

# Grow your own—2024

Growing food to feel better,  
eat better and help the planet

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*Most Australians grow food, or are interested in doing so. Younger people are most likely to express interest in growing, but often lack the space or skills required. This demonstrates the need for gardening programs and investment in community gardens. Some 361,000 tonnes of food waste, equivalent to seven Sydney Harbour Bridges, are diverted from landfill each year by composting and worm farming in food-growing households.*

November 2024

Evie Simpson

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## **Acknowledgement of Country**

The Australia Institute recognises the ancestral connections and custodianship of Traditional Owners throughout Australia. We pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and to Elders past and present.

## **Acknowledgements**

The Australia Institute partnered with Grow It Local to produce this report. Grow It Local is a community organisation that facilitates and educates Australians to grow, share and eat locally grown foods, often partnering with local and state governments to deliver workshops and connect growers around Australia.

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# Summary

The Australia Institute partnered with Grow It Local to conduct a national survey on food growing habits, attitudes towards food waste and concerns about food security.

The Australia Institute surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,008 Australians between 23 and 30 August 2024, asking a range of questions about growing food, food waste and food security.

## KEY FINDINGS

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- Over **four in ten (45%)** Australians grow some of their own food, or around **9 million Australians**.
- The most common reasons to grow food were to **access food that is healthy (69%)** and to **save money (60%)**.
- The overwhelming majority (81%) of Australians who grow some of their own food do so in their own backyard; the next most popular locations were a verge garden (28%), the front yard (19%) and on a balcony (13%).
- Two thirds of growers (67%) say that growing food **makes them feel happy and relaxed**, and half (51%) say that it makes them feel healthy.
- The overwhelming majority (84%) of Australians who grow some of their own food grow vegetables, and over half (55%) grow fruit trees and herbs.
- Almost two in three (64%) growers say **that growing food has helped them understand and reinforce the role of composting and worm farming in diverting waste from landfill**. Two in three (67%) growers also compost, use a worm farm, or use both. Extrapolating across Australia, this means that three million households grow food and compost or worm farm, diverting at least 361,000 tonnes of waste from landfill each year, equivalent to seven Sydney Harbour Bridges.
- Of those Australians who do not grow their own food, **almost two thirds (64%) of are interested** in doing so. Younger Australians are more likely to want to grow their own food, with **almost four in five (78%) Australians aged 18–39 saying they are interested in growing their own food**.
- The most common factors stopping Australians from growing their own food is space, with **more than three in five (61%) identifying lack of space as a barrier**.

Full polling results have been published on The Australia Institute website.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Australia Institute, *Grow your own full polling results*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Grow-your-own-2024-full-polling-results-WEB.pdf>

# Introduction

Australians love growing their own food. This was the finding of The Australia Institute's last survey on household food growing, conducted in 2014,<sup>2</sup> and a decade later, little has changed. Growing your own food is prized as a way to access fresh produce and to promote health, relaxation and happiness. Whether it's herb pots on a windowsill or a rambling backyard veggie patch, Australian say that growing some of their own food makes them feel better, eat better and tread lighter on the planet.

This report is a collaboration with Grow It Local, a community organisation that facilitates and educates Australians to grow, share and eat locally grown foods. Grow It Local often partners with local and state governments to deliver workshops and connect growers around Australia. Grow It Local has over 37,000 members nationwide.

The Australia Institute and Grow It Local conducted a national survey on Australians' food growing habits, attitudes towards food waste, and concerns about food security. The survey was of a nationally representative sample of 1,008 Australians and was conducted between 23 and 30 August 2024. The results of this survey are augmented by a survey of Grow It Local members, which was conducted in July 2024 and received 1,437 responses. The questions in the two surveys were slightly different, but overall both surveys yielded similar results: that growing food can improve health and wellbeing, help to foster a greater appreciation for the resources required to produce food and, by extension, help to prevent unnecessary food waste.

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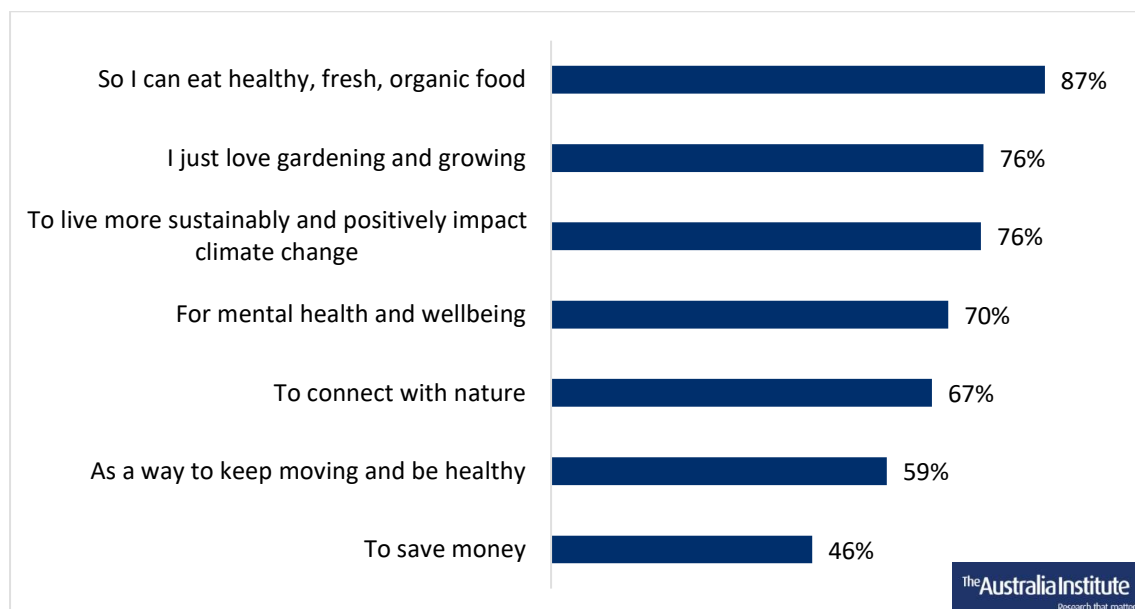
<sup>2</sup> Wise (2014) *Grow your own*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/grow-your-own/>

# Grow It Local member survey

In July 2024, Grow It Local conducted a survey of 1,437 of its members, asking a range of questions about growing food, health and wellbeing, and attitudes towards food waste.

