

# URBAN FARMERS

By Sue Jackson

**First broadcast in October 08 on Bush Telegraph *ABC Radio National***

Recently, some of our neighbours have taken to peering over our front fence a lot. I suppose it's understandable, as one by one the old faithfuls of our inner-city garden - the hydrangeas, camellias and azaleas – get the chop. And mushrooming in their place is a pocket-sized urban farm. Tom and Barbara, from the old TV series 'The Good Life' – that's who we're turning into.

I didn't mean it to happen. I started out small, with just a few potato plants camouflaged carefully amidst the hydrangeas and onions placed discretely beneath the roses. But then the bug really began to bite. I blame it all on my sister and brother-in-law.

On their farm near Bendigo, Jude, a wonderful gardener from way back, and Brien, a Jaara Elder and ex-park ranger who knows all there is to know about bush tucker, make growing your own food look so easy. Even in last summer's terrible conditions. Looking around their garden back then, I couldn't help but be awed by their ingenuity.

Everything was used for mulching - hay, bracken, even rocks. Many vegies, defying gravity, were planted vertically and at different levels, so the same water craftily fed them all. There were so many upturned plastic bottles that our seven-year-old niece was convinced Jude and Brien were growing them. And garden beds were shaded with overhanging sheets and curtains, so it looked rather like a huge outdoor laundry. But who cared when they were able to produce three delicious meals a day from right outside their door. I could hardly wait to get home to give it a try.

I must concede there are some significant differences between their circumstances and ours.

For one thing, Jude and Brien live on a remote dirt road. There are few passers-by and none of them is interested in looking over their front fence.

They also have horses and hence an endless supply of 'brown nugget' fertiliser. Though I recently solved that problem. On my last visit I realised how shameless I'd become when I sat blithely on the train back to Melbourne with a sack full of horse poo - ancient and odourless, I hasten to add - nestling companionably against my legs.

So far we're the only urban farmers in our street, but with food prices rising rapidly and increasing concern about food miles, I suspect it's only a matter of time before there are Tom and Barbara Goods everywhere. And I must confess I'm thrilled whenever I glance out our front window and see the broad beans jostling for position along the picket fence, the pea plants beckoning to passers-by in the breeze and the leeks luxuriating in all that neighbourly attention.