

# Edible Backyard



Greetings Edible Backyarders,

What an unsettling summer! Inconsistent weather has such a big impact on our crops – very hot followed by very cold, or wet followed by dry - stresses our gardens right on out. So if your crops are less than abundant, pest levels high and plant health low – it could be due to our very mad season.

The hot/ cold extremes have really affected my outside tomatoes – the leaves are thickened and curled up and the crops not as big as usual. The big winds have really affected my beans not to mention blown most of my apple crop off, and all the plums off. Infact the winds were so strong they even blew my big luscious zucchini right out of the ground. Factor the weather into your assessment of your crops' success (or otherwise). For example my passionfruits were just putting out their new shoots when we got snow – they are still recovering and this year's crop is poor. **How can we be smart gardeners and still grow well in these extreme weathers? Weather is out of our control, but there are still improvements we can make to our gardens to moderate the climate within.**

**Here's some ideas...**

1. More than ever we need to be creating lots of sheltered micro climates. Small is easier to create...little pockets of sanctuary for our most tender and vulnerable crops. You must get out in your winds to really understand them (don't sit inside and watch!) After all my lost fruit this year I obviously need more shelter for my deciduous orchard. This winter we are going to use our local manuka to create slat fences – we'll see how they help. In the vegie patch I am going to be smarter about using taller crops to protect the more tender ones – robust tall crops like oats, wheat and lupins are fab for this job, and a seasonal wind break is excellent in an everchanging place like a vegie patch.

2. Growing the right variety is another key to success. Find varieties that cope with well at your place and save your own seed year after year to develop a strong relationship between your plants and your eco system. Join your local seed bank/ seed swap (our local one is <http://seedysundaynz.blogspot.com/> ) and talk to gardening neighbours about what works well for them (especially older ones who have been living in your hood a long time.)
3. Make sure the varieties and rootstocks of your fruit trees match your eco system too. Many folks are determined to plant the varieties they know (comfort from the familiar!). These are often supermarket varieties bred for commercial operations and grown miles away in completely different environments eg: black doris, golden queen, braeburn. I promise you there are varieties out there that have excellent taste, and are far better suited to your region and the home garden. Check out local fruit experts like Sarah Frater at [www.ediblegarden.co.nz](http://www.ediblegarden.co.nz), or join local groups like treecroppers to get the lowdown on what works well in your area. Once again hit up those wise, older folks over the fence!
4. Diversity is key – gardening insurance means growing a variety of varieties so that you are covered no matter what the season. (It takes time to do the trial and error and learn what works for you). Three types of beans for me to suit hot or cool or windy summers (purple pod, dalmation and great lakes in that order). I am so pleased to have the “Great Lakes” this summer as the other two have slowed down after all that wind!
5. Finally healthy, strong soil. I know, I know it’s the standard answer, but tis so true! The more robust our soils the more robust our plants. Robust plants are better able to cope with extremes of weather (amongst other things). I am so impressed with my outside tomatoes – hanging on in there against all odds, looking ratty and with nowhere near the amount of cropping.... but still okay considering.

**February is the beginning of a very busy time for us food gardeners.** Firstly its time to reflect on the year just been and consider any improvements that need to be made. For me this means creating more effective shelter.

**February is also time to be planning ahead for the next 12 months.** Just as your summer garden is bearing fruits you need to be getting ready for autumn/ winter vege. I have just sown my first lot of brassicas and my first brassica bed is percolating away beneath a crop of lupins. Fortnightly sowings for the next few months will give you staggered harvests. How many brassicas do you eat each week? And what types of brassicas do you eat? Answer these questions and garden accordingly to make your garden work really well for you.

Here are the details of my next “Season by Season in the Vegie Patch” to help you through:

## **Autumn in the Organic Vegie Patch**

**Date: Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> March    Time: 9.30 – 12.30    Price: \$68.00**

**Autumn Diary** (March, April, May); Wander the vegie patch and potager and see what I'm up to; **Know your crops**: the art of **celery**, growing good **garlic**, the importance of **broadbeans**, winter **brassicas**, how to have **salads** all through winter, **companion flowers** for spring; **Autumn cleanup and preparing your beds for winter**; **Planning your crops** for winter; **DIPEL** for sale to help with cabbage whites!

**For more info see [www.ediblebackyard.co.nz](http://www.ediblebackyard.co.nz)**

Of course we are also heading into the major preserving and seed saving months. There will be a few late nights round here as I garden in the daylight; and seed save and bottle at night.