The most common reasons for members' interest in growing their own food were related to health and wellbeing: the overwhelming majority (87%) of members said they were interested in growing food to eat fresh, organic produce, while over three in four (76%) said they grow food because they simply love gardening and growing. Over three in four (76%) members also said they grow food to live more sustainably and positively impact climate change. Seven in ten (70%) said that they grow food specifically for the positive impact growing food has on their mental health and wellbeing.

**Figure 1: Reasons for growing food among Grow It Local members**



Source: Grow It Local (2024) Member survey

The Grow It Local member survey also found that people who grow their own food significantly reduce food waste by using up all their food; ignoring cosmetic standards on produce; preserving and storing food; composting; and using roots to regenerate and re-grow food. Four in five (82%) members said they use a compost, a worm farm, or both.

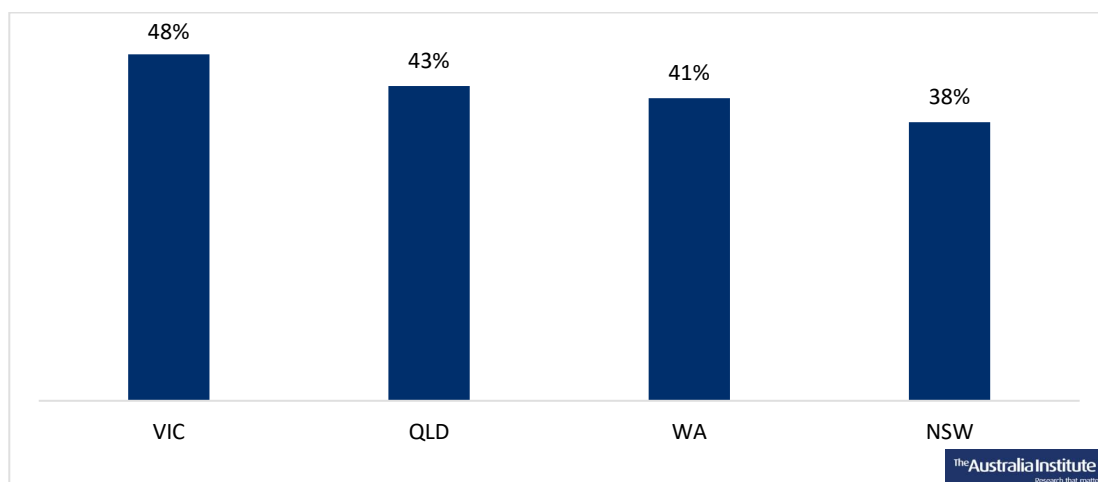
# Australians growing food

## INTEREST IN GROWING FOOD

The national survey found that most Australians either do grow some of their own food, or are interested in doing so. Full polling results have been published in a separate document on The Australia Institute website.

Almost half (45%) of Australians say they grow some of their own food, equivalent to around nine million Australians.<sup>3</sup> The number of Australians who grow some of their own food varies between states: Victoria has the highest proportion of growers, with just under one in two (48%) people growing some of their own food; this equates to around 2.6 million Victorians.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 2: Proportion of people who grow some of their own food, by state**



Of respondents who do not grow their own food, almost two thirds (64%) say they are interested in doing so. Younger Australians who do not currently grow any of their own food are the most interested in doing so, with over three in four (78%) of both those between 18–29 and those between 30–39 interested (compared to 22% for both age groups who are not interested).

Increasing the availability of community gardens, particularly in urban areas where students and young people are likely to be renting, could help make edible gardening more accessible to these age groups. Organisations like Grow It Local also have an important role to play in

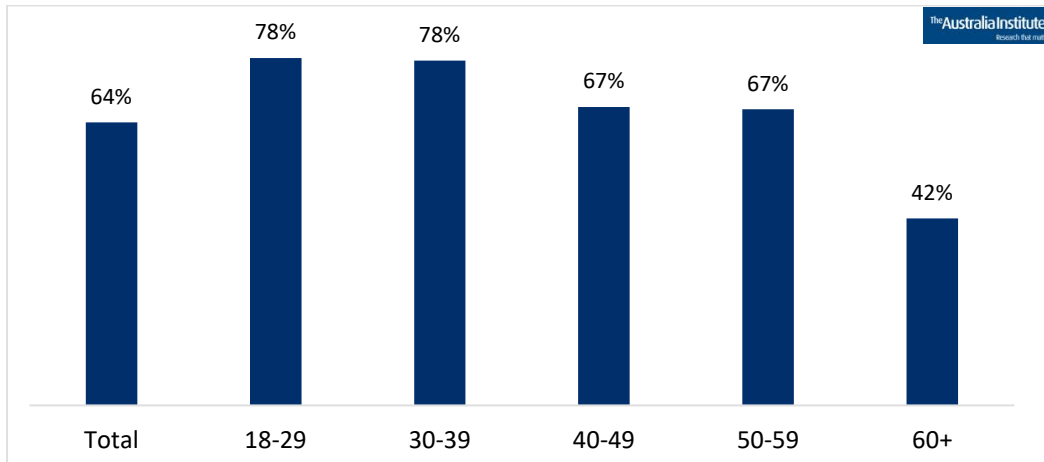
<sup>3</sup> Based on a population of 20.9 million adults. See <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/mar-2024>

<sup>4</sup> Based on a population of 5.4 million adults. See <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/latest-release#states-and-territories>



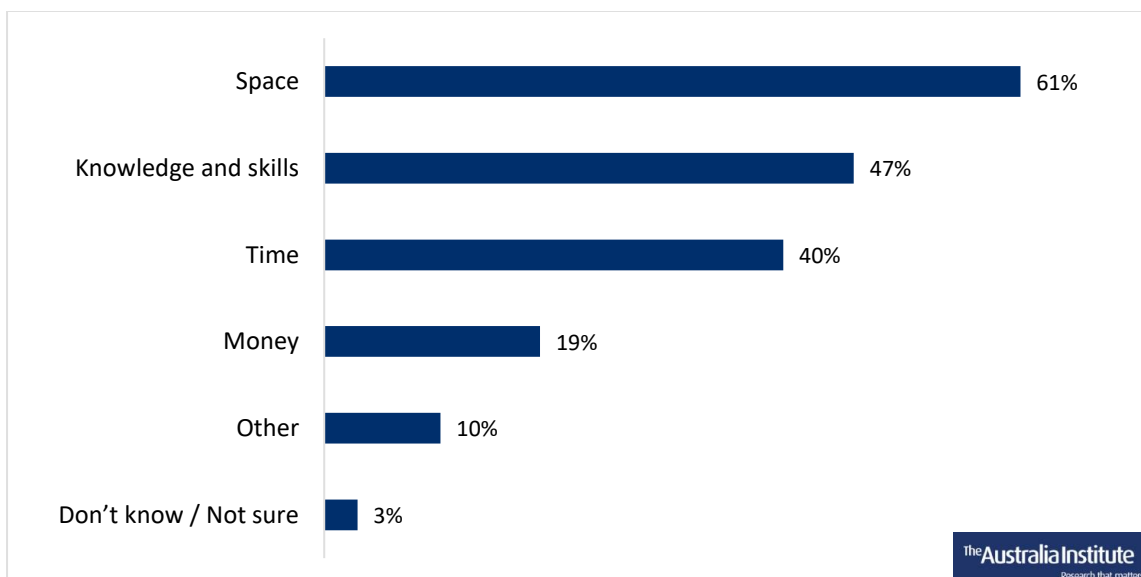
helping to bridge the knowledge and skills gap for all gardeners, particularly for young people who may be just starting out with edible gardening.

