



## 2014 International Year of Family Farming

*“Feeding the world; Caring for the Earth”*

# Itsy bitsy family farm, backyard Croydon

## Our Family Farm

Welcome to our “itsy bitsy family farm”. I had never thought of our backyard in **suburban Croydon** (Melbourne) as a family farm until recently. But we do work in it to **produce food we eat**, so it must be!

We began over a decade ago with a **few lettuce seedlings in a pot** - because we had seen a nice-looking selection in a pot at a nursery! Since then we have never bought a lettuce in a shop, preferring to take a few leaves off our own plants (*photo right*) as we need them.

The *photo below right* shows some of our small family farm beds and pots waiting for the new season’s planting. It has grown to more than a **third of the backyard** - not uncommon in our area, as some neighbours have similar gardens – and are also **part-time backyard urban family farmers**.

We don’t live fully off our ‘backyard farm’, but we do eat a lot of our **vegetables** from it.



## Our Farm

Our part of Croydon is pretty **flat** (*see photo right*). The two major “farm” sections total about **45 sq m**.

Our **clay** soil was overlaid with **new garden soil, mulch and compost** when we created these beds.

Melbourne's climate is **pretty hot and dry in the summer and cool to cold in winter**. Despite its wet reputation, it receives much less rain than people think – about half as much as Sydney. But it *is* known for having '**four seasons in one day**'. We have **tap water for our plants, also three small rainwater tanks**.

## Produce - '**Feeding the world**' is '**Feeding ourselves and friends**'

Once we had started with **lettuces**, they proved so successful that the next year we decided to put in a couple of **tomato** plants – also a great result.

The following year the **beds** were created on our lawn by **boxing** them up and filling them with **garden soil**, adding heaps of **compost** and **chicken manure**. Since we usually start our projects full of enthusiasm, but rarely carry anything through, we thought if we wanted to go back to all lawn, we could just knock down the edging and spread the soil. But that hasn't happened. We have been **family farmers**, growing our own produce and sharing our excess with friends and neighbours **ever since!**

Last year, a friend gave us a roll of newspaper containing what she said were "**a few tomato seedlings grown from seed**". When opened, the parcel revealed many more seedlings than we could ever use for us! Instead of throwing them out, we potted as many as we could and gave some away. Our little movie-making club benefited as members donated money to the club for these seedlings.



We planted the unsold seedlings (can't throw anything away!). We must have had about 20 very productive plants. When the crop arrived, we **bagged the fruit we didn't need**, and took this to our club. Again members donated to the club for tomatoes to take home!

Soon we had become producers of a variety of food plants. *How many different ones did you see in the photo on front page?* This year we will grow: about a **dozen types** of **vegetables**, like



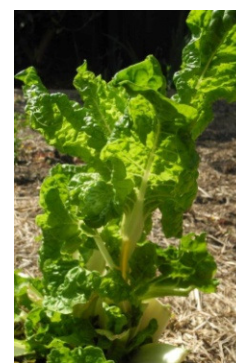
Carrots



Tomatoes



Parsnips



Silver beet

Some 50-odd tomato seedlings are under way so far this year, plus cucumber and zucchini - so I can see some huge sales and a bumper crop in the offing! Our **produce stall** has become quite popular at our club!

Our prolific **rhubarb** has been split into many sections to provide new plants given to others. When we have an excess of rhubarb, we cut the stalks and used them as gifts or as a club fundraiser.

*Doesn't the rhubarb have lovely big green leaves, as you can see in the photo right? Do you know why we cut stalks and not leaves for food? Their leaves will make you sick, but the stalks are delicious! (e.g. see <http://growharvestcook.com.au/tag/rhubarb/>)*



and **herbs**



Chives



Garlic



Parsley



Sage

And **fruits**



Strawberries (in the ground – note flowers we need bees for, and on a wall) and Lemons

## Sustainability - 'Caring for the Earth'

### Caring for soils and reducing waste

We care for our soils in two ways. **Sugar cane mulch** is laid each year, and then dug into the soil before the new season plantings. We recycle what we can and **compost** most food scraps, so we have very little to put out each week for garbage.

We have **three worm farms**. We feed our worms, who turn our scraps into liquid fertiliser and compost and improve our soils to grow our food plants ... and our flowers too !

## Welcoming Bees

Bees are our most **frequent welcome insect** guests. We treat them with respect and encourage them to visit with other flowering plants (*photo right*) in the garden like the roses and lavender. We discovered that spiders love to eat bees too- and they keep other insects down as well!

## Fresh food for us and to share

It's nice to go out into the garden, as I did yesterday, and pick silver beet, carrots, parsnips and rhubarb for dinner – it's all **on the plate within an hour of leaving the garden bed**.

**Food** doesn't come any fresher than **from home**!

*What about this harvest of tomatoes in the photo right?* When we grow **too much** to use, I cook and **freeze** a lot for later, so right through the year we can still eat healthy food we have grown.

We **share** a lot with neighbours, friends and our fellow club members, thereby helping to build our community. What we share helps to **grow awareness** that we can **grow foods** in **backyards** which are **better for the environment** and **taste great**.

## Low Food Miles

How is it better for the environment? Food from the backyard does **not** add to **greenhouse gas emissions** in its transport from the farm to the home. It reduces what is imported into the home from other farms further away via supermarkets. As we share some of our excess with neighbours, that spreads the savings on transport emissions.



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**For more information about family farming and the 2014 IYFF go to:**

<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