

Garden good for green thumbs

By Rosanna Dalibor
Busselton-Dunsborough Mail

INITIATED by Busselton's Pete Malavisi and started as an advert in the community notices, the Busselton Community Garden is finally starting to blossom after three years.

Located on the corner of Strelly Street and Southern Drive, the garden, run by a core group of local people, provides a place for people to grow vegetables and plants in a community-based environment.

Mr Malavisi said community gardens evolved in urban areas, where people often did not have room for their own gardens, and he could see a need for one in Busselton.

"You have issues with people who are renting who generally are not allowed to dig out their backyards to have a vegetable patch," he said.

"You have got the elderly moving into smaller units these days and they often lose their garden, and so this is part of that option of allowing people to come and garden somewhere that's communal.

"It's also an issue of the sharing of knowledge... I have been in Busselton for eight years and struggle every year to grow my vegetables.

"It's not easy here, it's actually quite difficult... a lot of it is based on the sand that we're on.

"But there is actually a knowledge base of people who have been here for generations and have managed, and I suppose this is an opportunity to bring a few people together to try and share that knowledge."

Although everyone can decide what they want to grow, the focus is on organic plants.

"I think that is the challenge," Mr Malavisi said.

"We are going to rely on anything that is certified, but also compost our own waste.

"It's also a dream to try to be fairly carbon neutral as such, so we are not going to be generating too much.

"If anything we'll be a carbon sink, getting in the trend with the modern."

He said the community garden committee received planning consent for the shire-leased area in January 2007, and started earthworks in April-May last year.

Until now, at the end of stage one of developments, the community garden has received about \$75,000 in grants, \$35,000 of it from the shire, though a further \$20,000 has been applied for to finish stage two.

When completed, there will be 80 garden plots, which are about 12sqm each and cost from \$25-\$50 a year.

The community garden also includes a children's playground, gazebo, compost, an orchard with fruit trees, worm farm and a chook pen, and will in time have toilets, water on site, a car park and an eco-building which will act as an office and education centre.

The site will be continuously open and people will be able to walk around and look at what other people have grown.

"People are actually really interested to see what other people have planted," Mr Malavisi said.

"I have no doubts whatsoever there will probably be a competitive element too as to who can grow the biggest tomatoes or what," he laughed.

Mr Malavisi said the garden would be completely finished in two years and had no doubts it would be a new tourist attraction.

He gave credit to the community, the shire and all the sponsors and was always on the lookout for more people to help finish off the work.

