

Gardeners get down and dirty



Warrnambool Community Garden Convenor Geoff Rollinson has been one of the driving forces behind the transformation of the old quarry.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #8F9F59;"] T
urning old quarries into beautiful places and spaces is something of a Warrnambool speciality: the late Sir Fletcher Jones did just that with Pleasant Hill outside his Raglan Parade factory.

About a kilometre up the hill from his masterpiece is another, equally impressive transformation of a former council quarry into the Warrnambool Community Garden and Hub.

Instead of taking things from the land, the Warrnambool Community Garden has spent the past six years putting life back into it.

The 2 acre site on the corner of Grieve St and Grafton Rd is a shining example of organic and permaculture gardening, with

the site divided into areas of raised vegetable beds, more than 50 fruit and nut trees, a herb garden, bush tucker area, communal garden and 56 individual garden beds, all of which appear to be thriving.



A piece of paradise – the community garden right in the heart of Warrnambool.

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[/dropcap]he individual plots are planted and maintained by group members who are assigned a patch of dirt for their own enjoyment. When Bluestone visited last week, the spring crops were booming, with beans, snap peas, rhubarb, spring onions, several varieties of lettuce and thick clumps of silverbeet among the delicious produce.

Incredibly, there was barely a weed to be seen.

“We have a flag system,” explained Convenor **Geoff Rollinson**.

“That means that if your plot is looking a bit neglected, a

flag goes up on it...but we have never had a flag. It is the thought of being flagged that is the deterrent," he said, laughing.



Where it all began...the Grieves St site before its transformation into an environmental hub.

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[/dropcap]he garden is home to several employment scheme projects and works in closely with other like-minded environmental groups around the area, who can also make use of the Hub: a retro-fitted portable classroom that showcases energy efficient building.

This weekend (October 12-13 from 10am), the garden is hosting its annual Dirty Weekend full of gardening and sustainable living-related activities, including composting, permaculture techniques, learning about edible weeds and indigenous foods, cooking with 'ugly' vegetables and various stalls, exhibits and competitions. A dry stone wall building workshop will also be held with expert David Long (\$88 – bookings 0429 928 511).

[box type="bio"] For more information on the garden, or how to become involved, visit its website [here](#).[/box]



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Thriving on flower power

Andy and Debbie Doeven live the kind of life that most people only fantasise about while staring out the window from their desk job. It has been more than 20 years since the pair decided to uproot from suburban Melbourne and start afresh ...

Success is purely organic



Nick Kelson sells organic produce fresh from his uncle's farm at Dennington.

By Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #8F9F59;"] W
[/dropcap]hen it comes to clocking up food miles, the 4.9km from Dennington to the Warrnambool Showgrounds is about as short as it gets.

This is how far the fresh produce travels each week from the Kelson family farm to a Sunday stall at the showgrounds, where **Nick Kelson** sells under the name **Merri Banks Organic Produce**.

Nick is the nephew of **Frank Kelson**, who has 16 acres at the back of the Dennington Oval, including 10 acres under production. The farm has been in the family since 1880 and produces potatoes, pumpkin, sweetcorn and garlic on a large scale for the Melbourne fresh food markets.

Fifteen years ago, Frank turned to organic production, making

him one of the first in the region to do so.

“My grandfather was horrified,” Nick said, laughing.

“He would say, ‘this house was built on super phosphate!’”

As Nick explains, however, his uncle could see the damage that chemicals were doing to the environment and realised that organic production was not only better for the long-term preservation of the farm, but that the produce tasted more like it should.



A pile of pumpkins was among the seasonal produce on sale last week.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #8F9F59;"] While the bulk of what Merri Banks produces is sold wholesale, locals are fortunate to have Nick selling a select range each week at the Sunday markets.

It is the only place where people can buy the produce direct.

The stall is the size of a couple of kitchen tables and Nick unloads his stock from the back seat and boot of a car, not a

semi-trailer.

Some weeks he will have boxes of fresh dug potatoes in a number of varieties, together with pumpkins, carrots and garlic. Other weeks there will be boxes of heritage tomatoes, sweetcorn and beetroot, alongside bouquets of kale, spinach and silverbeet.

It all depends what it is season.



Going, going, gone. Things move fast on market day.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #8F9F59;"] A [dropcap]dvertising is by word of mouth – and a trusty A-frame – with Merri Banks nowhere to be found on Facebook, Twitter or even as a website.

It is an old-fashioned, but winning approach, and Nick finds

most of his stock is gone by mid-morning.

"We have been here four years now. It took a while to build up, but we are doing well," Nick said.

Just as he spoke, a man approached to buy a purply bulb of organic garlic. Nick dropped it onto the scale.

"That'll be \$1.50," he said.

"Oh! I didn't realise it would be so cheap. I take another two thanks," the customer replied.

"No problem," said Nick, as he placed the bulbs into a brown paper bag and gave it a swing.



Organic garlic: not from China, Argentina or Chile...but Dennington.

[box type="bio"] Merri Banks Organic Produce. Sunday Undercover Markets, Warrnambool Showgrounds. [/box]

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