

Ben & Katie's Paradise

The backyard was a blank slate with only the pool when we bought the house in 2011. What started as a desire to grow food for our family has evolved into a love of both edible and ornamental plants, colours, smells, shapes and forms, and the wildlife that comes with these elements.

The first raised veggie bed along the back fence was constructed in April 2012. With the additional ones following soon after. For the first few years we grew relatively successful dry season crops that transcended nicely into wet season crops. After a few years the soil was tired and growing food started to get hard. Attending a 2-day biodynamic gardening course in 2017 introduced Katie to hot composting with biodynamics and using plants and flowers to attract beneficial insects, birds and lizards. This new insight aided in creating healthy soil and ecosystems in new garden beds that were emerging thick and fast. The lower part of the garden was transformed into a food forest around this time. Established garden beds are now topped up with horse and cow poo twice a year and then covered with mulching hay. Liquid chook poo brew is fed to the garden on a full moon and worm wee on the dark moon.

Embracing the permaculture principle of catch and store energy, a solar shower which drains into the garden below was installed, along with the 5000L rainwater tank for watering the garden during the dry season. This was the beginning of the Bali garden nestled under cooling shade sails. The heliconia's, cannas and ginger bring in a variety of birds and insects and provide a lovely supply of cut flowers for compostable gifts.

The chickens help to process garden green waste and only get fed a small amount of food scraps each morning so they will eat it all by night, helping to avoid feeding rats. Compost bins are dug into the garden or sit on top of aviary mesh that is then wrapped up around the sides, another measure to reduce rodents. A lot of green waste is simply chopped and dropped onto garden beds where it quickly breaks down and provides habitat for lizards and a variety of insects.

When it comes to wildlife, we know there are children's pythons and other larger pythons that have been sighted in the neighbourhood. A few cheeky tree monitors frequent the garden also. In 2019 the biggest surprise was evidence that a bandicoot was frequenting the garden and digging nose-deep holes every night looking for worms and other small insects. The bandicoot was also digging in larger pots where we had previously had problems with curl grubs. Bandicoots can be found along the bushland escarpment on Chung Wah Terrace, only a street away. The frog hotel is usually fully occupied year-round, and the clam shell bog results in dragonflies thriving throughout the year also.

The highest and driest point of the block at the front fence was transformed into a native garden 8 months ago and has established beautifully over the wet. Likewise, the plantings along the alleyway fence are also relatively new having been planted only 18 months ago.

Plans for the future include raised veggie beds next to the carport where they will receive sun year-round, a few more water tanks and a small garden shed. Continuing to garden within our family's realistic time limits is a big priority as our children continue to grow and explore different weekend sports. Luckily for us we have tapped into food that grows happily year-round in our beautiful tropical environment.

This weekend we are supporting Harvest Corner Community Garden in Gray and Good Shepherd Lutheran College Palmerston.

We hope you enjoy exploring our garden.

Regards,

Katie, Ben, Cobalt & Magenta.