

Summer 2018:
Vol 26 No 4 Issue 101

Canberra organic

Composting carp
Ethical gardening
Homegrown recipes

The quarterly publication of the Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.



President's report

How wonderful to be pulling this report together on a pleasantly overcast day with intermittent showers, and more rain forecast. Great planting weather, and hopefully the rain will keep those last spring frosts away from our sensitive new plantings. As gardeners, we are grateful when the weather gods treat us well and reward our efforts. Different for our farmers though, including those in our own local food economy, for whom their very livelihood relies on the weather giving them a decent break.

Heather Campbell's picturesque cabbages



COGS gardens on display

It was an exciting August for COGS, as the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability Shane Rattenbury MLA chose our Mitchell garden as the venue to announce the successful applicants in the 2018/2019 ACT Government community gardens grants program. It was a particular pleasure to showcase the Mitchell garden not just to the Minister and his team, and a number of Departmental managers, but also to representatives of successful grant applicants, several of whom represented smaller scale

urban gardening ventures, including apartment body corporates, who I am confident would have been impressed to visit such a beautifully kept exemplar of what community gardening is all about.

August also found a very engaged group of our members, plus some visitors, in the Kaleen garden, discussing all things 'preserving'. Apart from learning a lot from each other about kimchi, probiotics, relish, chutney and fruit preserving, the afternoon event under sunny skies allowed the group to see yet another of our lovely gardens in active use. Kaleen has a nicely bucolic air, as it sits next to UC Kaleen High School, with neighbouring goats, geese and chickens offering unsolicited gardening advice through the wire perimeter fence.

In addition, our Oaks Estate garden will be holding a community 'open house' on Saturday 17 November (9am start) to which you are very welcome to come, check out the garden and enjoy a breakfast 'sausage sizzle' with us. Oaks Estate garden sits within the picturesque Gillespie Park, on River Street, Oaks Estate, at the centre of, and a vital part of, the Oaks Estate community.

Lastly, in conjunction with the ACT Open Gardens program we are planning an open garden in early March, close to 'harvest festival' time. We hope to showcase our Kambah community garden, which also sits in a pretty green belt setting within Kambah open parklands. More on that once plans and dates firm up.

Our garden year begins

The COGS gardening year has begun, and what a start it was!

In August our Treasurer Andy Hrast and his invoicing team, including

Jo McMillan (Gardens Coordinator), Terry Williams (Committee member) and Richard Horobin (our resident IT guru), issued several hundred invoices for membership and plot fees for the upcoming year. A big job, involving close liaison with our community garden convenors as they tracked plotholder comings and goings, created invoices and recorded payments. Many thanks to this volunteer crew, and to you our members for your prompt payments. Your membership subs pay for your four quarterly magazines, insurance and centralised costs like room hire, while plot fees pay for water (our biggest cost) and garden equipment. As I write, a mere handful (small hand, at that) are awaiting acquittal. Well done!

It has also been Garden AGM time in September for our community gardeners, with fresh garden committees and convenors being elected to take 'on the ground' responsibility for managing the gardens as the year proceeds, in liaison with the COGS Committee. A very big thank you to those who have volunteered for these roles. I am very pleased to report that all our gardens, even the smallest, have a convenor going forward.

Gardening organically

It is timely to reflect on our organic charter, especially for our new plot holders.

I mentioned in the last President's report that your COGS Committee has been looking at organic herbicide use within our community gardens. This consideration is almost complete. Weed eradication is seen as best done mechanically, with any chemical, even if certified as organic, to be regarded as very much a 'last resort' solution, and being completely prohibited by our charter within garden plots themselves. Weeding guidance, and protocols for use of certified organic herbicides in non-plot areas of our community

gardens, will be settled soon to assist and guide our plotholders.

Next, an important reminder about our watering rules within COGS community gardens. ACT-wide Icon watering rules must be complied with, and importantly, in addition, COGS does not allow sprinklers to be used at any time in its gardens. We have a formal time exemption from Icon for drippers, for those gardeners whose plantings lend themselves to effective dripper use.

If forecasts are accurate, it could be a hot, dry summer. Be assured that COGS watering rules allow efficient and effective gardening, without your crops being adversely impacted. Please water wisely, and without sprinklers!

Two further reminders—inorganic fertilisers also have no place in our gardens. Use of compost and animal manures, certified organic products and mulches is encouraged to build healthy soils. As to bug control, please do not use insecticides—there are other far more sustainable methods, with guidance on our website.

Our website

Speaking of our website, I wanted to mention briefly the significant progress that COGS vice president Neville Jackson has made in revising, in some cases rewriting, our website guidance material. Already, you will find newly revised organic gardening guidance, with an orientation to Canberra gardening. Neville is now calling for subject-experts among you who are willing to contribute

your time and expertise in building the content further. If you feel you could contribute, please email Neville at vicepresident@cogs.asn.au.

Can you contribute to COGS?

In closing, I want to ask you—will you consider contributing to COGS?

As an organisation, we completely rely on good-hearted volunteers. Without volunteers, there would be no COGS and no community gardens!

We have a significant hard copy library but the Librarian role, which gives our members access to our books, and previously occupied by Margaret Stapper, is currently vacant. Could that be you?

Diana Cozadinos, our magazine editor, will be stepping down next March, after presiding over some beautiful issues over the last two years that have given pleasure and useful information to us all.

Sue Pavasaris, one of our Committee members, is stepping down from the Committee late this year as she returns to warmer climes. The Committee could accommodate a replacement for Sue, and up to three more members.

If you could see yourself in any of these roles, I would really like to hear from you—please send me a note to president@cogs.asn.au.

Until next time, enjoy your gardening.

—Sue



I very much hope to see some of you at our members' events, including our seasonal Xmas gathering at the Dickson meeting room (Northside Community Service, Rosevear Place, Dickson) on Tuesday 27 November (7.30 pm start), which for COGS marks the end of our 2018 gardening year.

— Sue

Canberra Organic is the quarterly publication of the Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.

It celebrates organic gardening, local produce, sustainability and information exchange in the Canberra region.

