

Red mustard plant and purple lettuce are in abundance in Katy Svalbe's (opposite) rooftop garden.



up in the sky

Katy Svalbe's first job as a landscape architect was to develop parklands for the Olympic Village at Homebush. Her latest project is more compact, but just as rewarding

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When Katy Svalbe first set eyes on the Sydney apartment she shares with her flatmate Ben, it was the potential she could see in the rooftop terrace that made her want to call it home. “It’s an amazing spot – you get the view to the inner west and, on the other side, there’s a wide-angle view of the city,” she says. “Evenings are beautiful with the sun setting. Most people are absolutely blown away.”

Landscape architect Katy, who is one half of Amber Road Designs (her sister Yasmine is the other half), wanted the space to be practical as well as picturesque. She decided with the all-day sunshine and a lack of pests due to the altitude, the rooftop was the perfect spot for a veggie garden. “I love the idea of being able to reach out and get a sprig of mint for your mojito, or a bit of parsley for your tabouli!,” she says.

Creating the dream kitchen garden wasn’t without its challenges. “There was a lot of pots and soil up there already,” says Katy. “So my first big job was about reconditioning the soil and mixing it into new compost with different nutrients, so it was capable of growing new material again. I didn’t have any composting going at the start so I took a load of green waste down to a local community garden, Charlie’s Garden in Darlington, and swapped it for compost, seedlings and plants. I get there as often as I can to learn to cultivate on a bigger scale.”

Then there were the access issues that come with a top-floor apartment (“luckily, there is a lift up to the eighth floor but the internal stairs were well trodden”) and the constant watering (“over summer, I was watering twice a day but at least there is a water outlet up there so I wasn’t running up and downstairs with watering cans!”).

It’s taken about 12 months to get the rooftop to the photogenic stage it’s at today. But with a garden based largely on seasonal plants, there’s no downing tools and enjoying the view; the space requires constant attention and there’s an inevitable rotation of feast and famine.

“In summer, we had kilos of basil,” says Katy. “So we were up there making pesto like mad people! But I had tomatoes growing right through the winter, which people tell me is quite unusual. That’s the great thing about a suntrap in a temperate climate – we have more than six hours of sun a day reaching the garden, and we aren’t overshadowed by surrounding buildings – you can be growing stuff all year round.”

Despite all the work she’s had to fit in, Katy couldn’t be happier with her unconventional yard. “It’s been a spectacular opportunity to have this space to experiment with,” says Katy. “I’m really lucky.” For more information on Katy’s work and her company, Amber Road Designs, visit [amberroaddesign.com.au](http://amberroaddesign.com.au).

Above, from left: Antique Indian mirror, \$1250, Elements I Love. Folding bistro chairs, \$200 each, and metal plant stand (towards back wall), \$600, both Ici Et Là. ‘Moroccan’ outdoor rug, \$125, Terrace. Opposite, top left: Antique French jardinière, \$1150, Elements I Love. Top right: Antique wheelbarrow, \$735, Elements I Love. Antiqued black pot with kalanchoe (in wheelbarrow), \$60, Garden Life. All other props, homeowner’s own. ADDRESS BOOK page 150



**mix & match**  
About 70 per cent of Katy’s garden is edible. The other 30 per cent is where she experiments with succulents and native plants. “As well as full sunshine, the garden can be exposed to wind and rain, so it can be quite extreme,” says Katy. “I’ve planted natives, such as proteas, and a whole range of little succulents. Sometimes a vegie garden isn’t the most attractive thing, especially when things are dying and changing over the seasons, so it’s nice to have other plants serving as a background to give the garden some volume and a bit of colour.” →



This rooftop terrace is home to a variety of plants. Potted succulents, perennials and ornamentals (top left) provide colour and texture. Oregano, kaffir lime, kale, thyme, parsley, sage, English spinach (bottom left) and pear tomato (below) are also on offer.







**MIRROR, MIRROR** This antique mirror, from Elements I Love, brightens up a corner and reflects the vivid greenery.

### dining out

One of the best things about the roof terrace for Katy is being able to have friends over on weekends and evenings. "We entertain a lot," she says. "There's a barbecue up there and it's the perfect setting." And guests love the fact they're eating what they see around them. "This winter, we've had an endless supply of English spinach and rocket, and it's wonderful to be able to take people up there and say look, we're going to eat from here tonight." While Ben is the 'supercook', Katy prides herself on her salads. "I love simple, fresh seasonal salads, mixing fresh leaves with fruits, nuts and cheese."



