

just. gardening
February 2009





“The fool looks for dung where the cow never browsed.”
Ethiopian proverb

“To be truly radical is to make hope possible rather than despair convincing.”
Raymond Williams

Gardening Introduction

For years I liked the idea of gardening, but never got around to actually gardening. The convenience of buying was more appealing to my lazier side. Someone even put a garden in for me once. It was a strange and mysterious thing that died before I had really got to know it. The whole idea was intimidating.

“You can do just about anything and it will grow,” they would say. “It isn’t hard.”

“Really?”. “Yeah, try it.”

“Ok, I’ll just put this spade in over here...”

“AARRGGH. What are you doing? You’re disturbing the micro-organic symbiotic relationship in the sub-cuticle layer of loam and your brassica are all out of their rotation with the potassium loving sproutlings?! Where’s your mulch? MULCH!”

Eventually, I discovered you really can do just about anything and have something grow. It is now the middle of winter in Dunedin. I have just finished an omelette with red silver beet, celery, sorrel, broccoli and coriander. It all came out of the garden – including the eggs. Gillian Welch is singing to me. “Gonna do it anyway, even if it doesn’t pay.” Fortunately it does pay. But she’s right. Even if it didn’t, I’d still do it. Why? Because gardening now seems like it is about far more than growing healthy, free food.

Forty percent of New Zealand household waste is compostable. Most of this ends up in landfills (more than one million tonnes a year) creating toxic lechate and methane gas. Composting not only prevents this, it nearly halves the rubbish bag bill, and sends all that goodness back into your own garden. Add to this current environmental concerns over ‘food miles’ and increasingly intensive production methods, and gardening starts to take on new significance.

This booklet is not an attempt at a comprehensive gardening guide. It is a brief look at some creative ways of gardening, and some gardening projects I have been exploring with friends. I offer this as a new gardener in the hope it will inspire others to become new gardeners. The resource section at the end has references that really are expert and can take you further.

The other GDP



In the winter of 2007, I set up a community project called the GDP (Garden Development Project). The project was supported by St John's Anglican Church in Dunedin and a group of friends. We take referrals through the local budget advice services, and establish a vegetable garden and compost system for families struggling with their food budget.

On Saturday mornings a group of about eight of us go around to someone's house with spades and gumboots. With the help of the family, we clear a good area, or set up a no-dig garden. We also set up a compost system, and sometimes clear the yard or trim the hedge. It's always a very social and diverse morning, and a highlight of my week. Not being a very experienced gardener, I'm usually frantically asking advice and reading gardening books the day before. At each house we leave a sprinkler, blood and bone, a fork and hoe (and the odd chicken wire fence to keep the dogs out). A couple of weeks later on a Saturday afternoon we go back, plant the garden, and introduce the family to someone who will act as their gardening mentor, providing ongoing support for a year. Each family is asked to help not only with their own garden, but if at all possible with another garden in their neighbourhood.

When we went to Mila's house, Andy stayed inside showing no interest in us being there at all. At lunchtime, however, he suddenly appeared and fired up a BBQ – sizzlers for lunch. Mila explained to us that earlier Andy had said the whole idea was a waste of time as they had tried a garden before and it hadn't worked, and that she was stupid to think we would actually show up. But as the morning wore on, and more people walked down by the side of his house to help in his yard without ulterior motive, he became

curious. A couple of days later, a bunch of his mates traipsed around the back. Mila thought they were going to give her a hard time about it again, but after looking at it for a while they also wanted to know why anyone cared about helping them out. They talked, she said, about hope.

Rachael and her children, Janie and Scott, were one of the first families to take part in the GDP project. Rachael was extremely enthusiastic and wanted four big plots dug over so she could get into crop rotation. Twelve of us went to her house, cut back the hedge, made a set of compost bins, dug over and removed all the weeds from her four plots. Not only was the garden dig successful, but Rachael commented that the enthusiasm and willingness of everyone to help gave her a new lease on life; she was encouraged and positive about more than just her garden. This type of response was not uncommon, but always surprised me. Janie was especially keen on carrots so we planted several rows.

