

GARDEN

OPENING

KIT

Produced by



**OPEN
GARDENS**
AUSTRALIA

2015

Preface

Open Gardens Australia (OGA) was established with the aims of promoting the enjoyment, knowledge and benefits of gardens and gardening in the Australian community as well as building strong public support for the development of gardens across the nation.

It pursued these aims by assisting garden owners to open their private gardens to the public for a nominal fee. Revenue raised at the garden openings was split between Open Gardens Australia and the garden owners. OGA directed its surplus funds from these openings towards benefiting various garden projects through annual grants. Garden owners also often donated their share of the gate takings, as well as funds raised by ancillary activities such as the sale of refreshments and plants, to charities and local causes.

From the time OGA commenced opening private gardens to the public in 1987 until its closure in 2015, it shared thousands of gardens and inspired countless people to realise their gardening ambitions. OGA and garden owners, supported by tens of thousands of volunteers, successfully opened close to 20,000 gardens and raised over \$6 million for charities and local causes - a tremendous achievement.

As a result of its success, OGA saw many community groups, charities and clubs follow in its footsteps and it was with great satisfaction that OGA witnessed the development of a strong tradition across the country of various groups and individuals successfully opening gardens to share, inspire and raise funds.

To ensure this great tradition continues and in the spirit of its traditional aims to share and inspire, OGA, having decided to close as of 30 June 2015, has produced, and made available free of charge, this Garden Opening Kit.

The Kit is a guide only. The information is not exhaustive and you should always check every aspect of your opening against current laws and regulations. Also, be aware of the possible impact of an opening on neighbours, nearby businesses or towns. Consider parking spaces and safety, visual and physical obstructions, freedom of movement, noise, pressure on nearby amenities. Our suggestions are derived from OGA's considerable experience of opening private gardens. It is designed to assist community groups and individuals on how to successfully open gardens.

Open Gardens Australia is proud to have been integral in developing the tradition of garden opening in Australia and it is hoped that this can be confidently built on for many years to come.

OGA wishes you every success in your open garden endeavours!



Deciding to Open

Many garden owners find the idea of having members of the public visit their garden quite daunting – and these concerns are natural. However, opening your garden is a very rewarding and enjoyable experience and it is often an opportunity for you to see your garden in a new light. It's also a great motivation to do those jobs you keep putting off!

If you do decide to open your garden to a paying public, it is good to keep in mind that their expectation will be high and they will anticipate seeing a garden that represents exceptional quality for its type and that the maintenance and upkeep is second to none. A general rule of thumb is for there to be enough in the garden to hold your visitors' interest for 30 or 40 minutes.

When to open?

Choosing when to open is very important. October and November are traditionally the busiest times of year for garden openings and this means lots of competition for publicity and visitors. Obviously, if your garden is mainly roses (for instance), you'll want to open at their peak flowering time. But remember that every other rose garden will be open at the same time, so consider opening at a different time of year. Autumn gardens are very popular with visitors, as are early spring and even winter gardens. If you live in holiday areas, summer openings can be very successful, as can twilight openings at the end of the week.

If you open every year you will not garner the interest and therefore visitation to your garden that you hope for. Think about how long it's been since you opened your garden and whether there is anything new or special that will interest fellow garden lovers.

If you are in a regional part of Australia, check whether other gardens in the area may also want to open, adding further incentive to drive some distance. Do some research and see if there are any other functions/attractions/town festivals planned that might assist in attracting visitors to your area. A holistic approach can be valuable to your planning.

Financial Considerations:

When setting the entry price for your open garden, it is important to understand the expenses associated with the weekend and, if need be, to ensure that your costs are covered. You should also contact your accountant about any GST implications and, if applicable, declaring any additional income.

Safety and Risk Assessments:

Inviting the general public into your garden for a fee brings with it a duty of care to your visitors to ensure that you are providing them with a safe environment to enjoy. As a result, it's important that you carry out a risk assessment to identify any hazards that could pose a risk to your visitors or volunteers.

