

# COMMUNITY HARVEST



Newsletter of the Australian City Farms & Community Gardens Network

WINTER 2004

## RECONFIGURING the gardens NETWORK



Australian City Farms &  
Community Gardens Network

**E**ight years after it was set up, the Australian City Farms & Community Gardens Network is to reinvent itself.

The need for a rejuvenated national organisation was proposed at meetings of the Queensland Community Gardens Network and at the April 2004 meeting in Sydney.

When the organisation was set up by Dr Darren Phillips in 1996, there were few community gardens in Australia. Now, there are many and a number of people are deriving livelihoods from them and using them for professional work. This has stimulated the need

for an organisation with a higher public profile that is representative of the different interests of community gardeners.

Since 1996, the Australian City Farms & Community Gardens Network has stimulated interest in community gardening, providing advice to gardeners and local government and information to print and radio journalists producing stories on the gardens.

Tertiary students and researchers are others that seek information from the Network by telephone, email and by accessing the Network's website

([www.terracircle.org.au/garden](http://www.terracircle.org.au/garden)).

At the same time, community gardening has been recognised as a valid use of urban land and as a positive contribution to developing a sense of community.

A further reason for rejuvenating the Network is because community gardening is now seen as part of a broader community-based food system that includes farmer's markets, community-supported agriculture and small business.

The July 2004 meeting in Bendigo will set the future direction of the Network.



# COMMUNITY GARDENING

## What are Community Gardens?

...from the *Community Gardening in SA Project*

Community gardens are recognised worldwide as a great way to grow food, improve your health, meet people and cultivate vibrant communities.

“Community gardening is about taking back the ability to produce food for ourselves. At the supermarket, you not only do not connect to the food system, but the money goes out of the region. People are looking for a sense of community, and they find it in their local community garden” (Claire Cummings).

“Urban community gardeners are bringing life and liveability, seed by seed, back to their neighbourhoods. The gardens nourish the body.

Community gardens:

- allow people to grow their own vegetables, fruit, herbs and flowers

- contribute to an ecologically viable and socially just food system
- are a convivial way of getting some fresh air and exercise with no gym fees
- foster community engagement and a culture of generosity, reciprocity, trust and self-help
- are great places to learn about gardening and share local and traditional knowledge
- preserve and improve the precious green space in urban environments
- develop innovative ways of living sustainably in the city
- create art projects, community events, celebrations, workshops and more
- provide opportunities for cultural exchange and learning
- some community gardens produce enough food share the surplus and/or develop community enterprises.

## At last, a newsletter

Those who joined the community gardens network following the late 1990s may not know that this is the Network's third print newsletter. The earlier two were produced not long after Dr Darren Phillips created the Network and after the Network published its 1996 inventory of community gardens and city farms.

Darren has moved on and so has community gardening in Australia (and New Zealand). The number of gardens has grown significantly as has the role of community gardens, with the more adventurous taking on social roles such as training and education and seeking a deeper involvement in Australia's growing community foods movement. A couple even host weekly organic farmer's markets.

Having been associated with the Australian City Farms & Community Gardens Network from its inception, We would like to acknowledge the work of all those who have participated as gardeners and as organisers. When we in NSW became contacts our mission was to have community gardening recognised by planning authorities as a valid urban landuse. That has been accomplished, not only in this state but Australia-wide thanks to the work of the Australian City Farms & Community Gardens Network.

Thanks, finally, to all those who contributed to this newsletter.

Find the Network online:  
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## GREETINGS from New Zealand

Thanks, Russ, for your emails on community gardening in Australia. Do keep them coming.

At this time of the year over here we are celebrating Matariki —known here as Maori New Year but referred to in a variety of ways by Pacific people and other cultures around the world.

Matariki, also referred to as Pleides, is the star cluster that heralds the start of the Aotearoa Pacific New Year and is visible to the naked eye in the pre-dawn sky after the full moon from mid-late June each year.

During this time we usually celebrate the European Winter Solstice. At our community gardens in Christchurch this year, instead, we are having a traditional Maori 'boil up' and a Hangi.

It is currently around four degrees celsius down here, so hardy souls attending will leave with a warm stomach at least (and hopefully a warm spirit) plus free seed saved at the gardens to honour and encourage a plentiful harvest for the coming season.

Regards,

*Christine Blance, Coordinator, Strickland Street Community Gardens, Spreydon, Christchurch, New Zealand/ Aotearoa*

# Celebrating COMMUNITY

An innovative community work programme is unfolding at Western Sydney's Holy Family Centre. Community worker Karen Ventriolis reports...

In 1999, a group made up of University of Western Sydney, Western Sydney Area Health Service, (Blacktown Council), Holy Family Centre and interested individuals met to discuss the establishment of a community garden.

This was a revival of interest/dreaming about community gardens that has been here at the Holy Family Centre for over 20 years. An initial garden was earlier started by Father Eugene Stockton with a group of alcoholic young men.

We decided to involve community members and to get BT (Blacktown) Council to provide goods in kind, such as soil, seeds, seedlings and mulch. Bunnings donated or heavily discounted tools and materials like clay breaker, seedling mix, etc. Donations also came from the community—tools, stakes, etc.

A small group of volunteers fluctuating between 3-5 started to work in the garden to build a sizable vegetable bed. The produce was used by members of the garden team, other community members, in the shop of the Holy Family Centre (HF) and sometimes, in the kitchen.

When the leader of the group died suddenly, the HF decided that a full-time worker was needed who would increase the momentum. The team had fallen apart and work in the garden ceased for a while.

A couple people focused on building community through means of gardening and arts. An application was lodged with Western Sydney Area Assistance Scheme that is administered by the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources and money was granted for three years.