"It's wonderful to be able to take people up here and say 'look we're going to eat from here tonight'."

### pumpkin salad

Choose quantities to suit numbers

**Pine nuts**  
**Japanese pumpkin, sliced into bite-sized pieces**  
**Olive oil**  
**Freshly picked herbs (Katy used rosemary and thyme)**  
**Rock salt**  
**Freshly cracked pepper**  
**Haloumi**  
**Pomegranate**  
**English spinach**  
**DRESSING**  
**Honey**  
**Fresh lime**

Toast pine nuts with a drizzle of olive oil until brown in a pan on low-medium heat.  
Bake pumpkin in the oven at 180°C with a splash of olive oil, herbs and rock salt and pepper until soft but firm and brown.  
Slice haloumi into rough triangles and fry in ridged pan or on a barbecue with a splash of olive oil.  
Crack open pomegranate and carefully tap to remove seeds.  
Create a bed of spinach leaves. Place all ingredients on top and gently toss to create desired mix and composition.  
Drizzle with olive oil, honey, freshly squeezed lime and season with pepper and rock salt to taste. →

### Mediterranean bruschetta

Choose quantities to suit numbers

**Pita bread**  
**Garlic, minced or finely chopped**  
**Olive oil**  
**Freshly picked basil**  
**Vine-ripened tomatoes (preferably a mix of cherry, pear or whatever you have to give colour, texture and flavour), finely diced**  
**Spanish onion, finely diced**  
**Goat's cheese**  
**Rock salt**  
**Freshly cracked pepper**

Warm oven to 220°C and place pita bread in to crisp with a drizzle of olive oil and a liberal sprinkle of minced garlic. Remove pita bread from oven when lightly toasted.  
Roughly chop basil, leaving some full leaves for presentation.  
Mix together Spanish onions, tomatoes and basil, and season with olive oil, rock salt and freshly cracked pepper in a large bowl.  
Scoop tomato, onion and basil salsa in even amounts onto pita bread.  
Crumble goat's cheese on top.  
Place basil leaves on top to garnish.







## mushroom & spinach frittata

Choose quantities to suit numbers

**30g unsalted butter**

**200g Swiss brown mushrooms,**  
**roughly sliced**

**2 vine-ripened tomatoes, cut into wedges**

**1 bunch English spinach**

**4 eggs (preferably organic)**

**½ cup grated parmesan cheese**

**½ cup crumbed goat's cheese**

**½ cup flat-leaf parsley leaves**

Preheat the grill to high. Melt 20g of the butter in a non-stick frying pan over medium heat. Add sliced mushrooms and tomato wedges, and cook, stirring for 3-4 minutes until tomato is just softened.

Bring a large saucepan of water to the boil. Pop in spinach leaves. Remove the saucepan from heat, leave for one minute, then remove spinach and place in a bowl of iced water. Drain, squeeze out excess water, then roughly chop.

Lightly beat eggs with a tablespoon of water in a large bowl. Stir in cheese, parsley, spinach and the mushroom and tomatoes. Season with rock salt and pepper.

Melt remaining butter in the frying pan over a medium-low heat. Add in the mixture, stir briefly, then cook for 5-6 minutes until golden underneath and nearly set.

Place pan under hot grill for 3-4 minutes or until just set and the top is golden.

Transform a courtyard into an outdoor entertaining zone by using a patterned outdoor rug to ground your dining setting

## 3 top tips for a beautiful rooftop garden

**1 Take a practical approach** to prevent any outdoor disasters. Consider factors such as ease of access, how you'll water the plants, what electricity sources you may need and how much weight the roof will bear. Tables, chairs, pots and rugs need to withstand the elements, because (unlike you) they won't only be outdoors on balmy evenings.

**2 Pick a theme and stick to it.** It's important to treat this space as you would an indoor area. Choose a colour scheme and apply it to plants, accessories and any other decorative elements. Take measurements and choose items that don't overfill the area.

**3 Consider your choice of plants.** Succulents are ideal from a maintenance point of view, edible plants and vegetables will give a back-to-nature feel and flowering plants will add colour. Well-placed mirrors will increase the 'size' of the space and the sense of greenery. ✦



WORDS: (3 TOP TIPS) NIGEL BARTLETT