



Set on 10 hectares in the verdant northern New South Wales hinterland, Olivia Newton-John's Gaia gardens were designed with health and wellbeing in mind. A lush medley of fleshy tropicals, regenerated rainforest area, an organic vegetable garden and citrus trees dripping with oranges and lemons, the gardens instantly set the pulse to slow and the mind at ease.

"Everywhere you go on the property there's something beautiful and different," says Olivia, whose favourite spot is beside the fire pit, watching as the sun sinks behind the rolling hills and throws colour into the sky.

"When I first came to this area, back in 1983, I just fell totally in love with it," she says. "There's something to me about the rolling hills ... The view almost looks European. It's like a mixture of everything beautiful I've ever seen."

Olivia discovered the Gaia property with friend and business partner Gregg Cave in 2004. At that time, the gardens were established but in need of a makeover. "Gregg and I found the property just after my mother's passing," she says. "It was pretty run down but had great bones with breathtaking backdrops. The property manager at the time, Jeff Schoen, had been with the place for over 19 years. We gave him some ideas for the look we wanted and he's transformed it."

Using native and tropical plants from local nurseries, Jeff and his team re-imagined the gardens as an exotic Aussie retreat, each area with its own unique character and soul. Along walkways and access lanes, lilly pilli, rose apple trees and hibiscus act as screening, while concrete tiles (a design by singer Grace Knight) and timber >

# Olivia's GREEN RETREAT

OLIVIA NEWTON-JOHN SHARES HER LOVE OF ALL THINGS ORGANIC, AS SHE TAKES US ON A TOUR OF HER OWN LITTLE OASIS OF HEALTH AND WELLBEING NESTLED IN THE HINTERLAND OF THE NSW NORTH COAST

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*My favourite place*  
"THIS IS ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL SPOTS IN THE WORLD TO BE OUT IN NATURE" ~ Olivia Newton-John



## *A healing retreat*

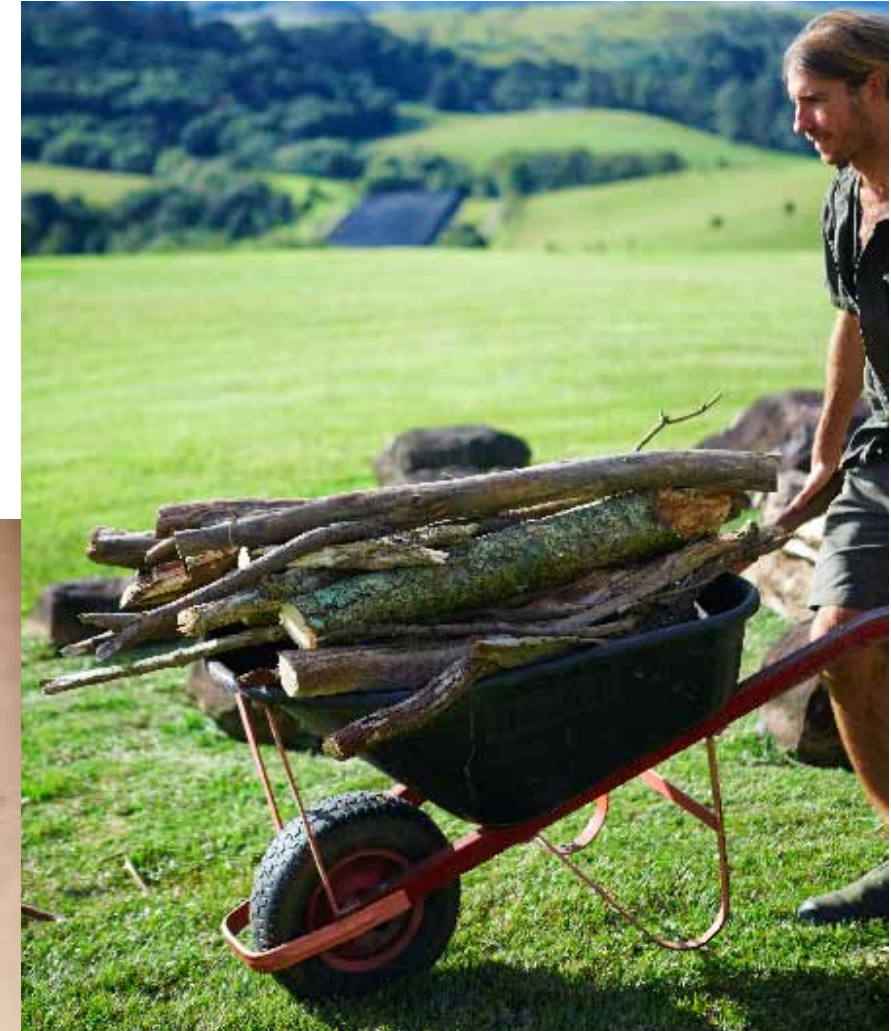
"GREGG AND I FELT SUCH A STRONG PRESENCE OF MY MOTHER. WE FELT SHE HELPED US FIND THE PROPERTY" ~ Olivia



