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Alai Aluli, left, Yuklin Aluli and Gerry Aluli spend some time together on the lanai of Gerry's penthouse apartment. Said Alai, "Once a month I help with the drainage, planting and some harvesting. I get to spend quality time with my mother, so it's a social event on top of a project. It's nice to see everything flourish."

On a lanai in Kailua, vegetables and relationships flourish

By Nancy Arcayna

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Gerry Aluli smiled broadly as her two daughters helped her harvest the vegetables on the 10-by-40-foot lanai of her Kailua apartment, where kale, chard, turnips, chilies, celery, mint, green onion, aloe, taro and pikake grow in various pots and containers.

"The kale grows like crazy," Aluli said. "I've used it to make a kale-and-white-bean soup, and I use it in smoothies and add some banana."

The 89-year-old missed her lush, nearly half-acre yard when she relocated to the apartment from the Lanikai home she had lived in from the 1960s until it was sold in 2012. Aluli recalled the lilikoi vine growing along the fence, an oversize ulu tree, Hawaiian hibiscus, sea grape trees, Queen Emma lilies and pohinahina.

"I knew my mother would miss her yard when we sold the Lanikai house. The edible garden on my mother's lanai was an attempt on my part to replace what she was going to miss," said her daughter Yuklin Aluli, a 66-year-old probate and trust attorney.

She contacted Fran Butera of Foodscapes for assistance. The company helps folks start and maintain edible gardens. Together they designed a plan that allowed her mother to have both food and flowers on her 11th-floor lanai. Many of the pots were brought from the Lanikai property.

"My daughters thought I needed some activity," said the energetic Gerry Aluli, who enjoys growing her own vegetables and cooking with fresh ingredients.

It takes her about 15 minutes to water the garden each day. "In the evening, I go out there and enjoy the view," she said.

Her other daughter, Alai Aluli, a 64-year-old Kailua resident, helps with the maintenance so it's easier for her mother to keep up with the daily upkeep.

"Once a month I help with the drainage, planting and some harvesting," said Alai Aluli. "I get to spend quality time with my mother, so it's a social event on top of a project. It's nice to see everything flourish."

Butera says the goal was to set up a space that was easy to care for on a daily basis and harvest as needed. To water the plants, a hose is hooked up to an extra faucet in the bathroom. Drainage was built into the lanai floor, Butera explained.

"The great-grandkids love coming over when she has tomatoes," said Yuklin Aluli. "They taste amazing if you drizzle them with the olive oil and sprinkle them with the basil."

Her mother loves the turnips. "She made a Korean turnip soup. The turnip leaves were tasty, as well," she said.

The elder Aluli is also enjoying cooking up her taro leaves. Each month, she plants something new. Next it's a Meyer lemon tree.

The family didn't garden together when Gerry Aluli's kids were growing up, but food and plants were a big part of their life.

"We had a real fondness for plants that were edible, smelled good or were culturally valuable, like ti plants," said Yuklin Aluli. "This is in many ways a new garden made from a lifetime of memories and great meals."

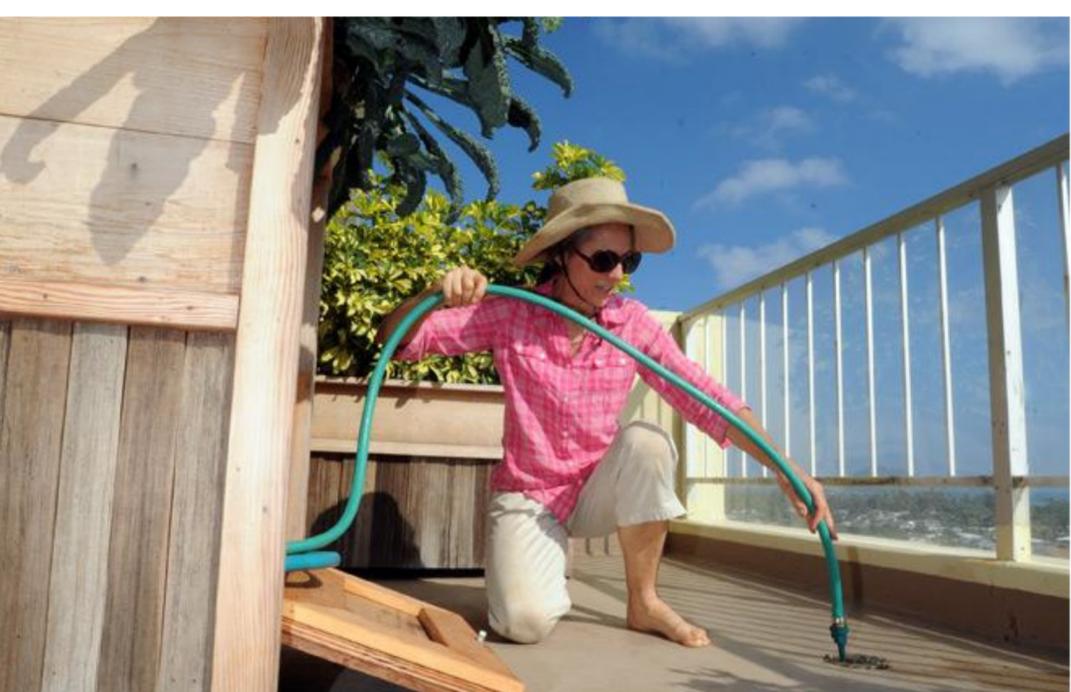
Contact Fran Butera of Foodscapes at 375-8025 or visit www.foodscapeshawaii.com.



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Gerry Aluli waters kabu and Hawaiian chili on her lanai. She plants something new each month.



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Fran Butera, gardener-in-chief for Foodscapes, drains excess water from a bed of chard in Gerry Aluli's lanai garden. Butera said the goal for Aluli's garden was to set up a space that was easy to care for on a daily basis. Drainage for the garden is built into the lanai floor, Butera said.



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