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Getting Ready For Kitchen Garden Day in Tasmania

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Cygnet, Tasmania is a small town of 800 people at the bottom of the world, situated on the D?Entrecasteaux Channel and surrounded by forests and streams. Waterways abound with life and the skies and gardens are filled with birds, frogs, bandicoots, possums, small kangaroos and all manner of other wildlife.

Industry here has always been focused on food production, primarily apples (for eating and cider making), berries and seafood. There is a small jetty where ships from England used to dock and fill their holds with apples in their off-season. Apple canning only ceased here a couple of months ago and orchardists are despairing at Australia bringing apples from New Zealand and China, when Tasmania, in my childhood, was called The Apple Isle and shelves all over Australia were lined with Tasmanian apples. Oh dear.

The people of Cygnet are made up of two main groups: the old-timers, often descendants of convicts brought from the UK in the late 1700?s, and the blow-ins, mostly people from the mainland of Australia looking for a greener life away from everything. Theoretically, food growing is an everyday thing and a natural part of life.

But reality is different, for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the wildlife is rampant and will devour everything you plant if it is not netted, if you live as many do, outside the township! Secondly, many blow-ins work in Hobart, a city of 250,000 less than an hour?s drive away, while they save money to build their green lives. These people often buy fruit and vegetables from the big supermarkets there, which mostly do not bother sourcing local, Tasmanian produce!

So, last World Kitchen Garden day I organised a walk to 4 home gardens to show people what you can do. We started at the tiny garden of a single mum who is renting, and progressed to an elderly woman?s immaculate garden which integrates food plants and ornamentals, then a Czech man who?s garden is very regimented and lastly to an eccentric Englishwoman?s delightful cottage garden filled with herbs and flowers and vegetables. It was a great success and we finished off with a BBQ in the Community Garden.

This year I decided to highlight school and other shared gardens. Here in Cygnet there are 2 schools. One has just started a Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden (a funding scheme stemming from one well-known Australian cook?s desire to promote children not only growing food and cooking it at school, but using the garden as an integral part of school learning).

First we will be visiting the Child Care Centre where a young mum has turned a boring shrubbery into a delightful children?s food garden. Second on the list is St. James? garden described above, where Marcus, a

local permaculturist is a teacher and mentor. Thirdly is the Cygnet Primary School where the kinder has a garden they cook from every day with the children and lastly the Cygnet Community Garden, where I am a volunteer.

It is a challenge, taking a walk to gardens as winter comes close to ending but, in our coats and walking boots, we will be celebrating the joys of growing food, at the bottom of the world!

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