## Where we are today

We have established vegetable and bush tucker gardens with the support of the Mt Druitt Department of Housing, but lately the local kids in the Al-lo-wa-Murrytoola (Dharug for 'Together we share and enjoy') school holiday programs have done planting and maintenance in the bush tucker garden. Greening Australia, the Royal Botanic Gardens Community Greening Program, and SCRAP (Schools Recycling All Paper) Biodiversity Program provided assistance.

Blacktown Council has assisted with heavy machinery (rotary hoe and back hoe) to help set up the Islander garden as well as material input (clay breaker and mulch) and a contract worker dedicated to the garden project. They have also recently provided us with a drip irrigation system so that watering in the vegetable patch, despite water restrictions, is easy and unbelievably water efficient.

We have established a native flower garden, rose garden and a fairy circle and the community has been centrally involved in the renovation of our courtyard, which is used for meetings by many agencies.



## Varied activities

A number of celebrations have been held including Islander BBQ's (Umu's) and a big youth festival which attracted between 500 and 700 people through the day and was an attempt to familiarise the community with the garden grounds. We hold our harvest festival in late autumn and our spring garden blessing on the Spring Equinox, 23 September. These events are open to the whole community.

An after school kids program has been running since 2003 with 20 – 30 regular local kids attending. They have established a Kids Food Forest and planted lots of interesting seeds such as gourds, baby veges, watermelons etc. Blacktown Council assisted us

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in the creation of a 'no-dig' compost heap. A Permaculture mandala and two murals about Permaculture and compost with have been created with local community artists.

A disabled group meets every Tuesday and we have been busy building up beds in the vege patch and putting seating around herb gardens in order to improve accessibility for this group. Lately, they have had a block of art therapy where they have painted garden seating.

Both the Holy Family pre-school and primary school attached to the parish and some parents are involved in planting and watering the vegetable garden. There is an emphasis on healthy eating.

June is Western Sydney Environment Month and every year the garden is host to many of our local primary school children. This year, nine schools brought their garden/environment clubs for compost activities, planting and learning in the bush tucker garden.

A total of eight local schools have been involved in the Environment Month celebrations, as well as programmes in recycling, indigenous traditional arts, bush tucker and kids gardening both after school and in school holidays.

The Royal Botanic Gardens Community Greening Program run garden training once a month for community gardeners. Gardeners learn about striking cuttings and building health of the soil organically.

## Benefits to the community

Building social capital, learning skills, dealing with personal and social problems, friendship, tapping into people's creativity, building ownership and a sense of place and belonging are ways the gardens



*Vegetable gardens at Holy Family Centre*

benefit individuals and the community. Process is emphasized rather than the end result.

To date, Holy Family Centre has supervised over 100 000 hours of Community Service. Most of this is done in the garden with planting, mowing, weeding, putting in paths, compost heaps etc. It supports the exploring of alternatives to the judicial system.

*Painting seating at the centre*



We have visited two inner city community gardens at Newtown and Waterloo and run various fruit picking trips.

## Our future

We intend to build participation in the gardens to include mental health groups, expand local school involvement with work experience programmes as well as work with local Koori Community Development Employment Programs in the bush tucker garden.

# the MOSAIC MANDALA project

...with Katie McGuire

If you haven't heard yet, there is a community art project happening at Northey Street City Farm. And it's looking amazing.

Funded by Brisbane City Council's community grants and supported by local businesses, the project is giving the community the opportunity to create a beautiful gathering place and public artwork that will be used for visiting groups, social and cultural events, meetings and educational programs.

The artwork will take the form of a mosaic, six metres in diameter, designed by the project participants.

## Diversity of involvement

Around sixty people of a wide range of ages, abilities and experience have been involved in the project. They bring a diversity of cultural and ethnic backgrounds—Romanian, Papua New Guinean, Niuean (NZ), Aboriginal, Vanezvelan /Chilean, El Salvadorian, Japanese, Taiwanese, Chinese, South African, Polish Australian, Italian Australian, British, USA, and Australian.

They are not only learning and developing creative skills in mosaic design and construction but are sharing their stories with each other. It feels good to be working on a common project with such a diverse group of people.

Over the past few months we have made large, detailed sections of the

design on sheets of mesh. They will later be transferred to the slab during installation. Doing it this way is much easier on the knees and back.

The less detailed parts of the design are being applied directly during installation, which began in June. We

will be locate under the mango trees in the Food Family and Culture Garden (back from the corner of Edmund and Edgar streets). You can now see evidence of the project as the concrete slab has been poured.

## Thank go to...

Many thanks to Boral Concrete (Bowen Hills) who generously donated six cubic metres of cement, to all the volunteers who laboured laying the slab and Richard Neilsen and WFD crew who prepared the site.

After the mosaic is finished the seating will be constructed.

## Interested in being involved?

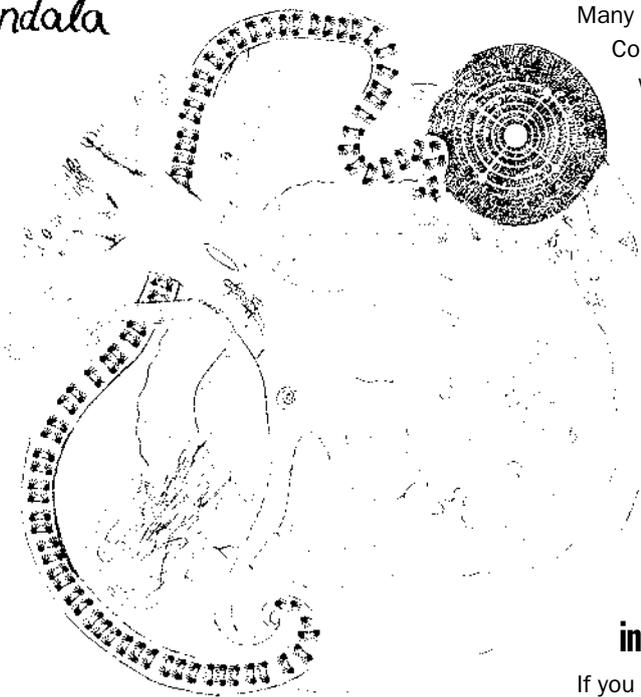
If you are interested in being involved in some way in this project or in future art projects at Northey Street City Farm you can:

- **fill in a Volunteers registration form** at the farm (and tick community art as your interest) or
- **contact Katie McGuire** 0431 328 176, 07 3857 8775.