Some things to check include:

- Pools: does your property comply with all relevant requirements for fencing of pools? You will not be covered by any insurance if your garden is non-compliant.
- Steps and uneven ground: While no one expects perfectly flat surfaces, you need to be aware of any really uneven or slippery areas, and either fix them or rope them off before you open.
- Equipment and tools: for example, have all hoses and rakes been put away so they do not become trip hazards?
- Can you secure any outbuildings, machinery or animals

Insurance:

Before deciding to open, you should contact your Home Insurer and ask if you are covered under your current Public Liability Policy for opening and charging a fee. If it is a one-off opening, they may cover you at no cost, but there may be a premium payable.

You may also want to take out Voluntary Worker Insurance to cover any accidents your helpers may have and Cash in Transit Insurance for the cash you have on days you are open. Your insurer will be able to advise you.



Preparing for the Opening

Opening your garden is a commitment that requires some lengthy preparation. Appendix 1: Action Timeline has been prepared to assist with some of the scheduling.

1. Your Garden

Paying visitors will have high expectations of your garden, specifically in relation to plant health and vitality and generally of the maintenance and upkeep. It is important to prioritise any replanting or changes to your garden as early as possible to ensure your garden is at its peak when you open it. Ideally, this would start approximately 12 months out.

2. Involving a charity

A charity can benefit substantially from a garden opening through the revenue raised. It does need to be recognised, however, that creating and maintaining a garden can be a costly exercise and as a result some garden owners prefer to retain some, or all, of the gate entry fee to help offset those costs. Others will prefer to donate all of the gate takings to charity.

So as not to mislead, it can be a good idea, if funds are being donated to charity, to clarify how much of the proceeds will be donated by statements to the effect of:

*100% of the revenue raised will be directed towards, or
X% of the revenue raised will be directed towards,*

This can be included in promotional material.

Working with a charity is of mutual benefit. The charity benefits from the revenue raised and the additional publicity of their cause, and you benefit from a “feel good factor” of donating, as well as with the possible additional assistance of helpers from the charity and increased publicity opportunities.

Charities can support the opening through:

- Selling morning and afternoon teas
- Supplying volunteers to man the gate or help with parking (provided it's not a public road)
- Assisting with publicising the opening through their own networks

3. Publicity

To maximise visitor numbers, the garden opening should be promoted as widely as possible. The more coverage you can get for your opening from the widest range of media, the more people will hear about it. Promotional vehicles include newsletters, newspapers, magazines, radio and TV, websites and social media. Personal contacts are also very useful.

Photographs are vital for publicity and should be organised well ahead. These are best if they show the garden at the same time of year as the opening.

Appendix 2: Promotional Ideas offers a selection of suggestions for getting the profile you want for your garden opening.

Appendix 3: Tips for Garden Photography for ways to enhance the types of images you may take for promotional purposes.



4. Additional activities and support

Ancillary activities can complement an opening.

Plant stalls are very popular. Visitors love to buy some of the plants they see growing in the garden but the plants you sell need to be of a high standard. You can propagate your own plants, or you might prefer to invite a local nursery to set up a stall. It's important to make sure that none of the plants being sold are considered 'weeds' by the local environment authorities.

Other activities include morning/afternoon teas, lunches, produce stalls, sausage sizzles, specialist talks, live music and displays of local artists' work.

If you are considering any of these activities, please ensure in advance that:

- It is clear how the proceeds from these activities will be distributed.
- Caterers have appropriate food handling certification.
- For tea and lunches, tables and chairs should be placed under trees or umbrellas in warm weather, and a menu board provided so visitors can see what's on offer.
- If you are planning on serving or selling alcohol, a liquor licence will be necessary. A winery often has a 'roaming' licence but this needs to be checked.

5. Insurance

It is important in opening a garden that there is adequate insurance cover in place. Insurance should cover Public Liability and Personal Accident (including for volunteers). It may be necessary to seek additional cover to ensure you are insured while people are setting up and preparing for the garden opening in the lead up to the weekend.

Any existing insurance you have may be negated because a fee is being charged to enter private property. It's important that you check the coverage and any exclusions well beforehand.

And if a group, school or charity asks you to open, you need to check that their insurance policy specifically covers you and your property.

Neighbouring Properties: in rural areas, where there is insufficient parking on site or restricted access to the garden, garden owners often arrange to use neighbouring properties. Note that the insurers of all properties concerned need to be informed.

