

THE SPIRAL GARDEN

The Spiral Garden contains a dug earth sculpture in the shape of a spiral, created by guerilla gardener John Overton in early 2013 as a reflection of his own spirituality and the sacredness of the space.

The Spiral Garden is a reflection of my own spirituality, which is age old and universal in nature.

For me, and I hope the garden community, its a sacred space as well. The commons and gardens are for all regardless of race, colour, culture, and creed. -

John Overton

The retaining wall beside the stairs leading up to the Spiral Garden from the Puriri Garden is made from pieces of broken up concrete from the exercise yard of the Wellington Women's Prison formerly at Mt Cook, when the women's prison was moved to Point Halswell in 1915.

THE POLLINATOR GARDEN

The newest area to be reclaimed as a garden, the Pollinator Garden contains the ruined foundations of the Prison Superintendent's house and a small grove of Western Red Cedar. After his release, one former prisoner was so attached to this place, he was allowed to live on this site, in the garage of the house. Raised beds are used in this area due to concerns about asbestos-contaminated soil. Now home to a healthy colony of honey bees, their output is shared with garden members.



Want to explore the lands beyond the garden? Scan to access a trail map.



ABOUT THE GARDEN

The garden is a mixture of private plots and communal spaces. It was established as a community garden in 2012 by John Overton. We have now grown to a thriving community of over 130 members, many of whom have become close friends. Family groups pay a small annual fee for their plot/s. As well as offering allotments, we host student volunteers, primary school and kindergarten groups, scouts, walking groups and more. We also run lectures, workshops, community events, and even the occasional birthday party and wedding.



Visitors welcome anytime. Volunteers onsite Sundays 10am - 4pm (ish)



On Facebook: Miramar Prison Garden



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130+ YEARS OF CULTIVATION

This part of Matai Moana | Mt Crawford has been cultivated by prisoners since the 1880s. The people who were imprisoned at Wellington Prison grew food for themselves and at one point, the animals at the Wellington Zoo. The garden grounds were originally much more extensive than the 1.1 acres we have today, including a significant farm site of 80 acres further down the hill.



The prison farm, 1950

The gardens and greenhouse were a significant part of the rehabilitation programme at the prison, providing native seedlings for the re-vegetation of the northern end of Miramar and many other parts of Wellington.

Ryan worked in the gardens and often brought me tomatoes, cucumbers, and lettuces. In a prison, these were little treasures. - Paul Wood, prisoner at Wellington Prison, 1996 - 2007

During WWII, 80 acres were cultivated. There was a dairy for milk production and the prisoners raised award-winning pigs. The prisoners built by hand the greenhouse, pond, terraces, and retaining walls.

Many of the materials used in the groundworks were sourced from the demolition of the Terrace Jail in Te Aro and the Mount Cook Jail. Other materials were sourced from the prison-run brickworks lower down on the hill. The bricks made there are marked with a distinctive broad arrow and the prisoner-made concrete posts can be found in fences throughout Wellington.

Mount Crawford Prison was temporarily closed in 2008 due to ageing buildings, but reopened in 2009. It closed permanently in November 2012, but we still find relics of the prisoners' time here. Tools, milk bottles and even old work boots are part of the garden's mini-museum.

THE GREENHOUSE

The current greenhouse was designed by a returned soldier while recuperating in hospital and was built in c1940, replacing an existing, smaller greenhouse. The outside bays were filled with manure and compost, generating heat through decomposition that kept the greenhouse warm enough to grow crops throughout winter. Later they were used to harden off seedlings before planting out. The greenhouse was once fully irrigated.



The greenhouse and puriri gardens, 1950

FIVE UNIQUE GARDENS

THE PURIRI GARDEN

At the centre of the gardens is the puriri tree, a favourite of tūi and our members alike. It is the area that has been most consistently cultivated in recent years. It is home to a Sharewaste compost site, keeping food waste from the wider community out of landfill and continuing to enrich the community garden's soil.

THE KAURI GARDEN

The Kauri Garden is anchored by the established and protected Kauri tree, planted sometime prior to the 1960s. The Kauri Garden has numerous fruit trees underlaid by organically edged plots. Established using fill brought up during the building of the army and airforce buildings at Shelly Bay, Hugelkultur (building beds on logs) is popular in this garden.

THE TERRACE GARDEN

Hand dug by prisoners, and once the main garden, the Terrace Garden provides a very sheltered growing space. The lowest point of the Terrace Garden is a permaculture-inspired food forest, where we host regular pruning workshops. Under construction is a grotto to house a sculpture of the Virgin Mary. This garden has two access points to the Potato Path, a trail that runs through mature pines along the full length of gardens, and so named because of the abundance of potatoes that grow on the steep hillside, including purple taewa (potatoes) and other heritage varieties. Perhaps they were established when prisoners discarded old spuds. We certainly find a lot of their other refuse along this path, including broken greenhouse panes, tools, interesting bottles, and many, many boots, likely made in the prison shoe workshop.