## How to contact Northey Street City Farm

- [www.northeaststreetcityfarm.org.au](http://www.northeaststreetcityfarm.org.au)
- corner of Northey Street and Victoria Streets, Windsor, Brisbane.

Mosaic Mandala  
Design  
Concept



will need helpers for this—if you like getting your hands dirty, come along.

## Workshops on offer

Every week, workshops are held on Saturdays 9am to 1pm, amidst the organic markets, and also Thursdays 10am to 2pm until the artwork is complete (currently we are meeting on the stage beyond the kitchen).

A special thank you to Ron and Bruce at the markets (from Mullumbimby) for kindly donating organic bananas for our morning tea every Saturday and to the Northey Street Café for their delicious organic coffee.

The final artwork, the mosaic mandala,

# the **SOLSTICE** GROUP

## social learning for sustainability

...by **Caroline Smith**

**S**olstice is a loosely bound group living in and around the Dandenong Ranges of Melbourne's east. The group was born in typically messy fashion through a serendipitous coffee shop conversation between like-minded people who wanted to become more active in their local community.

The outcome was to invite known environmental activists and others with a general interest in sustainability issues to meet together for lunch one day. About 45 people turned up and Solstice was born.

### **Sustainability through localism**

The group is essentially a social learning community with a particular interest in sustainability through localism, especially through food production. Many of the members had participated in a Permaculture design course run by the local Community House and are committed to its principles and practices.

support for local, preferably organic food production is a key to building sustainable community.

### **Farmer's market participation**

Solstice members participate in a weekly Farmer's Market run by local permaculturalist Graeme George at the old Healesville Station.

The market supplies seasonal fruit, vegetables, eggs and honey as well as beautiful pork, ham and bacon provided by local a rare breed farmer. There are seeds, bread made from ancient wheat varieties such as Spelt, locally produced spice mixes and apple cider vinegar. The market has become a real social event.

Organic coffee is available in the old station waiting room where there is a roaring log fire to keep warm by in the chilly mountain winter and roast chestnuts and wild mushrooms to be had in the autumn. By making these beautiful, fresh foods available inexpensively, participating local

After tasting the freshness of the market produce many customers go home determined to grow some of their own food, knowing there is a group of friendly people they can talk to for help in needed. All this adds to the building of local sustainability.

### **Certifying local food**

Our current project is to develop a local food certification assessment and labelling scheme that uses organic standards as the base but goes much further to include issues such as 'food miles' and sustainability of production.

This will enable small growers to ensure they use safe, organically approved growing practices without the costs of normal certification.

One of our members is an organic inspector. His role is to educate others so that as many members as possible understand and are able to assist others in their food production.

### **Celebration**

In Solstice, we honour the seasonal markers by gathering to celebrate on the solstices and equinoxes at members' homes.

This is a time for getting together, networking and enjoying each other's company over a glass of home made cider or a bowl of hot pumpkin soup.

### **Social learning through Solstice**

The focus of Solstice has been to organise around the issue of food. The community food supply has provided the impetus for social learning, with all the hallmarks of a participatory community of learners.

People participate actively in the social and cultural activities of the community, transforming their understanding, roles and responsibilities as they do so. There is collaboration in the development of projects of joint importance.

It is through groups such as Solstice that people can become involved in the sustainable development of their community, grappling with difficult issues, challenges and the contradictions that inevitable arise.

**The Solstice Group**

<http://solstice.sakienvirotech.com>

Solstice now has a locally run website and email mailing list. Messages are posted about everything from the war in Iraq to questions about where to find a good local mechanic.

Although we have been active for less than two years there are now about 80 members on the email list. Members believe that the ability for a community to meet its basic needs—food, shelter and a safe environment—is the core of sustainability and that

growers are sustaining one of the basic needs of the community without needing large amounts of fossil fuel for transport.

Customers become regulars and spend much time talking to the growers. They build relationships and learn how the food they buy is grown. As apple growers, we educate our customers that those Gala apples still in the shops must have been in cold storage for some time.

# GEELONG WEST

## nearly 20 and still innovating

The Geelong West Community Garden was established in 1985 to provide a 'green area' primarily for those in the inner suburbs with insufficient garden space at home. We have 35 plots available at a low cost.

About three years ago the decision was made to improve the garden to make gardening more enjoyable—we decided to seek grants to achieve this—and to be less insular and open up the community facility to others.

We achieved this by:

- publishing a newsletter in December 2001 and having local State Member Ian Trezise MP launch it at the garden
- obtaining coverage in the local newspapers
- making a successful grant application for the International Year of Volunteers 2001 to enable us to erect a shelter, build six raised garden beds and purchase a gas barbecue and gardening equipment
- holding an Open Day in 2002 during Pako Festa, a popular multicultural festival held in Geelong West
- establishing a free library of donated gardening books
- obtaining a grant in 2002 from Parks Victoria to produce a booklet about the garden; this was sent to libraries, council's customer service centres and neighbourhood houses

- inviting local Federal Member Gavan O'Connor MP to the garden for a photo shoot for the booklet; he was so impressed that he donated some money—we now approach him annually for a donation
- organising in 2002 to take orders for a local producer of mushroom compost; the money is set aside to upgrade equipment
- applying to our local ward councillor, the then Mayor Cr Barbara Abley for funds for a mulcher; the success of the application was announced by Cr Abley when she came to the garden to launch the garden booklet
- inviting many organisations to the garden such as the Friends of the Botanic Gardens, the Herb Society, the Geelong Organic Gardeners, the Grovedale Community Garden, the Fitzroy Community Garden and garden clubs
- visits by educational institutions which requested a visit to see a community group 'in action' and to view the fruits of our labour; they include local primary and secondary schools, Geelong Adult and Training Education and the Gordon TAFE
- hosting visits by distinguished guests such as Jane Edmanson, Basil Natoli, Jenny Smith and John Arnott.



