

Guilt-free pleasure

It's easy to create a beautiful, productive garden without the worry about wasting water

>> **Words & photography** Tony Fawcett

Hendrik Van Leeuwen loves home-grown vegies and beautiful gardens. But Hendrik, one of Melbourne's most successful landscape designers, believes there's no point growing vegetables and possessing a beautiful garden if you're guilt-ridden over the precious water you're using.

So, Hendrik has come up with a guilt-free way to garden while making as minimal a footprint on the environment as possible, particularly in the water department.

To show how it's done, he's set up the Hughesdale garden he shares with his partner, Nicole, as one of the most productive, attractive, enviro-friendly and least thirsty gardens about.

Just four years old, it's a picture of beauty and productivity yet is maintained by little more than a 9000-litre tank and a grey-water system.

Here grows all manner of produce, from your basic kitchen staples such as peas and beans to kiwi fruit, tangelos and tamarillos, in a setting so green that in parts it is reminiscent of the tropics.

One of its biggest secrets, Hendrik says, is choosing the right plants and planting them in the right places. "Even with water restrictions and times as difficult as they seem, there are lots of plants, such as liriopes, clivia, mondo grass, cycads, giant bird of paradise (*Strelitzia nicolai*) and

nandina that are fantastic in dealing with low-water situations."

The best example of this is either side of a path next to the house where there is an emphasis on colour, form and bold massed plantings of low-water species, including clivia, lilly-pilly and bird of paradise.

On the south side of the house, away from the burning sun, these lush-looking species are able to show off their best.

Elsewhere, ornamental pears such as *Pyrus chanticleer*, callistemons, olive, *Syzygium 'Captain Cook'* and even bangalow palms and a giant ornamental banana add to the enveloping and densely planted backdrop.

Included among all this is a good selection of Australian natives, including lemon-scented gum, kangaroo paw, brachycomes and lemon-scented myrtle (*Backhousia citriodora*), whose leaves when rubbed in the fingers have a wonderful citrus scent and can be used in cooking.

Scattered about are pockets of herbs by the sides of paths, rustic timber seats and a fire pit (just right for outdoor entertaining) encircled by a spacious Castlemaine-slate area.

Paramount to Hendrik's garden is the chook yard where a collection of bantams and rhode island reds produce not only eggs but also a regular supply of nutrient-rich compost.

As well as following organic and permaculture garden principles, Hendrik, where possible, has used only sustainable and environmentally sound landscaping materials. "My hope is that well-designed, sustainable gardens can go from boutique to mainstream, with people enjoying multiple benefits from gardens, guilt-free," he says.

Hendrik's garden (9 Camden Rd, Hughesdale) will open next weekend as part of Australia's Open Garden Scheme (www.opengarden.org.au). For more information on Van Leeuwen Green, the landscaping business Hendrik runs with friend Jake Green, see www.vanleeuwenegreen.com.



>> water-wise tips

- > Plant species with similar water needs together to make the best use of water.
- > Don't irrigate the south side of the house as much as the north side.
- > Be aware that many water-wise plants, such as liriopes and clivias, will rot if given too much water.

Hot stuff

A fire pit and slate paving makes an ideal gathering place (top)

Ruling the roost

Hendrik Van Leeuwen loves his backyard chooks (above)

Touch of paradise

This Melbourne garden has a touch of the tropics (left)

Outside the box

Box hedging gives this section a formal tone (far left)

