



90'S

Grant McDonagh

# GARDEN

I MAKE WINE WITH MY BURGUNDY GRAPES AND SOME SURPLUS

FRUIT, BOTTLE ENORMOUS QUANTITIES OF GOLDEN QUEEN

PEACHES WHICH I NEVER  
SEEM TO END UP EATING, AS WELL  
AS GIVING BEANS AND PEACHES

AWAY TO FRIENDS AND NEIGHBOURS.



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First let me say that my knowledge of gardening is limited, but more or less adequate to the task of turning a certain amount of dirt into food, which is proving to be both more & more necessary & more & more difficult as climate change kicks in, meaning there's been a serious summer drought here in Chch pretty much every year for the last 8 or 9 years at least, which is half the time I've lived here in my small 1870s inner city villa.

I garden using 100% organic, permaculture type methods which I learned the basics of when living in & around hippy communes in Nelson and Northland in the early 80s; I capture rainwater and reuse grey water bath & clothes washing water rather than use tap water, I practise companion planting, planting, weeding & harvesting loosely around the Lunar cycles, using where possible local, "heritage" type seeds this includes saving & occasionally swapping my own seed rather than buying it, and over the last 3 years I've gradually introduced as much charcoal as I can get into the soil, a method known as Biochar or Terra Preta also a DIY form of carbon sequestration. This improves the water absorption and retention properties of the soil enormously, as well as providing, in the cell walls of the burnt wood, a living space for an increased number of beneficial microorganisms which feed in to the food chain at the bottom, increasing fertility all the way up.

The place was completely empty of food producing plants when I moved here in '92 and open to vicious nor'westerly spring and early summer winds, which basically wrecked my growing efforts for the first year. So the first priority was to construct a shed which would act as a windbreak, creating a sheltered microclimate for the placement of my most important plantings - lots & lots of fruit trees, bushes and vines. I've had 13 bantams for the last 8 years or so, which I have allowed to range freely over my whole, enclosed back yard; & they've always provided me with their spider and bug eating skills, company, and their droppings which make a very fine compost starter ... plus the very occasional egg.

In the last six months I've started raising rabbits as well, but am currently going into a bad patch with their dietary mainstay - weeds gathered surreptitiously from all over the neighbourhood have been withering and failing to grow in sufficient quantity to feed - currently 7 of them 2-3 times a day. There's a lot more work and expense in caring for rabbits than there might seem at first glance, and they tie me to the place in ways my chooks & cat don't, since it's quite possible to put out cat & chook food for 3 or 4 days if I want to bugger off to Welly or wherever, but the rabbits need fresh, varied green stuff, fruit & pellets at least twice a day.

Though the 2-3 buckets of bunny droppings per week mixed with straw - which is bland enough to put straight onto the garden & around the trees, have made my veges bloom, and they're very

endearing, it's beginning to seem to me that, considering the work load, it's not really worth it. I'm thinking the ideal compromise is to downsize switch to guinea pigs instead & get some kind of feeder, maybe.

The only thing edible in the garden at the moment, now that the Broad Beans are finished, is Silver Beet, with early spuds still a month or so away & the main crop about 3 months off. The first thing to ripen every year in the tree/bush/vine dept is Currants, both Red and Black, which should be ready any time now, then its full on in the fruit dept & bye bye to Mr & Mrs Pak & Save [local supermarket chain] for 4-5 months till May. Plums come first & in great profusion from 2 mature and very prolific, and 20 to 30 im mature self sown native plum trees. Then it's other stone fruit; 3 large peach trees, 2 apricot & 1 nectarine, and my pride & joy the very *olde worlde* but delicious Damsons. There's also Cherries, Figs, 2 Pear trees, 5 Apple trees, 3 grape vines, a massive walnut and a smaller Brazil Nut which has just started producing after 15 years , plus no doubt other things I can't remember right now.

I have very little luck with Kiwifruit, Brassicas and Berries, Beans other than Broad Beans and no luck whatsoever with cit rus apart from a sheltered Loquat that's never produced any fruit ; but my tomatoes are looking good this year & it looks like it might be a good apple year (the first for three years for some strange reason, probably that local Bees have been under attack from dis

ease & Veroa mites . I am totally unable to graft things despite a number of risible attempts, though the number and variety of pip fruit trees makes that unnecessary.

There's also Feijoa, of which I've planted five or six of over the years; but only 3 have 'taken' & only one has really taken off as yet. They're good because they extend the fruiting season out to late autumn. I'm looking forward to two small bushes starting to produce fruit within 3 5 years.

I make wine with my Burgundy grapes and some surplus fruit, bottle enormous quantities of Golden Queen peaches which I never seem to end up eating, as well as giving Beans and Peaches away to friends and neighbours.

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*Christchurch, Dec 27 2010*



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