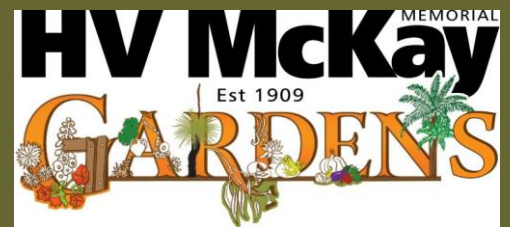


Newsletter

AUTUMN 2026



Website: <http://www.mckaygardens.com.au/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/FriendsofMcKayGardens>

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Community Festival 2026



This was the 11th Festival whose success was primarily due to the efforts of the President of the Friends Group, Speroulla Christodoulou, a local resident, who was supported by the Friends Group's Media Officer, Melanie Abdeen and assisted by other members of the Friends Group – Helen Reid, Catherine McDonald, Rainer Linz, Neil Head and Russell Smith. Visitors were able to obtain information about the Friends Group from the Heritage Tent that also displayed some of the extensive collection of historical photos of the Gardens that the Friends and others have collected over the years.

On Sunday 1 March 2026, the Community Festival organised by the Friends of the HV McKay Memorial Gardens was held at Anderson Road, Sunshine. Although the rain arrived just before closing, those who came enjoyed the Festival throughout the afternoon. Thanks to our major sponsor, Brimbank City Council, and Douglas Kay Real Estate, Bunnings Caroline Springs and the Brimbank Gardening Team who prepared the Gardens so well prior to the event.



In addition, The Friends again welcomed members of the Sunshine and District Historical Society, including President, Dr John Pardy, who explained to visitors to the SDHS desk the wide range of activities that the Society is involved in. Copies of their publications were also available to inspect and purchase. Local author, Lindsey Hogan, also had a stall once again selling copies of her children's book 'Sunny & Bobo'.



The Festival, Master of Ceremonies, Neil Ta, began the event with a Singalong for kids from his Music School that provides specialized music lessons for young children in the area. The Brimbank City Council Mayor, Councillor Virginia Tachos, then welcomed everyone and outlined the history of the Gardens and the role that HV McKay played in supporting the community and the workers from his agricultural machinery factory – leading to the establishment of the 8-hour work day. The Friends were also very pleased to welcome the other City Councillors who attended.



Multi-cultural music and dancing on display.

Following the opening performance of Neil Ta's Singalong, the 'Sounds of Polynesia' presented cultural dancing from around the Cook Islands.



As in previous Festivals, the stage came alive with dancing from around the world. This was followed by members of the 'Bonapasogit / Widya Luvtari Indonesian Dance Group' representing the Indonesian archipelago, and 'Bach Viet Dance' who showcased Vietnamese cultural storytelling through dance.



'Westend Performing Arts', the premier dance school in Sunshine, then took the stage with a range of performances by the school's students. This was followed by 'Pearl Afrikulture Rhythms', the heartbeat of Ugandan culture. The day ended, unfortunately accompanied by a rain storm, with the live popular band, 'Radio Waves', playing on despite the weather in their inaugural performance at the Friends Festival. We've guaranteed better weather next year for a return performance!



The Festival also welcomed back, 'Simsalabim' our Festival Wizard who let us know that this was one of his favourite venues to visit - and certainly the large trail of young kids following him around confirmed their enthusiasm for his wizardry.



Refreshments were provided by 'Cruising Creams' ice cream and 'Cherry Mouth Roasters' from Brooklyn, as well as 'MDA Twista Potato' who was kept busy all afternoon!



KIDS corner



The Kids Corner, once again, provided a range of activities with arts and crafts work, exotic face painting by our regulars Fairy Caitlin and friends, the Wizard's exploratory endeavours, and competitions including the lolly count in which kids gave their estimates of how many lollies from 'Yoyo's Lolly Shop' in Sunshine were in each of two large jars [ANSWER - 346 in the large one and 139 in the other]!



Friends Group member Melanie Abdeen, also helped with almost everything, including during performances and handing out free bottles of water to everyone (above in high-vis vest)!



Fitness corner



The Fitness corner provided a wide variety of activities for people of all ages including the North Sunshine Football Club's 'FootyClinic', 'Westside Gymnastics' from Albion, and 'Hall's Taekwondo' from Sunshine.



This year we also had a fabulous display of hand-crafted jewellery by 'Joy Factorie Clay Creations' that attracted a lot of attention.



Conserving heritage gardens



Ensuring that a heritage-listed garden is protected and adequately maintained involves effort and commitment from a wide range of people. The HV McKay Gardens and Church continue to face challenges from all directions. To the north is the beginning of work supporting the development of the Sunshine Superhub. To the South is the proposed residential development that will run adjacent to the Gardens and will influence how people from the Units will obtain access to the Gardens. To the East is the proposed airport rail link that may entail major changes to the garden bed that runs next to the Straight Six pathway. Some aspects of these changes may be beneficial, but others carry definite risks to the heritage values and design of the Gardens that the Friends are keen to protect.



Such challenges are not, however, unique to the HV McKay Gardens. Recently, the Secretary of the McKay Gardens Friends Group had discussions with the President and Secretary of the Friends of the Kyneton Botanic Gardens in Central Victoria. Although over 70km away, these heritage-listed Gardens have faced similar challenges to those encountered in Sunshine.

Some of the current issues that these two Gardens have in common include: maintaining a water supply during the ever-extending dry-months and deciding if drought-tolerant plants should be preferred over the original species; how best to provide interpretive signage in the Gardens and guarding against vandalism and theft of new plants; dealing with homeless people seeking refuge in the Gardens; deciding how best to make use of the Gardens through such activities as community festivals and picnics and trying to encourage members of the communities to participate in activities such as those carried out by Friends' Groups. Sharing knowledge and information among Friends' Groups is an extremely worthwhile way in which to address common concerns.

Kyneton–Sunshine connections

Interestingly, when the Friends of the McKay Gardens conducted interviews for their oral history program in 2010, we heard from Alexander (Lex) Gray that his father, Harold, was Head Gardener at the McKay Gardens from 1939 to 1950. Harold was the son of Edward W. Gray, Curator of the Kyneton Botanic Gardens from 1906 to 1936 and Ed's father, Josiah Gray (1845-1882), who had come to Kyneton from Wiltshire in 1877, was a botanist with a keen interest in native flora.

How *you* can help the Gardens

If you'd like to support the activities of the McKay Friends in protecting the Gardens, you can become a member. The annual subscription is just \$20.00, and you can join by contacting the Secretary at:

contact@mckaygardens.com.au

and send an electronic funds transfer for \$20 to:

Name: Friends of the McKay Memorial Gardens

Bank: Westpac; **BSB** 033-085; **Account** 385640

Becoming a member will keep you informed about the current state of the Gardens and how challenges to its existence are being addressed.



More information is available from our Website

<https://www.mckaygardens.com.au>

or on our Facebook page

<https://www.facebook.com/FriendsofMcKayGardens>