

FOOD SWAPS

A sustainable food movement is sweeping Geelong... food swaps are popping up all over!

A food swap is a social event to which people bring homegrown food to trade. It works on the honour system; you put what you've brought on the swap table and take whatever you think is a fair exchange, so there's no need to haggle and no money changes hands. Anything homegrown or homemade is welcome, such as fruit and veg, herbs, plants and seeds, eggs, honey, home preserves and even baked goods.

A food swap can have a hugely beneficial environmental, social, and economic impact.

Environmentally, food swaps allow people to drastically reduce their food miles. Forget the 100-mile diet; think 1 mile! They also encourage the spread of home food production, which increases biodiversity and food security. Growing some of your own food is hands down THE best thing you can do for the environment, as it sidesteps all the chemicals and fuel used in growing and transporting farm produce.

Socially, food swaps are great for building community. It's a great opportunity to meet other gardeners in your neighbourhood, and see what thrives in your local area. There is always a convivial atmosphere. At the first Cloverdale swap, two participants meeting for the first time discovered that they were neighbours.

Economically, the swaps increase access to fresh food for people who struggle to afford enough to eat, and reduce food bills for all participants. Last year I noticed a volunteer pumpkin plant come up in my garden and decided to let it be and see what happened, and ended up with 100kg of pumpkin. I've been taking the pumpkins along to the food swaps and routinely bring home my week's veg in trade. This makes a significant difference to my household budget.

Food swaps have changed the way I garden. I used to try to avoid gluts but now that I know I can swap excess veg for something I can use, I'm going to try and produce as much as my garden can. This is a positive feedback loop... see environmental benefits above! Others have been similarly inspired; one person who brought eggs said they had always wanted to try growing some veg, and took some tomato seedlings home. Another was so enthusiastic about his food swap experience that he left saying he would establish another bed in his veggie patch.

Even in late winter, there has been an amazing variety of food on offer at the swaps: rhubarb, artichokes, tamarillos, duck eggs, dragonfruit seeds, raspberry plants, and even some mulberry muffins, along with the usual herbs, lemons and silverbeet.

For the those who have nothing to swap, an hour into the swap the table opens up to sales by donation. It's a great way to access fresh food inexpensively. So far money raised is being used to promote the fledgeling swaps, but if it became a large figure we would look at donating it, along with any leftover food, to Foodbank Victoria.

A food swap is simple to organise; all it requires is a suitable venue and some time spent spreading the word. They can be as simple or as complex as the organiser is willing to make them. Some swaps keep track of their members, publish newsletters, serve tea and coffee, and invite guest speakers, while others keep it very basic. The Corio swaps offer help with picking fruit or other harvesting, in hopes of distributing fruit that would otherwise rot on the ground.

Participating in a food swap is a lovely way to spend a morning. Hope to see you there!

When and where:

9:00AM – 10:30AM every month on the:

1st Saturday @ Manifold Heights Primary School, Manifold St

AND the Sprindale Neighbourhood Centre, High Street, Drysdale

2nd Tuesday @ The Urban Bean Café, Labuan Square, Forster St, Norlane

2nd Saturday @ South Barwon Community Centre, 33 Mt Pleasant Rd, Belmont

3rd Saturday @ Cloverdale Community Centre, 167 Purnell Rd, Corio

AND Grovedale Community Centre, 45 Heyers Rd, Grovedale

4th Saturday @ Rosewall Neighbourhood Centre, 36 Sharland Rd, Corio

AND the Vitality Cafe, 229 Roslyn Rd, Highton

For more info, call Emily Swanson on 0409 658 325.