

A COMMUNITY GARDEN MANIFESTO: THE CONTRIBUTING GARDENS

by

Newcastle Community Garden Project, 2010





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Contributing Authors:

Gwen Allen, Anne Brandscheid, Nola Christie, Meryl Dunton-Rose, Chris Everingham, Kristy Lee Grainger, Nellie Hobley, Jodie Kell, Craig Manhood, Chris Morenong, Bill Robertson, Anne Rooke-Frizell, Linda Sherbon, Alan Wallington

For more information, contact jenny.cameron@newcastle.edu.au

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	iii
Ernie Hughes Memorial Community Garden	1
Fig Tree Community Garden	3
March Street Community Garden.....	5
Sandhills Community Garden	7
Silsoe Street Community Garden.....	9
Tighes Hill Community Garden	11
Villiers Street Community Garden	13

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to A Community Garden Manifesto: The Contributing Gardens.

This document accompanies [A Community Garden Manifesto](#). It tells the story of the community gardens that contributed to the Manifesto. It is also a written version of the stories that are on the Newcastle Community Gardens PlaceStories website, see <http://ps3beta.com/project/7733>.

The community gardens that contributed to the Manifesto (and that are on the PlaceStories website) were all involved in a two-day bus trip visiting each other's community gardens in Newcastle, Australia.

At each garden there was lots of discussion (and laughing and reflecting) which was audio-recorded and later transcribed. This document (and the PlaceStories website) is a compilation of the presentations that the community gardeners made at their own gardens.

Even though the gardens are all in the same town, you'll find that each is different. Each has its own personality. And this document reports on only seven of the twenty-three (at last count) community gardens in the Newcastle area!

Over two days there was only time to visit a small number of gardens. Therefore the gardens invited to be part of the project were relatively close to the centre of Newcastle and easily accessible over the two days. We also needed to keep the group relatively small so we could have whole group discussions (and fit on a mini-bus!). Each garden was invited to send two representatives on the bus trip. So each community garden selected two people who could talk about what happens at their garden (and were also able to give up two days to participate in the bus-trip).

For more information about these gardens or for more information about the project please contact Jenny.Cameron@newcastle.edu.au. You'll also find that the story for each garden has a link to a website that will give you more information and contact details.

ERNIE HUGHES MEMORIAL COMMUNITY GARDEN



The Ernie Hughes Memorial Community Garden is located on an unused bowling green at Mayfield Diggers Club, an ex-services club. Alan, tell us how the garden got started.

Alan Wallington

Well, I was involved in other community gardens in Mayfield, and I saw the two old bowling greens at the Diggers club and thought they would be ideal for a community garden. When I first wrote to the club they didn't seem to be very interested, so I drew up a plan and various statements about how the garden would be run, which I then presented to the Club General Manager. With that we got the go-ahead.

There was one condition. The club didn't want the garden to develop into an eyesore. So that's why the garden beds are all uniform. It also makes it easier us to mow around the garden beds (a chore the Club used to do). The club also provides us with water,

and we operate under their insurance cover and our own Public Liability Insurance.

To get started I built the first garden bed – that cost \$140. Then as people join they pay \$140 and they get a garden bed. So everyone time I get \$140 I build another garden bed ready for the next person. So it's like the same \$140 going round and round and round and round and round.

We currently have 15 garden beds owned and operating, together with several communal beds. Having people pay \$140 means that they have to be serious about the garden, and they're more likely to stay.

If people neglect their plot we get in contact and then if there's no response we dismantle their garden and say they can come and pick up the sleepers because they bought them. If they don't pick them up we use them again

There are only three rules here:

- Respect your fellow gardeners
- Respect the neighbourhood
- Respect the environment

We like to keep things simple and loose. I've been involved in different gardens and I have found the looser it is the smoother the garden runs



*Keeping things
simple and
loose*

We've been going eighteen months now. And the Diggers Club love the garden. They get a lot of kudos from the garden because as far as anyone is concerned it is part of the club, and that is why we have to keep it tidy, so that it looks like part of the club.

[Ernie Hughes Memorial Community Garden Inc.](#)

Community Gardener

Alan Wallington

Ernie Hughes Memorial
Community Garden Inc.

Story compiled by Jenny Cameron

***Remembering
the history***

And it's important that the garden is called the Ernie Hughes Memorial Community Garden. Ernie Hughes was a keen lawn bowls player and it was due to his hard work at persistence that the bowling green was built. I didn't want us to forget the history of the greens or the man who created them.

