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Meg Lin enjoys the vegetable and herb patch in front of her Manoa Valley home. "I love having fresh veggies and not having to pay for them," she said. "It's satisfying to grow most of my food."

Fresh Surprises

After a lot of hard work, Meg Lin still calls herself an "accidental gardener"

By Nancy Arcayna
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Meg Lin is not afraid to pick up power tools and get her hands dirty. She's built raised-bed garden plots at her Manoa Valley home, created a three-step composting system, made a rain catchment system to save water, set up a worm composting bin for food scraps, and plans to finish a rock wall in her backyard and install a solar outdoor shower on one side of her home.

She wasn't always comfortable working in her yard, and her efforts at gardening often resulted in failure. Once her three children were grown, she began focusing on the landscaping.

Lin said she feels like things have really come together within the last few years after contacting Foodscapes Hawaii, a company that assists folks in creating food gardens. The part-time Punahou School nurse received instruction on installing an 8-by-8-foot raised bed in the front yard that contains lettuce, kale, tomatoes, sweet potato, eggplant and herbs.

Everything happened grad-

ually, but once Lin perfected organic-gardening techniques, she felt confident tackling the other projects.

"It took me a while to find out what veggies would grow in the yard and where to plant them," she said.

Although it's obvious Lin sprung up in the backyard, she calls herself an "accidental gardener."

For example, blue ginger sprang up in the backyard, apparently as a result of bird droppings containing seeds. A hole in her gutter inspired her to connect a rain chain to divert water into a basin with lilies, and fish appeared as if by magic. A papaya tree that sprouted in a compost pile was another surprise, she said, noting "it's the best papaya that I've ever tasted."

THE SLOPING backyard was leveled with fill material, and a swimming pool was installed. There's also a picnic area for sharing outdoor meals and a nook with a daybed covered in comfortable pillows and framed with twinkling lights that is an ideal spot for reading or an afternoon nap.

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The Lin backyard houses hens for fresh eggs, ceramic pottery and plants such as water lilies.



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The Lins' dinner table is set up in the patio of the family's Manoa Valley home.

GARDEN: Yard in Manoa yields satisfaction, savings

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Lin considers her mamaki tree one of her greatest treasures.

"I brew a big pot of tea and refrigerate it, and it lasts the whole week," she said. "The kids love it. It's good for digestion and for lowering blood pressure and cholesterol."

She also houses four chickens she shares with another family. In addition to fresh eggs, the chickens provide manure that can be added to compost.

"It's the best soil I've ever had," she said.

Lin said she spends about 15 to 30 minutes each day tending to the garden, feeding the chickens and cleaning their coop.

She estimates a savings of

more than \$400 each month from growing vegetables and using the catchment system to water the plants.

"I love having fresh veggies and not having to pay for them. It's satisfying to grow most of my food," she said. "And I love to cook now; my family enjoys the meals more. I've found so many amazing-tasting foods. It makes a difference using the fresh ingredients."

Lin also enjoys sharing the wealth.

"We've lived on the same street for a long time. One of our neighbors fishes and shares his catch. I share my eggs and vegetables," she said. "It's that kind of community."

ON THE NET:

>> foodscapeshawaii.com



Meg Lin uses mamaki leaves for tea. She picks four leaves and a few sprigs of mint, boils the leaves in water and lets them steep overnight.

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