### **Seed to sow this month:**

- Tray Sow: Salads, winter brassicas, parsley,
- Direct Sow: coriander, rocket, carrots, beetroot, parsnip, greencrops
- Flowers: Alyssum, calendula, chamomile, wallflower, cornflower, larkspur, delphinium

### **Planting out this month:**

- Salads, brassicas, leeks
- Stocks, calendulas, chamomile, hollyhocks

### **Other Jobs:**

- Keep a good eye on your tomatoes for blight. If you are lucky enough to have a supply of raw organic milk then dilute this 1 to 9 and spray on your tomatoes weekly as a preventative.
- Preparations are under way for autumn/ winter crops – make lots of compost and add roksolid to your beds
- Keep your eyes on your pears and plums for pear slug. I use potash or flour and simply throw it over the tree to stop those slugs in their tracks.
- How are your apples – any codling moth sign? Throw infected apples to the chooks or pigs and plan for traps next spring.

**For those of you planning more fruit trees this year** – now is the time to decide where you will be putting your new trees and what you'll be growing. Choosing the right fruit tree for the right place is key to their success. Especially important is getting the right rootstock to ensure you get the right size tree. In two weeks time I'm running my orchard design course to help you make smart decisions. Sarah's inspiring 2012 catalogue [www.ediblegarden.co.nz](http://www.ediblegarden.co.nz) will be ready in a couple of months – I recommend waiting to see what she has in store then put your order in for winter. Bare root really is the way to go for deciduous fruit trees!

**Which Fruit Tree (pip/ stone fruit) goes where?** *For your fruit trees to be successful you need to put the right variety (on the right rootstock) in the right place! This workshop will teach you how.*

**Date:** Saturday 11th February    **Time:** 2pm – 5pm    **Price:** \$70.00

With smart planning, even a tiny backyard can grow fruit. You'll learn the differences between pip and stone fruits, and how to create the perfect environment for each of them to flourish in. Learn how to choose varieties and rootstocks that work best in our bio region, best orchard herbs, and how to prune and plant your newbies.

**For more info see [www.ediblebackyard.co.nz](http://www.ediblebackyard.co.nz)**

**Matt and I went on a Beginner Cheese making course at Half Cow Farm** a few weekends ago. It was so inspiring we started our dairy adventure as soon as we got home! Yoghurt and quark are easy and save you lots of money (you really don't need to use those supermarket kits). Janine is a very welcoming and down to earth teacher who made everything seem so simple. Fresh cheese and yoghurts use everyday items from your home. The only things I have bought are some rennet for haloumi and mozzarella, and a second hand easiyo incubator for \$5.00. Janine will be at our festival teaching yoghurt making; and selling yoghurt making kits and cheese kits among other things. To find out when her next course is join her email list on [scottjanine@xtra.co.nz](mailto:scottjanine@xtra.co.nz), I highly recommend it.

**How are your tomatoes going?** What a tough summer for them (god bless the cocktails who survive regardless!) Keep a close eye for any stem rots and sudden wilts – viruses are sudden and spread quickly and often the only solution is to pull the plant out. If you do pull them - don't throw your tomatoes away - simply hang the plant upside down under cover, and let the tomatoes ripen anyway.

Here's a few tips to help get them through till the sun arrives.

- Visualise a healthy abundant plant (don't work on your tomatoes with anxiety – it spreads!)
- A generous handful of vermicastings worked into the soil beneath.
- A weekly foliar spray with fish or seaweed. Use the whey from your cheesemaking for the soil.
- I am spraying cutonic copper fortnightly (for the first time in 6 years!) and I am also dabbing copper on any pruning cuts just in case.
- Only prune/ delateral on dry days and with clean tools/ fingers.
- Choose your best plants this year to save seed from, and get serious next year about your bed preparation!

One of our favourite tomatoes this season has been the Bloody Butcher. They have a unique flavour, very tasty – better than many of the greenhouse toms (apart from Brandywine – surely

the most divine tomato!) The Bloody Butchers have been ripening since the end of December – even in this crazy weather - I will definitely be saving the seed from these.

---

## Herbal news from Ali

Summer greetings,

The New Year is the perfect time to make your health and wellbeing a top priority, because without it not many of our other goals are achievable.

It's a great time to remind yourself that your body's default state is health. No matter what else is going on, every cell in your body is programmed to return to its balanced state - health. What a good thought, and good thoughts affect our cells too!

