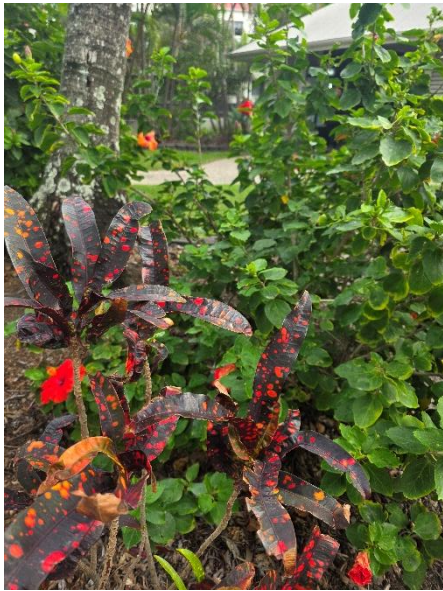
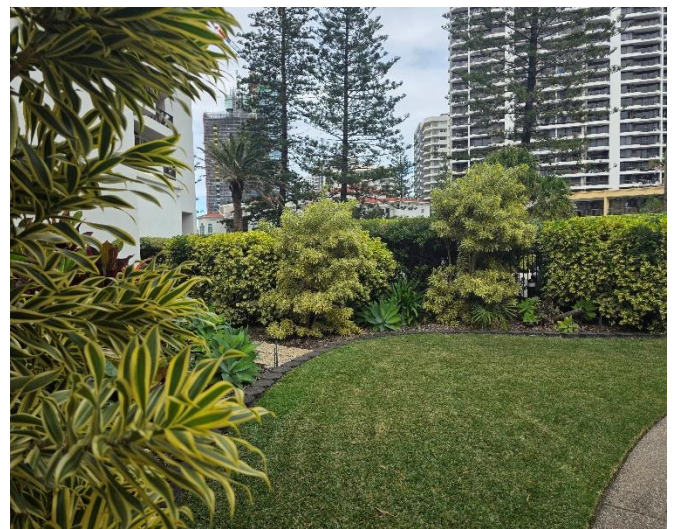


July Home Visit 2026 - Len's Retreat



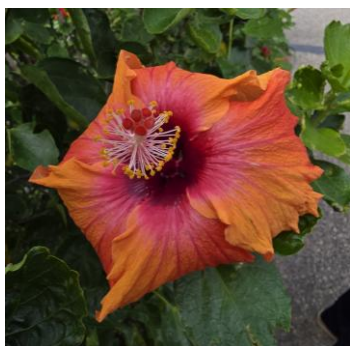
Our last newsletter had a theme around having a garden when you don't have a garden – that is, how to garden with minimal space such as a courtyard or the like. In such spaces you do not expect to see sights such as that at left, which appears to be a quite extensive garden. Instead that scene is from Len Neilsen's home in the LONGBEACH building at Surfers Paradise where Len lives on the nineteen floor and shares the garden with a lot of other people. For many of our members the question “when will we downsize and what to” is not just a passing thought but something that has to be answered if not now but possibly in the near future. More than a few of us have said things like “there is no way I could live without a garden” or “I'd hate to live just in a high rise unit and not be able to get out into nature” and the like. Visiting Len's for our Home Visit was fortuitous as it gave the fifteen or so who attended an excellent opportunity to think about whether apartment living automatically means no garden. **Can apartment living be compatible with having access to and being able to enjoy a garden?** Len's was a master class in facing this issue.



First thing to notice was that Len is lucky to be in a complex that has gardens considerably larger than all but those of us who own acreage. Despite a tennis court, a B-B-Q Pavilion and a large outdoor pool taking up a lot of space there are extensive garden areas on all sides of the building. How many such buildings have the space for a grass area (as above) like the area above? Private green space like that is a bonus especially when protected by well-maintained hedges with some very



densely coloured crotons. Even tall conifers were present along the side of the road beyond this area. Fitting in a large pandanus palm (*Pandanus utilis*) (above left) shows how much 'garden' you can actually get.



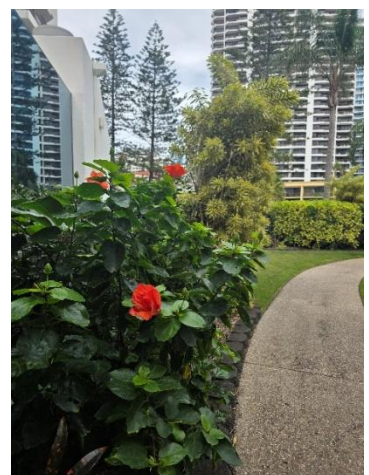
Just subtle differences amidst a large number of Hibiscus.

As Len described it this garden is a 'tough' garden – it has to be given how many people can use it and given that it needs to be easy care and long lasting. As a result the garden uses a number of key plants over and over again. The most obvious are several varieties of **Hibiscus** (at left) with very similar colourings in the flowers. These repeat over the entire area and provide unity as well as colour. Also repeated often is the '**Variegated Dwarf Umbrella Tree**' or **Schefflera arboricola** 'Trinette' (below right) which provides all year colour via it's leaves. More importantly in this situation it prunes well. It thickens up and provides a dense attractive hedge.



Among other plants used over and over are the 'Song of India' or **Dracena reflexa** (above left) whose variegated leaves complement the umbrella shrubs. Their longer leaves have a much whiter edge so adding contrast and complementary looks at the same time. To add to the reddish colour scheme are the bright reddish bottle brush like flowers of **Metrosideros thomasi** or 'New Zealand Christmas Bush'.

Red **Ixora** (bottom right) are also scattered everywhere. Reddish toned **crotons** like those below leading to the tennis court also help provide continuity and year long colour. In contrast the small fragrant white flowers of **Carissa macrocarpa** 'Desert Star' (at above right) stand out against its thick shiny green leaves. The mix of all these plants (as seen in the other photos here) are what dominates the garden.



The over-all result is very much a garden that looks good all year round. Our visit very much got those who attending discussing the advantages and disadvantages of being (at least part) owner of such a garden.



On the plus size ***"you can have a garden without having to do any work"***.

The garden has colour all year round, it is extensive enough for you go enjoy it at will and some-one else does all the work. No more getting down to do weeding then struggling to get back up. No more worrying about deadheading dozens of dead flowers as the gardener does that. No more heavy pruning and hard landscaping. Yet you still get to enjoy special plants like the ***Zamia furfuracea*** 'Cardboard Plant', the ***Dracena drago*** or the mass of ***Elkhorns*** (at left top to bottom). Plus, of course you get a sauna, indoor pool to add to the larger outdoor one, a gym, tennis court, undercover B-B-Q with three B-B-Q's, access ramps and lifts plus snacks on hand 24 hours a day!!! (at right). And you can invite friends and family in all year round to a great garden.



On the minus size ***"you can have a garden without having to do any work"***.

For those still able and keen to ***'get your hands dirty'*** and to ***'be in control'*** of what plants you have then this sort of garden is not going to meet your needs. Whining over a dead plant and shopping for a replacement is a drug of its own! For those of us addicted to the actual effort of gardening and still able to do it at will, this sort of garden is for another day.



For now, a **SPECIAL THANKS** to **LEN** for welcoming us. Though only a small group attended it was a great morning tea and home visit. The way the garden has been designed to be so easy care and yet so attractive at all seasons of the year was interesting to see. Being able to compare this sort of gardening to other home visits was something well worth doing.

