



## **Vera Street Community Garden Inc.**

*A volunteer-run, permaculture  
community garden in West Toowong.*

Our formal aims are:

*To create and maintain a sustainable community garden on environmentally aware principles.*

*To conduct habitat protection and Creek Rehabilitation at Toowong Creek.*

*To provide an opportunity for school and community interaction through the Science, Maths and Technology Academy.*

*To foster inter-generational and inter-cultural relationships in the local community.*

*To provide the opportunity for marginalised community members to participate in community activities.*

*To revitalise existing knowledge about gardening and native bush regeneration within the inner city suburbs.*

*To provide a link with the garden's historical roots as a Chinese market Garden and its Indigenous heritage.*

## **Convenor's Report – May 2009 – May 2010**

This report marks my second year as Convenor for Vera Street Community Garden, and I remain proud of the wonderful contribution that Garden members have made this year towards making the Garden and our broader community a richer and more vibrant place.

### **The Garden**

The Garden is looking fantastic, as trees enjoy their second year of regular rainfall and we learn what works and what doesn't in our no-dig beds. Thanks to the regular workers such as Lynn de Lange, Helen Bawden, CAS students, Ruth Brown and Jane Bell, the garden is getting lots of regular maintenance. And those of us who get down to the garden less frequently have been able to get involved with some significant garden projects this year, such as the planting of our bush tucker garden.

As with any garden, at least some time needs to be spent maintaining the area. Bamboo runners encroaching from our neighbours continues to be a hassle, and since we are committed to totally organic methods removal of the runners involves lots of hard work. Lynn and Helen led the process of regenerating the hill behind the garden by planting and watering trees and native plants in that area. The CAS students made a commitment this year to spend 15 minutes of every session pulling out noxious weeds in the creek area, and without this kind of 'hard yakka' work, weeds would gain the upper hand. The banana trees which were planted at the end of last year are growing strongly and one has a full hand of fruit ripening- very impressive!

This year we've rebuilt many of the original no-dig gardens and moved their positions and shapes to suit the prevailing conditions and requirements of the crops. It's great to be able to move our garden beds around, and this is something that other community gardens cannot do so easily if they have made big investments in garden edging. Cathy Renkin led the establishment of a bush tucker garden, funded by a Q150 grant. The plants were planted before the big rains over December and January, and are thriving. It is wonderful to see the outskirts of the garden becoming dense with useful trees and shrubs.

We're currently growing dozens of different varieties of plants, and have enjoyed harvests of pumpkins, chillies, tomatoes, strawberries, limes, oranges and lots of different herbs and other plants.

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Chillies ready to harvest



Bush tucker garden is thriving after being planted in November-December



No more bamboo! Clear space ready to plant out after removing invasive bamboo



Our first hand of bananas- not ready to harvest yet

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### **Bush Dance and Bush Tucker Garden**

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of October 2009, we hosted a Bush Dance at the Community Garden. We hired a marquee and band, and had a barbecue, fruit punch and deserts. We promoted the event through letterbox drops to around 500 residences in the local area. Approximately 150 people attended with a variety of attendees, from families with children, older people to groups of young single people. Our event started in the early evening and went until 9pm. Many people stated that they thoroughly enjoyed the event, and hoped that we would be able to repeat it in the future.



People had a great time, dancing, chatting, eating



The Bushland Boogie band played up a storm



The Chicken Dance was a favourite with the kids



People of all ages lining up for a dance. Q150 banners in the background.

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Roberta and Parvesh serving sausages



Callum, Dean and Richard on the bbq.

Over the following weekends we also planted a Bush Foods garden within our community garden to acknowledge and educate people around the Indigenous heritage of Toowong. This took several weeks and is now growing very well. The bush foods garden had to be planted over more than one event day, and not on the same weekend as the Bush Dance as originally planned. This was due to seasonable availability of plants, and the need to spread out the considerable work of constructing the garden once plants were available. The soil conditions were extremely dry and hard in October prior to the summer rains, and this made garden planting and construction more work than would have been the case if we had earlier rains. This is fundamental to the nature of gardening, the need to work within existing environmental and seasonal parameters, and is not something that could be considered a failure of planning or organisation. Being flexible in this way is essential to the creation of a garden that will work and remain sustainable.

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### **Other community engagement and partnerships**

#### **CAS**

Our interaction with the Science, Maths and Technology Academy continues to be positive, with the Community Action Service (CAS) program now entering its fourth year. Ruth and Jane have welcomed around 15 new students each term to the garden. The focus of our program is to introduce students to gardening and growing their food using permaculture principles.

Unfortunately we've had a lot of cancellations due to rain, but have been able to relocate to the school library at times. On one such occasion, the group sat around a table peeling rosella calyxes to be made into jam, which attracted lots of interest from other students.

