

2014 International Year of Family Farming

Feeding the world; Caring for the Earth

Family Farm Snapshots

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



Ecobotanica – our south east Queensland oasis

Our Family

Our kids grew up and moved away - it was time for us to make our escape to Redlands! So there's just two of us here most of the time. He's the part time consultant turned **handyman** and constructor of all things timber.

I'm the '**eco- educator**' and **horticulturist** specialising in organics, digging holes by the dozen, barrowing tonnes of soil and compost and making lawns into lunch, **permaculture** designer and teacher too. I just hate the mess of a typical permaculture property, so ours is permaculture pretty and very neat. That way you know where everything is and can weed, plant and mow with ease. I'm an apiarist too. I supplement my income through **organic garden consultations** too. It's a very satisfying job. You can see my web page at www.ecobotanica.com.au.



Our Farm

We moved to the outskirts of Capalaba in the Redlands **south east of** the big smoke (**Brisbane**), from a small suburban block (in Brisbane's suburbs), in May 2013. Our little family farm is really a farmlet, surrounded by small acreage properties, all **about 1.5 acres** in size. The block is **mostly cleared**, but we do have some majestic trees. *Can you see them in the photo to the right? What can you see in this photo about our uses of our cleared land? What do you think the flags are for? What about the clay structure in the foreground? Read on to find out!*



Farmers on thousands of acres would call it a pocket-handkerchief suburbia. We call it our heaven on a stick! Our dream has been to create a **self-sufficient lifestyle** that was both **eco and human friendly**. Our dream of a straw bale homestead didn't eventuate, but we have a beauty of a renovated home with all recycled and repurposed environmentally friendly interiors. In the words of our neighbour, "It doesn't stink, sweat, or suck energy".

We hate leaving home to tell the truth! It's pretty busy converting the acre and a half to an **organic certified** oasis of edibles, but it's a challenge we are relishing. Oh yes, I'm now a confirmed water diviner, having pierced low and high pressure hoses all over the block with my trusty fork. Ha ha!

Participants in my **organic workshops** are delighted with the marvellous food. It's usually harvested from the garden and is **always fresh**. In our previous suburban block, we had 200 different varieties of edible plants producing prolifically at any one time, On this new block of ours, our aim is to have **1000 different edibles**, keeping us in a full gamut of deliciousness all year round.

Tucked in among the garden shrubbery, are our many **bee hives** for Native Stingless Bees – *Can you see bees going into it in the photo above right?*



Our produce - 'Feeding the world'

A large **vegie** patch, **herb** terrace, tea gardens, **edible flower** gardens and **orchard** are now well under production, pumping out kilos of food weekly. The vegie patch has delicate edible flowers, sheep sorrel, bergamot leaves and flowers, green coriander seed and Madagascar beans, lemon myrtle, heirloom vegies and lots more.

An old donated bath (photo right) was put to good use as a **pond** for water lotus, another food source. It is stocked with native fish which eat all the mosquito larvae. This is how we did it:

<http://www.ecobotanica.com.au/Creating-a-vegetable-garden-from-scratch-bgp2582.html>



This summer we had many kilos of cucumbers, Asian greens, heirloom tomatoes, pumpkins and beans of all sorts. Oh there's a wide variety of other food too, like yakon, water chestnuts, Egyptian spinach, and arrowroot (in the photo right), but there are too many to mention. You'll see some of the developing story at www.facebook/ecobotanica



Our dream of small scale farming is a sharp reality - we've had to find a regular **market** for our produce:

- **Neighbours** are notified by SMS of our regular harvest sales and pop by for their regular vegie shop.
- A number of **Brisbane chefs** come 30km down the road to harvest from the garden too. They look for the things they can't buy in the markets or shops. It's a joy linking with them and connecting them to local growers for the things we can't grow.
- I run **workshops on organics and food** from our place and all who come love the energy and peace of the place. It's not unusual for workshop attendees to return for a number of workshops and to travel from interstate!

Some recipes are at <http://www.ecobotanica.com.au/Recipes-bgc82.html>

Includes 'Feeding ourselves'

Well, we **feed ourselves from our garden**. There's very little needed from the shops. We also feed our **extended family** from the garden. It's a highlight for them to wander through the patch and pick their dinner on a Sunday afternoon. The neighbours enjoy our produce too. All our visitors seem to go home with heavier bags than what they came with!



We grow our **herbs for teas and cooking**. We haven't bought a pack of herbs for yonks thanks to our large terraced plot of tea herbs (photo above right). We have a fresh cuppa any time we like!



