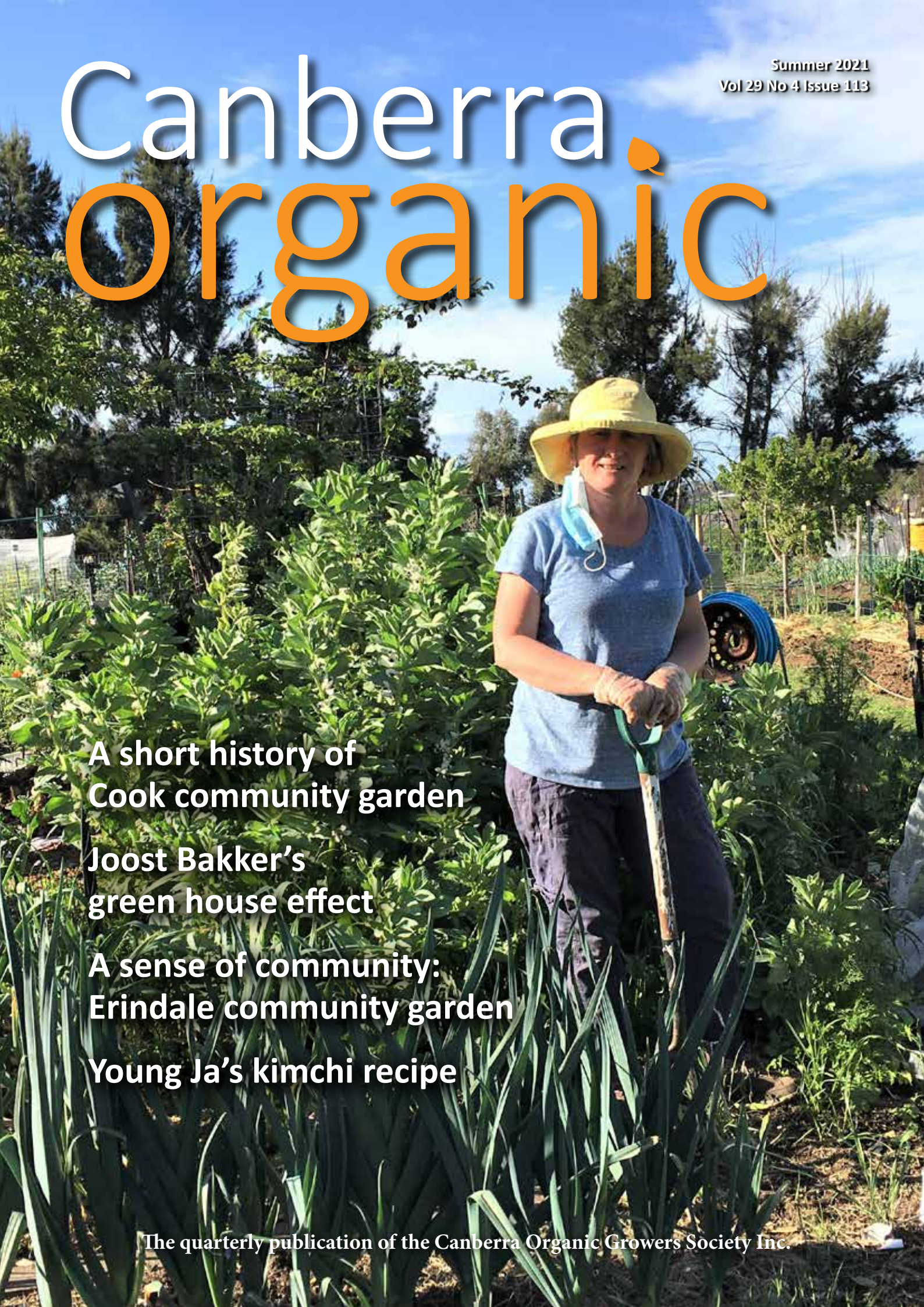


Canberra organic

A woman wearing a yellow wide-brimmed hat, a blue t-shirt, and purple pants is standing in a lush garden. She is holding a green-handled tool, possibly a shovel or trowel, and has a blue face mask hanging from her neck. The garden is filled with various green plants, including tall leafy greens and what appear to be asparagus in the foreground. The background shows more garden beds and trees under a clear blue sky.

