

Summer 2020/21  
Vol 28 No 4 Issue 109

# Canberra organic

**Growing a sense of community**  
**Gardening in the subtropics**  
**Worms and wasps**  
**Slugs and snails**  
**Gardening in a time of plague**

The quarterly publication of the Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.



# Editor's note

Welcome to the summer 2020-21 edition of *Canberra Organic* and a big welcome to both the newly elected and returning members of both the COGS Executive Committee and all the garden committees. I look forward to hearing all your news over the coming year.

Whilst 2020 has presented its challenges, we are finally seeing the emergence of a 'new normal' and it's great to see that our gardening has continued to be part of that. With longer hours of sunshine and warmer weather, it's a great opportunity to get outside and into the garden.

As always, we have a wonderful magazine filled with contributions from our members. In this edition, I particularly enjoyed reading about the role paper wasps play in organic pest management and it was also wonderful to see that Kambah community garden were able to continue the spirit of *Floriade* despite COVID-19, by taking part in *Floriade: Reimagined*.

It was also lovely to hear from Sue Pavasaris, a former editor of *Canberra Organic*, who is now living and gardening in Mullumbimby (near Byron Bay). It was wonderful

to see what she has been up to since she moved north.

As you'll hear from our new President, COGS is close to signing a 10-year licence agreement with the ACT Government. This gives us a great opportunity to think about the next 10 years of COGS and the future direction of the organisation. I encourage you to look at the questions posed to members on page 27 and provide your ideas, no matter how big or small, to the Executive Committee. After all, this is an organisation that is here to support its members.

In the meantime, enjoy the warmer weather and perfect growing conditions and I wish you a wonderful summer season.

—Rebecca Travers



Bill McDevitt at Charnwood community garden capturing a swarm of bees in the callistemon shrub. He will relocate the swarm and add to garden's bee colony. Photo by Philippa Hankinson

**Open Day at Kambah community garden**

**Date:** Sunday 22 November  
**Time:** 11am to 3pm  
**Venue:** COGS Kambah Community Garden, Springbett St, Kambah  
**Activities:** Plant sale, gardening demonstrations (e.g. growing microgreens), music (bagpipes) and more!

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# President's column

Fellow COGS members, welcome to the summer 2020-21 edition of *Canberra Organic*.

It's an honour to be writing my first President's column for inclusion in the COGS magazine at a time when there are so many exciting things happening in the Society.

Firstly, I would like to thank all the people who have taken on positions on the COGS Executive and as Convenors. COGS, as a totally volunteer organisation, cannot operate without the many hours they devote to keeping the Society and the gardens operating for all our benefit. Thank you.

Peter Weddell, our immediate past-President, had to withdraw his nomination for the position of President for health reasons and I thank him for leading us through the past tumultuous 18 months that involved two legal cases and the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you, Peter.

The Executive Committee has continued to operate throughout the pandemic to ensure that COGS continues to meet its regulatory and financial obligations, facilitate the day-to-day management of the Society and its 12 gardens and other matters, including legal issues raised by members. It has also been liaising with the ACT Government on the renewal of the licence that covers nine of the 12 COGS gardens. I am pleased to report that the wording for a 10-year licence extension has been agreed and all that remains is to finalise some boundary issues in a couple of gardens. I am hopeful that it will be signed by the end of the year.

COGS gardens are proving popular, with waiting lists at many of the gardens. The COGS Executive has begun planning for a half-day strategic workshop to look at the way forward now that we have the imminent certainty of a 10-year licence. I would be interested to hear your views on where COGS should be going when we look to the future of the organisation. Feel



free to contact me either directly at [president@cogs.asn.au](mailto:president@cogs.asn.au) or through your garden Convenor.

Two of our COGS gardens have recently won grants from the ACT Government through the *Community Gardens Grants Program*. Well done to the people involved in putting together the successful applications. The work (a shelter at Charnwood and upgraded water reticulation at Cook) will be underway in the coming months. Beautification works at the Oaks Estate garden with COGS funds are also proceeding. There is also work underway on the feasibility of an indigenous edible food garden at the Betty Cornhill garden.

It is pleasing to report a number of outreach activities in the gardens that include: a visit to the Charnwood garden from the Vietnamese community; arrangements for a wheelchair-bound youth to garden and a stroke victim to visit at Mitchell; partnering with the Red Cross for an Afghani refugee family to garden at Holder; and Betty Cornhill gardeners

organising a clean-up working bee in the area surrounding the garden. Congratulations to all the people involved.

The Bureau of Meteorology has declared a *La Niña* that is likely to bring wetter and cooler conditions this coming summer. That is good news as the hot dry conditions of the last summer sent COGS water consumption and the resulting water bills soaring. Nevertheless, we should all continue to be careful with our water usage and continue to use water conservation practices for financial and environmental reasons. Finally, a not very subtle reminder to all gardeners as we move into the warmer months that **sprinklers are not allowed in COGS gardens**. However, as it has in past years COGS will be seeking an exemption from Icon Water to allow the use of drippers during the day. The outcome of this request will be advised through the garden Convenors.

Happy gardening everyone.

— Andy Hrast (article and photo)

**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.

<b>Betty Cornhill</b>	Peter Rouse — cornhill_convenor@cogs.asn.au
<b>Charnwood</b>	Teresa Rose — charnwood_convenor@cogs.asn.au
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## COGS community gardens and COVID-19

To assist in slowing the spread of COVID-19 in the community, we must do everything possible to protect our gardeners and their families.

To ensure our gardens can remain open and we provide a safe environment for everyone, all gardeners attending a COGS community garden **MUST**:

- wear gloves or use hand sanitiser before opening and closing gates, shed locks and operating taps
- observe “physical distancing” with each other (at least 1.5 metres from your plot neighbour) and minimise contact with other gardeners
- wear gloves when using communal tools, and consider bringing your own tools

- not have more than two members of a household visit a plot, and
- not bring visitors to the garden.

Please **DO NOT** enter the garden if:

- you have been in contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19
- you have been ordered to self-isolate, or
- you are unwell and showing symptoms consistent with COVID-19.

No visitors or other unauthorised people are allowed enter the garden at the present time.

## Cook community garden

The Cook community garden welcomed the onset of spring at a well-attended AGM on 13 September 2020. Peter Weddell continues as Convenor together with an expanded and experienced committee — Julie, Margaret, Michele, Andrew, Greg, Mike, Alex and Ruth.

We were delighted to receive an ACT Government *Community Garden Grant* to replace ageing tap risers and standardise tap size and fittings across the garden. The project will enable the garden to significantly improve our existing water-conservation program.

Our seasonal working bees will take control of weeds, maintenance of perimeter plantings, and general mulching of the entrance and orchard areas, as well as pathways between garden plots.

We will also look to replace a number of perimeter plantings which suffered in the recent drought conditions, but the return to wetter conditions in recent months has improved the situation. Unfortunately, the infestation of cape weed and other weeds is concerning and proving difficult to control.

The rainfall over the past four months has been wonderful for the garden and spring plantings are well advanced. We've had excellent pickings of asparagus and artichokes — in fact we think it must be the 'Year of the Artichokes'

*New potatoes planted at the Cook community garden*



as pictures of Mario's and Tom's crops demonstrate. The reason of course is the winter and spring rainfall, shown in the chart below.