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The Canberra Organic Growers Society is a non-profit organisation providing a forum for organic growers to exchange information and supporting the adoption of organic growing methods in the community.

COGS encourages the use of natural methods to improve our soils, promote sustainability and produce fresh, nutritious food.

For information about COGS and organic gardening, visit the COGS website

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Community gardens

COGS operates 12 community gardens in the Canberra region, with the support of the ACT Government. The convenors and contact email addresses are listed below.

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
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The wisdom of edging at Charnwood community garden (photo: Peter White)





Editor's note

I love the way the garden suddenly bursts into life at this time of year, even if it occasionally takes me by surprise. A couple of weeks ago I was excitedly showing a friend the first two asparagus stalks poking through the soil at my community garden plot.

But life got in the way, and I got busy. Two weeks later, another gardener texted me to let me know how huge my asparagus was. I headed up there first thing the next morning and picked a kilo of asparagus, leaving about a dozen stalks that were halfway to turning into ferny greenery.

It was a good reminder that, sometimes, it pays to prioritise or risk missing out on the truly beautiful things in life.

Hopefully the fact that you're reading this note means that you've grabbed a cuppa, found a sunny corner of the house or garden, and set the time aside for an interesting read.

This magazine is such an eclectic blend of articles from both our regular writers and some new contributors. For example—for as long as I've been reading the magazine, Gerry Jacobson has been writing poems that capture the best of every season and gardening mood. I think this edition's poem (page 22) is one of my favourites.



We have insights into gardening in Alaska and Vietnam, some exceptional achievements in a couple of our community gardens, and an interview that shows gardeners are simply better when it comes to looking after the planet. Enjoy.

—Diana

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This month's cover:

Richard Horobin snapped this cherub at Mitchell garden.

COGS website update: Share your experience in growing food in Canberra

The information on the COGS website has been recently updated and improved with new guidance on organic gardening principles and methods including soil management, composting and controlling pests and weeds.

Our aim is to give visitors to the site an introduction to the basics of growing food organically and inspire them to have a go. We also deal with some of the specific challenges of growing food in Canberra; particularly our soil and our climate.

Our practical advice, however, needs more input from the wealth of experience of our COGS members in growing the wide range of fruits, herbs and vegetables that do well in our local environment.

Please send your tips and any of your own photographs to the COGS Vice-President, Neville Jackson at neville.jackson@bigpond.com who is working on the website project.



A small productive plot at Charnwood

I have inherited both my parents' green thumbs—my father loved growing edibles and my mother loved growing ornamentals, with each vying for space to fit in their particular chosen plants. There was a very productive garden in O'Connor so I learned about growing food organically and preserving food from an early age.

I became a member of Charnwood Community Garden in March 2016 when I took over a patch of ground approximately 29 square metres with a feijoa, bearded iris, some mint and a canna growing on it. The soil, although packed down and hard, was fertile.

To set up a framework for the plot I used wooden stakes, star pickets and aviary wire on three sides with access at the ends so that vegetables such as broad beans, peas and tomatoes could be contained within the space. Three metal arches were also erected over the middle patch which are now covered with plastic mesh to stabilise them and to better grow climbing plants such as gourds, snake beans and sweet peas. This also provides some shade during the heat of summer.

I enjoy growing unusual produce such as red and purple potatoes, globe artichokes, red snake beans, radicchio, ornamental gourds and many purple coloured vegetables (very high in anthocyanins) such as cabbage, kale, peas, broccoli and cauliflower. I also grow calendula and French marigolds around the plot for their bright colours and as a natural pest control.

What I love about community gardening is the camaraderie and the sharing of work, produce and ideas. As well as having this community plot and my own garden at home,



The beautiful Discovery Edible Kitchen Garden at the National Arboretum Canberra

I also manage the Discovery Edible Kitchen Garden at the National Arboretum Canberra on behalf of the Friends of the National Arboretum Harvest Group where I like to demonstrate growing vegetables, herbs and flowers together to create a beautiful and colourful tableau for visitors to enjoy and thereby carrying on my parents' legacy. The organically grown produce from this garden is used to

make chutneys, relishes, pesto and pickles to sell at market stalls and all funds raised go towards supporting Arboretum projects.

The plot has been incredibly productive over the past two and a half years—these photos show some of the produce from this wonderfully healthy little piece of earth!

—Ange McNeilly
(article and photos)

(facing page): produce from Ange's Charnwood plot, including (clockwise from top left), curly scarlet and tuscan kale; broad beans; red and purple potato harvest; purple cauliflower; ornamental gourd harvest

Charnwood community garden

To edge or not to edge— that is the question!

Unless you are lucky enough to have plot edgings provided—such as in the newer community gardens—almost all our community gardeners face the issue of whether to put a built edge around your plot or not.

There are some big advantages of putting in an edging:

- the soil depth can be more easily increased
- you can plant right to the edge of the plot
- water is more easily retained on the plot rather than running off
- the edging will help keep out couch grass and weeds
- plot maintenance is easier
- the plot dimensions can be more easily determined and fixed and the surrounding paths defined.

The simplest edging might just be some timber planks held in place with some hammered in pegs, but remember that treated timber is not allowed. Treated pine has an arsenic base—a definite no-no in an organic garden. But there are alternatives only limited by the gardener's imagination.

At COGS' Charnwood community garden, a variety of solutions to providing plot edging can be seen. Most edgings involve recycling old materials—the way to go. Old railway sleepers are a good heavy duty solution but cost \$40 plus if you have to buy them.



Variations on edging at Charnwood community garden

Old 30 x 30 cm concrete pavers on edge, split logs on end or logs placed horizontally, loose rocks or bricks placed along the plot edge, thick bark placed vertically in a trench, a raised

bed, or even thick planted comfrey or similar will work as a plot edging.

Lots of suitable cheap second-hand materials can be obtained at the recycling centres at Mitchell and the Mugga Lane tip. A material that stops weeds and grass getting into the plot is best—so boards are better than rocks.

The effort involved in building edges, the cost of materials, the maintenance needed and the aesthetics need to be thought about. For me, I like a variety of edgings and even a well maintained trench can be used between a plot and a path. I like the aesthetics of a variety of edgings in a community garden as this provides interest and ideas for other gardeners and is good recycling practice.