Before the opening it is important that a risk assessment is undertaken; hazards are identified and any potentially dangerous areas of the garden are roped off; all garden tools and equipment are safely stowed away; and sheds and dwellings locked and secure.

6. Garden notes

Information about the garden in the form of a set of garden notes is an important part of the garden-visiting experience. Your personal description of how the garden developed adds interest and overcomes the reality that you can't be in all parts of the garden at the same time to answer visitors' queries. The notes are also important for promotional purposes.

Usually about one A4 page in length but not exceeding two pages, they should comprise a brief history of the garden's establishment and could also include a (simple) garden plan that highlights items of interest or significance. To minimise the use of paper and the impact on the environment, ask your visitors to hand them back at the end of their visit, or produce a large version that you can display on a board at the entry. If you are promoting the garden opening on a website, then the notes can be made available there also.



See Appendix 4: Sample Garden Notes. As every garden is different, it's important that the notes tell the story of your garden specifically. Here are some ideas to assist in preparing the notes:

- Describe the garden: what kind of garden is it, what size, orientation?
- Choose three words which best describe the garden: consider the 'feeling' the garden provides.
- What makes it special?: consider special features at the time of the opening. What sets it apart? How does it differ from others in the area? Is there any history associated with the garden or house that could be included?
- What challenges have been faced in creating the garden? What has been learned? Have drought, floods or pests been a problem? Or have there been struggles with the soil condition or something else?
- What is a favourite part of the garden?

7. Parking and access

Garden openings are popular events and large crowds may be expected. That being the case, it's important that thought is given in advance to parking and traffic flow. If there is limited road parking, it may be possible to identify nearby places where cars can park (a neighbouring paddock, school car park, etc). 'Parking' signs should be displayed where appropriate.

It may also be necessary to have parking wardens (appropriately attired with high-visibility vests) rostered on to direct traffic on your property. Roster lengths of greater than two hours are not recommended, and care needs to be taken during hot weather to avoid overexposure to the sun and dehydration.

Please note that it is not lawful for non-qualified members of the public to undertake traffic management on public roads.

Many visitors are elderly or have limited mobility. If possible, allow them to drive close to the garden entrance so they can either park there or be dropped off and picked up.

If possible, volunteers should park their cars well away from the main garden entrance so as to leave the most convenient places available for visitors.

8. Toilet access

Whether or not a toilet will be available should be determined in advance of your garden opening. If you wish to make one available, this should only occur if access to it does not involve entry to your home. For security reasons, it is not recommended that indoor toilets be made available except in emergencies.

If toilets are available, they should be clearly signposted and checked regularly.

If a toilet is not available for visitors, please ensure that the helpers on the gate know the location of the nearest public toilets.

Where large crowds are expected, toilets may need to be hired. Hirers can advise how many will be needed based on an estimate of attendance numbers.

9. The entrance gate

During the opening, you as the garden owner should be available and visible in the garden, as visitors will want to talk to you, so seek help from friends or family to be on the entry gate to welcome visitors and collect the entry fee.

- DO NOT rely on an 'honesty box' system.
- DO NOT allow anyone under 18 to be on the gate alone.

If a charity is involved, they might be able to provide helpers. Ask well in advance. It is important to have people who are reliable, friendly and welcoming on the gate as their warm attitude sets the tone for a happy visit.



10. Information for gate helpers

An example of useful information for the people on the gate is listed in Appendix 5: Notes for Helpers.

11. Road signs

It is important that visitors can find your garden easily, so you will need road signs that are prominent and will direct people to the garden. Use strong colours for signs or balloons, with arrows pointing in the direction required. For long approaches such as to country gardens, multiple signs may be needed well in advance of any turns. A trial to test the location of signs is advisable.

12. Cash float

You will need a float of around \$200 with a variety of notes and, depending on your entry fee, plenty of \$1 and \$2 coins as well as 50 cent pieces.

13. Fire Danger

Australian summers can be harsh and fire danger is a very real prospect for many, particularly in our regional areas. Be sure to check the Fire Danger Index (FDI) rating in the lead up to your opening and talk with your local fire authority if the rating is "high" or greater. See Appendix 6.