As the year went on, their garden started to grow a bit out of control. Weeds grew and they were discouraged. Eventually, Rachael gave it up entirely. We lost contact with her just after Christmas. Later, she went and had a 'pointless' dig around in her unbridled weed bed, and pulled out a huge crop of massive carrots that tasted great. After clearing away some more weeds, she found that there were other things that had also grown despite the neglect. I had an exuberant phone call from her soon afterwards. She was over the moon, and keen to get a few more things growing the coming year – although in a smaller more controllable space.

Rachael had a lot of space. So what do you do if you live in the city or have no space?

Concrete Garden

Day 1



Day 2



Day 3



Day 4

Day 5



Day 6



Neil and Muriel lived in a house in Porirua with no lawn to turn into a vege garden. There was, however, an area of concrete outside the back door by a small washing line. They grew fantastic vegetables in a raised bed set on their tarmac for 10 years and eventually had a rich, thick pile of good soil as their base. The only disadvantage was that the carrots and parsnips grew down, hit the tarmac and took a left. Mind you, carrots with a 90 degree bend taste the same and make a good conversation piece, they are just a little harder to store.

How do you build a raised bed? Well, in the fine tradition of daily devotional books, follow the guide.

Day 1:

Passage. *"The Lord makes the sun to shine on the righteous and the unrighteous."* Matthew 5:45

Reflection. 5-6 hours a day sunlight is needed for most vegetables. 7-8 is even better. This is the same for both evil vegetables (brussels sprouts) and good vegetables (broccoli).

Action. Some time this week take a note of where the sun goes up, and where it goes down. Find north. Point '12' on a watch directly at the sun; north is halfway between the hour hand and the 12. If the only space you have is shaded for much of the day, that is ok too. It will mean you will need to plant shade-tolerant vegetables; ask at the local gardening store or see list in the back of this booklet.

Day 2:

Passage. *"The foundations were laid with high-grade stones, cut to size, and cedar beams."* 1 Kings 7:10-11

Reflection. It always pays to take the time to lay good foundations for any project. Cedar is a good hardwood so it doesn't need to be treated. It is best to avoid treated and tannalised wood which can leach into the vegetables. Stones are also good.

Action. Have a look around your yard, your neighbour's yard, under the house or, if necessary, the local building yard. Get enough material for boxing about forearm depth – an old concrete

slab, wooden planks, big bits of driftwood, bricks – anything will do. Wooden delivery palettes from hardware stores and other businesses that get large goods delivered can often be picked up for free, and are great for making small beds.

Day 3:

Passage. “...let...gather.” Exodus 5:7b (beginning mid sentence at ‘let’ and ending at ‘gather’)

Reflection. Less is more.

Action. Make a trip to the beach and find some seaweed. Collect up a bunch of old newspapers.

- Buy a bail of straw – from a local farmer, or garden centre.
- Buy a bail of pea straw – local garden centre.
- Buy a trailer of compost. The local transfer centre will sell you compost that they made out of all the green waste that they charged you to dump last year. Someone at your local church will have a trailer you can borrow for the day. If they don’t, and they can’t help you find one, something has gone seriously wrong; try Buddhism.

Day 4:

Passage. “Listen and hear my voice, pay attention to what I say. When a farmer plows for planting does he keep on breaking up and harrowing the soil?” Isaiah 28:23-24

Reflection. Not if he gardens like this he doesn’t. Gardening is about letting things be. One teaspoon of good compost contains 100 million hard-working gardening bacteria. These bacteria, along with other micro-organisms and fungi threads, do the real work of gardening for you. The fecundity of life in the garden doesn’t need big gumboot prints and spade abuse to help. Once the garden bed has been laid, looking after it will not be back-breaking work. And always avoid stepping on your garden.

Action. Layer up the stuff inside your frame as follows:

Layer I: Seaweed, coarse sticks, leaves; at least 10cm thick.

Layer II: Cover with hay. It will come off the bail in pads. Don’t break it all up, put the wads in as they are.

Layer III: Sprinkle on a dusting of organic fertiliser.

Layer IV: Cover with loose pea straw about 20cm thick.

Layer V: Cover with compost and top soil 10 cm deep.

The seaweed, sticks and leaves will provide great nutrients and allow drainage and aeration for layers above. As this all breaks down it will form a rich, organic soil. Each year you can simply pile more goodness (that you can probably make from your own yard or neighbourhood) on top.

There is a higher one-off set-up cost with this style of gardening, but if you only have a cobbled or concrete courtyard, it is worth it. Almost everything will grow in this way – however it’s best to avoid yams and potatoes. They can grow in containers next to your garden (see later).