—Peter White (article and photos)

Bird spotting at Charnwood community garden

Roger Curnow of Charnwood garden captured a photo of this unusual grey currawong playing in the netball court beside the garden after it was original spotted in a fruit tree. Grey currawongs are not common breeding residents and, compared to the cheeky black currawongs that haunt the garden, this one was very timid. It was the first sighting of a grey currawong at the Charnwood garden.



A year as Kambah garden convenor

My 12 months as Convener is actually a period of gratitude and thanks.

I tentatively accepted the role of Convener of the Kambah garden 12 months ago with the proviso that our gardeners accept the fact that I had a big “L” plate on my back, and would appreciate their support and acceptance.

We had seven vacant plots at that time and, as I pondered the reason for this, I stood in the garden and simply said to myself, ‘I’ll have this full by the end of 12 months, and I’ll do it by simply making the garden a happy place’. With seven vacancies, some slowly filled. Within a few months quite a few more left the garden for reasons such as moving out of the district, very busy time schedules, returning overseas to live, etc.

Regardless of all of the vacancies, by simply doing nothing at all other than ensuring a happy place to be in, just last week, two days before our AGM, we welcomed a new gardener who gratefully accepted our last vacant plot. When I now look at our garden full of wonderful gardeners, I think how blessed we are. I am a very happy Convener and love the garden all our gardeners who make it such a wonderful place.

A huge thankyou must be given to our previous Convener, Neville Jackson, who, for five years carried out the role in a very professional and dedicated manner. Neville was always willing to respond to garden members’ questions, assist with identification of vegetables and pest weeds and offer advice as to the best control measures. He was extremely generous with giving his time, particularly to the garden sponsorship of the ‘Goodwill Garden’ refugee program, to working bees, and to maintaining vacant plots. Earlier this year Neville was instrumental in having a deduct water metre installed at our garden, which has reduced our water costs. The Kambah Garden



Shirley Bolton at Kambah garden

members wish him all the best wherever life takes him in the future.

I am wearing the Convener ‘hat’ again for the next 12 months and believe I may now have progressed to a ‘P’ plate for this year. I can say with confidence that this ‘promotion’ is totally due to the support, time given, advice, assistance in every possible way that my wonderful committee has given me. Thanks Barbara, Geoff, Allan and Garry. You are all Convener material for next year!!

In addition to having a wonderfully supportive committee, I am very conscious of running the garden inclusively. Accordingly, all new ideas have been brought to the attention of all our gardeners at monthly meetings and their ideas and acceptance sought. To me, it is their garden, and I am simply there to ‘convene’ their wishes. I thank them all for their fantastic support and renewed interest in the garden.

The Committee and I early in the year commenced enquiries as to the possibility of fundraising in order to purchase solid timber borders, perhaps over a period of a few

years, for every garden plot. After some investigation, and thanks to the COGS executive team, we were advised that plot borders are totally the responsibility of individual plot holders so that idea was dropped.

Our next initiative was to seek funds via the ACT Government Community Gardens Grant program to construct a much-needed shelter. The formal proposal took many hours of laborious learning, emailing back and forth to my Kambah committee members, prospective suppliers, concreters, and then to the wonderful Executive team whose advice, personal time, and patience I am forever grateful for. A huge thanks to all of you. Unfortunately, the ACT Government saw fit to not include the Kambah proposal as a recipient of the grants. Our best wishes and congratulations go to those gardens that were successful.

For the next 12 months, our little garden team and wonderful gardeners will continue to move onwards and upwards.

—Shirley Bolton

Dickson community garden

Although summer is set to be a scorcher, the Dickson community garden members are looking forward to excellent organic produce both in our individual plots and across our shared spaces. We are all growing a diversity of vegies, herbs and flowers, and we're looking forward to getting to our range of berries and fruits before the possums do.

This season we are exploring some new ways to enrich the experience in the garden and to expand the range of productive plants.

One project is developing a Green Rangers club for our children to engage and inspire the next generation.

Across our members' families we have at least at 10 children who are always full of energy but running out of things to do that aren't boring to entertain themselves. We have cleared out a spare office room and are turning it into the Green Rangers clubhouse. We are developing important roles and responsibilities for the kids that are fun and educational about gardening—like helping our worms with watering diluted worm juice with mini-watering cans, using robot arm grabbers to collect rubbish, and weed 'detecting' that not only would teach the kids to identify weeds, but once they mark them with a high vis stake, the grown-ups are tasked with sorting them out. We are also making creative play spaces to practice building with wood, cable ties and nails, and quiet reading spaces like in a bean den (beans grown over a teepee of stakes) and maybe getting a swing or two.

A second project is researching native bush foods like Tasmanian pepper berry, lemon myrtle, yams and river mint to plant in our shared spaces, so we can harvest new and interesting foods and hopefully grow an attractive border hedge that can



Veronica Dunphy with her amazing cauliflower

disguise some of our barbed wire topped fence.

Other projects involve planning to make our own community potting mix, primarily based on our excellent composting system, and building dripper systems for the garden. Dripper systems are fun to build, and is much lego for grown-ups. A pair of secateurs and pliers, some hose, clips and connectors, and off you go.

We are continuing to work with Dickson College not only to share maintenance but to look at additional opportunities for the students to engage in other ways with the garden, such as embellishing it with their art and sculpture, or to integrate it with their culinary skillstreams.

As the new convener for Dickson, I would like to thank Fiona Dawes as

the outgoing convener, and Maya Berretta before her, for their commitment and effort, and for the shared food and knowledge. We wish Fiona happy harvesting in her move to the Kaleen garden.

Many thanks also to our member Veronica Dunphy, who endlessly shares her fabulous bounties and tireless energy. She is pictured here with the first 'home grown' cauliflower that I have had the pleasure to eat—it turned into a treat for my family as baked cauliflower in cheese sauce. Her broccoli also was well appreciated in a stir-fry.

