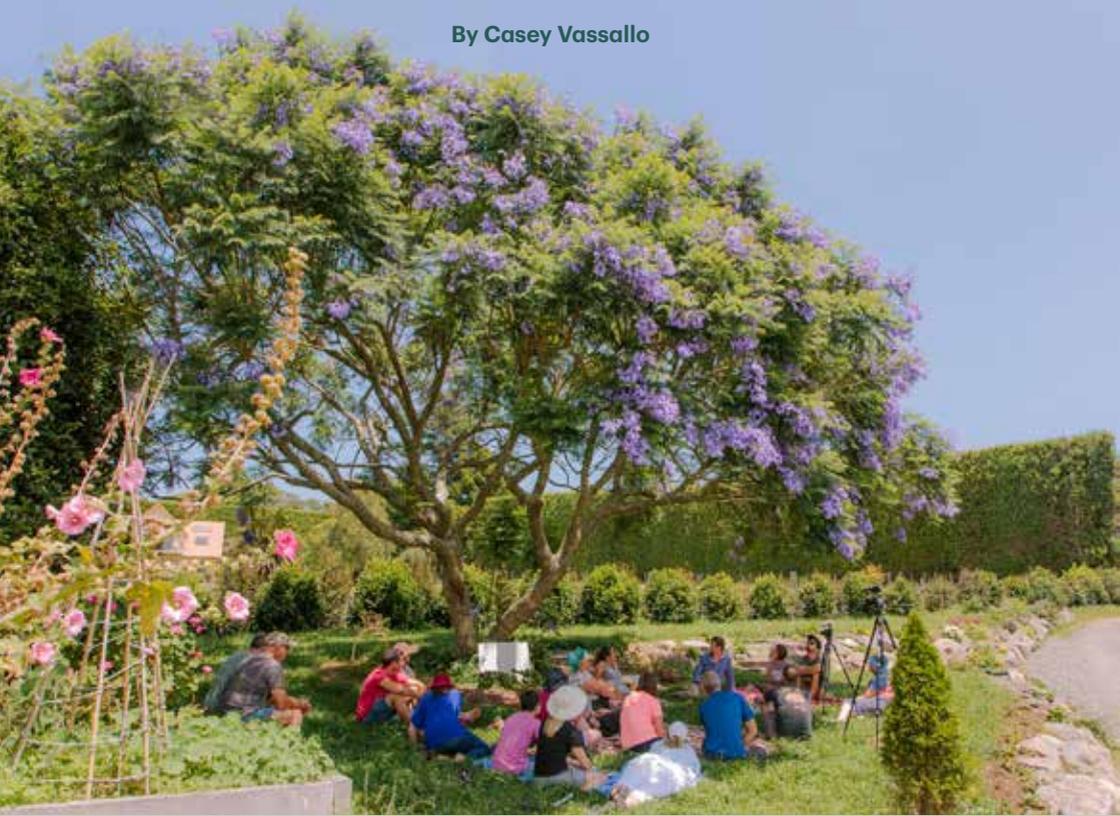


Future Proof

By Casey Vassallo



It's time to make fundamental changes to our lifestyle, and fast. So swap a frock or crop, reduce waste, learn about gardening, and hear the experts — Sustainable Backyards event is go!

How green are you? Do you avoid takeaway cups and straws? Pick up rubbish? Recycle and compost? Cycle as a means of transport? Avoid fast-fashion? Every bit counts in making a world of difference and now's the time we need to rally together.

Enter Sustainable Backyards. Back for its fourteenth year, the event is taking

over the Bay for the month of March. Put on by local not-for-profit initiative Envirohub, there're more than 170 events that run from grassroots practices to big-picture ideas.

Envirohub project manager and program coordinator Liesel Carnie says the family friendly festival has something for everyone, with both free and ticketed events



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to educate, inspire and bring awareness. “Some [events] can be really life changing, teaching you something you’ve never thought about before,” Liesel says. “It might be a little thing, but it’s those little changes, they all add up.”