**Figure 3: Australians who are interested in growing some of their own food, by age**



Those respondents who do not grow any of their own food were asked what factors were stopping them from doing so. Over three in five (61%) of Australians say that space is the biggest factor stopping them from growing some of their own food. The second most common factor is knowledge and skills, with almost half (47%) of Australians who do not grow any of their own food identifying this as a barrier. Almost two in three (65%) of Australians aged 18–29 identified space as a barrier—the highest proportion of any age group, likely because of low levels of home ownership. This age group was also most likely to consider knowledge and skills as a barrier to growing food, with three in five (61%) identifying this factor.

**Figure 4: Factors stopping Australians from growing some of their own food**



Respondents who either already grow their own food, or are interested in doing so, were asked about their motivations. The most popular reasons for an interest in growing food were to grow and eat healthy, fresh, organic food (69%), and to save money (60%).

Grow It Local’s member survey asked a similar question with a similar range of responses (see Figure 1). In both surveys, the most popular reason for interest in growing food was to grow and eat healthy produce. However, respondents in The Australia Institute’s survey were more likely to be interested in edible gardening to save money: this option ranked second in The Australia Institute survey and seventh in the Grow It Local member survey, suggesting that Grow It Local members are more likely to be growing food because they simply enjoy doing so.

In both surveys, growing food to live more sustainably and for mental health and wellbeing reasons were popular options, reinforcing the concept of edible gardening being an overwhelming positive and healthy pastime among Australians.

**Figure 5: Australian’s reasons for growing food or interest in doing so**



## WHERE AND WHAT GROWERS GROW

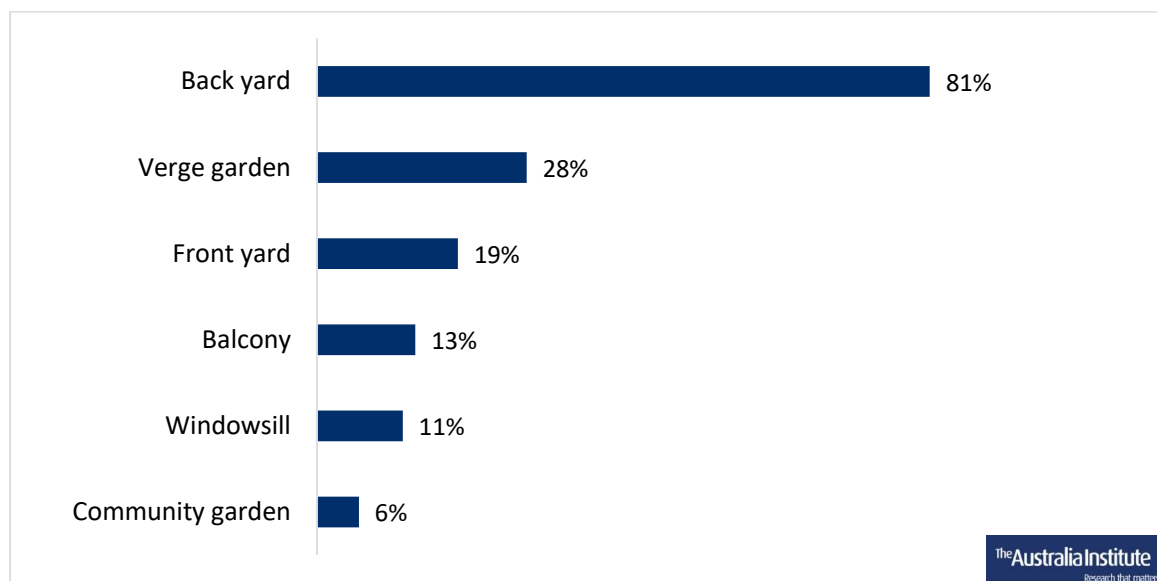
The majority (81%) of Australians who grow some of their own food do so in their backyards. The next most popular options were verge gardens (on nature strips) (28%) and front yards (19%).

Most Australians live in urbanised areas, and growing food on balconies, windowsills and in community gardens are also common, with around one in 10 Australians who grow food doing so on a balcony (13%) or windowsill (11%). Grow It Local has run workshops and

published guides on small space gardening to help growers without access to the space required for back yard veggies patches.<sup>5</sup>

Community gardens are an important resource for Australians with little garden space. While only one in 20 (6%) of those Australians who grow food say that they grow food in a community garden, more than twice as many (15%) of Australians aged 18–29 who grow food say they do so. Increasing the availability of community gardens in urbanised areas—particularly those with a high number of apartments or rental properties—may assist in addressing the fact that space is a significant barrier to growing food for many Australians.

**Figure 6: Location of edible gardens among growers**



Gardening helps support and maintain healthy local ecosystems, and cultivating a diversity of floral and plant species attracts bees, other insects and serves as a retreat for local wildlife, particularly in urbanised areas.<sup>6</sup>

