



## Kapiti Community Food Forest Proposal

### Introducing a very special Kapiti project

In May 2009, 60 people attended a screening by Transition Towns Kapiti of Geoff Lawton's documentary *Establishing a Food Forest*. The crowd was so inspired by the film that following the screening there has been open discussion on the possibility of establishing a community food forest in Kapiti.

A steering committee has been formed from an open forum held after the film night to work through the viability and management of the project. Currently in the early stages, we've encountered a lot of enthusiasm for a Food Forest and feel excited and honoured to nurse the project into being.

While many people here on the coast have their own land for vegetable gardens, not many have the available space for a large biodiverse and resilient food forest. Lack of both knowledge and support form barriers to many who wish to begin growing their own food. This project hopes to address and overcome these barriers by creating Kapiti's first food forest, which will educate, inspire and invigorate the community.

Members of the steering committee will soon be approaching the Kapiti Coast District Council to discuss possibilities for siting the forest in an urban area, easily accessible to the community. Once legal and technical issues have been sorted, the site planning and species selection will begin. Then the fun of planting and building begins. This is a long-term project with the forest reaching optimal productivity in 5-8 years. Meanwhile, the potential for learning, community-building and fun that can be achieved is enormous.

We've prepared this document to introduce the concept of forest gardening, communicate our intentions and garner support for the project.

## What is a Food Forest?

A food forest, also called a forest garden, is a productive and organic garden modeled on the ecosystem of a forest. Species are selected to create a stable, functioning environment that fulfils the needs of the gardeners by producing fruits, berries, vegetables, herbs, seeds and other useful plant material.

Food forests are established using permaculture design principles which mimic natural systems. Advantages are then gained in pest control, weed control and fertility without resorting to chemical means. Once established, the forest can be maintained with a minimum of human assistance as careful selection of site, plant species, plant location, nutrient resources and water management will do a lot of the work for us over the long term.



Traditional gardens are planted with annuals and perennials with little or no thought to how they work together. Forest gardens however, focus around trees and shrubs that take some time to mature and live to produce for many years. These are supported by multiple-layers of other species especially selected to work in synergy.

Different micro-climates are built to suit a wide variety of plants. Each plant performs many multiple roles within the system - promoting growth of other plants, inhibiting weeds, shelter, mulch, pest control, bird food, cross-pollination, attracting beneficial insects and of course providing food, medicine and utility plants for community use.

An important feature of this kind of garden is its ability to keep reproducing. A large number of different species will be planted, all of which will be chosen for being open-pollinated or heirloom varieties that self-seed - this is important to the continuity of the food forest and for biodiversity for the community.

## Why are we doing this?

We believe that the future we lead our children into will be strongly determined by the society we choose to help create. One of the most important goals any society must aspire to is the sustainable production of nourishing and varied foods. The creation of a food forest on the Kapiti Coast will be a step in this direction, aiding us to feed ourselves, providing a tool for learning and teaching others to do the same.

We believe a food forest will assist us to answer many questions that we face as a community:

- Where is our food coming from and is it healthy?
- How can we teach our children about food and our relationship with it?
- How can we foster and maintain a sense of community?
- How can we safeguard the genetic diversity of our food plants and protect heirloom varieties?
- What can we do to eat and buy locally for the benefit of our local economy and environment?

## **A Food Forest for Kapiti**

Planned, planted and maintained by the community, the forest garden will serve as an education resource, plant nursery, seed bank, outdoor community centre, meeting point and food bank. Accessible to all, the area will become an edible landscape with walkways and glades, natural in look but designed with our needs for sustenance and play. A living repository for the future, in the heart of our community.

The lessons learned through creating Kapiti's food forest will be adaptable and transferable - many elements of its design will increase the production and vitality of a garden of any size. As a teaching tool for the design of human food systems it will be invaluable, supplying plants and knowledge directly applicable to the local conditions and environment.

Through its creation, we will be developing a demonstrative alternative to current farming methods - providing food sustainably, independent of fossil fuels, artificial fertilisers and pesticides. In the process we will be growing a core group of experts who can transfer this knowledge and enthusiasm to the community at large.

### **The look and feel of a food forest**

The food forest itself will take on a lot of the character from the land on which it is grown. It is expected that we will need a minimum of 1,000m<sup>2</sup> to build a sustainable area, though plantings will start on a smaller scale. Preferred characteristics include a northerly aspect, free draining soil, a slight slope and water catchment.

Fruit and nut trees will be the most visible plants in the garden. Species are likely to include apple, pear, peach, plum, apricot, nectarine, bay, walnut, almond, and hazelnut.

The under-storey shrubs will act as companions to the trees, offering food, shelter and mulch. These may include elderberry, raspberry, gooseberry, loquat and a range of natives such as kawakawa, manuka and taupata. Other useful species will feature including flax for weaving and bamboo for supports. As the forest matures, climbers such as passionfruit and kiwifruit will be introduced.

The herbaceous layer (those plants closest to the ground) will be multipurpose plants that benefit the health of the garden, such as comfrey. Yarrow, phacelia, alyssum and other species that attract bees and beneficial insects will be encouraged and planted from the start. Medicinal plants will also be important, as will the more familiar culinary herbs such as sage and thyme.

A root layer, including onions, ginger and Jerusalem artichokes will complete the ecosystem's plant layers, providing both human and insect food.

Entering the food forest, a visitor will see a huge variety of different plants, but without the formal arrangement of a traditional garden. Paths will be clearly defined through areas of mass plantings. As in nature, what grows well in a particular spot will be determined by the local conditions but assisted by us with forward planning and patience.

It is envisaged that two separate parts will be created: the forest itself and a smaller demonstration garden, showing how the principles of the larger garden can be applied to a domestic garden.

## We need your help

This is a community project - we need your help as a community to make it happen! Currently, we are creating a library of resources, building networks and gaining skills and experience. This project has a huge amount of scope and we are keen to hear from anyone ready to offer support.

If you would like to help us with seed-saving, wielding a spade, creating gantt charts, teaching, contributing some time, money or land - whatever your skills, resources or experience, we would love to hear from you!



Plant varieties that grow well on the Kapiti Coast and that have become suited to the conditions through years of nurture by experienced gardeners are an invaluable resource. Seeds passed down from generation to generation tell stories, they help us to connect to the past while safe-guarding our future food supply. We need to start collecting this rich genetic heritage. Let us know about any wonderfully tasty local fruit trees, an old jar with seed packets that your grandparents left, delicious vegetables you've been growing for years - we'll try to keep them growing.

## Contact for further information

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[Or visit the Transition Towns Kapiti website](#)

## Further reading

Dave Jacke - Edible Forest Gardens (Chelsea Green Publishing)  
Bill Mollison - Introduction to Permaculture (Tagari Publications)  
Geoff Lawton - Establishing a Food Forest DVD (Permaculture Institute)

Photos: A backyard food forest in Whakatane, NZ. Credit: Yesterdaysfuture.net