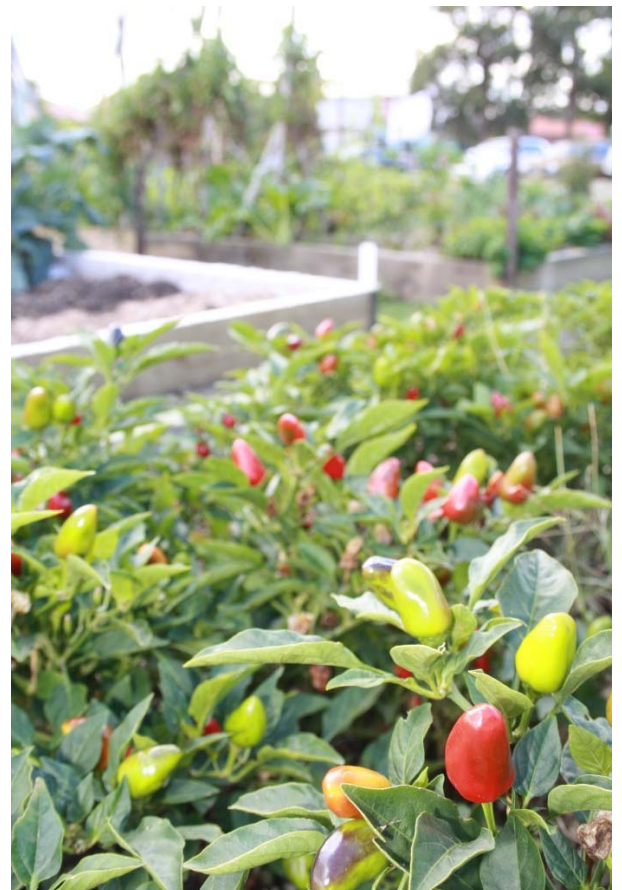


FIG TREE COMMUNITY GARDEN



Fig Tree is one of the oldest community gardens in Newcastle, and it's been an inspiration for many others.

Bill Robertson

We started out almost seven years ago. There was a flyer that Craig and some friends put around a few different parts of town saying “Do people want to start a community garden in Morrow Park?” and out of that we got started with our first working bee. Then 18 months later things changed and we had to move. So literally, we picked up whatever we could in wheelbarrows or whatever and we walked over the hill over here.

Craig Manhood

We were so shattered at the time and then when we came and saw this site we thought “You beauty”. And because it's such a big site compared to what we had, we've been able to expand into all sorts of areas.

There are layers of things that happen here. One of the things we do is a round trip every week to about 6 restaurants and we pick up bins of

food waste and we sell them some herbs so we raise a bit of money for the garden through those sales. It's one of my favourite parts of the week because you are around these people with a passion for food which is so similar to having a passion for gardening and I'm a hopeless chef, so I love that job because I learn when I see those guys.

Then there's the Hare Krishna place and they bring their food scraps here and they give the chooks this blessed food, this holy food. And then there's a lot of other people who come here purely to get rid of their waste. And it's a really good thing for the garden because we never need to import organic matter.

The other layers that we've got are the workshops. We sometimes get funding to run workshops, so there's one coming up on meditation in the garden and another on gardening in small spaces. We've got something on bee-keeping coming up later in the year and making pizza with kids. These are all council funded.

There's also a herbal medicine teacher, and her students do 20 hours volunteer work here every year



“We were so shattered at the time and then we thought ‘You beauty’”.

Bill Robertson

There are so many different people who come here, there is a young guy in his mid-30s and he comes along and just builds stuff.

Craig Manhood

We organised it so that he was a Work for the Dole supervisor and so they built the pump house, they built the chicken dome, they built the hothouse, they built the awning off the side of the shed, they sorted out the tanks, they built the cubby house—actually they built the lot.

The people across the road, they are connected and they will come in and pick salad leaves for dinner.

Something that’s startling for me is that I’m here every single week, and every week I come here I meet somebody new and I’ve been coming here for 6 years. You just don’t know who uses the garden.

Bill Robertson

No one person owns Fig Tree. I don’t think there is anyone who feels like they own the garden. We keep putting it out there that there is always an open door for people, so we say to people, “Be as involved as you like and make of it what you will,” because I don’t think that any of us feel so attached that it has to be done a certain way. I think that’s an important part of how the place works.