If, after talking with your local fire authority, it is decided the safest option is to cancel the garden opening, you will need to have a communication plan, which will include notification on any websites, phone calls to key stakeholders, and notifying the local radio stations for communicating to the wider public.

14. Beware Water signs and other special signs

If there are water features in the garden, it is advisable to display a Beware Water sign either at the gate or near the feature itself to warn parents of potential dangers for their children.

Other A4 signs to display can include:

- Donation to charity
- Beware of Water
- Return the garden notes

See Appendix 7 for samples of the types of signs you may wish to use.

15. Visitors book

A Visitors Book is a good memento of an opening. It should be placed with a couple of pens somewhere in the garden where visitors can sign it and add their comments. It should be put in a prominent spot but not at the entry gate as it's too busy.

16. Entry table set up

For the entry table and your volunteers, you will need the following:

- A copy of the Information for Gate Helpers sheet in Appendix 7
- An 'Open Garden' sign
- Copies of your Garden Notes (ask visitors to return them)
- A cash box or lidded container to hold your float and takings
- Water Hazard sign (if relevant)
- Sign of the charity being supported (if relevant)
- Poster or brochures about the charity and perhaps a Donations box (if relevant)
- Information on any other gardens open nearby (if relevant)

Appendices

Appendix I: Action Timeline

AT THE OUTSET	Do a risk assessment and identify hazards that need to be removed or mitigated.
	Take high resolution photos preferably in the same season that you will be opening your garden
	Confirm with your insurance provider what additional coverage you will need (if any)
	Consider how parking and garden access will be managed
	Undertake any replanting or additions to the garden well in advance so that plant health and overall maintenance is of very high quality
8-12 WEEKS OUT	Write Garden Notes and promotional material
	If involving a charity, contact them to discuss the level of their involvement including volunteers and promotion
	Prepare a media schedule by identifying opportunities for promotion and developing a timeline for them. Identify magazines, newspapers (local and state), TV and radio programs that promote gardening and garden openings, and gather relevant contact details (the names of individual reporters are best).
	Distribute promotional material to magazines with long lead times
	Determine what additional activities would be valuable and seek collaboration and sponsorship from appropriate organisations or businesses
	Consider how toilet access will be managed if one is being made available
	Prepare the gate manning roster
6 WEEKS OUT	Finish garden notes and print copies. Submit the garden notes to websites for online publishing
4 WEEKS OUT	Start distributing promotional material to media according to your media schedule
	Advise immediate neighbours of forthcoming opening
3 WEEKS OUT	Identify the best locations for placing your road signs
	Identify where to set up the entry table, as well as refreshment stalls, plant sales etc
	Continue distributing promotional material to media according to the media schedule – follow up
	Promote the opening to as wide a network of friends, family and colleagues as possible. Ask your volunteers to do the same.
	Liaise with volunteers regarding the set up for the opening in relation to times and positioning
1 WEEK OUT	If you choose to label your plants, start creating the labels and setting them out in the garden
	Put a sign outside the garden with the date of the opening
3 DAYS OUT	Arrange a cash float for the gate
	Ensure the garden is safe for visitors
	If opening during the summer, check your state's fire authority for fire danger rating forecast for the days you are opening your garden.

I DAY OUT	Prepare items for the entry table and for your volunteers
	Put away all tools and equipment
	If in summer, check the Fire Danger Index rating for your area and keep an eye on your surroundings over the weekend for any fires that start. Advise people and media outlets of cancellation if the danger is too great.
	Establish some 'rules of entry' regarding access to the house
OPENING DAY(S)	Put up the road signs
	Set up the gate and entry table.
	Put the "Information for Gate Helpers" sheet at the table: write in the fee, fundraising information (if relevant) and nearest toilet facilities
	Place the 'Beware Water' sign at the gate or near the water (if relevant), and put up any other signs to cover special circumstances
	Set up a table for the Visitors Book with a few pens
	Ensure volunteers set up areas for tea/coffee, plant sales etc. as arranged
	Brief the volunteers and those manning the gate, if toilets are on site, arrange to check them regularly for cleanliness
	Secure your home
AFTERWARDS	Ensure the helpers or the charity know the gate numbers
	Donate the cash raised for the charity as soon as you possibly can. Ideally this should be within a week of the garden opening.
	Write letters or emails of thanks to helpers, neighbours and anyone else involved. This means your garden opening will be welcomed if you choose to do so again.

