



## **Three hens and food plants, Dimboola**

### **My Family**

Hi there! I’m a **young woman** living in a Wimmera rural town, with my **cat** and **three hens**. I have a **big backyard** where I grow lots of **food plants** for my use (*e.g. see photo below right*).

**I do everything** – looking after the chickens, and all the garden duties. I love growing my own food, and **knowing the sources of what I eat!**

### **My Farm**

I am a **part-time** farmer, of a **¼ acre urban** backyard vegetable family farm. My town was settled over a century ago, removing many native River Red Gums, and occasionally planting palms for the homes.

My vegetables grow in **raised garden beds**, which is easy on my back. I brought soil as bags of **complete potting mix** for vegetables, with slow release fertiliser and wetting agents.

*In the photo of my garden right, find:*

- *the dense shade on the left under the palms,*
- *the various plots and tubs where I grow my food plants,*
- *gum trees above the houses of the town,, and*
- *lots of winter weeds in the foreground!*



My town, Dimboola, lies on a **flood plain** of the lower part of the **Wimmera River**. So my **backyard is flat**. The town's site has a long history of flooding bringing in silt and nutrients, but that doesn't happen often since the town has been here and the river has many dams on it. But it can still happen - as it did in January 2011, ending a long drought.

The climate has **hot dry summers** but I have a **rain water** in a **tank** and there is **town water supply** so my plants are not reliant on the rainfall, when it is dry.

## My produce - '**Feeding the world**' means **feeding me first!**

Over a year my garden produces heaps!! I have **nearly 40 different types** of food plants.

Firstly there are the **eggs** from my hens. I have **Silkies**. This variety lay up to **90 eggs each per year**. They are **tame** and get along with each other. I chose them as my first chickens. They are more people friendly than other breeds. Gonzo is three years old, Snowy and Baby Orange are about two years old *(Can you tell which is which by matching their names to their colours in the photo right?)*.



My goal in the future is to have chickens to supply meat. These will be a different breed.

I grow lots of different types of vegetables. For **seeds**, I buy **open-pollinating seeds**, not the hybrids:

- beans,
- beetroots,
- broccoli,
- cabbage, *(In the photos right, find the mauve seedlings and what they look like harvested)*
- carrots,
- cauliflower,
- cucumber.
- kale,
- leeks,
- lettuce,
- onions,
- peas,
- potatoes,
- radishes,
- silverbeet,
- sorrel,
- spinach,





- tomatoes, (*see Tom Thumbs on front page*)
- zucchini

I also grow **herbs** to add to my vegetable dishes:

- basil
- bay leaf,
- parsley,
- garlic, lemon thyme
- Nettle (stinging nettle weeds)
- rosemary.
- sage,
- thyme.

Then there are my **fruit** trees

- 2 apples,
  - 2 lemons,
  - a lime
  - loquat,
  - orange,
  - peach,
  - 2 plums,
  - and strawberries plants,
- and one **nut** tree
- almond.



## Sustainability - 'Caring for the Earth'

### Soils

To look after the soils, I use a **5-6 year rotation system** for my vegie garden. This means that I don't grow the same plant in the same place each year, but shift them to different parts of the garden. Different **plants take different nutrients** from the soil, so moving plants around does not exhaust the soil e.g. **broad beans** produce **nitrogen** and so the next crop in that garden would be **cabbages** which love it.



To keep my soil producing for me, I **add nutrients** to it. To be as organic as I can, I use: **compost; sheep or cow manure; blood and bone; potash and lime sulphate**. So there are plenty of nutrients to feed my plants, so they will grow well to feed me!

## Water

I **collect rain water** falling on my house in a **tank**. I use this on my vegie garden.

*You can see the pipe coming off the house into the tank in the photo to the right.*

## Insect Helpers

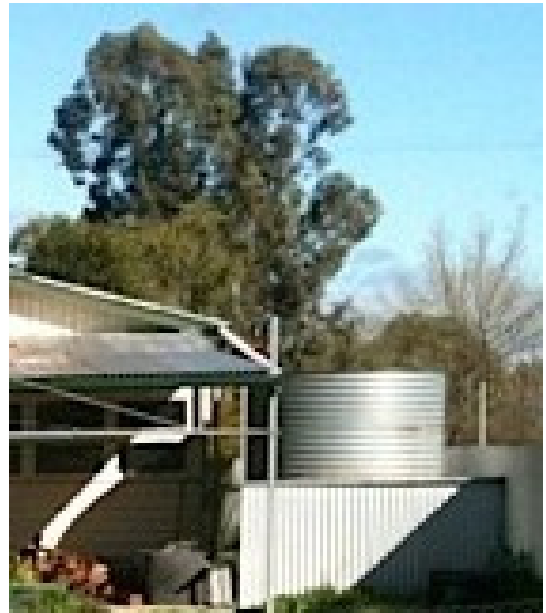
You may not see my **insect helpers** in the garden. As I **do not use harsh products** in my garden, good insects are attracted here. This is great as they work for me keeping pests from eating my food.

## ‘Low food miles’

My food has comes from as **close to me** as possible. It concerns me when so much food like fruit and vegetables has to travel so many miles – like tomatoes that are picked when they are green and gassed to make them red, so they have a longer shop shelf life, but less taste.

I try to **grow as much as I can** so that I can rely less on others and so I know what is in my food. I don’t want chemicals used in the food I eat, like it is in so much shop food, e.g. for a better shelf life. Nor do I want extra salt, sugar, and flavours added, e.g. 635 which is dangerous to health. So I **make my own**:

- **meals** at home
- **jam** - I buy Australian strawberries
- **bread and foccacias**.
- **soup stock**
- **nettle soup** out of stinging nettle weeds.
- **pesto** out of my basil leaves.
- tomato **paste**.



**“The more I can do for myself, the better –and, it is also helping the Earth”**

We, Donna Portway and Bev Collins, give permission to Jeanie Clark to use the information and photos about Donna’s family farm for the educational resources for the IY Family Farming. Map, editing and additional comments by J. Clark. (cc) 2014

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<http://familyfarms.enviroed4all.com.au/family-farm-snapshots/> for more in this series of snapshots

<http://www.fao.org/family-farming-2014/> <http://www.familyfarmingcampaign.net> for the official IYFF sites