While Fig Tree has broad community involvement, there has been a huge effort by workers and volunteers who are at the garden week in, week out. So we give a special thank-you to those regulars for providing sustenance and inspiration at Fig Tree.

[Fig Tree Community Garden](#)

Community Gardeners

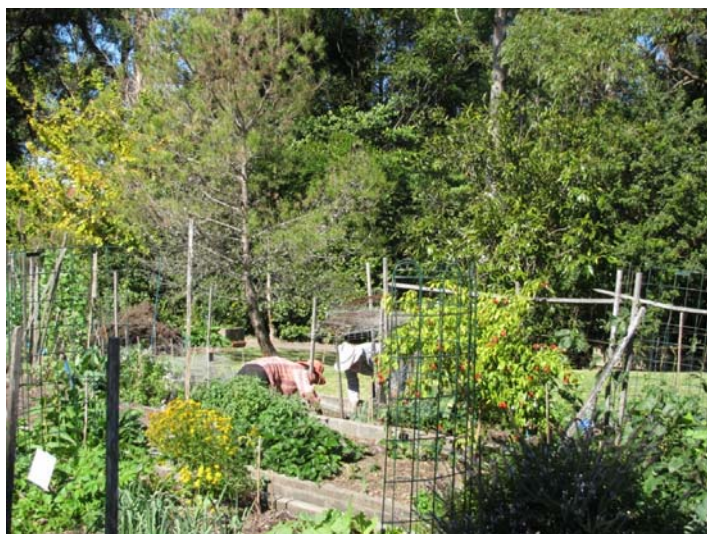
Craig Manhood & Bill Robertson
Fig Tree Community Garden

Story compiled by Jenny Cameron

“No one person owns Fig Tree ... there is always an open door for people”.



MARCH STREET COMMUNITY GARDEN



Change is a constant part of community gardening and not just because of seasonal changes. March Street Community Garden is in the midst of a transition.

Linda Sherbon

March Street is in the grounds of the Council's Community Greening Centre. It's based on an individual model, so everybody has a plot, and everybody keeps their own produce. Some people have gardens in their backyards, but some people live in units and townhouses and a garden is very important to them.

We used to work very closely with a liaison officer from the Council. At one point there was an officer here who was very structured, and there were lots of dos and don'ts. After he left we had nobody looking after us for about 9 months and we didn't know what to do. And then we got a new council liaison officer and she took us off in another direction. And she inspired us to do a lot of new things. She got us thinking more about communal activities. So we put in some communal garden beds in the tubs. And we started a mini-orchard,

and we got chooks, and we've now got a worm farm.

Then with council cut backs we have had to become more autonomous so it's a big learning curve for us. We have had to form a committee and various other things that not a lot of people want to do. People hate committees, people hate watering rosters and chicken rosters and it is quite difficult to get people to volunteer. And we don't have a coordinator because no one wanted the full responsibility, and it is a big responsibility because there are about 50 gardens here. And the tasks are falling to only a few people. We have lost people in the transition, haven't we Gwen.

Gwen Allen

Yes, so we have started having monthly working bees on Saturday and a BBQ afterwards and we are hoping to bring people together a bit more and get a few chores done around the place so that people are aware of what needs to be done and so people get to know one another. In the past it was very much people would come and tend their plot and they might stay for a bit, but there wasn't a lot of interaction, so we're trying to change that.



Changing the way a garden works

*“The gardens
are all an
expression of
people’s
personalities.”*

Linda Sherbon

We’ve started to grow herbs and sell them when the Greening Centre has plant give aways and at school fairs and Church fairs. But we still get a lot of help from council, it’s just that now that we’re more autonomous we have to raise funds for what we need. For example, we need funds to replace the hoses that have deteriorated. And we want to move the chickens and build them a bigger run. So that requires materials, we have to get resources for all of that, so that’s a big job.

Gwen Allen

The lovely thing about this garden is that there are all different methods, there is permaculture, and some people grow things in rows and some people just throw everything in together. The gardens are all an expression of people’s personalities.

[March Street Community Garden](#)

Community Gardeners:

Gwen Allen & Linda Sherbon
March Street Community Garden

Story compiled by Jenny Cameron

Note: As of February 2011, March Street community gardeners have been told by Newcastle City Council that they have to move. This is distressing for the community gardeners and they are currently negotiating with Council.



