

GARDENS

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Photograph by Claire Takacs.

In his suburban-Melbourne garden, Hendrik Van Leeuwen has created a tunnel of foliage texture. The broad leaves of a banana plant, at left, contrast with the tiny leaves of a mature *Melaleuca* (right). At ground level, ornamental grasses including *Pennisetum 'Burgundy Giant'* jostle for space.

RIPE FOR THE PICKING

Beauty and bounty are perfect bedmates in this garden created by an avid horticulturist in suburban Melbourne.

TEXT CHRISTINE REID • PHOTOGRAPHY CLAIRE TAKACS



A fire pit and seating are structural elements set against a background of lush planting including vegetables and pretty flowers. Clipped *Santolina* balls act as an anchor against the ephemeral plantings of giant sunflowers, while runner beans festoon the pergola. Massed ginger lilies and a pear tree hide the boundary fence; rainbow chard and chilli plants deliver colour.



'I LOVE THE LUSH LOOK OF MASSED CROPS THRIVING FROM LATE SPRING; I CALL IT MY LAZY SUMMER GARDEN.' HENDRIK



TOP AND ABOVE Allowing plants to grow around the hard landscaping helps soften its impact. Hendrik uses shallow baskets for gathering his salad ingredients.

Horticulturist Hendrik Van Leeuwen's garden offers much food for thought. It's a shining example of a productive urban garden and it shows how we could all make better use of our backyards. It's truly astonishing to see how many fruit and vegetables are thriving in this 15x48m patch. What's more, the overall effect is sensational.

Hendrik, who runs his own garden design business, has always been a firm believer in growing your own. "I just love the fresh-from-the-garden taste," he says. "I dislike food that has been wrapped in plastic; you don't know how old it is."

Hendrik moved to Hughesdale in suburban Melbourne six years ago and, fortunately for him, the block, both front and back, was virtually bare, with only a patch of kikuku lawn at the rear. "That gave me a blank canvas to work with," he says.

His key considerations when planning the garden were: the texture of the foliage; using form and colour as an integral part of the design; a strict watering plan with drip irrigation and rainwater harvesting; and, most important of all, the ability to grow food-producing plants – myriad vegetables, fruit and herbs – that look as good as they taste.

From the street the garden appears strictly ornamental, with massed plantings that knit together for a strong visual effect. There's no sense of the adventurous and exciting rear garden.

However, as soon as you step out of bifold doors onto the wide rear deck, which is made of sustainably grown sugar gum, you are embraced by a green, sheltered and inviting space. Timber boxes built into the deck, described by Hendrik as his 'salad bars', are filled to overflowing with lettuce and herb combinations. ➤



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE
A banana plant adds height and a sub-tropical flavour to this corner. Casual seating is incorporated into the raised beds. The entrance to the chook house feels as though you are deep in the country. The feathery appeal of *Pennisetum 'Burgundy Giant'*. The chickens are let out to range around the garden to clean up any wayward snails. A narrow path lined with clivias leads along the side of the house. The bounty: a basket of freshly picked plums.





- 1 House
2 Deck with cutouts for olive and kiwifruit trees
3 Lawn with viburnum, nandina hedging
4 Fire pit in paved zone
5 Studio
6 Chook pen
7 Fruit trees incl pear, apricot, plum, apple, lemon, lime, orange
8 Vegetable garden
9 Office
10 Path lined with *Pyrus calleryana* 'Chanticleer', *Liriope muscari*, Boston ivy, *dianella*.
11 *Buxus*, *Syzygium* 'Bush Christmas', heliotrope, agave, *Malus ioensis*
12 Bangalow palms, *Strelitzia nicolai*, *Hymenosporum flavidum*
13 *Callistemon*, *Lomandra*, *Anigozanthos*

“They have to be close to the kitchen,” says Hendrik. “Space and location are important for vegetables.” On the pergola overhead, kiwifruit, scarlet runner beans and muscat grapes jostle for space.

The back garden has several accent plants, such as a lemon-scented gum and a giant ornamental banana plant. These combine with hedges, paths, a small circle of lawn and a fire pit to give overall structure. Add to this a shed (complete with a television and table-tennis table) and a chook pen, and it’s nothing short of a miracle in cohesive design.

However, surprisingly, Hendrik says it’s not a garden to look at – rather a place for growing and harvesting. His vegetables are not grown in rows but in raised beds packed with vegetables from seedlings to mature specimens.

“I love the perfumes of herbs, so I made a little sitting space where there’s a good amount of sun,” he says. The wafting perfumes of rosemary, mint, oregano and thyme fill the air as you survey the perfection of the vegetable colour combinations.

Nothing is left to chance. In a tiny corner at the northern end is a dynamic

grouping of rainbow chard, beetroot, purple basil and red cabbages. Nearby, peas and beans twirl up supports made from discarded reinforcing mesh while nasturtiums clamber among lettuces of all varieties. “Globe artichokes, though, are my favourite, with their shapely grey foliage and large, edible flower buds,” says Hendrik.

Near the chook shed is a section that is laid out more formally. “It’s where I plant seasonal vegies such as corn, in streamlined rows, and let the zucchini and pumpkins roam. I love the lush look of massed crops thriving from late spring; I call it my lazy summer garden,” he says.

All around the garden, you can see the benefits of heavy mulching with pea straw and manure from the chook pen on the peach, tamarillo and apple trees, vegies and herbs. “Although I run a business designing low-maintenance gardens, I could happily spend all my time caring for, building up the soil and harvesting fruit and vegetables from my own garden. Something of an irony, isn’t it?” he says, with a laugh.

H&G

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CROP CYCLE

The key to Hendrik’s planting success is careful planning through sensible water use and regular soil maintenance. Drip irrigation is installed through the garden in zones that match plant water needs. He harvests rainwater in a 9000L rainwater tank servicing both house and garden and recycles grey water. Soil is enriched by endless composting. Almost all scraps and vegetable matter are used as food for Hendrik’s chooks. They make a deep litter that, in turn, provides compost for the garden. He constantly adds organic matter, cow and mixed manures to build up the soil. “I don’t dig the soil; the idea is to create a worm farm in the raised garden beds – the more worms, the better the soil.”



At ground level, silvery grasses and euphorbia contrast with the fleshy leaves of the banana plant and clumps of heliconias at mid level. The totem pole is one of two from Timor; they reputedly allow only good spirits to enter the space.