Day 5:

Passage. “A farmer went out to sow seed. As he scattered the seed some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, but when the sun came up the plants withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns which choked the plants when they grew. Still others fell on good soil. It came up and produced a crop.” Mark 4:3-8

Reflection. Try to be more careful next time.

Action. Plant seedlings or seeds into the top layer of compost and water well. Find out what works at the time of year in your area. For example; in spring, plant just about anything. In autumn, plant leeks, broccoli, bok choy and lettuce. In winter, plant snow peas, iceberg lettuce, garlic and spinach.

Day 6:

Passage. “Blow on my garden, that its fragrance may spread abroad. Let my lover come into my garden and taste its choice fruits [and vegetables].” Song of Solomon 4:16.

Reflection. Gardening is about far more than growing your own food. It’s about community. Everything in your garden will taste so much better if you share it.

Action. Eat the goodness out of your garden. Celebrate. Take some to your neighbours.

**“Just about any container
can be used to grow vegetables...
the point is creativity.”**



Beyond raised beds

There are plenty of other ways to grow veges, even if you don't have a big backyard. Below are just a few ideas to get you started. Imagination and initiative are key.

More Container Gardens

(Harder work to set up, but rewarding, and on hand in a city).

The bus I lived in for three years was six metres long. In window boxes I grew bok choy, kale, spinach, broccoli, silverbeet, carrots and herbs. This was one of my first attempts at gardening. The carrots were all extremely small – using standard dirt was a mistake because it compacted down too solidly when it got wet. The broccoli grew too leafy and shaded out other stuff that I planted too close. And yet, I had more kale, bok choy and silverbeet than I could eat, plenty of herbs, and lots of people saying “Wow, that’s cool; vegetables in window boxes. You’re an amazing person, you should be Prime Minister.”

“No no,” I’d say with false modesty, “You’re amazing. Tell me again about my window boxes.”

Priceless.

Just about any container can be used to grow vegetables. Old bathtubs, old boots, paddling pools, large ceramic pots, old plastic rubbish bins, big old coffee sacks (Gregg’s Coffee in Dunedin throw these out in their thousands), flower pots, the rusty car that you have to admit you simply are not going to restore, buckets, window boxes, wooden crates. Small is ok. You will just have to put a small plant in it; the point is creativity.

Guidelines for Container Gardening

1. **Place your container where it will get maximum sunlight.**

2. **Good drainage is essential**

- Place gravel in the bottom of pots.
- Raise container onto a couple of bricks if necessary.
- Drill 10mm holes in the bottom of plastic containers. Newspaper in the bottom will stop the soil falling out.
- Porous ceramics (and hessian sacks) will dry out faster – always keep an eye on when they are getting dry.

3. **A growing medium other than soil is best as soil compacts too solidly**

- Either buy potting mix or...
- Use the compost you have made. You may need to add some sand, sawdust or wood chips depending on what you’re planting (ask the people you get the seeds off, or read the back of the packet). The main concern is to have well draining soil that still retains enough moisture to keep roots moist.

4. **Feed your plants**

Because the soil drains well, the nutrients will also wash away so you may need to feed your plants. Make a liquid fertiliser by using a bokashi bucket (see later), or hanging a cloth bag of seaweed in a big bucket of water for a couple of weeks.

Beyond raised beds continued

Hanging garden

Really convinced you have no floor, window sill, doorstep or driveway space? Line a hanging pot with sphagnum moss and grow vegetables hanging in a window. No pots but several plastic buckets around? They will do fine if you make sure the handle is strong enough. Remember to select plants according to the depth and size of pot.



Upside-down garden

Put a slit in the bottom of an old sack, feed the roots of a zucchini or tomato plant through, fill with compost/potting mix and tamp down. Hang sack under eaves of house from a hook in a sunny place. All sorts of plants are happy to grow upside down. Just try, (or see appendix list).

Alternatively, cut a hole in a plastic bucket and plant a small variety tomato plant. You may need to use some gardening cloth or newspaper around the hole to keep the plant in place while its roots strengthen. Fill the bucket up, then plant basil in the top of the bucket. Eat from both ends.

When you are choosing plant types for this purpose, read your favourite gardening book or ask your local gardener which plants require the same amount of sunlight and water.



