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Bloom time

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The green revolution

Communal gardens are increasingly being incorporated into new apartment blocks.

Once upon a time, people moved into apartments to escape the gardening. Now, many are finding they can buy an apartment or townhouse, yet still satisfy their green-thumb itch with gardens included in their complexes.

For some, it's an informal arrangement, with residents setting up committees to help keep the lawns and garden beds around their buildings in top shape. But for an increasing number, it's now more about communal gardens being planted explicitly for residents to grow fruit, vegetables and herbs.

And in what's believed to be a first for Sydney, one new off-the-plan apartment development in Summer Hill, Carleton Estate, is selling individual garden plots also off the plan (see the cover property feature).

"We believe this has happened in Melbourne before, but not here," says the director of Sydney residential property at Colliers International, Ian Bennett. "The reasoning behind it is that obviously some people would like to have their

own little garden, while others mightn't have either the time or the inclination."

It's a reworking of a postwar British idea that led to blocks of council flats springing up with residents allocated their own allotments to grow vegetables and fruit.

The head of landscape architecture at HASSELL, Angus Bruce, has been designing several complexes, including Victoria Park's 206-apartment East Village, where developer Payce is cultivating 6500 square metres of greenery.

"It will have a whole series of raised planters for an orchard ... and below those will be space for growing vegetables and herbs," Bruce says. "We're finding a lot of families and young couples in the city still want to be able to potter and dig some dirt and plant seeds so kids can watch their carrots grow."

He's drawn up provisional plans for communal gardens at Mirvac's Harold Park development, too. "And, in seven weeks, we'll be able to announce the biggest rooftop farm in the southern hemisphere on top

of a residential development, but we can't make that public yet," he says.

Meanwhile, there are also plans for communal gardens on top of the new 139-apartment Harbour Mill in Pyrmont, while at the 209-unit Panorama in Crows Nest there will also be space on the roof for residents to grow herbs and vegetables and reap the benefits of their labour on an honesty system.

"People can garden with 360-degree views," CBRE's Tim Rees says. "It's certainly proved an added attraction to buyers."

It's a system that's already working well elsewhere. At Redfern's Signature Apartments, Robert Goodall says residents are enjoying a great crop of tomatoes, courgettes and basil. "It's been pretty good ... It's a sharing thing," he says.

Bruce sees it all as part of the urban-regeneration movement. "People want the facilities of living in a city, but they still want usable green space," he says. "It's collective urban farming."

COVER PROPERTY

How green will your garden grow? At Carleton Estate in Summer Hill, there's plenty of potential, with 29 garden plots being sold off the plan. The development has a range of 78 apartments set on 12,000 square metres – of which 8800 square metres of parkland is being retained as landscaped gardens.

Sixty of the existing trees will be retained and 39 more will be planted.

"It's a pretty unique offering," says a director at Colliers International, Ian Bennett. "A normal development of this size would have 500 or 600 apartments covering 75 per cent of the land space but

the developer here decided to go the other way, with only 25 per cent used for apartments ... He's gone open space and larger apartments to make it a premium offering."

The boutique project, developed by Nascon and Saade Construction with architectural firm Kennedy Associates, involves restoring the suburb's largest

mansion, which was constructed in the early 1880s. Two heritage buildings – the mansion and the stables – will be converted to apartments, while two four-level blocks will also be built.

For sale off the plan will be 24 one-bed or one-plus-study apartments (45-81 square metres internal) from \$489,000; 48 two-bed or two-plus-

studies (78-124 square metres) from \$660,000; and six three-bedroom or three-plus-study (118-131 square metres) apartments from \$860,000.

Prices for the garden plots, 20 of which will be 12.25 square metres and nine of which will be three square metres, are yet to be set.

"We're expecting this to be an extremely popular offering," Bennett says. "There's nothing else like it, and the light rail from Lilyfield to Dulwich Hill will connect it by the end of the year, with hopefully an extension to the city to come later."

For details see carletonestate.com.au or phone 1800 855 690.

PLANT THE SEED

Should your apartment building start a garden?

- ▶ Find out first how many residents would be interested in maintaining a garden.
- ▶ Work out an equitable system for dividing the spoils.
- ▶ Put money aside for a consultant to advise or to engage a gardener if resident enthusiasm for the work drops away.
- ▶ Review your bylaws to make sure they'll help.
- ▶ Try to anticipate any problems in future; for example, if a resident decides to keep chickens in the garden space.

NEW ARRIVALS LOVE LIFE IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Larissa Gallagher, a newcomer to Australia, decided she simply wanted to enjoy communal gardens when she was looking for a home for herself and her family.

"In the UK, we had a back garden that led out to playing fields beyond," she says. "So we knew we wanted plenty of outdoor space here as well, so we'd be able to enjoy the kind of Australian lifestyle we'd always imagined."

After researching lots of neighbourhoods, the 41-year-old e-commerce specialist and her 35-year-old husband, Ian, who works in the pharmaceutical industry, settled on a townhouse in Sydney's inner west – the master-planned Cape Cabarita community, which is set among landscaped parks and gardens.

As a result, their four-year-old son, Toby, and 17-month-old daughter, Anya, have adapted quickly to life in a new land, spending every spare minute playing outside.

"It's worked out really well," Gallagher says. "The gardens here are beautiful and, even better, they're kept really well by the gardener, so you don't have to look after them yourself.

"And if you're going to come to the other side of the world, you want to live in a beautiful landscape. It's also nice that you can be playing on the grass and you meet other families who are doing the same thing, so you end up having a network of friends very quickly."



Growing trend ... artists' impressions of garden-friendly Carleton Estate.



On a roll ... Larissa Gallagher, Toby and Anya make the most of their "backyard". Photo: Steven Siewert