Summer 2021
Vol 29 No 4 Issue 113

**A short history of
Cook community garden**

**Joost Bakker's
green house effect**

**A sense of community:
Erindale community garden**

Young Ja's kimchi recipe

The quarterly publication of the Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.

editor's note

Welcome to the summer 2021 edition of *Canberra Organic*. In our last magazine we had an article discussing how lucky we had been throughout the pandemic — only to be plunged into lockdown the week the magazine was due to the printers. For those who usually receive a paper copy, you will be enjoying both the spring and summer 2021 magazines together, after having received an earlier electronic copy of the spring magazine due to the closure of the printers.

For me, lockdown enabled me to focus on my courtyard garden. My wicking bed is now growing a

wonderful selection of salad greens and herbs and my hanging baskets are starting to fruit with strawberries. However I am most excited about the arrival of a small gooseberry that has appeared on my gooseberry bush. Growing up in England I have vivid memories of gooseberry picking in the garden of a friend of my parents. Our haul would be turned into a gooseberry crumble or gooseberry pie, served with creamy, hot custard. There is something so yummy about the tart taste they have.

Despite the lockdown, we still have plenty of stories from around our gardens and across the Canberra



community. With all of the recent rain, our gardens have still been producing and that is reflected in the wonderful stories we have to share with you for summer. I've particularly enjoyed reading about the sense of community Chris has felt after recently joining Erindale community garden and am looking forward to trying Young Ja's Kimchi recipe. We also have reprinted with permission an article on Joost Bakker's 'green house effect', as well as an extract from the Cook community gardens new booklet *From bush to bounty: A short history of the COGS Cook community garden*, which has been included in the magazine ahead of its official release later this year.

As the weather warms and the restrictions ease, I encourage you to get out into the garden and enjoy both the fruits of your labour and the sense of community we share at COGS. Wishing you all the best for the growing season ahead.

—Rebecca Travers
(article and photos)

Herbs and salad greens flourishing in my wicking bed



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FRONT COVER: Jo working in her verdant plot.
Photo by Ange McNeilly

president's column

The last three months, since the last edition of the *Canberra Organic*, have been a difficult time with the lockdown in the ACT.

As COGS gardeners, we have been fortunate that the COGS gardens have been able to be kept open for the permitted exercise during the lockdown. Initially one hour per day, then increasing to two and then four hours per day. I know most of our gardeners have taken advantage of the opportunity. I think I am safe in saying we are all mentally better off for having had the garden option for outside exercise available to us!

Thank you to everyone for following the conditions that we had to impose to keep the gardens open, including the use of the 'Check-In CBR' app.

The inability to have organised working bees during the spring growing season has meant that a backlog of work has developed. An innovative approach of a 'virtual working bee' has been used by some gardens to keep on top of the most immediate work to keep or gardens operating as well as keeping the spring growth, during this very wet spring, under control. A big thank you to all the people who put in many hours of their time, this year and in the past.

The lockdown has meant the holding of garden AGMs in their usual format has not been possible during September. The COGS Executive Committee agreed to extend the time for holding of garden AGMs to the end of October, as well as encouraging virtual meetings. Thank you to Peter Weddell from the Cook community garden for developing the techniques for these virtual meetings, which have been taken up by more than half the gardens.

The COGS Executive Committee has continued to operate during the last few months, as it has for most of the last two years — with the use of Zoom conferencing. This has enabled us to keep COGS operating and meet all of our operational and regulatory requirements. We have become quite adept!

The spring edition of *Canberra Organic* was produced as an electronic-only edition and emailed to all COGS members because the printer we use was closed due to the lockdown. The COGS Executive Committee decided that the printed version of the spring magazine would instead be sent out to those that receive a hard copy, with the summer edition. For some members, that's why you have received two magazines at once!

Covered wagon at Betty Cornhill garden (photo, Matt Mawson)



Earlier this year, a Strategic Planning Workshop was held which identified a number of areas of work for COGS. There is a report elsewhere in the magazine on how that is progressing. There are two pieces of work that I particularly want to highlight: the infrastructure review and the review of the COGS Constitution. There are reports on both areas of work in this edition of the magazine.

