



Grapevine archway



Anna-Marie Kingsley and Malcolm Batchelor

## creative nature

Meet the duo behind the off-grid horticultural wonderland that includes a food forest, mosaic sculptures, upcycled art, vege gardens and more.



Hattenburn Gardens is full of creative outdoor art.



*Anna-Marie Kingsley and husband Malcolm Batchelor have created, from scratch, six acres of fruit, vegetables, artwork, herbs and flowers near Carterton.*

**T**hey both come from farming families. Malcolm wanted to return to the land and live off-grid; Anna-Marie wanted a large garden. So when the couple bought their 60-acre block off Malcolm's parents in 2003, Hattenburn Gardens – nestled at the foot of the Tararua Ranges – was born.

Anna-Marie describes it as “an ever-evolving monster”, but the concrete gargoyles and teddy bears perched on top of Hattenburn's stone front entranceway give the first hint that this is a garden where creativity – and a touch of rebel spirit – rules the beds.

It is also a friendly garden, thanks not just to Anna-Marie's warm hospitality, but the more than 100 informative laminated signs throughout the garden explaining its various features. And it's a place where weeds are tolerated with surprising equanimity.

“People seem to find this a very reassuring garden,” she says. “They don't mind the weeds at all. Visitors say it inspires them because it doesn't look ‘professionally’ designed or landscaped. They look at things and think, ‘Oh, we could do that.’”

Art is everywhere at Hattenburn, including mosaic sculptures, a bubble bath made of succulents, and a menagerie of colourful creatures such as Covey the metal dragon. “There are real couches under those,” says Anna-Marie, a self-taught artist, as she points to the outdoor mosaic-covered “furniture”. “You pull all the soft fabric off the couch, add a wooden or metal frame, put rocks in the base, staple chicken wire to the frame and start slapping on the concrete.”

Construction of the couches and several huge mosaic pots was assisted by a steady stream of Wwoofers (Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms). The couple enjoy hosting these volunteers.

Anna-Marie's penchant for grunty creativity is also reflected in the garden's mass plantings (check out the alley of flaming canna lilies) and heavy infrastructure, such as the stone entranceway and goldfish pond, that the couple built themselves. It's hard to believe the property once comprised nothing but grassed paddocks.

“Both our families are big country garden people so they were pretty much aligned with what we wanted,” Anna-Marie recalls. “It included a long driveway with English trees, a big stone gateway and big native plantings. I was painting full-time back then, so I also wanted it to be

fairly easy-care. The vege gardens and orchard came a bit later, and we only added the food forest in the last year.”

The story of the food forest's development provides a colourful example of Anna-Marie's unconventional gardening style. “I have a friend who's really into permaculture and she kept twittering on about food forests. I thought, ‘For goodness sake, that sounds stupid.’ Then I decided to build a food forest so people could come and see it didn't work.”

But rather than fall victim to a common food forest issue – oversized trees – Anna-Marie festooned her fruit trees to keep the fruit accessible and low to the ground. She also grew most of the forest's trees (about 200 in all) from seed or cuttings to keep the cost down. “And then I thought, ‘Actually, I quite like this!’”

With a background in horticultural science, Anna-Marie is confident enough to experiment with a range of gardening styles, including heat-retaining walls, hugelkultur and vertical gardening.

The couple are also keen recyclers. More than 1000 black tyres keep the frost, wind and rabbits away from plants, while reusable organza bags protect tree fruit from birds. There is a recycled window greenhouse, and repurposed bed frames, swing sets, sheep netting and even trampolines are all put to good use for artistic or growing purposes. Naturally, the wood-fired hot tub in the food forest is also recycled. “We buy very little new and get a lot of stuff given to us,” Anna-Marie says. “We don't worry about things looking shabby.”

The off-grid property is often battered by wind and heavy rain, so trees are kept short until their roots are established and fruit trees are staked.

The land surrounding the garden is leased to Malcolm's sister and brother-in-law as a dry stock dairy runoff. The farm tracks crossing the garden occasionally provide some unexpected visitors. “The only time it has ever been a problem was when a big herd of cows got in, and poo went everywhere,” Anna-Marie recalls. “I had a classic car club coming to visit in the afternoon, but a Japanese Wwoofer who was here at the time was most helpful with a bucket of water.” ■

*Hattenburn is open daily for self-guided tours, \$7 per person. 99 Hinau Gully Road, Carterton. For more information: 021552112 or visit their website: [hattenburngardens.nz](http://hattenburngardens.nz).*



**MARISA KING** caught the gardening bug from her parents while growing up in Ōtaki. She is now an enthusiastic home gardener and enjoys growing flowers, shrubs and veges on a quarter-acre section in Masterton.