



# growing a menu

Jimmy McIntyre of Otahana Lodge  
Photography by Dean Mackenzie  
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The benefits of  
'growing your own'  
haven't escaped these  
three chefs, for whom *secateurs*  
are just as important as  
a spatula...

### Jimmy McIntyre – Otahuna Lodge

They look like bright jewels, garnets perhaps, tucked inside little nests of green. Irresistible, it's all I can do to stop myself from plucking one and popping it into my mouth. Alas, I'll have to wait.

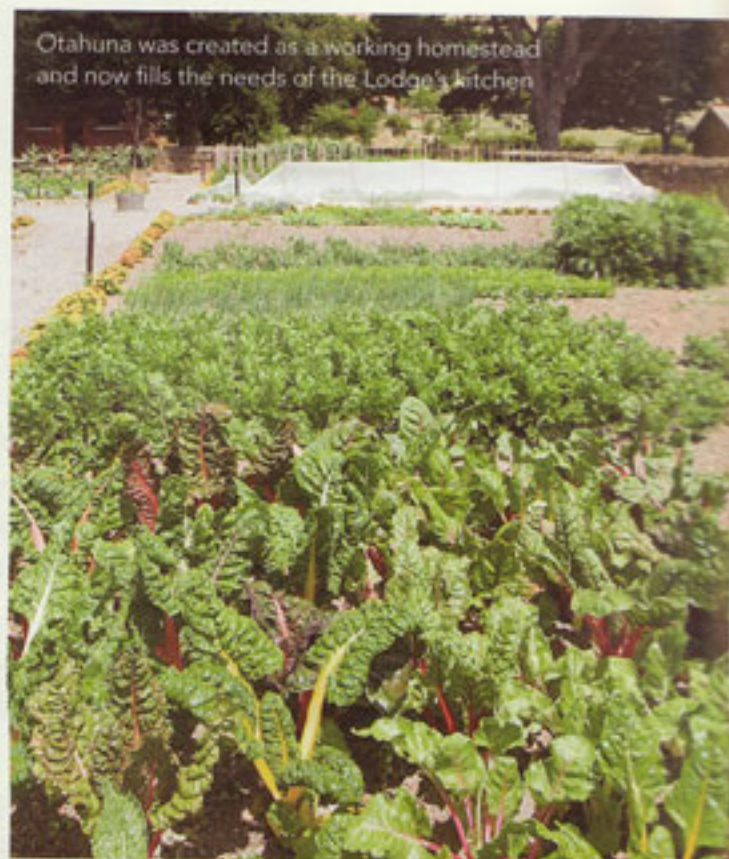
"Those strawberries won't be ready until tomorrow," says Adam, the sous chef from Otahuna Lodge in Tai Tapu, just outside Christchurch.

"I'm thinking of putting them into a tart or maybe I'll make some strawberry soup. I'll decide once they've been picked."

That's the beauty of being able to grow your own food – the spontaneity – and Adam and head chef Jimmy McIntyre revel in it. Each day they start work with a blank canvas and just go wherever the ingredients take them.

One day it's zucchini flowers stuffed with goat's cheese mousse; the next it's broad bean purée served on crispy ciabatta. With Otahuna's huge fruit and vegetable garden and extensive orchard at their fingertips the possibilities are endless.

Produce gathered fresh from the garden at Otahuna dictates the day's menu



Built in 1895 by Canterbury pioneer, Sir Heaton Rhodes, Otahuna's design was very much influenced by the noble country estates of Victorian England.

The gardens were created by A.E Lowe who trained at the famous Kew gardens in London. And, as Otahuna was a working homestead, the vegetable garden played a significant role in providing food for the Rhodes family and their employees.

Now that privilege is afforded by the Lodge's guests who sit down to a five course *dégustation* dinner in a dining room which looks like something out of period drama *Gosford Park*.

They can sup on any one of Otahuna's 50 different varieties of tomatoes, freshly podded peas, new potatoes, artichokes, blackcurrants, raspberries, leeks, hazelnuts, apricots and much more.

Basically, whatever can be grown is and it grows bountifully.

"Last autumn the orchard gave us 50 kilos of apples and we used every last one of them," says Jimmy. "I made apple tarts, apple jelly, apple sorbet and served up desserts of apples done four ways. We got a lot of chutney out of them too."

Instead of being bored stiff by the apples he was inspired and enjoyed the challenge of coming up with something different to do with them every day.

Jimmy has been at Otahuna for the past four years and says he could never go back to cooking a prescribed city restaurant menu. Starting from scratch every day is a chef's dream and under Otahuna's new ownership the gardens have improved greatly.

"We've always had a good garden, but now Miles (Refo) and Hall (Cannon) are really putting a tremendous amount of energy into building on that and increasing the production while keeping up the quality."

It's not just the vegetable garden that's been productive. The woodland area has yielded some culinary delights too.

