



Keri Anderson has hankered after an edible garden for years, she says. "I've been mulling it over since the kids were little and I became more concerned about their health."

She switched to natural products and organics, and the next logical progression seemed to be producing her own fruit and vegetables.

She was held back until a final decision was made this year to remain in their present house. That decision has recently been supported by the rise and rise of food prices, putting organics out of reach of the family's budget, "and I was sick of spending a lot of time and effort in the garden just for flowers, I wanted to get something edible for all my labour".

Keri, however, was not confident of her ability to achieve the levels she wanted on her own – up until now her repertoire had been confined to tomatoes and lettuces. And the site was difficult, sloping 1.5m down the back of the section where the gardens were to be established.

So she called in an expert. "I'm not good at any design things – I needed to get everything in the right place and some good advice as well. I've been living in Hamilton 10 years, but I'm still not familiar with the soils and what grows best."

A garden designer/environmental-sustainability specialist first checked out the Andersons' site, took photographs, looked at the soil – and listened. Keri's brief included fruit and vegetables available for picking throughout the year; a cricket pitch for her son; and an introduction to permaculture – composting, creating a worm bath/farm, catching rain water.

The garden designer then drew up a couple of concepts, from which Keri selected her final working plan.

This gave extensive details on every aspect: different cultivars – three types of apple, for instance, that would produce fruit early, mid and late season – what to plant where and what grows best in Hamilton conditions, soil (Keri's is clay based) improvement and preparation, rotating crops, hard landscaping, including two flat areas for seating in summer and winter. Step-by-step instructions on the construction of the raised beds were given too, and how to create a worm farm.

The designer also recommended getting rid of as much existing lawn as possible to better retain nutrients within the soil.

Keri has attacked the plan on a pay-as-you-goes basis. "I've probably done things out of order. I'm improvising a bit."

First, she removed the borders from the original garden, created a large blank canvas to work within. Next she cut down superfluous existing trees and got rid of their stumps, ordered the fruit and citrus trees, planted them with a healthy surround of compost.

An organic gardeners group put her in touch with



Keri Anderson ready to put plans into action for her new edible garden.

a nursery whose trees were healthy, good sized and cheap – about \$10 a tree. She also sourced plants via the internet and a sales table at her church offered all types of plants, including passionfruit, herbs and vegetables, for a donation.

Keri's focus now is on constructing the framework of the raised beds from untreated timber surrounds, gum's best she understands. Then getting them and their contents level, improving soil condition, preparing it for spring planting. Keri has one compost bin up and running well, but even when she has three working in rotation, she will supplement by buying in compost.

She will plant the beds strictly to what the family – husband Ian, 13-year-old Niall and 10-year-old Merryn – likes to eat. No insecticides will be used in this garden; predators will be controlled with neem oil, garlic spray and a soapy concoction made from detergent and oil, and by a companion planting system. She will also create a corner

native garden that will attract beneficial birds and insects.

This first year Keri will grow her vegetables from seedlings, they will ensure best results for a novice, she feels. She'll progress on to seeds once she gains confidence, which will open up opportunities to grow "something other than supermarket varieties - weird looking zucchini, different tomatoes, purple carrots ..."

Biggest outlay so far in this garden has been for the expert advice. "But I figure if I get everything right it will be worth it. I'd planted a plum tree in the wrong place and it just shot up instead of fruiting. The hard landscaping – the decks and the bricked area – will be another big expense, but I'll leave that for now and do things a piece at a time. I've got nearly all the big plants now, I only need two more trees, and I've spent only \$250.

"And I'm going to invest in a hand-mower – very ecologically correct – to mow the bit of lawn that's left. That saves on getting someone in for \$25 a mow."

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