

Cultivating Community



By Nev Sweeney et al.

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1.0 Introduction

It seems to me, here in our little corner of suburbia, that the modern world of electronics like TV, computers and Smart phones allows us to stay in our homes and keep track of our friends and family but, it actually works against true community. Indeed, the dislocation caused by Covid has only made things worse. We have worked for years to increase the level of interaction within our local community, using different ideas and techniques and the effects have been variable.

When working in our front yard, the presence of the street library, the street pantry and the community bench have provided opportunities to chat with both neighbours and passers-by alike. However, the number of passers by in our small cul-de-sac is limited and interactions tend mainly to be with our closer neighbours, some of whom we have known for over forty years. Having said that, we have a lady and her little girl who regularly donate lemons to our street pantry, we have had piles of books for the street library left on the community bench, and have had people provide us with treats like Tim Tams in return for fruit and veg taken from the pantry. None of these interactions would have been possible without these features being in place.

The gardening group was successful for over ten years and had attendees from the Blue Mountains to Richmond to Parramatta, which is a great thing, but I was hoping for more attendance from our local area. Having said that, the group brought us into contact with wonderful people, some of whom we still see today. Then there are Bridget and Mick, who came to us, then started attending Permaculture Sydney West and then moved to Tasmania to start their own sustainable farm. While we lost physical contact with them, they took what they learned from us and others to live their best lives in Tasmania.....and we still see them via social media.

We have been privileged to see some of the work done by others, such as Beth Healy's Hope Gardens and Manu's Lyttleton Stores and the 'Farm it Forward' initiative. We have also been blessed by the wonderful people and great friends that we have met through Permaculture Sydney West which we have been members of for over ten years. PSW does not feature in this eBook, because it has one of its own that talks about how it was started and runs to this day. It is available as a free download also from the Under The Choko Tree website, here [Resources \(underthechokotree.com\)](https://underthechokotree.com)

While it is not for everyone, over fifteen years ago we decided we wanted to share our work with others in our area and opened our garden for several open days each year. These included International Permaculture Day, Sustainable (formerly 'Solar') house day and the Sydney Edible Garden Trail. These open days allowed us to connect with lots of like-minded people, some of whom joined our local sustainability group and/or Permaculture Sydney west.

Cultivating community is not a one-shot thing, of course, and there are always new ideas in the wings, which we want to give a try. If you are interested in cultivating your community, it is a case of trying things out and seeing what works for you in your particular situation. This eBook will provide lots of ideas from a number of people that

almost anybody can have a go at and work against the trend, actually encouraging community in their area.

Have a look and see what things you might like to be involved in, or if what interests you doesn't already exist in your area, have a go at starting something up.

1.1 What is Community?

The term 'community' will mean different things to different people, but here are a few definitions that are out there -

Cambridge Dictionary: the people living in one particular area or people who are considered as a unit because of their common interests, social group, or nationality.

Merriam Webster – a unified body of individuals

But I like Wikipedia's definition - A community is a social unit (a group of living things) with commonality such as place, norms, culture, religion, values, customs, or identity.

1.2 What are the benefits of being part of a community?

Health (mental and Physical) – a study on the effect of loneliness caused by the shutdowns during the Covid 19 pandemic showed that people who lack social connections are more likely to suffer high levels of stress and inflammation. Also, research consistently links the lack of social connectedness with health conditions such as heart disease, high blood pressure, immune disorders and cancer, suicide and early death. Communities are about relationships with others and having a feeling of connectedness, which has a major impact on mental health. Without community, people may feel more isolated and lonelier.

Support – a member of a community has access to a support network, who can help out during hard times, whether the hard times are more general as occurred during the pandemic, or more personal such as can happen due to a loss of job, illness or divorce.

Safety – having a community around you can provide a safety net and a feeling of security in times of trouble and means you have people looking out for your welfare.

Resilience – Resilience is about being able to take a hit (whether it be economically, physically or psychologically) and keep going. The like-minded individuals that make up your community can provide physical and emotional assistance to a member who is experiencing hard times.

1.3 Conducting a household community sustainability audit

One of the things that seems to have been reduced (if not entirely eliminated) by our increasingly isolated urban and suburban lifestyle is a sense of community. The benefits for your sustainability, health and psychological wellbeing, of being connected to the wider community outside our door are well documented. But how do you start?

By answering the questions in this audit tool (see appendix 1) it will give you an opportunity to assess degree of connectedness or otherwise your current lifestyle supports. It may also give you some ideas to increase that level of connectedness which you can build into your overall plan.

You may want to work through the Sustainable Lifestyle Assessment Matrix first to understand the bigger picture of sustainable living or if you just want to focus on “Community” alone give the audit a go. It can be as simple or formal as you like, filling the form out as you go or just running through things in your head and working out where you go from there. I recommend the more formal method so you have a record of where you are starting from which you can come back to later, re-do and get a feeling of how far you have come.

I also suggest that you share this with your family, or the people you are living with, so improvement can be on a united front, after all the “community” who lives in your house is important too.

Instructions

Go through all of the questions one section at a time and mark the number most appropriate for your answer from “always” = 3 down to “never” = 0 by circling, crossing out or whatever. Some questions may appear to support a more yes/no answer so to reflect this it would be best to mark 3 for yes and 0 for no. If the question is not applicable to your situation, strike it out and when counting up the maximum possible number to work out score do not add 3 for that question.

To calculate your score add up all of the potential answers and multiply by 3 to give the maximum possible score, and then add up all of the scores from your answers. Divide your answer score number by the maximum possible score and multiply by 100, this will give you your sustainable consumption score as a percentage. The number itself does not mean much, but acts as a base upon which to improve.

Review the results with your family, focussing on some of the lower scores and this will help you focus on areas which you wish to improve. This may be as simple as buying clothing second hand more often or making sure you buy environmentally friendly cleaning products; or you may wish to write up a plan so that you can track your progress over time. Either way you may want to run the sustainable consumption audit again every year or two to check over all progress.

The audit is set out in four sections, starting with ourselves and moving outwards into the world.

Part 1 examines some of the personal daily choices we make to support a more sustainable community, the second part looks at how we interface with our neighbours and while doing that whether we support the ideals of sustainable community. Part 3 looks at community building opportunities in our local area and the fourth part look as how we participate in the government process to support sustainable outcomes.

Remember, the numbers themselves do not mean much, but provide a base upon which to improve and help you work out the direction you wish to improve in. The whole point of this exercise is to help you work out where the sustainability of your lifestyle is at currently and then help you make decisions on how you wish to improve it. Hopefully, it could even be fun as well!

2.0 Our House, Our Street

2.1 Making and Installing the street library



I was tooling around on the internet one evening when I came across the concept of the street library and I must admit the idea fascinated me. You can find the official Australian Street Library website [here](#). The concept is to provide a place on your property which protects books you no longer need or want from the weather, but leaves them accessible to passers-by. This is so that they can take what they are interested in and then keep things going by bringing back their unwanted books and putting them into the street library for the benefit of others.

While it possible to buy completed street libraries, it seems to me that it is best if you can build your own, and where possible build it out of salvaged, recycled and repurposed materials. So having decided that is what I wanted, and having gained approval for my project from the Domestic Director of the Choko Tree, I set to, to design it.

The Design

As I have said on many occasions, I am a technician not an artist, and so my design for the street library reflects my skills. The carcass would be a fairly prosaic, almost square box with one shelf, a clear door and a skillion (flat sloping) roof to shed the rain. The clear front panel I had left over from a previous project and it had been kicking around the garage for quite a few years. My initial thought was glass, but for public safety (and the fact I didn't have any glass the right size) the PVC sheet won out. The size of the

PVC sheet (600mm high by 550mm wide) set the dimensions of the outside of the carcase.



Raw materials

The carcass would be constructed from marine ply which had some history. Before I was married (yes, back in the dark ages!) I had worked for a plywood company in Homebush Bay, Sydney and I had bought some of their produce to make a bookshelf. The bookshelf started off in my room in my parents' place, came with me when I moved out to St Clair, but for the last 20 years or so it was used for chemical storage in the garage. When the chemicals went I pulled it apart for renovation but decided it would make a great street library. The roof and door framing were recycled pine from old chook tractors and the flat roof was cut from some mini-orb I had souvenired from a discard pile on a building site (with permission!).

The fittings (hinges, handle etc.) were taken from stuff already in the garage and the only new piece was some Masonite to make the back piece, because I had nothing big enough that was waterproof in my store of materials.

Construction

The Carcase

The first thing to do was to construct the carcase, the long sides of the bookcase which were to form the bulk of the carcase were too long, so I cut them down to 600mm and as luck would have it, the existing shelves were the right length to give the carcase an overall width of 550mm. The plywood was pretty old and a bit rough, so I gave each piece an overall sanding to improve the surface, I had not applied any finishing to the bookshelf so the surface was original. To connect everything I used 50mm x 50mm x 40mm wide 1mm thick angle brackets, one in each corner of the outer box and one each end of the shelf, giving a total of 6, originally brought in for another project and not used, quite a while ago.



Using a picture frame vise to hold the joint steady



I secured all the angles with 8 gauge x 15mm button head timber screws. The carcass was not particularly dimensionally stable at this point (ie it wobbled!) but was much more robust when I attached the Masonite backing, using the same type of screws. With the carcass more or less complete, I gave the entire inside and outside 2 coats of water based outdoor acrylic white paint, with a day or so in between coats for drying. Just to make sure, I applied a small bead of silicone sealant to all inside joins, preventing any rain from getting in through any remaining small cracks.



Carcass Completed and awaiting Paint

The Door

To make the front door I grabbed some 41mm x 19mm DAR pine recycled from an old chook tractor and measured up the outside of the PVC sheet which was to form the clear panel at the front. I cut 4 pieces of the pine on a 45° angle on our drop saw so that they would form a rectangular frame when assembled. To join these all together to make the frame I used 8 25mm x 25mm x 20mm x 1mm thick angle brackets, one on the inside and one on the outside of each 90° angle joint, which formed the corners of the frame. When the frame was completed it also got 2 coats of outdoor acrylic white paint, then the PVC panel was attached to the inside for the frame using the same 15mm screws.



Door completed, showing inside



Door attached to carcass, complete with handle

To attach the door to the carcase I used a pair of recycled hinges off an old door and then screwed on a couple of magnetic catches I found in the garage (while looking for something else of course!). This completed the door.

The Roof

To make the roof I used my nibbler to cut a piece of the mini-orb 680mm wide by 500mm deep. To support this I made a frame with the long sides made from two pieces of 84mm x 19mm, 460mm long pine, joined to form a square by two pieces of 41mm x 19mm pine 500mm long. I cut a wedge off the bottom of the 84mm thick pieces so that when it rested horizontally on the carcase, the top had an angle of a bit less than 5° to ensure the rain would drain off. I also cut the front to a 45° roughly so that it did not stick out at the front. Once completed the frame got the white paint treatment as well.



Roof frame



Roof frame attached



Roof frame painted

To attach the frame to the carcase I used 20mm screws and then used the 15mm screws to attach the mini-orb to the frame. This completed the library part of the street library, I just needed a way to mount it in out front yard.

Mounting

The first question was “where?” I wanted it to be in the front of the yard, in our longitudinal Food Forest and after much discussion and wandering around, worked out that it would be best near the water meter in the middle of the food forest. In the place we picked there would be protection from the weather by reasonably large *melaleuca alternifolia* trees on each side which would cut down the force of the sun and the rain. We have just had a blustery and very rainy day and the trees did protect the library quite well, no water got inside the library.

Now the question of “how?” I was a little concerned because the street library itself weighs quite a bit and full of books it will only be much heavier so mounting on a flimsy stick frame was not going to work. After much thought I eventually went with the design on the Street Library Website. It consisted of a central 90mm x 90mm post cemented into the ground, with two 90mm x 90mm angled supports, one on each side a top plate. The street library is then secured onto the top plate by screws.



Mounting post installed

As luck would have it I had some 90mm x 90mm posts recycled from when a friend of mine did his place up and had them replaced with something fancier, one was over 2 metres long. I cut the main post to 1500mm long, the idea being that it would be buried 800mm into the ground and have 700mm above ground.

I used my post hole digger to dig the mounting hole down to 800mm and about 250mm wide, although I did remove some soil from the top third or so to open it out a bit. I mixed up 2 x 20kg fast setting, high strength concrete in my wheel barrow, then shovelled some of the wet concrete into the bottom of the hole. I placed the post into the hole and filled in the rest of the wet concrete around the post. I used my spirit level to make sure the post was upright correctly and tamped it down with some spare timber to remove any voids or gaps in the concrete. Even with two bags of concrete I could probably have done with another third or half a bag extra, but once the concrete had gone off the post was stable enough.



Supports and top post in place

I left the post untouched for a couple of days to let the concrete set completely. To make the supports I cut two 260mm long sections from the remaining 90mm x 90mm post and then chamfered the ends off at 45° using a hand saw, tiring but it gave a better result! To finish off the mounting post I took some of the leftover marine ply and screwed a sheet down to the top of the post with a couple of 8 gauge 50mm countersunk chipboard screws to form the top plate. I then held the supports in place, on each side of the post so that they were in contact with the top plate and the side of the post, then screwed them into place with 3 of the same type of screws at each end.



In place and secured

With the mounting now complete, I placed the street library on top of the top plate and then put two screws each through the bottom of the library, through the top board, and down into the three supports. This gave the library a solid mounting which feels quite secure.

The Books

The idea is for the library books to be second hand or otherwise surplus and in that way they can be passed on to a new readership. My idea was to have books about growing food, making stuff and living sustainably but we also threw in some novels (Tom Clancy, a bit of sci fi and even a couple of Mills & Boon) as well to round things out a bit.



Our box of books, waiting to go into the library

There is a [sheet of labels](#) you can download from the Street Library site and if you print them off onto self-adhesive paper you can cut them up to make stickers and put them on or into your books so people are aware they came from a street library. So I did just that and applied them to each of the books, there are 30 labels on the sheet. The Choko Tree street library is now in place and awaiting customers!

2.2 Making a Community Bench



We want to improve community facilities in our area and part of our work in that vein was to install our street library, but everyone knows that you can sit and read in a library, so we made a bench for passers-by to sit on as well. The idea is that, with or without a street library, a community bench provides a resting place for tired or elderly walkers, a place to meet your neighbours and friends, or just a place for passers-by to rest and enjoy your front yard. It provides a place where anyone can sit and enjoy the scenery.



Bench ends

As usual we prefer to put things together with recycled/repurposed materials. Years ago friends gave us a set of cast iron bench ends which they picked up from out the front of people's houses where they had been placed for rubbish collection. It seems that people buy the benches for their garden, but when the wood rots out they tend to throw out the much more robust cast iron ends and start again rather than refurbish. Our friends had several sets of ends which they were going to revive and gave us one to work on as well. The bench ends have been sitting around our place for *mumble* years before I came across the community bench idea.

Construction

To make the bench seatable again was a fairly easy matter, I needed some timber 60mm – 70mm wide to make the slats for people to sit on and when we re-did the back deck we pulled up the original hardwood decking. Some of the decking was still in good condition and at 65mm wide and varying lengths it would do the job admirably. To make the bench the right size to give comfortable seating for two people I cut the slats to 1 metre long with our drop saw. The timber may have been old but like me it was still pretty tough! So rather than using a hand saw the drop saw was the way to go.



The original design had the seat composed of 5 slats on the bottom for sitting on and timber surrounding a cast iron design which formed the backrest of the seat. I didn't have the cast iron design so I decided to put in a top and bottom slat in the back and

then screw some Masonite (left over from the backing for the street library) onto the slats once they were in place.



To fix the slats in place I used $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 30mm (yeah, I know – mixed measurements but that is how they were labelled!) mushroom head bolts and nuts. I held each slat in place and then marked where the hole should go with a pencil. I drilled the holes with a $\frac{1}{4}$ " drill bit and then drilled in about 4 – 5mm with a 16mm spade bit, so that the heads of the bolts would sit in below the level of the wood.



I cut the Masonite to size so that it would sit in behind the brackets the slats forming the back were fixed to, and then screwed it on using 8 gauge x 15mm button head timber screws. With everything in place I sanded the slats back and gave them two coats of the outdoor acrylic white paint which I had used on the street library, the Masonite got three coats.



Location

I wanted to locate the bench close to the street library but not obstruct anything else, like our water meter. After several trials we settled on its current location, on the nature strip to the right of the street library and just in front of the central melaleuca tree.

To make sure people understood the bench was for public use I added a “Have a Seat on Me!” sign onto the Masonite backing by just printing it off, laminating it and sticking it on with double sided tape. I also added a Choko Tree logo using the same process.



While I haven't noticed it being used yet, yesterday afternoon I came out and found one of the books from the street library sitting on the bench where someone had been reading it and then just put it down before they moved off. So we are obviously getting some traffic!

Even without a street library, it is worth installing a bit of community seating. The bench is not tied down in any way so we will see how it goes, although our area does not seem to be a hot spot for vandalism, beyond a bit of fence graffiti.

2.3 Making and Installing a Street Pantry



Here at the choko tree, at different times of the year, we get excess produce and like when we step out the front door in summer, arms full zucchinis, and all of the surrounding neighbours close all their doors and windows, a similar thing happens in late autumn with chokoes! So having worn out our friends, family and neighbours with our excess, I wanted to make food available to passers-by. I had the idea to make a 'street pantry' (analogous to our 'street library' but with food) when I first saw pics of what others had done on the net a few years ago, and now it was time to spring (limp slowly?) into action and put something together.

The Base

My first thought for the base was to rip apart some of the pallets stored down the back for exactly this sort of purpose, but the common sense took hold and I wandered around looking for something that would be quicker and easier! As luck would have it, I found a wooden crate in one of the sheds, it had been used for several things over the years but at this point it was just sitting there full of crap. Winner! I relocated the crap (can't have too much crap!) and dragged it out into the light of day for inspection.



While we do get surpluses, in most cases they are not huge, so I did not want a vast street pantry that spent most of its time being 90% empty thus I didn't want something too large, just large enough to contain a mix of whatever we had going at the time. The crate was 445mm long x 320mm wide x 200mm deep so it seemed ideal for my purpose.



The next question was where to mount it? I looked around the area where the street library and community bench are located and decided rather than try and fit it onto the trunk of one of the melaleuca trees at the front, I would instead screw it onto the post that the street library sits on and directly below it. There should be no mistaking my intent if I did that.



Before I did anything else, I painted a coat of blackboard paint on each end of the crate and let it dry so that I could mark it up the way I wanted.

The Fit Out

The next point was to design the street pantry and decided to simply turn the crate on its side, install a roof and a single shelf inside.



The roof is the same material I used for the roof of the street library, ie Mini Orb and I found a piece that seemed to be wide enough and I only had to cut it to length. The final piece was 550mm long by 330mm wide, thus allowing 50mm or so overhang on each side and 130mm at the front. There would be no overhang at the back because the whole deal was to be attached directly to the street library post.



I wanted to angle the roof up, for several reasons. One, (obviously) so rain could run off towards the back, but also, (two) since it was being mounted low on the pole, to make it easier to reach in and get the goodies. Also (three) I wanted to be able to support the overhanging part of the roof. To do these things I installed a length of DAR 40mm x 20mm pine the same length as the roofing Mini Orb into the front of the case with two wood screws. I then drilled and screwed the Mini Orb to the front support and the back of the case with three wood screws. That seemed to do the job.



To make the shelf I grabbed some of the leftover 3 ply from making the Chook Tractor Access and cut it to fit the inside of the crate. To support it I cut a couple of bits of waste timber and then screwed them to the side of the crate. It was then just a matter of sliding the shelf into place. I had installed the side supports so they were at the same height as one of the holes between the slats at the back, so the shelf slid in and a little bit onto the back slat so that it was supported on three sides. In reality I guess it was plenty strong enough for the loads that would be placed on it, after all how much could a few chokoes weigh?

Installation

The installation really was a five minute job once the pantry was assembled. It was just a case of clearing away some of the foliage from the bottom of the post, lining up the pantry so that it did not obstruct the library door and then drilling in four wood screws through the back and into the support post. Job done!



Or so I thought!