To achieve good health we simply need to support this wonderful, natural process. Do this by supplying your body with all the nutrients it requires; and by avoiding exposing your body to artificial additives (which require extra energy resources to eliminate them.) When we can't eliminate we get toxic build up, a depressed immune system and illness. All the while our bodies are still using their precious energy to return to health, so why not make it easier!

A daily conscious awareness of this concept is the first step to taking responsibility for your health and is a great goal for 2012.

Herbs are a wonderful companion to this process; they not only provide nutrition but also supply goodies that support our organs to eliminate waste and toxic build up. One of the most abundant and useful herbs for this is **Dandelion**, *Taraxacum officinale*.

The **Roots** contain – Vitamins: A,B,C and D; Minerals: Potassium, calcium, sodium and some phosphorous, iron, nickel, cobalt, tin, copper and zinc

The **Leaves** contain- Vitamins A,B,C and D; Minerals: Potassium, iron and copper.

This herb stimulates the liver and kidney function. Both parts of the herb have activities in both areas though the leaves are stronger for kidney excretion and the root for liver based secretion.

The bitter constituents of Dandelion stimulate production of bile by the liver which has the knock on effect of increasing digestive potential and increasing the loss of metabolic waste via the bowels. The loss of toxins this way means the liver is able to process more such waste from the blood with benefit to all tissues. **This whole process is started simply by chewing a leaf and experiencing that bitter taste!**

Dandelion's use as a diuretic (encourages waste excretion via kidneys and increased urine output) is especially clever, as it contains three times as much potassium than is usual in most

green plants. With increased urine output, potassium tends to become depleted which puts the body's electrolytes out of balance. The high levels of potassium in dandelion counteract this process ensuring that balance is maintained.

The health benefits of these actions are far reaching and there is a lot more to say about the humble Dandelion. It's important to identify it correctly before use, as there are a few imposters. Once you are sure you have the true Dandelion; add leaves to salads, make tea from the leaves or a decoction or vinegar from the roots .

Find out more at the Edible backyard Summer Festival or the next Herbal healing workshop "Remarkable Roots" on April 7th.

Be well, naturally.

Ali

---

**Festival tickets are flying out the door...** we are all very excited about the two days we have lined up for you. Our festivals are a boutique affair - we like it small and intimate, so that the people who come can make the most of the experts available - however this means limited tickets. There are no gate sales – so if you want to come book in today! Email me on [Kath@ediblebackyard.co.nz](mailto:Kath@ediblebackyard.co.nz). Here's a refresher

Edible Backyard Summer Festival: 2012 *escape for the day... an enriching day for grownups!*

**Dates:** either Saturday Feb 25<sup>th</sup> or Sunday Feb 26<sup>th</sup> **Time:** 10 – 3 **Price** \$20.00

**Booking is essential – there will be no gate sales.**

Growing garlic, solar driers, topbar beehives, flax weaving, green woodworking, broadforks, yoghurt making, managing pest and disease on fruit trees, herbal health, cooking with fire, from garden to table (clever ideas for using up excesses), seed saving, growing healthy soil, berry jam competition.... coffee, food, music..... hand forged tools, organic seedlings for the winter garden, yoghurt and cheese kits, herbal teas and balms, seedtrays and much much more!

If you are feeling blue about your vegie patch this season then remember we are all in the same boat! – and most important of all - celebrate your successes! Outdoor tomatoes may not be the best this year, but salads and herbs tick over no matter what; carrots, onions and beetroots are tucked under the soil and grow through snow and sun; beans and cucurbits flourish in all the rain (I often wonder why we persist with tomatoes – perhaps we should base our diets round nourishing beans which grow so well for us). Compost still does its miraculous thing (every time I open a new pile I get a thrill).

Our highlights this season have been the black figs - fresh figs with homemade yoghurt for breakfast is so very luxurious, the garlic crop is a real cracker (plaits and seed for sale at the festival), and big fat juicy strawberries, strawberries and more strawberries (dare I say it I am happy they are finishing!).... life is good!

**Our new workshop timetable will be up on the website on 1<sup>st</sup> March.** Ali is taking a rest from workshops this year to focus on her studies, so her last one will be "Remarkable Roots" in April. **Do you have any ideas for an Edible Backyard workshop? I'd love to hear them. If I use your idea for a workshop then you can do it free!**

Yours in the earth,  
Kath