	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct
2019	21	6	22	39	22
2020	62	38	143	51	64*

*\*Rainfall to date*

As a result, we all have great hopes for bumper crops of tomatoes, capsicum, beans and the like — but the cockatoos are already circling!

—Peter Weddell (article and photos)

*Mario's artichokes (top photo); Tom's artichokes*



## Starting fresh at the Betty Cornhill garden

**M**y name is Guy and together with my wife Trish, I have two plots in the new Betty Cornhill garden (BCG) extension. We have been gardening for nearly 30 years, mainly at our Conder home and have always had a small vegetable and flower garden wherever we were.

About 10 years ago, our stormwater drain blocked and we experienced some serious flooding. We called the plumber who had to get a digger in to open a 5 x 1 metre hole to the depth of the drainpipes — about 60cm. The drains were then cleared and resealed, but with no digger on site anymore I thought to just fill in the hole. I did so with our vegetable garden.

My neighbour mentioned a method by which you can fill the hole with waste timber, saving the well dug soil for new beds. This is based on a method called Hügelkultur — *“a horticultural technique where a mound constructed from decaying wood debris and other compostable biomass plant materials is later (or immediately) planted as a raised bed. Adopted by permaculture advocates, it is suggested the technique helps to improve soil fertility, water retention, and soil warming, thus benefiting plants grown on or near such mounds.”* (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hügelkultur )

You can read about the pros and cons on the internet, but our personal experience indicated a very positive

growing technique, which we then used for all our new beds at the residence and are attempting now at BCG.

Firstly, it is not for the faint hearted. In our first 25m<sup>2</sup> I dug four holes, each about 2.5 metres long and 1.2 wide, so that our purchased raised beds would sit on top of them. I dug about 50–60 cm deep depending on where the clay line ran. That is approximately seven cubic metres of soil, or about 90 wheelbarrows!!! Yes, that hurt. The weather was so good when we started that I just kept digging. Any other time of year, I would have gone a lot slower, but Mike’s veggies looked so tasty and we had new gardeners all around. But not next time!! A much slower approach will be used.

I then filled each hole with branches, bits of trees, sticks and leaves from under the gum tree. Yes, that’s where all that rubbish went. Bits of Sylvain’s leftover pumpkin and eggplant stalks went in, then soil to ground level. I tried to put the larger pieces down first (5cm and wider), then the rest, because you really don’t want to dig into them ever! I then placed the purchased 1 x 2 metre x 30cm corrugated iron beds on top at ground level and filled with soil, horse and cow manure (another eight wheelbarrows per bed).

I now know what lies beneath the surface of our extension plots. There was very little root timber, maybe half

a dozen 3–4 cm thick pieces. Thanks to the BCG for getting rid of the bigger roots earlier. The soil was very friable, and the clay when I got to it, very soft!

Minh also suggested an alternative to hot composting, which requires a dedicated space and protection from wild animals. So, I also dug a trench about 30cm wide to bury our compost. In the last ten weeks, I have managed to fill it for about four metres. The animals found the first few additions but by placing some green manure and straw then dirt on top to hide the scent, we have been reasonably successful. So in another three months I will have dug a parallel trench, then one more over spring to have a 1 x 5 metre strip of compost for the next bed. I won’t be using the Hügelkultur method for this strip of the plot and will do the same thing in our second plot.

Then the joy of planting. Here I took the advice of fellow BCG gardeners... Chinese cabbage, leek, red and brown onions, garlic, pak choy, broccoli, red cabbage, English spinach and silver beet. We have been picking the leaves of anything and adding to stir fries and soups. Although, what we are really looking forward to is summer and potatoes, corn and pumpkins.

—Guy (article and photos)

(left to right) Pieces of a wattle and gum trees; the beds covered and the next holes on the right waiting to be dug; the completed beds



## Charnwood community garden—in pictures



*(above) Beautiful iris; arum*

*(below) Hail at Charnwood community garden (photo: Bill & Glenda McDevitt); Humour is alive and well at Charnwood! (photo: Jurgen Sadlo); Bees attracted to corn tassels*



## Mitchell community garden — connecting with community

With the recent welcoming rains, our garden not only got soaked — it almost flooded (twice). The Mitchell community garden is mostly flat and does not have enough of a slope to assist the excess water to drain away. A couple of innovative gardeners created trenches throughout the garden which guided the water to the plots — away from the pathways and the grassed parking area.

Now that we have enjoyed some welcomed sun and warmth, we are ready to get planting with our summer crops. Our greenhouse is well stocked with seeds propagating and seedlings — bring on November.

In July, we had inquiries from a couple of local residents about spending an hour or two in our garden. They wanted to experience the joy of gardening and the wellbeing effects the calmness of being in a garden like ours has to offer.

One gentleman, Mr Zhang, has spent much of his life gardening and then unfortunately suffered a stroke. He is limited in his ability to garden so instead comes and sits for a while in our garden, listening to the birds and enjoying the feeling that a garden can provide. He takes away some produce and looks forward to his next visit.



*Visitors to the garden*

Another visitor is a young man, Joshua, who has spent most of his life in a wheelchair. His illness limits him in so many activities, but gardening is one he enjoys. Just feeling the soil and watching the seeds send up their heads, brings a huge smile to his face.

Joshua has seeded pumpkins and beans for us to grow in our community *Donation Garden*. He has planted rosemary cuttings and weeded a little of our community garden space. His care team tell me that he really enjoys the time in our garden and looks forward to each Tuesday's visit to "get into the garden" again. His next venture is creating a large, oblong pot of herbs so he can harvest some for his team and his friends.

To be able to share our garden with those who enjoy the pleasure of being able to spend a little time in a healthy, safe and vibrant garden space, is what community is all about.

Recently, one of our gardeners took a drone video of the garden and some very impressive images of many of our plots and different areas. Seeing so many lush looking plots rewards you after the hard work of gardening through the cold, wet days of winter. We have welcomed spring, as for many it is the most enjoyable time to

*Joshua enjoying his visit to the garden*



spend an hour (or four) in your plot. Happy gardening everyone!

We have also welcomed our Mitchell Garden Committee, consisting of Narelle, Gwen, Kate, Carman, Richard and Jon, following the recent Annual General Meeting. We look forward to working together over the coming year.

—Narelle McLean (article and photos) and Rod Quiros (drone photo)



## COVID-19 nettles at the Holder community garden

As the new Convenor for the Holder community garden, I would like to start by thanking David Rice for his work as Convenor over the past year. With bushfires, heat, snow and COVID-19, it has certainly been a challenging year. Spring, however, has been warm and wet and brought with it some beautiful blossoms.

With *La Niña* settling in, hopefully it will be a cooler summer. *La Niña* brings more rain, which has meant the grass and weeds have also loved the gentler weather and are growing non-stop! It will take a number of working bees to keep on top of things.

At Holder, unfortunately COVID-19 has kept some people away from their gardens — literally. We were particularly concerned about one plot, as we had not seen the gardener for some time and the garlic crop was buried in waist-high nettles. I emailed the gardener who replied quickly to say they were overseas. They had gone to look after a sick family member a few months ago and were now stuck and unable to get a flight home anytime soon.

