

Growing, pest management and harvesting

with Liz Hanson

Growing your plants

Five key points to get plants to grow fast and healthy:

The 3 Ms: **Minerals, Mulches, Manure**

And the 2 Ws: **Watering, weeding**

Minerals and manure are the building blocks for the plants.

I make liquid manures out of comfrey and kelp. And I use animal manures. Remember healthy animals produce healthy manures – so use get the best you can get; organic chicken and cattle manures, if possible.

You need a heavy layer of mulch on top of the soil, as the sun is hot and desiccating here in the subtropics. I combine manures with my mulch, and this creates healthy soil life – mulches help create living ecosystems in the soil.

Watering

With increased sunlight, you'll need more water for healthy plants. Timing for watering is best when the sun is gone; I prefer the mornings, it keeps water off the plants overnight and reduces fungi problem. You can use automatic watering systems, sprinklers, or hand held hoses – ensure your watering is Waterwise as possible.

After watering check whether plants are getting enough water – dig in under mulch and check soil is wet.

Weeds are plants out of place – they compete with your plants and steal nutrients. Nature will fill spaces, and mulches, as well as keeping soil cool and moist, will help keep weeds down in your garden.

If you are weeding too much – you have a garden design fault. Think of other ways to keep weeds at bay – perhaps use living pathways.

Once removed, weeds are a resource. You can put them compost, back as mulch, or in liquid fertilisers.

Pest management

Pests are attracted to stressed plants – so first ensure plants are happy, by increasing water and food.

Micro pests include cabbage moths, 20 spot lady beetles – if I have healthy plants, I don't worry about these.

For macro pests (e.g. parrots, bandicoots, scrub turkeys, kangaroos, fruit bats, fruit fly), exclusion is the key – use fencing or nets, bag your bananas.

Invite select wildlife in, and provide habitat for them. Nectar-eating birds also eat insects, as do frogs and lizards. So provide habitat for them: flowering native plants, ponds, birdbaths, leaf litter, and decaying logs.

Diversity in your garden is key – so plant a mix of herbs, vegetables, and flowering plants.

Harvesting

The fun part! Having a food garden changes your food habits – eating seasonally, means we cut transportation costs, green house gasses and reduces our need for supermarket foods.

Become one of the real healthy food people – see your garden as the new supermarket! Nothing is more satisfying than harvesting food from your garden and eating it.

Continuous planting will ensure continuous harvesting i.e. don't plant all your lettuces at once. You can also continually pick from outside of many veggies, e.g. celery, lettuce, broccoli. Cucumbers, tomatoes, eggplants, will fruit all season.

If you eat it – try and grow it. Make that your challenge! Start small, succeed, then expand.

So remember your 3 Ms and 2 Ws – and pest management will look after itself – and in the end you'll have a bumper crop for the table.