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Anne Prescott plants 3,000 chillies each year, including jalapenos (this photo), Hungarian 'Hot Wax' and 'Mexicana' (below).



If you'd asked Anne Prescott how to grow a capsicum or a chilli two years ago, she admits she wouldn't have had a clue. But that was before she and her partner Kevin Baker took a fortuitous Sunday drive past Orcona Chillis 'n' Peppers in Pakowhai, midway between Hastings and Napier. "I'd taken a year off after running a café for five years, so I was looking for something new to do when we spotted the 'for sale' sign. Six months later we were in at the deep end," she recalls. Anne was well equipped to continue with Orcona's line of chilli relishes and sauces, but she wasn't so confident about the horticultural side of the business.

Luckily, the former owners Richard and Hilary Anderson were more than happy to show her the ropes. Anne now raises 3,000 chillies and capsicum plants from seed each year, including "Shrek-green", 'Hot Wax', spicy Thai varieties, jalapenos, habaneros and 'Rocoto Manzano'. The seeds are sown in trays in July so that the plants are ready for potting up in growing bags in September and October. Anne's chillies are trickle-fed and kept in glasshouses and tunnel houses so she can ensure she gets the biggest possible crop. "If you're growing chillies, my best advice is to keep it consistent. They hate

extremes – whether it's too hot or too cold, too wet or too dry," says Anne. Anne is now a self-confessed chilli connoisseur who grows, sells and eats chillies every day. And that's not all – she's also put in an impressive vege patch. "I've got the littlest pantry you've ever seen but it doesn't matter because I can step outside and pick whatever I need. If you've got lemons, limes, herbs and chillies and capsicums you can make anything." **Mytopia mushrooms** Aiman Samy has long been fascinated with fungi. As a university student in Egypt, he took a two-week course run by

Aiman's first love was wild fungi. When he came here, he started a website to record all the mushrooms he saw in the bush (www.allaboutmushrooms.com). Then he set up trials, growing edible oyster and shitake mushrooms – and

Above, clockwise from top left: Cheerful gerberas from Primo Peppers; Te Mata Mushrooms sell button mushrooms in buckets; Gelato maker Carlo De Negri; Purple peppers from Epicurean Supplies; Kevin and Christine Mawson's kohlrabi.

A taste of Italy

• When Carlo and Cherry de Negri decided to set up a business making traditional Italian fresh fruit gelato and icecream, Hawke's Bay seemed the perfect location. Almost every flavour imaginable – from tangy lemon to tasty plum – was available on their doorstep. • With up to 20 flavours available at any one time, the gelato captures the essence of the season. • "It's amazing to have access to such a range of local produce," says Cherry. "Our limes are hand-squeezed and in May we'll have tamarillo gelato at the market – the tamarillos come from a grower at Porere Beach."