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Barter idea takes root

NEWS > ENVIRONMENT 04 AUG 08 @ 11:15AM | BY JULIA ADLER

GROWING a bumper crop of chemical-free veggies on a double block of prime real estate would be mind bogglingly expensive for most green thumbs.

But landscape designer Mat Pember, 28, found an enterprising way to beat the inner-city land squeeze by making a deal with a community-minded Thornbury resident.

Mr Pember approached landowner Joy Adcock with the idea of growing vegetables in the vacant block next door to her house near the Northcote Golf Club. In exchange for using the 0.1 hectare of land rent-free, Mr Pember offered to keep the land neat and tidy.

"I love home-grown vegetables and working outdoors," the Fitzroy resident said.

"Just being there every day to water the plants stops the block from getting overgrown and keeps illegal rubbish dumpers at bay."

And there'll be plenty of fresh produce to go around the other side of the fence too. Ms Adcock will be given boxloads of fresh veggies at harvest time.

Ms Adcock, 55, said she was planning to grow vegetables on the unused block, but hadn't got around to setting up a garden until Mr Pember knocked on her door.

"I had the space and it's nice that someone could use it," Ms Adcock said. "The food is fresh and you know what's gone into growing it."

Mr Pember, who co-owns gardening business The Little Veggie Patch Company, said bartering produce for space was a great way to bring the neighbourhood together.

"And I'm sure the neighbours will meet up while throwing out their kitchen scraps in the veggie garden compost," he said.