

Food Production

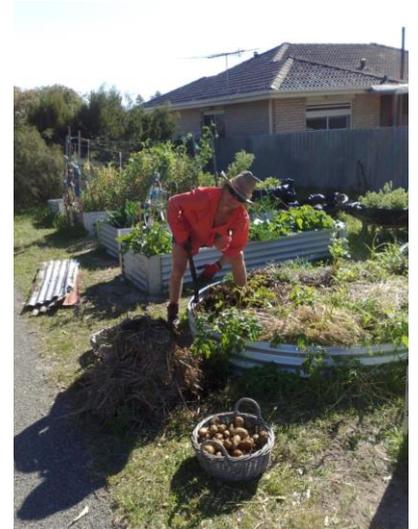
We have attempted to use as much of the space we can for food production. Neither of us are gardeners and we still have a lot to learn. Shani finds Diggers Seed Club and the Organic Growers Association great support. And there is a lot to be said for trial and error!



We find it really satisfying to be able to wander out of the front door or down the street and make a salad fresh from the garden. And, despite quite limited space, we have gone for nearly 3 years

producing about 90% of our veggie needs.

Despite water restrictions, producing your own food is much more water efficient—David Holgrem suggests can be up to six times more water efficient than commercially grown food. Other benefits include reduced carbon emissions, fossil fuel use, the ability to recycle waste into compost and the obvious health



benefits of eating organic food and digging in the garden. It also reminds us that our food comes from the earth and we need to cherish and protect it.



Guerrilla Gardening

Living in the suburbs of Fremantle, it can be pretty tricky to find enough space to grow your own food, and it is particularly hard to find space which receives enough sunlight.

After watching "The Power Of Community" - a DVD about how the Cubans' used suburban gardens to feed themselves following the collapse of the Soviet economy and trade sanctions by the US, we decided to make use of some of the "underutilised" land around us.



We have established gardens on the road reserve near the cycleway to the beach and on our verge, following the concept of "ask for forgiveness, not for permission".



This area is our Hulbert Street Guerilla Garden. Participants in our Living Smart courses have assisted in the development of several raised bed vege gardens. The neighbourhood kids help with planting and share the produce.

We find people tend to make three comments as they go past this garden First they say "Hey this is fantastic! Good on

you" and start telling you about their garden at home. Second they say is "don't people steal your stuff or wreck it?" - and the answer is not much.

And lastly they say "Did the council give you permission?"

Raised Beds from Rusty Roofs

To the east of The Painted Fish and spotted down the street are a series of raised garden beds - most of them were made from old tin when our neighbour Sandra replaced her roof, and flashing Tim scavenged from a skip.



These raised beds are useful because the sand in south Fremantle is very fine, powdery and hydrophobic. We found that building up the soil with compost does work but it takes a really long time.

Some of these beds were filled with an organic vege soil from the Green Life Soil Company, others were filled using the no dig method, and others were filled with a mixture of our compost and sandy loam.

We started showing people how to make these beds when so many people commented that they could not afford "new" raised beds, or found old tanks increasingly difficult to find. We also love reusing "waste" material.



No Dig Garden Soil

Shani is especially keen on making no dig garden soil. It reminds her of making a lasagne - a bit of preparation in getting all the materials together but it comes together so quickly once you are organised - and such flavours when it is all combined!

She uses a "recipe" from Josh Byrne's great book "Green Gardening" (if you buy one gardening book buy this one!) The no dig beds here were created by layering dry leaves, green weeds, straw, sheep manure, lucerne, cow manure, more lucerne and mushroom compost.



Really it is like a bit compost heap - you leave it for a while and then plant away!

Most no dig instructions will suggest putting your bed on a layer of carpet or wet newspapers. Others swear by geotextile weed mat, still others use plastic sheeting.



We have tried all of these in our garden and can tell you one thing - couch grass is very persistent! We recommend digging it out before you start.

Reticulation

Shani loves reticulation and always sleeps well when she successfully 'retics' a new bed. She once had a neighbour come running concerned about her excited screaming and running around in a circle—she had put the retic on for the first time and it all worked!

We converted all our vege garden beds to under mulch drip irrigation. Drip irrigation can reduce your water use by up to 60%.

We have used a system called KISS (Capillary Irrigation Sub-Surface System) This is a sub surface irrigation system for potable or treated greywater, that combines existing drip lines with a new form of geotextile covering, to prevent root incursion and distribute the water more evenly. Sadly this product is no longer available in WA.

We find the system much more effective than spray or standard drip irrigation. You do have to watch it since you don't see the water under the mulch however and the plants do take a while to get used to it.



Winter Sunlight



One of the vege gardens at the Painted Fish, while very productive in summer, was rendered useless in winter due to the neighbour's two storey house.

The idea of mirrors on the wall of the house was borrowed from Mawson House. Tim drew scale drawings and found that the distance and angle from the garden was perfect to reflect noonday sun at the winter solstice across the full width of the garden.

We scrounged the local salvage yards, bought three old wardrobe mirrors for \$300, and Tim installed them. Because we used the original sliders, the mirrors can be lifted in and out.

The garden still struggles mid season but is one of the most productive beds in mid winter.

In summer the sun angle means that the heat and light are reflected down onto the path. We do get the odd March day when things can get a bit hot in the vege patch but we did not have to remove the mirrors last summer.

Compost

Tim and Shani are a bit addicted to composting. Our compost bays are our main source of conditioning for our soil. Every two or three weeks we turn the mature compost into the garden, turn the immature compost over into the next bay to help aerate it and make a new batch of compost.

We use alternative layers of carbon in the form of straw, dried leaves or lawn clippings, shredded paper etc and nitrogen in the form of green vegetable matter and food scraps with a layer of fresh manure (sheep, horse, chicken etc) in between. We keep adding layers until we get a one metre square batch.



We collect compost materials from a local lawn mowing contractor, neighbours, our goats rabbits and chooks, and our own garden.



We have located one set of compost bays directly under the studio windows. People will tell you that compost stinks, but none of our guests have ever mentioned the smell - we must be doing it right!

Materials Collection

We have found that as we get more into composting, we are constantly scrounging for materials.

We get help from all sorts of people -

Our local lawn mower brings us lawn clippings.

We collect tree prunings from the cycle way and we use our mulcher to turn them into garden mulch.

We collect horse poo from the local stables.

Friends and neighbours are a great source of green waste and food scraps.

Our local council has a spot where you can collect free mulch every two months or so.

And all of it is stored on one of the road verges waiting for the next compost making day. By having an area to collect all the "goodies" the whole process is more enjoyable and productive.

