

Kitchen garden: Christiane Keller's edible harvest

- **Susan Parsons**

Latest News

When we met Dr Christiane Keller she was about to spend the afternoon grafting onto root stock cuttings from apple trees in a friend's orchard in Pialligo. The varieties Discovery, Cox's Orange Pippin, Granny Smith and Lady Williams will be planted as a hedge along the side of the front garden. Her favourite apple is Belle de Boskoop, a beautiful Dutch baking variety.

When Christiane, her husband Ludger Dinkler, and son Tom Keller (aged 11) moved into their house in Hackett in 2014, the front garden was over-planted with Australian natives, English cottage style plants and ornamental cherries. The deliberate decision to have a vegie patch in front of the house changed the sociability in the street. Working all day in a back garden means you see no one.



Dr Christiane Keller, in her garden picking Kale. Photo: Jay Cronan

So in June last year, they held a working bee with a group of friends, and installed five wicking beds. The soil is a mixture of organic compost, mushroom compost and lucerne hay mulch. One bed is filled with varieties of kale, lettuce and broad beans and another has half a dozen large cauliflowers ready for the kitchen.

One bed planted with five blueberry shrubs and alpine strawberries has acidic soil from t20-year-old wood rows in Bombala which is also the source of bark used on garden paths. A handful of alpine strawberries is eaten every weekend with honey yoghurt on bread.



Dr Christiane Keller's garden produces a good crop of cauliflower. Photo: Jay Cronan

Around their home in Offenburg in south-west Germany, Christiane's grandparents had an orderly vegetable garden with fruit trees and that started her interesting in growing edibles but when she lived in Perth from 2007-2010 her inspiration was *ABC Gardening Australia's* Josh Byrne who had 30 fruit trees on a 600-square-metre block.

In Hackett, a vegetable harvest record is kept and, this year Christiane has harvested 255 kilos of produce which included 45kg of zucchini, 32kg of potimarron and red kuri pumpkins, 15kg of potatoes and 180kg of tomatoes. Seedlings are purchased from a stall outside Epic markets and she harvested her own seeds each year and exchanges seedlings with the residents in her street who are keen growers and with a friend in Ainslie.

As Spring plantings she is trialling purple dragon carrots from Diggers heirloom legends collection which are said to have superior anti-oxidants and carotene to other carrots, the Maui purple chilli from Diggers balcony collection because Ludger says you can never have too many chillies, and Red malabar (*Basella rubra*) a decorative climbing spinach with twining red stems and succulent leaves for stir-fries - if next autumn's frosts don't get them first.

Christiane is an anthropologist who works with Aboriginal artists. She has created a sculpture from driftwood gathered at the far south coast with a 'whale' woven from reeds which was the star in a camping ground at the far south coast last Christmas. It lends a jaunty air to the wicking beds.



Calendula to keep the pests away. Photo: Jay Cronan

Growing plants to use as herbal teas and medicines is part of Christiane's ethos and the dried stems hang above the central kitchen bench. It's a nice touch when she strips the leaves from lemon verbena, throws them in the tea pot, adds the hot water, and pours a refreshing cup of afternoon tea. This was accompanied by a jar of olives, wild foraged and cured by Christiane to a recipe from a Californian website.

For our favourite she slit the olives, packed them in cooking salt and left them covered with a kitchen cloth towel on a tray outside on the front verandah for two months. At that point they are really hard but she put the olives into a plastic tub, added water, placed a plate on top of the olives and left them for three weeks. If a scum develops on top just add more water. When drained, they were delicious.



Sculptures in the garden. Photo: Jay Cronan

Bright orange calendula, Thai basil, coriander, Vietnamese mint and lemongrass are all picked fresh and bring special flavours to light and quickly cooked Asian dishes and noodle soups.

When Christiane was travelling recently her husband, Ludger, cooked a traditional German dish in which he used homegrown kale.

GERMAN GRUENKOHL MIT PINKEL

(Kale and smoked sausage)

1.5kg potatoes, peeled and cut in biggish pieces

1 kg kale, coarsely chopped

1.5 litres stock (an amount to cover the potatoes)

4 smoked sausages (originally Mettwurst) Kransky or Chorizo

2 smoked bones or Kassler (smoked pork)

3 tbsp white wine vinegar or cider vinegar

hot English mustard to taste

salt and pepper

Cook bones and potatoes for 10 minutes and then add the kale. Simmer for 30 minutes and stir occasionally, then add sausages and simmer for another 10 minutes. Add vinegar and hot English mustard. Serve and eat sausages with mustard.