Old tyre garden

Potatoes can take over a garden if you are not careful and diligent at getting them all out (I'm neither). They also need covering up as they grow, and so...

- Get three old tyres (free from any tyre repair shop. The tyre shop man will probably have a tyre mountain; if you have some spare time you could take all these, fill them with clay and build a house. The walls would be super well-insulated and wouldn't slip on wet roads).

- Place the first tyre on the ground.
- Fill with compost and pea straw.
- Plant four or five seed potatoes.
- When the shoots reach about 15cm tall, add more straw to almost cover the shoots.
- Add tyres on top to make more room.
- At harvest time, you will have a three-deep stack of tyres filled with potatoes.



No-dig garden

A no-dig garden is far less maintenance than a standard dig garden because there are fewer weeds and the weeds that do grow are easier to pull out of loose soil. You can follow the layering system of the concrete raised bed garden described previously without needing to build framing. Simply start the layers right on the grass. However, rather than beginning with a layer of seaweed and sticks, start with a 10-50cm layer of newspaper. This will kill the weeds, eventually break down, and encourage worms up into the growing layers. To further encourage the worms, stick a fork into the soil, loosen slightly and wet with a hose before you lay the paper.

The soil will build up and develop as you add more compost and straw each season. As above, it does not like to be disturbed so digging is unnecessary. Set your garden up so you can reach everywhere without walking on the soil.

Once everything has been planted and seedlings have grown up, surrounding plants with some hay or pea straw will further hinder the growth of weeds. There are a few things (like lettuce) that don't like to be crowded like this, but generally it's fine. This straw or hay will also breakdown eventually and continue to add goodness to the soil for the following.





COMPOST: Making your own goodness

New Zealanders throw out 320kg each of compostable material each year, about 40% of household rubbish. This clogs landfills, creates toxic leachate and greenhouse gas. You're going to help change that. Composting is good for the environment, and your budget.

Make a couple of bins, reasonably sized, so you can remove the front or get the compost out somehow. You could use wood, or stacked hay bails or anything really, as long as air can get into it. Nailing a few wooden delivery palettes together to make a square bin works well. Throw in some sticks first, then put in all your food scraps, lawn clippings, dried leaves, vacuum cleaner bag content, ripped up paper, seaweed and garden waste. Keep it covered as it likes to get warm. Whenever you throw in some green stuff (food scraps, lawn clippings), add some brown stuff too (hay, dried leaves, sticks, paper). Add some animal manure, and a sprinkling of lime once in a while. Don't worry if you forget.

After a while – say when the bin is getting full or you can't remember when you started the compost – it is good to turn it over into another bin. It may be a bit of a guggy, stinky mess. That's ok. It will eventually break down completely – it just takes time. Basically, the compost just needs air, a bit of moisture and material to break down (some green, some brown). With a bit of luck, worms will get into it as well; that will really speed things up and save the world a bit faster.

Top tips about composting

- Everything that was alive will rot, just mix it up a bit. This happens frequently to Members of Parliament. Throw in heaps of brown, green, twigs and moisture; eventually it will be usable compost.

- Keep meat out, it will attract rats.
- A cheap compost can be made out of chicken wire and stakes. Make the chicken wire circle slightly under a metre round. It needs to be big enough to hold some heat. If it is too big, it will

not build up fast enough to get a critical mass.

- A large compost pile (no bin at all) built all at one time out of all the available materials in your garden is cleaner and faster to breakdown than food scrap compost. Some people like to build one of these piles in the autumn and one in the spring to be ready the following season.

- There are plenty of compost bins that you can simply buy from a store if you want to keep the whole thing looking tidier. This is probably best if you have very limited space. Care will still need to be taken to mix the material in the bin to stop it smelling.

- Watch out for too many grass clippings. If you pile up your grass clippings all in one place, add some course branchy material and poke holes into the pile with a stick to encourage aerobic activity.

Bokashi

Not only is this a fantastic word in a league with candelabra, maniacal, Catholicism and teppanyaki, but it is also an excellent indoor compost system. If you are growing vegetables in containers or pots, they will need to be fed as the nutrients wash out in the well-draining growing material. A bokashi compost bucket will provide all the nutrients you need.

