

GARDEN NOTES

ZHOU'S SUSTAINABLE KITCHEN GARDEN

36 FIMSTER CIRCUIT KAMBAH



21-22 NOV 2026

HISTORY

"Sixteen years ago, this garden was mostly weeds. Today, it produces hundreds of kilograms of fresh organic fruit every year."

Welcome to my sustainable kitchen garden.

My name is **Zhou (Joe) Chen**, and I have been a Commercial Cookery teacher at CIT for more than 18 years. My garden, located in Kambah, covers approximately 900 square metres. What began as a block overrun with weeds and only a few herbs has gradually been transformed into a productive and sustainable kitchen garden. Today, it is home to more than 30 fruit trees, a wide variety of herbs and seasonal vegetables, together with roses, conifers and Japanese maples.

For me, gardening and cooking have always gone hand in hand. Growing fresh, organic produce has given me a deeper appreciation for quality ingredients and the care required to produce them. Every fruit, herb and vegetable harvested from this garden eventually finds its way into my kitchen, where it inspires the meals I prepare for family and friends. It also enriches my teaching at CIT, where I encourage future chefs to understand and respect the journey of food from the garden to the plate.

Creating and maintaining a productive garden while teaching full-time is both challenging and rewarding. Between family life, cooking and my work at CIT, time is always precious, so the school holidays become my busiest gardening season. Every season brings its own tasks—from enriching the soil with homemade compost and organic fertilisers, to mulching to conserve moisture, pruning fruit trees, thinning fruit for better quality, maintaining irrigation systems, training espalier trees, installing bird netting to protect ripening fruit, and controlling pests using environmentally responsible methods. Harvesting one season's crops quickly gives way to preparing for the next. There is always another task waiting, but there is also always something beautiful to enjoy.

My goal has always been to garden as naturally and sustainably as possible. Rather than simply growing fruit, I aim to create a healthy ecosystem that provides fresh food throughout the year while caring for the soil, conserving water and supporting local biodiversity. As part of this approach, I installed a **4,000-litre rainwater tank** that collects rainwater from the roof gutters. Together with directing additional roof runoff into the garden, it helps sustain the garden through Canberra's dry periods while reducing water consumption and household water bills. To make the best use of every drop of water, I have also installed a pump that recycles water from our daily spa bath, allowing it to be directed either into the garden or back into the rainwater tank for later irrigation as part of my sustainable water management practices. I also maintain **seven compost bins**, recycling garden prunings, fallen leaves and kitchen scraps into nutrient-rich compost that continually improves the soil, feeds the garden and reduces waste. Sustainability is not just something I talk about—it is something I practice every day.

Gardening, like cooking, is a lifelong learning journey. I completed evening horticulture classes in plant propagation, which inspired me to develop skills in propagation through cuttings, division, air

layering and grafting. Watching a tiny cutting grow into a healthy fruit tree is one of the most satisfying experiences a gardener can have. Like many gardeners, I continue to learn through books, *Gardening Australia*, YouTube, open gardens and ideas shared by others.

Before moving to Australia, I won numerous fruit and vegetable carving competitions in Shanghai more than 27 years ago. My love of art has naturally found its place in the garden through sculptures, urns, pedestals and decorative wall plaques. The star jasmine covering the brick walls at the front and back of the house not only creates a beautiful green backdrop but also helps insulate the house during Canberra's hot summers.

The harvest reminds me every year why the effort is worthwhile. My Brown Turkey fig tree has produced an incredible **47 kilograms** of fruit in a single season, while my nectarine tree yielded **20 kilograms** and my double-grafted Stella cherry tree produced **18 kilograms**. My Fuyu persimmon regularly yields around **14 kilograms**, the Moorpark apricot more than **8 kilograms**, and one Granny Smith apple weighed an impressive **485 grams**. The garden also produces generous crops of peaches, blueberries, black mulberries, Li jujubes, Fuji apples, Nashi pears and raspberries, together with lemons, rosemary, thyme and kaffir lime leaves that can be harvested almost year-round for home cooking.

Perhaps the greatest reward has not been the harvest itself, but the friendships, knowledge and sense of wellbeing that gardening has brought into my life. It has taught me patience, resilience and the importance of lifelong learning. Every season brings new challenges, new discoveries and another opportunity to improve both the garden and myself.

One of my greatest pleasures is sharing fresh organic produce with family, neighbours, friends and colleagues, then transforming those ingredients into delicious home-cooked meals. If even one visitor leaves today inspired to plant a fruit tree, grow a few herbs or vegetables, or start composting at home, then opening my garden has been worthwhile.

I hope your visit gives you new ideas and inspiration to make your own garden more productive, sustainable and enjoyable—no matter how big or small it may be.

Please feel free to ask questions during your visit. I am always happy to share what has worked in my garden and to learn from fellow gardeners as well.

Thank you for visiting. I hope you enjoy exploring the garden as much as I have enjoyed creating it.

TOILETS

Wanniassa Shops (next to Coles) - 4 mins drive, or Kambah Village - 6 mins.

GARDEN OWNERS

Zhou (Joe) Chen