Linda went out a bit later to check my work and reported that she was concerned about how people would have to bend down to get under the protruding roof, and that the edge of the roof was a bit sharp and may possible cause an injury.



That was immediately remedied by getting some surplus garden hose, slicing it open down one side, and then pushing it over the outer edge of the Mini Orb roof. This provided a safe and non slicey edge to the roof.

I then stocked the pantry with some goodies. Now it was job done!



2.4 Installing a 'Pick your own veg' area in our front yard

One of the problems with putting fresh fruit and veg in our street pantry is that it works better for some produce than others. For robust stuff like citrus and other fruits, chokoes, caulis, root veg it works well but for leaf crops, they do not put up with sitting around in the pantry for any length of time and tend to look pretty second-hand after only a few hours. It can take some time (days) before items get removed by passers-by.



Cleaned, cleared and ready to go!

At the same time that I was pondering this problem, I was also looking at a couple of bathtubs that were already in the front yard and set up as wicking beds. They were not in use and had been taken over by weeds. It seemed a shame to have that growing space and not have it in a productive condition.

Also in the same area (ie the northeast corner of the front yard) there is our well grown (6 metres) bay tree (*laurus nobilis*). I am pretty sure it would keep all of St Clair in bay leaves if people could identify it. Unfortunately, most of the people around here don't seem to pick up that it is a useful tree.



Lauris Nobilis (our bay tree!)

Eureka! This would be a great place to start a garden where by-passers could harvest their own fresh veggies themselves.

The first part was to rehabilitate the wicking beds (how I put them together originally can be found in Appendix 6). I pulled out all the weeds, added some potting mix and then applied a layer of sugar cane mulch. To make it a little mor obvious, I also installed a couple of stepping stones at the front of the beds for access. The next question, was what to plant?



In summer the beds don't get much full sun due to the shade from the mulberry tree, but in winter the area gets about four hours of full sun a day due to the mulberry losing its leaves and the lower angle of the sun. Due to the lack of sunlight for part of the year it seemed sensible to grow leaf crops. Seeing as we were moving into winter, one bed received broccoli, the other got silver beet.



Getting the seedlings was easy, I was able to use seedlings that were not needed for our normal annual veggie patches. I normally sow more than I need to ensure I get

enough and then I can pass unneeded seedlings on to others. In this case I just potted them on into newspaper pots and when they were big enough they went into the bath tubs.

It has been several months (it is late winter now) and the silver beet seedlings have grown enough to be harvested, but the broccoli have not headed yet. I wondered for a short while how to make it easy for by-passers to cut some leaves without needing to pull up the entire plant (providing a knife seemed like a bad idea) and came up with the idea of providing an old pair of secateurs. I affixed them to the baths with some chain and bolts, mainly to prevent any local kids from pinching them and using them to prune their mum's roses down to a stub. We will have to see how that goes.



Last of all, I put together a sign and telling them to 'Help themselves' to veggies and bay leaves which has now gone into place. I am awaiting to see if anybody will take advantage of the free fresh produce that we want to share!

Help Yourself!

Take some veg for yourself, and leave the rest for others! Also, that tall tree to your right? It's a Bay Laurel, it produces the spice 'bay leaves' so feel free to grab a few leaves for your cooking, too.



2.5 Making and distributing Veg Grow Boxes

There are times, occasionally, when everything comes together.

It was interesting to watch the upsurge in people wanting to grow some of their own food as the impact of COVID-19 hit. Clearly this is something I personally wanted to encourage, and so the articles and YouTube videos on the Choko Tree reflected some of that encouragement. Then a friend of mine said he had some polystyrene foam boxes he no longer needed that I could have if I wanted to pick them up. I wanted!



With a little thought it came to me that I could grow some veggie seedlings and make DIY veg boxes out of them and pass one on to every house in the street. Fortunately we live on a comparatively small street with only twelve houses apart from our own so it was not an impossible task. Between the boxes my friend provided and a few I had already hanging around I only needed to buy a couple to complete the numbers. One of our local purveyors fruit and veg sells them off cheaply so I was able to make up the numbers at low cost.

The only real cost was the growing medium which needed to be bought, and I settled on a mid-range potting mix, not the el cheapo stuff but not the \$10 plus a bag stuff either. I bought sufficient to allow about 25 litres plus a bit per box and seeing as some of the boxes were different sizes the uptake was variable.

Designing the Boxes

I needed to work out exactly what veggies I was going to put in each box, and the design I came up with was put together with the colder weather in mind, but would actually work for any time of year. What I came up with was this –



- Radish (Variety: Cherry Belle) – radish are a root crop so the seeds had to be sown where they are to grow and I sowed them in a line down one side of the box, 8 to 10 of them per box. They are the quickest growing vegetable in the box and should be able to be harvested within a month. Once harvested there will be more room for the other veggies to mature.
- Lettuce (Varieties: Oak leaf and Green mignonette) There is one of each planted either side of the central leaf vegetable. These are different from the usual iceberg lettuce for sale at Woollies. Oak leaf does not head at all, the leaves are harvested from around the bottom and sides of the plant as they grow, this makes for a longer harvest time. The green mignonette can be harvested in the same way but will eventually form a small heart. Both lettuce types were started off in punnets, then transferred directly to the veg boxes. They can usually start to be harvested in a month and half to two months. Once they start to bolt (send up seed heads) and go bitter they can be removed to leave space for the third veg.
- Spinach beet (Perpetual spinach) This is the central veg which I raised as a seedling then put into newspaper pots for transplanting. It is a short lived perennial, lasting up to 2 years, and is a slower grower than the other two vegetables being ready for harvest in six to eight weeks.

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Constructing the Boxes

Before I did anything else I sowed the two types of lettuce and the spinach beet seeds in punnets, then left them to germinate and grow, a couple of weeks later I started working on the boxes themselves.

The process was fairly easy and there is an [article](#) and [YouTube video](#) if you want more detailed information. Most of the boxes (well actually, all except one) did not have drain holes so the first order on the agenda was to put in some drain holes. The cleanest and easiest way to do this is to use something hot to melt the holes and I used an electric soldering iron, which was quick, efficient and easy – turn the box upside down, burn in a dozen random drainage holes, then move onto the next one.

To fill the boxes I first put in a layer of organic matter, this would break down and release nutrients as plants grew and reduce costs by taking up some of the volume of the box that would not need to be filled with potting mix. Generally when making veggie boxes I use grass clippings because we don't use chemicals on our lawn and row a variety of species (weeds) in our lawn. In this case because I was making so many at one time I didn't have enough lawn clippings so I made up the balance with the straw/chook manure mix from the chook retirement village.



With the boxes half full of organic matter I then topped them up with the potting mix and gave them a good watering. I set them all up on the area where the tiny house will be down the back yard, I could keep an eye on them there and they would get plenty of sun. I sowed the radish seed in a line down one side of each of the boxes. I was going to wait for the radishes to come up, but was too impatient so after a few days I transferred the lettuce seedlings and one spinach beet seedling into each box. I watered each box every day or two.

When the radishes came up, and there was an excellent germination rate, I let them grow for a few days then mulched around the larger seedlings with sugar cane mulch, but left the strip where the radishes were growing bare.



I figured it would be a bit weird to drop this on someone's front porch without any explanation so I put together a letter on what it was and how to care for it, along with a colour picture of each veg when mature. I printed off a copy for each neighbour and included it with the veg box. A copy of the letter is available at appendix 3.

Once everything was well grown, I delivered them all one morning, and that morning I really got my exercise! They were heavy, but seemed to get heavier as I delivered them. I don't expect any reaction, but I hope they are able to keep their DIY veg boxes going and get harvest some fresh produce from them. Who knows? Maybe they will even get the veg growing bug! I can only hope.



In the end, there wasn't much reaction although a couple of neighbours did thank me and one even gave us some really nice home baked muffins. Another neighbour told me that they had just had some of the produce with their lunch, so that was nice to hear! Most of the boxes disappeared into back yards and one that was left out the front does appear to be flourishing.

2.6 Hosting an Open Garden Day

Over 15 years ago we realised that while we were trying to live more sustainable lives and encouraging others to do so, the impact we were having outside our own family group was negligible. The neighbours were tolerant of our foibles but not really interested and apart from that the only record of our efforts was the odd article in Grass Roots magazine. We were at an eco-show and I talked with a gentleman from the Alternative Technology Association who suggested we open for Sustainable House Day and since then we have opened on sustainable house day up until the advent of Covid and we now open for International Permaculture Day and the Sydney Edible Garden Trail as well.

While it would be quite within the realms of possibility to hold an open day yourself, just for your local area to showcase what you have been doing, there are a couple of advantages to being part of a larger organisation –



Insurance – Unfortunately we live in a very litigious society and if someone hurts themselves on your property you could be liable for their injuries. That is not a reason to avoid having an open day, but it is a reason to make sure that you are protected and if your open day is under the umbrella of a larger organisation you will be covered by their public liability insurance. Having said that we have not had one injury since we started opening to the public, but having the protection is wise. Most household insurance policies have a some public liability insurance attached to them as well, but if you intend to open stand-alone it would be worth asking your insurance company whether you are still covered under those circumstances.

Promotion – you can bet that any umbrella organisation you become associated with will have a much bigger budget for marketing and advertising the day than you will. Local leaflet drops and posters in your local library, shops and doctors offices is a cheap way to publicise your open day as well as telling all your contacts on the net but advertising on buses and taxis, magazine and newspaper articles and radio and TV ads are a much more sure fire way to get people to come. We have had over 70 people come in a day and less than ten; I know which I would prefer! So let's assume that you are ready to put yourself out there and open your house and home to visitors from the public, what happens next? Well, from our experience, here are some of the issues you might want to think about –

What are you going to open?

This comes back to your level of comfort with having the public snooping through your stuff, you may want to restrict people to the front yard only, give them free reign all over the place or somewhere in between. We open the front yard, garage and backyard and have a process that we take people though covering each area in turn. We do not take the public through our house, which is reserved for invited guests only, but I know of people who do take tours through their house and do it very successfully. It is a decision you will have to make and in part it will be driven by where the interesting stuff is that you want to show people.



How long are you going to open for?

The hours that you open for may be set by any umbrella organisation you are dealing with or you may have some say in what hours you open. We generally open between 10:00am and 4:00pm and if we get a good day after 6 hours of walking and talking I am absolutely shattered and while there may be a lull around lunch time, there may not be so it is good to arrange your significant other to prepare some walk and talk food for you just in case. You may elect to only open for the morning or afternoon and if the umbrella organisation has stuff going on all weekend you may want to open only one of the two days. The important thing is to make your decision early so it can be put on any promotional material and communicated so that your visitors will know when to turn up. Although you should be prepared for people to turn up late, early and on the wrong day as well, not many thankfully but it does happen!

The clean up

You will want your place to look its best when you open so allow a day or two prior to the day itself to preen. Mow the lawns (if you have them), pick up the crap that most of us put up with for the rest of the year and make sure everything looks tidy. If it is possible that your open day will attract children as well as adults it helps to look at the open area at a child's level and see if there is anything that they could hurt themselves on or that they could inadvertently destroy. In our experience most kids are well behaved and their parents keep an eye on them but all you need is one little rotter to do something unspeakable while everyone's back is turned to sour you on the whole experience. There is no need to be paranoid but just have the thought in the back of your mind when cleaning up, or is there an area from which kids will be banned to save you the trouble?

Helpers

If you expect to get more than half a dozen people through in a full day you will need people to help you, even if all they do is provide crowd control. The best helper is the one who knows something about your set up, can give a bit of commentary during the tour and can answer questions, although it is fair enough to defer to you for the curly

ones. Fortunately for me my wife and son-in-law are ready willing and able to help me out on open days and they lighten my load somewhat. It is quite possible that the larger organisation may allot you helper(s) and if this is the case be grateful and get them to arrive at least an hour before the day is due to start. This is so you can give them their own private tour if they have not been there before and so you can let them know what you expect of them. If you have to supply your own helpers then friends and family are the best pool to draw from although one year when helpers were unavailable I got several people from one of the forums we are on – Aussies Living Simply and we all had a great day.

Labelling



An example of labelling

If you have intentions of doing this more than once, or even if you don't you may get sucked in and having some labels on your creations and a little bit of blurb about what they are and how they work this will support your unskilled helpers and give people something to look at and read until you become available to talk to them. We do it fairly simply using Microsoft Word, a large easily read title, a smaller sentence or two of information and a bit of appropriate clip art to add colour all on a piece of A4 copy paper. Print it out in colour and then laminate it so you can use it year after year and these days with the cost of a small A4 laminator and some pouches and you can do it all at home.

Unfinished projects



The unfinished aquaculture system

Don't hide these, let people know that you are on a journey too. Showcase the works in progress as well as those finished masterpieces that you are rightfully proud of because sometimes seeing the process you are following will make it easier for someone to repeat what you have done than by just seeing the finished product. You may even deliberately keep an unfinished work to demonstrate how something is made or how it works. We did this with the latest open day by keeping a self watering vegetable growing container that is not filled with potting mix, so when we got to that area of the garden I could pull it apart and show how it was constructed. This makes it much easier to demonstrate a concept and hopefully helps people remember what they have seen.

Take-away material

Do you want to have material on offer for people to take away with them? It is easy for us now, we had a stack of business cards printed up with our site address on it and when I am talking to people, particularly those who take notes, that what they will be seeing is covered on our website. Back in the days previous to our website I would photocopy some of the articles that had been published in Grass Roots for people to take. We get quite a bit of material from the sponsors of Sustainable House Day including free ReNew magazines to give away as well. You might want to download stuff from the net about what you are doing if you don't have any written material of your own or you might not want to bother with any takeaway stuff and that is fine too.

Photographs

There are two issues with the taking of photos – yours and someone else's. If you want to have your own record of the day, and it can be fun to look back on, don't plan on doing the photography yourself; you will be too busy walking and talking. This is an ideal job for one of your helpers, preferably one of the ones who will be doing crowd control rather than one who could be pressed into service if a busload of people arrive. That way you can get a complete record of the day. The other issue is do you want to allow visitors to take their own photos? I don't see a down side to this and we always

let people take any photos they want but you should think about this and not be forced into a decision the first time someone asks if it is OK to take photos and decide what you want.

Note: I wish to thank Carmel from the Penrith Council Sustainability Team and Robert from Permaculture Sydney West for the photographs used in this article.

Weather



The display at the back of the house including weather protection

One of the things that you can't control is the weather. The open days we have are in May and September when the weather in Sydney is very changeable, so we are constantly looking at the weather forecast and praying not for rain! We have had all kinds of weather for open days from cold, wet and windy all the way through to the best weather imaginable. As the old saying goes – Hope for the best but plan for the worst. We have a number of tarpaulins that we can set up including one over the washing line and one over a frame in front of the garage and they provide cover for static displays of gear we have made and areas out of the weather for visitors to stand. On hot days the cover we have up also provides room out of the sun so have a look around your place and work out if there are covered areas you can erect for the day to make the experience more comfortable for you and your visitors. You may also want to have some cheap umbrellas to lend to visitors in case they do not bring their own.



If you are a bit nervous about taking people through what you have been doing that is understandable, but just remember that you will know more about your activities than them and they are there to learn more. When it comes to public speaking nothing is more satisfying than talking about a subject you are passionate on to an attentive and motivated audience. If someone does ask you a curly one the response is simple – “I don’t know the answer to that but if you leave your contact details with me I will find out and get back to you”. Then do it!

Another thing is not to be put off if you feel that you haven’t got enough to put on a show. There are people out there from all parts of the spectrum including the absolute beginners and sharing with them where you are on your journey is also worthwhile. We all have to start somewhere and by showing them what you have achieved you may just prove to them that they can do it too, so that they will go home prepared to give it a go.

There is some work involved in setting up and running an open day but don’t let that put you off, it is a hugely fun thing to do and very satisfying when you are relaxing at the end of a hectic day spent walking and talking to all manner of people. We have certainly made friends out of some of the people who have come to look so if you are in any way interested in getting involved with an open day or setting up your own don’t delay – go for it!



3.0 Our Neighbourhood

3.1 Starting a local community group

3.1.1 The Beginning

Yonks ago I wanted to start up a group based around people in our area living more sustainably. A fine idea but my thinking was rather fuzzy so I never really moved too far with it. Eventually I decided that it would be good to build it around the fairly non-threatening idea of home grown veggies – save money, provide food for the family and have fun – that sort of thing.

If I could attract both new and veteran veggie gardeners we could get cross fertilisation (if you will pardon the pun) of ideas and share seeds, seedlings, produce and growing techniques and information; everybody wins! Getting too heavy with global warming and peak oil can put people off, so starting off with something a bit more positive increases the likelihood of reaching interested people.

I put a flyer together with our email and phone number and put them up around the place (Including our local McDonalds) but never really got any bites. I knew there must be people out there but contacting them seemed to be a bit more difficult than I thought.

Then I had my second brain-wave. Our local shops are reasonably big and popular, so why not get a table, bring along some seedlings and other stuff like the solar oven and pot-in-pot cooler to spark some interest and have a bit of a stand. They are also only 5 minutes walk away so I could transport stuff easily. I knew that the centre management were well disposed towards community groups; and there were a number that had tables there regularly so off I trotted to talk to them.

I started into my spiel and was brought to a rapid halt! Before I could even commence discussion I needed \$10 million in public liability insurance. What a shock! There was no group to share the cost with, only me. Although I found somebody on the internet who would insure me for one day it would cost me several hundred dollars. Bugger!

I didn't forget the idea but had to shelve it for a while, back to the drawing board. But then something interesting happened.



Bob and I in the shopping centre

I became involved in setting up some sustainable living workshops with Mamre Farm and as part of that we decided to do a promotional stint in our local shopping centre. They had no problem allowing me to have some signup sheets and flyers for a veggie growing group as part of that and (woo hoo!) they already have the right level of public liability insurance. I was in!



The surface of the board facing away from us

We did several shopping centre displays, the first one went off well and we had some interest in the workshops as well as the veggie growing group. I designed the flyers to be half an A4 sheet so that they were the right size to be folded up and put in a pocket. We also had a white board and were set up so that the back of the whiteboard was covered in brochures and accessible without approaching our table, that way people could walk up and browse without feeling intimidated by us. Next time we will make sure that flyers will be available to pick up from that side of the whiteboard too. We were there on a Saturday morning from 9:00am to 12:30pm.



Talking with one of the visitors

Some people did stop to chat, but it was good to have someone to talk to during lulls in the enquiries. If you try this and it is only you, take a book!

We ran the second one and were having a similar experience when my wife suggested giving out the flyers rather than just letting the people come to us. D'oh! This worked very well and it also seemed to work better when Rachel was giving them out rather than me, so never underestimate the power of a pretty face.

It took six months but the St Clair backyard veggie gardener's group got up and running. In the end while we only got one expression of interest from the Saturday morning stall at the shops, a number came from other areas. Notably two different very enthusiastic families contacted the website after seeing flyers in the local library and one lady became interested after visiting us here at the choko tree on Permaculture Day. Now with a committed core of people we are able to start regular meetings and work on getting more members as we go.

3.1.2 Venue

The obvious venue is one of the group's houses if anyone has the room; because it is comfortable, safe, amenities are in place and it is free. In our case, because I was setting it up the obvious place would have been at our house but we didn't have the room to fit everyone in so I had to look farther afield, specifically facilities provided by our local council.



In the end there was a community cottage behind our local shops available for rent and they had a vacancy on Monday evenings so I chose the third Monday of the month and a quick email to the members confirmed that this was OK.

Due to the fact we were a community group the rent was set at a very reasonable \$10.50 per hour and we only needed the venue for 2 hours. It is certainly

large enough to take far more than our current 10-12 people so as the group (hopefully) grows we will have no trouble accommodating the new members.

Another bonus is that if we have 10 or fewer meetings a year we are covered by the council's public liability insurance policy, although if site visits to each other's houses or other places are on your agenda as they are on ours, it would be wise to check into the costs associated with public liability insurance. If it is agreeable to the members, the cost of the insurance would be borne by everyone so there would not be too great a financial burden on the organiser.

After the group agreed on the venue and timing of the meetings at the first meeting I booked out the venue for the following year so that we are guaranteed a place to meet. Other possibilities are your local school if you have any contacts, they may be able to arrange the use of their facilities or your church if you attend one may allow you to use one of their rooms for meetings.

