

Feasting on fields of colour

June 1, 2010 - 5:08PM

Hapi Fiefia and Cath Kelly have created their own little Garden of Eden - and their fields are plentiful, writes Joanna Savill.

Hapi Fiefia's farm is a beautiful thing. Over row upon raised row, leaves and fronds in varied shades of green bake in the autumn sun. Here and there, a burst of colour emerges – the brilliant red of a chilli, the butter yellow and mauve of an almost tropical-looking blossom. “Okra flower,” Fiefia says, stopping to pick one. “You can stuff it like a zucchini flower. And you can eat the leaves as well.”

There's okra, too – fat, ribbed, green fingers, slightly furry – growing as fast as Fiefia can plant them. And there are potatoes, snake beans, corn, breakfast radishes, countless lettuces, leaves and more leaves. “Anything I can find, I plant,” Fiefia says. “And I make it grow.”

It's a far cry from the security business Tonga-born Fiefia was running in central Sydney until a couple of years ago. “It was terrible,” his partner, Cath Kelly, says. “I thought, 'Why am I doing this to myself?' ” Fiefia adds. “More than 12 hours a day – up to 25 hours continuous. So one day I decided, 'What the heck?' I walked away.”

The pair found land at Catherine Field in south-west Sydney and began to clear it. Fiefia planted a few things. “Then suddenly we had all this zucchini and other stuff,” Kelly chimes in. “So we had to work out what to do with it.” They slowly began selling their produce and a tree-change life was born.

Then again, growing things is something Fiefia has always done, particularly in his native Tonga. He also loves a challenge.

“Back in my country, people grow yams up to six foot [1.8 metres]; taller than me,” he says. “So I thought to myself, 'Next year I will grow one too.' And I did. And it took three people to lift that yam.”

That yam, and a 75-kilogram watermelon not long afterwards, netted him first prizes at his local show. After 17 years in Australia, he has his hands in the earth again.

Between rows of eggplant – long and skinny, fat and purple, round and striped – the pointy-leaved branches of chilli plants hang with fruit and up to 53 varieties are grown throughout the year.

The chilli leaves can be used in cooking, especially in the traditional Tongan umu, or ground oven, where they are baked with onion, coconut cream and diced ham or bacon. Kelly also uses sweet-potato leaves, pumpkin leaves, taro leaves and pele – a Tongan “spinach”, like okra, from the hibiscus family. The flavours are extraordinary – rich and nutty, sweet and chewy, slimy and peppery – each one quite different from the other. “And so healthy,” Fiefia says.

While the produce is not certified organic, it's grown without chemicals. “I don't spray. So the insects eat what they want and I harvest what's left,” Fiefia jokes.

And there's certainly enough to go round. Under the name Field to Feast, the pair supplies city grocers, such as Alfalfa House, About Life in Rozelle and the Fratelli Fresh stores, as well as offering farm sales and tours by appointment.

Victor's Food ([victorsfood .com.au](http://victorsfood.com.au)) runs regular tours to Field to Feast farm, which include an umu lunch.

Field to Feast will be at The Sydney Morning Herald's Growers' Market (7-11am), Pyrmont Bay Park, Pyrmont (opposite Star City Casino), on Saturday (growersmarketpyrmont.com.au).

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