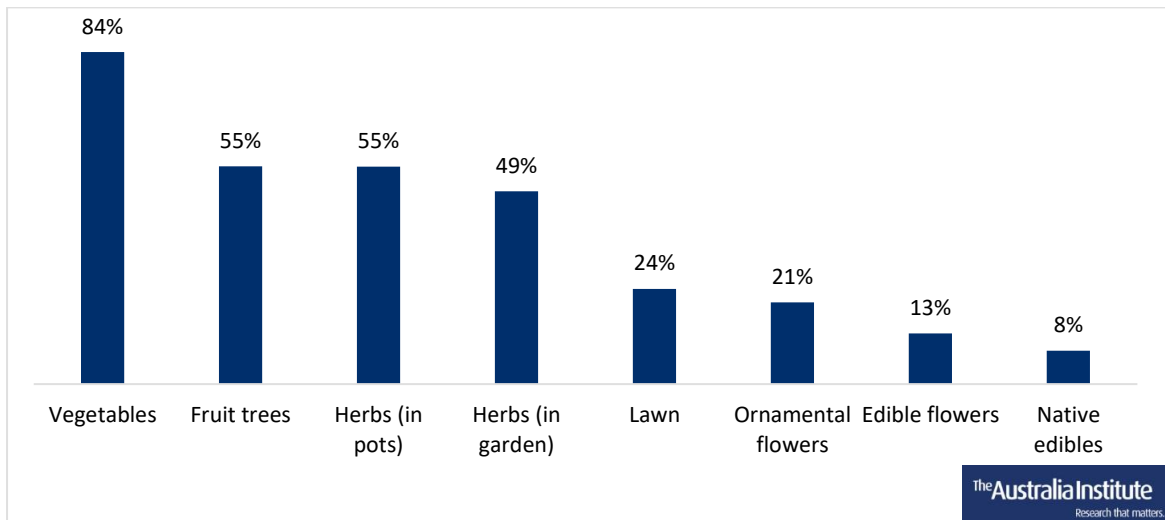
Respondents who grow some of their own food grow a range of plant types, but the overwhelming majority (84%) grow vegetables, while over half (55%) grow fruit trees, along

<sup>5</sup> Grow It Local (2024) *Pots and small spaces*, <https://growitlocal.com/category/pots-and-small-spaces>

<sup>6</sup> Mumaw and Mata (2022) *The socio-ecological benefits of wildlife gardening*, <https://gardensforwildlifevictoria.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/The-socio-ecological-benefits-of-wildlife-gardening-Mumaw-and-Mata-v1-31Mar22-lowres.pdf>

with herbs in pots (also 55%). Around one in five (21%) grow ornamental flowers and one in eight (13%) grow edible flowers.

**Figure 7: Type of plants that Australians are growing**

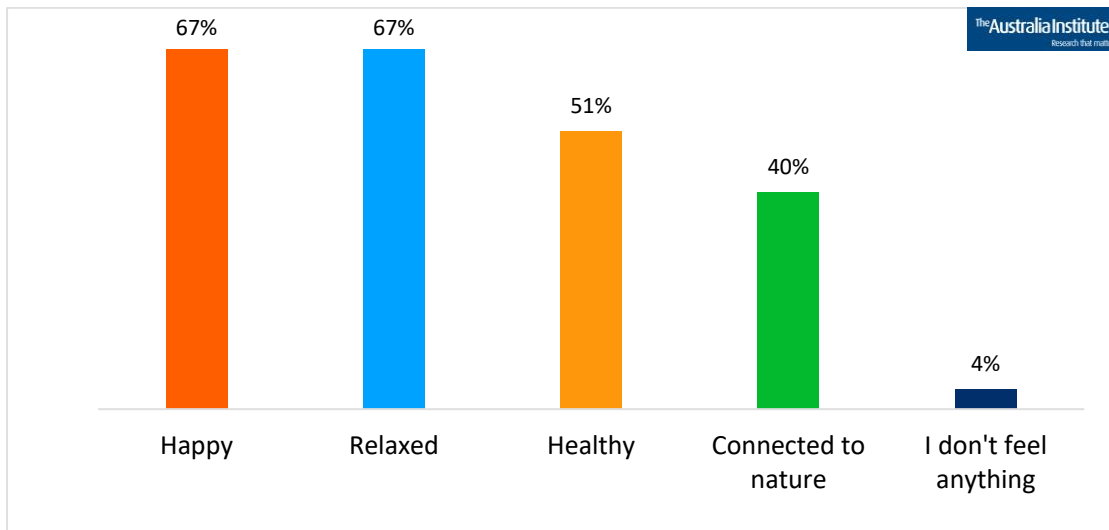


Growers are likely to grow several varieties of edible plants over the course of a year, with almost half (46%) saying they grow three to five varieties, one in four (26%) saying they grow six to ten varieties and one in ten (10%) saying that they grow a whopping 11–20 varieties over the course of a year. Just under half (46%) of grower respondents say that they often grow more than they can consume of a particular variety, compared to 54% who say they do not often grow more than they can consume.

## HEALTH AND WELLBEING BENEFITS OF GARDENING

Respondents who grow their own food were asked how spending time in their edible garden makes them feel. The activity of edible gardening has an overwhelmingly positive impact on the wellbeing of growers: two in three (67%) growers say that spending time in their garden makes them feel happy and relaxed, and half (51%) say that it makes them feel healthy. Less than one in 20 (4%) say that spending time in their garden does not make them feel anything.

**Figure 8: How edible gardening makes growers feel**



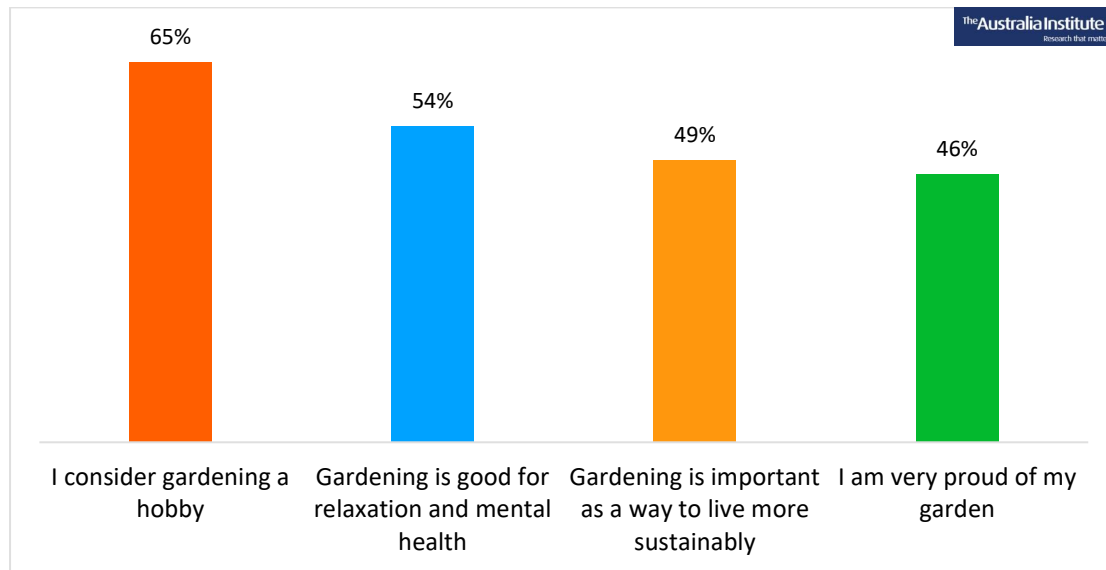
Respondents who grow some of their own food were asked whether they related to a range of statements relating to edible gardening. The options were:

- Gardening is important as a way to live more sustainably
- I consider gardening a hobby
- I am very proud of my garden
- I see gardening as a way of increasing the value of my home
- I see gardening as a journey not a destination
- I wish I could spend more time gardening
- I spend time searching for gardening information (books, tv, internet)
- Family / friends often ask for my advice about gardening
- I will garden no matter what the weather is like
- I am a reluctant gardener. I only do it when / because I have to
- Gardening is good for relaxation and mental health
- I'm becoming more interested in gardening than I used to be
- None of the above.