3.1.3 Promotion



Here is what our flyer looks like

One of the easiest ways to promote your group is to develop and print some flyers that say a bit about your group and give contact details, I used both my home email and email/guestbook details for our website, at the very least include a phone number. Once developed you can put a flyer up and leave take away copies in any of the following locations in your local area, assuming they give you permission, to get to your target audience –

- Doctor's surgery
- Health food shops
- Day care centres
- Local library

Other ways you can get the word out is to see if you can get a press release put into your local School and/or community newsletter or approach your local papers that can be positively inclined towards community groups. Also try approaching a community radio station if one exists in your local area although even the mainstream radio stations sometimes have time set aside for community service announcements and could give your veggie gardening group a plug.

3.1.4 Setting Up the Room



Tea and Coffee Making Facilities are good to Have

Even before the meeting started I arranged to have tea, coffee, sugar and milk as well as some sweet biscuits with me for refreshments after the meeting. You shouldn't rely on your venue to provide them so take some with you just in case they don't. It is a very nice way to end the meeting by having an informal chat over tea and coffee. I got there early and set up the chairs in a semi-circle so that everyone could see everyone

else, in front of a wall that I had set up butcher paper on, holding it up with Bluetack to record ideas. I also took 8 or 10 books about veggie gardening from my library and placed them on a table to one side of the room so that people could have a browse through while having their coffee or tea.



Setting up the room prior to the meeting

I put a sign on the front door of the cottage so people would see that this was where the meeting was and provided a sign-in sheet at the front of the room including a place to enter their email. In this way I could make sure that everyone was able to receive copies of notes from the meeting as well as reminders for the next meeting and any other details required.

After welcoming everyone and thanking them for their attendance the first point was to confirm that the time, date and venue were suitable for future meetings and then confirm the date of the next meeting. We then went around the room and each person was given an opportunity to speak, telling the group 3 things -

- Their name,
- What experience they had with growing vegetables, and
- What they would like to get out of the group/see the group do.



Happy smiling faces

While I as the facilitator recorded each person's responses to the third point on butcher paper so we could build up an idea of where group members wanted to go, a few of the responses are listed below –

- Learn how to grow vegetables better.
- Make the best use of what you've got.
- Learn to grow vegetables organically ie without chemicals.
- How to plan a vegetable garden, what to plant when etc.
- Be more self-sufficient.
- Share ideas and learn from each other.
- Learn how to set up and maintain a worm farm.
- Learn about growing and using medicinal herbs.
- Learn about preserving the harvest.
- Learn how to companion plant.
- Learn about chooks in the back yard.
- Learn about composting.
- Get together to do practical learning workshops like plant propagation or pruning.
- Have workshops or working bees at each other's houses regularly.

It was decided that this list could be added to in subsequent meetings. The concept of having a guest speaker eg someone from a local Permaculture group to discuss Permaculture principles; or to show a DVD related to vegetable culture was discussed and accepted. There was also a short discussion around what would be the ideals of the group and these were agreed to be –

- Have fun.
- Save money.
- Connect with likeminded local people.
- Share ideas and experience.
- Learn new things.



The Book Table

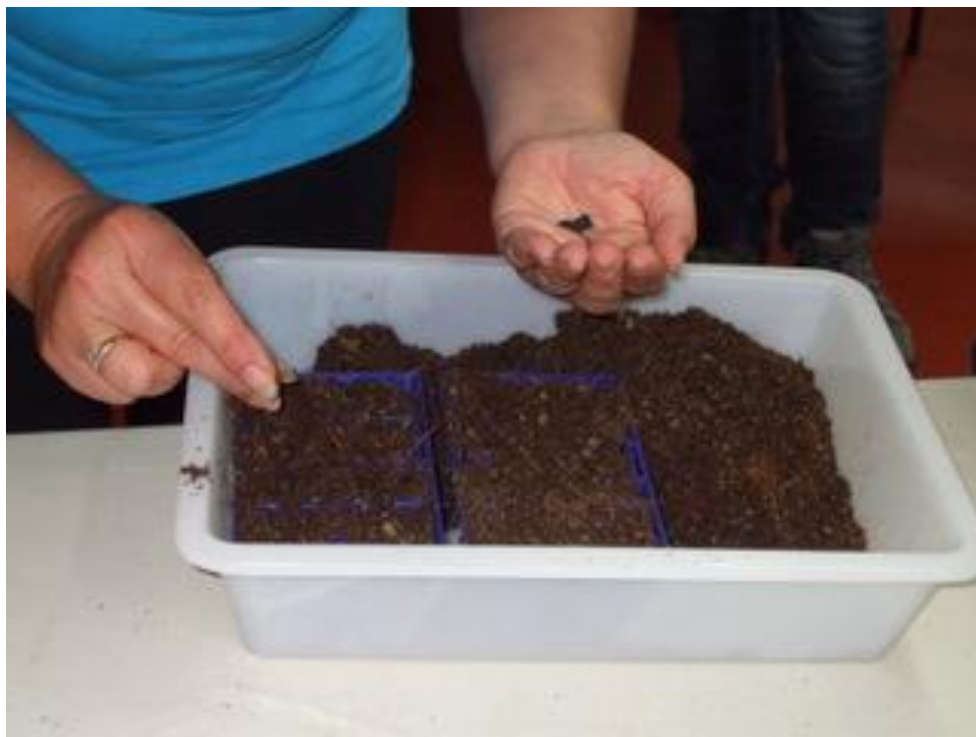
Once the meeting is concluded (and tea, coffee and biscuits happily consumed) it is important to return the room to its original condition and clean up afterwards so that you get invited back to use the facilities again! All that remains then is to type up any notes of the meeting (I hesitate to be so formal as to call them “minutes”) and email them out to the members.

3.1.5 Running a meeting

The group has now been formed and the first couple of meetings have been conducted. We are still getting new members and over a dozen people at the last meeting. This first meeting was all about setting up the group and the second was about planning what to grow so it was time to move into the more “technical” side of gardening. So by mutual consent the third meeting was about how to grow vegetables from seed.



The Seed Raising Mix Raw Materials



One of the group sowing seeds into the seed raising mix

I don't have access to a projector at the moment so I had to transfer the information I wanted to present onto butchers paper with brief notes (but no diagrams, my drawing skills suck!) that covered off the following –

- Why bother? – satisfying and fun; save money; give them a head start; plant only growing plants; wider range of veggies over commercial punnets.
- Which seeds are sown directly versus sown in punnets – big seeds and root crops direct sown, everything else in punnets.
- Hygiene – the need to disinfect all trays, punnets, tools etc with dettol or bleach etc to prevent disease build up.
- Making potting mix – the usual formulation of one part sand, two parts compost or worm castings and three parts cocopeat (horticultural coir), mix by hand and keep damp to prevent dust formation.
- The process for sowing – putting the mix in punnets, tamping down, sowing twice the diameter of the seed deep and then filling the rest of the punnet cell.
- Conditions for best germination and growth – warm and moist with plenty of light when the seeds germinate and protect from pests.
- Pricking out – use a paddle pop stick, at the four leaf (2 seed leaves + 2 true leaves) stage, keeping as much soil as possible, pit into filled tubes or pots then level off with seed raising mix.
- Plant out by hardening off if required, in the late afternoon is best, dig a hole and place tube directly in the hole, cover up, mulch and water in.



During the Practical Exercise

Having gone through all of the theory we had a 10 minute coffee break to give everyone a chance to regroup and have a talk with the other members. After the break we did the practical. I had provided some plastic trays of sand, cocopeat and sieved compost, a plastic up in each tray and smaller trays to mix the seed raising mix up in and some 8 cell punnets for people to use. I also had some seeds appropriate for the season just in case, but had asked everyone to bring their own seeds to use and share and in the event there were plenty of seeds to go around.



During the Practical exercise

I also provided an ice cream container and scissors to make labels for the punnets and within half an hour everyone had made their seed raising mix and planted their seeds in the punnets. After a quick discussion we decided this theory then practical format for the meeting was a good one and that some of the meetings going forward would follow the same formula. After some discussion we identified the following subjects as suitable for future meetings.

- Wicking bed
- Self watering container
- Cardboard Box Solar Oven
- Worm Farm
- Bokashi bucket
- Hay box cooker
- Rocket stove
- Natural bug spray
- Sprouts and microgreens
- Seed saving
- Moveable sun shade
- Mini-greenhouse
- Up-the-wall garden



The meeting wound up on this note and everyone seemed to be happy with the night's activities.

3.1.6 Three Years On

The group which started out as the St Clair Veggie Gardeners Group is now in its third year and we have a dozen or so people who regularly attend with a few others who drift in and out. The format is still the same, the first half is me or another presenter spruiking on about a particular subject for about an hour, then we break for coffee and cake & biscuits followed by a second hour or so of practical, which may be me or others demonstrating a skill or technique or it may be something everybody can have a go at. Either way there is always a practical component of each session.





I now have a very effective, if somewhat small, projector - the Samsung Pico SP-H03 LED - the size of a cigarette box which, unfortunately they no longer make. There were some problems with it and I had to take it back to the shop to get it looked at twice before the warranty ran out so maybe they discontinued making them for a reason. Also, being LED you really need a dark room for it to be effective, it can't fight against sunlight.



Projector Plus Tripod

I also have an Inca i3150 tripod and an Epson ELPSC21B screen, both of which fold down and are portable and all together make a reasonably professional and easily transportable kit for making presentations. The tripod also gets used when I am taking photos for articles so it is very handy to have around. As with a lot of things, you get what you pay for and a little bit more cost up front buys you better tools for delivering presentations, cheaper ones have less functions and don't last as long.

Originally I would put a half A4 page flier in the St Clair Library and these would disappear over time, we got a couple of members that way. Recently, to try and drum up some more new members, I have left flyers with my mate Don at the St Clair Michel's Patisserie. The fliers, 1/3 of an A4 page wide, are printed off in colour and left on the counter where people buy their coffee (see next page). So far almost 90 have been picked up but I have had no enquiries.....yet!

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| <p>St Clair Sustainable Living Group</p>  <p>Are you interested in living more sustainably? Do you want to get together with other like minded people?</p> <p>Let us know you're interested by logging on to www.underthechokotree.com and emailing us through the site, or just come along to Autumnleaf Community cottage (1 Autumnleaf Pde, St Clair, just behind the shops) on the 3rd Monday of the month at 7:00pm (Feb – Nov).</p>  <p>LEARN THINGS, SAVE MONEY, HAVE FUN</p> | <p>St Clair Sustainable Living Group</p>  <p>Are you interested in living more sustainably? Do you want to get together with other like minded people?</p> <p>Let us know you're interested by logging on to www.underthechokotree.com and emailing us through the site, or Just come along to Autumnleaf Community cottage (1 Autumnleaf Pde, St Clair, just behind the shops) on the 3rd Monday of the month at 7:00pm (Feb – Nov).</p>  <p>LEARN THINGS, SAVE MONEY, HAVE FUN</p> | <p>St Clair Sustainable Living Group</p>  <p>Are you interested in living more sustainably? Do you want to get together with other like minded people?</p> <p>Let us know you're interested by logging on to www.underthechokotree.com and emailing us through the site, or just come along to Autumnleaf Community cottage (1 Autumnleaf Pde, St Clair, just behind the shops) on the 3rd Monday of the month at 7:00pm (Feb – Nov).</p>  <p>LEARN THINGS, SAVE MONEY, HAVE FUN</p> |
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The three-to-an-A4 Flyer

The number of subjects one can cover in backyard veggie growing is limited and after a while start going over old ground and so, with the consent of our membership, at the start of this year we became the St Clair Sustainable Living Group as I was looking at in the first place. This has allowed the interests of the group to branch out somewhat and make my job of finding topics to talk on easier. We still cover some growing and gardening related subjects but also cover other things related to energy, water, food preservation and storage and low energy cooking.



The Whole Lot - Ready to Go!

At the end of each year, I draft a list of 25 or 30 topics we could cover in the following

year and at the November meeting we discuss the next years' program and pick out the most popular topics. Our program for 2013 is reproduced below –

- Preserving (bottling)
- Homemade beverages
- Growing and using medicinal herbs
- Alternative power supplies
- Soap making
- Water collection and storage
- Native beekeeping
- Improving energy efficiency of your house
- Preserving (Smoking)
- Black soldier fly harvesting

Having done this for a while now I will say that it is a lot of work, and when I get home from work on the third Monday of the month I don't necessarily feel like going out again. But they are a great bunch of people and it is very satisfying to be able to play a (small) part in helping them live more sustainably.

3.1.7 Five Years On

People come and go but we have 6 to 8 diehards who come along most months and the odd newbie every-so-often. I must admit that I haven't done much promotion of the group over the last 12 months, but I thought we were getting to a point where we needed to discuss where the group was going, and where the members wanted it to go. So after the official bits (ie me getting up and banging on about how to summer-ise your garden) of our November 2015 meeting, we circled the chairs for a pow wow.

As I saw it, there were a number of ways the group could go –

1. Continue as it is – A reasonable option but I do a fair bit of work for the meetings and I wanted more returns, in this case: bums on seats.
2. Continue as it is but as of early next year, put some effort into promotion, ie getting more members, preferably from the local area, seeing as this was the idea in the first place but only 2 of our regulars actually live locally.
3. Continue but as a local group meeting under the auspices of a larger permaculture group. This had been discussed a couple of years ago but rejected so we could retain our autonomy. It did have some advantages in terms of insurances, but as long as we only meet 10 times a year we were covered under the community centre where we meets insurances.
4. Wind things up and call it a day.

When I discussed these options with the group, option 4 got shot down immediately, option 3 was examined and rejected again, option 1 was not my pick, so you guessed it, next year we will be putting some effort into drumming up some more attendees. The most heartening thing is the way everyone volunteered ideas and assistance on how we might improve numbers, they are certainly committed to keeping the group going.

3.1.8 Ten Years On

Well, here we are, the gardening group, renamed the St Clair Sustainability Group six years ago, is moving into its 10th year in 2020! While I never really considered a 'use by' date for the group, I am still a tad surprised we are still here! So I guess it is time for a bit of a review.

What Has Remained the Same

The venue is still the same – Autumnleaf Neighbourhood centre – and we still meet on the third Monday of the month, February through to November, starting at 7:00pm and going to whenever, but usually somewhere between 8:00pm and 8:30pm. This works out well because we hire the hall for 2 hrs and I am usually unlocking to set up at around 6:30pm, but even on the odd occasions we have gone over, no one has ever said anything.



We have had one or two guest speakers over the years but mostly it is still me, developing and running a presentation. Sometimes this gives me a chance to road-test ideas for presentation I do for councils or PSW and sometimes they are specifically for the St Clair group.

Our attendees still vary anywhere from 4 to 10 people to a session, with 6 to 8 regular die hards. There are occasional ones who come along for a while, or even just once, then drop out and we never see them again. Our biggest success story is Mick and

Bridget, who saw one of our fliers in the local library and came along, stayed with the group for years, joined Permaculture Sydney West and then moved to their own farm in Tasmania, a couple of years ago!

What Has Changed

The Projector - Our little Samsung Pico SP-H03 projector passed on a few years ago and we now have a full size Epson EB-S130 projector which is coupled to my laptop computer with a USB and HDMI cable. This has two distinct advantages over the old one: firstly, it has much more power and so works well in daylight or with the room lights on (reducing the problem of people falling asleep during my talks) and it has a cordless remote so I can move the presentation on without having to hover around the back of the projector, pushing buttons. It is too large to be stable on the tripod, so gets set up, along with the computer, on one of the folding tables.



Social media – I now advertise each meeting on a number of local and Australia-wide Facebook groups, including our Under the Choko Tree Facebook page, as well as sending out an email to all of the regulars, reminding them of the upcoming meeting and what will be discussed.

Meeting format – The original format was an hour or so of me gabbing on, coffee, then a practical section. Over time this proved to be too hard to keep going. A lot of the subjects people were interested in were just too difficult to arrange a practical component for. We still do the odd practical session but it is only one or two a year, rather than every meeting. So the usual format now is for me to do my talk, then we have coffee and biscuits.

Also, at the end of last year (2019), I suggested we revisit some of the older topics, because we have almost a whole new crowd compared to the early days, so I drew up a list and got people to vote for their favourite ones. This gave me a list of popular topics

which I was able to draw from during the year, although I did sneak in a couple of new ones I was working on too. Quite often, I would revamp an older one and include some new content to improve it.

Costs – while not huge, the cost of hiring the hall has increased over the years and now that I am semi-retired we no longer find ourselves able to fully fund the meetings as we used to, so we ask the regulars to kick in at the start of the year. It doesn't cover everything but it helps.

So there you have it, will we still be at it in another 10 years, who knows? But the last 10 have been fun!



3.1.9 Postscript

Unfortunately, the group did not survive very long after the occurrence of Covid. We did try the whole ZOOM thing but it did not work very well and after a couple of times we wound it up. I was still hopeful of things getting back to normal, but in the end I took the community centre key back to the council in early 2022. It is possible that it may spring back to life in the future, but I doubt it!

As mentioned in a couple of places earlier, it was quite a bit of work to set up, and for most of the time it was while I was working full time but it was worth it for pleasure of working with the people who would come along, and the stuff I learned along with them.

The routine was –

- I would get home from work and have dinner, pack the car and drive the short distance down to the community centre.
- Take the key and unlock the community centre, turn the alarm off, switch the lights on.
- Go back to the car and bring back to the room my computer, the screen, the projector and the wheelie bag with all of the cups and some biscuits.
- Set up the table out the front and then the computer/projector and the screen. Sometimes I would just use the white wall as the screen but the real screen gave a better picture.
- I would then set up any tables required for practical activities and all of the chairs, usually a dozen or so, in two lines in front of the front table.
- I would do my bit, then we would have coffee and biscuits, often the members would bring something to share.
- Then, with the help of the members, all the furniture would be put away and someone would sweep the floor. They would help me drag my stuff out to the car, while I did a final check around of the room, turn off the lights, set the alarm and lock the front door.
- While that was theoretically it, there was often some discussion in the carpark as well, then we all headed for home.

Perhaps my most enduring disappointment was that I really wanted the group to be a local group. Local as in most, if not all, of the attendees living in St Clair. It was local in terms of western Sydney, but we had attendees from the Blue Mountains, Windsor and Winston Hills. I am certainly grateful for those who came, but the original terms of reference for it being a St Clair group never eventuated.

Having said that, I do not regret one bit of the time and effort that went into the group.

3.2 The Grumpy Old Men



There are a number of groups of people who get together down at our local shops for coffee and conversation, and I belong to one of them! This is a form of community which is important and can perform key functions in our increasingly isolating world! This particular idea works well for us retired gentlemen, which is a demographic that can easily become isolated. This has been exacerbated by Covid.

I belong to the local Anglican church and this group was started by Scott, our previous minister some eight years ago and it has been operating ever since. Originally, one of the gentlemen decided we needed to have T-shirts and so we all got T-shirts with the logo "Grumpy Old Man Club – only happy when complaining" and thus we became the Grumpy Old Men or in short "Grumpy Club" or just Grumpy's.



We meet at 10:00am on a Thursday outside the coffee shop at the local shops, usually one member gets there a bit early to claim a seat so that we usually sit in the same area, and other locals know us. We get coffee and sometimes sweet treats at the coffee shop, and then proceed to solve the world's problems together.

Attendance will vary from week to week, depending on availability of the Grumpy's. It may be five or six one week and then over a dozen the next. The group is accessible with two current members being in wheelchairs and one with a mobility scooter. Not all members of the Grumpy's are current church members and that is not a pre-requisite for membership.



The group has a Facebook page to keep in touch with and one of the founding members also set up a Skype group. This was very handy and much used when Covid was keeping people in lockdown. We would all grab a cup of coffee and meet on Skype together so that we could maintain the group. One member who recently moved away keeps in contact via the skype group, and we still get attendees who have moved out of the local area, but make a point of coming back when they can on a Thursday.



This contact has proved to be important over the years and more than one member who has been going through a rough time has found support, consolation and encouragement from the other Grumpy's.

It has also proved to be just plain fun!

You can start your own Grumpy group easily enough, just pick a time, date and a place and invite your mates. Good luck!