Jane, Gary, Rosemary, October 2003



Gary, Basil, Fiona, Peta, May 2004

### Other initiatives

We have a lease with council and have developed a very good relationship with the council officer who we have contacted to have the back fence line moved back thus giving us extra space, replace keys and locks, facilitate our use of the nearby Youth Club's toilets, provide timber, and a myriad of other things.

After a period of consultation, a list of Top 20 herbs was devised and a new herb garden established using equipment lent by a local firm and materials that were donated, including herbs propagated by the Geelong Herb Society. Geelong Botanic Gardens was approached and have donated a range of salvias to plant along the back fence line.

Some of us have been to planning meetings and provided information to other groups hoping to establish community gardens in Geelong.

Projects for the future include the construction of a sandpit and the erection of another garden shed.

We have had a display in the foyer of the Geelong West library and plan to do some forward planning for the garden's 20th anniversary.



Working bee to create new plot January 2002

# HOLISTIC TRAINING at Dungog Community Garden

by the Dungog crew...

The Dungog Community Garden is on its way to becoming a centre for holistic environmental education and training.

Our popular weekend courses have attracted participants from as far away as Sydney, Taree and Newcastle. Many local people also seem keen to develop skills in sustainable property management and organic farming.

Sixty people have taken part in courses which ran over the June and October long weekends. Twenty missed attending the October course, already full in July thanks to word-of-mouth reports by June course participants.

In 2003, the garden hosted twenty, two-hour workshops for local primary and high school students with a further ten workshops still to run.

The kids participated in a range of activities including planting bird-attracting natives, exploring the ponds and habitat areas, making worm farms, no-dig gardening and designing better schools and gardens. All workshops were designed to instil in the kids a greater respect and love for their environment, while at the same time making them fun and creative by employing experienced, innovative teachers.

The community garden's educational activities will continue under the banner of Skills for Sustainable Living.

A range of workshops, courses and presentations will be offered as well as the Permaculture Design Course of 72 hours duration.

A quarterly newsletter has been developed to notify interested people of upcoming activities. Please contact Faith Thomas on 4992 1133 if you would like to be added to our mailing list.



*Education in community gardens provides training in organic gardening and sustainable living skills*

The Dungog Community Garden is now online and anyone wanting to know more about the Skills for Sustainable Living program should go to: [www.dungog.org/~garden](http://www.dungog.org/~garden)

Here, you will find details of all courses and workshops as well as photos, biographies of presenters and testimonials from past course participants.

In 2003 all programs were offered free of charge, thanks to the generous assistance of the New South Wales Government's Environmental Trust. The Community Garden is a non-profit organisation and costs will be kept low through continued sponsorship and funding arrangements.

**More information:**

*Faith Thomas, Skills for Sustainable Living program 02 4992 1133.*

**Read more about community gardening in the ABC's...**

## The Organic Gardener magazine



**Australia's authoritative journal  
of organic growing and living**

**Subscriptions: 02 8444 4490  
or from your newsagent.**

# REPORTING from STRADBROKE

## the Queensland network's get together

Morag Gamble, Queensland network co-ordinator reports...



Morag Gamble

City farmers and community gardeners in Queensland meet every six months to share ideas and inspiration. The fifth Queensland gathering was held on Stradbroke Island in Moreton Bay over a weekend in May.

We'd all packed our swimming gear, but it was rainy and cold. I am told it was warm in the water, but my scarf and coat were too cosy. The thought of scurrying across the wide sandy beach in my bathers, blasted by the cold winds and sand didn't quite appeal. For a Melbourne-born girl, I guess this was quite a wimpy response! The rain, though, didn't dampen the energy or enthusiasm of the meeting.

It was the first time we had gathered for a weekend. Previous gatherings at Crystal Waters, Northey Street, Caboolture Community Garden and Woodford Community Garden were one day events. We were invited to Stradbroke by two sisters, fourth generation islanders, who wanted

to start a community garden on the Island and were seeking some support, ideas and energy. It didn't take much arm-twisting for the group to agree and by the end of the weekend plans for the Stradbroke community garden were drafted.

About 50 people carpoled across on the ferry to the tip of the island. The Point Lookout community hall and beachside campground were our home for the weekend (and for some, the adjacent Bowls Club). Mostly people came from South East Queensland but others travelled from as far as Sydney and Adelaide to attend. As well as city farmers and community gardeners, there were locals, council officers and University of Queensland agriculture students (from South Africa).

We developed the weekend program collectively. The commonly-identified topics became the session themes and facilitators, with knowledge or skill and those areas, volunteered to lead them.

In the mornings we focused on sharing information while afternoons were spent learning practical skills together.

### Day one

On day 1, we explored site planning and design—ecological design principles and inclusive processes.

- how to write a successful grant application
- fundraising, financial management, work and income generation opportunities at community gardens
- designing and delivering education programs at community gardens
- herbs—growing, harvesting and processing
- cooking and processing unusual

foods

- water conservation, storage and irrigation
- chickens in community gardens.

After a shared evening feast—a delicious array of foods we had brought from our gardens, I presented a slide show of community gardens and other community food projects from around the world—Cuba, Turkey, Indonesia, UK, USA, Hong Kong, Korea, Denmark and Slovenia.

