

Tony and Nicole's multi-terraced food garden

January 2015

Imagine a large house on a ridgetop in Skye. The back yard drops steeply down into a deep bush covered valley which has been cut out to make 3 terraced areas joined by steep steps. Tony and Nicole have asked Vital Veggies to install veggie gardens, berry gardens, fruit trees and herb gardens on each of the terraces - enough to feed their family of four.

We commenced the lowest level just before Christmas, making the 13 garden beds on site. Loads of perseverance and perspiration helped to get equipment up and down that steep hill. We all have legs of steel now!

Here's what the lower level looked like before the garden beds were installed.



Just last week, Nicole found a huge brown snake living in a hole on this level so we're now very alert to every step.

February will see us back at Tony and Nicole's cliff hanger job. A metal chute will be installed from the top level to the lower level so the 15 tons of Vital Veggies super soil can be dumped into the top and flow down through the chute to the ground on the lower level to fill the garden beds.

We'll keep you posted...

Tony and Nicole's food forest – Work begins

February 2015

The back yard of Tony and Nicole's property at Skye drops steeply down into a deep bush covered valley. Turning this wild slope into a multi terraced food garden and outdoor entertainment area was a brave vision requiring logistical planning, hard work and patience.

Vital Veggies mapped out and designed the food garden. Careful consideration was given to the placement of the berry gardens, veggie gardens, fruit trees and herb gardens on each of the terraces to make use of sunlight and the micro climate in this area, but also to economise access. The lowest garden level is quite a hike from the back door down four sets of very steep steps - better suited for the berry gardens and veggies that don't need daily picking.

The lower level terrace

We love the lower level. It's wild down there and the view over the valley is stunning. Gully winds blew gales on some mornings before the summer heat set in and blistered our tools and bodies.

Just before Christmas we completed making the 30 garden beds on site. One set of beds would sit against the retaining walls and hold the bushy berries; facing these, under the pine trees would be beds for the climbing berries. In between we made a set of diamond shaped beds for a variety of veggies.



3 garden beds completed on the lower level, 27 more to go...

In nearby trees, koalas growled back at the power tools. Kookaburras and yellow tailed black cockatoos chatted and sang all around us. Lizards jumped in and out of our lunch bags. Luckily the snakes kept their distance....

Our work on this level was interrupted firstly by the Christmas break, and then by the wall rendering which had to be completed before we could position all the garden beds.

Finally it was time to fill the completed beds with soil. 60 tons of our special soil were delivered to Tony and Nicole's driveway and a chute was constructed so the soil could flow from the house level down to the 30 garden beds on the lower level.

Tony operated the Bobcat up at the house, dropping the soil into the chute. Roger operated the digger at the bottom, putting the soil into the garden beds.

The work was hot and dirty.



Tony dropping soil into the chute



Roger moving soil at the bottom of the chute

Sally smoothed out the soil in the beds, installed the irrigation, and planted all the berries. Goji berries, blueberries, redcurrants, blackcurrants, gooseberries, cape gooseberries and strawberry guavas were placed in the beds against the retaining wall. The climbing berries were planted in the opposite beds where trellis was installed: raspberries, tayberries, marionberries, boysenberries, thornless blackberries, and kiwiberries. In the diamond garden beds we've planted some winter veggies: cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, potatoes and onions with a couple of free beds reserved for asparagus.

To finish off this level we laid weed control matting over the ground followed by a final layer of compost and mulched the berry gardens with straw.



The middle level terrace

The next level up was designed to have vines along the wall side, fruit trees overlooking the outer edges and a lawn area in-between.

Garden beds had already been built into this level and rendered during construction so we didn't have to make them.

Our work here was to fill the beds with soil, install the automatic irrigation system, and plant the vines and fruit trees.



Middle level: Soil dropping out of the chute and being watered to reduce the dust. Roger is moving soil into the garden beds

Mid summer...these were long, hot 40 plus degree days, and the work was intense for everyone. But when the time came to plant, we were all rewarded for the hard preparation work.



Sally planting the grape vines

Along the southern end of the rendered wall we planted 8 grape vines; along the northern end we planted 8 passionfruit vines: black, golden and banana varieties.

Two exotic dragon fruit plants take pride of place in the middle. They'll grow to produce exquisite flowers and fruit. In amongst the vines are a selection of green leafy veggies, beetroot, carrots, climbing peas and broad beans.

In the garden beds opposite the vines, the baby fruit trees are now happily established, and what a magnificent selection of fruit Tony and Nicole will soon have: nashi pears, william pears, 2 varieties of apple and cherry, a peach, peacharine, nectarine, apricot, pomegranate, fig, lime, finger lime, 2 different lemon trees and 3 orange trees!

This is going to be an amazing food forest.



Baby fruit trees on Level 2 overlooking the veggie and berry gardens on Level 3

The upper level terrace

The upper terrace level is closest to the house and only one steep flight of stairs down from the back door. One long garden bed had already been built into place here and after filling it with soil we planted all the 'go-to' veggies: late tomatoes, kale, lettuces, spring onions and a selection of herbs.



You can see the newly planted Level 1 veggie garden bed on the right side of the image.

As a complimentary gesture, Roger planted a few nut trees somewhere down the bushy slope and ran a line of irrigation to them. They'll take a couple years to get established, giving Tony and Nicole a bit of time to establish the pathway down to collect the nuts!

We're thrilled that we'll get to service and look after Tony and Nicole's huge food garden on a regular basis. Working on the slope and climbing the steep sets of stairs between terraces (with equipment!) is more than compensated for by the magnificent views across the valley and immersion in the wild natural environment.

Update on Tony and Nicole's Multi-Terraced Food Forest

April 2015

The multi-terraced gardens are still a work in progress. New lawn has just been installed on the first two levels and they've ordered a beautiful fountain for the middle level.