There was also a women's group (Grumpy Old Women?) who met on a Wednesday, but unfortunately that group did not survive the Covid shut down.



Our beloved leader Capt. Mannering, oops, I mean Scott.

3.3 The Permie Pod

No! This article has nothing to do with the movie "[Invasion of the Body Snatchers](#)", it has more to do with permaculture!

One of the things you can be involved in with your local permaculture group is the "[permablitz](#)", which may also be referred to as just a 'blitz. This is where permaculture people descend on someone's back (or front) yard with picks and shovels and implements of destruction to make it into a more productive space. It is generally carried out in line with a plan devised by the owners, or by an experienced permaculturist at the owner's request. With our group these can happen anywhere in western Sydney and the lower Blue Mountains and we organise them once a month. However, an idea came from our president Greg at a committee meeting that we could have a more local, less formal association of our members who would get together as

required to help each other out. After some discussion these groups were called “permiepods” or more usually abbreviated to just “pod”. The people in these pods would be local to each other, ideally on the same street but at least in the same community.

Needless to say I was interested in getting a pod going, but where do you start? It seemed to me that likeminded people who you got along well with should work. About the same time discussions were being carried on about pods, I was working on the “learning circle” program (see more about this program in the next section) with two other couples in our permaculture group that Linda and I both liked. It seemed obvious that we could form a pod.



Our Last Pod: lemonade tree removed

The downside was that one family was over 30km away from us and the other was almost 25 km away in another direction. In the end another family not part of the original program also came into the pod and they were closer still but not quite 20km away. This was not local! In the end we all knew and liked each other so we decided to give it a go.

My concern that just selecting people by locality would be too “artificial” and the social dynamic would be missing, the end result being that the pod would not endure. So to that end we created a pod with permaculture friends, which I believe will be more long lived because we already have a relationship with them.



Our Last Pod: Nelly Kelly passionfruit (and mess of rootstock) removed

Once we decided to form our pod we got together at one of the “podders” houses on a Saturday afternoon to work out the logistics. After working out how things would work, we ate together, which is a nice thing to do and a good thing to create community. What we came up with was pretty simple –

- We would get together on the third Sunday of the month. (Yeah I know, it was supposed to be less formal, but in the discussions we figured if we allocated a day we would do it, otherwise we might not get together at all)
- It would be for a couple of hours (in practice it could be anywhere from a couple of hours to most of the day)
- We would get together on a rotating roster at each other’s place in turn.
- The work would consist of whatever the resident pod members required at the time.
- There would be food supplied by the resident pod member after work was completed (morning or afternoon tea, lunch or whatever.)

We have now been operating for about a year and in most cases we have been getting together monthly, but sometimes the date has had to be changed when someone is unavailable for the agreed one. The work has been varied, from cleaning out a shed to moving firewood, assisting with planning a tiny house and even running a water line to a garden area and cleaning out garden beds.



Our Last Pod: another veggie patch extended

The social aspect has also been important. We are getting work done for the resident pod member but it is also lots of fun working together to help out other people. We also get to see things finished that would be difficult for a single person or family and the mix of skills which we have in the pod can mean a better finish to the job. All in all it has been a very successful and rewarding experience which we all intend to carry on into the future.

3.4 Study Circles for Sustainability

3.4.1 The Theory

Study circles, also called learning circles are a form of folk school or community education where a group of people discuss their experience of and plan actions around a particular issue or subject. The group uses their collective experience to discover new insights through conversation. In this setting everyone is equal (denoted by the term “circle”), rather than as in formal training or education where a group gets together to be taught by a teacher who has special knowledge. The conversations are coordinated by a facilitator, who may or may not have training and who also takes part in the conversation process along with everyone else. The output of these conversations, in addition to new insights discovered during the process, is an action or actions to be carried out and reviewed at the next meeting.

They are generally run on a small scale, with the best size being 6 to 8 people and while they can be held in an external venue convenient to the members of the group, it is also common to hold them in one of the member’s homes. The life of a study circle can be limited to a specific number of meetings or open ended, carrying on for as long as the

members want it to. It is a good idea to get together regularly, every week or two, so that the impetus is not lost by too much time between sessions. Each session runs for about two hours, long enough for everyone to contribute but not so long as people become tired.

The Agenda – Running a Session

The first session will be a bit different in that there should be some discussion about the study circle process, ground rules for the group dealing with each other should be set out and what the participants' expectations of the process are. Once this has been carried out each session will follow roughly the same format –

- Meet and greet, check in and review of any actions from the previous session.
- Discussion of the topic based around three questions related to the topic and what the participant's experience of the topic is.
- Review and summary of the discussion and any actions to be carried out during the week.

The Questions

My intention is to run our learning circle based around sustainability issues, but you can run a learning circle based around a wide range of subjects:

Question 1 – aspect of subject applied to your life, when have you had experience of the issue in your life and what does it mean to you/how do you feel about it?

Question 2 – what barriers are there which prevent you and/or your family from improving activities around the subject under discussion?

Question 3 - what actions can you take to improve your performance around the issue being discussed, what actions will you commit to doing?

For example, if the issue being discussed is around eating more sustainably the questions could be phrased as follows:

Question 1 – what does eating more sustainably mean to you?

Question 2 – what is stopping you from eating more sustainably now?

Question 3 – What action(s) do you think you can carry out over the next week to help you eat more sustainably?

Ground Rules

As with any discussion involving a number of people, things can run more smoothly if a series of rules are formulated by the group that regulate how people relate with each other. These rules would generally be agreed at the first meeting, preferably written down and then posted in a place where all participants can see them. Everyone in the

group has the right to call someone on them if they feel that person is not playing by the rules. Some examples of ground rules might include –

- Everyone gets a fair hearing.
- Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
- One person speaks at a time.
- Share “air time.”
- Conflict is not personalized. Don’t label, stereotype, or call people names.
- Speak for yourself, not for others.

Furthermore, in her book *Living Room Revolution*, Cecile Andrews identifies a number of “rules of good conversation”. If everyone bears these rules in mind when the conversations are happening, the experience will be a positive, uplifting and informative one for all the participants –

- Take the risk of saying what you think or feel.
- Listen.
- Be congenial.
- Speak with enthusiasm and energy.
- Appreciate others.
- Ask good questions.
- Be an equal.
- Tell your own stories.

Where Learning Circles Don’t Work Well

Recent research here in Aus (OK it was 2003 but I just found it) has shown that learning circles don’t work well under some circumstances, generally where –

- There are no pre-existing social networks from which an interested facilitator can form a study circle.
- There are pre-existing social networks but they don’t see any relevance in the study circle subject
- The facilitator acts as a “teacher” rather than a facilitator of group learning
- Group members perceive that facilitation is 'too much work' when previous facilitators are no longer available. ie no-one is prepared to step in and facilitate the meeting if the regular facilitator doesn’t show up or becomes permanently unavailable.

Note taking

It would be up to each individual group as to whether they wish to take notes about the discussion as it happens or not and this decision should be made at the first meeting. If a decision is made to take notes throughout the process, it can be handy to have an external person (a “note taker!”) who does not contribute but is there to record the discussion. If this is not possible one of the group should become designated not taker when they are not making their contribution. The facilitator can be note taker but can

take the facilitators attention away from their primary role.

Should you decide to do it, note taking performs several functions; it helps group members stay on track and move the discussion along, it provides a way to capture the wisdom and common themes that develop in the discussion and it creates a group memory of the whole dialogue.

If notes are to be taken, the note taker may find the following advice useful –

- Capture big ideas and themes, not every word
- Use the words of the speaker as closely as possible. Be careful not to alter the intended meaning
- Check with the speaker or the group to make sure your notes are correct
- Write neatly so everyone can read the notes (This is a difficult one for me)
- Number each page at the top. Identify each set of notes with a clear title
- Be low-key. Stay in the background and don't distract people from the conversation. Be aware of times when recording is not appropriate (for example, when people are sharing personal stories)
- Create a sheet called "Parking Lot." Capture and park ideas that come up in the conversation that the group wants to return to later
- Post the ground rules each time, along with any notes or sheets of paper that the group will need to refer to during a particular session

The study circle approach has many applications, but it is my intention to explore the methodology by inviting a half a dozen friends and colleagues into our home to try and increase our knowledge and understanding of how to live a more sustainable life. I also intend to share the journey with you.

3.4.2 How it Worked in Practice

Attendees

To give this a go it seemed that 6 participants would be a good number initially. Two of those participants would be Linda and myself (obviously) and I approached two other couples who were friends of ours through permaculture Sydney west. Both couples were interested and seeing as we all knew each other that would reduce any time required on introductions etc. Being active in PSW also meant that all couples had at least a baseline knowledge of sustainability issues.

The Meetings

My initial thought was to set up the meetings to be held weekly, but after some discussion we made the decision to get together fortnightly. This was far enough apart to be able to follow up on any actions agreed by members of the group but close enough together to be able to keep the thread of what was going on. Also, we were all busy so the difficulties associated with committing to one night a week for 8 weeks were made easier by giving us a week off between each meeting. By and large we were

able to keep to this schedule with only one of the meetings needing to be put off for a week or two due to outside circumstances.

We set up the meetings so that each couple would host a meeting at their home each successive fortnight, starting with us. This worked well as we lived at fairly similar distances from each other and it meant the hosting couple only had to do it once every three weeks. We got together usually in the hosting couples lounge or dining area. There were to be a total of 8 meetings, one for each issue to be discussed and a final one so we could do a wrap up of the series, find out how everyone felt about the process and where the group felt they wanted to go from there.

I opened the first meeting with a summary of what learning circles were about, how they worked and what issues we would be discussing. The meetings were generally structured so that I gave a quick introduction, we then discussed each of the three focus questions in turn and then agreed if any actions were to be carried out by the attendees. The meetings took about two hours and at the end the hosting couple provided tea, coffee and supper while the other couples also bought some food to share.

The Questions

In developing the questions I first needed to work out what the sustainability related theme of each meeting would be. To do this I used the same sort of breakdown I used when developing the Sustainable Lifestyle Assessment Matrix ([SLAM](#)) and came up with the following headings –

- Food
- Energy
- Water
- Transport
- Waste
- Consumption and
- Community.
- (I would now add 'clothing' to this list

Under each heading I developed the three discussion questions as covered in the previous section –

Question 1 – aspect of subject applied to your life, when have you had experience of the issue in your life and what does it mean to you/how do you feel about it?

Question 2 – what barriers are there which prevent you and/or your family from improving activities around the subject under discussion?

Question 3 - what actions can you take to improve your performance around the issue being discussed, what actions will you commit to doing?

Once I had developed the questions I emailed them through to the other couples so that they could review them before each meeting and consider what their responses might be.

A copy of the questions I developed may be found in Appendix 5

Review (so how did it all go?)

After the seventh session we got together an eighth time to discuss how everybody felt the process went. The first question was around what went well or what “worked”. The general consensus seemed to be that the entire process worked pretty well. It was worthwhile to remind some participants of what they knew but also by committing to the group, actions arising were carried out that may have fallen by the wayside otherwise. Some permanent changes were made in the areas of food and transport but other areas such as community were a bit more “woolly” and longer term although a couple of ideas brought out during this particular discussion made it onto my personal “to do” list.

The fact that it was a small group and partners were involved was good because discussions involved everyone and both partners were part of the discussion. Meeting as a group also allowed us to “recharge” with likeminded individuals and focus on our needs rather than the larger group (in this case PSW). A dedicated time for discussion also meant that time was given to considering each subject and everyone was able to get something out of each discussion.

The headings and the process of focussing on one heading per meeting using the questions was good in generating discussions and acting as points of reference when the discussion wandered off topic. The discussion wandered of course somewhat frequently but we always made it back onto the topic (sometime with a little nudge from me) and this generally contributed to a relaxed atmosphere. The social aspect of having a relaxed atmosphere and being welcomed into each other’s homes was also appreciated as resulting in a pleasant experience for all.

While the feeling of the group was that my facilitation was good in general terms, my feeling was that it was a difficult call to pick when to guide the conversation back into the area to be covered. I think that perhaps I erred on the side of not guiding things enough but in the end we seemed to get where we needed to go.

The list of things which didn’t work is thankfully much smaller – we had no note taker and so some of the points we pondered would escape due to busy lives and/or poor memory. Providing everyone with a pen and paper and the time to record any insights would remedy this shortfall.

It was also noted that some of the questions were a bit broad, particularly when discussing the big subjects like food and energy. A refining of the questions would be worthwhile for any subsequent learning circles. There was also some overlap between

the areas but to a certain extent this is inevitable for example food waste can be covered under “food” or “waste”, etc.

And there was no wine!

Where to From Here?

Over the last few months our get togethers have been very pleasant and so we have decided for each family to develop a sustainability related project and then we will pool our resources to assist each family in turn to realise the project. This developed into us forming a ‘Permie Pod’ (See section 3.3 above)

4.0 Our World

4.1 Starting a community Garden

By Russ Grayson and Fiona Campbell.

A few years ago Russ Grayson contacted me with the offer of stack of magazines called 'Green Connections', which was published in Victoria in the late 1990's. Of course I eagerly accepted, picked them up and am now working my way through them. I saw this article by Russ and Fiona in issue no 14 (Oct/Nov 1997) and was so impressed I had to contact them and ask them if I could reproduce the article in this eBook. They said yes and so here the article is, reproduced in full, with permission.

Russ Grayson and Fiona Campbell have facilitated the development of many community gardens. From submissions to contracts and group work they have experienced what works and what doesn't. Here is invaluable advice for permaculturalists and gardeners who wish to enter the public arena (in a paid or voluntary capacity) to encourage food production in urban areas.

Ring! Ring! Fiona picked the telephone up. "Hello?" "Good morning. I have a grant to hire someone to start a community food garden at our community centre. I wonder if you could tell me the award rate for a permaculturist?"

Yes, it was an improbable call!

The caller was a community centre manager in western Sydney and she had just received a substantial grant to finance the creation of a community garden at her centre. Now she wanted to employ a permaculture designer part time, not only to design the garden but to find, organise and train the gardeners as well.

The job would call for someone with more than the Permaculture Design Certificate. As well as being able to plan a garden site according to the principles of permaculture design, the successful applicant would need people skills such as group facilitation, negotiation and conflict resolution; promotion and publicity skills to target participants; project management skills to design the project, timetable it, estimate and source inputs and manage funds; and teaching skills to carry out the transfer of design and horticultural skills to participants.

These skills are useful to people hoping to work with communities and community organisations to set up and manage community food gardens. Our experience as state coordinators for the Australian City Farms and community Gardens Network, and as community garden designers and trainers, has made it clear to us that the acquisition of such skills is becoming increasingly important for permaculturists working voluntarily or for an income in the community sphere. Designers working with voluntary community garden associations may find that many of these skills exist within the group.

Getting Started:

The process of setting up and city farm or community garden can be seen as a series of linked activities over time. Before we look at how to make a start, let's consider a few points about the process which will encourage participation and a sense of ownership and responsibility by the gardeners.

Participation:

Most community gardens are grassroots developments resulting from the coming together and cooperation of interested people. Participation in decision-making and the taking of responsibility for the garden and the people working in it, are therefore fundamental to successful community gardening.

Especially in the early stage, you will be attending planning meetings. To encourage participation it helps to have access to someone with facilitation skills to run the meeting so that all voices are heard and all opinions taken into account in decision making.

At the same time your meetings, no matter how informally structured, must be business-like and as short as practical while still allowing time to get through all the business.

Openness:

The community based organisation set up to plan and manage the community garden should ensure that it remains open to new members, to new ideas and changes in direction. Records should be accessible to all to ensure accountability.

Structure:

People sometimes take a laissez-faire attitude to community garden development, preferring to 'let it happen' rather than to develop an effective but relaxed structure to guide garden development. Such people frequently have an aversion to the planning process and may interpret effective structure as overstructuring. Effective structure and planning, however, are a necessity if your group is to take responsibility for an area of public land and to maintain accountability for its maintenance to the landholder.

Landholders, such as local government, will look more favourably on an organisation displaying effective structure, which is often seen as an indicator of site management ability.

Planning, Designing and Implementing:

Now it's time to look at a model process for setting up a community garden. We should keep in mind, however, that there is no single way to go about this.

The process which follows should be adapted to your particular circumstances. You might, for instance, already have land; or perhaps you're like the community worker at

the start of this story who has the crucial resources of land and funds but lacks the most important resource for any community garden – a community ... people. The point is to adapt the flow of the process to suit your circumstances. Let's make a start....

Phase 1 Developing the Vision

In this initial phase, we clarify why we want to start a community garden and what we hope to achieve. If you are likely to play a role in the skills transfer to inexperienced gardeners, plan to spend a minimum two years with the project to nurture it – that is the time frame we have found necessary to pass on horticultural, design and organisational skills.

For community garden animators – people who assist others to establish community gardens – the aim is to plan yourself out of the project by passing on skills so the gardeners become self-managing as they take over your role.

Now is the time to promote your idea for a community garden and bring in new people. Organise a meeting, develop your aims and define a set of objectives which will help you achieve your aims. Gain group agreement to the aims and objectives so that all feel that they 'own' the idea.

Phase 2 Collecting Background Information

This is the research phase of community garden development. Do a skills audit to discover what talents and abilities are available within the group.

During this phase, visit other community gardens to collect information on how they started, what type of organisational structure they have, what they do about public liability insurance, where they obtain their resources, their links to local government, how they are funded, where their seeds come from and how they pass on skills to new gardeners and how they improve their own skills. It is during this phase that you decide whether your garden is to be a shared garden – in which people do whatever work is necessary at the time – or whether yours will be an allotment garden with plots held individually by gardeners who have exclusive rights to what they grow as well as full responsibility for their plot. Many gardens combine shared and allotment plots.

Phase 3 Finding a Site

Having set up your organisation, it's time to find a site. Don't be too ambitious – a small, well managed site is less draining on your time and resources than a site with gardens sprawled higgledy- piggledy over the landscape.

Community gardens are most commonly located on local government land, however you will find them on land owned by schools and universities, churches and hospitals. A useful way to approach the gaining of access to public land is to approach your local council with a site in mind or for advice on where a site might be found.

There are two ways to do this. The first is to approach councillors, especially those known to be amenable to the idea. They might advise you on a course of action. The second way is to approach council directly. To do this effectively, a well-written, well presented submission will go far.

Your submission should contain: a description of your group; the aims and objectives; the skills and competencies of your members; your actual or proposed legal structure (eg incorporated association); case studies of other community gardens, particularly those in the same city; potential sources of funding grants or other avenues for fund raising; what lease arrangements you would prefer; what you would require from council; how you manage foreseeable risks; the advantages of community gardens for the community and for councils.

Draw up a brief management plan outlining the maintenance work which would likely be required of any site to help convince council of your organisational capacity to responsibly manage a garden.

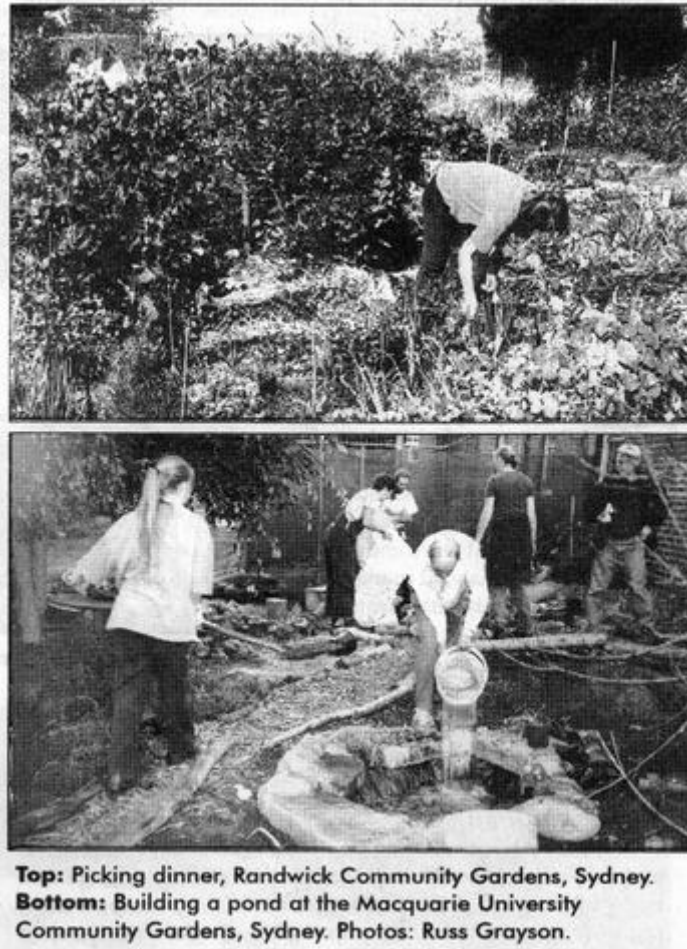
Present this material to council's strategic planning or other relevant section. Arrange a meeting with decision makers to take them through the submission, to talk through their concerns and convince them through your competent manner that they can entrust you with a piece of council land.