I said we would see what we could do to help. Together with my partner, we went to the garden one afternoon to make a start. When we arrived, we discovered a friend of the gardener was there. They had bravely cleared up half the nettles in only a T-shirt and food preparation gloves for protection! We were very happy they had made such a good start on the 60m<sup>2</sup> plot.

We got stuck in and were soon joined by another gardener who volunteered to lend a hand. The friend left, but the three of us persevered and finished off the job. We created a pile of nettles about 3m long by 1m high.

This story is an example of just one of the many challenges thrown up by COVID-19, but also a demonstration of the wonderful sense of community we have in our garden.

Happy gardening to you all!

— Neil Williams (article and photos)



(above) Flowering crab apples in the Holder garden  
(below) The mountain of pulled nettles



## Betty Cornhill gardeners' PUP walk

A pat on the back to a group of Betty Cornhill community garden members (and friends) who took time off from spring planting on a Sunday (4 October 2020) to go on a 'pick up plastic' walk along the banks of the Molonglo River west of the Scrivener Dam. Asked whose idea the initiative was, a gardener commented: "I planted the seed, someone watered it, and it grew."

Dubbed the PUP (pick up plastic) walk, Suzanne, Heather, Connie, Mike, John, and Gabi (later joined by Di and Bella who walked from Scrivener Dam to meet up with John) combed an area of river bank less than a kilometre from the Betty Cornhill community garden.

Amongst the more interesting 'finds' were a pair of tights, a football, and a fishing lure, that made up some of the five large bags of rubbish collected. Also dredged from the riverbank was the ubiquitous rusted shopping trolley. The PUP group hope such walks will become an



*A group of Betty Cornhill gardeners taking a break on their 'PUP' walk.*

annual event with other COGS gardens, and indeed the wider Canberra community, encouraged to organise their own walks with family

or friends, take a photo of their find and post it on Instagram or Facebook using the hashtag #pickupplastic.

—Gabi (article and photos)

## Successful Community Gardens Grant for the Charnwood community garden

Recently, the Charnwood community garden was pleased to receive a \$4,588 grant through the ACT Government's 2020 *Community Gardens Grant Program*. This money will buy materials to self-build a much-needed shelter from sun, rain, and hail at the garden. It will adjoin the existing garden tool shed and provide shelter:

- for our gardeners during meetings and gatherings
- to keep produce fresh before donating to Canberra City Care
- to keep produce fresh for sale on open days
- to conduct workshops
- to sort collected vegetable and flower seeds



*Concept of a rustic shelter to be built at the Charnwood community garden*

The Deed of Grant with the ACT Government was signed-off on 15 September 2020, so we now have 12 months to spend the money. Much work needs to be done, however, before embarking on this project:

- trees need approval to be removed and quotes obtained for their removal

- detailed building plans need to be drawn and approved by the ACT Government
- a building certifier needs to be engaged
- the site needs to be prepared
- materials need to be purchased
- a construction plan (with timelines) needs to be developed to guide the self-build
- OH&S issues need to be assessed
- working bees need to be organised.

It is hoped that all gardeners will assist in the build, learn to work as a team, learn some new skills, have some laughs, and get to know each other better.

—Teresa Rose (article and photos)

## Floriade comes to Kambah community garden

Canberrans are all garden lovers at heart. Who doesn't love Canberra's *Floriade* program, as we have known it for many years? However, with the COVID-19 hiccup, the traditional *Floriade* had to be cancelled. Not to be outdone by a virus, the wonderful organisers of this program put their heads together and created *Floriade: Reimagined*. This new iteration of *Floriade* created a trail of colour and joy across all of the Australian Capital Territory, as never seen before. Some displays were created by the *Floriade* team, with many others created by small and larger community groups such as COGS Kambah community garden!

*Floriade: Reimagined* publicised an offer for community groups and organisations to seek a donation of annuals and bulbs. Knowing that we had two, flat-wheeled, leaky old clapped-out wheelbarrows, we decided to apply for sufficient flowers to plant in the two barrows. That equated to less than 2 square metres. We were given 200 English daisies and 54 tulip bulbs. It was such a generous donation, but — dilemma — where to plant so many?

This generous donation set off a scurry of activity in our garden, with members purchasing potting mix

and kindly donating it, and other members donating and lending pots and large planters. In the end, we had more pots and planters and potting mix than bulbs and annuals, so, this encouraged and enthused our members to buy additional flower seedlings and bulbs, and so our small contribution to *Floriade: Reimagined* grew. Despite wet and cloudy days, cockatoos and bugs, our displays finally bloomed and brought the beauty of spring and the spirit of *Floriade* right into our garden.

Because there were a lot of wet days during the 5-week period of *Floriade* we didn't receive as many visitors as expected; however, many who walked past our fence line stopped and admired our beautiful display of flowers. Our garden plots were also looking amazing during this period. All the credit goes to our wonderful members who, as a group, consistently work together to maintain a combined garden that is a credit to each Kambah member and to COGS.

—Shirley Bolton (article and photos)

(below) The two wheelbarrows filled with *Floriade* bulbs  
Beautiful flowers in bloom at Kambah



Floriade Reimagined at Kambah



## Mekong Organics tours the Charnwood community Garden

The Charnwood community garden hosted a *Mekong Organics* study tour on 20 September 2020 under COVID-19 safety rules. The event was posted on Facebook and on the *Mekong Organics* website. The purpose of the study tour was to link new Vietnamese immigrants — interested in practising organic farming methods and understanding the concept of sharing and community engagement — with the theories of organic food production and practice at small-scale farming in the urban area of Canberra.

The event was organised by Dr Van Kien Nguyen, Director of *Mekong Organics*, Charnwood Garden plot-holders, supported by Dr Teresa Rose, Convenor of the Charnwood community garden, and COGS. The tour lasted for two hours with brief introductions from Dr Van Kien Nguyen on *Mekong Organics* and the purpose of the study tour, and from Dr Teresa Rose on the structure of COGS, the Charnwood garden, and principles of organic farming methods in growing vegetables at the Charnwood garden. Although the day was cold and overcast



*Teresa Rose, Convenor of Charnwood community garden, at the Mekong Organics study tour*

with intermittent rain, the tour managed to attract 24 new and young Vietnamese men, women and children from across the Canberra region. Feedback from the event is summed up by Mrs Ngan Nguyen:

“I enjoyed this event as I learnt a lot about how to grow organic vegetables in a small size, but very diversified in crops. Before I visited the garden, I thought it was a small piece of land. Now I know that there

are many small pieces of land which attached to individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, that people are sharing the farming methods and even share food. It is an ethical model of community organic farming that I have just seen. I can apply it to the practice organic vegetable farming in my home garden.”