Having been gardening for many years and in different Australian cities, I am loving that I can continue to learn new things about what and how to grow edibles in Canberra. This

Around the COGS gardens

year, I learnt that chilli plants, left in a pot in the glass house, will resprout in spring even though they looked completely dead. Not so impressed with my first ever brussels sprout that I invested \$5 in, that grew nicely but then the small, fat buds bolted. I also learnt that there are many ways to beat back couch grass, however my investment of hours on my knees following every piece of runner covering the plot that I gained when I joined in March, was worth the effort. No regrowth yet, but equally, cardboard loaded with mulch acts well to suppress the enemy along pathways. Coriander from seed was also a raging success in my plot over winter, and is growing so well that there is plenty to share. Lastly, I have learnt that I need to know more about anticipating and responding to visiting snakes, too!

We are looking forward to a bountiful and fun summer.

—Teresa McMaugh
(article and photos)

(right): Enthusiastic coriander crop
(below): Dickson garden in October



Mitchell community garden: a year in review

It been a busy gardening year at the Mitchell Community Garden, with some big changes taking place that have only been possible through various donations, grants and the fundraising efforts of those in the garden.

At the beginning of the gardening year we constructed a new shed, to house all of our equipment, as well as purchasing shelving, fittings and tools for inside the shed. We also purchased a water tank including a pump, to allow us to save rain water for use in the garden, as well as purchasing a generator to provide power.

Thanks to a successful application to the *2017 ACT Government Community Garden Grants* we were also able to install a new water line and six additional taps across the garden. This enabled us to purchase new hoses and hose fittings, as well as moving and reinforcing current taps and hoses to enable easier access to water for all our gardeners.

Our communal fruit trees are doing well after being pruned and sprayed and we also managed to plant new fruit and berry trees in the orchard. The front of the garden now boasts a wonderful communal flower and herb garden, to encourage bees and butterflies to visit the site.



We were also fortunate to be successful in our application to the *2018 ACT Government Community Garden Grants* round, in which we have been provided with funding to replace the front fence and entry gate. This will improve both access and security at the garden.

Our old, smaller shed also underwent a dramatic transformation into a wonderful new greenhouse. Thanks to the efforts of one of our wonderful gardeners, who constructed it in his spare time, we now have a new greenhouse which is already filled with seeds starting to sprout and

will be ready to plant once the cold weather passes.

The end of the gardening year saw us hosting the media event for the announcement of the *2018 ACT Government Community Garden Grants* by the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability, Shane Rattenbury MLA. Approximately 80 people were in attendance on a beautiful clear day and enjoyed a wonderful lunch.

During such a busy year, we also welcomed 19 new gardeners and their partners to the garden, adding to our vibrant gardening community. A special thank you must go to Narelle, as Convenor of the Mitchell Community Garden and all those on the 2017-18 Committee for their hard work behind the scenes.

Thank you also to everyone who got involved either through a sausage sizzle, moving the old shed or many of the other activities that took place. Without our community of wonderful gardeners, we wouldn't have achieved so much. We are looking forward to what we hope will be an equally productive 2018-19 gardening year out at the Mitchell Community Garden.

—Rebecca Travers (article and photos) and Richard Horobin (photos)



Announcement of ACT government community garden grants recipients

On 29 August 2018, the Mitchell Community Garden hosted the announcement of the recipients of the ACT Government's Community Garden Grants.

Under clear blue skies, the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability, Shane Rattenbury MLA announced the recipients of the grants for 2018.

The Minister was accompanied by approximately 80 other visitors, including other grant recipients, ACT Government staff, those from other Community Gardens and members of COGS. We enjoyed a wonderful lunch and a very successful media event.

All visitors were incredibly complimentary about Mitchell's Community Garden, noting how well equipped, modern and vibrant it is.

The Mitchell Community Garden was also successful in receiving another community grant, which is great news. A total of \$8,300 will go towards replacing the entire front fence and the entry gate. This will improve security and safety at the garden.

To read the full *Canberra Times* article, visit the website at <https://tinyurl.com/y7lwxac9>

—Rebecca Travers



Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability, Shane Rattenbury, and guests



There was a great turnout for the grants announcement

Erindale community garden

Tracey Bool's productive garden



Young-Ja Kim makes the most of her garden space at Erindale



Composting carp

Canberra has abundant availability of the wonderful gardening material—carp. Carp is an invasive pest species of fish which has significantly contributed to extensive degradation of natural aquatic systems in large parts of Australia. Carp is now the most abundant large freshwater fish species in many aquatic habitats throughout south-eastern Australia. The ACT and NSW Governments encourage recreational carp fishing as a legitimate method of carp control. While carp is deleterious in our waterways, it is a superb addition to most compost heaps. Canberra gardeners have a valuable role to play in the responsible disposal of carp if they are willing!

In composting terms, carp is just wet, highly nitrogenous material. In gardening terms, the end result of carp compost is a rich plant food and an excellent soil conditioner.

In my experience, carp can be quickly and easily composted—about 2-4 weeks should be enough time for the fish to be completely eaten by the compost and no longer detectable in any form. A further 3-4 months composting should be enough time for any harmful pathogens to be destroyed in the repeated heating, cooling and turning processes.

As the weather warms up, carp spend more time near the surface and interest in recreational carp fishing will increase. In many instances, people who fish may not have a plan for any carp they catch and remove from local waterways. This can lead to carp being discarded on or near waterways, or in public rubbish bins. While discarding carp in public spaces may not always lead to environmentally or socially detrimental outcomes, in some instances it may. Gardeners to the rescue! We can put those dead carps to good use.

In the last few months I've composted approximately eight carps in three of my slightly over one cubic metre pallet compost bins. For my carbonous material, I use whatever

is free—wood chips and mouldy hay have been my major carbon inputs recently. I use the layering method—a thick layer of carbon and a thin layer of nitrogen and so on. I chop the carp up into 3-4 sections with an axe and layer the pieces in the top of the lower third or quarter of the cubic metre compost pile. If your carbon ratio is sufficient, the compost will not smell.

Another method of using the carp in the garden is to bury it. This leads to much slower decomposition and experience at the Charny garden indicates that the hole must be quite deep—at least 50-70cm—to avoid any unexpected reappearance of your carp. We suspect curious local wildlife rather than curious local gardeners.

