

GREENHOME

AN URBAN GARDEN FIT FOR A CHEF, A GISBORNE ECOSANCTUARY
AND A LOW-MAINTENANCE PLOT FOR A WEEKEND GETAWAY.



Sue Fleischl, director of The Great Catering Company, with a fresh bunch of basil plucked from her organic home garden in Auckland.

TO EVERYTHING, ITS SEASONING

Sue Fleischl's home herb garden is so prolific, it's now supplying her business with organic freshness.

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The Hawke's Bay upbringing that inspired Sue Fleischl, founder of the Great Catering Company, to embark on her culinary career sounds nothing short of idyllic. "It was wonderful growing up in Hawke's Bay, in the fruit basket of New Zealand, in the perfect climate for growing," she says. "My father was a doctor, originally from Austria, and we were introduced to a lot of Mediterranean flavours right from birth. He had been given some olive trees by a patient, so every olive picking season we were up on the ladders picking olives. We had our own big barrels in the shed and we would supply all of our friends.

"We had guava and avocados, kiwifruit, vegetables, and big fig trees at a time when nobody really knew what figs were. My Dad even designed his own device for picking them made out of a pair of old jeans! We always cooked together and Sunday afternoon was always beer and olive time for us and whichever of our friends came round."

This naturally led Sue to decide her destiny lay in the world's kitchens, but her family were initially not too keen. "All of my family seemed to go into medicine, and back then in the 1960s and 1970s chefs were the lowest of the low!" she says. "So my Dad wrote to the Savoy Hotel in London and got me a job. He said, 'If you are going to do this, you are going to do it right.' The chef there said he agreed – and that after getting such a bad reference for me from my school that he knew I would be a brilliant chef!"

So began years spent working in restaurants and hotels around the world before Sue discovered the joys of catering and moved back to New

Zealand in 1995 to be closer to family. Ten years later, she started her own business, The Great Catering Company.

Her return to the garden, growing the 'urban herbs' that now grace her company's menu, is something of a natural progression, but not one she saw coming. "I didn't really enjoy gardening as a child, which must have frustrated my father," she says. "I really got into it when I



THE RECIPE

Snapper baked with urban herbs

Serves two

350g snapper
300g peeled Agria potatoes
1 clove garlic, thinly sliced
2 dessert spoons pine nuts
1 handful black olives

- Heat oven to 180C.
- Cut potatoes into 1cm slices. Boil in salted water for 7 minutes, then drain and leave in colander for a few minutes to steam dry. When dry, heat olive oil in a heavy pan and gently sauté the potatoes for 10 minutes. Add the garlic near the end of this process so it doesn't burn.

- Wash fish and pat dry with paper towels. Remove the pan containing the potatoes from the heat and place the fish fillet on top of the potatoes. Season it with salt and pepper and drizzle with olive oil. Sprinkle over the pine nuts and olives. Place the pan containing fish, potatoes, pine nuts and olive oil in the oven and bake for 5 minutes.

- While it's cooking, make the

herb dressing by whisking together:

1 cup of chopped soft herbs from the garden (I used oregano, Italian parsley, chives, basil, thyme and coriander)
1 teaspoon of capers
Zest of 1 lemon
½ cup good olive oil
1 dessert spoon of chardonnay vinegar

- After the fish and potatoes have been baking for 5 minutes, remove the pan from the oven, drizzle the fish and potatoes with the herb dressing, and bake another 5 minutes or until the fish is cooked (thick fillets may need an extra 5 minutes).

- Serve with your favourite salad. •

Baked snapper with a selection of Sue's 'urban herbs' and potatoes (this page). Sue rises at dawn to gather the herbs requested by her chefs (opposite page).