"When I got here I thought there must be some porcini mushrooms out there somewhere and I asked my mate who is an avid forager to come and have a look with me. Sure enough there were, and after mulching under the trees last season we got over eight kilos of them."

Another unexpected delight has been the mulberry tree.

"I'd never really seen mulberries before coming here and now we use them for all sorts of things like vinegar, jams and jellies. Mulberry vinegar can make a beautiful marinade for duck and it's just another thing I'm able to experiment with."

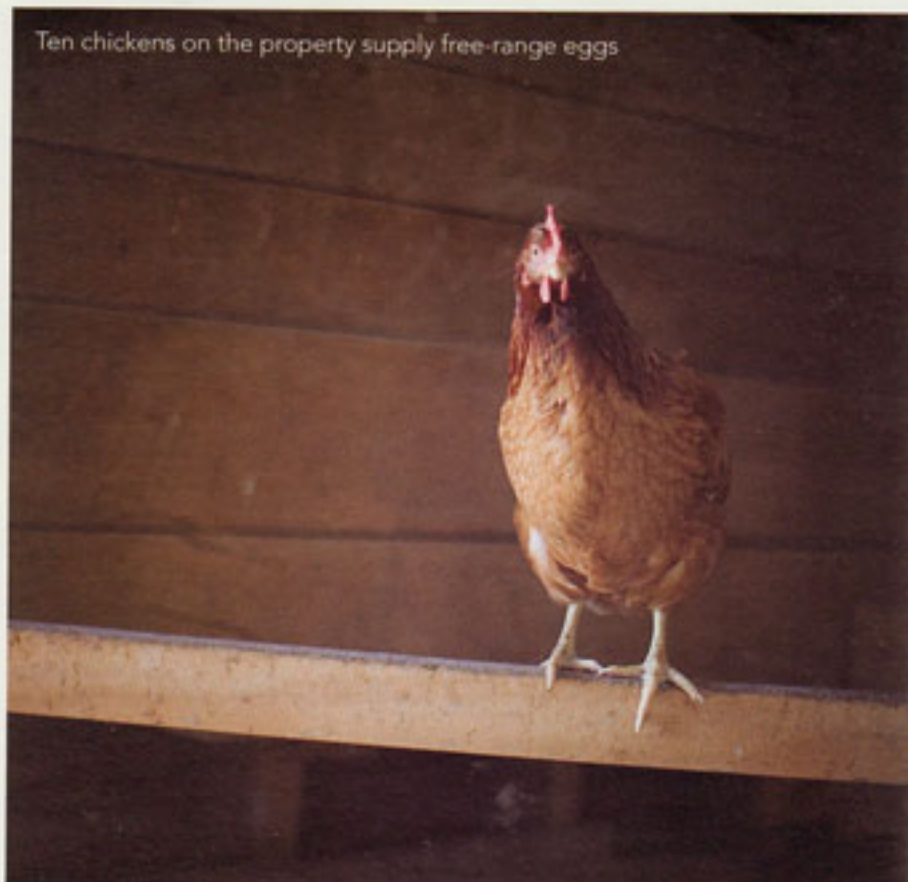
Much of the produce comes from heritage varieties with exotic names like Zebra tomatoes, Turtle beans and cardoons, a thistle-like plant that is a close relation of the artichoke.

Many are cultivated from seed in Otahuna's small nursery which is tended by a team of four gardeners. The aim, one day, is to be certified organic.

With such close attention the harvest is often more than the guests at the lodge can consume, which means Jimmy spends a good deal of time thinking up ways of preserving and storing the remainder. A good amount of the excess is bartered away with other Tai Tapu food producers, a box of mulberry vinegar here for half a dozen free-range ducks there – a long-standing tradition of country life.



Ten chickens on the property supply free-range eggs



"We do lots of jams and chutneys and we infuse olive oil with all sorts of things. I really love making sun-dried tomatoes and preserving the lemons and making pickles. That way, whatever time of year, there is always something on hand from the garden."

A clutch of ten chickens provides Otahuna with free-range eggs and pigs and sheep are also kept on the farm.

As well as being a chef, Adam is a trained butcher so it's his role to see to carving up the animals once back from the abattoir.

From the pigs comes free-range bacon, ham, sausages and salami plus an array of scrumptious pork dishes that Jimmy conjures up and Otahuna spring lamb is, apparently, like no other.

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Plans are currently underway to produce a range of Otahuna brand delicacies to be sold at farmers' markets and the like, and guests often go home with a jar or two of jam.

"How many other chefs get to work like this? The guests love it, I love it and we are not trying to be too clever about it. It's cooking as it should be, using the freshest, best ingredients and serving them simply. It's magical."

By the way, the strawberry soup was delicious.

Otahuna Lodge – 03 329 6333 or visit [otahuna.co.nz](http://otahuna.co.nz)