From the discussion that followed, the idea for a consultancy group formed. The network (Australia-wide) is full of people with diverse profession skills. We aim to bring these people together to have community gardens and community food systems designed into new housing projects from the start.

Jude and Michel Fanton from the Seed Savers Network dropped in on their way back from the Brisbane Social Forum to lead a session on local seed saving networks.

### Day two

On Day 2 we focused on:

- starting a market garden, farmers market, CSA or food box scheme
- healing and spirituality in community gardens
- community Decision making processes and conflict resolution skills
- involving the local community, working with and training volunteers
- involving schools in community gardens and community gardens in schools
- composting and worm farming
- bushtucker and natives
- saving and swapping locally

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# community gardening—part of the **COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEM**

...by Russ Grayson

**W**hether you grow it or buy it, there is a hidden revolution going on in the Australian food scene. Concerns over the quality of mass produced food and a demand for fresh, locally grown produce is fostering the rise of a diverse community-based food system and small business enterprise.

Like home gardening, community gardening is a do-it-yourself approach to food, however not everyone has space to garden and not everyone who enjoys food is interested in growing it.

It is for these reasons a community food system is emerging. It is largely invisible to the agribusiness food supply chain and even to most people in the suburbs of our cities.

The community food system consists of two strands.

A do-it-yourself 'agricultural' strand:

- community food gardening
- home food gardening (including container gardening on apartment balconies).

The transactional strand consists of:

- community supported agriculture—

CSA— in which farmers produce in-season herbs, vegetables and fruit for urban people on a weekly basis

- food co-operatives—membership-based buying groups that may have a shopfront to sell directly to the public; members receive a discount based on the time they put into helping the co-op
- farmer markets, where growers sell directly to people (eg. Northey Street—Brisbane— and Collingwood Children's Farm grower's markets, Melbourne)
- organic home delivery services— small to medium sized businesses that deliver pre-ordered organic foods and products to the home
- organic food and product retailers operating from shop fronts.

## Local food a stimulus

Boosting these community-based and small commercial enterprises is an increasing demand for fresh, nutritious and locally grown food, especially when it has been grown organically.

Local food, consisting of fruits, vegetables and herbs whose



*Vegetable seller from Round Tree Farm, Fox Studios farmer market, Sydney*

availability varies with the seasons, is commonly found in the farmer markets that are increasing in number in our cities and rural towns.

## The fresh food people

Community gardens are not only a component of this fresh food revolution. They are venues where the techniques of domestic food production can be seen and taught.

The gardens are 'growing places' in the sense that they produce what the gardeners eat and foster the personal growth of gardener and visitors through demonstration and education.

Community gardeners, and those participating in the community food system in general, really are the fresh food people.

## More on food systems:

[www.permaculture.au.com/  
community%20food%20systems.html](http://www.permaculture.au.com/community%20food%20systems.html)

*Community Supported Agriculture a Slow Starter:* [www.pacific-edge.info](http://www.pacific-edge.info)

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adapted seed in Community gardens

- starting a garden on sand
- helping Stradbroke get a Community Garden started.

By the end of the weekend, the walls were plastered with posters of ideas and strategies...tables filled with information and photos from the various projects lined the entrance to the hall. Another table was filled with seed and plant materials for exchange.

## Yandina next gathering

The Yandina Community Garden will be hosting the Sixth Queensland City Farm and Community Garden gathering on 6 November - a one-day event. The 7th will most likely be a weekend again in another beautiful part of this region. The feedback we give after each gathering helps build on our shared knowledge.

*Morag Gamble, Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network (QLD contact) P: 07 5494 4833, [info@permaculture.au.com](mailto:info@permaculture.au.com)*

# SA COMMUNITY GARDENERS work on starter's kit

...by Claire Fulton and Deidre Knight

Community gardening is enjoying increased popularity around Australia and in South Australia we have more community gardens per capita than any other state, with more than 30 established and others emerging.

In 2003 and 2004, there has been more growth and revitalisation than ever before with a 'Community Gardening in SA Project' funded by the Department of Human Services and auspiced by the Community and Neighbourhood Houses and Centres Association of SA. The Project set out to find ways to support and network of existing community gardens and to promote community gardening.

We started the project by mapping community gardens throughout the state, discovering several new projects in the process. The Community Gardening in SA maps include contacts and descriptions for 30 gardens. Availability: P: 1300 737 612 (cost of a local call).

## Fostering involvement

Many of the community gardens in SA emerged with little contact with each other. A Community Gardening Gathering held in October 2003 gave people the opportunity to meet and learn from others and to visit some of the best gardens around Adelaide.

Experienced gardeners drew together their knowledge of plant propagation, community arts, Permaculture, fundraising and involving children and schools in gardening. They also put their heads together on the everyday practicalities of community gardens including working with volunteers, getting support, insurance issues and dealing with vandalism.

## Developing the resource kit

From this experience and information brought together at the gathering, a resource kit for community gardens is in the final stages of development.

Intended for groups starting new gardens as well as existing gardens, it includes information on funding applications to garden design, getting land to running training workshops. The kit will be online in August 2004.

## Researching needs

Research was undertaken to find out what SA community gardens need to sustain and develop their work.

The survey revealed that a high proportion of community gardeners are female, around 50 years with medium physical abilities. We also discovered that around 60% of the gardens are located within or around community centres.

The needs of South Australian community gardeners are consistent with those in many other parts of the country. They are seeking ways to access funding, recruit and keep volunteers and improve pathways to training and skill sharing.

The collected information was used in the Community Gardens Forum held here last month. We specifically targeting government and non-government agencies to inform them of the value of community gardens and how they may be of assistance.