The results show that most growers choose to partake in edible gardening because it is enjoyable. Almost two in three (65%) growers consider gardening a hobby, and the majority (54%) think that gardening is beneficial for relaxation and mental health. Almost half (49%)

of growers also say that gardening helps them to live more sustainably, and over two in five (46%) find their garden to be a source of pride.

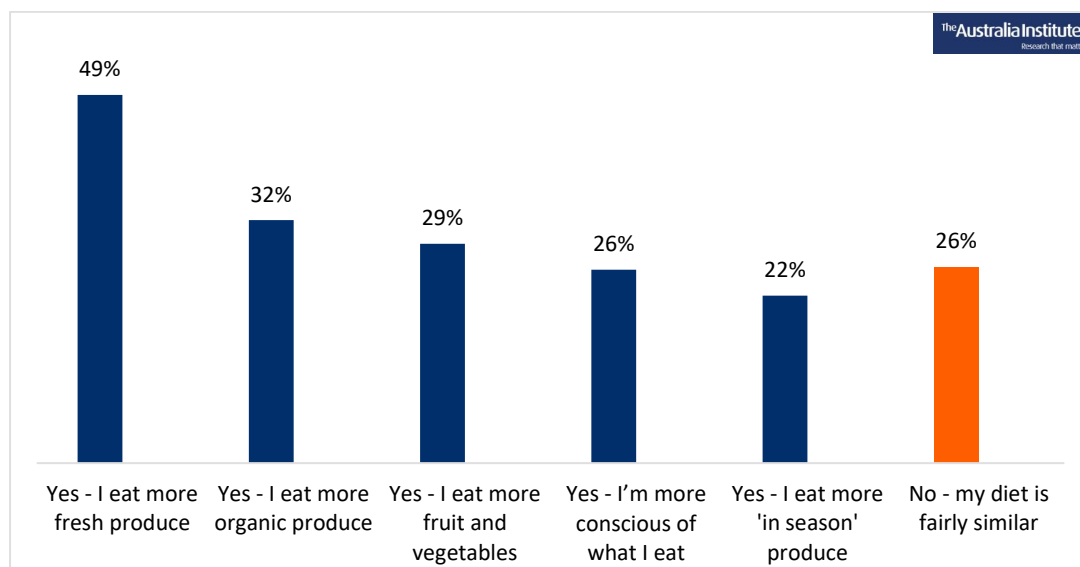
**Figure 9: Agreement with statements about growing food among growers**



Additionally, over four in five respondents (82%) would recommend edible gardening to others, and over four in five (81%) also say they are interested in becoming a better grower, suggesting that edible gardening is a popular and positive pastime.

The benefits of edible gardening extend to physical health, both by supporting healthier dietary choices and by making fresh produce more readily available to Australians. Among respondents who grow some of their own food, only close to one in four (26%) say that their diet has not changed as a result of doing so. Almost one in two (49%) say that growing their own food has allowed them to eat more fresh produce, and over three in 10 (32%) say that it has enabled them to eat more organic produce—products which are typically less affordable in grocery stores.

Figure 10: Influence of growing food on diet



These responses should be of interest to Australian policy makers, because in July 2023 the Federal Government published *Measuring What Matters*, the country's first national wellbeing framework. The framework is designed to help track outcomes in Australia's society and economy, and one of its themes is a focus on fostering "a society in which people feel well and are in good physical and mental health."<sup>7</sup> Studies on the impact of gardening on wellbeing, mental health, and quality of life have found that horticultural-based therapies such as gardening have been effective in improving health, wellbeing and quality of life both in the general population and vulnerable subgroups.<sup>8</sup> Gardening is now being incorporated into schools, and into wellbeing and therapy programs in care facilities.

Further to the wellbeing framework's objectives, Australia has committed to the National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030, which aims to "improve the health and wellbeing of all Australians at all stages of life through prevention".<sup>9</sup> The Strategy's focus areas include, among other goals, improving access to and the consumption of a healthy diet, increasing physical activity, and promoting and protecting mental health. In order to achieve its objectives, the Strategy identifies 'protective measures' to promoting preventive health in Australia. These include contact and connection with nature, access to community gardens, and access to affordable, nutritious fresh food.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Australian Government Treasury (2023) *Measuring what matters*, <https://treasury.gov.au/policy-topics/measuring-what-matters>

<sup>8</sup> Pantjiru et al (2024) *The impact of gardening on well-being, mental health, and quality of life: an umbrella review and meta-analysis*, <https://systematicreviewsjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13643-024-02457-9>

<sup>9</sup> Department of Health (2021) *National Health Strategy 2021-2030*, p. 33, [https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/12/national-preventive-health-strategy-2021-2030\\_1.pdf](https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/12/national-preventive-health-strategy-2021-2030_1.pdf)