— Dr Van Kien Nguyen (article and photos)

<https://mekongorganics.com/>

*Attendees at the Mekong Organics study tour*





## Growing a sense of community

By being an active member of a community garden, you are contributing to achieving several of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

My PhD research focussed on UNSDG 11 — “Sustainable cities and communities”. It found that community gardens, as well as growing food, can help to grow a sense of community. Several of my case study community gardens acted as “third places”<sup>\*</sup> — where home is first place; work/school is second place; and third places are informal public places, where people get to know others in their neighbourhood and develop a sense of place and community. Community gardens that are third places provide opportunities for conversations and activities between members and the local neighbourhood. For example, at a pocket community garden in inner Brisbane, members talked about chatting over the fence with locals; the neighbourhood playgroup children playing in the bamboo ‘cave’; a venue for knitting classes; and place for local teenagers to practise guitar. Members place the produce

*Pocket community garden, Brisbane*



*Denmark Library community garden*

out for anyone to help themselves (an abundance of passionfruit). A local business donated a pizza oven which puts to use the produce from the healthy herb garden for community events. One member described, “It’s nice to get out with your neighbours and work together towards a common goal and it’s nice to see a transformation take place.” (Stefan, Brisbane)

One library in Denmark transformed a large area of grey concrete into a community garden, with the help of the site’s private housing company (which provided fully matured apple trees in planters). As a library is already a good example of a third place, this community garden was particularly successful at bringing together the local residents. The act of gardening gave strangers a way to communicate across different languages and backgrounds. As the librarian said that before the garden, “It was very boring, very bland. It was just grey and grey. I think in many ways this garden has made at least this part of the neighbourhood more friendly, more inviting, more social.” (Yvonne, Copenhagen).

As people work together to create and maintain their local community garden they help to create an inclusive sense of place and play a role in strengthening the sociability of their local neighbourhood.

— Dr Joanne Dolley,  
Research Fellow, Griffith University

<sup>\*</sup>*The Great Good Place. Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You through the Day* (Oldenburg, 1989)

<https://www.e-elgar.com/shop/gbp/rethinking-third-places-9781786433909.html>

## From Canberra to Mullumbimby — gardening in a sub-tropical paradise

**C**anberra Organic readers may remember me from when I edited the magazine between 2013 and 2016. It was a great privilege — I learnt so much about gardening and made some wonderful friends. When my partner John retired in 2018, we left Canberra and moved to a one-hectare block of land outside Mullumbimby near glorious Byron Bay. It's so fertile here that even the most novice gardener can get good results. I'd been boasting about this to another COGS member when they suggested I write an article for the magazine ... so here it is!

### I love garden boxes

When we bought this property there were four garden boxes overgrown with weeds and feral plants. John built another four garden boxes, so we now have eight, which is perfect for rotation gardening and accommodating plants like garlic and potatoes that need a longer growing period. It also enables us to create soil mixes to suit particular plants and the raised sides offer some protection from the chooks.

### Chooks are a gardener's best friend

Chooks can present some challenges in the garden, but they are also a gardener's best friend. They provide eggs and manure and have an appetite for lots of insects that would otherwise compete with us for the plants. Our Canberra chickens made the long trip up here with us in the back of the car and have adjusted well to living in paradise — although I do think they miss the warm porridge I'd make them on frosty Canberra mornings. John made them a fabulous fox-proof chook pen and they've since been joined by four new Araucana chickens. The chooks spend a lot of time roaming around the hectare, eating pests (and plants) and doing healthy things like dust-bathing. Chooks have never forgotten that their ancestors were



*Sue in her garden with one of her chickens*

jungle fowl, so they prefer to graze under trees and shrubs. Trees also give them some protection from predators — we have sea eagles and other large birds of prey here.

Chooks need a good layer's mash, but also eat most things except citrus and onions. Never give them anything with yeast in it as they aren't designed to digest yeast and will get sick. Our kitchen waste goes into the rubbish or a mini bin for compost or a mini bin for the chooks — artwork on the containers ensures no confusion.

### Trouble in paradise!

Regular rain and warm, humid conditions encourage plant growth but also a plethora of pests and plant

problems. Being an organic gardener, I don't use chemical sprays so it's been a matter of finding out what works and sacrificing the occasional plant in the name of experimentation.

One of the best solutions has been growing nasturtiums with everything! These vibrant, underrated plants are edible but also exude a scent that repels many insects. They've saved my apple trees, rocket, finger limes and pomegranate.

French marigolds are good too, and I grow tansy with the brambles and with the sweetcorn to prevent cutworm. If the corn does get cutworm it goes to the chooks. I plant flowers to encourage bees and beneficial insects like ladybeetles.



Garden boxes

Sometimes covering things is the only option. Despite a home-made fruit-fly trap and a tansy plant the peach tree was under so much attack I had to net it.

Thanks to *Gardening Australia* I have a collection of home-made sprays to fight mildew and other fungal and

bacterial diseases. I've only had to resort to a purchased fungicide — registered for organic use of course — to treat anthracnose on the papaya and mango.

And there's always the pretend white moths to discourage the cabbage moths.

Flowers to attract insects



Rosella

### Pudding plants and dragonfruit

Subtropical climates suit a massive variety of fruit. The fruit of the black sapote (*Diospyros digyna*) is called 'chocolate pudding fruit' because it truly looks and tastes like chocolate pudding. Our sapote are young but growing with vigour.

You'll see a dragonfruit (*Hylocereus costaricensis*) growing up an old hills hoist in this area — all they need is a post! Full of anthocyanin (the rich red colour) dragonfruit makes an attractive addition to a fruit plate.

We have red papaya, passionfruit and pineapples; lychees and a full range of citrus trees, including the wonderful finger lime (*Citrus australasica*) that does so well in this area.

I'm also growing a vanilla orchid near the back veranda to make it easier to hand-pollinate on the rare occasion when it decides to produce a flower. Wish me luck.

Other exotic fruit we are growing includes blackberry jam fruit (*Randia formosa*), jaboticaba (*Myrciaria cauliflora*), Burdekin plum (*Pleio-gynium timorense*), Davidson plum (*Davidsonia jerseyana*), rosella (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*), grumichama (*Eugenia brasiliensis*) and a Brazilian custard apple (*Rollinia deliciosa*).

(continued on following page)

(from previous page)

### The banana circle experiment

Years ago, I read an article about a permaculture way of growing bananas. Bananas are hungry feeders and need a lot of water, so this seemed like a good solution. You dig a two metre in diameter hole — or get an excavator to do it for you — and mound the soil up on the sides. Then you cover it with cardboard, compost and mulch, and cut three holes at spaced intervals on the mound for the bananas. Bananas like well-drained soil and the pit is a good place to throw lawn clippings and garden waste. When you water, the run-off flushes through the composting material providing a rich source of nutrients. You can also plant pawpaws, sweet potatoes and other plants on the mound.

This is a banana-growing region, so you need a biosecurity permit to grow bananas. You get this from the NSW Department of Primary Industries and they will also give you the names of banana growers who can sell you the suckers or corms. I bought two lady finger corms and one cavendish corm from a local grower. The corm is a big rhizome with growing points that eventually pop through the surface. Lady finger take longer than cavendish to appear, but all of our bananas have now put in an appearance. In 18 months time I'll be climbing up a ladder with the silver ripening bags to bag



*Cavendish emerging*

the bunches. Then we'll have 100 bananas ripening all at once so it will be time for banana bread, banana cake and bananas with everything!

### Bees are next

Northern New South Wales is a big macadamia growing area which means there are a lot of beehives being moved around for pollination. Our neighbour has both European and native bees and the local honey is exceptional. Bees will be the next addition to our garden. I've done the workshop, researched hives and

just need to get it all set up and get the bees. We've been planting bee-friendly plants, so they'll have plenty of food.