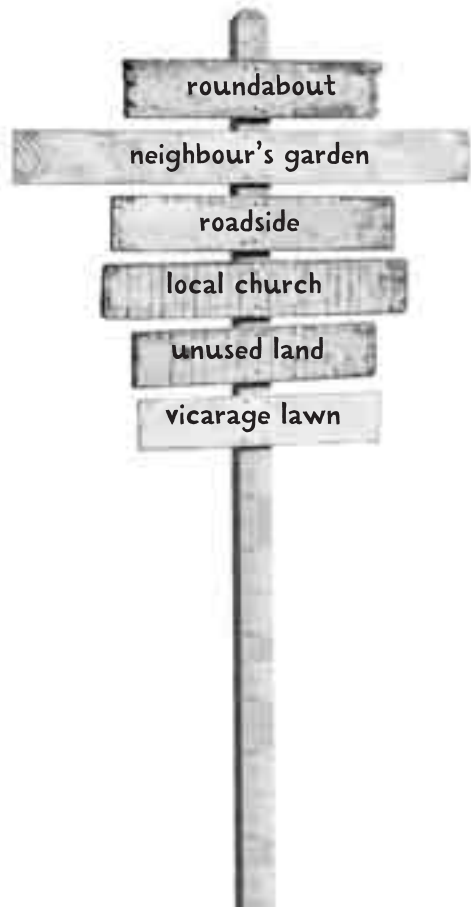
Essentially, it is a 20-litre bucket with holes in the bottom and a sealed lid placed inside another bucket. Food scraps are sprinkled with an active micro-organism that, when wet, begins to ferment and breaks down the food inside. The end result is a rich organic liquid that drains out the bottom and is collected in the second bucket. This is a very strong plant food and can be diluted and added to every second or third watering. It is also excellent for all your other house plants.

Once the bucket is full, it takes about six weeks to completely break down. Two buckets are handy so you can keep one in use while one is sitting. The Bokashi website has more information and a list of local distributors. www.bokashi.co.nz

Other places to garden

There are plenty of other places to grow vegetables such as:

1. The grass between the kerb and the roadside.
2. The grass in the middle of the roundabout at the end of your little no exit street.
3. Your neighbour two doors down who has lots of space, but whose age or health prevents them gardening. Ask around church; there will be someone who has space and no longer gardens, but would love to still have a garden in.
4. How about the vicarage lawn? Just get started one night. Tell them I said it was ok, and feel free to give them my phone number.
5. Not just the vicarage. Chances are the local church has plenty of lawn, and almost certainly several people are complaining about mowing it (also they don't like the music). Welcome to the world of allotments. More on this later. But seriously, given the current global climate, a church with a large lawn that they mow each week, dumping the clippings in a corner or sticking them in a bag to send to the transfer station so you can go there and buy it back as compost, has serious cause to question their salvation. (Oh alright then, too extreme; but surely purgatory).
6. Or try guerrilla gardening – plant stuff on land not being used, like council property, empty residential lots, parliament lawn etc.
7. (...salvation)



A more standard approach

Although I was originally asked to put something together about alternative spaces for gardening, turning a piece of lawn into a garden is undoubtedly easier and cheaper. Turn half a spade depth of soil over so the grass is underground. Break the soil up a bit with the spade and add compost and manure (and lime if your soil is solid like clay). This is best done in the winter to let the frost get at it. The grass will die and add nitrogen. Try to avoid the urge to use RoundUp. If you have time, plant blue lupins your first year, then turn them into the soil. They break things up a bit and add nitrogen.

For weeding, either find a good torpedo hoe, then, regardless of what the seed packet says, make your rows a little wider than the hoe blades. Once a week, weeding can be done by running the hoe up the rows. Easy. Or get some straw or hay from somewhere and surround plants. This will keep weeds down, warmth up and moisture in.



Top 10 tips for a successful garden

1. Have a go. Try it. Realise that there will be failures as well as successes. Be ok with failure. For example, my brother's celery got rust and died this winter. I was completely ok with it.

2. Develop a frame of mind that views gardening as something slightly subversive of a global food system controlled by multinational agribusiness that has posted record profits on the back of a global food crisis that has forced millions into hunger (probably won't work if you vote Act).

3. My celery didn't die.

4. Stick little signs on your vegetables that say "Now fortified with essential vitamins and minerals. Low fat. KAZOW yummiier than the other 19 brands next to me on these shelves. Everyday low price."

