

Growing Lyttelton

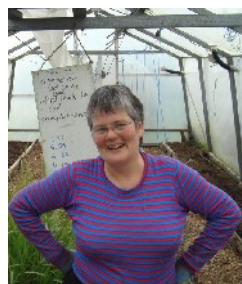
The Opawa Garden 2007

When the CPIT closed down their horticulture department in the middle of 2007, PL was able to take over 2 acres of their land, situated in Opawa, to grow organic and affordable vegetables for Lyttelton people.

The land had not been worked for three years and was very overgrown. Toshi and Bettina were employed as part time gardeners to try and establish the area as a working garden again.

This formidable task was started in July, with the able and willing help of a group of volunteers who met regularly on Sunday mornings for a working bee. The tasks tackled were very repetitive: weeding, weeding and weeding, mainly to get rid of some of the dreaded couch grass that had invaded all of the garden. Within the realm of weeding however there was great choice: anything from quietly hunkering down in the warm tunnel house with a trowel in hand to slashing down waist high grass in a paddock, hand digging it, up to three times, always removing more weeds, and finally rotovating so that the ground could be raked for planting.

We were lucky to also have experts within our volunteer group: some knew how to prune the fruit bushes, others worked with the harakeke flax.



A metal shed to keep our tools in was purchased, as well as several bails of pea hay and some seedling/potting mix. All our tools and wheelbarrows were donated, Toshi contributed garden scales and Bettina badgered a friend into donating the Rolls Royce of hoes, a \$100 American swivel hoe, which has been extensively used.

The two tunnel houses were the first spots to be weed free, and were planted in spinach, different lettuces and carrots, which in September became the first crops to be sold. The work continued on the outdoor areas, and a small herb garden was established in a plot close to the tunnel houses, and several bigger cropping areas were established in the garden.



By the end of November we decided to stop the working bees as people were becoming too busy before Christmas and we had some clean land to work with.

The following crops have been grown this season: 6 different varieties of lettuces, spinach, several varieties of Asian greens, several varieties of radishes, cabbages and broccoli, potatoes, green and yellow courgettes, green and yellow scallopini, several varieties of squash and pumpkins, white, yellow, red and orange carrots, curly and Italian parsley, two varieties of chives, rocket, mint and sorrel.



In the tunnel houses there are basil, six varieties of tomatoes (green sausage shaped ones, tiny yellow pear shaped ones, dark red Russians, striped tigerellas and more), capsicum, lemon cucumbers and beans.

We also made good use of some of the existing plants in the garden: we harvested artichokes, black currants, gooseberries, blueberries, several varieties of apples, rhubarb, lemon grass, sage and thyme.

Toshi has been mainly responsible for the hard, backbreaking work of preparing and planting the field vegetables (thank you Toshi!), whereas Bettina has been very lucky to end up with the care of the greenhouses, the herbs and doing the harvesting and delivering of vegetables. John (Bettina's husband) has worked as a casual back-up a few hours each week. Mark has come in three times with his weed eater to tame the jungle of weeds springing up in the unused areas and the CPIT has mowed the grass paths in the garden.

The majority of the crops went to Lyttel Piko Health food shop, Lyttelton Coffee Company and London Street restaurant. All three have been incredibly supportive, understanding when we were short of produce, and happily accommodating when I pressed unusual vegetables onto them to try. Ground Delicatessen has also started to order our produce. Whenever there was a surplus of produce we sold it on the Farmers Market.

Our first crop (salad mix) has been our most steady seller, with standing orders from Lyttel Piko and The Coffee Company since week one. Our most coveted crops have been the colourful carrots and tomatoes, and we could easily have sold triple the amount.



Looking back at how garden looked 6 months ago, it has vastly improved: the overgrown area of weeds has been turned again into a productive piece of land. Contacts have been established with shops and restaurants in Lyttelton and all the produce we grew has been bought. It has been a very heartening start, there are still many challenges ahead:

After three years of neglect, there are still many tasks to do before the land will be fully productive again:

The soil is starting to feel impoverished; there are no earth worms present; making compost and applying it onto the beds is an urgent priority

The fruit trees need to be pruned properly. There were too many apples of sub standard size.

There are parts of the garden which we have had no time to work on, e.g. the herb spiral area and the old chicken enclosure. The weeds there are starting to creep onto the blueberries.

The double skin tunnel house's skin is getting very opaque, limiting the growth of vegetables.

The demand for organic vegetables far outstripped what we could produce. However to produce more (and earn more!), we would need more people working in the garden, because Toshi and Bettina have only a limited amount of time available.

Plans for the future-

The next step for Grow Lyttelton could be a box scheme, where 20 individuals or families commit themselves to buy a \$20.00 box of fresh, seasonal vegetables every week for one growing season and also commit to donate 20 voluntary hours to the garden, which could be monitored by the time bank. The box scheme will soon be open to enrollment.

CPIT is at the moment arranging with us to process their food scraps and turn them into compost at the garden site, an arrangement that will be advantageous for us and them.

Grow Lyttelton has unlimited possibilities, not only for growing vegetables, but also as an educational venture, where small gardening courses could be taught and a place which the neighbours could use as a park, a place to walk and sit and chat and meet other neighbours.