

Bev's own Garden of Eden

IT'S hard to tell where Bev Debrincat's garden ends and the bushland of the Field of Mars Reserve starts. For her, it's one and the same – deliberately.

Eleven years ago, Mrs Debrincat set about shaking up her life.

She left the computer industry, to which she had devoted most of her adult life, in search of something more environmentally meaningful.

At the same time, the Debrincat family moved into the house in Westminter Rd, Gladesville, tucked well away from the street and on the fringe of the reserve.

She still spends a lot of her time at the computer, but these days her days are a more satisfying venture into nature, both in cyberspace and the open space that stretches from the back of the house down to Buffalo Creek.

Bev was drawn to a part-time course in bushland regeneration before slipping the computer scene and went on to finish that and work on bushland restoration projects with the National Trust.

She now uses both experiences to advance the restoration of our natural foliage.

She has mounted websites that educate people about invasive plants, providing a "weeds lookup" resource, and another to help people "Know Your Garden's Natives".

And while she coordinates with a worldwide alliance of those who care about the planet's environment and its people on the resto-



gorgeous gardens

A Gladesville home overlooks bush that is creeping ever closer to its welcome mat, writes COLIN KERR

ration and protection of native plants, her attention is firmly fixed on her own backyard.

"My garden is native, So much so, it's wild," she says, and that's clearly the way she loves it.

"Even my mother says 'why don't you tidy up a bit', but it's the way nature wants it, and so do I."

This garden is wild. The native grasses grow tall and the lawnmower languishes under the decking, clearly a no longer needed petrol-drinking invader of the scrub's peace and quiet.

Bev walks around pointing out tiny plants here and there in the green expanse.

"Ah ha, that's a weed and that's



Bev Debrincat stands at the place where her garden meets bush, or is it the bush which meets the garden? Picture: DAVE SWIFT

coming out," she says, deftly plucking the otherwise healthy-looking plant out by the roots.

Bev and some friends spend a few hours a week on their hands and knees weeding the bush around Buffalo Creek.

The group of like-minded bush-lovers have the blessing of Ryde Council, which must also approve any removal of specimens, including even the seeds that Bev wants

to take and grow into more plants to return to the same bush.

"Gradually, my garden is merging with the reserve. As the native plants I put in creep towards the reserve, the bushland is coming to my garden."

"Watch out for the spider," she warns as she walks among the trees and huge webs with a huntsman waiting patiently.

Some native plants need a strong reminder to propagate. The

best is fire. One such welcome event for the undergrowth came within a searing 50 metres of the house three years ago.

This close encounter with nature persuaded the Debrincats to host a portable fire-fighting unit in their driveway, supplied by the NSW Fire Brigade.

There are some troublesome exotics in the neighbourhood that creep into the bush, but the weeding team keeps a firm hand of their spread.

While the pretty "exotics" – the regular inhabitants of most gardens – are unwelcome visitors, Bev does admit to a bent for some even more exotic varieties of her own.

In two greenhouses and a huge conservatory between the garage are hundreds of orchids, mostly native, but accompanied by some from all corners of the globe.

What seems to be a conflict of interest vanishes as Bev wanders down aisles of potted orchids.

And there is pride in her voice as she recounts that she was probably the first person ever to have seen a tiny orchid from the Philippines flower in captivity.

For someone devoted to restoring Australia's flora, which she refers to as the natural capital, she is just as proud that the tiny filipino orchid has been named after her for that first flowering.

The *bulbophyllum debrincatae* has firmly planted Bev Debrincat in the landscape of her gorgeous native garden.

veinfreelegs

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