Appendix 2: Promotional Ideas

I. Media releases

Many media outlets get their material from media releases. It is important to prepare and send them out well ahead of the opening. Be aware that journalists are usually inundated with releases so yours needs to “stand out from the pack”. It also pays to make personal contact with journalists to try and persuade them to run your story.

You need to be aware of the different lead times involved. If in doubt contact the relevant publication or program and ask them.

Some magazines and newsletters have lead times of a month or more while for newspapers it can be up to two to three weeks. Radio programs often schedule interviews at least a week ahead of time as well.

For newspapers you should aim to have the story about your opening appear during the week leading up to the opening. Any earlier and people tend to forget.

Contact details for radio stations and newspapers can be found on-line.

Media releases should be no more than one page in length and should include the following:

- A catchy headline such as:
“X garden opens for the first time for Y charity”
“ Rare trees on show for the first time to aid Y charity“
- A high quality photo (see Appendix 3: Tips for Garden Photography)
- A brief description of the garden and its highlights
- The name of the charity being supported and what it does
- Location, opening times and cost
- Contact details for more information

2. Preparing for an interview

An interview is an ideal opportunity to promote the garden opening. Here are some tips:

- The interviewer will want to get to know you and your link to the garden or charity so be open to telling your story succinctly and in an engaging way.

Before the interview ask these questions:

- How long will the interview be?
- When is publication/broadcast planned?
- Are photos required?
- Who is the audience: readers, listeners?
- Is it national, statewide or regional?
- Does the interviewer have a particular angle they are interested in?

Remind yourself of desired outcomes

- To encourage people to come to the open garden
- To promote what's different and interesting about the garden
- To promote the charity partner
- To promote your particular region



Remind yourself of what's in the Garden Notes:

- Describe the garden – what's your favourite part?
- What was the motivation in opening the garden?
- What's the history of the garden?
- What makes it special?
- What have been the biggest challenges?
- Why are you passionate about gardening?

Prepare a list of up to five points you must get across during the interview. These usually include:

- The location of the garden and opening times
- The charity being supported
- 3 or 4 things about the garden
- How much entry is
- Where tickets are available

Radio pointers:

- Make sure you repeat the name of your garden and the opening dates at regular intervals so people who have just tuned in will hear them
- Mention any other gardens in your area opening on the same weekend
- If you use social media, let your friends or followers know when you are being interviewed so they can tune in and help spread the word

Talk about your region:

- Find out what else is happening in your area (eg school fair, market, other event...) that people could visit on the same day. This will inspire them to make the trip if they're travelling any distance.

ABOVE ALL: be positive, be yourself and have fun!!

3. Using Social Media

Social media is fast becoming one of the most used marketing tools for promoting activities such as events. It is a good way to share some photos of the garden and to promote its opening.

If you already use it – get 'posting' and 'sharing'!

4. Using websites

There are a number of websites that allow you to list your event in their 'what's on' section including a number of gardening websites. In some areas local councils and tourism bureaus also provide these listings. Having your opening posted on these is very worthwhile as they often attract a broader audience.

If you're involving a charity you should ensure that your opening is listed in a prominent place on their website.



Appendix 3:

Tips for Garden Photography

Before you start taking any photos:

Tidy up your garden: Move things like hoses, rubbish bins and cars and anything else that you shouldn't have in your photos. Mow the lawns, dead head roses and, if necessary, remove any major weeds.

Prepare your camera: turn off date stamps and make sure your camera is set to take photos of at least above 1mb (2mb is better). Media cannot use photos if they are not of high-resolution.

Take a few test photos to check that the colour settings on your camera are correct.

Taking photos:

Always take multiple photos

Try taking photos from different angles and move around your garden. Photos taken from a kneeling position (or ground level) are often very successful.

Always take your photos with the sun behind you.

Try to avoid too many long shadows. It's often best to take photos between 11am and 3pm.

Composing your photos:

Before you push the button look and see what is included in your photo. Is there a power pole, too much bare earth, dog, hose, too much house, cars? If you move a little bit you may be able to avoid those things.

