



the good life

A drab entertainer's courtyard in the heart of Melbourne is reborn as a thriving, feel-good garden complete with vegie plot and chicken coop

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PHOTOGRAPHY SHANIA SHEGEDYN

Nothing breathes country into city life like a vegie patch, a few fruit trees and a couple of roaming chooks – and that's exactly what you'll find in this organic garden in inner-city Melbourne. "You get to pretend you're not in the heart of the city while still having the joy of living in it," says owner Vivien. "It gives me joy every day. I actually think I've died and gone to heaven."

It has a big impact for such a small space, especially when it started out as a completely paved entertainer's courtyard. For Vivien, an English country girl at heart, it was "amazingly desolate", so she turned to Mat Pember and the team at Little Veggie Patch Co to pop in an organic vegetable garden. When this hit the mark, they were commissioned to relandscape the area for chickens, gardening and entertaining. The team then set about making the garden visually appealing. "We installed more organic materials, like the cypress pine fence, red gum sleepers and the mulch with pea straw," says Mat.

The natural revamp creates the perfect home for Vivien's hens, Flower and Rose. "I just love having them cluck-cluck around," says Vivien. "It doesn't matter if you go to farmers markets, there's nothing like eating a day-fresh egg."

Plucking fresh vegies from the kitchen garden yields the same level of pleasure and pride, with everything from carrots and strawberries to all manner of herbs currently 'on the menu'.

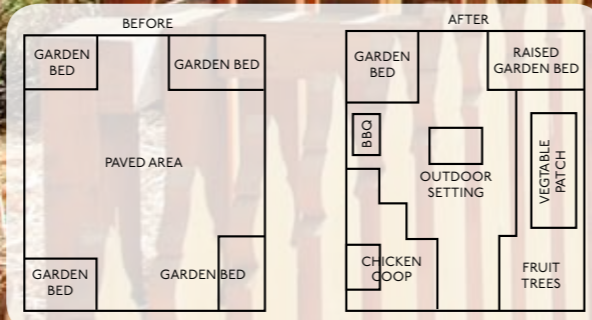
With its focus on self-sufficient living, the garden gives back to the environment as much as it does to Vivien. The injection of lush green plants means there's not as much heat radiating through the area and it has also created a new little ecosystem of birds and insects. "Diverse plants keep the pests and predators diverse too, and they help the vegie garden grow each year – the insects and pollinators remember where their vegetables are and the predators keep the pests in check so year after year your plants will continue to thrive," says Mat.

The garden has a natural balance. The garden beds are mulched using recycled chicken hay, and the chickens provide manure and constantly turn over the soil. "I do have a few problems with white caterpillars," Vivien admits, "but I am coping with that. And, of course, they're fed to the chickens so it's a lovely, never-ending cycle." >



natural wonder

This garden serves up a banquet of fresh produce that isn't just limited to the organic vegie patch. On offer is an array of fruit trees: apple, lemon, orange, kaffir lime and mandarin.



timber tales


Red gum sleepers house the vegie patch and line the garden beds. The old pavers from the original garden were reused. Says Mat: "They were a bright yellow-white. We painted them a darker colour for contrast."



urban chicks

Vivien's chickens, Rose and Flower, bring great fun to the garden. While the city life's for them, they often enjoy "grass holidays" in Rosebud West, a Victorian seaside town, with Vivien's children. Their city coop was an internet buy and, while Rose and Flower have free run of the back garden, Vivien's neighbour put in the picket fence to keep them safe. "You've got to be careful about predators," warns Mat. "Chickens need safe housing but they also need to live as freely as possible to lay healthy eggs. Vivien's is a great example of how little a space you need to have happy chickens." *Contact Mat Pember of Little Veggie Patch Co on 0422 067 874 littleveggiepatchco.com.au.*



Vivien {right}, with one of her beloved hens, Rose, is the proud owner of this bountiful organic garden. An abundance of fresh produce thrives, from carrots {left} to spring onions, eggplant and beetroot {far right}. "There's a lot of joy in having people over for dinner and saying, 'All that you're eating comes from the garden.' It's special," says Vivien. 



vegie variety

A smorgasboard of veges and herbs flourishes in this vegie patch, which includes basil, thyme, chilli, spring onions, cucumber and marjoram. Strawberries border the raised bed.

"People who COME INTO THE HOUSE CAN'T BELIEVE THAT SUCH A SMALL GARDEN HAS SUCH RICH GROWTH" ~ OWNER VIVIEN



budget breakdown

Vegie patch (including timber, soil, drip irrigation and plants)	\$1250
Revamping of pavers and landscaping	\$1400
Chicken coop and pre-fabricated fencing	\$600

total..... \$3,250