

THE TASMANIAN COMMUNITY FOOD GARDEN

A creative community hub for growing and learning at the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens, in Hobart.

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The much loved and iconic vegetable garden, at the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens, is well known to viewers of ABC Television's Gardening Australia programme as 'The Patch'. In its early days, under the guidance of former host and gardening guru, Peter Cundall - a living legend in Tasmania - it quickly became a popular little pocket of the gardens. And it continues to be a bit of a mecca for visitors to Hobart.

This special part of the gardens (still affectionately regarded as 'Pete's Patch' by some) has continued to evolve and expand over the years. In fact, it is becoming a real hub for community gardening and gardeners, and an inspiring place of learning, in what must be one of the most beautiful classrooms in Australia. And by the way, Peter Cundall loves what has been created here and continues to pop in for garden events.

A Site For Demonstration

The main vegetable garden plays a continuing role as a demonstration site for both the ABC programme and the general public more broadly. Television presenter and keen food gardener, Tino Carnevale, has carried on Peter Cundall's legacy of using a 'six bed vegie patch' as a teaching tool. Both men have inspired many a fellow gardener to cultivate their own



The SecondBite gardening crew.

little patch or further develop their productive gardening skills. Countless techniques have been demonstrated, relating to all manner of vegetables, and many tips and practical skills have been shared, covering everything from composting and the creation of healthy soil, to crop rotation and organic pest control.

Tino has also been involved in presenting some of the educational gardening workshops that the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens has developed for members of the public. He has enjoyed helping to guide various community groups as well, in the establishment and

development of their own plots within the food garden.

A Source of Inspiration

Signifying a new and progressive approach for a botanical garden, a beautifully designed and greatly expanded version of the vegetable garden was officially launched last year as 'The Tasmanian Community Food Garden'. Largely thanks to seed funding from the Tasmanian Government's Community Fund, plus in-kind support from the Botanical Gardens and its

dedicated staff, in relation to the garden's design, construction and ongoing management.

Community and school groups have been invited to take out their own plots within this garden space, and teams of volunteers regularly come in to tend their garden beds and harvest the produce. These groups, made up of people from diverse ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, include the Red Cross, disability groups, various Community Houses, 'Veterans and Families', the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) '24 Carrot Gardens Project' (with a demonstration plot highlighting kitchen gardens in schools), supportive housing organisation Common Ground, and the food rescue and redistribution service SecondBite.

Many of these groups are part of a coalition known as 'Feeding the Future', which has the aim of improving the food security of all Tasmanians - especially those individuals and communities with

lower incomes or other challenges, who may be at greater risk of not having sufficient food to eat, especially fresh, healthy food.

A Centre for Learning

Following the transformation of 'The Patch' into the Tasmanian Community Food Garden, the beds have grown from the original six to more than 20. Along with the adjoining 'education pod' for workshops and training, the end result is the creation of a special place for collaboration and learning.

Community engagement and education have become an important focus for the Botanical Gardens. On-site workshops, hosted by experienced horticulturists, feature a range of topics and often include hands-on and practical demonstrations relating to growing food and gardening through the seasons. Members of the public are invited to take part in



A healthy crop of brassicas and greens.

these inexpensive sessions (free for Community Food Garden members and groups), generally held over the warmer months.

Botanical Gardens staff have also been involved in running certificate courses in horticulture as well as outreach sessions in various regional communities. This supplementary educational program is helping to empower people and communities with the skills and confidence to grow their own food. At the same time, enhancing their ability to connect with others within their communities. Seeds and seedlings, ideas, excess produce and even meals are shared when people come together at community centres and events.



Erin Grainger has reconnected with a childhood love of gardening.



A workshop on plant propagation takes place in the nursery.



A sea of green – aesthetic and productive.



Darren Evans harvests fresh, healthy food for his community group.

Tino Carnevale, from Gardening Australia – at home in the vegie patch.
(Photo Courtesy of RTBG)



Beautiful quince flowers – signs of spring.



A Model for the Future

At the Tasmanian Community Food Garden, the local volunteers who help out their respective community groups often remark about the welcoming and relaxed environment that the Botanical Gardens provides. There are many benefits to being involved. Firstly, the participants find the act of gardening itself to be quite therapeutic and they get a lot out of the social interaction with fellow gardeners and staff. They also really appreciate the opportunity to learn new skills and constructively contribute to the development and maintenance of this productive garden. And an added bonus is the

harvesting of fresh, nutritious food to take back to their communities and groups. Any surplus produce is donated to SecondBite, for distribution to emergency food relief programmes and people in need. Nothing goes to waste!