Phase 4 Negotiating the Lease

Let's make the assumption that you have been granted access to land. Don't expect to find land immediately – it sometimes takes a while. Keep in mind that you might be knocked back a number of times, especially if council insists on a community consultation with the neighbours of your preferred site.

Characteristically, neighbours are concerned about noise, aesthetics, pollution, traffic, impact of the garden on their property values and vandalism. Your submission might address these issues to indicate that your group intends to develop ways to effectively deal with them.

Try to negotiate a written lease with the landholder – security of tenure is important to maintaining group motivation. While many community gardens have only informal, verbal arrangements for access to their site, a written lease is a better guarantee of tenure and provides the sense of security necessary to the contribution of effort.



An initial one year lease will do two things. It will give the landholder the option of discontinuing the access arrangement if the community garden group does not have the motivation to persist with project or fails to maintain the mutually agreed standards of maintenance, and it gives the group time to assess whether the project can be sustained. The arrangement should provide for an option, providing both parties are happy with the site management after one year, for future five year leases.

Phase 5 Understanding Your Site

Go to council and obtain a site survey plan. If this is not available, measure up the site and draw it to scale. We start the design phase with a sector and site analysis. Identify the wind characteristics and direction, sun and shade patterns through the seasons; pollutants entering the site; rainwater runoff and pooling; wildlife; existing structures (and whether you want to keep them); soil pH and type; dry areas; boggy areas and other site information.

Identify microclimates; pleasant and unpleasant places; problem areas and areas that show opportunities that can be addressed in the design phase. Remember you permaculture design principles – look for connections between things; place related things close together; find more than one use for things (multifunction). This forms the foundation for your site base plan.

Phase 6 Designing Your Garden

Next you identify the features you want on site. List the things you would like on site (such as play areas for children, seating areas, orchard, passive and active recreation areas etc.) and the things you might not want (such as agricultural chemicals if you want an organic garden – bees if people are allergic to their sting etc).

Locate these things on your base plan. You may do several layouts before you are happy that your layout has taken into account your site conditions and everyone's needs. Finally, draw up a final design. This guides the implementation of the community garden. Other parts of the project design document include identification of the resources needed and where they are likely to come from; budgeting for the different work chunks, if appropriate; financial management and the publicity/promotional plan. The entire design phase should be participatory, with site information collection carried out as practical workshops to pass on design skills to the gardeners. This completes the design planning stage.

Phase 7 Building the garden

This is the implementation phase –the time when you put into action the design you have developed. Construction of garden beds, soil improvement, pathway construction, compost making, propagation of planting material, building of a storage shed and a pergola or shelter for the gardeners are some activities during the implementation stage.

Now is the time to draw up a timeline. It is the timeline which schedules what is done and when. To make a timeline list all the chunks of work needed to build the garden. List these in a sequential order. Now we can schedule them on the timeline. Plot the work chunks in a column. Now plot a year divided into months across the top of the page. Plot the time estimated to complete each work chunk as a horizontal line according to its start and finish time.

From this process you end up with an estimate of the time needed to complete each work chunk, which chunks have to be completed before a following work chunk can be started, and which chunks can be done at the same time. Don't be too ambitious – allow plenty of times to complete the chunks – things usually take longer than anticipated. This is your timeline and it will guide you through the following implementation phase of your garden project.

May we suggest that, at the start of the implementation phase, you not only construct a tool storage shed and garden beds, but that you build some kind of shelter where the gardeners can congregate, brew a pot of tea or coffee and socialise. We have found that people join community gardens for social reasons as much as for growing food. Community gardens, therefore, have an important community-building function. The construction phase ended and the first seeds in the soil, it is time to implement the management plan. The management plan schedules recurring tasks such as plant propagation, planting calendar, compost production, site maintenance and risk

assessment for safe public access. The scheduling of social events, management meetings and workshops is also programmed into the management plan.



A Rudimentary Sketch

This is, as said before, a rudimentary sketch for a community garden development project. As for assistance, try contacting permaculture associations or designers, and organic gardening associations.

There is little written material to help you set up a community garden, a condition the [Australian city Farms and Community Gardens Network](#) intends to redress. *In the 20 years since this was written the ACF&CGN has gone from strength to strength and their website (linked above) is well worth a visit.*

4.2 Hope Gardens

By Beth Healy



Next to Blaxland East Public School (BEPS) there is a Grow Free Lane designed, developed and implemented by Beth Healy. It is an amazing initiative that allows neighbours and passers-by to collect local, organically grown, in season fruit and vegetables for free!

Hope Gardens is a project close to my heart. When I first started volunteering at Blaxland East Public School, there was a homeless person residing in the laneway, not often seen in the day, but evidence of their existence.

There is a need to offer something different for our community. It began in June 2016 when I launched the first Grow Free Cart in NSW. It was small but productive and a lot of seedlings, plants and cuttings were exchanged. The cart was upgraded to a new market stall style Grow Free Cart as a gift from a parent in May 2019.



The dream of expanding gardens in the community was an initiative while studying the Diploma of Sustainable Living at UTAS, specialising in environment, health and wellbeing. While studying Global Food Security, my thoughts about solutions to economic problems and food security in the community changed. We needed something more than a hamper or pantry items. We needed free food for all, fresh, locally grown and chemical free produce.



I designed the gardens for my assessments. I approached the manager and owner of the laneway, Chambers's Cellars, and they were keen for me to use the space for the community. Once the design was done, I contacted local community organisations and neighbours to invite them to be involved. With limited funds, we focused on the 'free garden'. The cheapest gardens were purchased, with the intent to fundraise for more sturdy gardens in the future. The garden beds were donated, we used locally grown compost, repurposed old haybales and made hügelkultur style garden beds. Seedlings and seeds were donated as well as sugar cane mulch. In 2021 in lockdown, I was unable to work onsite at school. This is when the dream came alive. The planning, preparing and design came to fruition and we expanded from just the herb bed in November 2021.



We have regular volunteers that water, plant and maintain the garden. Also, someone who mows and trims the edges. We have a volunteer who creates artworks and signs, though these go missing in the public space.

I host regular visits with the local daycare centre, preschool and playgroup in the area.



This space is evolving, and like all gardens, takes work. We need more volunteers as some have returned to work. We plan on regular working bees in 2023. We are plotting on.

4.3 Lyttleton Stores – Cooperatively Producing and Exchanging Food Locally



Lyttleton Stores - The outside!

I was privileged to get a glimpse into a new way to cooperatively produce and exchange food locally. Six local women have gotten together to run an enterprise which sells fresh and preserved food which has been locally produced, bulk foods and arts and craft items, in a refurbished old shop. They have also set up a 'community hub' where people can sit down, read from the reference library of sustainability books, and eat food cooked onsite with local produce as well as some vegetables and herbs grown in a [small garden beside the shop](#), and you don't get much more local than that!

The Ladies Involved



Manu in the Garden

Manu, a small scale food grower with a background in permaculture and regenerative agriculture, manages the vegetable garden, teaches and coordinates vegetable gardening and permaculture workshops and events, and runs the 'backyard grower' system in the shop. She also records all that goes on in the Lyttleton garden blog.

Allegra is responsible for bookkeeping, accounts, payroll, human relations, and coordinates all the other art, craft, cooking and homesteading workshops.

Eloise has a background in media arts and museology. She coordinates Atelier, curating the space as well as building connections with local makers of hand-crafted home wares, jewellery and other objects.

Charlotte is the Pantree organic produce shop coordinator. She manages orders, suppliers and everything to do with selling organic produce.

Kim is the kitchen coordinator. She bakes artisan sourdough bread, crafts daily dishes, ferments, dries and preserves all excess produce from the shop.

Jacinta supports coordinators, develops new projects, chairs meetings, and researches funding and grant opportunities.



Kim in the Kitchen

Their original concept was that the cooperative would take produce from local small farmers (2acre to 20 acre farms) who were farming at least organically, but preferably regeneratively. Initially this was only 3 to 4 local farms. The fruit and vegetable obtained from them was retailed through the shop (Littleton Stores) which is located in Badgery Crescent, Lawson, in the lovely Blue Mountains west of Sydney.

The fruit and vegetables proved popular to the extent that they would regularly run out of produce, which would require them to restock from the organic markets in Sydney. This was not an ideal situation and so they came up with an idea to increase their supply of local organic produce by approaching local backyard growers.

The Blue Mountains has quite a lot of older homes, and a lot of those homes have fruit trees in their back yard.....mature fruit trees! So while all of us new sub-dividees (including St Clair) have to wait for years for their fruit trees to get big enough to provide a really decent harvest, there in the Blue Mountains you can move into a place where the trees are already providing bountifully. However, there are also a lot of people who have been there for a long time and are becoming somewhat.....mature themselves. They may no longer have the physical capability to allow the processing large amounts of fruit, so what do they do?



They become a registered backyard organic grower of Lyttleton Stores!

So, to increase the availability for sale of local organic produce, they contacted friends and family in the area to let them know if they had any produce gluts they could bring them to the shop and they would be give store credit for the cost price of the produce. These older producers in the area are also generally on a pension, which does not pay for much, so it was a win-win situation: the shop got produce to sell and the locals were able to provide themselves with a variety of fresh or preserved organic food with no money changing hands! Winner! This word of mouth campaign resulted in their first 10 to 15 backyard growers.

However, even with the produce coming in (initially mainly fruit) there was still a need for more local organic producers, so they did a callout for more backyard growers through their Facebook and Instagram pages. This was met with great interested a quite a number of people we keen to become Lyttleton backyard growers.

As with any new idea, some fine-tuning needed to be made to ensure growing practices used by growers were in line with what Lyttleton stands for: organically grown, no chemicals and preferable with care for soils. When it was restricted to friends and family (including extended family) they knew the produce was grown organically (at least) and regeneratively at best, but as soon as other producers are thrown into the mix, they devised a protocol for inspecting and approving growers so they could become registered backyard growers of Lyttleton Stores.



Bulk dry goods are also available

Assessing Growing Practices for Registration

To get around this the Lyttleton Stores collective developed the 'Lyttleton Organic Backyard Standard'. This is a document which sets out a series standards which people wishing to register can be assessed against. The standard elements include:

- Fertilisers and soil health.
- Pest and disease control.
- Wildlife.
- Weed control.
- Seed raising.

The standards provide some background information around the requirements for each element and then sets forth three standards –

Best Practice – what your backyard production would look like if you were doing it regeneratively,

Allowed practice – while not being best practice, these methods can be used and registration will still be achievable, and

Prohibited Practice – such as using synthetic pesticides and fertilisers which means the backyard grower will not be able to be registered at the moment.

In all cases the grower can alter their practices to achieve the next rung up the ladder and if they move from prohibited practice to allowed practice they may become eligible for registration at a later time.

The Lyttleton Organic Backyard Standard is reproduced in its entirety in appendix 4.

The standard is used by a member of the cooperative who is experienced in assessing growing practices to review each and every new applicant for registration.

Planning Supply

With the large number of producers coming on line (50+ as of April 2018) and with the production of fruit Vs vegetables approaching the 50:50 mark, some method of planning was required to smooth out variations in supply. This has been twofold, with the first innovation being to make a note on the registration form of what produce the new grower can provide at what time of year. This is all entered in a spreadsheet, which will be used to monitor backyard grower produce and harvest year after year.



Library and area to hold workshops and group meetings

Also, where it was originally set up so that growers could drop off produce at any given time and then make purchases with their store credits, this became difficult where many growers had gluts of the same type of produce. A policy was put in place so that growers must phone the shop before harvesting to ensure the produce is required at that time. For example if someone wanted to harvest their large supply of kale, but the shop already has sufficient for their needs, the grower could be instructed to put off their harvest for a week (or whatever) to spread out the supply. This can reduce problems with uneven supply of produce and the resultant waste.

Keeping up with the Joneses'

Organic and regenerative farming is a small sector in Australia at the moment, but it is growing and farmers (including the Lyttleton Stores ladies) attend a yearly conference called "Deep Winter". It is held in winter each year (who knew?) and according to the website ([Deep Winter Agrarian Gathering](#)) "is a loose affiliation of Australian farming friends (both old and new) who gather together in the deep of winter to share stories, solidarity, seeds and cider."

This is a great initiative, which I highly recommend you visit if you are in the area, they are just off the main road through the Blue Mountains and easy to find. They are open from 9:00am - 6:30pm Monday through Saturday and 10:00am - 5:30pm Sunday.

The community hub is open when the shop is open during the week and becomes the workshop space on the weekend.

4.4 Farm it Forward



Photo Credit - Manu

The Farm it Forward initiative grew out of the work done at the Lyttleton Stores Co-operative, which was developed to sell and distribute local organic produce grown in the Blue Mountains (west of Sydney) where backyard growers could swap their excess homegrown produce for store credit.

The fly in the ointment, as it were, was that there wasn't enough excess produce! Manu noticed that people who were interested in becoming involved as registered backyard growers for Lyttleton Stores usually fell into one of three broad categories:

1. Older people who had the land and wanted to be productive, and were excited by the prospect but lacked the physical capability, and the help of others to get it up and running. They did, however, enjoy the social interaction with Manu and the Lyttleton team.
2. Young parents with small children who were in the first stages of starting a food garden or already growing but were time poor, and

3. People with established fruit trees, who could provide a decent amount of home grown fruit for the coop, but as they got older found it difficult to keep up with the demands of backyard growing.



Photo Credit – Manu

There was also a group of young people who would hang out at the community hub at Lyttleton Stores, they were very ecologically-minded and very in touch with the natural systems around them, but had no job opportunities in the mountains in the areas they were interested in and passionate about. They wanted to grow food and be more resilient but with land prices being what they are could not afford to buy land themselves.

So what if there was a social enterprise that could be able to put two to four young farmers through training to give them the skills to grow regeneratively, allow them to be paid part time (10 to 12 hrs per week), and grow food in the backyards of people who were interested in being part of the program? And in return for their support, allow people who owned the backyards to receive a box of organically grown produce per week?

Thus ['Farm it Forward'](#) was born!

The idea behind Farm it Forward was that it would be a replicable system, developed with the help of a volunteer team member who happened to be database guru. They are currently recording all of their data on database systems and spreadsheets (including Google Sheets integration) so that they can fine tune their systems to iron out the bugs and work the best they can, then make it available open source to anyone who wants to start a 'Farm it Forward' enterprise in their own local area.



Photo Credit – Manu

The system is set up so that they can record plantings and harvests using their phones, helping them keep track of how much of a type of produce is being grown where. The job of coordinating different crops being grown in different small scale market gardens in separate locations can be quite difficult, so they are developing their own tools to make the process easier, then field testing them before making them available for others to use.

The work also involves keeping track of the very efficient timed drip irrigation set up on each plot, which keeps the crops watered for 30 minutes to 45 minutes every day at the moment (late spring), although this will need to be increased as the weather warms up. The team also physically check on how the irrigation etc. are running every two to three days. The bulk of the work is harvesting and delivery to Lyttleton co-op, a local cafe and a local restaurant, which is carried out twice each week.

To provide mentoring and training in regenerative growing techniques for the (currently) 3 three young farmers, three experienced growers have come on board –

- Sonya – who was a market gardener in the US for 3- 4 years and who is also the fresh produce coordinator for the Blue Mountains Coop,
- Lizzie and Gee – who run Piccolo farm, a small community supported agriculture farm, which is run on organic principles but is currently not certified, and

- Cameron – The farm manager at Warrah Farm, (which is linked with Warrah Society Disability Services) in Dural, which is a biodynamic farm.

Initially 4 plot owners showed interest in the program and these were set up to commence growing in spring of 2019. One was an old tennis court. All told at the current time the program has 6 plots of land which add up to one and a half acres in total. Two plots are on tank water and the other 4 are on town water, but use very efficient drip irrigation. Most plots are in the mid-mountains but one is in Blackheath (west of Katoomba).



Photo Credit - Manu

Mulch is used extensively on the plots, in contrast to the usually bare soil of conventional market gardening, including wood chip mulch to reduce water consumption further.

One thing which the operators of the program did not anticipate was the level of voluntary community participation. Volunteers, not directly participating in the program, have come from all over the area to provide labour to make the program a success. Once a week they get together to help with harvesting, weeding, cultivation and other odd jobs required to run the program. The program participants (often older people as described above) also have the positive impact of contact with younger people several times a week, so the program is also providing an antidote to social isolation for these residents.

Early on in the process of developing FiF, they contacted Blacktown and Blue Mountains Youth College, who provide alternative school for disadvantaged kids who are

struggling in the mainstream system, to get them through to their HSC. A group of between 5 and 10 of these students come every Thursday to the Blackheath plot to volunteer. One of the kids has now been offered a paid Summer job working on the FiF gardens.



Photo Credit – Manu

All produce from the plots which is not returned to the residents in the form of weekly food boxes, is sold to local co-ops, including Lyttleton Stores, Blue Mountains Co-op plus a local café and a local restaurant. This provides a small revenue stream coming back in to FiF. They also grow free produce for Blue Mountains Food Rescue and Blackheath Public School.

So far they have been able to grow 90kg of produce from the beginning of spring to now, as at November 2019.

The plots in the mountains (especially the one in the upper mountains at Blackheath) will be concentrating on spring, summer and autumn growing. Due to the slow down in growth during the winter season, other revenue streams are being explored for this time. The intention for FiF during the winter is to run workshops on waterwise growing strategies and water efficient irrigation techniques including making ollas, drip irrigation etc. A Introduction to Permaculture Design Course is also on the drawing board as a winter activity, as well as one-off food garden installations.

Planning is also underway to introduce Greensmart pots to residents who may have mobility problems, the pots have a wicking capability to ensure efficiency of water use but allow the growing of produce in such a way that the pots are easy to move around. To finance the start-up of Farm it Forward, they were able to get a series of grants from

—

- Blue Mountains Food Co-op
- Blue Mountains Council
- Bendigo Bank
- NSW Government Youth Opportunities Program

Due to the fact that there are issues in the Blue Mountains around an aging population with poor diet and mental health plus social isolation, a social enterprise of this kind, which works towards correcting these issues, has been provided with funding to encourage the development of the required systems.



The Farm it Forward model can also act as a bridge between our current, 'consumption at all costs', mode of living and a more sustainable, satisfying home based lifestyle such as the one described by David Holmgren in his book, *RetroSuburbia*.

Currently, to support the enterprise, the team are developing documentation and tools. Once everything has been well and truly tried and tested, all this data will be released at the end of Winter 2020, open source for others to be able to replicate their success.

Back before Christmas (2019) I was privileged to watch some of the Farm it Forward volunteers installing ollas in the area which used to be a tennis court. The conditions were really bad due to the bushfire smoke and heat, but still they kept working!





4.5 Fighting the Good pH-ight Starting a community vegetable gardening group in the Western Suburbs

by Greg Harriden

Greg Harridan is a community worker who was responsible for conceiving the idea of a community vegetable gardening group in western Sydney and then funding the idea, which I was able to help make a reality, at least in part. Anyway, here is the process from his viewpoint.

Following his article is my article on setting up and running workshops which describes the process from my point of view

Nev Sweeney

‘Developing’ communities: frustrating, ambiguous, exciting.

When I was employed as a community development worker in a small organisation in Western Sydney, I was given a relatively clean slate to work with. The community that I was to ‘develop’ was a small suburb with only 1000 dwellings, housing around 3,500 inhabitants. At the centre of town was a community centre with ample space and facilities including kitchen, two large halls and an outdoor area with lush green lawn and patio. At the time there was very little activity at the centre and my aim was to re-invigorate community participation in the space.