I source my carp from the Canberra Carp Fishing facebook site. Canberra Carp Fishing has been more than happy to throw fish my way and they are always looking for people to recycle carp—in fact, you may have heard Trimmo and me on ABC Canberra discussing this very topic with Lish a few months ago.

Why not try feeding your compost some carp this summer?

—Alexa Furphy

** This article does not attempt to explain the composting process in any significant detail and anyone embarking on a more adventurous composting process should do some research to satisfy themselves that their proposed approach is safe. Google Scholar always brings up excellent, easy to understand, thoroughly researched articles and I highly recommend the Victorian Fisheries Authority factsheet on composting fish (<https://tinyurl.com/y6ur3v5l>), as well as any of the north American big lake articles on composting pest fish species.*

(below): carp ready for composting, and after about two weeks in a very active compost pile during winter





For love of vegetables

I have just spent three months in northern climes. It was really a mountain, loch, fiord, lake and glacier crawl through Scotland, Norway, Iceland, British Columbia and Alaska. The weather was perfect, the company good and the landscape spectacular. But after five weeks in Alaska I began to have cravings. Not for vegemite, not for Australian beer, but for fresh vegetables.

There is only so long that you can tolerate great slabs of meat, mountains of crab, and fish that has been cooked too long. Then there is all the fried food, the deep-fried food and crumbed food, the processed food, the hamburgers and pizzas. Of course, there was also all the pastries, buns and cakes and even sweet bread. Vegetables didn't seem to make it on the menu, except for Yukon gold potatoes which I must admit were tasty.

I wondered whether Alaskans ate such unhealthy food because they didn't have a choice, or they really loved the taste of high fat, high sugar food, or because they grew up on it and had never learnt to appreciate vegetables. We had a lot of mediocre meals in Alaska. I was desperate for some fresh, crisp vegetables or



Lettuce seedlings, ready to plant

carefully prepared flavoursome salad by the end of the holiday.

Although there is usually a Soup and Salad section on Alaskan menus, the soups are usually chowder and, delicious as they are, they are very light on vegetables. Unfortunately, the attitude towards preparing salads in Alaska seemed perfunctory. A

salad usually consisted of an iceberg lettuce quickly slashed into strips and deposited, tasteless ribs and all, onto a plate. Clumps of food, such as orange grated cheese, yellow grated cheese, sweet corn, chicken etc. were dumped on the bed of lettuce. A dressing from a pouch was usually provided. If a grilled strip of meat, loaded with a sickly-sweet sauce, was added it was called a Thai salad.

You may think that this was because you can't grow vegetables in Alaska because it is so far north. But vegetables grow well in Alaska in summer. In fact, because the sun shines for most of the day, vegetables grow fast and to prodigious size. We visited Coldfoot, just north of the Arctic Circle, and they had a good variety of vegetables growing even though it was autumn.

I was so glad to get home and stock up on an amazing array of beautiful, healthy and delicious vegetables. We are blessed with an enormous variety of salad ingredients which are easy to grow—cos lettuces, tomatoes of every colour, tiny cucumbers, apple cucumbers, telephone cucumbers,

Denali, in Alaska, the highest mountain in North America



Community gardens around the world



round radishes, long radishes, bicour radishes, capsicums the colours of the rainbow, snow peas and sugar peas, celery, mushrooms, baby spinach leaves, baby beetroot leaves, rocket wild and domestic, Italian greens, Asian greens—not to mention all the other things that creative cooks add to salads like couscous, orange segments, tiny broccoli florets, mint and cashew nuts.

Australians are very good salad makers. They recognise that making salads is a subtle art and that all the ingredients must be respected and treated gently. They are prepared to experiment with wonderfully flavourful dressings and unusual ingredients. Above all, I think that we appreciate that salads are not only amazingly healthy but can be a taste sensation and perfect meals in their own right.

So, you should rejoice that summer has arrived and you can grow and enjoy a huge variety of salad ingredients and fresh vegetables.

No amount of moose burgers and reindeer sausages can compensate for wonderful vegetables.

—Elizabeth Dangerfield

(right): kohlrabi growing in an Arctic garden at the end of summer; an array of seeds available in Australian shops (below): an unusual sign in Wiseman, Alaska



Fighting waste from your own backyard

Does being a gardener mean you're less likely to waste food? Bethaney Turner thinks so.

'People who garden have a higher value for their food,' she said, 'because they're aware of the labour that goes into food production.'

'That's why community gardening is important—once you're growing food you become much more attuned to climate and soil and more careful about the way you live.'

Food waste, food security and food sovereignty are areas of keen interest to Bethaney in her role as Assistant Professor in International Studies at the University of Canberra. However, COGS members might know her better as a long-term plot-holder at the Kaleen garden.

Bethaney describes food as a useful 'lens' to look at the global environment and how to live more sustainably because food is something we all engage with.

Her interest in this area developed during the year she spent in Mexico, studying at the Universidad Iberoamericana.

'It was interesting to see the local reaction to the genetically-modified corn coming into Mexico from America,' she said.

'The Mayans describe themselves as "the people of corn" and corn is of such interest that the price of tortillas is on the news every night.'

'It shows how our relationship with food is shaped by our socio-cultural backgrounds.'

Food waste in the developing world, for example, is related to the management of food while in the developed world most food waste is from what people buy from supermarkets and end up throwing away.

Bethaney said a lot of the literature about how to reduce waste is about community connectedness—for example, if someone has cooked extra food they might share it with



Bethaney Turner

friends. That doesn't happen in isolated households.

'People find it difficult to gift their leftovers,' Bethaney said. 'We've started to see things like cook-ups at work where people bring in their leftovers to share.'

'One of the things I'm working with at the moment is "ShareWaste", an online movement that started in Sydney where people share things like compost. It's a cool thing to alert people to. People in apartments, for instance, may find it more difficult to manage things like compost. It's another option for avoiding food rotting in the [fridge] crisper.'

