

fruitful haven

The guest menus at Greenhill Lodge are based around produce from a much-loved kitchen garden. **Bill Adams** takes a stroll.



Tucked away in rolling hills about 15 minutes' drive west of Havelock North is Greenhill Lodge – one of Hawke's Bay's finest.

You need to know where you are going to find this secluded delight, but once you get there the desire to stay is strong. This reaction is all too familiar to owners Christine and John Dick who, having escaped from a more corporate and hectic side of hospitality now like to stay home as much as possible.

Greenhill is blessed with a gorgeous landscape decorated with century old trees and with a homestead dating back to 1898. Christine and John love their home and take great pride in its kitchen garden that supplies them with nearly all the vegetables and fruit necessary to feed themselves and their discerning guests.

Homemade jams and preserves are popular at breakfast, "I make a lot of marmalade, apricot jam (see box, right), feijoa jam and lemon honey," says Christine. It was her quince honey that caught my attention that morning, a recipe which she has shared with us (top, right). As we chat in their open kitchen, these two very laid-back hosts work away, Christine rustling up a lemon tart for dinner and John, the qualified cook of the two, producing a plate of poached eggs and bacon brightened up with

a sprig of wild flowers. "We encourage our herbs to go to seed", he says, "because we use the flowers to garnish many of our dishes and they are good for the bees".

Bees are providing them with runny comb honey, thanks to a rental beehive system that was a present from their children.

Hire a Hive supply and maintain the hives, and the household receives the honey once a month. "The bees are also fond of our rosemary and lavender hedges" says Christine.

Their kitchen garden is surprisingly small but very practical, with raised beds that are easy to get around and close access from the kitchen. It's also ridiculously pretty with a rambling rose guarding the gate and a trimmed hedge surround.

Beyond this is the orchard full of old trees that Christine says "look after themselves, apart from watering and pruning. Hawke's Bay has such a wonderful climate for all this stuff and when this house was built shops were not close by so they had to grow everything they needed". Things haven't changed much since then, with the garden at Greenhill offering no excuse to have to head in to town.

Book to stay at Greenhill Lodge at www.greenhill.co.nz

Quince honey

Peel, core and blend 5 large quinces in a food processor. Add 600ml water and boil until soft. Add 9 cups of sugar and boil for a further 15 minutes, stirring to prevent it sticking to the pot. Pour into sterilised jars and seal.

stonefruit

In the Greenhill orchard apricots, plums, peaches and nectarines grow alongside their exotic relatives greengages, pomegranates, figs and quinces. "They are all old trees and seem to look after themselves, apart from watering and pruning", says Christine.

...in the garden

- Stonefruit grows best in areas with hot, dry summers and cold winters if the trees are protected from frosts and are well-watered.
- Naturally fertile, free-draining soils suit most stonefruit but check into the specific requirements of each fruit; plums will tolerate wet feet, peaches and nectarines won't.
- Many stonefruit varieties have good resistance to diseases. The fruit however are not bird-resistant. As Christine says: "it's always a battle to beat the birds to the best fruit".

...in the kitchen

Besides serving the orchard fruit fresh from the tree, Christine freezes it for use later in the year and makes many preserves. She makes a lot of apricot jam and says "everyone has their own favourite recipe but I find if you leave some kernels in with the fruit, it sets and tastes better". (The stones have to be cracked open and the kernels removed.)