We also have plenty of home-grown food — in fact so much that we give it away to our neighbours and friends. I never think of garden work as 'work'. It's sheer pleasure to be out with the chooks getting my hands in the dirt. But COGS readers already know how enjoyable gardening is, so I guess I'm preaching to the converted.

— Sue Pavasaris (article and photos)

*Ladybeetle eating aphids*



*Chooks at large*





## Paper wasps — my little garden friends

The 'paper wasp' (*Polistes humilis*) can be identified by their long thin legs and banded yellow and black colouring. They are common throughout Australia, except for Tasmania, and have been introduced to the North Island of New Zealand.

Some decades ago, I found out by accident that the common garden pest of the pear and cherry tree, the slug, was mysteriously absent. Back then, my father and I used to spray 'malathion' (an insecticide) to rid the trees of this pest.

One year I asked my father if he been spraying, but he hadn't. Instead I observed a long-legged paper wasp buzzing about the leaves. It turned out that they were doing a great job looking after the trees, as well as keeping spiders away from the walls and eaves of the house. Thereafter the spraying of insecticides ceased. This totally organic method is a perfect example of a native Australian insect



*Nests are carefully attached to a cup hook placed into wall, using a fine wire to attach the nest to the cup hook*

dealing with an introduced pest species.

I'd also heard of people using vacuum cleaner dust to deal with pear and cherry tree slugs, but this is something I've never personally

*The beautiful colour of the cherry tree in autumn*



supported. It is difficult to get full tree coverage and more importantly, this material comes from carpets and other household dusts, which would contain micro-plastics from clothes, and things like nylon from carpets. Not a good idea to put onto our fruit trees!

If my friends have paper wasps that they don't want, I collect and re-home them (nest and everything) at my place. This is best done at dusk, when they are usually quieter and located on and in the nest. Before sunrise they are then placed at their new location. Some will fly off at sunrise and do not return, but most come back to their new surroundings. It's important to set them up before sunrise, as this is when wasps get their bearings on their current location.

Amazingly I've never been stung — they seem to understand and are able to sense that I'm no serious threat to them. And the trees are so healthy that I can also enjoy the autumn foliage, as cherry trees have absolutely stunning colours.

Now the only issue seems to be that there is a shortage of slugs for the wasps to feed on. At times I drive around looking for some to bring back home for them. They can either sense or perhaps smell the slugs, as the wasps are always excited and can be basically hand fed. It also seems that this information is passed onto offspring and from season to season. They seem to know who I am, with new nests being built outside my window and on the side of the house that I spend most of my time.

More recently, I also think I've made another major discovery. Paper wasps also seem to attack the juvenile slugs of the 'elm-leaf beetle' (*Xanthogaleruca luteola*). If this is the case, then why not deploy the wasps instead of the current practice of injecting elm trees with insecticides?

—Michael Calkovics (article and photos)

## ***Calendula officinalis* — history and value**

The pot marigold, or *Calendula officinalis*, lights up our winters with its bright yellow and orange daisy flowers when everything else is dank and lifeless. The ability of pot marigolds to keep flowering all year round has earned them their official title — *calendulae* from the Latin meaning *throughout the months* or *first of the month* or even *little clock*. In Canberra they flourish when many tough flowering plants are overcome by the cold. In the dark mid-winter when it is too miserable to sally forth out of the house you can leave them alone for weeks only to find that they have been flowering away throughout your absence.

Pot marigolds are native to the Mediterranean. They were first recorded in the 3rd century BC. The Romans and Greeks used the flowers for garlands and crowns for ceremonial purposes, and the flowers are sacred in India where they have been used to decorate statues of Indian deities since ancient times. However, for the past 350 years Mexican marigolds have taken the place of the humble calendula in Indian garlands. They are a bit more robust. These newcomers belong to the *Tagetes* family and were sacred to the Aztecs.

Pot marigolds are recorded in gardens in France in the 5th century AD and seems to have reached England by the beginning of the 13th century. Seems the plant is no longer found in the wild, although it's not very fussy about where it grows as long as it gets lots of sun. It is easy to grow from seeds.

For a humble, often neglected plant, it is one of the most useful. It has been used for centuries for medicinal purposes, for cooking and other practical uses. It turns up in herbals and medieval paintings of gardens. *Calendulas* were used by country folk for remedies for inflamed lymphatic nodes, duodenal ulcers, inflammatory skin lesions,



*Calendula officinalis*

for treating leg ulcers and as an eye lotion for conjunctivitis. It is mainly the flowers that are used. *Calendula* tea made from the petals is drunk for its health benefits and calendula oil is used as an anti-inflammatory and to help wounds to heal.

Like other medicinal herbal plants, marigolds have become associated with rather miraculous claims over the years. Unfortunately, pot marigolds do not protect you from scorpion bites and sleeping on a pillow stuffed with them does not tell maids who they are going to marry.

Walking barefoot through a patch of marigolds does not help women to communicate with birds and they don't save you from highwaymen and robbers. This last idea probably comes from the legend that when Joseph and Mary were escaping to Egypt, they were set upon by robbers who took Mary's purse only to find it was full of golden flowers and not money. Hence calendulas were known as Mary's Gold or marigolds as we know them today.

A large number of pharmacological substances can be extracted from the petals, including a range of glycosides; triterpene, a volatile oil; gummy, mucilaginous calendulin; and soap-like saponins. All of these are said to aid bile secretion and promote wound healing.

Some pharmacological studies do suggest that extracts from calendula flowers have some antiviral, antigenotoxic and anti-inflammatory properties *in vitro*. There is some scientific evidence for the effectiveness of calendula ointments to treat skin problems. Randomised trials show that Calendula cream or ointment is effective in treating radiation dermatitis. There is evidence from *in vitro* studies that Calendula flower extract can help with cramps and constipation. There is also some experimental evidence that it could have anti-tumour properties. Like so many herbal plants used in the past for medicinal purposes, a lot more research is needed into the efficacy of different calendula preparations used to treat a range of medical conditions, in order to verify the accumulated folk wisdom about the use of the plant.

In the home, people used dried petals to flavour soups and stews and to colour them (instead of using very expensive saffron) hence the common name — pot marigold. In fact, marigold petals make an excellent yellow dye and have been used to colour cheese and butter (yes even in those days there were additives) and fabric. You can also add the petals to salads and omelettes and use them to make a delicious tea. They also make excellent cut flowers. Pot marigolds are very versatile and underrated plants.

—Elizabeth Dangerfield (article)

## Homemade golden Calendula oil

Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*) oil is very easy to make and has so many health benefits. I have been making my own oil for quite a few years, but in the past I used organic petals I was buying from a wholesaler. Since I started growing my own calendula flowers, the oil making has become a real passion.

Here are just some of the potential benefits that you will get from using calendula oil:

It helps with damaged skin of all kinds (safely used on all parts of the body); assists with irritated and dry skin; helps with healing minor wounds and cuts; is known to soothe eczema; relieves nappy rash; can assist with inflammation and pain; and has antibacterial and antifungal properties,

It is easy to grow calendula from seed, or with seedlings from the local nursery. It is delightfully easy to grow!

