

2014 International Year of Family Farming

Feeding the world; Caring for the Earth

Family Farm Snapshots

<http://familyfarms.enviroed4all.com.au/>



Half a century gardening, Box Hill

Our Family

My **uncle** was a great gardener and **family farmer**, not only producing a **backyard** of vegetables and fruit, but also with his own eggs from his hens. He lived down on the coast and came up to put in our fruit trees, when we moved to a new housing estate in Melbourne over 50 years ago.

Most of the work in this garden has been done by my **Mum** – now in her mid 80's - still loving being out in her flowers, **fruit trees** and **vegetables** (photo right). All her married life, she has grown vegetables and fruit, for her family to use. It is part of the unpaid work of a Mum and housewife. It was exciting for Mum to think of herself as a farmer for the first time, thanks to this IYFF.



Mum does get some **help**:

- My **Dad**, also in his mid 80's, helps a little - mainly with picking- and does the lawns.
- I help when I visit too, mainly with weeding and some picking, as do my **brothers**.
- Mum also has some **paid help** to do the bigger jobs, like build raised beds, to make it easier for her to keep producing food as she gets older.

Can you see where the flowers, fruit trees and the raised vegetable box of the main food part of the garden are in the photo above? What do you think my Mum is doing?

Our Farm

City people don't often think of the food producing part in the garden of their home as being '**family farm**', but it really is a **small suburban** one.

Mum's is part of a garden on **top** of a **hill**, so the soils drain well. There is reasonable rainfall in Melbourne most of the year, except in drought years! There is an excellent urban water supply, so plants can be watered with **hoses**, when it doesn't rain much or for a few days.

This area had been **apple orchards**, before being cleared for housing, so it is good for growing things. Before Europeans came here, the hills had been Eucalyptus **forests**. But when we **arrived**, there were **no plants**. That didn't last long and within a year, the house had flower beds, fruit and other trees and a vegetable patch.



The house and garden is on a traditional $\frac{1}{4}$ **acre** block. Apart from the buildings, the largest part of this space is taken up by lawn. Next came the flower beds and other flowering trees. The **food producing** parts take up less than about **10 sq. m.** in the garden. Most of the fruit trees are along a fence (photo above). The **raised garden bed** (photo right) is out on its own to make it easy to get to from all sides.



How many different types of plants can you see in the raised garden bed?

In the food parts of the garden, now, only the **lemon tree** remains from the citrus trees planted about 50 years ago. **Rhubarb** and **Silver Beet** have also been grown through that time. Near the fences, the **peach** (top photo) and **apple** (photo right) trees, are about 40 years old. The **vegetables** are in the new part of the garden - the raised garden box and the carrot box.



If you look closely at the top photo you will see three types of flowers, but the one in the middle is peach tree blossom in 2013. Likewise if you look closely at the photo right, the apple is in the centre.

Our produce - 'Feeding the world' means 'Feeding ourselves'

From the **tree to the pot to the tummy** – apples from the fruit tree (photo above), into stewed apple, (photo right).



The flowers, fruit and vegetables are all **used by Mum and Dad**, or given away to **family and friends**. Mum and Dad love the fresh food they get from the garden, but will **stew** some fruit, to keep it longer. They don't try to grow enough of everything they need, as there are many shops within a ¼ hour drive.

This small suburban garden produces many plants for eating:

- There are many plants in the small space of the raised garden bed:
 - **Vegetables :**
 - **beetroot**
 - **capsicums –green,**
 - **carrots** (photo right just picked)
 - **silver beet**
 - **strawberries**
 - **sweet corn**
 - **tomatoes,**
 - **zucchini**
 - and **parsley**



How many of the above plants can you find in the photo of the raised garden bed on the previous page?

- There are more **carrots** in a box (photo above)
- There is a plot of **rhubarb** beside the raised bed.
- There are **fruit trees near the fences**:
 - **apples** (photo right)
 - **lemons**
 - **peaches**
 - **passionfruit** (last photo of snapshot)



The photo right shows the produce from this garden in mid-March 2014. *Can you name the different fruits and vegetables?*



Mum was disappointed when the almond-X-walnut tree did not grow in the 1970's, and when the orange and grapefruit trees died in the last decade.