#### *Junior Rotary Award*

This year we have hosted four separate students and their parents who are participating in the Junior Rotary Award, each for a period of 10 weeks. The Award is aimed at giving Year Six children the opportunity to develop attitudes towards volunteerism by assisting organisations and people in need, to learn about their own community, to develop healthy attitudes towards physical recreation and to develop new skills. The Community Garden is unique as many community organisations require volunteers to be at least 12 years old. Instead, we welcome children volunteers working with their parents.

#### *Other community gardens, schools and Landcare Groups*

We continue to provide email advice and welcome visitors from other community gardens around Australia. This year we welcomed guests from The Gap Community Garden, and provided email support to Warners Bay, Wynnum Manly, Gold Coast, Blue Mountains and Fairfield community gardens.

We are also currently working with Toowong State School and Toowong Child Care Centre about hosting excursions at the Garden.

In November 2009, we held an information stall at the Recycling Festival, hosted by the Cubberla Witton Catchments Network. Thanks to Judy Haines, Ruth and Jane for helping to run the stall, and to Volker and Madeleine Hilsenstein for lending their worm farm for the display.

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Cathy Renkin coordinated the Community Garden's Clean Up Australia Day efforts, helping to collect many bags of rubbish from Toowong Creek and nearby areas.

### Grants

As mentioned earlier, we acquitted the Q150 grant, through holding a community bush dance and planting a bush tucker garden.

We also spent a significant amount of time and energy applying for a Gambling Community Benefit Fund grant to build a large shed on the site. Unfortunately our first submission was rejected due to not having an auspice through the SMT Academy, and we have just been advised that our second submission has also been rejected. This is a disappointing result, especially given the amount of work and consultation that Ruth did to put our application together. At this stage, we are not sure why we missed out on the grant, and it has put our plans to build a shed on the site in jeopardy.

### Membership

We had a huge increase in new members last year, due to a public talk in the Toowong Library and a Grow Your Own Veggies course- we had 29 new members join. This year, membership has been more steady, and have attracted 14 new members in the past 12 months. Ann has been working with the committee to improve and simplify the joining process, so that new members are welcomed quickly into the group and can start receiving email communication quickly.

The committee has also been focussing on ways to better run working bees and meetings, to better meet members' interests. We held a planning session earlier this year to ask members where their priorities and interests lay for the community garden, and this has greatly informed the committee's planning for the year. For example, members highly valued opportunities to learn about gardening, so we have initiated a guest speaker at every meeting.

### Thanks to committee, members and other special people

This will be my last meeting as Convenor, as I will be resigning after my two year term. Vera Street Community Garden Inc has always had a policy that no one person should stay in a committee role for more than two years, and this helps to ensure that the organisation stays fresh and vibrant in the

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way that it is managed. I've enjoyed my role as Convenor, and will look forward to helping the new convenor settle in over the coming months.

Thanks to the committee who have kept the administration side of the Garden ticking along. Jane Bell has been a tremendous source of energy and support to me, and I have appreciated her wisdom as past convenor and Secretary.

Raj Gupta has also reached the end of his two-year term as Treasurer, and has fulfilled the role efficiently and with diligence.

I'd also like to thank the committee members for their efforts and support over the past year- Ann Birmingham has been a very organised membership secretary, and Judy Haines has contributed her time and knowledge to the committee as well.

Of course, you can't have a garden without gardeners, and I'd also like to pay tribute to our most regular gardeners- Lynn and Helen. The two are seen down at the garden at least every week, and have taken many new members under their direction and guidance. As someone with a young toddler to care for, I've appreciated that Lynn and Helen are down at the garden regularly and keep me and other garden members informed of what's happening.

I'd like to thank a few other special garden members. Ruth Brown deserves a special mention for her contributions to the garden through the Gambling Community Benefit Fund grant application and her commitment to the CAS program.

Kelly Greenop did an amazing job of coordinating the Q150 grant application and bush dance, and Cathy Renkin coordinated the bush tucker garden project and this year's Clean Up Australia Day effort.

Thanks to the Queensland State Government for their sponsorship of our Q150 bush dance and Bush Tucker Garden. Thanks also to Councillor Peter Matic for his continued support of the Garden, and in particular for hosting the Productive Meetings workshop which has vastly improved the effectiveness of our meetings.

Finally, I'd like to publicly acknowledge the efforts of everyone who has contributed to the Garden this year- whether it was planting a seedling, digging up a clump of bamboo or helping serve at the bush dance, your contributions are what have made the Vera Street Community Garden the special place that it is. Thank you!

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Naomi Waldron

Convenor, May 2010.

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