At the University of Canberra, Bethaney is working on a new course of study called Global Environmental Futures. It's about teaching how to live more sustainably in a shifting environmental situation. As part of this course, Bethaney will be taking a group of students to Hong Kong later in the year.

'We'll be looking at markets as a way of encouraging a more global way of thinking about food.'

She said it's interesting that, although developments like the internet have given students more access to the world than previous generations, they tend not to think beyond their immediate environment.

Closer to home, Bethaney said she's been gardening at the Kaleen community garden since it started. Like most keen gardeners she grew up in a family who grew their own produce.

'My grandfather was a champion vegetable grower at the local show,' she said. 'He was grand champion every year for about 15 years.'

'The secret to his champion vegies was cow sh*t and my grandparents had no food waste—they composted, there was always a chicken bucket under the sink and the dogs and pigs got the leftovers.'

And it wasn't only food that wasn't wasted—Bethaney's grandparents valued everything.

'I remember grandma washing out the plastic bread bags and hanging them on the line. Nothing was just thrown away.'

Bethaney's parents moved from the farm when she was very young so she grew up in a more urban area, which led to some difficult choices.

'We had a massive strawberry plot,' she said, 'but as kids we wanted a pool so no more strawberries!'

It's the memory of the taste of those strawberries and home-grown food that encourages Bethaney, time-poor like most of us, to continue to garden.

'I think the interest in heirloom fruit and vegetables is a reaction against the limited varieties people have access to,' she said.

'We've lost taste to varieties that are easy to transport. People who shop at farmers' markets are interested in taste so we're starting to see an awareness of re-enlivening taste.'

She said there are also signs of more awareness of the shifting climate and strange weather events.

'Gardeners often want to control their space but know they don't have ultimate control over the soil and the weather.'

'You could see this tension for gardeners as a metaphor for our lives.'

You can find out more about ShareWaste on <https://share-waste.com>.

—Sue Pavasaris (article) and Nick Potter (photo)



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Recipe

Broccoli and stilton (blue cheese) soup

We might be coming out of the depths of winter, but many plots around Mitchell's Community Garden show no signs that they slowed down during the colder months. Bursting with winter veggies such as kale, brussels sprouts, broad beans, cabbage, cauliflower and broccoli, they all make fabulous additions to a delicious hearty soup.

This recipe highlights the delicious broccoli, from the brassica oleracea species and a great source of vitamin C.

Ingredients

- 1 onion (diced)
- 2 potatoes, large (diced)
- 1 ltr chicken stock (or vegetable stock to make it vegetarian)
- 300 g broccoli
- 85 g stilton (blue) cheese (or other crumbly cheese e.g. cheddar)
- Juice of half a lemon
- 150 ml milk
- 1 tsp butter, margarine or olive oil
- 2 tbsp creme fraiche/sour cream (optional)

Directions

1. Soften onions in butter/margarine/olive oil, add diced potatoes and stock and bring to boil for 10 minutes.
2. Add broccoli and cook for further 10 minutes.
3. Add two-thirds of the cheese and lemon juice.
4. Purée until smooth.
5. Add milk and crème fraîche/sour cream and return to heat and season. Do not let it boil.
6. Top with the remaining cheese to serve.

—From the kitchen of Rebecca and Jeremy, Mitchell community garden



Finding kindred spirits on Cat Ba Island

North Vietnam in early June this year had temperatures in the 30's, the humidity was average and the sun was shining. We were lucky enough to be able to visit the village of Viet Hai on Cat Ba Island, several hours boat trip off the mainland. Sustainable gardening is just a normal part of daily life here.

There was a choice of a bicycle or an electric car ride which took us from the boat dock about 5km to the village, the road winding around the water and then uphill inland.

Arriving in the village to a small area where cool drinks were offered, we were then led on a guided tour around the village. We were shown the old way of making huts out of mud and rice husks and many old tools that were used.

We walked through the central area of the village where there is a pond filled with fish and wooden seats under the shade of trees to enjoy the quiet space.

There are rice fields on one side of the village, their stalks laden with the golden harvest and the expanse of vegetable gardens on the other side. Between these two cultivated areas the ducks paddle down the waterways. Another food source along with pigs and chickens.

I had seen gravestones in many country areas around Vietnam on our



An enthusiastic vegetable garden

travels and it was interesting to know why the grave stone memorials were positioned in the food gardens. We were told that the elder generation had suffered much starvation in their previous lives but in the 'afterlife' they would no longer be hungry by being located in the food garden.

There were so many different 'greens' in the food gardens and, though I recognised beans and sweet potatoes, many of the Vietnamese leafy greens were unknown to us.

There were trellises of a plant I recognised as a cucurbit but I couldn't find out the name with our lack of language skills of Vietnamese plants. There were bananas and paw paw, limes and green skinned mandarins.

We were shown the chickens, free range, but inside a fenced area sur-

rounded by lush lemon grass plants 'to keep out the snakes'. The pigs looked healthy but were housed in small enclosures with which I felt uncomfortable, however I felt that the local people loved these animals enough to care for them in their own way.

We also walked past the herb garden outside the 'hospital'—a small building, where all the healing herbs were labelled very methodically ready to be plucked and turned into a tonic, salve, poultice or other use of medicinal herbs.

Such an interesting experience with like-minded people so far away from my own organic garden.

—Heather Campbell
(article and photos)

The ancestors spend eternity in the vegie patch



The hospital herb garden



Cool cabbages

Last summer I had a disastrous crop of tomatoes and lost most of them to root rot despite diligently removing infected plants as soon as I noticed. Even the heritage varieties which valiantly hung on but finally gave up the fight.

A lesson to me is to remember not to plant any tomatoes in that bed again as the fungus can remain in the soil for quite a number of years.

So, though disappointed, I decided with the usual gardener's resilience to plant something else and of course for the time of year it was cabbages.

As the bed had been prepared for a tomato crop I had dug in sheep manure, a sprinkling of lime and compost from my bin. No further compost or sheep manure was added though I added a sprinkling of rock dust.

The seedlings were given a good watering and, once I was happy that they had settled in over the first week, I added a layer of lucerne mulch around the plants.

