

EAT WELL

Gardeners are digging in for dinner, writes **Loretta Hall**

Nursery food

A NURSERY with a focus on growing food is now running cooking classes to inspire gardeners to plate up their produce.

Bulleen Art & Garden is also encouraging home gardeners with excess harvest to meet once a month to swap fruit and vegetables with others who are just as keen to cook with home-grown food.

One of the presenters in BAAG's rustic room for cooking classes, Melbourne chef Tony Chiodo, says cooks get more of a connection to their food when they know where ingredients are from.

"If you grow it yourself, you get in touch with the seasons," Chiodo says.

He has an Italian backyard in Melbourne's eastern suburbs, filled with olive, fig, almond, peach, pear, pomegranate and citrus trees.

"It may have blemishes or not be the right shape but it doesn't have to be pristine," he says. Chiodo, author of new cookbook *Feel Good Food*, uses wholefoods for his cooking and says he enjoys fossicking in BAAG's garden beds for freshly picked organic ingredients for his classes.

BAAG's cooking class co-ordinator Maria Ciavarella says there is often a surplus crop in the display beds and this inspired a food swap that runs every third Saturday morning of the month.

People bring in their produce that can be value-added, such as jams or seeds, Ciavarella says. "There are



Home-grown: Chef Tony Chiodo is running cooking classes to encourage gardeners to plate up their produce. **Picture:** Ben Swinnerton

herbs and vegies and eggs and someone we know, who doesn't have space for a garden but has a thriving worm farm, brings in worm castings and swaps them for produce."

BAAG has a chook run, a working compost display and a food forest with a top storey of apples, cherries and quince through to an understorey of tamarillo, currants and gooseberries.

The bush foods section displays indigenous ingredients to grow in your backyard, and the range of certified organic seedlings in stock, according to the season, is grown locally at

CERES in East Brunswick.

At BAAG's entrance are raised, edible garden beds of herbs and ornamental edible plants, which are tended by staff, Joy's Garden has society garlic, leek, tatsoi and mizuna.

This commitment to home-grown food runs right through to BAAG's owners Bruce and Meredith Plain who, Ciavarella says, have converted their home tennis court to a giant vegie patch.

Ciavarella is running a new class on July 24 on one of her favourite topics.

Making Marmalade with

Maria is a hands-on workshop with a takeaway treat of citrus marmalade, she says.

She has invited Chiodo to present a winter version of his Garden of Eating summer class, and on July 25 he will prepare a menu that will use many ingredients grown in the nursery's display beds.

Other classes include Vegies on a Budget on August 8 and Citrus: Choosing, Growing, Eating on August 26.

★ Bulleen Art & Garden, 6 Manningham Rd West, Bulleen. Open daily 9am to 5pm; ph 9850 5155, www.baag.com.au