

Birkenhead front yard

A typical Adelaide front yard, if there is such a thing, consists a lawn area, a couple of trees, some bushes down the side fence and a few ornamental flowers. But as people are becoming more informed about health and environmental issues, they are now utilising all or part of their front yards to grow food.

Introducing food producing plants into the front garden landscape can be as simple as installing one or two raised beds and this is exactly what our clients at Birkenhead did. They identified an area in the front yard that could easily be renovated. This area, along the southern fence line, receives plenty of sunlight and although the shape of the space isn't a perfect rectangle, two simple timber garden beds placed end on end seemed like the best option.



A perfect site for a raised bed food garden.

Tree roots

What appeared to be a simple job of clearing this small site turned out to be more onerous once work commenced. When we started digging the irrigation trenches, we found the soil was thick with millions of capillary tree roots, which made digging a very hard job.

As this small area sloped down from the fence to the path we had to consider whether to level the entire area or not to level. Roger decided to retain the slope and compensate by digging out trenches on one side for the garden beds so that they would sit level within the sloping ground.



The ground work - digging up tree roots and digging trenches for the irrigation pipes and the garden beds.

Making the garden beds came next, and as you can see from the muddy ground in the image below, we were working in some unusually wet December weather that interrupted our work schedule for a few days.

Weed control mat was laid over the entire area and cut to shape to prevent the very active tree roots from invading the soil in the raised garden beds,. As an extra precaution, once the garden beds were in place we also lined the bases with heavy duty root control barriers.



Sally is laying the weed control mat and cutting it to fit the space. You can see that the two raised beds have already been made and are on the pathway.

With the weed control mat down, the garden beds were placed on top and levelled, then the root barriers and worm farms placed in the beds.

Filling the beds

Soil time had arrived, and our beautiful soil was waiting in a heap on the footpath. The front gate prevented us from using the digger to move the soil, so Roger constructed a ramp up onto the garden beds. This was a wheelbarrow job and you've got to be pretty fit to push 50 barrow loads of soil up a ramp then tip them up and over into the beds without losing balance. He didn't falter once!!!



The front bed is half filled with soil and the ramp is placed ready to fill the other half.

Finishing off

Towards the end of an installation, there are lots of little jobs to finish it off to a high standard. Timber borders were inserted along the pathway to help contain the gravel. The original bushes that had been removed and placed to one side were re-planted around the base of the tree by the front gate. Gravel was distributed and raked out. Seedlings and seeds planted. Stakes and netting erected for climbing beans. And a solar powered owl was attached to a base to deter the local birds... The final touch? Our Vital Veggies plaque on the end of the front bed.



The finished food garden at Birkenhead.

We hear that many neighbours wander past and comment on this simple food garden. It is superbly functional and beautiful. The owners are learning about how food plants grow, they are harvesting fresh, delicious, organic food, and they are so delighted at the abundance of produce that they are now sharing around with their family, friends and neighbours. It has become a natural sanctuary from their busy lives.