1. Once the plants flower, pick the flower heads as they bloom.
2. Place the flowers on a cotton cloth to dry. I use only petals as I love detail, but you can use flower heads as well.
3. When they are completely dried (3–5 days approximately), fill a clean, sterilised jar with the petals and press them in to fill as much as it possibly can fit.
4. Slowly pour in organic extra virgin olive oil while gently tapping the jar on a hard surface to make sure that it fills all the space in the jar.

5. Leave the lid off for around half an hour and pour in more oil if needed to completely cover the petals. There will be air bubbles coming out.
6. If you have some rosemary essential oil on hand you can add a drop which will help to preserve the oil.
7. When that is finished, close the jar and place on a sunny window sill. Every now and then shake the jar a little to redistribute the oil through the petals.
8. In 4–6 weeks strain the petals and pour oil into a dark bottle (I use an amber bottle). And it is ready to use!

### A couple of notes

You will get a beautiful golden colour when extracting. A little bit goes a long way!

You can use almond or walnut oil instead of the olive oil, however, they are more fragile and may expire sooner.

With the olive oil, you can macerate in the sun. With the almond or walnut oil, it has to be in a dark, cool place. If you are in Australia or Europe, Hofer make a nice inexpensive organic olive oil (from Aldi).

If you like lavender, you can add a layer of lavender flowers to it as well. For my personal use, I am currently making a mix of calendula, red clover, lavender and chamomile.

Enjoy making this beautiful oil that will nourish your skin!

—Nataša Zaric (article and photo)



## Yacon — cultivation and health benefits

My sister has been growing yacon in her vegetable garden for a few years now and usually gives me some of her harvested tubers for eating. This year, I researched the plant online and asked for some rhizomes so that I can grow them in my own garden and plot. "Yacon" means "water root" in the Inca language and its tubers were historically highly valued as a wild source of thirst-quenching refreshment for travellers<sup>1</sup>. Yacon, *Smallanthus sonchifolius*, is a species of perennial daisy grown in the northern and central Andes, from Colombia to northern Argentina. It is also grown on the Atherton Tablelands in Queensland, in southern Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand, where the climate is mild and the growing season is long. Yacon is also called "Peruvian ground apple", possibly from the French name for potato, *pomme de terre* (ground apple).

Yacon is a close relative of the sunflower and Jerusalem artichoke. It's a vigorous grower, as plants can grow to over two metres in height and produce small, inconspicuous yellow flowers at the end of the growing season. The plant produces a perennial rhizome to which the edible, succulent storage roots are attached, and which are the principal product of the plant. The rhizome develops just under the surface of the soil and continuously produces aerial shoots. In dry or cold seasons, these aerial shoots die back, however, the plant reshoots from the rhizome during warmer, moist conditions. The plant can be grown using cuttings and the purple corms at the bottom of the stalks. It will not reproduce from the tubers, which will rot in the ground if not harvested.

The edible tubers can grow up to a kilogram or more. The tubers contain fructooligosaccharide which is an indigestible polysaccharide consisting of fructose which tastes sweet but passes through the digestive tract unmetabolised. Hence it has very little caloric value but does have a prebiotic effect, meaning it is used by beneficial bacteria to enhance colon health and aid digestion.



*Yacon eating tubers*

Yacon tubers are crisp, juicy, resinous and slightly sweet tasting, with floral undertones to the flavour, perhaps due to the presence of inulin. "The leaves of the yacon contain quantities of protocatechuic, chlorogenic, caffeic, and ferulic acids, which gives tisanes made from the leaves prebiotic and antioxidant properties"<sup>2</sup>.

Yacon can be easily grown in gardens in climates with only gentle frosts and should be planted in a well-dug bed in early spring when the danger of frost is over as aerial parts are damaged by frost, however the tubers are not harmed unless they freeze solid. The plants grow best when fertilised.

After the first few frosts in autumn, the tops will die and the tuberous storage roots are ready for harvesting. It is best to leave the perennial rhizomes in the ground for propagating the following spring. Tubers left in the sun to harden

after harvest taste better than those eaten immediately.

"Until the early 2000s, yacon was hardly known outside of its limited native range and was not available from urban markets. However, press reports of its use in Japan for its purported antihyperglycemic properties made the crop more widely known in Lima and other Peruvian cities. Novel products such as yacon syrup and tea have been developed. Both products are popular among diabetics and dieters"<sup>3</sup>.

Yacon is easy to grow, tastes wonderful and is good for your health, so give it a go!

—Ange McNeilly (article and photos)

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2010/dec/13/how-grow-and-cook-yacon>

<sup>2</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yac%C3%B3n>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## Towering Inwormo!

It came from the deep, dark depths of below. Partially decomposed matter, emanating from the mouldering tube, began moving. Wriggling. Squirming, to escape the clutches of that garden crazed fist...

**I've got worms!**

Not exactly the most endearing phrase to exit the vocal chords of my keen-bean kid. To anyone inoculated with a spring dose of garden mania, however, hearing of worms wriggling rampant in the vegetable patch is music to the vermiculture loving ears.

It was one autumn, after my compost bins began overflowing with late blooming food plant debris, that I first got into worm farming. Since stomping in mud, climbing through chook pens, and anything else in the “totally gross” category of outdoor activities was my children’s flavour of the month, trialling a worm farm seemed an obvious household investment.

After a particularly slow, cold winter start, our food scrap factory began yielding a modest return on investment, with enough worm tea to see our spring seedlings (tomato, cucumber, zucchini ... you get the tea-seasoned picture) off to a rocketing start. By the following season, we had a sizable lump sum (two trays' worth) of worm castings and a steady supply of weekly, worm-tea-infused soil conditioner.

So as to expand our flaring love for worming about the garden, we decided to try our hand (and spade) at an in-ground form of the farm: worm towers. Created from a length of poly-pipe sunk deep into the garden bed, these wormeries proved to be an ergonomic way of searing those nearby garden weeds (and spare food scraps) as well as adding plenty of *Lumbricus* love to the soil.

For anyone keen on venturing outside the worm farming box and burning through some weeds, tower style, then I present to you the instructions for making your very own 'Towering Inwormo' (as seen at our Kaleen COGS garden):

### Resources:

- Poly-pipe 60cm length x 15–20cm diameter
- Carbon (brown leaves, shredded paper, straw)
- Straw/coir fibre (or both)
- Greens (weeds, food scraps)
- Worm tower cover (ceramic plate, plastic pot)
- Worms

### Method:

To prepare the worm tower, you need to get handy with the drill. Measure and draw a line around the poly-pipe 40cm from one end. Using a large drill bit (at least 1–1½ cm wide), drill holes at regular intervals, all over the pipe, ensuring that the holes remain below the 40cm marking.



*Towering Inwormo filled with layers of worms and carbon-based materials*

These holes will allow the worms to move in and out of the tower at will.

Dig a hole (I use a QwikDrill) 50 cm deep and wide enough to accommodate for the diameter of the pipe. Place the pipe into the hole and secure the tower by pushing the soil firmly around it.

Fill the pipe 1/3 full with carbon material. Layer on the worms (I used a 1kg yoghurt bucket full of worms from my worm farm) and add another couple of handfuls of carbon-based material followed by a couple of handfuls of greens. Top with straw or coir fibre. Water in the worms (4–5L) and cover the worm tower with a plastic pot or ceramic plate. Leave the worms for a couple of weeks before feeding again. This gives them time to adapt to their new home.