Avoid clutter and trying to show too much in one photo. You may be better to take a series of photos.

Where possible include a point of focus –bird bath, sculpture, seat etc.

Take both portrait and landscape orientations.

Introduce depth of field and perspective.

Focus:

Make sure your images are sharp and clear

It is very difficult to take sharp and clear images on very windy days

Use a tripod if possible

Appendix 4:

Sample garden notes

Welcome to our garden. We purchased this property approximately 20 years ago. At that time both the house and the garden were a disaster and since then our $\frac{3}{4}$ acre garden has been evolving.

We had some large established trees to work with, but also many large dead and dying trees that had to be removed. This was a godsend as it let in more light to large areas of the garden. We had a picture in my mind of the general layout of the garden and have worked towards that. Since we established the basic layout we have changed things slightly as our tastes change over the years.

Since we last opened, three conifers in front of the glasshouse have been removed, as they were getting increasingly large and creating too much shade. This area has given us more room for many more perennials, shrubs and bulbs which are thriving in this sunny open space. Of course the glasshouse then looked very ugly, necessitating the building of a screen, which we then bricked inside and is now a great space to grow our propagated plants.

As well as these sunny spaces there are a number of areas that are shady, ideal for growing woodland plants. We have been experimenting with growing arisaemas from seed collected from my stock. These have taken up to five years to flower but have been well worth the wait.

Throughout the garden we have tried to use plants that have good foliage for most of the year rather than flowers that may only last a few weeks. Some of our favourites are the strappy phormiums, choisya and sambucus, to mention just a few. The ornamental grasses also give the garden another dimension and are fantastic in summer with their fluffy seed heads.

We have been recycling our grey water from the laundry and bathrooms onto the garden for about eight years with no ill effects. However you need to be very careful with the types of soaps and washing powders used. Except for some hand watering of vegetables and pots, the garden is not watered at all. Keeping the garden mulched is essential for moisture retention and weed control. We have installed three rainwater tanks and this water is used for the veggie patch and is also for fire fighting purposes if needed.

We hope you enjoy our garden and we are happy to answer any questions you may have.

Funds raised will go to our local CFA to help purchase much needed equipment.



Appendix 5: Information for Gate Helpers

FEE

The entry fee is \$.....

FUND RAISING

Funds raised today are supporting

TOILETS

If no toilet is available in the garden, the nearest public toilet is at:

GARDEN NOTES

Please give visitors a copy of the Garden Notes but ask them to return it to you on their way out (this is to save paper and the environment).

ACCESS INTO THE GARDEN

Some visitors will be quite elderly or have limited mobility. It would be appreciated if you would allow them to drive close to the garden entrance to park or to allow the driver to drop them off or pick them up.

VISITORS BOOK

A Visitors Book is available in the garden for visitors to sign and put in comments.

Appendix 6: Fire Danger Index Rating

Code Red FDI 100+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ALL garden openings in the area cancelled
Extreme FDI 75 - 99	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ALL garden owners need to contact their local fire authority at least two days before their garden opening and then again the day before the opening to discuss the possible need to cancel
Severe FDI 50 - 74	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ALL garden owners need to contact their local fire authority at least two days before their garden opening and then again the day before the opening to discuss the possible need to cancel
Very High FDI 45- 49	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ALL garden owners need to keep a close eye on the FDI rating for the area and any fires that start • Conditions need to be monitored by the garden owner over the weekend
High FDI 12 - 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ALL garden owners need to keep a close eye on the FDI rating for the area and any fires that start • Conditions need to be monitored by the garden owner over the weekend
Low - Moderate FDI 0- 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No action required
Days of Total Fire Ban (TFB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ALL garden owners need to keep a close eye on the FDI rating for the area and any fires that start • Conditions need to be monitored by the garden owner over the weekend

Appendix 7: Sample Signs

**Proceeds from
today's garden
opening will
benefit**

**Thank you
for your support.**

BEWARE
WATER

**CHILDREN
MUST BE
SUPERVISED
AT ALL
TIMES**

GARDEN NOTES

Please help us to reduce waste by returning the garden notes for others to re-use.

All garden notes are available on the website
[www...](#)

Thank you for your help.