

Environmental Sustainability at Norman Lindsay Gallery

By William Smith

The Norman Lindsay Gallery and grounds is one of the most visited of the National Trust's properties. NLG has 49 acres, almost half of which are formal gardens and lawns with the remaining area consisting of remnant old growth forest. The main challenges for me as head gardener are to minimise the impact of some 30,000 visitors a year and the periodic risk of bushfires.

Since starting as head gardener at NLG seven years ago, my vision has been to develop the workshop into a productive and efficient work and teaching space for organic gardening and environmental sustainability. With the help of tradesman and a dedicated team of senior volunteers the first step was to renovate the workshop to improve its structural integrity and compliance to Occupational Health & Safety requirements.

We built a new six metre workbench, shelving and storage racks for tools, equipment and consumables, excavated the rear of the workshop and constructed a paved area from old bricks to provide an outdoor workspace. The workspace has been evolving over the last seven years and the volunteers have helped with many aspects including carpentry, concrete and cement work, stone work, building, tree work, lawn mowing, pruning, mulching, bush regeneration, making compost and leaf mould and planting – as well as helping with large and small events at the property. With their invaluable help we have been able to make significant progress in developing the infrastructure of the gardens and it is a great pleasure to work together.

The Green Corp Program

In 2008 I started teaching organic gardening to groups of the general public while looking for opportunities to involve NLG in training young people taking courses in environmental sustainability, horticulture and/or land management. In this I was lucky to be able to build on the Gallery's relationship with Max Employment in Springwood, which had already been referring senior volunteers to me. The federally funded Green Corp program hosted by NLG in conjunction with Max Employment started in April 2010.

Participants in the program are enrolled in Certificate 2 Conservation and Land Management. Two days a week are spent in the classroom, and two more in practical training at NLG. Max Employment uses the federal funding for personnel, equipment, classrooms, protective clothing and materials for participants, while the National Trust provides the location, a head gardener/co-ordinator to work with Max Employment trainers and managers and decide on projects to be undertaken. The first Green Corp program at NLG finished in



Green Corp team help re-lay the path to the café. (Photo: William Smith)

December 2010 and the initial feedback has been that many of the participants have gained work since completing the course, which is very gratifying to everyone involved. The most recent program began in April 2011.

A productive mix of energy and experience

I find myself in the enviable position of having a wonderful group of senior volunteers 20 years older than myself and an enthusiastic group of young participants who are 20 years younger. Although it is uncommon for both groups to work together (as they attend NLG on different days of the week), both groups have worked on some of the same projects. While the Green Corp students move on after six months, some of the regular volunteers have been working here for over six years. Their experience and knowledge provides a wonderful continuity to the project

The most successful project we have completed over the past seven years has been the development of an aerobic composting system and processing area which includes eight bays, three large leaf cages and the storage of 60,000 litres of rainwater in an underground tank. All the lawn clippings, leaves and prunings are used, thus turning all the organic materials that need to be removed from the formal gardens and lawns into a compost product consistent with the aims and techniques of organic gardening. What greater things can be achieved at NLG with the help of the Green Corp and senior volunteers in future is only to be imagined, but I am very good at that ...

William Smith is Head Gardener at Norman Lindsay Gallery



National Trust CEO Will Holmes à Court and Norman Lindsay head gardener William Smith with participants from the Green Corp program and employees from Max Employment



National Trust CEO Will Holmes à Court with the team in the renovated processing area. (Photo: William Smith)