

TRASH THE TRASH

After embarking on an eco-food challenge, three nutritionists discover the joy of sourcing local food while reducing landfill waste. They share their story with KAREN SHAW.

When Barbara Radcliffe, Simone Johnston and Liz Paul embarked on an eco-food challenge as a pilot study for Queensland Health, little did they realise how life-changing it would be.

The three Brisbane-based community nutritionists planted edible gardens, dramatically reduced their waste and learnt valuable lessons that supported their healthy eating message while also helping the environment.

For project co-ordinator Barbara Radcliffe it was all about examining consumption and waste, and learning how this tied into a sustainable food supply. "As community nutritionists, we also wanted to give people relevant, practical information about how to eat healthily and sustainably," she says.

The eco-challenge, which involved a total of 16 nutritionists, went for seven months. It was divided into three parts – sourcing and eating locally grown and seasonal food, reducing waste going to landfill and eating more sustainable fish and plant-based protein such as legumes.

The participants enjoyed researching where to buy food produced within a 500km radius of Brisbane and trying to grow their own. They experienced difficulties sourcing some ingredients such as flour, but Simone Johnston



Harvesting vegetables from your backyard means they're seasonal, fresh and use no fuel or packaging getting them to your door.

managed to track down a producer in the Darling Downs region. After this, Simone started to regularly quiz market stallholders to establish the origin of foods such as apples, and was surprised to learn that items often travelled from interstate.

This discovery prompted her to join Food Connect, a community-supported agriculture (CSA) system distributing the organic produce of local farmers. "I pay a subscription and receive a box of seasonal fruit and vegetables regularly," she says. Simone admits she's had fun trying out unfamiliar produce such as pomelo and kohlrabi, which is now a firm favourite.

Growing edibles

Simone has also recently bought a house and set about creating a garden full of edible plants, where once she might have focused on ornamentals. "Growing your own food is really easy and such a joyful thing to do," she says.

She espaliered fruit trees, planted a rosemary hedge and is growing ginger, coffee, pineapple, herbs and a lemon myrtle. She is now a self-professed composting whiz and is experimenting with a no-dig garden. Her chickens Henny Penny, Foxy Loxy, Abigail and Babs provide eggs and recycle leftover food. She says their poo mixed with straw is excellent for the garden.

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Barbara Radcliffe reports a similar experience. She started with small raised beds, which are now bursting with healthy lettuce, parsley and other delicious herbs. "It's surprising how much you can produce even in a small area," she says. She's also tried growing blueberries, raspberries and dragon fruit, and finds it much easier than expected, with the added benefit of delicious bounty for the table.

Producing less waste

Participants discovered that once they started growing their own vegetables at home, or bought fruit and vegies from farmers' markets, there was much less packaging and rubbish for the bin because they took their own shopping bags on each expedition.

Initially, Barbara's family of three re-labelled the rubbish bin as 'The Landfill Bin'. That way, everyone understood where rubbish was going and was mindful about what went into the bin. Barbara also contacted the local council for a comprehensive list of recyclables, which meant tin foil and the odd pizza box were no longer going into landfill.

Any tree and shrub prunings are mulched and returned to the garden. She proudly boasts a compost bin for much of the green waste, a worm farm and a Bokashi Bucket that helps break down leftover meat, oil and other food products that are best kept out of the compost. She admits her compost recipe still needs some finetuning, but figures the waste is better breaking down in her yard to nourish the garden than in landfill producing methane.

"No food scraps means no plastic bin liners, because everything in the landfill bin is clean," she says. And she has been amazed that the amount of rubbish leaving the house each week is now a scant bucketful, where once it almost filled a 240L bin.

Liz Paul found a similar decrease in rubbish to just a few items each week that fitted easily into a plastic bucket. She discovered that buying fresh fruit and vegies from her greengrocer and taking her own carry bags was a big help in reducing packaging waste.

Tumbleweed Recycling Pack (September winner)

Liz Taylor, of Riddells Creek, Victoria, for the creative gifts she helps her students make for special celebrations such as Father's Day and Mother's Day. They make recycled paper squares, dry them, then attach flower seeds to the front. The message inside reads: "Roses are red, violets are blue, plant this card, flowers for you."



WIN

Get a head start on recycling with this Tumbleweed Recycling Pack, including a Worm Café, 220L Compost Bin made from recycled materials, Compost Mate aerator, Worm Blanket, Worm Farm and Compost Conditioner.



Great news! We have another five fabulous Tumbleweed Recycling Packs, valued at \$200 each, to give away. For a chance to win, share with us your best suggestion for reducing waste. Write your idea in 35 words or less on the back of an envelope, with your name and address, and send to Gardening Australia/Tumbleweed, Locked Bag 5030, Alexandria, NSW 2015.

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"It's also been fun getting to know the fruiterer who specifically explains what's local as well as seasonal," she says. "Having these conversations is really hard at the supermarket, so it's opened my eyes to how far our fruit and vegetables often travel."

The third challenge was probably the toughest for participants – the change from meat to more plant-based proteins such as legumes. Barbara says that participants exchanged legume-based recipes and tried out different dishes. One challenger said her children started demanding more legume-based meals such as interesting African dishes.

Barbara, however, found this part of the exercise quite challenging, even though she experimented with recipes.

For her, the easiest part was reducing waste. "I'm gobsmacked at how much less waste we now produce," she says.

While the challenge finished some time ago, the results have made an impact on all three participants. It made them realise that making even small changes to their lifestyles could have some effect on the environment. All agree the most rewarding part of the challenge was proving that eating a diet of healthy, unprocessed and locally grown fruit and vegetables is also really healthy for the planet. **GA**

FURTHER INFORMATION

- * Sustainable food practices: ecofriendlyfood.org.au
- * Home deliveries of low-mile, organic produce: foodconnect.com.au
- * To buy Australian: ausbuy.com.au