decking are a pleasure to walk on. In the heart of the property, fragrant shrubs such as gardenia and lemon-scented myrtle grow in front of the living quarters, and bird's nest ferns, rock orchids and bromeliads create the perfect understory for camellia, hanging heliconias and 'Simbu Sunset', an easy-grow variety of tropical rhododendron. "Gregg and I felt such a strong presence of my mother. We felt she helped us find the property, so we wanted to incorporate her favourite plant, tropical rhododendron, throughout the property in her blessing," says Olivia.

An early encounter with Bill Mollison, the 'father of permaculture', and Olivia's long-held belief in the benefits of fresh, organic food sparked the idea of the vegetable garden. "I've always really admired what he stood for," she says. "An organic garden was always a dream of mine for Gaia."

The garden produces a nutritious bounty of Asian-inspired herbs, dark leafy greens and other essential ingredients. "Eating things that are grown just outside the kitchen is a wonderful thing for a person to experience," says Olivia. "The food is freshly picked, it offers so much more nourishment." Which is exactly the point here at Gaia. "Nature is my balance, it's what helps me feel replenished in my spirit and my soul," says Olivia. "When I've been travelling, just one or two days up here and I feel like I'm totally healed."



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: Gardener Michael Umback transports wood collected from the property to the fire pit, positioned to enjoy the stunning views over the rich, green countryside; juicy lemonades ripe for the picking in the fruit orchard; the fluffy blossom of the Mexican Flame Bush, a shrub

native to South America; a colourful visitor enjoys the pretty petals of a hibiscus flower; melon pink and white-tipped camellias feature throughout the gardens, with flowers adorning water features; the trumpet-shaped blooms of 'Simbu Sunset', a tropical rhododendron planted in honour of Olivia's mother.





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: The exotic passionfruit flower; snow peas ready to eat; Olivia's interest in permaculture gave her the idea for the vegetable garden; the wispy heads of fennel; chief operation manager and horticulturist Jeff Schoen digs into the fresh kale; dandelion greens, a relative of the sunflower.



### *Fresh pickings*

"NOTHING TASTES AS GOOD AS FOOD RIGHT FROM YOUR OWN GARDEN" ~ Olivia

With a focus on fresh greens, the Gaia organic vegetable gardens serve up a delicious offering of salad leaves, rustic and Asian-inspired herbs, and sweet tropical fruits. To ensure food is available year-round, plantings are staggered and the soil is enriched with chicken-based fertiliser, compost and straw mulch. Dipel, an organic bacteria, is used to ward off pests.

*"Everywhere you go  
ON THE PROPERTY, THERE'S SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL  
AND DIFFERENT" ~ Olivia*

## EXPERIENCE GAIA

Olivia always planned to share the benefits of the Gaia gardens with others. Located in Brooklet, an easy half hour's drive from Ballina airport, Gaia Retreat and Spa is an award-winning, boutique resort with day spa facilities open to the public most days of the year. With idyllic surrounds that help you relax and revive, Gaia packages include accommodation, health, fitness and detox treatments, and delicious daily meals from the Gaia Kitchen. The menus incorporate the freshest ingredients picked from the organic vegetable garden. Guests are invited to enjoy the walks and sweeping views, and plant a tree to help regenerate the natural rainforest. Founded by Olivia Newton-John, Gregg Cave, Ruth Kalnin and Warwick Evans, Gaia Retreat and Spa packages start from around \$915 for two nights, with daily flights to and from Ballina available from most capital cities. Visit [gaiaretreat.com.au](http://gaiaretreat.com.au) for more information. 🌿



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT:** Perched within Gaia's 'Sacred Garden', a fully screened outdoor room is home to massage tables and a stone bath; a decorative wall tile; votives light the pathways after dark; stone Buddhas add a spiritual touch. "People know he was a man of peace and love," says

Olivia; squares of grass intersect the decorative floor tiles, designed by singer Grace Knight; an enchanted walkway curls past a bronze sculpture by Frank Miles. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Sculpture by local artist Suvira McDonald makes a stunning landmark.