5. Have a brother who is extremely knowledgeable about all things gardening. A phone call is quicker than reading a book, easier than knowing everything yourself, and helps you keep in touch with family (a friend works here also).

6. The person at the local gardening shop will be your friend.

7. Be gentle with yourself and don't set unrealistic expectations. Start small and grow bigger as you learn and gain enthusiasm.

8. Get a complete garden book that tells you about soil conditions and planting times. The Yates one is great, so is "Organic Gardening for New Zealanders".

9. Read the back of seed packets. One of the guys involved in our gardening projects is a fantastic gardener. I would always ask about how to sow a particular seed. Eventually I realised that whenever I asked he would read the answer off the back of the seed packet.

10. Do a little bit frequently to stay on top of it all.



CHURCH
VEGETABLE
GARDEN
OPEN

All that lawn



As recently as 30 years ago, the tour the Bishop made around the various parishes in the Diocese included an inspection of the Vicar's vegetable garden. If it was not up to standard, they had to stay working for the church the rest of their lives as punishment (or something along these lines).

In the last month, the GDP has gone in a new direction. In conjunction with the Presbyterian church down the road we are digging up their back lawn to set up a community garden. The idea is not only to end up with lots of fresh vegetables for the food banks (and for the people who help), but to provide an educational opportunity in a much needed contemporary issue. Several open days will be put on during the year with tea, coffee, and maybe a BBQ. The first day will be preparing the plots. The area has been divided into four plots; each will be gardened differently to show the variety and possibilities. We will also build a raised bed garden over an area unsuitable for gardening. Alongside the various gardening styles we will set up a variety of composting methods.

Subsequent days will include:

- A planting day
- A 'maintaining the garden' day
- A 'dealing with common problems' day
- And a cooking, eating and celebrating day.

The project is a combined effort between the Anglican and Presbyterian churches of Highgate in Dunedin. The ecumenical nature of the project is encouraging, as is the churches' involvement in contemporary social issues in a practical, local, community-building way.

People will be invited to be involved at whatever level they like. They might like to be involved in growing and looking after the gardens, or perhaps to simply come and get some ideas or ask questions. Hopefully people will be inspired to duplicate what we do in their own yards. I can also imagine including simple cooking groups around the produce grown. Or how about a community kitchen using the existing church facilities where people can come and cook food with the help of some good volunteer cooks?

"Let's go out for tea."

"OK. How about Burger King, we could win a Hummer!"

"Nah, lets go to St Johns. All the fresh food is in the cool room, the kitchen space is excellent and other people will be using it too."

"Ok, lets skip down there now clutching our penny and singing a little tune about potato and leek soup."

"Yay!"

You can see from the above scientific simulation how much people like it.

For a healthy, happy job



Join the
**WOMEN'S
LAND
ARMY**

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1945

Digging up the past

Joan Francis was in the 'Land Army'. In England during the war, so many people were off fighting that the Land Army – made up substantially of young women – was sent to different parts of the countryside to tend the crops, raise the animals, and keep the country producing food. The circumstances of the times meant that growing vegetables was just as necessary as making bullets. It was part of your patriotic duty.

Joan Francis is also my grandmother and I think she is great. We all know her as Lally. Talking to her about her childhood is always fascinating. I forget so often that the way the world works is not inevitable. Things have not always been as they are, and will not stay so. I'm not suggesting we should wind the clock back or romanticise the past, but it seems that whenever people talk about pressing environmental issues: plastic bags, ocean pollution, greenhouse gases, food prices, peak oil... the solutions discussed resemble a way of life and skills my grandparents' generation took for granted. Gardening, making your own cleaning products, sprouts, having a milking goat, sharing allotment land, fixing things, making things, making do, using far less electricity and hot water and other resources than we would consider survivable, entertaining yourself for hours with a stick and walking 15 miles uphill in the snow to school and 15 miles uphill home again...

Either that or the solution revolves around continuing exactly the same lifestyle that created the problems in the first place in new improved ways. As if we expect to find the holy grail technology that will enable us to continue our pursuit of unlimited economic growth and 'more' as a basic right without consequence. Too much demand on resources like oil? No problem, turn all the food –producing land over to biofuel crops, then we can still advertise a Hummer as a sensible prize for our fast food restaurant. (Good work BK, way to read the times). Hmmmm, oil prices are rising, and food prices seem to be up 75%. No problem, use more intensive farming techniques and petrochemical fertilisers... wait, what was the original problem?

