



CAMDEN

cornucopia

Find inspiration in the transformation of a forlorn estate into a showcase property, complete with the quintessential kitchen garden

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Photos by Diane Norris

When my husband Larry and I first set eyes on Glenmore House near Camden on the outskirts of Sydney some 24 years ago, the property consisted of a collection of rather forlorn farm buildings sitting higgledy-piggledy in an undulating landscape, unhedged, unfenced and without running water. The *raison d'être* of each of these buildings had all but vanished and it would take many years of restoration and garden-making to establish the sense of permanence that exists at Glenmore today.

Creating a kitchen garden was a high priority and I was delighted to discover an ideal position for one: behind the old dairy. So I managed to persuade Larry that we should make an immediate start. I had visions

of intricate, traditional gardens in my head — neatly laid-out rows of lettuce, leeks and plate-sized cabbages. I don't mind confessing that my Beatrix Potter notion was short lived.

I had some fun with beds of tomatoes and basil and other lovely combinations that we all enjoy on our plates. But, with multiple beds, all beautifully edged in rosemary, it soon became too much to look after, especially with a young family and work commitments to think about. It wasn't long before rabbits ate the rosemary and pretty much everything else was attacked by every pest you can name. The kitchen garden had to be put on hold for a while.

I was not to be deterred, however, and, although I continued to grow a few peas, beans and tomatoes just outside the kitchen each year, eventually the time was



right to get back to the original plan.

I knew I wanted to grow as much of our fresh produce as possible, implementing organic methods — and not just from an edible point of view but from an aesthetically pleasing one too. I also hatched a plan to launch Kitchen Gardening Days, realising by this time that I wasn't alone in my quest for knowledge about growing organic produce.

So, armed with a vision for Kitchen Gardening Days at Glenmore, I set out to find someone



It took 25 years with lots of ideas and hard work to create the thriving organic kitchen garden at Glenmore House

who could ensure our own kitchen garden would be a success this time around.

Surprisingly, it took some time, for although there were many landscape garden designers there were not so many who really understood how to grow vegies organically.

Ultimately, I found Steve Batley of Sydney Organic Gardens, who confirmed that the footprint of my first kitchen garden would indeed be ideal to work with. It's Steve I have to thank for explaining to me all the bits of information that seemed to be missing from what I was reading, from crop rotation to companion planting.

With my views on the visual as well as the edible aspects taken into account, we devised the straightforward plan that underpins the kitchen garden at Glenmore and implemented two garden concepts within the original framework: a series of traditional crop-rotation beds as well as beds for guild planting which is a natural gardening method used by those who follow the principles of permaculture.

Next on the list was to find someone who could teach those who were as equally excited about growing edibles but who were hesitating about where to start. I wanted a qualified horticulturalist who would be able to answer all those curly questions that were bound to be asked and, once again, someone who really knew about growing organic vegies. Although it took me years to find her, eventually the

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indefatigable Linda Ross appeared on my radar and the rest, as they say, is history.

Kitchen gardening has completely changed the order of my life and I thoroughly recommend it to anyone tossing around the romantic notion of creating a potager of their own. I can't pretend it isn't hard work, and it does take time, but what a delicious time in the day it is, whether watering early on a summer morning, the pungent scent of herbs overwhelming the senses, or tying up peas on a chilly winter afternoon.

The aerobic exercise you get from pushing a wheelbarrow of compost and shovelling it out onto your garden is far more satisfactory than any time spent in an indoor gymnasium. And the exercise gained in the process of making your



MICKEY'S TIPS

• Never plant tomatoes with potatoes. I can't recall where I read it, but it isn't something that's likely to stick in your mind unless you've had practical experience. I allowed self-seeded tomatoes to do their thing and it's true: tomatoes near potatoes will render your potatoes no larger than marbles.



• Soak beetroot seed overnight before planting.
• Try scattering blood and bone to keep rabbits away.
• Sow two seeds for each plant you want. Remove the one I call the "insurance policy" once both plants have reached good strength.

own compost is a boost not only to your own health but also to the health of your soil and your produce. My mantra remains: "Feed the soil, not the plant!"

I take enormous delight in building structures each season for peas, beans and tomatoes; whether teepees, tunnels and boxes, or in simply using prunings for cages to mark out where I've sown seed. I've discovered that the process of kitchen gardening tends to make you extremely resourceful and there are many ideas you will discover that you must try, all accompanied by varying rates of success.

Still-lives abound for anyone who grows food and there is always great joy to be had in collecting a basket of colourful fruit and vegies. The keen gardener will be rewarded with a plethora of pickings for the window sill or kitchen table. Edible flower arrangements are something to behold and the sheer beauty of vegetables or herbs let go to flower then seed is likely to prove a great source of delight.

As for the lucky gardener, he or she will revel in the joy of eating the first pea or broad bean of the season, asparagus cut straight from the earth or a tasty, red-blushed tomato. Never again will you be unsure of what produce is in season or out and you will probably find four or five different veg on your plate — the result of



the season's comings and goings. As one vegie comes on, another will be in full flight and yet another will be on the way out.

For example, you may have a mountain of broccoli, an assortment of peas and some fennel but very few broad beans. These may be joined by parsnips or turnips but, if the aforementioned

Though Mickey once dreamed of formal designs, the garden grew organically — in more ways than one



- 1 Citrus, like this lemon, grow in the formal house gardens too
- 2 Purple beans are among Glenmore's seasonal produce
- 3 Mickey (wearing her favourite big straw hat) runs one of her kitchen gardening days at Glenmore
- 4 The gardens have changed dramatically from the symmetrical layout Mickey initially envisaged

vegies are the ones you've harvested for dinner, it means it's early spring and so you won't be combining them with asparagus or globe artichokes (yet) — and certainly not tomatoes, capsicums, aubergines, zucchini or beans.

The best thing of all is you will have carried a bountiful basket no further than from garden to kitchen, with no trip to the shops required. You will find you use fewer recipes as you really don't need to do very much to just-picked produce. The health benefits are obvious, while the results are delicious: an omelette here, wilted greens there, a simple sorrel pistou sauce to fold through your pasta and great bowls of salad leaves and petals. Not to mention jams and marmalade, crumbles and ice-cream. A kitchen gardener is never caught without a little present at hand.

And so to all would-be kitchen gardeners, I have no hesitation in encouraging you on your own exhilarating journey. Be patient, start small and learn from your mistakes. You will most definitely reap delightful rewards for the eye, your table, your health and, without question, your very soul.

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