We were fortunate to have three very influential speakers—Basil Natoli from Cultivating Community in Victoria spoke about his role in the Department of Human Services as advocate, promoter and lobbyist for community gardens; Mal Gilbert from Port Pirie community garden spoke of his passion for gardening and how it has helped him recover from substance abuse; Rosie Mangan from the Housing Trust gave a presentation on the Trust's commitment to community development via its support of community gardens.

We workshoped ways to meet the needs of community gardens. The forum was a great success with agencies keen to see how they can participate in the process.

## Your nearest community garden:

[www.communityfoods.com.au](http://www.communityfoods.com.au)

**More information:** 1300 737 212

## Brisbane... Growing Communities

Imagine having an organization that helps you plan your school or community garden, gathers the resources and contacts that will make it happen and organises training.

Well, we've arrived! Linda McKee and Giulliano Perez are doing this for two schools in Brisbane. With Queensland Department of Health funding they are helping Grovely and Zillmere State Primary Schools set up community gardens.

With Dr Shawn Somerset from Griffith University, we're researching whether gardens in schools can improve the nutrition of students and others. We have come up with a strategy to develop a separate organization that will eventually hive off and respond to these requests. My role is to develop the strategy. Dick Copeman applied for funds last year to initiate the schools project and we were overjoyed to get the nod in January.

*John Morahan*

# STILL EVOLVING after eight years KOORAGANG CITY FARM

Rob Henderson reports...

**A**fter more than eight years we are still evolving, but more importantly we are still here.

A quick history for those who have not been to or heard about our community garden and city farm. Kooragang City Farm (KCF) came into being after a wetland enthusiast and a fisheries habitat biologist convinced the NSW Government to rehabilitate some state owned, degraded farm land and surrounding wetlands that lay in the upper reaches of the Hunter River estuary.

The City Farm was an ideal opportunity to acknowledge the historic agricultural aspects of the estuary while demonstrating farming alternatives.

## Developing a sense of community without neighbours

I was engaged in 1995 to design, then from 1996 to the present to develop and manage the farm.

As you can see from this orchestrated, as opposed to a needs or community driven beginning, one of the hardest jobs was to develop a sense of community toward the farm even though we had no immediate neighbourhood.

Kooragang City Farm is surrounded by the Kooragang Wetlands (1000+ha) and Kooragang Nature Reserve (2000+ha) and is located between the north and south arms of the Hunter river on an area formally known as Ash Island.

Kooragang City Farm now manages approximately 150 hectares of land which includes about 90 hectares of holistically managed pasture feed beef cattle, a bush food garden, an organic community garden, a herb garden, a Permaculture orchard, five kilometres

of walking and cycling tracks, 10-15 thousand new native trees, 3500 eucalypts in a farm forestry/ grazing layout, three kilometres of protected river banks and many hectares of managed wetlands. Together with the Kooragang Wetlands we have planted over 100 000 indigenous trees.

A dedicated group of individuals volunteer hundreds of hours per year to work, enjoy and share in the daily farm activities. Like most community gardens we rely significantly on the passion, drive and effort of volunteers to keep the garden vibrant and productive.

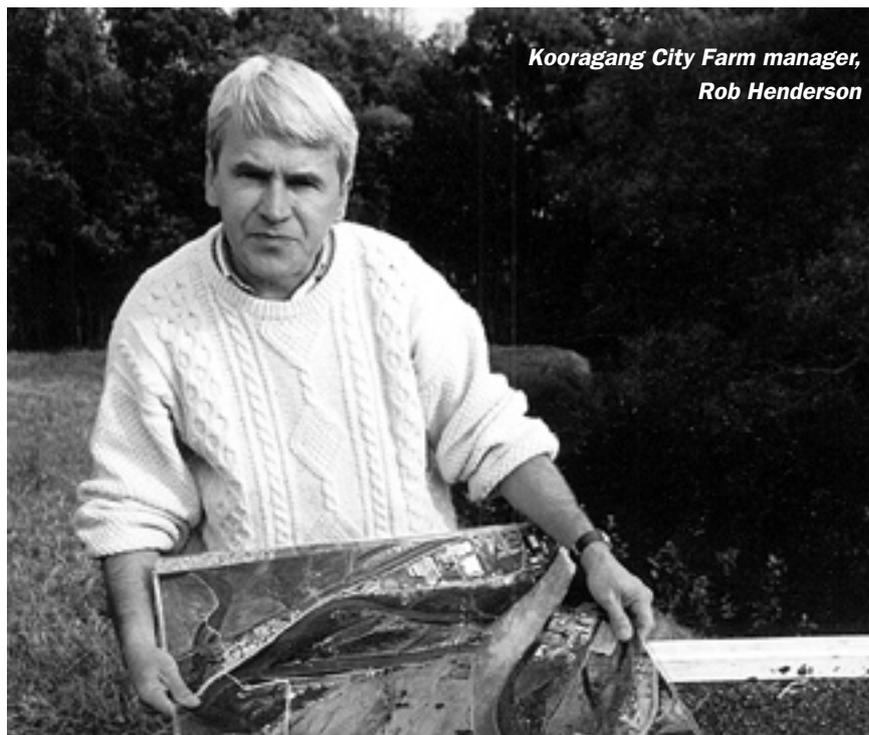
Collectively, we decided that all of the community gardens (thirty nine individual beds of various shapes and sizes) would be shared, with no personal allotments. This enables all of the gardens, including the surrounds, to be maintained to an equal standard with organic bed rotations, job allocation based on an individual's capacity, a more cohesive

feel and of course, shared produce.

Like many community gardens, our daily numbers vary from no-one to several dozen. This can make garden planning awkward but is a reflection of the diverse group who make Kooragang City Farm their own. We have retired people (76 is the oldest), some who live in a mobile home village with no gardening space, one school of very low IQ children, a couple of early retirement 'mutual obligation guys', two special schools for kids in crisis, a few respite care folk, some who are rehabilitating after head injuries and some from a psychiatric rehabilitation service, occasional visits from Greencorps and work for the dole and then there are those who just want to come and garden.