Community development can be a double-edged sword. When your only real mandate is to build rapport with local residents and organisations (meet people and chat with them), respond to community needs and desires (listen) and start developing some tangible activities that respond to these needs (create a space for other people to chat and listen to each other), your goals can seem a little ill-defined. For most community

workers there are endless arrays of activities that can be implemented- the only limitation being the scope of one's imagination. This lack of direction can be daunting. However it can also be exciting. For the first few months in my new role I was slightly overwhelmed with the ambiguity. My days were taken up with meetings with local service providers, handing out surveys in the local shopping centre and wading through the ethereal web of the internet for inspiration. I had little idea if I was meeting with the right people, if the surveys were relevant and if I was not kidding myself thinking my hours perusing the internet were productive in any way.

However after some time the ambiguity gradually gave way to a new-found energy. The catalyst for this occurred on the last working day of the year. My colleagues and I had just finished exchanging Kris Kringle gifts and stuffing ourselves with savoury and sweet Christmas delights when my manager drew my attention to a new round of funding that had just opened up through the local council. The funding related to a community-arts based project aimed at developing local physical spaces into sites that would bring people together. For some time I had been flirting with the idea of trying to develop a community gardening project in my community. My eyes lit up when I saw the funding proposal form and I thought this may be my chance.

The Proposal

There were only two main problems. Firstly, the proposal was due on the 11th of January. This also happened to be my first day back at work in the New Year and like most of my fellow countrywo/men I planned to spend my break alternating between frolicking in and complaining about the heat. This would leave little time for writing up funding proposals. The second problem was that while a community garden would certainly create a space in which people could come together, share ideas and engage in meaningful activity together, it did not necessarily fall into the category of an arts project- at least not in the traditional sense. I was too full of cake to tackle such problems at that moment so I relegated the idea to the back of my mind and gave myself an early mark.

Over the summer break I couldn't shake the feeling that this was an opportunity that I should pursue. While cavorting in the woods (and the 45 degree heat) with some hippies at a new year's music and arts festival I came across a man doing a talk about community gardens. This particular chap had been part of a group that set up a community garden in a suburb on the northern beaches. Although his microphone didn't work and most of his audience was stoned, he spoke with a mix of enthusiasm for the project and impudence for council authorities. Both of these things appealed to me. I spoke with him after the talk and his message was clear: It can be done! All you need is a lot of enthusiasm..... oh, and some money. How much money exactly? Well let's just say I was expecting the necessary funding pool to be at least one zero shorter than it was. Again I was left feeling uncertain; was it worth pursuing this path if it was not going to be viable to establish such a large amount of money?

Furthermore, even if I was able to acquire funding from the council I would need to get the support of a community artist. One of my friends happened to be an artist whose

works deal with questions of social inclusion and community- close enough to a community artist, right? I asked if he would mind putting his name to the project and he was happy to do so. After numerous discussions with him about how to include an artistic component into the project proposal, my enthusiasm grew and the question of whether or not the funds would be adequate to start an actual garden seemed to take a backseat. This marked a pivotal point in the process and was indicative of the attitude that I believe one needs to take into such a venture. That is, don't focus too much on the barriers. If your gut tells you it will work, then give it a crack. (An age old cliché, but in this case a truism.)

When I returned to work in the New Year I spent the first day back frantically writing and re-writing the funding proposal to council. It was throughout this process that I realised that all the meetings in the latter half of the previous year were useful after all. Like a lot of funding proposals this particular application required evidence that the project would be supported by a number of parties including community members, organisations and other key stakeholders within the community. I was surprised at how willing some of these players were to pledge their support to the project. By four thirty I had put together what I thought was a relatively strong proposal and I was getting ready to leave for the day... until I received an email from one council department stating that I would have to prove that I had permission from another council department to use the patch of land I had proposed as the site for the garden.

When I look back on that day, I imagine the grin that must have emerged on the face of the Facilities Co-ordinator at council when she received an email at quarter to five from an enthusiastic, but naïve, young community worker casually asking to dig up a sizeable patch of land on which there had been no safety assessment carried out, for a project that did not even exist yet. Thankfully, she was gentle on me. She showed support for my idea but was obliged to compile a list of about ten important questions that would have to be addressed before council could even consider granting access to the land. These included everything from project logistics (Would the area be fenced off? Who would be given access to ensure it is maintained?) to mundane OH & S concerns (Is there access to toilets? Where would tools be stored?). The radical in me was frustrated with these barriers. Surely there was a time in the not too distant past when our relatives, feeling the desire to plant some vegetables, saw a patch of land, decided whether it was viable and went for it. Perhaps it was the image of their faces, smirking at the absurdity of the strips of dull red tape plastered across my computer screen, which spurred me on. This list of barriers seemed insurmountable, if only because they had to be overcome in the space of half an hour. But they were not going to stop me submitting my application. I put together a rough list of responses to them and emailed them off. I also shot through my application to the department in charge of funding for the project and marked the progress for land allocation as 'pending'. I did not hold out a lot of hope but felt satisfied that I had given it my best effort.

The Project

The good news came a few weeks later. Council had granted me \$5000 for project development. This was not the full amount that we had applied for, nor was it being

provided to implement a community vegetable garden. Rather, it was to provide the funds for the groundwork: consulting with the community, rallying together support, drawing up plans, encouraging the community to envision their dreams for the space. Again, these are all extremely malleable concepts. And when working with communities one can either choose to be constricted by this endless list of ambiguous terms and concepts or stretch them as far as their elasticity will allow. If you have a goal that you feel is unique and worthwhile, then you will be drawn to the latter.

My initial desire was to run a series of community vegetable gardening workshops at the community centre. I felt this would satisfy the various (and in some ways conflicting) provisos placed upon the project by the various council departments: that no immediate alterations be made to the landscape or the grounds of the community centre; that the groundwork be put in place for the possible future development of a garden; and that the project serve as a place-building exercise. I had recently heard about some local initiatives run by TAFE and council such as composting, worm-farming and veggie gardening in-a-box workshops. I thought something similar would work well. However I was unsure where I was going to find someone qualified enough to run such workshops without blowing our budget in the first two weeks. Here my earlier attempts at rapport-building with local organisations served to be useful once again. I met with the coordinator of a local community farm that I had liaised with a few times in the past. She said she would not be able to run the groups due to commitments at her farm but put me in contact with a local man named Nevin who she thought might be interested.

We arranged a meeting with Nevin and after explaining what my aims were he immediately agreed to jump on board. Along with having undertaken a variety of horticulture-related courses, Nevin explained that he had spent the last 20 years turning his backyard into somewhat of a permaculture wonderland. Nevin was knowledgeable and passionate about vegetable gardening and sustainability more generally. Furthermore, his skills were largely self-taught; a reflection of the attitude that if you have an idea worth following, you should just do it. This was a crucial point in the overall process and without Nevin's support the project would not have been able to go ahead- at least not in the form that it did. It may be possible to characterise Nevin's involvement as a piece of really good luck. But perhaps it is also necessary to evoke the spirit that I mentioned earlier: Don't focus too much on the barriers. If your gut tells you it will work, then give it a crack. If I am honest I was never really certain who I was going to get to run the workshops. I just believed in the project and trusted in the fact that everything would turn out well.

As mentioned earlier, when given an agenda that is malleable, one needs to take advantage of that malleability. Applied to this particular project, working with the elasticity of concepts such as 'consultation' and 'community engagement' meant that the proposed 'groundwork' became much more than mere consultation or project development- it was a meaningful and vibrant project in itself. We carried out a series of eight community vegetable gardening workshops focusing on topics such as creating your own seed raising mix, vegetable gardening in a box, organic pest control and making a worm farm. Participants learnt the theory behind the topics but also had a

chance to get their hands dirty. The workshops were carried out in alignment with DIY principles in acknowledgement of the fact that many people do not have a lot of extra money floating about. This also meant that the workshops themselves were cheap to run. After a couple of weeks the workshops received some publicity in the local paper and this increased the number of attendees. By the end of the workshops, people had been provided with a chance to share ideas, learn a few things and most importantly make friends. We are still uncertain whether or not we will be able to acquire that elusive patch of land to start a full blown vegetable garden. However, the group is only just getting started and I get the feeling that the best days are yet to come.

Lessons Learned

I have mentioned a number of principles that guided me throughout the process of starting a community vegetable garden group as a community development worker in a small organisation in Western Sydney. Possibly most importantly was a belief in the integrity of the project. Subsequently I made an attempt not to get too caught up in the barriers and trust in the process. There were also a number of other slightly more specific lessons I learned that are worth making note of.

- *It doesn't have to cost an arm and a leg.* I was deterred when I was informed how much it had to cost for other communities to set up full blown community gardens. However, starting a group like ours was not expensive at all- due in part to the DIY ethic that underpinned the workshops. At the time of writing we have completed the eight workshops and still have plenty of money to spare. We plan to use the remaining funds to install some seats and plant some fruit trees. (Possibly the first steps towards bringing my initial vision of the space into being?) This is taking into consideration the fact that participants did not have to pay anything and were provided with all necessary materials. If group members are willing to put in a small contribution each week, it would be possible to run similar workshops on next to nothing.
- *Spread the word.* It is difficult to know which avenues to promote such a group. We put flyers in the local shopping centre, GP surgeries, a day care centre, local school newsletter, etc. However, word of mouth can be just as effective. From my experience people like to hear about these types of initiatives from someone they know and/or trust. Our numbers grew just as much as a result of community members spreading the word amongst the people on their street than anything else. Advertisement in the local newspaper was also very effective. I was placed at an advantage working for a community organisation. Through my connections with council, I gained access to good press. However there is no reason that community members cannot approach the local rag and try and get their group in the paper. Finally, when promoting a group like this there a few key hooks one can utilise: create a better future for your kids; save money!
- *Be prepared for the red tape.* Unfortunately when starting a community group, there are often a whole variety of barriers that arise from local authorities. As I

have stated, it is important not to let these deter you. Often council merely wants to see that there is enough support to ensure a project is going to be sustainable. Be pro-active. Get together a committed group of people, hound council (as well as the community organisations that represent you) and demonstrate that this is what your community wants.

- *Start small.* My original vision for the community centre involved a full blown community garden, with an army of vegetables sprouting from every corner. I imagined passers-by admiring the ripe tomatoes beckoning them to take a few home for tonight's salad. This vision was gradually humbled and the group commenced with half a dozen interested locals learning how to sow seeds. But this was ok. Like the seeds we sowed, the workshops germinated and flourished. And as for my original vision, this still remains. But now a whole group of people also have a vision. And while each individual has different ideas and desires, the vision is, to some extent, shared. And now that we have numbers, the list of barriers seems much less formidable.

4.6 Running Community Workshops



Happy People

Are you a sustainable living guru? Or, like me, are you just someone who has experience of living a more sustainable life that you wish to share with others? Either way (or anywhere in between) one way of letting others tap into your experience and learn from what you have done is to conduct some workshops in your community. This is a very rewarding thing to do, sharing your hard-won knowledge and experience with those who are just starting out so if you are in a position to do it, it is worth considering. I have found it to be a huge amount of fun!

Setting the Boundary

Living more sustainably is a wide field covering many diverse subjects so to stop yourself from getting caught up in trying to cover too much it is best to draw a circle around the topics that you wish to cover. Ideally these would be topics that you have experience in that others wish to learn about (funny 'bout that!). While my original efforts were around trying to interest people in low energy cooking, the subjects that people seem to have the most interest in were about vegetable and fruit gardening and food production in the backyard in general. This caused me to develop the workshop series "Eating the Suburbs – producing food in and around the suburban house".

Funding

Sustainability is somewhat of a flavour of the month with local councils at the moment (2011) so they may be interested in funding your workshop(s). Talk to their sustainability coordinator, they will probably want you to develop and put in a submission about what you can offer and what the participants can expect to get out of the workshops. If you don't get funding it is not the end of the world if you are focussing on low cost ways of helping people live more sustainably. The workshops that I run don't use lots of resources and what they do use are sourced reasonably cheaply so that even without funding you could run the workshops charging participants \$5 to \$10 to cover the cost of materials. If you are charging for your time that is a different matter, but for me it is about getting the message out to as many people as possible rather than making money, but either way running sustainability workshops is unlikely to make you rich!

Venue

If you are working with councils, then they usually have one or more community cottages or neighbourhood centres that you can use and you may be able to get their use for free. These can be somewhat underutilised and sometimes they are so busy you will need to book in advance but even if they do charge it will be only a nominal fee if you are acting as benefit to the community rather than a commercial enterprise. You may be lucky and your area could have a sustainability training centre like the old chook research station at Seven Hills that is now a sustainability training centre for Blacktown council. Talk to them and see what is available.

Short of council owned venues there may be churches or community halls in your area that could be available or even your own or someone else's house. In any case the things to look for in a venue are –

- Space – for people to sit, stand, move around and complete practical activities. Some of the practical activities around food production are a bit messy so having an outdoor area to conduct things like making veggie box gardens and potting things up would be good.
- Climate control – it is really difficult to concentrate on what the presenter is saying when you are freezing to death or sweating like a pig so if you intend

conducting presentations at times that are outside the mildest weather in spring and autumn some form of heating and cooling is important.

- Tables and chairs – most venues will have chairs available, and you need to make sure that you have enough, but even three or four folding tables will make the workshops flow much better. You will need one to set up and present from, one to set up any practical activities on and one for tea and coffee (more about this later). If you do intend to have an outside activity then a fourth table already set up outside, or just the third one if there is no inside activity as well, will make your job much easier.
- Tea and coffee facilities – this makes for a nicer before and after session discussion time and break time if you are going to have one. Most of the venues will have a kitchen of some description but even if there isn't you can provide an "el cheapo" jug and boil it on the table right there in the room. A cake and few biscuits also goes down well.
- Projector – while the possibility exists that one will be available it is quite probable that the venue will not have a projector so to make your life easier it would be better if you can provide your own. In one community cottage we have access to a projector but in the other we don't so for a few hundred dollars we bought a small one about the size of a cigarette packet (a Samsung Pico projector) that does not even need a computer to run it, it works directly off an SD card or flash drive. One thing that will help is if the venue has a blank, light coloured wall that you can use as a screen otherwise bring along some butcher paper to use as a screen, whiteboards tend to be a bit too reflective.



Our mini projector

Timing

Once you have decided on the material you want to present you then need to think about your target audience, which will to a certain extent determine when you run your sessions. Mothers with young kids and retirees will be available during the day, working people without kids will be available of a night after work,(but they will be tired) and weekends almost everyone will be available particularly if you want to run longer one-off sessions or multiple sessions during the day.



Talking Time

If you opt for the after-work scenario it is important to build breaks and practical exercises into your sessions because standing up in front of your audience and just talking or worse yet, showing lots of slides on your projector (death by overhead) will put at least some of them to sleep no matter how riveting a presenter you are. After spending a full day at work their capacity to absorb new information will be diminished, particularly towards the end of the night.

In general terms I have found a two hour session that is composed of one hour theory presentation and one hour practical activity with a coffee and stretch break in between is ideal. It is long enough to get your point across and give them some practice without overloading people that may not have had any formal education for many years.

Promotion

Promoting your workshops will be made easier if you are working under the auspices of your local council but even if you are not there are relatively cheap easy things you can do to generate interest in your sessions –

One of the easiest ways to promote your workshops is to develop and print some flyers that say a bit about the workshops and give contact details, at the very least include a phone number but an email is good too. Once developed you can put a flyer up and leave take away copies in any of the following locations in your local area, assuming they give you permission, to get to your target audience –

- Doctors surgery
- Health food shops
- Day care centres
- Local library

Other ways you can get the word out is to see if you can get a press release put into your local School and/or community newsletter or approach your local papers that can be positively inclined towards community groups. Also try approaching a community radio station if one exists in your local area although even the mainstream radio

stations sometimes have time set aside for community service announcements and could give your veggie gardening group a plug.

Paperwork

There are various bits of paperwork that can make your life easier (or cause a pain in the bum, depending on your point of view) –

Disclaimers etc. – if you are working with the council, local councils tend to be very bureaucratic ie driven by paperwork so it is highly likely that they will have forms that the participants will need to fill out, and quite probable you as the presenter too, that protect their bums in case of accident or whatever.

Insurance – when working with the council and even on council property you should be covered by their public liability insurance and likewise on church premises but rather than trust to luck, ask and be sure. Your household insurance will probably have a public liability component but here again, check to be sure.



Practical time

Sign-in sheet – The council will want records if for no other reason than to know how many people are turning up although sign in may be a requirement for insurance purposes as well. It is handy for you too and make sure that your sign in sheet has an option to put down email address, that way you can keep the group updated on any changes or problems and if you need them to bring anything for the next workshop an email reminder before the day is a good thing.

Photo release – if you are going to take photos and use them later for promotional activities or whatever, a signed photo release is a good thing to have in the files. The council may require one anyway.

Feedback form – or “Happy Sheet” as they are known by trainers. These are given out to the participants at the end of the workshop or at the end of the series of workshops give you an opportunity to gauge how your work has been received by your audience. A section of the happy sheet should be allocated to asking if there are other workshop subjects they would like to see and this is a good way of conducting market research with people who have already proved they are willing to turn up.

Conducting community workshops is a great way for you, the presenter, to give back to your community and connect with like-minded people who are motivated to learn. It is also great for the people who attend because they are learning valuable life skills as well as meeting new people they can discuss them with. Everybody wins, so if you have ever thought of doing this sort of thing contact your local council and see what they say. Remember though that even if they are not interested you can still go it alone, so good luck!

November 2011 Update - All of the PowerPoint presentations that I use in this workshop series have now been uploaded and are available in the Resources section of, [Living sustainably in the suburbs \(underthechokotree.com\)](http://underthechokotree.com)

July 2014 Update - Through [Permaculture Sydney West \(PSW\)](http://PermacultureSydneyWest.com) I have been running some sustainability workshops for local councils and a friend of mine who is a corporate trainer (and past president) has developed some guidelines for our members to use when running workshops for PSW. The PSW workshop Guidelines covering suggestions on how to set up and run a successful workshop and suggestions on how the presenter can make the workshops for informative and memorable. He has also provided a document providing ‘softeners’ or how to deal or how to deal politely, respectfully and effectively with disruptions during training. when training. These documents are provided at the end of this eBook as Appendices 7 and 8 respectively.

5.0 Resources

Books

Superbia! – 31 Ways to Create Sustainable Neighbourhoods – Dan Chiras and Dave Wann – New Society Publishers (US) 2006 ISBN 0 86571 490 8 – This one is a ripper! It has loads of practical ideas for bringing back community to your suburb and in the process making it more sustainable. If you can find it, grab it!

Going Local – Creating Self Reliant Communities in a Global Age – Michael H. Shuman – The Free Press (US) 1998 ISBN 0 684 83012 4 – This is a book about economics, how to bring them back to a local scale and what benefits there are if you do. While the book is based around the US political system it does have ideas that could be applied everywhere around keeping money in the local economy rather than having it siphoned off around the country or around the world.

Community Gardens – Penny Woodward and Pam Vardy – Hyland House (AUS) 2005 ISBN 1 864 47096 8 – This is not a “how to” about community gardens but rather a description of various community gardens in Australia; the sort of people who use them, the sorts of things they grow and the techniques they use. Very informative but also good to build up enthusiasm to start your own.

A Handbook of Community Gardening – Susan Naimark Ed. – Charles Scribners’ Sons (US) 1982 ISBN 0 684 17466 9 – This is a “how to” book on developing a community garden. It is a series of articles by members of the Boston Urban Gardeners Inc covering taking the idea through to reality, selecting and developing the site and tending the garden. There is also a section on developing local food systems like food coops and farmers markets. Lots of detail, a good book.

Local Food – How to Make it Happen in Your Community – Tamzin Pinkerton and Rob Hopkins – Green Books (UK) 2009 ISBN 978 1 900322 43 0 – This is a very “hands on” and “how to” book, coming out of the Transition Town movement it has a whole stack of ideas about improving sustainability and community by getting food production back to a local level. Some ideas such as provision allotments reflect the UK experience and have limited application in Aus, but overall a very good book.