The design of the garden makes the most of the gently sloping site and includes tiered levels, with quite an extensive series of raised beds, seating and even a small outdoor amphitheatre, all surrounded by a myriad of fruit trees. All in all the Community Garden is a lovely place to visit, at any time of year. It's also a great place to learn about growing food - from observing the demonstration sites firsthand to taking part in workshops. There is certainly



Staff enjoy working with the volunteers in the garden.

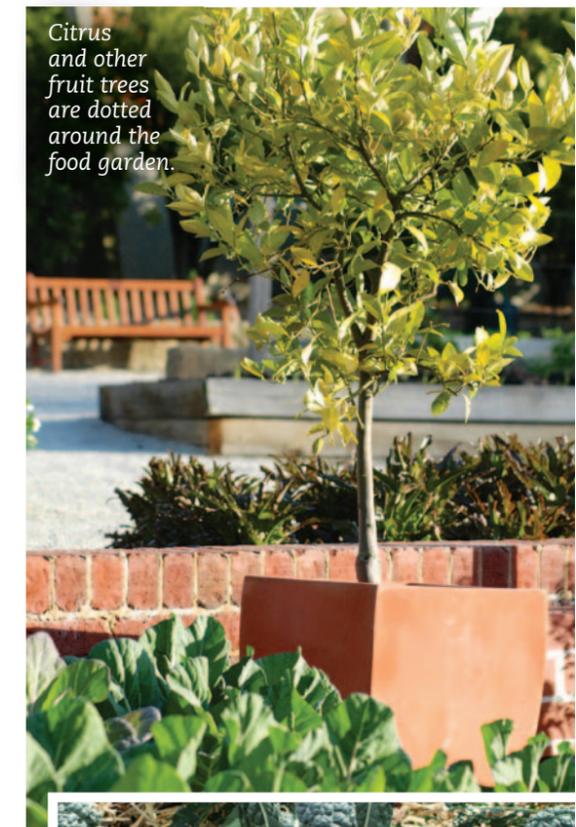
Ex-hotelier, Tony Heath, gets a lot out of being a volunteer.



Sara Brain enjoys doing something positive for the community.



Citrus and other fruit trees are dotted around the food garden.



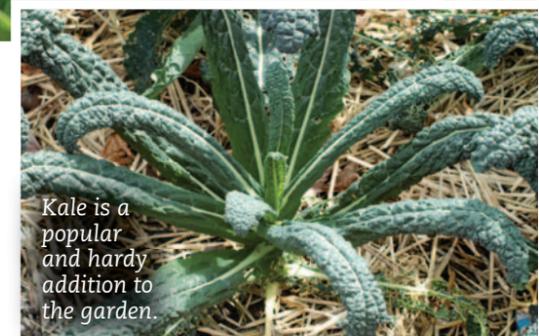
SecondBite – Redistributing Fresh, Healthy Food

SecondBite has the most active group of volunteers within the community garden - tending not just their own dedicated plot but also providing valuable assistance to gardens staff in other parts of the food garden. In return, this not-for-profit organisation gets access to much of the general food that is harvested. Reaching the first tonne of harvested food, six months after the garden's opening, marked a major milestone.

The healthy and nutritious food is distributed to SecondBite's network of welfare agencies and community groups in need. Some of the individual recipients have in turn, started helping out in the garden, developing valuable

skills in the process and further strengthening the pool of volunteers. Some participants have even started cultivating pots and plots at home – putting their new skills to good use.

Aaron Kropf, State Manager of SecondBite Tasmania, says the gardens staff have been tremendous and very supportive, mentoring volunteers and demonstrating in a very practical way, how to grow good food. "The staff highlight just what you can do with a small plot of land and it's great for members of the community to be able to learn about fresh, healthy food in a working environment," he explains. "The programme gives everyone the opportunity to participate and be involved in learning how to grow their own fruit and vegetables, including people who wouldn't normally have access to this sort of training and information. That's been a real benefit to many in the community."



Kale is a popular and hardy addition to the garden.