If you are in the area, call in and say hello. Our regular working days are every Tuesday and Friday.

*Rob Henderson, Manager,  
Kooragang City Farm, P: 02 4964 9308  
Mobile: 0418 669 438*



*Kooragang City Farm manager,  
Rob Henderson*

# Cabramatta, Western Sydney... **RECLAIMING A PUBLIC PLACE**

...by Peter Norton & Jeremy Hill

**H**ughes Street Park was one of Cabramatta's 'shooting galleries' for heroin addicts. Local residents rarely used the place.

But that has changed, thanks to an initiative sparked by local community group, Urban Concern. Peter Norton and Jeremy Hill have helped replace the fear and isolation around the park with a sense of community.

## Laying the ground work

Wanting to foster community life in the area, in early 2000 Peter and Jeremy approached Fairfield Council with the idea of developing a community garden.

"We were lucky to make contact with a council employee who was interested in the idea and who was good at turning the rusty wheels of local government".

The council provided a substantial portion of the funding (ABC Open Garden Community Grants Scheme and a local Club under the CDSE scheme among other sources) for the project as well as the installation of water services and free water.

"So, after the council approved the concept, we gathered together a working group of representatives of local ethnic community organisations and a representative from council. The cooperation of the council has been crucial to the success of the garden although it has not been without its stresses and tensions."

The working group met regularly over twelve months to thrash out how the garden might function, how to communicate the concept to the local community and gauge support.

"We wanted to do it this way as we wanted the garden to be 'owned' by

the community, not just seen as a service provided for the community.

## Hard yakka begins

"Council completed the earthworks in Spring 2001 and we got stuck into building the raised garden beds and tool shed. There has been a nucleus who did most of the work. Most focused on their own plot."

## Challenges lie ahead

There is still a long way to go before the project has anywhere near reached its potential as a 'community builder'. While there are definite signs that gaps between the different ethnic groups are closing, they remain large in many cases. Of course, language barriers are always going to be an obstacle there.

As we begin to face problems with disease and pests, the challenge of dealing with these issues without resort to chemical pesticide and fertiliser looms large. Concepts of Permaculture are not that easy to communicate cross-culturally.

## Benefits become apparent

The community garden has contributed to a transformation of Hughes Street Park:

- it has now been returned to the wider community rather than being the preferred place for heroin users to shoot up and is largely syringe-free
- plots are enthusiastically gardened and make a significant, healthy and very low cost contribution to the daily vegetable/herb requirements of plot-holders
- the garden has provided a very tangible, rewarding and therapeutic occupation for a group of retired, unemployed, underemployed Cabramatta migrants and refugees.
- gardeners forge relationships (to varying degrees) with gardeners from the same language background and across language/ethnic boundaries.



*Allotments and pergola at Smith Street Community Garden, Cabramatta*

# community gardens as **THIRD PLACES**

...by Russ Grayson

According to US social researcher, Ray Oldenburg, we inhabit three distinct places in our lives.

The 'first place' is the home and the 'second place' our workplace. 'Third places' are shared places where we informally interact with others.

The important thing about third places is that they are locations where people meet informally. They are congenial to social interaction, itself a component of community-building.

Oldenburg described the concept of the third place in his book *Great Good Places* (1989, 1999; Marlowe and Company, NY). He identifies successful third places as coffee shops, cafes, restaurants, hair dressers and libraries.

Community gardeners could add their gardening venues to Oldenburg's list. They more than adequately fulfil his criteria, one of which is that third places have to be cheap to visit.

## **Informal interaction the key**

It is the social interaction - the discussion, the creative thinking and collaboration, the generation of ideas and the like - that are the critical function of third places.

Out of informal interaction come the initiatives that create a sense of place, a sense of belonging and involvement, a sense of community.

## **Recreating the village green**

Sydney-based social researcher, Hugh Mackay, reports that his research has disclosed the need for something similar to Oldenburg's third places.

Noting the declining size of the Australian household—the growing number of one and two person dwellings—Mackay proposes that new

developments incorporate what he calls a 'village green'. He envisions this as a venue for informal interaction or quiet sitting and observing.

Mackay says we have a 'herding instinct', a need to be with people even if it is just sitting in a coffee bar in their company without interacting with them. It is a need to be with others of our kind.

What Oldenburg and Mackay are proposing is more than the traditional community centre and a great deal more than the shopping mall. Malls are essentially commercial spaces rather than community places. They encourage visitation for the purpose of buying and selling rather than informal interaction. Sure, visitors might interact in the coffee shops found in malls but they do not 'hang around' as would people at a true third place.

## **Conviviality the essential characteristic**

A criteria for third places is that they offer the opportunity for conviviality.

## **Community gardens as third places**

### **...the essentials of conviviality**

The presence of a number of design features and personal attitudes help make community gardens successful third places:

- an open, participatory and democratic approach to garden management that includes all gardeners who want to take part
- a means of solving disagreement amicably
- a sitting place sheltered from sun and rain where gardeners can make a cup of tea or pot of coffee and talk
- a person designated to liaise with new gardeners and welcome visitors to the garden
- regular social events and workshops.

To do this successfully they have to attract a sufficient number of people and be easy of access. Oldenburg says they should be within walking distance of the home or on a public transport route.



*Conviviality — the essence of community gardening*

# Fern Tree Community Garden sows **SEEDS FOR HEALTH**

...a report on the Seeds for Health program, Adelaide

**S**eed *Seeds For Health* is an organic, grass roots community garden program combining support, education and healing in a hands on, eight week program designed to equip people to produce their own organic food. An activity of Adelaide's Cancer Care Centre, *Seeds For Health* continues an 18 year tradition of innovative and effective healing programs.

