

BETTY MALONEY - GARDENER EXTRORDINAIRE

The Peninsula has a wonderful range of residential gardens and this started with the villa gardens of the 1860s with homes such as Fairlight House, Oyama and Whitehall in Manly. It took a little time for gardens featuring native plants to make their presence felt but this finally came to pass with the drive and imagination of Betty Maloney (1925 – 2001) who lived in Frenchs Forest. Born in Victoria, she moved to Sydney in the 1950s and was taken by the flora of the Hawkesbury sandstone landscape. Her love of native plants resulted in a garden which is still on the Heritage List of Warringah Council. One of its main features was a display of Australian Rock Orchids.

Betty was recognised as one of Australia's leading botanical artists. In 1974, she and botanist, Alec Blombery, were commissioned to produce a book on Australian flora. It took them 4 years and an enormous amount of travel to complete what was entitled "Proteaceous of the Sydney Region", which contained 86 watercolour paintings crafted by Betty. This limited edition is still accessible at the Mitchell library. The collection of paintings was purchased by Esso for \$200000 and then donated to the nation as a Bicentennial gift.

Betty and her sister, Jean Walker wrote a number of books on the design and maintenance of bush gardens, as well as operating a consultancy to assist home owners all over Sydney. With particular relevance to the Peninsula there were chapters on angophora gardens and casuarinas. These books which came out in 1966 have been described as a pivotal moment in garden design.

One of the results of their promotion of bush gardens was the encouragement it gave to native birds which are such a feature of the Peninsula and remain one of the great defining characteristics of Sydney compared to other cities around the world. The legacy of Betty Maloney and the celebration of native gardens remains with us today.