

There is nothing more satisfying than growing mint for your mojito, paw paw and lime for your breakfast and eggplants for your babaganoush. These are some of the rewards I am reaping after turning a palm garden into a productive garden over the past 16 years. When I first moved into 20 Clarke Crescent, I was in awe of the 15 metre high coconut palms and the tropical feel of the garden created by mass plantings of Golden Cane, Foxtail palms, Carpentaria palms, Date palms and any other palm you can imagine. I loved the garden. What I quickly came to realise about this palm garden was the high maintenance involved in collecting palm fronds. With a reticulation system in place, the garden was regularly watered. I started to wonder about the money spent on water and the lack of edible benefits I was getting from the garden. The other problem was that with so many palms, it was impossible to plant a productive fruit tree and grow it successfully without the palm roots impinging on it and stunting its growth.

I made a decision to get rid of all the palm trees in my garden. The bigger palms were removed by an arborist; the smaller ones I took out myself. Planning the new garden, choosing fruit trees and planting them was the fun part. The garden is now packed with fruit trees including: lime, lemon, ruby grapefruit, jackfruit, mangosteen, sapodilla, black sapote, starfruit, star apple, mulberry, passionfruit, paw paw and soursop. In one sunny area you will notice chilies, lemongrass, basil, eggplant, pineapple and tomato plants. I have been particularly successful at growing eggplants with one in 2018 weighing in at 920 grams! All my productive plants grow really well in full sun with some horse manure, hay mulch and plenty of water.

Chickens have always been an integral part of my garden – for their eggs and manure. You will notice a secure area for them with plenty of shade, hay and roosting areas. I planted productive trees in the chicken coop area to provide the chooks with shade and also to benefit the trees which they unknowingly fertilise. Having the chooks along the front fence provides entertainment for children in the neighbourhood coming to visit them and creates a friendly community atmosphere.

Managing with no reticulation system now, I use the sprinkler on all the productive trees and also water by hand. I have filled in the rest of the garden with NT native bird and bee attracting trees which require minimal water. One of my favourite trees in the garden is the Ylang Ylang tree which is native to the Philippines and Indonesia. It seems to grow well in this climate and its flowers have an incredible perfume which is strongest at night. This tree is a must for any NT garden!

Favourite tools	Compost method	Go to garden product	Best fertiliser
Mattock – for digging out palm roots and digging holes for new fruit trees. Crowbar – for prising out golden cane stems.	Directly throw all kitchen scraps into the chook coop or under a fruit tree. Note: no compost bin used in my garden.	Hay for the chook coop and to mulch around the garden.	Horse manure.