To keep your Towering Inwormo happy, healthy and blazing at the ready:

- Place a couple of handfuls of greens in the tower each week, as well as some carbon material.
- Ensure the contents of the tower remains moist. If the tower starts smelling or vinegar flies emerge from the funnel, add some carbon material and some crushed up eggshells.

Now it's time to sit back and enjoy the more wholesome, wormtastic fruits of your hard-earned garden labour ... so long as you managed to get your worms into the tower before those thieving neighbourhood magpies had their spring fill!!

—Dianna Trudgian (article and photos)

## Controlling snails, slugs, slaters and earwigs in organic gardens

Plentiful rainfall during spring has favoured an increase in snail, slater, slug and, to a lesser extent, earwig populations. Some gardeners suggest that these invertebrates are in 'pest' proportions causing seedlings to disappear overnight. They often ask what techniques can be used to control them in organic gardens.

COGS' advice is to use integrated pest management ([cogs.asn.au/integrated-pest-management](http://cogs.asn.au/integrated-pest-management)). This requires identifying the pest you are dealing with and developing an understanding of its biology before trying to manage it using various control measures (see Tables 1 and 2), and also understanding what contribution they make to the ecosystem.

COGS does not allow chickens in its community gardens, so they cannot be used as a means of organic pest control. COGS also does not encourage 'organically acceptable sprays' because they are still toxic, can disrupt the natural ecosystem in your plot and harm beneficial insects.













Some organic control measures (such as that shown in Photo 1) can also kill beneficial insects, so the method used must be monitored as to whether the benefits of killing the pests outweigh the loss of beneficial insects. The aim is to manage 'pests' not to eradicate them and to foster an ecosystem that is in balance. Feedback from productive gardeners suggests that plot hygiene is the best defence against pests.

—Teresa Rose  
(article and photos)



*Vegetable oil and soya sauce have successfully killed snail, slug, slater and earwig pests but have also killed beneficial arthropods such as spiders, lacewings and beetles. (This tray was placed underneath my rhubarb.)*

**Table 1: Damage and control of four invertebrate pests**

Pest	What it looks like	Typical damage caused	A suggested control
Snail			
Slug			
Slater			
Earwig			

**Table 2: Characteristics and control of four invertebrate pests**

Characteristics	Invertebrate pest			
	Snail	Slug	Slater	Earwig
<b>Group</b>	<i>Molluscs</i>	<i>Molluscs</i>	<i>Crustaceans</i>	<i>Insects</i>
<b>Class</b>	<i>Gastropoda</i>	<i>Gastropoda</i>	<i>Isopoda</i>	<i>Dermaptera</i>
<b>Habit and habitat</b>	No legs; cannot hear; does not like sunlight; leaves a slime trail; uses sense of smell to find food; stores food for winter; lives 2–3 years; can have up to 430 hatchlings.	No legs; has tentacles, blowholes and thousands of backward pointing teeth; lives 1–6 years; lays 20–100 eggs; leaves a slime trail; does not like thick foliage or strong-smelling plants.	Seven pairs of legs; can roll into a ball; can live for 2–3 years; scavengers. Attracted to stressed plants; lives on damp ground surfaces, among fallen leaves and decaying logs, rock heaps, heaps of rotting vegetation, shady dark places and under objects like pot plants and bricks.	Attracted to stressed plants. Hides in confined areas such as rocks, bark, timber and under debris. If an earwig does not budge it is probably protecting its pale oval eggs beneath it. In summer they congregate in groups under plants, organic mulch or debris to shelter from the hot weather
<b>Survival requirements</b>	Needs to keep skin damp to breathe.	Needs to keep skin damp to breathe; needs water to generate a thick protective mucous to cover the body; sun will desiccate slugs.	Moist environment; does not like venturing far from cover.	Needs shade.
<b>Diet</b>	Plants, fruits, leaves, vegetables, stems, bark, fungi. Dead or dying plants. Sand and soil for calcium to obtain thicker shell.	Any kind of vegetation but prefers tender leaves. Will eat decaying vegetables, fruits, leaves and fungi.	Eats dead or damaged plants, animal remains and other decaying organic matter.	Eats other small invertebrates. Shreds and eats dead or damaged plants.
<b>Most active</b>	At night; early morning when ground is wet; after rain.	At night when risk of dehydration is low; early morning when ground is wet; after rain.	At night.	At night; hides during the day in dark and moist spaces.
<b>Contribution to the ecosystem</b>	Vital food source for birds and mammals; eats harmful parasites from some plants; recycles organic matter into compost to build the soil.	Vital food source for birds, mammals, earthworms and insects; recycles organic matter into compost to build the soil.	Recycles organic matter into compost to build the soil.	Preys on aphids, slugs and snails
<b>Predators</b>	Earwigs, centipedes, rats, mice, beetles, possums, leopard slugs, lizards, birds, snakes, mammals.	Earwigs, beetles, rats, leopard slugs, lizards, snakes and possums.	Birds (magpies), centipedes, toads, spiders.	Frogs, birds
<b>Control measures</b>	Do not over water. Manual removal early morning; beer in jar lids; remove shade and wet conditions. Crushed egg shells; sharp grit. Plant strong smelling herbs.	Do not over water. Manual removal early morning. Crushed egg shells. Plant strong smelling herbs.	Don't over water. Keep leaves and fruit off the ground; coffee grounds; sweet water traps with honey, sugar or fruit juice. Upturned melon skins, wet crumpled paper. Scooped out half of potato or orange; yoghurt, sour cream and	Manual removal. Dry crumpled paper in upturned pots; loosely rolled newspaper. Remove mulch around plants; trays of oil with soy sauce. Remove eggs; remove breeding sites. Turn compost heap regularly.

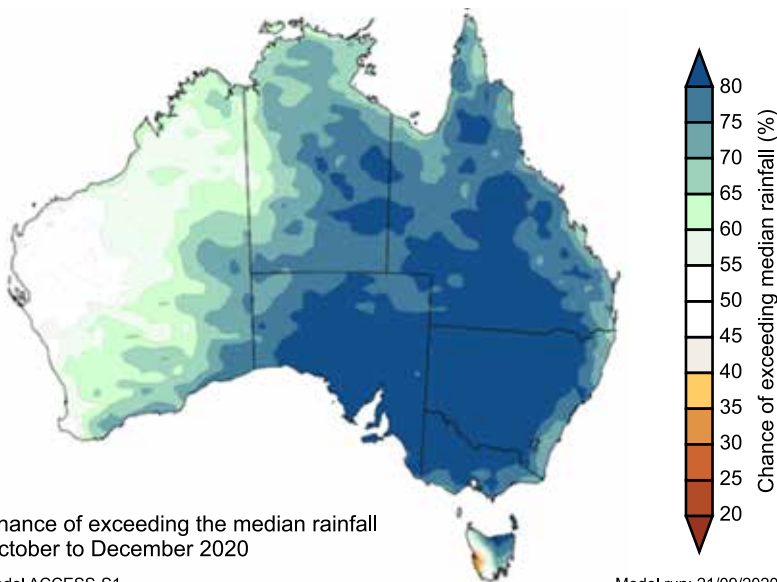
## La Niña declared

The Bureau of Meteorology declared on 29 September 2020 that a La Niña has developed in the Pacific Ocean and that it will continue well into summer 2020–21.

