



## 2014 International Year of Family Farming

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

# Our ‘tree-house’ garden, Glen Waverley

## Our Family

Greetings from the Williamson family of two parents and a university-aged daughter. We live in **Glen Waverley**, a leafy suburb in the eastern part of ‘the World’s most live-able city 2010-2014’, Melbourne.

Many homes here have both back and front gardens. Some families, like us, **grow food part-time** in their **back yard gardens**.

Our home is like a living in a huge **tree-house**! *Can you see why by looking at the photo right?* We have **tall trees sheltering and surrounding** our house and large terraced garden. The verandah encircles the house so we live in tree tops with birds and possums. There are lots of native trees and bushes, and some fruit trees. Where is our family’s farm? The vegetable garden is in the backyard and can be seen in the *photo on page 2*.



My wife and I work on our **landscape planning/NRM consultancy business** (Scenic Spectrums P/L). I am also doing **PhD research** in the cropping landscapes of northwest Victoria’s Wimmera-Mallee region on biodiversity conservation.

Hence, we have a **small part-time suburban backyard family farm, growing vegetables** for **our food use** and as **recreation**. We are sometimes joined by a couple of **friends** who enjoy doing this too. Our **‘farmwork’** is all done by **hand**, and **shared** by all: weeding, soil preparation/fertilizing, watering, pest control and harvesting. My wife also grows **succulents** for use in “Picture Frame” planters that she **sells** or gives to friends for fun.

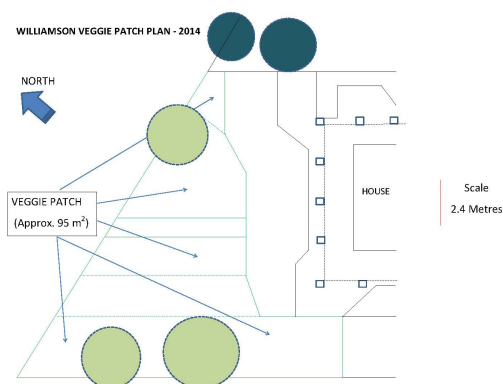
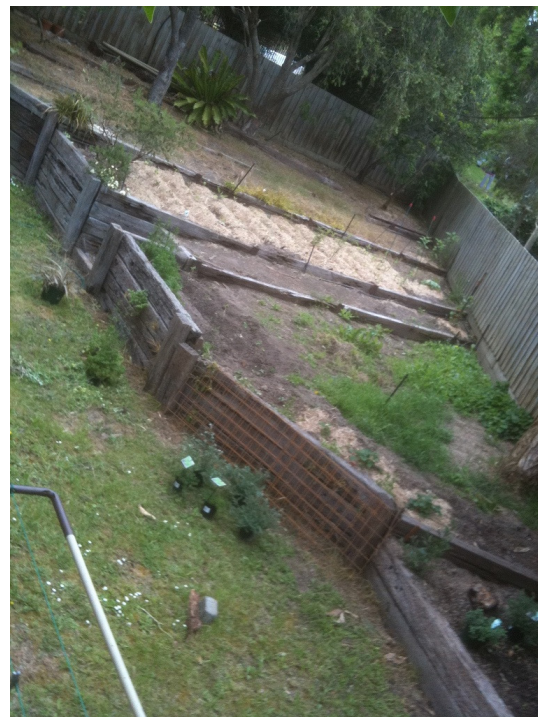


## Our Farm

The eastern suburbs of Melbourne are **hilly**. Their **soils** have a **heavy clay soil base** with mountain soils on the top 200 – 250 mm. *In the photo of our home on the previous page, you can see how steep a slope our land is. In the photo right of the garden in the backyard, you can see that the land is flatter and that we have **built plots** to **add topsoil** to it and manage the slope. We add compost, cow manure, blood & bone and gypsum to improve the topsoil and break up the clay subsoils. We also encourage **earth worms** and **other soil biota** for soil health.*

Melbourne has a **temperate climate** – it gets cold in winter, hot in summer and can rain all year, but we expect most in winter and spring. This means the best time for **growing** most vegetables is from **spring through to autumn**.