I always cover my brassicas with exclusion netting from the time they are planted in the ground. I use a



A red cabbage

fine exclusion netting sitting over 5 covered star pickets—one for each corner of the bed and one in the middle of the bed. The netting has a cross over doorway so it's easy to get inside the space to weed if required. I use the large gardeners pegs to secure the netting to the star pickets and there are always handy rocks around my plot to secure the bottom edges from the wind.

This protection means that every year the cabbages, once large enough, look particularly beautiful like those in a child's story book. During their growing period I do little to them except water and weed and occasionally pull off the dead bottom leaves to keep the ground clear.

This year I grew a mixture of early and late varieties both red and green. The Chinese cabbage variety, One Kilo Slow Bolt, grew quickly and to such enormous sizes that I had to cut each cabbage into quarters, one for each of the families so they were not overwhelmed.

The cone shaped Sugarloaf, also a quick grower, I interspersed between the longer growing late varieties so that when they were harvested there was still room for the others to expand into the spaces.

Some volunteer parsnips also set seed under the shade of the cabbage leaves so I left some of these to grow to maturity and they were pulled in late July and August when most of my cabbages had been harvested.

References: *Organic Gardening*, Bennett Peter, New Revised 7th Edition, Cabbages p.153

—Heather Campbell
(article and photos)

A sugarloaf cabbage



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Home grown recipe—silverbeet pasta

In 1980, when my third daughter was born, I developed an interest in self-sufficiency. I learned how to preserve the excess vegetable production from my home garden. Some vegetables do better than others and this includes silver beet. My family credits me with inventing this dish which has been a family standard for the last 30+ years.

Silver beet starts off slowly but once it starts to produce it grows very well and, if you are only feeding the family, you will often have a surplus. Once blanched, it can be drained and then frozen in Chinese food containers and then stored in the freezer. My daughter, who was working in Sydney, would visit us in Canberra every so often. She would take home a couple of home bottled passata and a few Chinese food containers of frozen silver beet.

The other components to this meal include cottage cheese and tomato passata, which can be made at home as well.

Silver beet: harvest the leaves and wash them to remove dust, bugs and small snails. Snails do not go well in this dish. Slice a heap of leaves and then chop/dice them. Place them in a pot with a little water and steam. This will reduce the volume by up to 80 per cent. Once these have been steamed, drain them in a colander and let them cool.

In a large bowl place an amount of raw dry curly pasta as required for one or more serves, add a tub (500gm) of cottage cheese (or ricotta) plus the silver beet. Mix all the components until well mixed and then place into a buttered baking dish and flatten down. Add the equivalent of two tins of passata. Poke the pasta dish to ensure that the liquid permeates to the bottom. This liquid will cook the pasta. If there is not enough liquid just add more water.

You can add a topping of your choice. We normally add a layer of tasty and parmesan cheese. You could add bread crumbs as well.

Place into a fan-forced oven at 180 degrees Celsius for up to 45 minutes or until the pasta is soft.



© Can Stock Photo / igordutina

Serve as a slice. It keeps in the fridge for up to a week and can be frozen as well.

Homemade passata

I pick a variety of home grown tomatoes and then blend them in a Kenwood blender. I pour the juice into a strainer and shake so that the pulp drops out and leaves behind the skin

and seeds. Do not tip the tomato seeds into your compost as the garden that uses this compost will have a lawn of tomatoes—not what you want.

Place all this pulp into a stainless steel pot (do not use aluminium pots as the tomato puree is acidic), bring to the boil and reduce by at least 50 per cent—this can take up to 45 minutes. Experience says that you need to stir the juice while it is coming to the boil because the top layer will bubble over the top of the pot if you turn your back on it—more cleaning up on the stove.

Pour the reduced passata into sterilised jars—ideally with a pop lid—close and then place in a pot of hot water and boil the jars for about 20 minutes. This boiling will kill any bacteria that have been missed in the passata or that were not killed when the jars were sterilised. Remove the jars and wait for the pop lids to pop as the contents cool. Next day these passata jars can be stored in a cupboard or pantry. These will keep for at least 12 months.

The alternative to this is simply pour the passata into Chinese food containers and freeze. You will need to store these in the freezer until use.

When using this passata in cooking a teaspoon of sugar may be necessary to improve the taste.

—John Myszka

Handy tips

Coffee grounds

Coffee grounds before they are used are acidic. After the grounds have been used to make coffee the used coffee grounds are now no longer acidic. A recent episode of *Gardening Australia* showed a professor using coffee grounds to add fertiliser to his vegetable gardens. He did not use the grounds straight away. He blended them in equal quantities in a cement mixer with sawdust. This mixture is then allowed to compost for several months.

Egg shells

Egg shells provide calcium to growing plants. Many plants need calcium to produce fruit. These plants include chillies, capsicums and tomatoes. The option is to place a small quantity of crushed egg shells in the bottom of the hole into which you plant your tomato seedlings, so when the tomato grows it will have its own direct supply of calcium—it is worth a try.

Pacific and Indian Ocean conditions increase chances of a hot dry end to the year

The Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) report released on 9 October says that conditions in the Pacific Ocean warrant raising the outlook for an El Niño to the ALERT level. This means there is approximately a 70 per cent chance of El Niño occurring in 2018—around triple the normal likelihood.

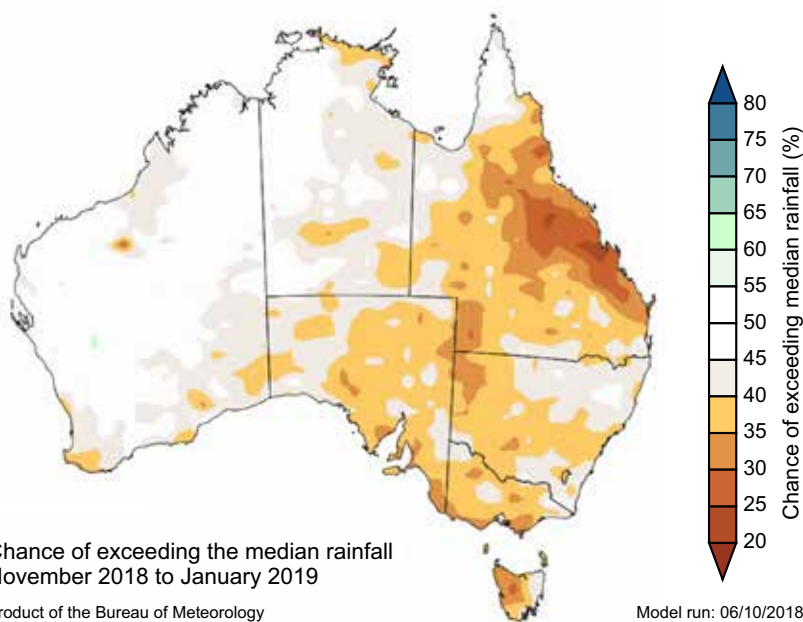
In the Indian Ocean, a measure similar to the El Niño and known as Indian Ocean Dipole has reached a positive level.