How about we drive less and grow our food a little closer to home? New technology and energy efficient production methods are fantastic, but they need to go hand in hand with some down sizing, stepping back, re-imagining, and finding joy in other ways of doing things. As it was when Lally was in the Land Army, I wonder if gardening is again becoming a necessity of the times. I like talking to her generation about this sort of thing because it helps me engage my imagination about the way things could be in my neighbourhood and church community.



The theology of gardening

What follows is a theological encouragement of church-related community gardening, and personal neighbourhood gardening.

Augustine said you should.

Calvin and Luther said you should.

Barth was into it.

Bonhoeffer was a little busy with the war, but would have said you should. Conclusive? Absolutely.

Moreover, over the last 36 months global food prices have gone up 83%, leading to food riots in many of the poorest countries. Even in New Zealand, basics have been pushed out of reach for many families. The United Nations has called it a global food crisis.

There are all sorts of pressures contributing to this crisis. In 1999, oil was \$8 a barrel; in July it was \$140 a barrel. Now it's back down to \$50, but over the long term, the only way is up. The agribusiness industry is not only reliant on oil for mass transportation of foodstuffs around the world, but for every stage of the food process – planting, irrigation, harvesting, processing, storage, distribution and sale – including the heavy use of petrochemical fertilisers.

As the rising food prices cause global hunger, on the other side of town the same multinational agribusinesses have been posting record profits. This is not simply an anti-corporation rant by any means, but it is hard to appreciate Monsanto's net income off the back of food-related products more than doubling in the three months to February, while the World Bank claims 100 million face severe hunger. Their posted profit increased from 1.44 billion to 2.22 billion dollars. Similarly Archer Daniels Midland increased their net earnings by 42% in the same three months and Cargills by 86%.

A further reason often suggested for the price pressure are the emerging economies of nations such as India and China. Their consumption habits are developing to match the consumptive habits of the West. This has meant a huge increase in land being used for meat and dairy production rather than grains. An irony of the often unspoken goal of the 'development' industry. But what happens when everyone consumes to the degree we do?

Australia has suffered huge drought-related crop failure, adding to the difficulties. There are those who would suggest that increasing droughts are climate change issues and therefore, along with oil and consumptive habits, also linked to our lifestyles.

The single biggest factor appears to be the massive growth in biofuel production which has seen huge areas of farmland formerly producing cereals and rice being converted to soy or other specifically biofuel related crops. A recent World Bank paper claims as much as 75% of food price rise has been caused by biofuels. This report hit the world media headlines recently as it seemed the paper had not been intended for release. The World Bank claimed that it wasn't secret, but that the paper was still being sent around for peer review. As such, naming a figure wasn't appropriate. Regardless, the link between biofuel production and food prices (100 million facing starvation) is beyond doubt. What is in doubt is how to respond.

How to respond? Where to start? Perhaps we speak of empire... consumerism... never ending pursuit of 'more'... detachment of production and consumption? The claim 'Jesus is LORD' as a political statement in the face of Empire... an ethic of secession... small acts of resistance

to that which is wrong as the only way to be fully human? Concern for the marginalised and poor... Christian faith about a way of life, not just belief... globalisation creating an indisputable link between lifestyle and the global community... Christian ethics being an act of improvisation within a drama... the Church as prophetic voice re-imagining a more just way to function as community? Communion forming us as one body with those our lifestyle marginalises... food crisis and the above pressures... the Church as a group of people called to live in such a way that bears witness to the justice and love of God? Clearly too much for a gardening booklet. Consider posting a response on www.justice.net.nz, the Anglican Social Justice website.

I believe gardening is part of re-engaging our communal imagination. What is it that we want our neighbourhoods and communities to look like? Do we want to live in communities that are able to look after themselves if oil and food prices continue to rise? Do we want neighbourhoods that learn to reconnect consumption with production? Do we want our church communities involved with a pressing global issue affecting marginalised New Zealand families? To be part of forming resilient communities where food security comes from daily life? I can imagine backyard fences coming down. I can imagine gardening becoming as widespread as it was when my grandmother was a child. I'd love the GDP to put gardens in for people because they want the same gardening opportunity as everyone else, not because they can't afford to go to the shops. I'd like to see city roundabouts growing lemons, apples, rhubarb and silver beet. I'd like to live in the type of community that has time to take a dozen zucchini next door because you just can't eat them all.

