



**Opposite page, top:** The restored barn, behind a bed of lavender, houses essential garden tools. **Below:** A simple salad of freshly picked green leaves and radicchio is spiced up with a scattering of peppery nasturtium petals. During the kitchen garden days, participants enjoy lunch at the outdoor table, **above**. Here, bruschetta, **top right**, is topped with fresh broad beans – seen, **left**, just plucked from the vine – and peas with crisp prosciutto, garnished with flowering thyme. Mickey Robertson, **below right**, stands before the pool house, originally the stables. The stalls were taken out, a concrete floor poured, then the original timber planks were put back in place. Espaliered apple trees begin to clamber over the apple arch, **below left**, an arbour in the making.

# GROUND RULES

*At Glenmore House, outside Sydney, budding gardeners learn about plot-to-plate organic gardening and sample the results.*

MICKEY ROBERTSON HAD the colour-drenched, rambling flowerbeds of Monet's famous garden in Giverny, France, in mind when she planted her first garden at Glenmore House in Camden, an hour south of Sydney. "I bought hundreds of pink tulips and planted them in a great swathe across the front fence. I thought it would be absolutely divine," says the interior decorator and gardener. The tulips never bloomed, but lessons were learned and the gardens at Glenmore House now stand as an altogether more personal and practical collection of plant life, with flourishing organic vegetables now the subject of Robertson's popular kitchen gardening days. Held monthly, the days include an introduction to organic vegetable gardening and garden-fresh lunch.

The relaxed, pastoral elegance of the setting belies the weekends Robertson and her husband, Larry, spent camping inside the dilapidated small sandstone farmhouse – a "horrible mess" – while nurturing it and the surrounding buildings back to beauty. Meanwhile, Robertson persisted at establishing a garden. Her first vegetable garden failed to take hold, but a dinner at Amsterdam's Restaurant De Kas, a farm-to-table eatery where most of the produce comes from the surrounding gardens, revived her desire to establish a working garden of her own. "It became this obsession about seeing the vegetables grow in a really attractive way, then seeing them on a plate." Convinced that others would be interested in growing their own vegetables organically, Robertson enlisted Steve Batley, of Sydney Organic Gardens, to help her install a vegetable garden that could be used for a school.

The garden was in the ground for three years before Robertson was introduced to horticulturalist Linda Ross, the ideal person to educate people on growing their own food: "she's fun, open and compelling", says Robertson. While Ross is out in the garden talking participants through fundamentals like crop rotation and companion planting, Robertson can be found in the kitchen preparing garden-fresh vegetables as part of the lunch to be served, although not all the eating takes place at the table: "There's a lot of grazing as they go – a pea here, a broad bean there, a little tomato straight from the vine. I think and hope that a sense of generosity is felt by everyone who attends."

Seasonality determines the focus of the monthly kitchen gardening days. Visit in March and enjoy a lunch of summer's last yield while planting your autumn crop of garlic or legumes. October's agenda is building struts for pumpkin and cucumber, to provide shade for next summer's leafy greens. Robertson's passion is infectious, with visitors relishing the hands-dirty approach. "I just love the sheer enthusiasm of the participants. You can see the thrill of possibility for creating their own gardens building up over the day."

Connecting with your food is simple, she says. "We should eat as locally as possible, and you can't get any closer than your vegetable garden." CONOR BURKE *Glenmore House Kitchen Gardening Days, \$198 per person, including lunch; visit [glenmorehouse.com.au](http://glenmorehouse.com.au) or call (02) 4654 5484.*



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