

FRANCISCO & MICHAEL'S FOOD GARDEN

Hello and welcome to 2 Hope Street. We hope that you enjoy our garden!

14 years ago we moved to 'Hannah our house of hope' which sits on lands that are home to the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and the Bunurong peoples of the Kulin Nation (West Footscray), which is six kms from Naarm (Melbourne) CBD. Hannah is a wooden cottage that sits on a 354 m² suburban block.

Hannah, called Fluffy by her neighbours in the street, was the owner who had lived in the house since 1940 and had been a florist. As a florist, Hannah had planted many flowering plants in the front yard like roses, *strelitzia*, *camelias*, *magnolia Stellata*, *daphne*, *hoya* (inside) and dwarf calla lilies. In the backyard she had a lemon tree, cumquat tree and a hibiscus. Having this sense of a gardening lineage adds a layer of care and appreciation to creating and growing our garden. We have only lost the diseased lemon tree and some roses.

We already knew we wanted vegetable beds, but with an east facing garden we decided to establish them in the front yard to avoid the crippling afternoon sun in the backyard. The house is also set back from the street and it made sense to utilise the larger front yard for our vegetable beds. West Footscray was a working-class suburb, made up of locals, returned service people and immigrants from countries such as Italy, Greece, Poland and Vietnam. Establishing the vegetable beds in the front yard attracted many compliments from our older neighbours who, through necessity, had grown their own food and recognised something familiar and right in what we were doing.

Removing lawn that has been in place for 70 years by hand is no picnic, though we did discover large and fat worms threaded throughout the clay soil. We started with small areas like the verge, moving onto the garden beds and overtime removed all the lawn on our small patch of land.

Our soil is basically grey sticky clay for two meters with 40cm of topsoil. Because of that we dug coffin sized holes under the raised vegetable beds and filled them with scoria. This helps absorb rainwater, a kind of wicking system, that can supply the beds and prevent the front yard from flooding with the torrential rain we now get. Over time our soil has been improved with compost, manures and soil blends and is now brimming with worms and micro organisms.

Starting with small ground level garden beds we set about understanding what would grow well, even experimenting with bananas in Melbourne's cold climate. Not so good. They were tiny but the flowers were pretty.

Anticipating our middle and later years, we raised the garden beds and created stable paths. There was a cement path that ran the length of the block and when we started to pull this up, discovered the 1940s brick path beneath. We uncovered that path, saved the bricks and used them 10 years later to lay new paths. We added to this stockpile (who would've thought, one little wooden house would have so many bricks) by repurposing salvaged bricks from the two external chimneys we had to pull down.

GARDEN NOTES

We dug out the area where the beds would be and screwed together hardwood frames, using pebbles for the paths around them, and mulched the rest of the garden. Over time we have built reo-archways and walls for fruit and berries, espalier runs for almonds, limes and pears and smaller ground level beds to add alternative heights to the garden.

Every foot of soil is real estate for growing a productive garden. We've planted fruit trees near the house to provide shade in summer, a leafy place to sit away from the sun and to also add mid-level height as the garden comes up to meet the house.

While the front yard is our 'working' garden, the backyard is a different thing altogether. We wanted to create an oasis that provided food but was quiet and calm, with dappled light and spaces to gather or rest. We planted a fig tree in the middle of the backyard for our son to play in when he was little. That tree has now become the central point for the small back garden and it is incredibly productive, yielding hundreds of figs a year which our neighbours enjoy eating.

We curved irregular bluestone pavers around the fig to a paved area with a high pergola that we've planted with a Japanese wisteria. On the fence side of that curved path we planted various citrus that enjoy the afternoon sun and make use of the rich soil that had been left from the old dunny run. We kept chooks for many years and their run along the back fence added rich manure to the soil. Under and behind those we have ferns, various groundcovers and bromeliads to add lushness and a sense of tranquillity. On the inside curve of the path, around the fig and against the back veranda, we planted all our kitchen and medicinal herbs, flowers for the pollinators and house, and added a permanent water bowl for bees and birds in summer.

Our street verge is a mix of grevilleas, kangaroo paw, wattle, pig face and native grasses with introduced plants such as elderberry, rosemary, lemon verbena, mint and comfrey. The soil is poorer here to suit the natives and if anything else can be added and survives, it stays!

To date we've planted over 29 trees and currently have 17 different vegetable types in the garden as well as 19 herbs and medicinal flowers, and too many ornamental flowers to count.

Because of our planting we now have New Holland honey eaters, wattle birds, finches, parakeets, galahs, cockatoos, pigeons, crows, native and European bees, wasps, ladybugs (as well as all the pests) visiting, nesting, resting, eating and creating homes in our garden.

Because of our garden we have made friends, fed our neighbours, exchanged ideas and information with people who understand the importance of prioritising habitat and above all, our garden has connected our family with our community, the land we live on and, each other.

Francisco and Michael's Food Garden is located on the lands of the Wurundjeri and Bunurong people. Open Gardens Victoria wish to acknowledge the Traditional custodians and we pay respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

**These notes can be downloaded from the Open Gardens Victoria website:
www.opengardensvictoria.org.au**