We also grow Isa Brown Hen's (photo right) for **eggs**.

Our **Native Stingless Bees** provide us with **honey** and an **income** from classes, hive splits and sales. *Can you see the honeycomb I am collecting from the opened hive in the photo on the next page? Since they are stingless bees, why do you think I wear a hat with a net over my face, but no gloves on my hands?*

We built a **cob oven** at a community workshop we held here in 2013. Twenty-four people came and enjoyed making cob, creating a work of art, which we've called 'Bella'. *You can see Bella in the foreground of the first photo.* She is a beauty, made from clay and straw and a few fire bricks. She is hot and sensational! She graces the back terrace, not far from the kitchen. **Pizzas** (photo below right), **roasts, desserts, bread, cakes** – all made perfectly on Bella now we've got the hang of making her fire!

Sustainability - 'Caring for the Earth'

We've chosen to embrace **organics** here and by making that choice, we are inherently caring for the water quality, **encouraging predatorial insects** and **providing habitat for beneficial insects and animals, and for the native plants and creatures** in the waterway corridor at the back of our block. Some of our block is kept as **indigenous planting**. More is being developed for **native habitat** and a **bush tucker trail**. Redlands City Council is proactive in supporting people who wish to plant for nature. Our local native botanic gardens at 'Indigiscapes' is our source of tube-stock plantings.

The dominant native tree is the glorious white-trunked **Scribbly Gums**. They tower over us all day, whispering their serenades, but occasionally dropping whopping limbs. We love them, but don't loiter underneath!

Wallabies laze in the waterway corridor. **Koalas** grunt out there at night. Rosellas and Sulphur Crested Cockatoos are there too. They both entertain and outrage us coming into our garden!

These Cockatoos (see photo right) are like a rowdy bunch of teenage boys, swooping in with 19 mates each morning and evening for a drink from our salt water swimming pool. While they are at it, they



pick the living daylight out of the trees, crack open the rain gauge, snip off the sunflowers and seedlings at ground level and swagger around the place looking for trouble. Do they always call out 'Julie'??? They do here. Is it the same everywhere? I don't remember hearing that call as a child.



There are big and small, native and introduced creatures in our **insect control team**. The **hens** dine on insects as they wander about the plants, (photo above right). The photo to the right is a **Lacewing**, a predatorial insect – ie it eats other pest insects. **Wasps and Hover Flies** are also predatorial insects, but they also like to feed on nectar. **Alyssum** is planted with Cauliflowers (photo below right) to encourage the insect control team here!



Our **Native Stingless Bees** are small bees which travel up to 800 metres around the neighbourhood, **pollinating** the trees and vegies and **gathering nectar and pollen** from the bush in the waterway corridor out the back. They are much more docile than their European counterparts who used to chase me around the paddocks as a child when dad took me with him to raid our family's hives!



While we do have town water, our aim is to use only **natural water** in all the garden areas. We've installed big tanks, have a **bore** and are constructing **swales** to assist in the infiltration of overland flow.

*Did you notice the flags in the first photo? Did you think they would be for decorating a swimming pool? Well the **flags** are – but to **discourage ducks** from landing on our pool. It's for our use, not theirs. It is also a **saltwater pool**, to avoid the use of chlorine on our land.*

The **septic** is doing a pretty good job of keeping the new **orchard** green, even through the big dry this summer.

It doesn't extend to the inherited golf green though. Now that useless piece of turf (sorry golfers) - that sucked up water and 'weedfeed' - has been put out to pasture. It's our flat garden spot, earmarked for a meditative labyrinth in 2014. The bunkers, by the way, have made a great **compost area** and **sand pit**. *Can you find them on the first photo? Here they are dug up!*



Our big challenges

We are **small scale family farmers**, but our challenge is to become self sufficient in most of our food, and to share it with family and friends. It's going to be more of a challenge as Climate Change takes hold, but if we can't do it here, how can our farmers elsewhere do it?

We want our little farmlet to be **self sustaining** and to be a positive **influence** for all those who come here. We hope to **inspire** people, especially city folks, to make the change from consumers to **back-yard producers**, thus reducing their own **carbon footprint** and feeling a **connection** to their **food** and the **Earth**.



Once people realise the **effort** that goes into producing a plateful of food, I find they begin to **appreciate** lots more...farmers, producers, good food quality and real taste. AND of course, they come to realise the **love, sweat and expertise** that goes into making each mouthful.



Green hugs to all our farmers and a big **thanks** from us!

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delicious organic gardens
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For more information about the IYFF go to:

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

