished.

BAAG receives approximately 135,000 visitors each year. Most visitors are locals; however, we do attract visitors from greater Melbourne, country Victoria and even interstate. Both the artworks and display gardens attract many visitors and they often combine visits to other local attractions such as Heide Museum of Modern Art.
From inception, the business has been built on the objective of helping people to get out into the garden. Although still at its heart, over the years this has evolved beyond simply gardening to have a greater vision to incorporate enabling people to connect with nature, the environment, the community and their creative side.

BAAG’s mission statement is ‘to work with and inspire home gardeners, local communities, and horticulturalist and landscape professionals to contribute to a healthy, biodiverse planet through;

- Enabling and encouraging sustainable living
- Nurturing creativity in art and gardens
- Local food production and gardening
- Indigenous plant and habitat gardening
- Responsible resource and chemical use
- Supporting sustainable communities, environmentally focused groups and individuals
- Being an effective, ethical and viable business, which celebrates healthy communities by example.

The BAAG Team

BAAG employs up to 50 staff across the business. Staff are critical to the long-term success of any business. In addition to skills necessary to running a successful garden centre (plant / art knowledge, accounting, marketing etc.) BAAG consciously employs staff with an extensive knowledge of and passion about sustainable gardening as well as a commitment to the environment.

Staff are trained and actively encouraged to provide the highest level of sustainable gardening advice, even when it results in reduced sales.

BAAG’s ethos and passion for the environment and the community are championed across of levels of the business. Bruce and Meredith Plain, since acquiring the business
back in 1982, continue to instil their vision for the business and have inspired many of us at BAAG to aspire for sustainable outcomes that would not be possible without such support.

**Benefits Delivered by BAAG**

BAAG has been undertaking a program of community, environmental, and arts initiatives, which reflect its strong environmental and community ethos.

**BAAG’s Community Contributions**

BAAG is deeply embedded in and interdependent within our community. We have created community and sustainable gardening and living leadership that is locally relevant. BAAG has been proactive in supporting local community groups and schools with sponsorships and donations, advice and talks, but it is the more proactive participation in the community which are more significant.

These are just a few examples.

**Sustainable Gardening in Australia**

Sustainable Gardening Australia (SGA) [www.sgaonline.org.au](http://www.sgaonline.org.au) is a not-for-profit, nongovernment organisation, established in 2003. Which is a highly effective means of getting valid sustainable information to a wide range of home and professional gardeners nationwide.

BAAG is a passionate supporter of SGA:

- Bruce Plain (Director of BAAG) was the president of SGA from its inception until 2018 when he became Vice President
- BAAG co-founded SGA with the University of Melbourne and Environs Victoria
- BAAG has provided rent free office accommodation since 2004 and significant other financial support.
- Paul McMorran, BAAG’s CEO, developed the SGA ECLIPs concept (Environmental Certification for Landscape Professionals) prior to his current role, and Bruce Plain currently runs the program in a voluntary capacity.

**Monthly Vegie Swap at Bulleen Art & Garden**

In 2009, the BAAG vegie swap, through the initiative of one of our staff members, was the second to start in Melbourne. There are now many vegie swaps throughout Melbourne, some of which have been inspired by the experiences and the advice that we have provided at Bulleen Art & Garden
The swaps have attracted a loyal following in this time. As well as being a means of diversifying access to fresh home grown produce, the swaps have morphed into as much a social outing and a point of connection for many of the swappers. They are also another way to increase knowledge, both through talks by staff and through swappers sharing their own experience.

**Community festivals and activities**

BAAG runs numerous hands-on creative activities, many with a sustainability focus both in-house and at community festivals each year.

The Banyule Kids Arty Farty Fest is a highlight each year. Attended by over 20,000 people, BAAG has attended the festival every year since 2005. Over the years we have run free clay sculpture workshops, found object collage making, mini worm farms and paper pot making among others.
Some of BAAG’s biggest onsite events to date have had a strong art focus, these include the 2012 Gaia night which combined a fundraising event for Sustainable Gardening Australia, mural launch and exhibition opening, the 2015 Bolin Bolin Gallery relaunch and the 2017 50th Birthday Party and Sculpture Garden Launch.

We are also many free in-house garden talks, such as during the Harvest Festival.

**BAAG’s work in the parks**

BAAG has been developing indigenous gardens between the Yarra River and its property in conjunction with Parks Victoria staff since 1996.