SANDHILLS COMMUNITY GARDEN



We're at a wonderful spot in East Newcastle, with the Hunter River on one side, and the ocean just over the hill. Chris take us on a tour of Sandhills community garden.

Chris Everingham

Well we're an unfenced garden in a very public place in a public park. And we have to share this part of the park with everyone. And that really determines our positives and our negatives.

Right next to the garden are the old tramway sheds that have facilities for bbqs and picnics. And we get lots of people coming here for parties and so on. And they wander over to look at what's happening in the garden.

We're also next to mixed public and private medium density housing. People from the housing walk through the gardens day and night on their way into town, and to the train and the buses.

The great sense of fulfilment that I have is when people from the housing estate, who don't even come to the working bees or anything like that,

when they come and pick things. So people in all these houses, you see them in the afternoon coming to pick things and treating it as if it is their garden. And even though I hate jargon, it's that idea of pride of place. This is their garden.

The main thing we try and do is keep everyone in greens—spinach, lettuce and so on. And that's probably our big commitment to the community—keeping the greens up

What happens though is that people take things before they're ready. And I think it's because everything's free and there's this real urgency to take it before somebody else does. It's such a novel idea that you can just come and take food. People need time to adjust to that idea. That's the thing about being in a public place and being open all the time

But it's amazing when you look at it, and there's a lot of vandalism in this part of Newcastle. And ok you lose a plant or two. But you learn to let that go. And you build up the gardeners' spirits when that happens, you say, "Look it doesn't matter. It's not so important. We've all got our own journeys."



“Being an unfenced garden in a very public place determines all our positives and negatives.”

“It’s about cultivating this attitude of generosity.”

And once somebody took one of our compost bins, and I know who it was because I see it in their yard. So now we paint all our compost bins.

But really the garden is about cultivating an attitude, and that’s what community gardens are all about. It’s about cultivating this attitude of generosity. It’s an ethic of generosity.

And people give us stuff all the time. They give fruit trees, olive trees, nut trees, banana plants. There’s a tamarillo over in the corner which people gave us when they were leaving the area. So the givers win out. It’s amazing.

[Sandhills Community Garden](#)

Community Gardener:

Chris Everingham,
Sandhills Community Garden

Story compiled by Jenny Cameron



SILSOE STREET COMMUNITY GARDEN



Community Gardens come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. Silsoe Street Community Garden in Mayfield is a small community garden. But that small size has lots of benefits.

Jodie Kell

One of the things I like about this community garden is that it's very low-key. All the garden beds are shared, so we have a monthly working bee to look after the gardens, and we have a weekly watering roster and a fortnightly mowing roster. On average, around twenty people turn up to each working bee. That's been enough to build and maintain the garden.

It's really nice when you're on the watering roster and people are walking past and they just wander in and ask about the garden. And we've had a lot of respect from people. The garden is unfenced and we haven't had anything vandalised. And there also seems to be enough food here for people to come in and take things. Nellie, we've talked about this.

A shared garden where anyone can come in and take things

Nellie Hobley

That's right. I live directly opposite the garden and I see people who've never been to working bees come in and take things, and I get excited by that because I feel that the community is really benefiting. Most of the people who are involved in the garden have their own backyard gardens, so they're not doing it for food for themselves, they're getting something else out of it

Jodie Kell

Yeah, for me it's really transformed my neighbourhood because now I know so many more people, and I've made really good friends through the garden.

Nellie Hobley

Well, we work in with the Community Greening Centre which is part of Newcastle City Council. This means we are volunteers of the Greening Centre and are covered by their public liability insurance, but we have to follow their Occupational, Health and Safety requirements.

Overall, Council has been really good to us. We are on Council land and so Council worked with Hunter Water to get water connected to the site and to get taps near the garden beds.



We also got a Community Grant from Newcastle City Council. We used the money to build garden beds, buy soil and put an irrigation system in, which was just brilliant over the summer when it was so hot and dry.

[Silsoe Street Community Garden](#)

Community Gardeners:
Nellie Hobley & Jodie Kell,
Silsoe Street Community Garden

Story compiled by Jenny Cameron

*“We’re relaxed
and we’re
having fun!”*

Jodie Kell

A lot of the plants have been donated. One of our members has a friend who has a nursery and they donated the fruit trees, and old seedlings. But at the working bees basically you just bring seeds and seedlings, and we chuck things in and if they grow they grow, and if they don’t they don’t. That’s the nice thing about being a low-key community garden. We’re relaxed and we’re having fun!