La Niña is the cool phase of the El Niño and is associated with cooler than average sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean. Recent observations show the central tropical Pacific Ocean is now 0.8°C cooler than normal.

La Niña events often form in autumn or winter, then decay in late summer. The greatest impact normally occurs during the spring and early summer period. La Niña events normally last for around a year, however they can be shorter, or much longer.

Five of eight forecast models predict the current event to be strong, while three suggest moderate strength. Overall, the modelling suggests this event will not be as strong as the La Niña of 2010–12, which was one of the four strongest on record.



Chance of exceeding the median rainfall October to December 2020

Model ACCESS-S1  
Base Period: 1990–2012

Model run: 21/09/2020  
Issued: 24/00/2020

Five models of the Indian Ocean indicate the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) will be negative for October, and three models continue negative IOD values into November.

Both La Niña and negative IOD typically increase the chance of above average rainfall across much of Australia during spring. It can also mean cooler days, more tropical cyclones, and an earlier onset of the first rains of the wet season across the north.

### Dam levels in the Canberra region and capital cities

	Sept 2020	Sept 2019
ACT storages	85%	54%
Murray-Darling Basin	56%	36%
Burrinjuck Dam	80%	34%
Blowering Dam	77%	58%
Sydney	94%	48%
Melbourne	72%	63%
Brisbane	61%	62%
Adelaide	67%	59%
Perth	47%	48%

—Andy Hrast (article)



# Adult WORMS for sale

Packs include juvenile worms and worm capsules (eggs)

**1000 worms (0.25 kg) \$30.00**

**2000 worms (0.5 kg) \$50.00**

**4000 worms (1.0 kg) \$90.00**

- Pack contains adult composting worms consisting of three varieties; Red wiggler, Tiger and Indian blue
- Worms will consume over half of their body weight in a day
- Worms produce a casting (vermicaste) that is rich with nutrients and full of microbial activity

# Global Worming

Bungendore Road, Tarago NSW 2580

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Instagram: @global\_worming



## Gardening in a time of plague

Lockdown and isolation. Months of chocolate and TV. Can't travel. But in Canberra there's always somewhere to walk. And I rediscover the wilderness of my home garden. It's very large and out of control. Well, it has been neglected for forty years. Our busy lives — two professions, three children, demanding hobbies, and retirement spent travelling to see grandchildren.

In the autumn and winter days of lockdown I pull vagrant couch grass from neglected corners; it has thrived and spread in years of drought. I excavate a couple of 'hills' that we constructed from paving stones and concrete rubble in the seventies. I think we were striving for an adventure playground. Archaeological finds include toy soldiers from our kids in the 1970s, a milk bottle top also from that era, broken tiles and cement left by the 1950s German builders, and a knapped stone, maybe an arrowhead, from time before 1820.

**I weed the carrots  
prune the climbing rose  
while the world  
passes one million cases  
of COVID-19**

We mulch and compost to build veggie beds. Inspired by the 'pollinator island' concept we plant native shrubs, also lavenders. Some things are immovable, like the great mulberry tree that's split into two halves; the rotting woodheap that we rarely use; and the remnant 'lawn' once kept for kids to play on and guinea pigs and chooks to graze. Kids, chooks, guinea pigs are long gone but there is a difference of opinion on whether or not to keep the grass. Let's leave it for now.

**my spade in the soil  
planting out seedlings  
over there  
it's men in masks digging  
to bury the dead**

Our government stimulus payments come in so we pass it on to the local economy. The 'Odd Job Lads' help us with the heavier weeding, mulching, and cutting back ivy and honeysuckle. 'A Handyman' is engaged to paint the old shed. Which leads us on to another lockdown project: clearing the shed of accumulated stuff.

**getting rid  
of old tins of paint  
letting go  
of old intentions  
unfulfilled ... moving on**

And now this spring with La Niña and its blessed rain. A wonderful succession of bulbs flowering; jonquils and snowdrops; daffodils; triteleia and grape hyacinths; bluebells and freesias. Crops of parsnips and leeks and spinach now finishing; garlic and carrots and snow peas and broad beans coming on. An abundance of lemons and rhubarb.

**rambling rose  
in creamy cascades  
lilac blooms  
for older lovers  
love play lingers**

—Gerry Jacobson (article and poem)



Photo: Matt Mawson



# 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.

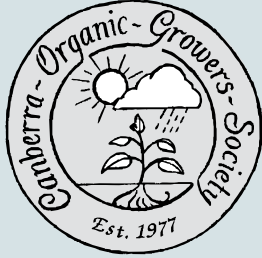
Remember to leave space in your vegie patch for those winter vegetables that prefer to be planted in late summer to early autumn. Brassicas and other winter crops need time to mature before the extreme cold of winter sets in.

	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.



## The future direction of COGS

COGS is close to signing a 10-year licence agreement with the ACT Government that will cover most of its gardens.

With the certainty of the 10-year licence, the COGS Executive Committee sees this as an opportune time to consider the future directions of COGS and is planning a half-day strategic workshop for early next year.

The sorts of questions that will be considered include:

1. What do you consider is the role of COGS, both in the wider community and in the oversight of the 12 gardens?
2. Why did you join COGS?
3. Should one of COGS' primary objectives continue to be transforming community perceptions about organic growing, or is organic growing now considered mainstream practice?
4. What do you think should be the objectives of COGS be over the next 5 years or 10 years?
5. Should COGS' focus be on running community gardens, or should it be solely focused on lobbying for organic gardening in the ACT, with garden committees taking full responsibility for management of community gardens?
6. Is there an ongoing role for COGS to hold public talks on organic growing, or hands-on workshops in the gardens? Can this be better done through social media?
7. Would members be prepared to pay higher fees in return for paid professional management of COGS? An expanded number of gardens?
8. Has COGS become so big that the average garden member cannot see the need to be involved in the work done by the COGS Executive Committee? How could this be reversed? Is it time to divide COGS into 12 autonomous associations, one for each garden?
9. What are the key infrastructure and investment needs of COGS gardens?
10. What issues would members like to learn about/ receive more information on? For example, managing and improving Canberra's soils?

The Executive Committee is interested to hear your views on these and any other matters that are of concern or interest to you.

Please email me directly ([president@cogs.asn.au](mailto:president@cogs.asn.au)) or pass your views through your garden convenor. I look forward to hearing from you.

—Andy Hrast (article)

# What's On



## Let's talk about gardening

**Our Facebook community is growing every week.**

Our page includes the latest on the events, news and gardening advice that matter to Canberra gardeners.

Just search for the Canberra Organic Growers Society and 'like' the page.

OUR FACEBOOK FOLLOWERS

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Find us on: **facebook**

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Please remember to email [members@cogs.asn.au](mailto:members@cogs.asn.au) with any changes to your email or postal address, or correspondence preferences.

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Canberra Organic is a unique way to reach people in the Canberra region who have an interest in organics, gardening and the environment.

Our circulation is around 700.

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Payment is to be made in advance. COGS members are eligible for the price in brackets.

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Full page	\$72 (\$60)	\$240 (\$200)

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**Tosca disguised as a tree**  
(photo: Sue Pavasaris)