

## Community Garden 3231 Launches at Aireys Inlet

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At a meeting of the Rural Women's Network in 2009 a group of Aireys Inlet residents got together to discuss climate change and the impact it may have on local life. They decided that if the community could grow its own food, then some of the worst effects of living away from the large centres or the need to travel distances to obtain food could be avoided. A committee was formed to create a community garden in Aireys Inlet. The group wanted to grow food locally and learn how best to do this. A bus trip to Melbourne to visit several community gardens got everyone enthused. The committee looked at several locations for the garden and finally settled on a Shire-owned site at 2 Fraser Drive, Aireys Inlet. The garden serves the community comprising Aireys Inlet, Fairhaven, Moggs Creek and Eastern View hence the postcode for the area in the gardens name.

There are currently 70 garden members, with 18 private plot holders. Construction of the garden commenced in March 2010 with the erection of a rabbit-proof fence. There are now compost bins, garden beds, paths, planted fruit trees and a partly constructed shed. A feature of the garden will be the raised beds and seat garden beds for use by members with mobility or back problems. It is planned that most of the construction will be completed in the next few months. We are presently eating our way through the first delicious crops.

The rapid development of the garden has been based on a few basic things. First, much time was put into planning the layout of the site using the views of many people. This meant that once the discussions were finished and construction began, the work to be done was clear. Second, we divided into teams to get things done. The Building Team was to construct the fence, shed, paths, garden beds and other infrastructure. The Gardening Team worked out what was to be done to prepare the soil and plant out the beds. The Administration Team wrote the members agreement to clarify the rules and delivered the safety training to all members. In the background they also applied for grants and obtained funds. The Networking Team was the social lubricant at the working bees. They baked the scones and provided the tea and coffee where members gathered together and got to know each other. At the working bees the tasks to be done were predetermined and members joined the builders or the gardeners depending on how they felt they could help. It all came together successfully. Finally, the enthusiasm and energy of the committee members that was poured into the work has caused things to develop so quickly.

Some of the effects of the community building from the garden can be observed near the Aireys Inlet Post Office most weekdays. Without mail deliveries, residents go there to check their mail boxes each day. Polite nods and reserved smiles have been replaced, for many, with greetings using each others' names, and referring to the progress of the garden or the experience of working together on a shared project. A sense of belonging to a community has been enhanced.

Much of the strength of the garden is based on empowering members to become more self-sufficient. The garden is really a centre of learning where people can come to discover how to improve on their past practices, or to get more from their efforts in growing their own food. Complete novices can find out what is best for their garden and how to get started growing organically. The social support of other members also encourages good gardening practices from site selection, to composting, to seed gathering and propagation. This educative role will sustain the garden members to do things for themselves. When the garden is further developed, it is planned to have cooking demonstrations to show how simple meals can be prepared from the food grown in the garden.

But the work is not all sweat and toil. When emailed recently for help to get 100 bales of straw from a farm near Ceres, two members with a large trailer volunteered. As retired farmers, they knew something about moving bales of straw. At the farm the bales were carefully placed and the trailer piled higher and higher. With two bales in the rear of the 4WD and 56 bales on the trailer, we were in for an interesting trip home. The farmer selling the straw tied the load for us and off we went. As we turned out of the farm gate onto the road, the load shifted. We stopped and re-tied the load. A little further along our driver noticed that the load seemed to be shifting again. This time it had moved out to the left as the camber of the road created a lean in that direction. Calling out "This should fix it." our driver sharply swerved to the opposite side of the road. The load righted itself. However, we were now travelling at 90 kph on the wrong side of the road with a somewhat unsteady load in tow. We eventually made it back to the garden where in untying the load, it collapsed on us burying two men under it. We laughed fit to bust. Who knew that gardening could be so much fun.

The enthusiasm of our members will hit you when you visit. They are passionate about the garden and love to work there and with each other. Come and visit us, we'll make you a cup of tea and share some stories. There is much more to the community garden than the gardening. Under the shade of some trees we plan to have some cooking demonstrations using the food we have grown ourselves over the summer. Saturdays around noon would be a good time to drop in and see what is going on. See you there.