The Envirohub Speakers Forum is integral to the program and this year’s panel of local and international experts will discuss the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals at Club Mount Maunganui on 29 March. Someone who has been a speaker at Sustainable Backyards many times over the years is Auckland-based journalist Rod Oram. “Sustainable Backyards to me is so wonderful because it’s about local people and organisations responding to these big issues,” Rod says. “I think it’s absolutely amongst the best in the country.”

With over 40 years experience as an international business journalist, and a wealth of knowledge in economics and sustainability, Rod carries weight on the topic. “As a people we have to fundamentally change everything we’re doing to make sure we get back to working with nature, not against it,” he says. “We need to achieve an absolutely unprecedented speed, scale and complexity of change that humankind has never come within cooee of doing before.”

The Sustainable Development Goals provide a framework for all countries to work within. “If you look at New Zealand’s score on the SDGs, we are performing poorly on many of them,” Rod explains. “The one that we’re performing the worst on is the seventeenth, which is

about collaboration on these goals. We’ve got no excuse for that at all — as a small country we find it far easier than much bigger countries to work together in our communities.”

Rod says it kicks off with action at a local level. “We hope that then aggregates up across a town, a province, a country, across Asia-Pacific, across the world. Those local responses deliver the global impact.” And therein lies the power of events like Sustainable Backyards.

“The most important thing of all about Sustainable Backyards is that people feel useful when they participate. It gives them encouragement, an appetite to do more and that becomes infectious,” Rod says. “If an infinite number of us each do our infinitesimally small thing, that becomes big.”

“What we do over the next ten years determines what we do over the following century. The way forward is to focus on these big issues, whilst at the same time reminding people that this is not some gentle change to business as usual,” Rod says. “I hope people clear their calendars and just immerse themselves in Sustainable Backyards morning, noon and night, all the way through the program.”

And immersion is pretty easy with such a broad range of events on offer. With practical workshops like the Eco Dye & Leaf Print and Trendy Mender, clothes have their time in the spotlight. And the Frock Swap on 27 March encourages everyone to get down to The Historic Village with five items to exchange. “The idea is you bring along some good-quality items that are in style, but you might not be so interested in,” Liesel says. “We give you a token and you can swap it out for something else. You can come along and get a whole new wardrobe.”

⤵ Clockwise, from top left: Take a composting workshop with Leo Murray from Why Waste; hear Rod Oram at the Speaker’s Forum; learn about a plethora of topics at Plenty Permaculture including garden design; get involved in a beach clean-up. Opener: A workshop at Plenty Permaculture.



↑ Beach clean-ups at Mount Maunganui and Papamoa are great activities for the whole family.

The ever-popular Beach Clean-up is back in Mount Maunganui and Papamoa this year, but with a twist — an underwater clean-up will also be happening. “At the same time as the beach clean-up, there will be scuba divers picking up the rubbish in Pilot Bay.”

Gardening and sustainability go hand in hand, so there’s plenty on how to grow your own food, forage for remedies and utilise small urban spaces. Get along to one of the farm tours by Six Toed Fox Organics, where they share what they’ve learnt on their three-acre property in Omanawa. Head to Plenty Permaculture for a range of workshops including garden design and alternate energy options, or hear about soil degradation and what can be done at The Magic of Soil with Professor of Physics and astronomer Phil Gregory on 13 March.

And there is plenty scheduled around food of course. The Food for Thought rescued food festival on 23 March (see the story in this issue for more details), along with chef Peter Blakeways’s cooking

class with rescued food on 31 March, will be definite highlights. There will also be workshops on everything from making apple cider vinegar to wild edible weeds and the composting process.

Beyond the Sustainable Backyards events, Envirohub drives many strategies, such as the Zero Single-use Plastics campaign to support individuals and local businesses alike in cutting down. They’re also part of Predator Free BOP, which provides free backyard rat traps in order to protect native birds. On the back of this month’s events, you can also get along to bite-sized versions of Sustainable Backyards throughout the year. ☺

The Sustainable Backyards programme runs for the month of March, with a range of free and ticketed events. Look for the Sustainable Backyards brochure around the Bay of Plenty or visit: envirohub.co.nz. To be across other Envirohub events and initiatives throughout the year, follow [f @envirohub](https://www.facebook.com/envirohub)