

# TIAKI IN KIRIKIROA

## Hamilton Gardens

### A living testament to the Tiaki Promise

Hamilton Gardens stands as a testament to environmental transformation and community engagement. Operations Manager Gus Flower, says the gardens have evolved from a former landfill and quarry site into one of New Zealand's premier horticultural visitor destinations, attracting around 500,000 visitors annually.

The journey of rehabilitation and development reflects a deep commitment to the Tiaki Promise, emphasising sustainability, education, and cultural heritage.

For 23 years, Gus has been dedicated to Hamilton Gardens.

**"We realise what an extraordinary place we have here," he says. "It's a very special place for our team, the local community and visitors. Its vital we protect it, enhance it wherever we can, and showcase it proudly."**



The gardens flourish with diverse plantings and meticulously landscaped areas, drawing both local and international admiration and accolades. Among its star attractions are its 18 enclosed themed gardens – from its Ancient Egyptian Garden and Surrealist Garden to its Sustainable Backyard Garden and 21st Century Concept Garden.

The site itself was originally home to local hapuu Ngaati Wairere, and Hamilton Gardens emphasises cultural heritage and connection to mana whenua, particularly through Te Parapara Garden, located near the site of a former pā. This garden celebrates Māori horticultural traditions, featuring crops like kūmara, which are harvested and shared with the local community and the Māori King as a gesture of respect and connection.

"Te Parapara holds a significant place in our efforts to honour the land's history and cultural importance," Gus says.

Giving back to the community is a focus for Gus and his team and a unique aspect of Hamilton Gardens is its collaboration with Wintec, the local polytechnic.

Horticulture and arboriculture students from Wintec study on-site, blending classroom theory with hands-on practice. This partnership nurtures the next generation of horticulturalists, providing invaluable real-world experience.

"We have a strong connection with Wintec students and tutors," he says. "They join us for work experience, and many have gone on to become part of our team. It's rewarding to see their growth and contribution to the gardens."



**The Mighty  
Waikato**  
Where magic runs deep

To learn more about Tiaki in Kirikiriroa Hamilton visit:  
[waikatoz.com/tiaki-in-kirikiroa](https://waikatoz.com/tiaki-in-kirikiroa)



Hamilton Gardens' commitment to sustainability is evident in their innovative practices. A significant portion of the produce grown in the gardens, including crops from the Kitchen Garden and Te Parapara Garden (New Zealand's only traditional Māori productive garden), gets donated to local charities such as Kaivolution and the Salvation Army – which use it to feed some of Hamilton's most vulnerable people.

These contributions support community food bank programmes, ensuring that the positive benefits of the gardens extend beyond their aesthetic and educational value.

Environmental responsibility is a core value at Hamilton Gardens and the team has implemented a comprehensive pest control programme to protect plantings and native wildlife to ensure a thriving ecosystem. Native plantings throughout the site are a core focus and additionally, the gardens produce their own mulch from collected vegetation, which is then used to enrich the soil and support healthy plant growth.

**"We're proud of our waste minimisation and recycling efforts," Gus says. "Producing our own mulch from garden cuttings is a great example of sustainable practice."**

Another exciting initiative at Hamilton Gardens is the focus on attracting native butterflies. By planting specific flora that cater to the larvae of native butterfly species, the gardens aim to create a haven for these important insects.

"We're working to encourage native butterflies like the red admiral, yellow admiral, and copper butterfly. It's an exciting project that will enhance the biodiversity of the gardens and conservation of these special species," he says.

The gardens' connection to locals is strong, with residents taking immense pride in this green sanctuary in the middle of the city. Events like the Hamilton Arts Festival Toi Ora ki Kirikiriroa and Gourmet in the Gardens foster a sense of ownership and appreciation among locals, Gus says.

"Hamiltonians see the gardens as their own. It's a place where people come to relax, learn, and connect with nature."

More than just a beautiful destination, Gus says Hamilton Gardens is "a living museum" of civilisations through time and a beacon of sustainable practice. The dedication of his team ensures that this vibrant space will continue to inspire and educate visitors for generations to come.

**"Our commitment to the Tiaki Promise is about protecting and preserving our beautiful surroundings and vibrant community for the future," Gus says.**



**The Mighty Waikato**  
Where magic runs deep

To learn more about Tiaki in Kirikiriroa Hamilton visit:  
[waikatoz.com/tiaki-in-kirikiroa](https://www.waikatoz.com/tiaki-in-kirikiroa)