The program provides skills in vegetable gardening, both in gardens and containers, so it will be possible for people to grow their own 'food for healing'. The experience provides the opportunity to connect with nature and gain the important health benefits of relaxation, reducing stress and anxiety, increasing self reliance and a sense of achievement. As well, there are the fun and connections of being part of community gardening.

## **Fern Tree the venue**

The Fern Avenue Community Garden in Fullarton provides the setting for the program. The Cancer Care Centre has a plot in the community garden for demonstration and to produce crops that provide a healthful lunch after the morning session in the garden.

Participants spoke of the therapeutic benefits of the programme.

"This course has enriched my family's life as well as my life. I have an increased enthusiasm for life. As I eat more healthy food, I am getting the energy to keep up with my enthusiasm."

"The course is educational, enjoyable and therapeutic. It promoted the connection with nature and assists in the healing process."

"This course has had a very positive impact on my health—not just the

knowledge gained, but also the unexpected spiritual uplift from being in this special place with special people"

## **Organics, connections and fun**

In the community garden, learning about organics and Permaculture is rewarding and fun and a great way to meet like-minded people.

The programme is not limited to people with cancer. The Cancer Care Centre encourages participation by those who are interested in preventing illness and promoting wellness—it is for anyone interested in healing and in living a healthy life. It provides the skills and confidence to improve lifestyle and to produce food.

## **Eco-fun workshop successful**

Within the programme, a holiday eco-fun workshop was held for children and it sparked much interest and involvement.

Setting up a worm farm brought excitement—the wonder of worms and of planting seeds held much fascination.

## **Community gardening as therapy**

The great value of the community gardening program is the sense of purpose, focus and achievement that everyone can experience, along with a wonderfully revitalised sense of the beautiful magic of nature.

"The course was practical and helped me move on after a serious illness", said a participant.

The experience of community gardening has so much to offer and this is especially so for anyone who has been experiencing difficult challenges in their lives.

## **New Zealand contacts:**

### **Dunedin Community Gardens**

Developing skills and knowledge on organic growing. Shetland Street Reserve, Kaikorai Valley, Dunedin.

### **Golden Bay Community Gardens/Seed Exchange**

Organic production for local markets and seed exchange—open-pollinated varieties. Garden is part of long-established intentional community. Sol Morgan, PO Box 156, Waitapa Road, Takaka. P: 0-3 525 8337. solmadara@yahoo.com

### **Motueka Organic Community Gardens**

420 Main Road, Riwaka, Moteuka. PO Box 176, Moteuka. P: 0 3 528 8535, fax 0-3 528 8066.

### **Operation Green Thumb**

Wellington's Community Gardens. Various sites. 1/10 Lyall Parade, Lyall Bay, Wellington. P: 0 4 934 2629.

### **Strickland Street Community Gardens**

Christchurch. Contact Christine Blance. P: 0 3 379 9087.

### **Waimarama Permaculture Seed Exchange**

PO Box 926, Nelson.

### **Waimari Community Gardens**

Contact Stuart Edwards, Brook Street, Nelson. P: 0 3 548 4575.

### **Christchurch Community Gardens Association**

Networks community gardens as community and educational resources and social centres promoting self-sufficiency. PO Box 327, Christchurch, 8015. P: 365 5038. F: 379 2250.

ocga@organics.org.nz. Sustainable Cities Trust Office, 4th Floor, Ibis House, 183 Hereford Street, Christchurch, 8001.

**Christine Blance:** P: 379-9087 christine\_blanche@hotmail.com  
Kate Hewson, Secretary, P: 364-2017 kate.hewson@canterbury.ac.nz  
www.organics.org.nz

### **Organic Garden City Trust**

Promotes sustainable, healthy living in Christchurch through education and support in implementing organic system. Two main projects: (1) Kids' Edible Gardens in 23+ primary schools, (2) Christchurch Community Gardens Association—networking community gardeners. P: Leith McLean 365 5038. PO Box 327, Christchurch, 8015. ogct@org.nz  
www.organics.org.nz

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**Australian City Farms &  
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**FINDinfo...**

### Community gardens directory:

Australian Community Foods  
www.communityfoods.com.au

### Community gardening info:

Australian City Farms & Community Gardens  
Network: [www.terraccircle.org.au/garden](http://www.terraccircle.org.au/garden)

### Farmer's markets:

[www.farmersmarkets.org.au](http://www.farmersmarkets.org.au)  
[www.ofa.org.au](http://www.ofa.org.au)

### Local Seed Networks:

Seed Savers Network: [www.seedsavers.net](http://www.seedsavers.net)

### Organic industry

Organic Federation Australia  
[www.ofa.org.au](http://www.ofa.org.au)

### Training in community food system education & organic living:

SEED: [www.permaculture.au.com](http://www.permaculture.au.com)

### Starting community gardens:

*Cultivating Community:*  
[www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/  
building\\_stronger/safer/commgard.html](http://www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/building_stronger/safer/commgard.html)

*Australian Community Garden Network:*  
[www.terraccircle.org.au/garden](http://www.terraccircle.org.au/garden)

Pacific Edge: *Growing Food, Growing  
Community (e-book available soon)*  
[www.pacific-edge.info](http://www.pacific-edge.info)

### Thesis & studies on community gardening:

*Gardening in the Street: Sociality, Production  
And Consumption In Northey Street  
City Farm;* Emanuele John Gelsi; 1999;  
University of Queensland;  
[www.cityfarmer.org/brisbane.html](http://www.cityfarmer.org/brisbane.html)

*Sustainability as Seen from a Vegetable  
Garden;* Louise A. Crabtree; 1999;  
Macquarie University, New South Wales  
[www.thirdangel.com/sustainability](http://www.thirdangel.com/sustainability)

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