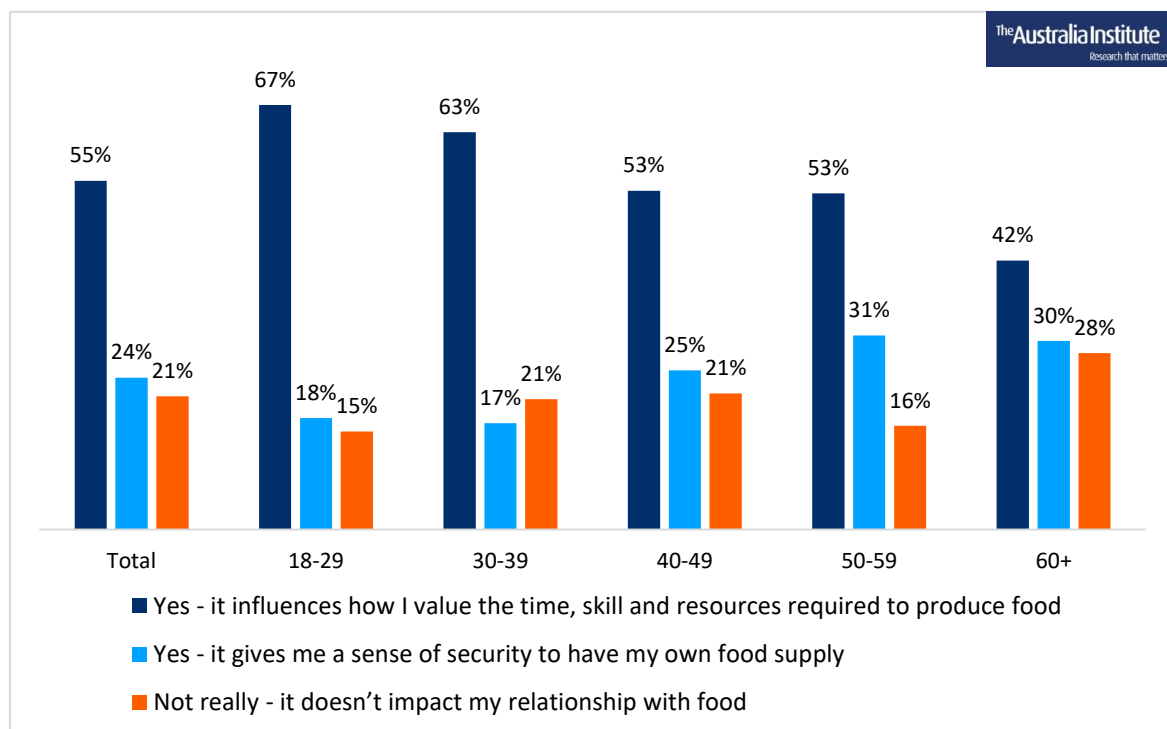
<sup>10</sup> Department of Health (2021) *National Health Strategy 2021-2030*, p. 15.

## GROWING FOOD PREVENTS WASTE AND EMISSIONS

Respondents who grow their own food were asked to indicate whether growing food had changed their perceptions of food waste. A majority (64%) of Australians who grow their own food say that doing so has indeed changed how they perceive household waste, reinforcing their understanding of the role of composting and worm farming in diverting waste from landfill. One in three (36%) say that growing their own food did not change how they think about the food waste they generate.

Younger Australian growers are more likely to say that growing food and/or sourcing locally grown food has given them a greater appreciation for their food. Two in three (67%) of Australians aged 18–29 who grow some of their own food say that growing food has influenced how they value the resources required to produce food, but only one in six (18%) say that growing food gives them a greater sense of food security. Compared to their younger counterparts, older Australians were overall less likely to say that growing food has changed their perception around food waste, but were more likely to say that growing food gave them a greater sense of food security than younger respondents.

**Figure 11: Attitudes to growing and/or sourcing locally grown food, by age**

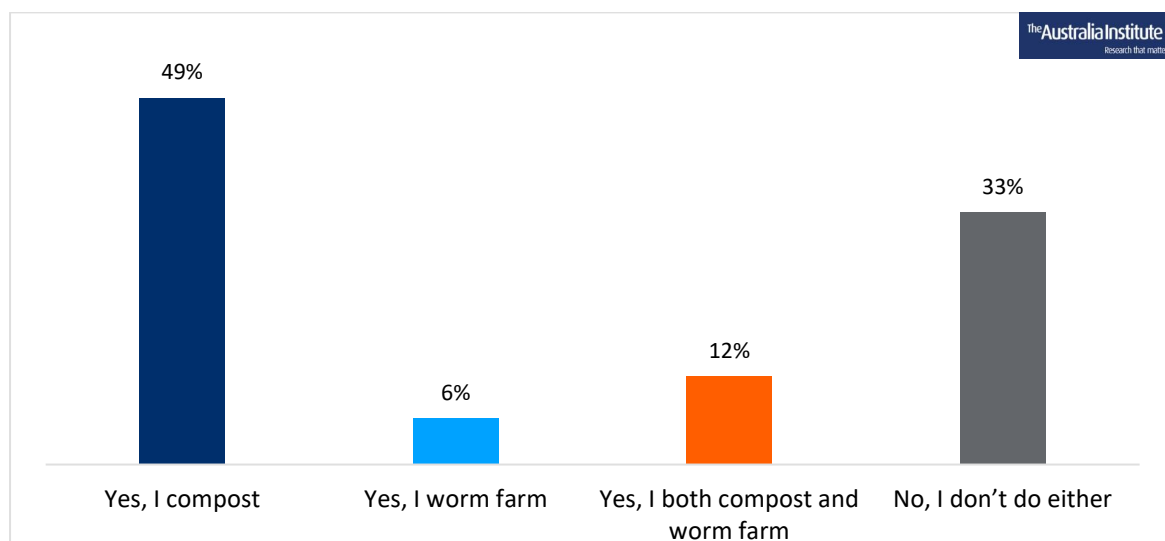


Respondents were also asked whether they compost or use worm farm systems. Two in three (67%) food growers say that they either compost, worm farm or both, compared to one in three (33%) who do neither. Composting and worm farming can be less accessible to those living in apartments, particularly those who are renting or do not have access to a



community garden. Almost two in three (64%) of growers also say that growing their own food has changed how they perceive food waste.

**Figure 12: Composting and worm farming among growers**



Based on these results, and two other estimates, a rough estimate can be made of how much organic waste is diverted from landfill by growers’ composting. The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that there are 10 million households in Australia,<sup>11</sup> and Grow It Local estimates that each composting or worm-farming grower diverts 2.3 kg of waste from landfill per week, or 120 kg per year.<sup>12</sup> Based on these estimates, three million composting households divert almost 361,000 tonnes of waste from landfill each year, as shown in Table 1 below:

**Table 1: Composting households diverting waste from landfill**

Item	Estimate	Unit
Number of households	10,000,000	
% of households that grow food	45%	
% of food growers that compost/worm farm	67%	
Households that compost	3,015,000	
Composting waste diversion per household	120	kg/year
Waste diverted by composting	360,594	t/year

<sup>11</sup> ABS (2024) *Household and Family Projections, Australia*, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/household-and-family-projections-australia/latest-release>

<sup>12</sup> Grow It Local (2024) *National Impact Report*, <https://growitlocal.com/>. As noted in Grow It Local’s impact report, this is a very conservative estimate, with 3.75kg per week reported by a NSW local government study. A more recent academic study found that household food and organic waste collection in northern Sydney collected 215,899 tonnes from 550,435 households, or 7.5kg per household per week. See Madden et al (2023) ‘Emissions associated with the management of household organic waste, from collection to recovery and disposal: A bottom-up approach for Sydney and surrounding areas, Australia’, *Cleaner Waste Systems*, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2772912523000374>