Initially, the site contained severe weed and degradation problems, and other problems due to previous site practices and the adjacent industrial area. The site is considered particularly suitable for developing indigenous gardens because it has a range of topographical features within a relatively small area allowing the development of themed plantings.

BAAG’s work has been recognised by Parks Victoria Ranger and botanist Cam Beardsell as one of best examples of suburban revegetation. The indigenous gardens are adding visual amenity to the park as they are screening the busy road and industrial area from the river.

Organised walking tours and tree plantings have been run on a number of occasions, often in conjunction with the Friends of the Yarra Valley Parks. The events build awareness of the cultural and environmental significance of the region, and the use of indigenous plants.
Another example of BAAG’s work in the parks is the joint development of the Bolin Bolin Precinct from Heide to Bulleen Park in collaboration with Parks Victoria, Heide and the city of Manningham.

**Art & Creativity at BAAG**

Art and creativity are incorporated to almost all facets of the business. At Gaia Night, February 2012, Jason Smith, the then CEO Heide Museum of Modern Art talked about how BAAG was a welcome respite, encouraging artists and writers, not only in their art, but in living sustainably.

Through art BAAG can:

- Introduce many people who would not dream of visiting an art gallery to art.
- Provide a much-needed exhibition and sales space to local artists and craftspeople
- Encourage the community to discover their own creativity
- Get across sustainability messages in many different ways
- Entertain our customers.

**Permanent artworks**

Permanently installed art has been an integral part of the BAAG experience over a number of decades, creating an ever-evolving open gallery of local artists. One example is the front façade which incorporates the work of 8 local artists, signalling that there is something new and exciting behind the big coloured fence. It started with an overall concept and fence design by Akira Takizawa in 1995 and has been continually evolving since then.
Art is used to tell a story and communicate the sustainability message in a visual form.

- “Still Life with Fruit I and II” celebrates an abundance of fruits.
- The large mural above our classroom “The Last Journey of Pedro Piscator” urges us to think about biodiversity - saving our trees from the ravages of “the city”.
- The “Habitat Tree” with Bunjil addresses the need for homes for our native animals and birds while
- “Symphony in Bee Minor” is a playful mural of bees in an orchard – and their role in fruit production.

Art Spaces

For more than 25 years art and craft have been very important to BAAG. After 20 years of gallery exhibition experience, the new Bolin Bolin Gallery opened in 2015 in the heart of the retail space.
The exhibition program for this space, includes 8 to 10 solo and group exhibitions each year. The exhibitions are varied, and often feature recycled metal sculpture, ceramic sculpture, ceramics, mosaics, glass, baskets, textiles and 2D art.

A new sculpture garden, with commissioned artwork by Sculptor Nicola Hoyle, was established in 2017 to display large garden sculptures.

You can find more art in the Garden Gallery, shop and throughout the nursery.
Art Workshops

BAAG has regularly run Art Workshops since 2000 and have helped over 1,500 discover their creative talents.

We love seeing local people building their identities around what they create instead of what they consume.

Enabling and encouraging sustainable living

BAAG is trusted by gardeners and the community. It presents environmental options and a powerful message in a non-judgemental and tempting way. We demonstrate that sustainable living is fulfilling and fun. The environment is the prime concern and sustainable living as a core message throughout the business.

Our sustainable gardening and living programs focus on reducing our own and our community’s footprint by encouraging people to reduce resource use, protect and love biodiversity and to grow their own food.

Gardens can be places where we learn to connect deeply with nature and realize opportunities at home to combat the effects of climate change. This message is communicated to our customers in a number of ways including:

Sustainable living and gardening classes

BAAG has been running classes since 2007 with an annual attendance of approximately 650 students

Class topics include amongst many others composting, habitat gardening, bush foods, food preserving, vegie gardening for beginners, bee keeping, and gardening is small spaces.

The cost to attend the classes are purposefully kept affordable, and similar to not-for-profit organisations. Class sizes are limited to give attendees the best experience possible.

Website, newsletter, social media

BAAG has an up to date, well developed online system to inspire and educate our community to live sustainably, this includes

- a web site which provides a wealth of information on sustainable gardening and living topics. This site receives approx. 40,000-45,000 page views each month
- a free monthly garden newsletter promoting sustainable gardening to over 13,000 garden club members
- BAAG is also active on social media, including Facebook, Instagram and twitter

Signage in the nursery

On the ground, our nursery signage includes carefully researched plant shelf-talkers for many plant varieties which cover weed risk, water and chemical requirements. Much time has been spent by our nursery staff researching and collating information relevant to our local area.
General signs and demonstrations cover a range of environmental topics such as composting, chemical use and soil improvement.

