

Having a garden and eating it, too

By **MARY O'BRIEN**

GARDENS can be both productive and pretty, and Hendrik Van Leeuwen's backyard is proof of this. He is passionate about growing his own food, but he wasn't going to sacrifice a good-looking garden for the sake of his vegetables.

Mr Van Leeuwen has an advantage over most suburban gardeners: he is a landscape designer and has spent years researching the most sustainable and drought-tolerant plants. He wanted an organic, edible garden using sustainable materials and very little water. But design and choice of plants were also important.

"It's all doom and gloom as regards gardens at the moment. But this is absolutely not true," he says.

"It's about knowing and understanding the right use of plants. You can still have a green garden in Melbourne, even with stage 4 restrictions, if it's planted well."

He started almost four years ago with a blank canvas: nothing but lawn in his generously sized garden in Hughesdale. He installed a 9000-litre water tank, hidden behind a garden shed and surrounded by a chook pen.

He also put a grey-water diverter in the house and is careful about the products he uses.

Mr Van Leeuwen's garden ticks a lot of environmental boxes, but it's also pretty, with layers of interest and a palette of decorative plants.

At the front of his house is a small formal garden of hardy, low-water-use plants, which are purely ornamental. There is an emphasis on contrasting foliage.

Syzygium Bush Christmas is used for hedges, pathways are framed with English box, and *Helleborus corsicus* and New Zealand flax are used to good effect.

"We can still have lush-

looking gardens in Melbourne that use minimum water," he says. And so he has created, at the side of the house, a lush, tropical feel with cliveas, lilly-pilly and birds of paradise — all thriving with little water.

Pride of place in the backyard goes to a giant ornamental banana tree. A lemon-scented gum, hedges, paths and a fire pit give the garden an overall structure. A pergola is hung with kiwi and grape vines. There's a small boxed herb and salad garden just a few steps from the kitchen, and a pretty display of succulents in a giant pot.

Edible plants are scattered throughout the garden, including the perennial globe artichoke, broccoli, celery and silverbeet.

Mr Van Leeuwen loves his "serious" vegetable patch near the chook pen, where he plants carrots, spring onions, zucchini, beans, rhubarb, asparagus and corn.

The chooks earn their keep by supplying eggs. And their manure, mixed with straw, is terrific for the vegetables.

Mr Van Leeuwen divides the garden into three zones for watering. The vegetables and annual crops are watered by rain and occasionally mains water. He uses rainwater and grey water for the fruit trees. The third zone, with drought-tolerant plants, needs hardly any water. He says his biggest mistake was having too much lawn initially.

Mr Van Leeuwen runs a landscaping business with an old friend.

They became members of Environmentally Certified Landscape Industry Professionals last year.

The Van Leeuwen garden at 9 Camden Road, Hughesdale, will be part of Australia's Open Gardens on October 24 and 25, 10am to 4.30pm, \$6.

▶ Art of the garden A2



Canny gardener: Hendrik Van Leeuwen visits the chook pen in his Hughesdale backyard.

PICTURE: GARY MEDICOTT