This total weight per year, 361,000 tonnes, is equivalent to seven Sydney Harbour Bridges. The Bridge weighs 52,000 tonnes.<sup>13</sup>

Australians wasted a total of 7.6 million tonnes of food in 2018–19. Of this total, 2.46 million was wasted at household level, equating to 246 kg per household. This cost households around \$19.3 billion.<sup>14</sup> Food waste is also a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions and was responsible for emitting 17.5 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>-e in 2018–19, the equivalent to the emissions of a major coal-fired power station.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the rising cost of food, food waste is increasing, not decreasing. In 2005, The Australia Institute made the first known estimate of the value of food waste in Australia, finding that Australians threw away \$2.9 billion worth of fresh food, \$630 million of uneaten take-away food, \$876 million of leftovers, \$596 million of unfinished drinks and \$241 million of frozen food. This equated to \$5.3 billion on all forms of food in 2004.”<sup>16</sup> Another Australia Institute study conducted in 2009 found similar results, estimating that Australians wasted \$5.2 billion worth of food a year.<sup>17</sup>

Polling conducted by The Australia Institute in 2023 showed that the clear majority of Australians support various regulatory reforms to reduce food waste.<sup>18</sup> However, despite high levels of public support, the Australian Government appears to be lagging in its progress toward meeting the National Food Waste Strategy’s stated goal of halving food waste by 2030:<sup>19</sup> the *National Waste Report 2022* estimated an overall 3% increase in organic waste going to landfill (from 5.73Mt to 5.89Mt) between 2016–17 and 2020–21.<sup>20</sup> With a majority (64%) of Australians who grow their own food saying that doing so has changed how they perceive household waste, encouraging and facilitating more Australians

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<sup>13</sup> Bridgeclimb Sydney (n.d.) *21 facts about BridgeClimb Sydney*, <https://www.bridgeclimb.com/news/21-facts-about-bridgeclimb-sydney>

<sup>14</sup> Note this figure includes primary production, processing, wholesale, retail, households and hospitality. Food Innovation Australia Limited (FIAL) (2021) *National Food Waste Strategy Feasibility Study*, p. 18, <https://www.fial.com.au/sharing-knowledge/food-waste>.

<sup>15</sup> FIAL (2021) *National Food Waste Strategy Feasibility Study*, p. 18, <https://www.fial.com.au/sharingknowledge/food-waste>

<sup>16</sup> Hamilton, Denniss and Baker (2005) *Wasteful Consumption in Australia*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/wasteful-consumption-in-australia/>

<sup>17</sup> Baker, Fear and Denniss (2009) *What a waste: An analysis of household expenditure on food*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/what-a-waste-an-analysis-of-household-expenditure-on-food/>

<sup>18</sup> Anderson et al (2023) *Food waste in Australia, and how supermarkets profit from it*, p. 7, Table 1.

<sup>19</sup> Department of the Environment and Energy (2017) *National Food Waste Strategy*, <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/national-food-waste-strategy.pdf>

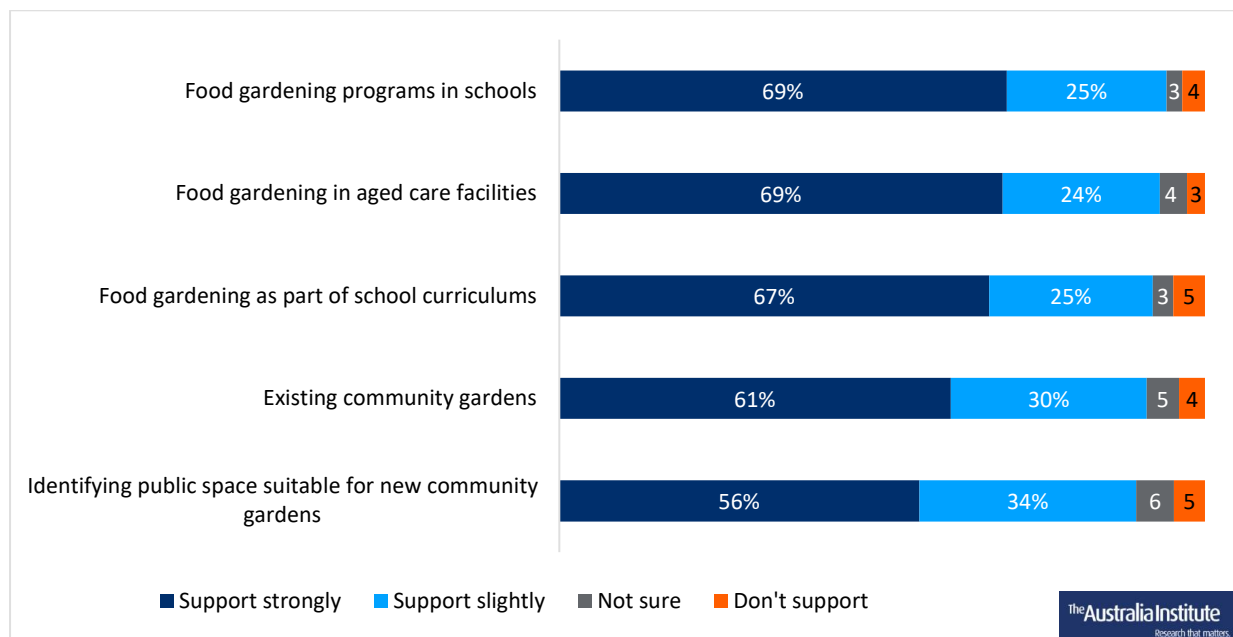
<sup>20</sup> DCCEEW (2022) *National Food Waste Report 2022*, <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/protection/waste/national-waste-reports/2022>

to take up edible gardening is a key step towards avoiding food waste and meeting the National Food Waste Strategy’s waste reduction goal.

## ATTITUDES TOWARDS FOOD GROWING INITIATIVES AND CONCERNS ABOUT FOOD SECURITY

All survey respondents – those who grow, and those who do not – were asked to what extent they support a range of food growing policies and initiatives, including food gardening programs in schools, aged care facilities, and community gardens. All policies were strongly supported, with levels of support ranging from 94% for programs in schools (including 69% who strongly supported such programs) to 89% support for identifying public space for new community gardens (including 56% who strongly supported this idea).