Resources and references

Below are just a few resources that I have found really useful for learning. No sense getting overwhelmed with lots of them. Better to find one good one and have a go.

The local gardening shop

One of my favourite reference places. Sometimes you can get what you need a little cheaper at some mega store or another, but the local store will be run by a local gardener who, it has been said, “knows how deep the frost goes here.” Well worth the visit. [See what I did there? I didn’t name Mitreio Mega. I just said “some mega store” but you knew what I meant anyway? Clever.]

The Yates Garden Guide, Harper Collins Publishers: Auckland, New Zealand (2002)

This is a comprehensive guide that also covers fruit trees and flowers; however, it is expensive. The Yates website also has a planting calendar. It does, oddly, seem to keep suggesting Yates seeds even though heritage or heirloom seeds often have yummier varieties that have the advantage of reseeded.

Organic Gardening for New Zealand Gardeners. Random House: Glenfield New Zealand (2004)

This book provides good information about different fruit to organic growing techniques and vegetable varieties. Unfortunately, it does not really have New Zealand specific content.

GardenNZ – www.garden-nz.co.nz

This is a great website that includes a month by month guide for your garden (click the tips/tasks tab. Then the monthly tips and tasks link). You can also sign up for a gardening newsletter. Make sure you specify vegetables, otherwise before you know it you’ll have flowers taking up all that great growing space.

The Star Gardening Book

This is an old Dunedin publication specifically for the area. It has a week-by-week rundown of what you should be planting and doing in your garden and greenhouse throughout the year. Fantastic. If you don’t live in Dunedin, you may be able to find one for your area.

“Why would you live in Dunedin?” I hear you ask with the usual tone of cold weather disgust.

“Dunedin was actually the driest city last year”, I inform you smugly.

“Yes but we have a longer growing season in [anywhere], and it’s warmer.”

“..”

“Well?”

“Not Invercargill.”

“Pardon?”

“..”

Animal, Vegetable, Miracle. Barbara Kingsolver. Harper Collins Inc USA. 2007

This really is fantastic. Just read the first few chapters...

Also, what a fantastic name – Kingsolver. Since names came from professions I assume that if you had a King in the days of old who started introducing stupid laws like, “you’re not allowed to save your seed from one year to the next or harvest what is left in the ground if it grows the following season.” (like Monsanto, who’d have a 10 million dollar budget to prosecute if you do). Then the yokels would get together and after much muttering some guy called Borage would say... “Call the KingSolver.”

Compost - compost.your-info-station.com/index.php

A good compost site if you want to go beyond putting everything in a heap.

My brother. His phone number is 027 412 7183

NZ Gardener Weekly Tips and Advice

Part of the Get Growing campaign to encourage Kiwis to grow their own fruit and vegetables. Send an email to getgrowing@nzgardener.co.nz

For further ideas and inspiration, try the following in your favourite search engine:

Community Supported Agriculture (there is one in Wellington); box schemes, guerrilla and gardening, container gardening

No planting times and guides have been included as there is significant variation around the country. Check with your local gardening store, or buy a comprehensive gardening book (even then a garden store will know about local conditions.) Adjacent I have included a container gardening depth guide to make getting started easier. The chart comes from page 287 of the Yates Garden Guide.

Vegetables in containers

Vegetables

Most Suitable Varieties

Recommended Min. Depth Of Container

Cabbage	Earliball / Sugarball	25cm
Capsicum	All	40cm
Carrot	Baby / Chantenay	25cm
Cress	Salad Curled	10cm
Cucumber	Salad Bush	40cm
Eggplant	All	40cm
Herbs	Many types	20cm
Lettuce	Cos / Salad Mix	25cm
	Buttercrunch	25cm
Mustard	Quick Salad	10cm
Onion	Spring / Shalot Bunching	20cm
Radish		20cm
Silver Beet	Fordhook Giant	25cm
Tomato	Tiny Tim / Small Fry	30cm
Zucchini-marrow	Blackjack hybrid	40cm
	Greyzini hybrid	40cm
	Lebanese	40cm



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