



Growing great veggies

A holistic short course to help people create more productive food gardens

2016-17 snapshot

6 courses

133 participants

3 community garden hosts

3 local government locations

Benefits of local food production

Successful small-scale food-growing:

- reduces individual carbon footprints
- decreases food waste
- strengthens local economies
- connects people to nature.

Background

Food-growing workshops in Adelaide were initially scoped by Natural Resources Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges staff as being either 'high-level' covering complex topics, such as an extensive 10-day permaculture course; or 'low-level' covering simple topics over a few hours, for example, a short wicking-bed course.

To overcome this lack of middle-ground training, a research phase with key local and interstate practitioners was conducted.

From these conversations, the development and trial of an advanced, day and a half, vegetable growing course was proposed.



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There was a need, within the broader community, for a course beyond [an] introduction to organic gardening, for people who had begun gardening and had experience.

Mark Stevens, Happy Patch Community Garden.

Outcomes from the courses

The course increased participants' knowledge, skills, capacity and confidence in growing their own food.

It also created networks by connecting community members to food-growing experts, and to other like-minded individuals.

Format

Growing great veggies was co-developed and is currently co-facilitated by local urban farmer Steven Hoepfner and market gardener Nat Wiseman.

The course is run over one full day (9 am – 5 pm) and then a half-day (9 am – 1 pm) follow-up session is held three months later.

With support from the NRM levy, participants pay a subsidised \$65 for the course.

This included take-home course notes, a 'what to plant when' chart, other relevant handouts and catering.

Each session also included:

- site selection and soil fertility
- advanced soil preparation
- organic pest management
- tool selection and use
- in ground and above ground options
- planting schedules and planning
- propagation techniques.

Why people grow their own food

Participants said they enjoy growing their own food for many reasons, including:

- personal satisfaction and enjoyment
- improved mental health
- opportunity to spend more time outdoors
- self-sufficiency
- delicious, nutritious produce
- ability to share with friends and family
- easily accessible fresh produce
- ability to teach children about nature



- stronger connections to the seasons
- food cost reduction
- carbon footprint reduction
- chemical use reduction.

What was valued the most

All participants completed a survey at the end of the first full-day session, to tell us what they valued most about the course.

- ✓ Soil preparation information was the most popular.
- ✓ Propagation, planning and irrigation sessions were widely considered valuable.
- ✓ Good overall coverage of gardening topics was noted, with many participants commenting that they liked 'everything'.
- ✓ Practical tips with demonstrations were effective and memorable.
- ✓ The engaging and entertaining nature of facilitators was frequently noted by participants.

"The course was fabulous, very inspiring and full of totally applicable knowledge and practical skills and methods."

The follow-up session was also valued for a variety of reasons including continued motivation to get started on implementing new knowledge; the opportunity to catch up with the group again; and the opportunity to workshop potential issues which may have arisen over the break.





Success stories

Participants were asked how the course had impacted their food-growing success. Here a few snapshots of what they said:

"Since taking the course, we've had more success in the garden than ever before. We attribute this to the lessons learnt in the course, especially the need to fertilise and water more. The latter was particularly influenced by a demonstration during the course of how much water is required to adequately rehydrate a garden bed."

"Since taking the course I've had continued success, I was even able to grow carrots, which previously have never been seen in my garden!"

"I took on board so many things I learnt during the course – I mulched more, I planted some natives to attract birds and bees and I started growing from seed – with success."

Where to next?

Some participants suggested ways to enhance the course.

Ideas included print outs of all hand-outs on arrival; a greater focus on management of pests and plant diseases; a visit to an active market garden; more time for troubleshooting and interaction amongst the participants; an opportunity for soil testing; and more hands-on elements.

Networking opportunities were also suggested such as skill sharing (mentoring opportunities); working bees (blitzes) in each other's gardens; an online forum for sharing; and monthly tasks/planting reminders.

Potential new course topics

Participants said they would also be interested in learning more about:

- edible natives, bush foods
- fruit tree growing, pruning and grafting
- worm farming and composting
- bee keeping
- kids' gardening
- market gardening (business-side)
- seed saving and sharing
- gardening in small spaces.

New course hosts

If you would like to see this course in your area please contact the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board.

If you would like to develop any new courses to respond to the interests of you community please call us to see how we could work together.

Growing great veggies is funded by the NRM levy through the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board.

For more information

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