How to Save Your Neighbourhood, City or Town – Martiza Pick – Sierra Club Books (US) 1993 ISBN 0 87156 522 6 – While not specifically written around sustainability issues it does give some good advice on how to master community organising techniques to organise a grass roots campaign.

The Locavore Way – Discover and Enjoy the Pleasures of Locally Grown Food – Amy Cotler – Storey Publishing (US) 2009 ISBN 978 1 60342 453 0 – This book is like a series of articles about setting up and tapping into local food resources, so it is easy to read a bit then put the book down, picking it up later without losing the thread. Equal parts of motivation, how to and examples of what people have done.

The Transition Handbook – From Oil Dependency to Local Resilience – Rob Hopkins – Green Books (UK) 2008 – This is the “bible” of the transition movement, which developed out of the Permaculture movement. This book is a complete “how to” of setting up your own transition initiative to relocalise and revive our community spirit, driven by the twin challenges of peak oil and climate change. The book is written around the UK market town and so some development is needed for it to be better applicable to the Aus experience. We bought this book when we were in England a few years ago but now there is an Aus version.

Start a Community Garden – the essential handbook – LaManda Joy – Timber Press (US) 2014 ISBN 978 1 60469 484 0 – This is the best book on community gardening I have seen, and only a quarter of it is on actually growing stuff! The rest talks about the much more challenging side of community gardening – people management. Part 1 is about organizing a community around the community gardening and the initial meetings and how to get the most out of them. Part 2 is about planning and checking to make sure resources like water etc are available as well as moving through the meetings to bring the garden to life. Part 3 is about managing the group and keeping it heading in the right direction and then moves on to the technical issues of planting and growing. Lots of great tools to help working with people. No photos, some line drawings.

The community Gardening Handbook – Ben Raskin – Leaping Hare Press (UK) 2017 – 978 1 78240 449 1 – This book is about the UK experience of community gardening rather than the US, above. It is somewhat heavier on the technical growing side. It starts off with an introduction to community gardening, one page per entry, describing examples of how others have developed community gardens. The next chapter covers getting started and the third chapter is about planning the site and covers technical skills like seed saving albeit in not much detail. The rest of the book is taken up with a plant directory covering fruit vegetables and herbs, one page per plant. Lots of photos and some line drawings.

Street Veg – Naomi Schillinger – Short Books (UK) 2013 ISBN 978 1 780 72112 5 – The book is set out over 12 months on a month by month basis with each month broken up into 6 headings: “Community Corner” covering the skills and issues about getting community thing happening; “Sowing and Planting Vegetables” covering what to grow when and how to do it through the year; “Sowing and Planting Fruit & Vegetables” ditto!; Simple but Brilliant Ideas covering such diverse topics as volunteering, garden sculpture and a DIY watering system. “One Pot Shop” covers setting up a food garden in pots and “Harvesting” which covers the how and when of.....harvesting! Lots and lots of colour photos.

Fair Food – Nick Rose (Ed.) – University of Queensland Press (AUS) 2015 ISBN 978 0 7022 5366 9 – This is not a “how to” or technical book but rather a series of stories on “how I did it”, the “it” being taking back food production and distribution back to a community level and out of the hands of the big corporations. The book is a series of

monographs by different authors and edited by Nick Rose. Issues covered include permaculture, food hubs, backyard food forests, food connect network and lots more. No photos.

Sharing the Harvest – Elizabeth Henderson with Robyn Van En – Chelsea Green (US) 1999 ISBN 978 1 890132 23 3 – This book is about creating and developing a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm. Part 1 covers what a CSA is and how it fits into a sustainable food system. Part 2 covers how to create a CSA, choosing the farmer and the land. Part 3 covers a whole lot of stuff about organising including labour, money matters legalities (in the US, different here) and communicating with the community. Section 4 covers growing and handling food and distributing the harvest. Part 5 covers a number of CSA models including farmer initiated CSAs and consumer initiated CSAs and agriculture-supported communities. A few black and white photos and line drawings.

Power From the People – Greg Pahl – Chelsea Green (US) 2012 ISBN 978 1 60358 409 8 – This is a US book and full of great ideas but I don't know how applicable it would be here in Aus. The book starts off with a section on why the idea is good and our vulnerabilities, followed by discussion of energy sources, the centralised energy system and benefits of relocalising. The next part covers strategies for the homeowner to put in place to become more resilient, followed by the meat of the book – how people have got together and organised and run community energy systems, based on solar, wind, hydro and biomass well as other energy sources. There are examples in the US of how people have organised local renewable energy systems. A few black and white photos.

Energy Efficient Community Planning, a guide to saving energy and producing power at the local level – James Ridgeway – The JG Press Inc. (US) 1979 ISBN 978 0 932424 02 3 – This is an old book covering a whole stack of ideas around energy saving, and working with local government to put in policies to support it. The book includes reproduced documents from various US cities about policies and programs they put in place to reduce energy consumption in their area. Also included are examples of community innovations around using and financing renewable energy solutions. The book has a small number of black and white photos.

Take Back the Economy, an ethical guide for transforming our communities – J. K. Gibson-Graham, Jenny Cameron and Stephen Healy – University of Minnesota Press (US) 2013 ISBN 978 0 8166 7607 1 – The book talks about what the economy is and how we fit into it. The book then goes on to discuss strategies for taking back work, taking back business, taking back the market, taking back property and taking back finance from the multinational corporations and relocalising. The book details examples of how this has been done by different groups all over the world, including Australia. There are a number of tools and checklists to help you get started. No photos, some line drawings.

6.0 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Household Community Sustainability Audit form

| Ourselves (Personal) | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|-----------|--------|-------|
| No | Item | Always | Sometimes | Rarely | Never |
| 1.1 | We patronise local retailers where possible | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 1.2 | We are members of a local CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) initiative | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 1.3 | We buy our food from local growers/farmers markets where possible. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 1.4 | We regularly educate ourselves on sustainability and/or environmental issues important to our community | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 1.5 | We contribute to sustainability initiatives through our local schools (Stephanie Alexander program etc.) | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

| Our Street or building (The Neighbours) | | | | | |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|-----------|--------|-------|
| No | Item | Always | Sometimes | Rarely | Never |
| 2.1 | We share our tools and other resources with our neighbours | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 2.2 | We attend a sustainability group with our neighbours (eg Sustainability Street, Transition Street etc) | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 2.3 | We support our neighbours with food, time or other assistance in times of need | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 2.4 | We are on speaking terms with most of the families in our area of the street or building where we live | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 2.5 | We get together with our neighbours for sustainability initiatives (eg group solar panel buying, street verge gardens, group composting etc.) | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 2.6 | We organise/attend street parties | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 2.7 | We welcome new neighbours to our street | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

| Our Neighbourhood (Community Groups etc) | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|-----------|--------|-------|
| No | Item | Always | Sometimes | Rarely | Never |
| 3.1 | We are a member of our local permaculture group | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 3.2 | We are a member of our local seed savers group | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 3.3 | We are members of our local church | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 3.4 | Our children attend local youth groups (eg. scouts/guides etc.) | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 3.5 | We are members of our local sustainability group (eg transition, 350.org, food fairness alliance etc. | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 3.6 | We attend a local community garden or community orchard | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 3.7 | We are part of an organic food buying coop | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 3.8 | We receive and/or contribute to a neighbourhood newsletter | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 3.9 | We are part of neighbourhood watch program | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 3.10 | We are part of a neighbourhood club (eg sports, investment, gardening etc.) | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

| Our Neighbourhood (Community Groups etc) (Cont.) | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|-----------|--------|-------|
| No | Item | Always | Sometimes | Rarely | Never |
| 3.11 | We contribute to a neighbourhood skill share program | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 3.12 | We use our local library | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 3.13 | We attend meetings or presentations at our local community cottage | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 3.14 | We contribute to and/or draw from a local tool library | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

| The Government (The world outside our neighbourhood) | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|-----------|--------|-------|
| No | Item | Always | Sometimes | Rarely | Never |
| 4.1 | We attend local government meetings when sustainability issues are discussed | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 4.2 | We are aware of our local councils' sustainability action plan | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 4.3 | We contribute to our local council's sustainability initiatives | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 4.4 | We attend state government meetings when sustainability issues are discussed | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 4.5 | We attend federal government meetings when sustainability issues are discussed | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

Total possible points (P) =

Total points achieved (A) =

Score % = $A / P \times 100$

Date audit was completed:

Appendix 2 – St Clair community Group Meeting Topics: 2014 to 2020

2014

| | |
|-----------|------------------------------------|
| February | Planning for a sustainable life |
| March | Water demand management |
| April | No meeting |
| May | Solar cooking |
| June | Growing vegetables in small spaces |
| July | Growing fruit in small spaces |
| August | Worms and worm farms |
| September | Spring gardening |
| October | Growing citrus |
| November | Backyard chooks |

2015

| | |
|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| February | Breadmaking |
| March | Attracting beneficial insects/bug hotel |
| April | Organic pest control |
| May | Putting our 12 volt system together and lessons learned |
| June | Attracting birds to your garden |
| July | Growing fruit and vegetables for flavour |
| August | Growing from seed |
| September | Designing a guild |
| October | Making a constructed wetland |
| November | Summerising your garden |

2016

| | |
|-----------|----------------------------------------|
| February | Conducting a needs and yields analysis |
| March | Plant families |
| April | worms |
| May | Catch and store water |
| June | Low cost, low tech irrigation |
| July | Improving your resilience using zones |
| August | Edible weeds |
| September | Mushrooms |
| October | Backyard chooks |
| November | Soil |

2017

| | |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------|
| February | Making and saving energy |
| March | Planning a small productive garden |
| April | Garden pest management |
| May | No meeting |
| June | Time poor vegetable gardening |
| July | Guilds and food forests |
| August | Spread, slow and sink –dealing with greywater |
| September | Organic pest control in the home |
| October | Chook tractors |
| November | Spring & summer gardening |

2018

| | |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------|
| February | Companion planting |
| March | Perennial vegetables |
| April | Waste and what we can do about it |
| May | Winter vegetable growing |
| June | Making herb and spice mixes at home |
| July | Making yoghurt at home |
| August | Growing food indoors |
| September | Small space food growing |
| October | Getting the most out of living sustainably |
| November | Cheesemaking |

2019

| | |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|
| February | Growing veggies from scraps |
| March | small space fruit growing |
| April | Growing citrus |
| May | No meeting |
| June | No meeting |
| July | Backyard chooks |
| August | Irrigation & water management |
| September | Aquaponics |
| October | Summer-ising your garden |
| November | Waste and what we can do about it |

2020

| | |
|-----------|----------------------------|
| February | No meeting |
| March | Succession planting |
| April | No meeting |
| May | No meeting |
| June | No meeting |
| July | No meeting |
| August | No meeting |
| September | Mushrooms (ZOOM) |
| October | Growing for flavour (ZOOM) |
| November | Worms (ZOOM) |

Appendix 3 - *Hi, I'm your DNY Veg Box*

In these times of troubles, or in fact any time, it can be a good thing to be able to grow some of your own food, and this veg box is here to help you with that. If you already grow food, great, but if not this veg box will give you a start.

The box has been put together by placing a layer of organic material, in this case either lawn clippings or a straw/chook manure mix in the bottom of the box. This will slowly break down and provide nutrients for the growing veg, reducing the need for you to provide fertiliser. Over the top of this organic layer is a second, and top layer of commercial potting mix, for the vegetables to grow in.

There are three types of vegetable in the box –

- Radish (Variety: Cherry Belle) – radish are a root crop so the seeds need to be sown where they are to grow and they are sown in a line down one side of the box, 8 to 10 of them. They are the quickest growing vegetable in the box, you should be able to harvest them within a month. Once harvested will leave more room for the other veggies to mature.
- Lettuce (Varieties: Oak leaf and Green mignonette) There is one of each planted either side of the central leaf vegetable. These are different from the usual iceberg lettuce for sale at woollies. Oak leaf does not head at all, the leaves are harvested from around the bottom and sides of the plant as they grow, this makes for a longer harvest time. The green mignonette can be harvested in the same way but will eventually form a small heart. You can usually start harvesting in a month and half to two months. Once they start to bolt (send up seed heads) and go bitter they can be removed to leave space for the third veg.
- Spinach beet (Perpetual spinach) This is the central veg which was raised as a seedling then put into newspaper pots for transplanting. It is a short lived perennial, lasting up to 2 years, and is a slower grower than the other two vegetables being ready for harvest in six to eight weeks.

Place the box in a nice sunny place that gets at least 4 hours of direct sunlight per month and water it regularly, depending on the weather but in most cases twice a week at least. Check the soil regularly though to make sure it is not drying out.

So have fun, and good luck!



Oakleaf



Green Mignonette



Cherry Belle



**Perpetual
Spinach**

Appendix 4 – Lyttleton Stores Organic Standard

Organic Backyard Standard. Version 22.03.17 by Lyttleton Stores

Welcome to the Lyttleton Backyard Growers! This is a group of local community members who have a passion for home grown produce and a love for gardening, The group is a way to network with others who share the same passions and a great way to share the knowledge of growing in the Blue Mountains, where a variety of growing conditions are presented throughout the Blue Mountains.

As a Lyttleton Backyard Grower, you have an amazing opportunity to trade your excess garden produce in the Pantree Store. This means sharing the lovely produce you grow at home, and receiving store credit in return for your labour of love.

The following document outlays the practises that are encouraged to grow in association with 'organic growing methods'. This is an important aspect of being a Backyard Grower as we don't want to sell produce that has been sprayed by nasty chemicals, or grown in soils containing unnecessary synthetic fertilizers. The idea of growing 'organically' is better not only for us humans, but also for the environment we garden in.

We hope the following points both reinforce your knowledge and provide you with a few things you might not know.

Fertilizers and soil health

The main reason for fertilization is to feed your plants with minerals they need so they grow strong and healthy. Plants require different amounts of elements you might know about, and also plenty you don 't. They exist in the soil in various amounts and are bound to particles in the soil.

Soil contains an enormous workforce of bacteria, fungi and other insects that eat, dig and increase the availability of the elements for plants. So in fact, when you fertilize your garden you are feeding the soil, eg the workforce that you and your plants are dependent on for healthy growth.

When you feed the 'soil workforce' with synthetic fertilizers and other manufactured products, these contain the required elements in an already available form. This is not ideal for two reasons, the first is that the plants can directly access these elements (almost like 'plant junk food'). This will cause the plant to grow well, but only until the laws of physics mean water pushes the product through your soil until the plants can no longer reach it, and this is where the nutrients enter ground water supplies. The second reason that 'plant junk food' isn't great for use in the garden, is because the 'soil workforce' will become sick from the chemicals included in these products. The soil workforce is the most precious part of any garden, so protecting them is the best way to ensure a happy and abundant garden.

This can be achieved by considering the 'soil workforce' , before considering your own production needs and wants. The soil workforce is the oldest workforce on Earth and so they

are resilient, diverse and masters of life on the land. You can harness their potential with just three easy steps:

- **Compost!!**

Composting is the oldest practise for recycling nutrients in a food garden situation, where old vegetative material is taken at the end of its life cycle in one area and used at the start of another cycle. There are many methods of composting, which are discussed below in composting notes.

- **Mulch!**

Mulching is like applying a sun protection for the soil. Leaving your soil exposed to nature's elements will greatly reduce the fertility and durability of your food garden area. There are lots of options when you are planning to mulch, and some will suit your specific situation better than others. This means considering your growing context, followed by a little trial and error is the best approach.

- **Do No Harm!**

It is a common practise for humans to dig, rake and mechanically disturb soil in as many ways as possible these days. Though soil is an incredible ecosystem for the workforce living amongst it. This requires careful treatment of their habitat to ensure they thrive and therefore benefiting your plants!

Best Practice: Composted animal manure. cover crops, worm castings & tea, compost tea, weed tea, composted plant material, kelp meal and other collected seaweeds, living mulch crops, mushroom compost

Allowed: Rock minerals such as high-calcium ag-lime and dolomitic limestone, commercial seaweed tea, fish emulsion, grain meal, blood & bone

Prohibited practice: Synthetic fertilizers, chemically produced minerals including quicklime & sugarlime, ash from burned manure, compost with black waste (sewage).

Composting notes:

There are many ways you can recycle nutrients from your kitchen and garden into forms that are available to the plant. You can keep compost worms in worm farms, old bathtubs and many other DIY methods. You can compost your kitchen scraps, garden cuttings and weeds by composting in a variety of ways. Composting is either seen as an activity that is too hard or a waste of time. Animal products must be from good source of healthy naturally raised animals, Composted animal materials must be heated to 65C over approximately 14 days. Turning the pile every 2-3 days to add air to the pile aids the digestion of organic materials. After the 14 days there shouldn't be anything in the pile that is recognisable from its original state. Let the pile rest and turn occasionally over a further 10 weeks.

Turning is only necessary for adding oxygen between the particles in your compost. This is to avoid the creation of an anaerobic environment, which will introduce pathogens to the

compost. , including prior to making a tea. Composted plant materials must be heated to above 55C over three days turning at least 2 times.

Pest & Diseases control

It might come as a surprise to some people that we share our space with others that we're unfamiliar with. These others have the same instinctual need to survive as we do, and this means they're probably going to eat, drink and live somewhere, when you are keeping a food garden, it can be hard to see that the plants we're caring for have become food, drink or something else's home.

It's difficult to not reach for the first easy solution you find, these days that means grabbing a pesticide, fungicide or herbicide. These chemical solutions are not only a band-aid fix. They are costly, unnecessary, kill many beneficial insects and fungi (including bees) and can be harmful to Y'our health.

As with anything in the natural world, if something is noticeable, it is generally indicative of an external and broader cause. this requires an assessment and understanding of lots of parts of the area you're working in. Pests and disease are usually a sign that there is something not quite right with your food garden. So when dealing with this type of issue, there are lots of approaches you can take.

Best Practice: companion planting, egg shells. coffee grounds & copper tape for snails & slugs, plant derived repellents like neem, caraway oil, seed fennel, chilli, garlic, tea tree oil, eucalyptus oil, pure organic soap flakes, solar powered territorial diversions (fake white moths), sticky traps, most importantly is to have a healthy garden with healthy soil and a healthy diverse equilibrium of bugs.

Allowed Practice Biological and Microbial products, diatomaceous earth (algae), pyrethrum (Chrysanthemum), com gluten, cassia plant bark and wood, equisetum (horsetail), ryania stems, cholecalciferol (vitamin D), pheromone traps, DiPel

Prohibited Practice: synthetic insecticides, synthetic fungicides, synthetic miticides, synthetic parasiticides, synthetic herbicides, detergent based soaps, rotenone, synthetic wetting agents, Tobacco products, heavy metal pesticides, boric acid, snail bait.

Wildlife

Wildlife is the most invaluable addition to incorporate into your growing system. The benefits nature will provide you, when you use it respectfully, will outway any laborious technique you use in your garden. Keep in mind, you want to have a good time when gardening, not working yourself too hard. When you invite wildlife into your space, it will provide you with pollination, pest control, mulching services and adds to the overall aesthetic to your space. You're also doing the wildlife a favour by providing a safe haven from the spread of humans, which means less areas where wildlife are able to roam.

Best Practice: adequate fencing/netting, kinetic deterrent like scarecrows, fake snakes, shiny things like tinsel or cd's hung in trees,

Allowed Practice: trap and relocation for larger animals like possums, high frequency sound deterrent,

Prohibited practice: unlawful culling of wildlife

Weed control

Best Practice: thermophilic composting (hot composting) of weeds, commercial straw from a certified organic source, dried grass clippings and leaves, living mulch] ground cover plants e.g. roman chamomile. chickweed or miner's lettuce, natural fibre weed matting, chook-tractor, weeding/ mowing — utilise clippings into compost.

Allowed Practice: vegetable ink printed papers such as newspaper and flattened cardboard boxes, local straw from an organic/wild/neglected paddock, plastic weed matting.