TIGHES HILL COMMUNITY GARDEN



Tighes Hill is a guerrilla garden. Nola tell us how the garden came about.

Nola Christie

The site used to be a concrete batching plant, and when the facility was moved the bays were filled up with concrete and the whole site was just fenced off and basically left abandoned. I live next to the site, and one day some kids jumped the fence and threw rocks, breaking my windows. And that was the impetus for doing something about this vacant black of land.

“We have always referred to ourselves as a guerrilla garden and we really like that.”

We tried to find out who owned it, but nobody put their hand up. So we thought we'd just go ahead and get started. We did a flyer drop in the neighbourhood, of a couple of hundred flyers. We had half a dozen people reply and we had our first blitz day on the 12th of July in 2009. From those small beginnings, we now have 70 households on our email list. We have a newsletter; and we have a blog called Community Gardening for Idiots.

We have working bees on the second Sunday of every month, but people seem to come all the time. Kids come after school and we have a chook roster where people let the chooks out, feed them, collect the eggs.

We also have Cocktails in the garden on the last Friday evening of every month. It is a real really big social event, there are people who don't come and garden but the LOVE to come and enjoy a cocktail!

Meryl Dunton-Rose

Yeah, and right from the start we have always referred to ourselves as a guerrilla garden and we really like that. Now that we have been going for some time, we feel confident enough that no one is going to tell us that we can't be here.

One of the issues with a guerrilla garden is insurance and risk. We have thought about giving people a briefing on OH&S. But in terms of suing there is no one to sue because no-one owns the garden. And we're trying to go against the idea that you blame someone else for something you have done. The people who come here take responsibility for their own actions.



Putting in the infrastructure

Nola Christie

When we started there was no soil on the site. So we got some soil donated but it was very clayey. So we so we planted a green manure crop first, and now this is the first planting of food crops.

We were filling up a bin from my garden tap, and people would bucket it out onto the gardens. But now Ready Mix, who had the concrete batching plant, have donated four water tanks and a plumber to hook them up them up so we can catch the rain water from the roof of my house. This will be a huge development for the garden, because it will give us ample water. So now we're really looking forward to our second summer in the garden.

[Tighes Hill Community Garden](#)

Community Gardeners:

Nola Christie & Meryl Dunton-Rose
Tighes Hill Community Garden

Story compiled by Jenny Cameron.



VILLIERS STREET COMMUNITY GARDEN



One of the things that can happen to community gardens is that they have to close down. This is what happened at Villiers Street Community Garden in Mayfield.

Anne Rooke-Frizell

We were on Department of Housing Land, and then the Department wanted to resume the land and use it for Social Housing, which I think is a good thing. But it meant we had to close down.

“It was important to maintain the community and friendships we had built.”

It was awful when we were told. Some people wandered away. And that was sad, but that’s what they needed to do at the time. Whereas some of us felt it was really important to maintain the community and the friendships we had built.

Chris Morenong

It was very discouraging. Annie remained positive throughout the whole thing. But I just left it. I didn’t feel like doing anything. I still wanted to be involved but I thought “What’s the point?” We had put a lot of time and energy into building the garden.

Anne Rooke-Frizell

We looked around for another site. I went to see the local church and they agreed that we could use a portion of their land and so we’ve started a new community garden there, and that’s called Church Street Community Garden. And other good things have happened.

When the garden was here, I bought a water pump to get water out of the creek, as it’s very dry here in summer. We don’t need the pump at the church. So I’ve got a friend who is working with an Indigenous community in South Western Queensland to build a permaculture garden, so I’m going to take the pump up to them, and I hope that we can build a relationship between the two gardens. So that’s going to be a real positive.

And we’re working with Alex from Valencia Street, the next street over, and he wants to plant Valencia trees in Valencia Street so we can have a Valencia orange festival each year.

And I’ve started guerrilla gardening in my street. When I cut down my Robinia tree, I made a little seat for people to sit on.

And we’ve offered to help set up a small community garden with the tenants when the social housing is built here



“Positive things have come out of it.”

So even though this community garden has gone—and that’s sad—there’s also lots of positive things that have come out of it and that will continue to come out of it.

[Church Street Community Garden](#)

Community Gardeners:

Anne Rooke-Frizell & Chris Morenong
Church Street Community Garden &
Villiers Street Community Garden

Story compiled by Jenny Cameron

