



**The Kitchen Garden Classroom: Educating Children for a Healthy Future**  
**13 October 2008 Abbotsford Convent**  
**Session A3: Fruit Growing in School Gardens**  
**Louis Glowinski, author of *The Complete Book of Fruit Growing in Australia*.**

Hi, I'm Louis Glowinski, an amateur fruit grower, invited to talk to you because I had the cheek to write a book on the subject – so everyone thinks I'm an expert.

I'm glad to get a quorum – I was a bit worried when I found we were head to head with Stephanie – anyhow she gets the cooks, I get a few of the gardeners.

For children I should have the easiest sell. Most garden produce used in the kitchen on a daily basis consists of vegetables and it can be difficult to get children to like their veg. However fruits are different – sweetness is the characteristics of fruit and sweetness interests children as does fast food and snacking and fruit is the quintessential fast food.

And that's why I was so perplexed by my observations in the late 80s. My surgery lies on-route to a local school and next to my surgery was a plum tree overhanging the fence – and the children walked straight past, not interested – it seemed against the natural order – an insult to nature itself. Clearly food for them did not grow on trees; it came sanitised, packaged from shops, actually originated in shops.

It reminded me of an early *Sesame Street* episode, targeted remember at urban black ghetto children – the segment showed a mother and child walking through a supermarket and the question was posed 'Where does milk come from' – quite! How else were they to know that milk was once a biological product?

At about the same time I was giving a few interviews, promoting my book, speaking to lots of new people and in every instance, every single one, the interviewer would start to reminisce about their childhood – about the mulberry tree by the creek, green gage plums at Nanna's, stealing fruits from over the fence, chestnut harvests in the old country, picking wild strawberries, and a patient of mine even started rabbiting on about cloudberry gatherings in Finland.

Needless to say I was a bit put out, I've got a book to promote and they were all carrying on about their own childhood. I had to re direct their focus back to the topic, me and my book but it was difficult to do – clearly this was a very

pleasant part of their childhood. And just as clearly irrelevant to the present generation's childhood, what are they going to reminisce about?

Our urban children are largely estranged from any contact with the soil and just as importantly estranged from any form of self sufficiency. They have become increasingly addicted to passive and solitary entertainment technology which reached a nadir with the popularity of violent video games, and the most recent phenomenon of pseudo interpersonal interaction on the net has to be considered an improvement.

I don't want to overstate my case as clearly most children are getting on just fine without any hands on contact with growing and that especially applies to the high achievers but .....

Surely part of education, part of civilizing children, creating the legendary well rounded (intellectually) human being involves exposing them to and teaching them enthusiasms for a wide variety of nature's creations including the food that sustains them. To know how to grow things and how to prepare a healthy tasty meal is part of an antidote to the helplessness felt by some in our society.

How can we interest them in their natural surroundings? Can we do it with purely ornamental plantings with their intrinsic sophisticated sterility? While it's important to provide beautiful surrounds for our children I doubt whether that will lead them to an interest in planting for themselves. We would need to use the more basic drives of appetite and curiosity; we need to channel their hunting instincts, plant things for them to find and snack on for themselves, preferably unusual things, not available in shops, and we need to plant them as part of the landscape outside the orchard using a separate part of the curriculum to teach them the tending of fruit plants in as enjoyable a way as possible. Both aspects are important.

Our children won't be able to look back to the enjoyment of Nanna's greengage cos Nanna didn't plant any in the 70s. There is no chestnut by the creek, we mostly live in flats. As for the great outdoors, the bush, we all love the bush, but its not Europe, North America or even Asia – it's hard to get a feed in the Australian bush. No, we will have to do the planting if we want our children to run just a bit wild and have a few culinary adventures, get a free feed, recreate the original sin and steal a few fruits.

The rest of the presentation consists of slide show and discussion.  
Problems discussed – a selection:

Spraying – choose fruits that don't need spraying if at all possible. In fruit fly country, it is essential to bait or spray. Organic bait was suggested by a participant and is preferable. Bagging fruit was also discussed and having cheap labour in schools makes this an option.

Netting was mentioned and a participant mentioned the real disadvantage of birds' corpses entangled in netting upsetting the children. It was suggested that plantings do include common but expensive fruits such as cherries

especially in low income areas as many children would never have tasted a good cherry.

The problem of nuts and the paranoia regarding litigation was discussed. Perhaps schools should be designated nut growing or nut free. Anyhow the solution is not to avoid all nuts growing. Allergies are common – bees, eggs, citrus are often implicated but life threatening allergies are very, very rare.