Sustainability - 'Caring for the Earth'

Soil Care

There are many things that Mum does to care for the soil in her backyard farm:

- soils kept moist by **hand watering** when dry.
- Sugar cane mulch, potting mix and bark chips to **mulch** the soil
- A seaweed liquid to further **fertilise** the soil
- A **compost** bin (see photo right, it's the green tub) is used for kitchen scraps and some garden scraps

Plant Care

The above not only care for the soil, they also help the plants to be healthier. Mum also helps care for the plants by:

- Planting plants which like shade **under trees**, and some plants needing **shelter** on the hottest days are given a cover then.
- Giving some plants **extra care** – e.g. the carrots have a box to grow in (photo previous page)
- Protecting the plants from snails with **snail bait**
- Protecting the lemon tree from the wasp which is living in it, by **cutting off** the thickened stems where wasps make homes (see photo above right)
- Planting many flowers that **bring bees** to visit which benefit bee, flower and farmer!

In the photo middle right, look carefully to find where this European Honey Bee's head is? It's driving into a passionfruit flower bud. Once fully inside, the bud closed over it. Then look at the final photo of this snapshot for the result– the pollinated bud opened into a flower of many parts, to become a passionfruit.

Habitat

As well as creatures listed above, this 'family farm' as part of a 50 year old suburban garden, is home to:

- **birds** like
 - **doves,**
 - **pigeons,**
 - **magpies,** (photo right)
 - **thrushes**

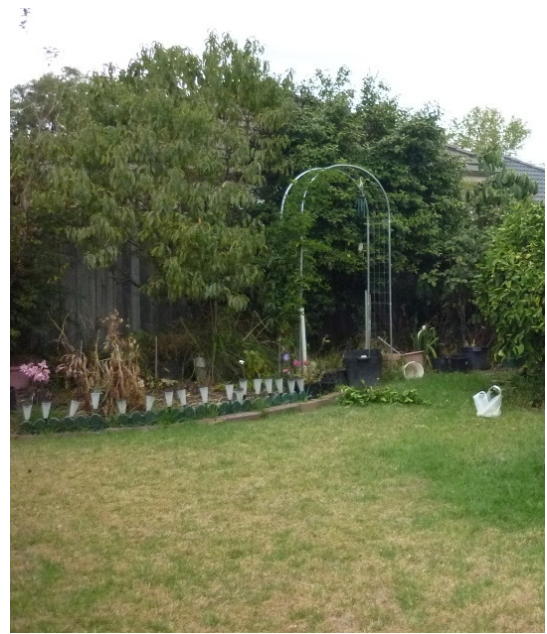


- reptiles
 - skinks,
- little life
 - insects,
 - spiders,
 - millipedes (photo right)
 - and worms.



Porous surfaces

Our backyard has mostly **porous** surfaces: the grass, herb gardens, and vegetable beds. When rain falls, it can **soak** into the ground. Porous surfaces, like soil with plants in it, allow it to do this. But hard surfaces, like concrete and bitumen, block the water at the surface and make it run off to the lowest point. When human activities replace porous surfaces with hard ones, they increase the amount of this run off. In high rainfall events, this can increase the amount running off so much as to result in small ‘flash floods’ in adjacent lower areas.



Lowering food miles

‘Food miles’ counts the **all the costs of transporting food**, for its use of fuel, and costs in pollution, including greenhouse emissions. Foods eaten where they are grown create no food miles.

My Mum has both **regularly used foods** (like parsley and apples) and **hard-to-get foods** (like passionfruit – photo right- and rhubarb) in her **backyard family farm**. While saving them money, their **zero food miles** help care for the Earth too.



I, D. Smith, give Jeanie Clark permission to use my information and photos of my suburban ‘family farm’, under a (cc) licence 2014. Written by J. Clark from interviews with D. Smith. Peach and raised bed photos by D Smith, all other photos and map by J. Clark. © 2014

For more information about the IYFF go to:

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

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

<https://www.facebook.com/InternationalYearOfFamilyFarmingIYFF> for the facebook updates.

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at <http://familyfarms.enviroed4all.com.au/snapshots/50yeargarden-Box Hill.pdf>

