

CREATING COMMUNITY EDIBLE GARDENS IN THE KIMBERLEY



On a cold and wet evening on 5 July 2017, ABC's gardening guru **Sabrina Hahn** talked to the Society's members about her 13-year program helping remote Aboriginal communities to grow at least some of their own fruit and vegetable crops.

Sabrina was invited to be part of philanthropic group EON ('Edge of Nowhere') to provide horticultural advice to these communities. [Lombadina](#) was one of the first to be involved as the Government had previously had a large greenhouse established there that was not being used due to lack of training and advice about what to plant and when.

The project started in schools as community councils and local politics in some areas made it difficult to get garden areas allocated. Getting the school kids involved was also a great opportunity to educate them about healthy diets and hygiene, as well as where food comes from – not just from the community store. The remoteness of many communities means very high transport costs, particularly for fresh vegetables, and during the summer Wet Season it is often impossible to get regular deliveries. So, there are also sound financial reasons for growing your own food.

The program includes teaching the kids, and parents, how to prepare and cook the produce harvested. Due to low literacy levels in a lot of communities, many demonstrations are usually necessary to get the messages across, as there is little prospect of people following written advice.

The success of the program is largely due to EON's volunteers ensuring that Aboriginal children take ownership of the gardens; the kids do all the soil preparation, planting, weeding, and harvesting. If people are not interested, and don't show up or prepare the gardens, the volunteers go to other communities.

There are also trips into the bush to collect bush tucker, but the focus is on growing things that will thrive in the ideal winter climate: all manner of vegetables, melons, and fruit trees are tried. Being largely school-focused, the gardens typically lie dormant over the hot and wet summer holidays. Sabrina told of trialling peanuts in one early exercise, which was a great success until the Education Department outlawed peanuts in schools, even though there are no peanut allergies among Kimberley Aboriginal kids. Another suggestion was that the kids should wear gloves to work in the garden – even though most don't even wear shoes.

The program has projects in 13 Kimberley communities, and while not all are wildly successful, many are, and there are observable improvements in kid's health and positive attitudes towards the project. The mantra of healthy food, healthy eating, healthy homes, is proving very successful, and EON has attracted some financial support from the WA Health Department, Lottery West, and some corporates.

More on EON Foundation at <https://eon.org.au/>

Mike Donaldson