**Garden displays**

Display gardens across the site are based on sustainable garden design and focus on a range of themes including produce, native, indigenous, bush foods, companion planting, and low water / chemical use.

The BAAG experience starts from the moment people walk onto the premises through the Edible Parterre display gardens. Visitors walk along a coloured concrete path, following a vine with a pebble mosaic stem and leaves studded with hand crafted ceramic vegetables. The walkway is lined with beds of lush produce plants; herbs, fruit, vegies, succulents and companion plants.

Edible Alley is a display garden stretches along the driveway as you enter BAAG, softening what was a bleak area of concrete. The aim is to inspire visitors to try some edible plantings at home. The garden features lemons, cumquats, grapes, kiwi fruit, plums, mandarins, almonds, mulberries, curry plant, raspberries, cherries quinces and a range of sub-tropical varieties.

This a narrow garden that shows how to grow wonderful fruit even in very small spaces.

Children love the chook pen and it encourages them to think about where food comes from and recycling scraps.
The companion planting display encourages good bugs into the nursery, assisting with our Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach.

**Staff advice**

BAAG’s philosophy is never to pursue extra sales unnecessarily but to provide the best possible outcome for the customer and the environment all the time.

**Local food production and gardening**

We believe that produce gardening has many positive health, social and environmental outcomes. BAAG is recognised throughout Melbourne for providing support and encouragement to people who produce and share food.

We stock, arguably, the best range of food-producing plants in Melbourne, having spent years building the infrastructure, information, processes and systems. We make a practice of stocking uncommon food-producing plant varieties to ensure they are not lost.

**Indigenous plants and habitat gardening**

We believe that there are many positive outcomes to growing indigenous plants and habitat gardening, including:

- Provide habitat, shelter and food for our local wildlife
- Help preserve your area’s local plants
- Save water and reduce chemical and resource needs of your garden
- Enhance wildlife corridors and provide links between fragmented and otherwise isolated areas
- Contribute to the distinctive local character of an area

At BAAG, we promote these advantages heavily both on-site in the nursery and via our website.
Responsible resource and chemical use

BAAG practices and promotes Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

The use of IPM in retail garden centres has not been commonplace due to the unknown impact of several factors including stock constantly turning over and concerns for how delaying any spraying might impact of the selling potential of the stock.

To combat these challenges, BAAG has teamed up with Angelica Cameron from IPM technologies to adopt an IPM approach to pest and disease control in the nursery.

BAAG’s IPM approach includes cultural techniques, companion planting, biological control, trapping and monitoring, highly specific microbial pesticides and selective and timed spraying.

Since initiating our IPM schedule, we have noticed a big increase in the number of beneficial insects at BAAG and a very significant decline in pest and disease problems.

The lessons that we have learnt in the nursery we are now passing onto our customers to implement in their own gardens.

Responsible resource and waste reduction

Bulleen Art and Garden undertakes a number of initiatives to encourage the responsible use of resources and reduce waste

Being an effective, ethical and viable business, which celebrates healthy communities by example

BAAG’s philosophy is that we want to arm our customers with knowledge rather than a quick fix. This builds long-term trust and support as well as improved sustainable outcomes for the local community.

Many of the initiatives to achieve our objectives are undertaken not as grand one-off gestures but are through the culture, policies and procedures within the organisation.

Our policies and procedures have been refined over many years.

Some cover environmental sustainability topics such as our Environmental weeds policy. However, most cover the general operations of the business to ensure that we continue to meet our safety, human resources and legal obligations. These activities are critical, getting them right gives us the opportunities to go beyond the day to day running of the business, to be innovative and to focus on achieving positive community and environmental outcomes.

BAAG supports like-minded businesses

BAAG provides the opportunity for over 775 businesses, helping small and micro businesses, including artists and specialist plant growers to enter the market with their products. Artists and Craftspeople are also heavily reliant on BAAG due to the reducing number of venues for exhibition and sales. More than 100 artists sell their work at BAAG each year

Where possible we preferentially deal with those supplying:
- Product with environmental credentials
- Locally sourced indigenous plants
- Produce plants & certified organic products
- Fair trade products
- Local products
- Handcrafted works

At BAAG, we are looking forward to implementing our future objectives. Including:

- Community connecting projects such as the “Pobblebonk” Environmental playscape interactive art installation.
- Innovative garden services and products, helping customers achieve their sustainable gardening goals.