El Niño conditions combined with a positive Indian Ocean Dipole in spring increases the possibility of a dry and warm end to the year. It also raises the risk of heatwaves and bushfire weather in the south, but reduces the risk of tropical cyclone activity in the north.

— Andy Hrast

Dam levels in the Canberra region and capital cities

| | % FULL October '18 | % FULL October '17 | | % FULL October '18 | % FULL October '17 |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| ACT storages | 67 | 79 | Sydney | 63 | 87 |
| Murray-Darling Basin | 52 | 69 | Melbourne | 65 | 71 |
| Burrinjuck Dam | 42 | 59 | Brisbane | 75 | 71 |
| Blowering Dam | 66 | 76 | Adelaide | 61 | 87 |
| | | | Perth | 53 | 40 |



Summer love

November
begins with blossom
brings us broad beans
and blowflies
strawberries and storms

they say
you become what you eat ...
gorging
on mulberries
fat and black and juicy

Christmas morning
cicadas chirping
flies buzzing
mossies biting
cockatoos squawking

the plum tree
shakes its dappled shade
on my bare legs
a warm wind whistles
its song of hope

this drizzle
is far too gentle –
the Earth
cries out for rain –
send ‘er down Hughie

such a moody
January
afternoon
sultry, sleepy
languid with summer love

—Gerry Jacobson





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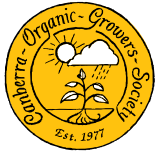
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summer planting guide

Mulch and compost

In summer it is a good idea to mulch your garden beds to help keep the soil cool and moist. One experiment showed that a 4 cm layer of straw reduced evaporation by 73%. Be careful not to lay down a thick layer of sawdust or lawn clippings that can pack down to form an impenetrable barrier to water.

Soil with lots of compost contains all the nutrients your plants need for strong, healthy growth. In addition well-composted soil retains water and acts like a sponge to keep your plants moist through dry summer days.

Heat protection

On days of extreme temperature your plants may need to be physically protected from the heat. This can be achieved by covering plants with shade cloth secured on a frame e.g. weldmesh or irrigation pipe bent over to form a tunnel, with shade cloth secured by pegs.

Watering

Try not to water the leaves of plants that are susceptible to fungal diseases (e.g. tomatoes, cucumbers, pumpkins and zucchinis) and try to water individual plants thoroughly, rather than watering a whole area.

Always follow water restrictions and check soil moisture before watering—a rostered watering day doesn't mean you must water.

Weeds

Keep weeds down. They compete with your plants for food, water and sunlight. It is best to tackle them when they are small—before removing them becomes an exhausting exercise.

Pests

Pests can multiply over summer. Don't reach for the pesticides. Observe if there are natural predators present, remembering that there will be a delay between the appearance of the pest and the subsequent build-up of its predators.

If you must spray, use an environmentally benign spray. Read books such as Jackie French's *Natural Pest Control*.

Harvesting

Make sure you harvest your crop regularly—in most cases this will encourage your plants to continue cropping and you can enjoy your produce at its peak.

Remember to leave space in your vegie patch for those winter vegetables that prefer to be planted in late summer to early autumn. Brassicas and other winter crops need time to mature before the extreme cold of winter sets in.

| | DEC | JAN | FEB |
|-----------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Bush beans | S | S | |
| Beetroot | S | S | S |
| Broccoli | ST | ST | T |
| Brussel sprouts | ST | ST | T |
| Cabbage | ST | ST | T |
| Carrots | S | S | S |
| Cauliflower | ST | ST | T |
| Celery | T | T | S |
| Chicory | S | S | S |
| Chinese cabbage | S | S | |
| Cucumber | ST | T | |
| Endive | S | S | S |
| Kohlrabi | ST | ST | T |
| Leeks | S | S | |
| Lettuce | ST | ST | ST |
| Marrows | T | | |
| Parsnips | S | S | S |
| Potatoes | S | S | |
| Radish | S | S | S |
| Silverbeet | ST | ST | T |
| Squash | ST | | |
| Swedes | | S | S |
| Sweet corn | ST | T | |
| Tomatoes | T | T | |
| Turnips | | S | S |

S = seed sowing; T = transplanting

This table is a guide only—observe seasonal weather patterns before deciding when to plant, as there will often be distinct differences in summer weather from one year to the next.

Planting times will vary for different varieties of the one vegetable e.g. December plantings of heading lettuce varieties should be successful; while February plantings should be the butterhead varieties.

What's On



Canberra's future is more healthy and active

Local Canberra organisations have been invited to take part in the development of the ACT's innovative approach to preventive health, with an aim to tackle some of the biggest health challenges facing our community.

The Healthy and Active Living Strategy will help create the right environment to nurture the future health and wellbeing of all Canberrans.

"We want to shift the focus from treating illness, to preventing illness and keeping people well, so the Healthy and Active Living Strategy will help us understand local challenges, agree on top priorities for preventive health and work together to create the right environments that protect and promote health and wellbeing," said Minister for Health and Wellbeing Meegan Fitzharris.

"A proposed framework will be tested and refined with representatives from across the community over the coming months. This includes non-government community organisations, businesses, and education and research sectors."

For more information on development of the Healthy and Active Living Strategy contact: healthyandactive@act.gov.au

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