Prohibited practice: coloured ink, gloss or petrochemical wax paper/cardboard, carpet, chemical weed killers such as Round 'Up,

Seed Raising

Best Practice: raising your own seedlings from Australian, non-GMO, non-hybrid, open-pollinated seeds with no chemical treatment is encouraged. Using coco-peat over peat moss is also recommended as a more environmentally sustainable seed raising option. Making your own seed raising mix is best (this a good recipe: <https://www.milkwood.net/2022/11/07/seed-raising-mix/>)

Allowed Practice: Sourcing seedlings locally from markets. commercial seed raising mix, perlite (puffed volcanic rock). Substituting perlite with biochar is recommended as a more environmentally sustainable option.

Prohibited Practice: Avoid chemically treated seedlings and seeds (from commercial hardware stores).

References: Allowed & Prohibited substances of CNG, 2015, Biodynamic Gardening by Monty Waldon, Gardening South of Australia by Steve Solomon,

Lyttleton Stores' Organic Backyard Grower Registration Form

Name:

Garden Address:

Business Name: (Optional)

Australian Business Number: (Optional)

Available Seasonal Produce:

Phone number:

Email:

Would you be interested in giving one of us a garden tour Y/N (Optional)

We value gardens that are loved, even if a little wild at times, and worked in a safe and healthy organic practice. We don't mind what style of gardener you are: organic, biodynamic, traditional, permaculture or other — it is up to you. We do value transparency in terms of allowed and prohibited substances, so if there is anything on the above list that you would like to discuss please contact Manu and Cam via email at [REDACTED] or by telephone on a Mondays, Thursdays or Fridays.

Tell us a bit about your gardening practice please:

Backyard Grower Registration Frequently Asked Questions

How long will the registration approval process take?

We will be in touch with you via phone and/or email to arrange a visit to your garden. Our garden coordinators Cam and/or Manu will come and visit your garden within a few weeks of your application according to your availability. We will then let you know via email if your registration has been approved.

Can I bring produce into the shop before the registration process is completed?

Unfortunately, we will only be able to accept produce once you are a registered backyard grower. We will send you appropriate information about harvesting and bringing produce in once your registration has been approved.

How can I find out more about growing food organically?

We have a bi-monthly food growers meet-up at Lyttleton Stores where you can meet other backyard growers, swap seeds and cuttings, and ask Cam and Manu any questions. There will be a guest speaker on different topics at each meet up. You can also follow our garden blog on www.lyttletonstores.com.au/blog where you will find loads of information on growing chemical-free food.

How will I be paid for my produce?

All organic backyard produce is swapped for store credit, which can be utilised in any part of Lyttleton Stores. If you wish to be a grower who is paid in money, you will need to provide an invoice and have an ABN. If this is the case, please contact Jacinta Carmichael-Parissi to discuss becoming a supplier.

NOTE: We are not allowed to take backyard eggs, which is very sad, but we don't want to go against NSW regulations. We reserve the right to refuse poor quality produce, and may at times need to change the buying price — which will be up to you as to if you 'd like to continue with the sale.

Appendix 5 – Sustainable Learning Circle Questions

Food

Question 1 – what does eating more sustainably mean to you?

Question 2 – what is stopping you from eating more sustainably now?

Question 3 – What action(s) can you carry out to help you eat more sustainably?

Energy

Question 1 – What is your experience of using energy more sustainably?

Question 2 – What limits you using energy more sustainably at the moment?

Question 3 – What can you do to support your efforts towards more sustainable energy use?

Water

Question 1 – What is your experience with sustainable water usage?

Question 2 – What are the barriers to you using water in a more sustainable way?

Question 3 – What can you change that will help you use water more sustainably?

Transport

Question 1 – What is your experience of sustainable transport?

Question 2 – What prevents you from using more sustainable modes of transport?

Question 3 – What actions can you take to travel more sustainably?

Waste

Question 1 – What issues around unsustainable waste practices have you experienced?

Question 2 – What prevents you from reducing waste at home?

Question 3 – What actions can you take to prevent waste being generated?

Consumption

Question 1 – What does sustainable consumption mean to you?

Question 2 – What are the barriers to more “sustainable spending” that you have experienced?

Question 3 – What can you do to modify your spending habits?

Community

Question 1 – When in your life have you experience community and what does it mean to you?

Question 2 – What are the forces in our culture that make community difficult?

Question 3 – What actions can you take to increase community in your life?

Appendix 6 – Putting together the bathtub wicking beds referred to in Section 2.4 – Pick Your Own Veg

A couple of months ago my friend Danielle made herself and her family a wicking bed based on a bathtub which had been thrown out. The idea came about as a result of our sustainability circle discussions and it was to be made using as little money as possible. She managed it for the grand total of \$3.50! The only monetary cost involved was a top layer of potting mix over compost from the chook yard, everything else was found. All plants were grown by her from seed. It sounded like such a good idea and I thought I would give it a go.



Danielle's wicking bed, newly constructed



and producing bountifully

Also, my next door neighbour had great success with butternut pumpkin in her front yard last year and I thought I might give it a go this year. A wicking bed would be the ideal platform to give it a go with. I had a bathtub or two left over from my previous aquaponics attempt so that wouldn't cost me anything, but would I be able to pull the other stuff together?

First I had to fix the bath. Ordinarily all you would need to do to make the bath watertight is to put the plug in, but I had taken out the drain plug fitting and installed a flange to take the inside pipe of the bell siphon. The flange was in pretty good shape but I tightened it up anyway and applied some silicone sealant just to be sure. I was able to pick up a blanking plug from the hardware and once I gave it a goodly dose of Teflon tape and screwed it home tightly, thus sealing the hole.

Before attempting to fill the bath, I wrangled around into its final position in the front yard and set it up level on bricks. Moving the thing once full would have been a much more daunting proposition, especially seeing as we had to turn it sideways to get it through the garage!



The bath set up in the front yard with wood chips in place

The material which goes in the bottom of the bath to form the reservoir and keep the growing medium up out of the water is usually either gravel or wood chips. I didn't have any gravel but I am going to replace the woodchip mulch under the citrus trees in the backyard so I was able to scrape up enough bark from there to do the job. The bark had been exposed to the weather for a couple of years and so it had the added advantage of any tannin or other nasties in the bark being already leached out. The bark went into the bottom of the bath.



The set up is completed

Once the bark was in I knew where the drain holes needed to be so I drilled them in. As usual with a larger hole drilled into steel I started off drilling a 1/8" pilot hole followed by the main 1/2" drill hole. Drilling into the enamelling on the side of the bath can be a bit tricky because its smooth surface can cause the drill to slip out of place. The effect is reduced by drilling a pilot hole, but if you still have problems a bit of adhesive tape over the area to be drilled will allow the drill to bite.

With the holes now drilled it was just a case of filling the rest of the bath with the growing medium. I had recently been offered some mushroom compost as a freebie, so that is what I placed in the rest of the bath. Once the mushroom compost was in place I mulched the bath with chook shed straw and planted it out with some of our seedlings, then filled the reservoir with water.

The only cost was the original cost of the wood chips, so I did OK!



Peeking through the undergrowth

A month or so later.....



Appendix 7 – Permaculture Sydney West Workshop Guidelines

By Greg Meyer

PSW has a reputation of delivering workshops which are interesting, informative and useful. These guidelines help you engage, inspire and educate people **so** they are willing and able to apply the skills and information you offer, back home, and integrate them into their lives.

These guidelines suggest what to do **Before, During, and After** your workshop to ensure people are getting the most from your time together and **use** what you teach.

Then, together we can create and maintain sustainable, resilient communities better able to:

Care for the Earth, Care for People and Share the Surplus.

Before the Workshop (Things to do as soon as you get the gig)

- 1) **Confirm** the following aspects of the workshop with the client/sponsor)
 - a) **Topic** and expected “**take aways**” for the participants. Clarify how they will measure the “success” of your contribution. Future work depends on it.
 - b) **Dates** and times (both start and stop times)
 - c) **Venue**: including location in large complexes, access for heavy materials, parking...)
 - d) Number of **participants** expected. Minimal/ maximum numbers (for you and them).
 - e) **Materials** provided by them. (hand outs, fact sheets, garden supplies, tools, etc)
 - f) **Fee** for service (what they agree to pay you for your time and expertise) Per hour? Participant dependant? Materials included? Parking fees? Etc) Pay sheet to fill out?
 - g) **Contact** names and phone numbers to find the right people on the day
- 2) **Prepare** and gather all the resources you’ll need for the workshop:
 - a) **The program** – the steps you’ll take them through to teach your topic. What you will say. Questions you’ll ask them. Things you will do. Things they will do. This is the map you will follow as you guide them to learn the skills you are offering.
 - b) **Activities**: Ensure there are **THINGS FOR THEM TO DO** so they aren’t just sitting and watching and listening. A good rule of thumb is 15-20 if info dump and 10 mins or so of some way of using the info dump. Or 10-2- mins of instruction and then turn them loose to do it themselves.
 - c) **Slides** (Keep them easy to read, with pics and words consistent formatting)

- I. Same background with our logo, website and email of presenter
 - II. One idea, message/ slide
 - III. Pics to back up each point
 - IV. Overview slide is only for direction. Details for each point on separate slide.
 - V. 'Busy' slides are ok if left up as a reference for them to work from.
 - VI. Have a logic/ flow to your information so they can find it later (e.g., chronology, sequence of process, small to big, young to old, principles, functions)
- d) **Hand outs**, PSW brochures, fact sheets, evaluation sheets, (anything to be printed)
 - e) **Ingredients**, materials, (e.g., mulch, manure, wood, nails, cloth, seeds, , etc)
 - f) **Equipment**, tools, (e.g., gloves, hats, boots, shovels, pots, jars, power, water, etc)
 - g) **Assistants** (Skilled? Unskilled?, How many?)
 - h) **Facts**/figures/details. Ensure your information is aligned with Permaculture ethics and principles. Check with an experienced Permie with a PDC if you're not sure.
 - i) **Yourself**: be clear about what your are offering people and what you want them to take away. Be there for them. Your confidence and enthusiasm for the topic gives them confidence and encouragement to try something new.
- 3) Arrive at least 30 mins before start time to:
- a) **Find the venue**, park, unload. Put up the PSW stand/sign./banner
 - b) **Set up and test** your equipment or anything that turns on/off
 - c) **Set up the room** or area/space to best support your workshop. Put things where you'll need them. E.g., handouts, brochures, materials you'll need...
Make it easy for people to enter, move, sit, see and hear.
 - d) **Be calm and ready** to greet people as they arrive. Your manner and demeanour sets the tone for the way people will participate and react.

During PSW Workshop Guidelines. Things to do on the day.

- 1) **START ON TIME!** **Welcome people** and thank them for coming (**name the workshop** and give a one liner summary so they know they're in the right place). Thank the "sponsor" and PSW for putting on or supporting the workshop.
- 2) **Logistics**: Timings (breaks, finish,) Toilets; Safety talk: things to be careful about (tools, access, ground, equipment, first aid kit, evacuation.

- 3) **Honour** the First nations of Australia who lived on the land you are now on.
Acknowledge that they lived here resiliently for over 50,000 years. Pledge to continue and add to their caretaking for the benefit of all Australians and the planet.
- 4) **Give** a little synopsis of PSW and the presenters: Who we are. Our purpose. Use photos
- 5) **Outline** Program: Overall purpose; What they will learn and take away. Relate this to their lives; processes, activities, handouts and behavioural guidelines (e.g., stay on topic, care for each other, stay manage distractions, keep it real, useful)]
- 6) **Check in with them** briefly by asking, ***“What brought you here today? What are you hoping to learn and take away and use?”*** Listen and note down their “back home” situations so you link your information to their lives and expectations.
- 7) **Begin the instruction.** Follow your program. Remember to check in with them each time you make a major point to see if they “got it”. Simple things like, “Does that make sense?”
“Is that clear?” “Any questions?” “Do you have anything to add?”
- 8) **Stay on time.** Keep an eye on the time so you follow your program, cover all topics, give them time to practise and finish on time. Have your break when you said you would. Check in regularly to see how they are doing with the content/instruction/skills.
- 9) **Stay on Topic** (People get distracted by their own minds, each other and you. Expect it. Their questions or interruptions area hidden gift. Use them to relate your info to their world.
And, stay in control by following these tips.
 - I. Only one person speaks at the same time. If they interrupt you, let them finish, thank them respectfully and use their words to bring everyone back to the topic at hand.
 - II. Quiet the Noisies and encouraging the Quiets (see attached ‘softeners’ pages)
 - III. Off topic Qs – turn them back to the topic after honouring their eagerness to participate
 - IV. Handling Objections: Find the ‘wisdom in the dissent’. Honour their input. Find something valid and useful in their comment. Educate them so they have an ‘ah ha’ moment. Defer for further reference. Return to topic.
- 10) **Keep them active.** They need to leave feeling competent and confident to apply the skills you are offering back home. Give them enough things to do so they are eager to go home and try it themselves. Keep an eye on safety issues all the time.
- 11) **Wrap it up formally.** 10 mins before finish time gather them and summarise the day. Ask them **what they’ve learned and how they will use it.** Ask how they will apply the workshop back home. Offer handouts.

- 12) Promote any upcoming PSW workshops, Blitz, Seed Savers, Living skills course, monthly meeting or council sponsored workshop. Ask them to complete the evaluation sheet and where to leave it. Start packing up while they complete evaluation.

After Workshop Protocols

- 1) **Be available** to say goodbye and answer questions as they are leaving.
- 2) **Make sure** they take away the resources from workshop and promos for PSW.
- 3) **Pack up** all your gear (someone often offers to help, **say “Yes, thank you”**. It validates them and gives them a chance to talk more about their world.
- 4) **Collect** evaluation sheets and complete any paperwork required by the sponsor. If they want to take the evaluations with them, have a quick to summarise:
What worked? Things people liked and you want to keep doing.
What didn't work? Things that didn't land that well and you'll want to ditch or change.
Good ideas? Any suggestion for you to consider for next time.
- 5) **Check** that you've left the area clean and tidy so we leave a good impression and practise the ethics of Permaculture.
- 6) **Sign** any paperwork from the sponsor to make sure payment details are completed.
- 7) **Thank** the sponsor (if they're there) and get their feedback about how it went. At to your list from the evaluation sheets. Sign and give them any official paperwork so you get paid.
- 8) **Prepare** a short summary of the workshop we can post on the website and give as a promo at the next meeting. We want to let people know all the ways we are support permaculture in the Sydney West area.

Appendix 8 – Influencing Questions or how to deal politely, respectfully and effectively with disruptions during training.

By Greg Meyer

To quiet the “noisies” and give the “quiets” a chance to speak during meetings or conference calls or trainings etc.

If someone have been “going on” for a while, at their next breath, hold up your hand, palm facing them, fingers up and say:

“Thank-you ...(name).” Then, turn your hand palm up and sweep it around the room to include the other people present and say, “Could we just hear what others have to say about that?”)

“Ok, I think we understand that you feel/think..... about)
“Does anyone wants to add to that?”

“What do the rest of you think about that?” (Use hand sweep again subtly.)

“Can I interrupt you for just a moment? --- Does anyone have a question?”

“Right, let’s just make sure we are all on the same page. Would someone else mind summarizing what (.....) has been saying?”

“Thanks, (.....). Now, can we see if anyone else has something to add?”

“Great! How do the rest of you feel about what (.....) has been saying?”

If someone has been speaking generally, universally around a topic, say:

a) “Perhaps you could give an example of what you are concerned about?”

“Could you summarise what you are saying in one sentence so we can make sure we all understand what you mean?”

“I’d like you to do something a bit silly to help us get the essence of what you are saying. Could you explain this so that an eight-year-old could understand it?

“For the sake of those who are not following you could you re-phrase what you are saying in the form of a request? What do you want?”

“Just in case we’ve missed anything, can you please recap your point in one phrase or sentence to see if we have the essence?”

“(.....), can you please give us a short sound bite of your main point here?

Thanks, (.....) I’m just a bit confused about where this is going. Could I have a short summary of what you are saying so I can catch up?”

“What is a one-liner that captures what you are saying here?”

To return people to the topic, agenda, task at hand

- a) "Can we just clarify the purpose of this meeting before we continue?"
- b) "Is it ok to pull up for a moment and check if we are sticking to our agenda?"
 - "May I remind everyone that we are just trying to....."
 - "Hey, all we're doing here is.....(give short one liner describing purpose). Is that right? Or have I missed something?"
 - "Time out! Can we return our attention to our (agenda, objective, topic, outcome, task at hand, etc)? Is this discussion leading us there?"
 - "We may be straying off the track a bit. Can we take a moment to restate the outcome we're going for and make sure we are on target?"
 - "Does anyone else feel we are:
 - Going around in circles here?
 - Solving the wrong problem?
 - Missing the point?
 - Off track?
 - Confused?
 - Lost?"
 - "Could I just ask how this discussion fits in with (our agenda, purpose, etc)?"
- c) "Is anyone else a bit confused about how this fits in with (our purpose/goal?)"

To interrupt sarcasm, personal attacks, put downs, arguments.

- a) "Whoa! Could everyone please take in a big breath and let it out slowly?"
- "Ouch! We are getting a bit rough here. Can we turn our concerns into clear requests so everyone can start focusing on solutions instead of problems?"
- "Would you please say that again with a bit more dignity /respect/ harmony?"
- "We understand that you are reasonably concerned/upset/angry about this. Could you separate your emotion from the point you are trying to make?"
- "Excuse me. Is this kind of talk in keeping with our code?"
- "Is anyone else feeling a bit uncomfortable with where this is going?"
- "I was wondering if we are practising our code right now?"
- "Would anyone mind if we just took a little break here, re-focus our attention on our purpose and treat each other with more respect?"

To encourage the "quiets", check in with the group, monitor alignment or just create a pause to cool down.

- a) "So, how are we all feeling about this so far?"
- b) "Have we heard from everyone on this issue?"
- "Do you feel we have covered this topic already or is it only me?"

- c) "Does anyone else have something to add?"
- d) "Who else thinks this is a good idea but it needs more discussion?"
- e) "Do we need to talk about this issue a bit more before we go on?"
- f) "Is anyone else confused here? I got lost when we were talking about....."
- g) "Am I the only one who feels we may be missing the point here?"
- h) "Is it possible we have another issue here that deserves our attention?"
- i) "Does anyone else feel that this meeting is not working as well as it could?"
- j) "Could we take a quick vote to see how we are feeling right now about this?
0 = totally lost/against/disinterested and, 5 = 100% with it/for it/eager.
When I say, '1,2,3' hold up the number of fingers for how you feel now."

To offer new ideas, suggestions, different viewpoints, solutions.

- a) "Could we.....?"
- b) "Do you think you could?"
- c) "Have you ever thought...?"
- d) "Have you ever tried?"
- e) "How easy would it be for you to?"
- f) "I was wondering if?"
- g) "What would be the benefit of?"
- h) "What if we.....?"
- i) "Would it be alright with you if we.....?"
- j) "Would you have any problems with?"
- k) "How about if we.....?" Could that help?"
- l) "Have you ever noticed that when you (.....) , that (.....) happens?"
- m) "Were you aware that when you it caused ?"

To stop rumors and replace them with facts and truth.

Ask the person spreading the rumor:

- "Do you think we should stop this and check it out?"
- n) "Do we really want this kind of misinformation spreading through the place?"
- o) "Who do we need to talk to, to get the full story about this?"
- p) "What can we do to get the truth here so people don't start making up their own versions of what really happened?"
- a) "Who told you that? Would you mind if I asked them where they heard it?"
- b) "How about we both go to them and ask if this is true?"

- c) "Is this the sort of rumour we want to be associated with and spreading?"
- d) "This is an example of how morale gets shot around here. What can we do to set the record straight for everyone?"

To challenge people who are "bad mouthing" some one else

- a) "Ah, how did they react when you told them how you feel?"
- "So, what did they say when you told them what you are telling me?"
- "Excuse me. Are you telling me this so we can see them together or are you going to speak to them on your own?"
- "What happened when you explained your concern to them?"
- "I have to tell you that I'm uncomfortable talking about someone who is not here to defend themselves. Can we include them?"
- "Is telling me the best way for you to address this issue with them?"
- How can I help you bring it up with them so both of you are ok about it?"
- "Before you go on, I need to say that I'm not the one who should be hearing this. It is between you and them. Can we go see them and talk together?"
- I'd love to help you with this, but I'd need to hear their view as well as yours. Do you mind if I talk to them too?"