When we first moved here, there was no vegetable garden but an over-growth of weeds. Our first job was to clear it! Now our vegetable garden (*see plan right*) takes up about a 1/10<sup>th</sup> of our house block space. At about **95 sq. m.** in area, it is **large for a suburban backyard** here. How many plots do we run? You can count them *in the photo and the plan*.



We have made it into **very productive land**. It provides a substantial amount of vegetable and fruit food for our family and helper friends from late Spring through late Autumn.

Although this is **not enough for us to live off**, it greatly reduces the grocery bills. However, there are plenty of food shops and farmer's markets throughout Melbourne and our nearest supermarket is less than 1 km away.

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

We produce a great range of **vegetables, herbs and fruits** from our garden, which we love using. We can make them into great meals with **salads** (*see top photo next page*), **soups** (*see middle photo next page*), and **deserts** (*see second bottom photo next page*)! Last year we grew over **30 different foods**, which are listed below. *Can you name the plants in the photos on the next page from our list of produce below?*



## Vegetables

- Asparagus
- Beans (yellow *(in photo right)* & green)
- Broccoli
- Capsicum
- Chillies (various)
- Egg Plant (*dark plant in middle photo right*)
- Jerusalem Artichokes
- Kohlrabi
- Lebonese Cucumbers (*green plant in top and middle photos*)
- Lettuces
- Pumpkins
- Radishes
- Rhubarb
- Snow Peas
- Sweet Corn (The yellow cob is revealed when the protective sheath of light green leaves is removed- *photo top right*)
- Zucchini



## Fruits:

- Chokecherries
- Lemons
- Monstera
- Peaches
- Plums
- Raspberries
- Strawberries
- Thornless Blackberries
- Tomatoes (2-3 varieties, including Tom Thumbs *(see middle photo)*)
- Watermelon

*(On the photo above right, can you find the pieces of strawberries and peaches from our garden? They are red and yellow, respectively.)*

## Herbs

*(see photo right)*

- Coriander
- Mint
- Parsley
- Rosemary (*large bush on left in photo right*)
- Tarragon
- Thyme



# Sustainability - 'Caring for the Earth'

## Water efficiency

Melbourne **summer's** can get **very hot** and affect our plants. We tried **mulching** with pea straw to stop the soil drying out in the heat, but earwigs and millipedes became a problem! This coming year, we plan to minimise the evapo-transpiration, by **watering** in the **early morning** and at **night**. We are also putting in a **drip irrigation** system, so that the water will go directly into the soil for the roots to use. These will save water and not bring pests.

## Pest control

What do we do to eliminate invasive weeds, plants and pests in our garden? When and where ever possible, we pull them out and use herbicides and pesticides as little as we can.

## Keeping our nature around our treed- house home

We have **retained** as many **trees** as possible on our block. Fitting our food garden into our native trees is important to looking after (**conserving**) the **biodiversity** of this area. Our trees also improve urban **air quality**, by filtering it, making **oxygen** and they **store carbon**.

Our block has **Spotted Gums** (*Corymbia maculata*), **Pittosporum**, **Swamp Paper Barks** (*Melaleuca ericifolia*) and a **Fig Tree**. They enshroud the front of our home and bring all types of birds to our front door (*see photo first page*). At the rear, the **Swamp Mallet** (*Eucalyptus spathula*) – a native of the Avon Wheatbelt of Western Australia – is a favourite roost of Tawny Frogmouths and Butcher Birds. We have planted more **natives trees** (like **Bottlebrushes** (*Callistemon*)) and shrubs to create inviting habitat for **native creatures**:

- **Birds:** Butcher Birds, Tawny Frog Mouths, Magpies, Currawongs, Rosellas, Rainbow Lorikeets,
- **Marsupials:** Flying Foxes, Brushtail Possums,
- **Reptiles** : Skinks,
- **Insects** - and lots of bugs.

There is a **challenge** in this. How do we keep our **maximum tree cover**, while still allowing in enough **sunlight to grow** vegetables? Keeping as many native trees, shrubs and ground covers is always a **challenging balancing act**, be it in our small urban garden or on the extensive cropland farms in the Wheatbelt, where I currently research.

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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

