

# GARDEN TO TABLE

The grapevines were brutally pruned right back to the main stem when I met them. They had been pronounced dead for a year, then surprised everyone by spending a summer sprouting all over the place and fruiting prolifically. Some bunches of beautifully tasty grapes were left in the fruit bowl one weekend, I presumed they were from our garden but as the grapes ripened on the vine the birds scoffed the lot. Two vines, big trellis. So, I hitched a few of the larger, longer sprouts onto the wood loosely with binder twine to guide its future.



When they (there are three) had lost all their leaves the next winter, I cut off everything except those few; leaving three to five nodes for spring sprouting and tied the vine more persuasively. Tāku hoa iti did the high stuff as I'm not good with ladders. Well, that was a few weeks ago and now they're vibrantly alive and ready. We're training the grapes for shade. As the birds get the fruit the vine might as well be up high then the birds may leave some for us, low down, hidden under the leaves. Grapes are easy to buy anyway, Aotearoa overflows with them in season.

Grapes are good on a cheese platter but, as there are none on the vine presently, I used almonds. I started this one with fresh Italian parsley from one of the raised beds, on a square pottery plate. We had a couple of class soft cheeses, it's so easy to buy bitter brie and feta is good, nice and salty and healthy; a contrast. Tell your guests it's Bulgarian goats cheese although this time, in truth, it was a Dutch sheep milk cheese. I don't know whether it's called that because of the sheep or the milk. By chance, it was Dutch salami and in the bottom of the cheese drawer I found some ancient South African beer sticks, so cut them very small and buried them in halved vine tomatoes, letting them sit and seep. Then stuffed peppers, why wouldn't you halve them, no one wants to be seen as greedy. They cut best with a super sharp steak knife. Almonds are a rare addition, but their brown roundness was needed to fill a vacant place on the plate and they were eaten.

Yes, we had a dinner party, a good reason to hone my cheese plating skills which never had much of a workout and are needed more often in middle age. Not like when you're young and running around after children and catering might be just beer and chips. I'm missing the broccoli which would have been sprouting constantly now if the pig hadn't uprooted it. It's high in fibre which helps your digestion, scrapes the rubbish out, and broccoli also assists in keeping blood sugar levels down and has lots Vitamin C when it's raw. It curbs overeating; probably by filling you up with something that's not fattening and which takes a while to digest.

Along those lines and always aware of the threat of middle-aged spread and the dangers of carbohydrates, I'm crazy about salad, specifically broccoli coleslaw. This may be a misnomer because I drop the cabbage and go straight for the nutrients. Here's how I make it and this method goes for any sort of vegetable salad. Slice onion so thinly you can almost see through it: in halves is easiest. Then add garlic and raw ginger; lots of it or, if you're not brave, to taste. Oil, natural Virgin Olive oil and vinegar, just ordinary malt vinegar (or lemon juice if you're not blood O type) and mayonnaise. Equal amounts of oil and vinegar and three times that amount of mayonnaise. Salt, ground sea salt (don't eat the Himalayas), be generous; the Lebanese, masters of salad, load them with salt and lemon juice, each balancing the other out.

Thinly sliced celery and I chop the stalk off the broccoli, skin it and cut it into strips, then separate the rosettes. Tiny sticks of carrot will put nice colour in, and quarters of capsicum sliced small. This salad needs to be made an hour ahead of the meal, to sit in its juices and it will last in the fridge. You can add coriander, parsley, whatever tickles your fancy and/or you have in the garden.



No broccoli so I made some silver beet coleslaw which is what I brought my kids up on. Silverbeet or Chard, as the English harshly call it, is so easy to grow and it's a good source of iron, vitamins K, A, C and calcium. It's full of antioxidants and has potassium for blood sugar levels also it's high in fibre so reduces cholesterol. Translated; it's slimming and builds good bones. My children are big, strong and independent now. That done, my preference turns to broccoli coleslaw and my attention to forming tempting cheese platters.



**Fiona Sullivan**