**Figure 13: Support for various food gardening policies**



All respondents were asked to indicate how much they agree with a range of statements about concern for food security.

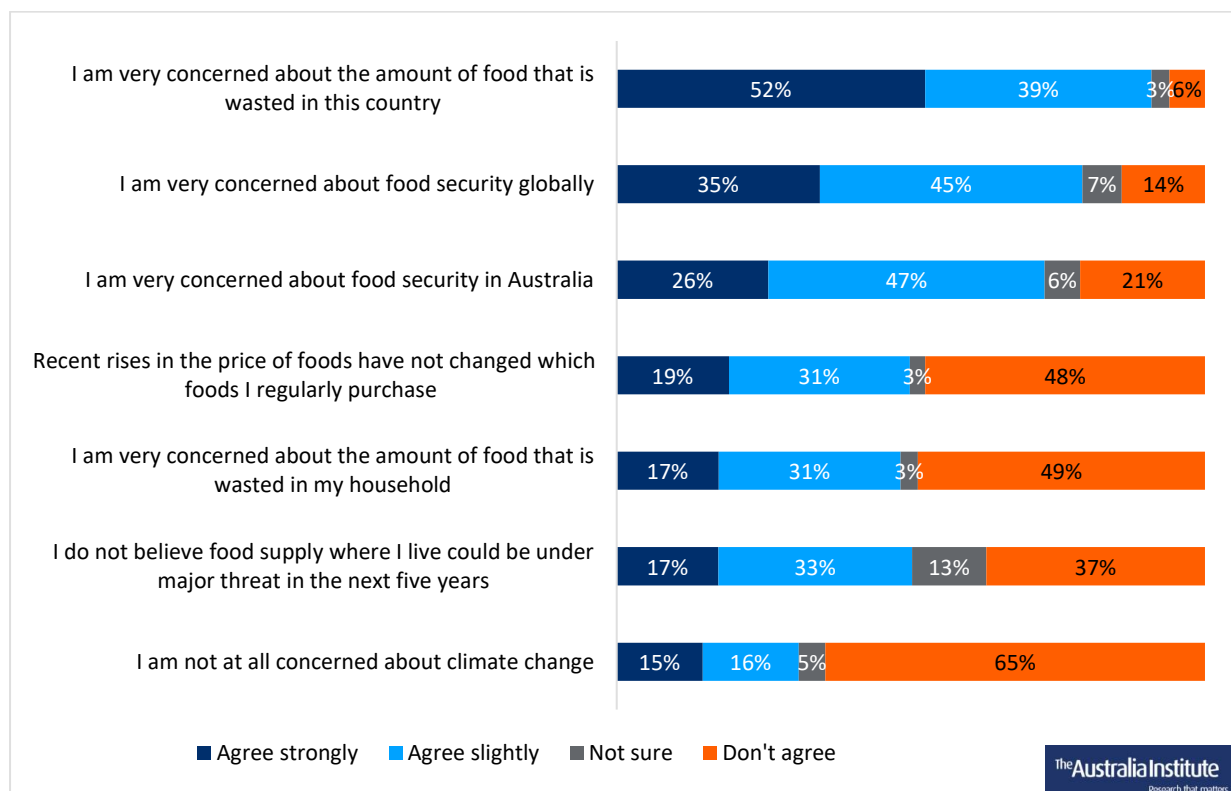
The statements were:

- I am very concerned about the amount of food wasted in this country
- I am very concerned about the amount of food that is wasted in my household
- I am very concerned about food security in Australia
- I am very concerned about food security globally
- I do not believe food supply where I live could be under threat in the next five years
- I am not at all concerned about climate change
- Recent rises in the price of foods have not changed which foods I regularly purchase

An overwhelming majority of Australians (91%) agree they are “very concerned with the amount of food wasted in this country”, including 52% who strongly agree. Half of Australians (48%) agree they were “very concerned about the amount of food wasted in my household”, including 17% who strongly agree.

Two in three (65%) disagree with the statement “I am not at all concerned about climate change”. Four in five Australians (80%) agree that they are very concerned about food security globally, and 73% agree that they are very concerned with food security in Australia. Australians were divided on the statement “recent rises in the price of foods have not changed which foods I regularly purchase”, with 50% agreeing and 48% disagreeing.

**Figure 14: Agreement with various statements concerning food security**



# Conclusion

Whether in a backyard veggie patch, community garden or in pots on an apartment windowsill, Australians love growing food. Edible gardening can improve health and wellbeing, help to foster a greater appreciation for the resources required to produce food and, by extension, help to prevent unnecessary food waste.

Almost one in two Australians say they grow some of their own food, and find it to be a source of relaxation, pride and happiness. Many more Australians are interested in growing food—particularly younger people—but space, skills and time are common factors stopping them from taking up edible gardening. Through their popular and accessible online resources, workshops and community events, Grow It Local have been helping to address these barriers for people all over Australia, whether they have a balcony, a patch in a community garden, or acres of space to use for edible gardening.

Continuing to enable and educate Australians to grow their own food is essential for, increasing the consumption of healthy, fresh, seasonal produce, reducing food waste from going to landfill, and supporting positive health and wellbeing.

# Method

## Short disclosure statement

Panel provider	Dynata
Research company	The Australia Institute
Client commissioning the research	Grow It Local
Fieldwork dates	23 August 2024 to 30 August 2024
Mode of data collection	Online recruited from research panel
Target population	Australian adults aged 18+
Sample size	1008
Australian Polling Council compliant	Yes
Voting intention published	No
Long disclosure statement	See below

## Long disclosure statement

Effective sample size after weighting applied	987.93
Margin of error associated with effective sample size	±3%
Variables used in weighting	Age, gender, state/territory based on Australian Bureau of Statistics "National, state and territory population" data
Gender identity categorisation	Those who answered the gender identity question as "Non-binary", "I use a different term", or "Prefer not to answer" had their responses included with females for the purpose of reporting, due to constraints from weighting data availability
Weighting method used	Raking method
Full question text, responses categories and randomisation	See below
Source of online sample	Dynata's online panel
Positioning of voting intention questions in questionnaire	Immediately after demographics, before policy questions
How were undecided voters handled?	Respondents who answered "Don't know / Not sure" for voting intention were then asked a leaning question; these leanings are included in voting intention crosstabs
Method of calculating ZPP	NA
Voting intention categorisation	Voting crosstabs show voting intentions for the House of Representatives. "Coalition" includes separate responses for Liberal and National. "Other" refers to Independent/Other, and minor parties in cases where they were included in the voting intention but represent too small a sample to be reported separately in the crosstabs
Location results	Results are shown only for larger states