The infrastructure review identified gaps in garden resources and identified priorities. Thank you to everyone involved, especially Neil Williams who coordinated that work. As a result for the first time COGS has an overall view of the infrastructure and resources in its garden and this means investment can be accurately targeted. COGS is in the fortunate position of being in a strong financial position and I encourage gardens to come forward with proposals for funding of the areas identified in the review or other needs that may have emerged.

The review and updating of the COGS constitution is also progressing well to bring it into line with current legislation and practices in use in COGS. There will be more on that work in coming editions of the magazine.

Finally, congratulations to the Holder Garden with their successful bid for an ACT Government grant to upgrade their water reticulation system.

With a favourable weather outlook and the end of the lockdown, we can look forward with confidence to a bountiful harvest this season.

Happy gardening.

— Andy Hrast (article)

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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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Sandra's salad in a bathtub (photo, Matt Mawson)



Erindale community garden — being part of the COGS community

I'm a relatively newcomer to the ranks of the COGS community. I'd heard about the organisation over the years having been shown copies of your great magazine — the articles in them are full of inspiration and so relevant for the Canberra environment — visiting display gardens through the Open Gardens Scheme and talking with one of your great contributors Ange McNeilly, whilst I was helping at the Discovery Garden at the Arboretum.

Last year I downsized — moving from a large home on approximately 1100sqm to a smaller courtyard home on 313sqm. As I've always gardened, my daughter was concerned whether I'd have enough garden space — well I found a lovely house with great spaces front and back for me to potter in and thought that there was enough space here for me to make my mark! However, factor in wanting to grow things like zucchini, pumpkin and all those other plants that just need space — well it was going to be a challenge. It was while I was visiting the COGS Mitchell community garden last year that I suddenly had an 'a-ha' moment and decided I should put my name down for a plot.

Going forward, I now have a plot at the Erindale community garden.



Chris and Rod sieving the compost, being careful that any earthworms go through the sieve unharmed

Since it's one of the smaller COGS gardens, everyone needs to help pitch in with the communal areas. It's been an interesting year with COVID restrictions limiting people's abilities to get to the garden and quite a bit of inclement weather. During winter I had been gradually cutting back the blackberry canes when I could, with others helping when they had time. But with limited availability of

people during the winter, the plants have been taking over. Mint and lemon balm has been finding its way onto the garden paths, borage has been spilling over blocking access on some paths, weeds — including that hated 'sticky weed' has been creeping in — all in all, there is plenty to do.

Last Saturday the weather was great and with restrictions eased more — I was finally able to work with others at the garden. We started off attacking the compost area. Erindale has three large bays for compost — two of the bays were due for clearing out to make room for the new clippings/weeds which will soon come. We got busy digging up the compost, sieving it and putting it in large tubs ready for members to use when needed. There is something great in feeling newly made compost and looking at the abundance of worms — it's sort of quite magical really when you think it comes from a pile of old weeds, leaves, paper and waste from an organic greengrocer (Didi, our

Our composting adventures were most productive. We are very keen on producing lots of compost for our garden. At the garden we grow lots of borage (and also comfrey) to provide food for pollinator insects — the bees absolutely go crazy — but they are also most valuable 'accelerator' plants to speed up the composting process. We added garden waste, the bigger twigs of the old compost, shredded paper and torn newspaper, a bit of the 'old' compost with earthworms, veggie and fruit scraps, chook poo pellets or whatever else we have, a bit of cow manure, sheep manure and layer it up — like a sandwich! The last layer are leaves from our separate leaf compost pile. Once we run out of leaves, we will cover with some mulch of pea straw or whatever we have available. We also add nettles to compost as powerhouse for minerals and another valuable compost accelerator plant. We then cover the whole pile with a blanket or shade cloth depending on the season.

(continued on following page)

Tulip time at Kambah community garden

It's been tulip time in Kambah Community garden this spring. The garden has been abloom with a dazzling display of tulips and violas and other annuals.

The display has been part of the Floriade community program where schools and Community organisations, including gardens, participate in the annual Floriade display around the city and suburbs.

The flowers have adorned every spare space in the garden, including old wheelbarrows, disused watering cans, planter boxes and in some cases, scattered among the vegetables in some plots.

An enthusiastic working bee at the end of winter planted 400 tulip bulbs and another 400 annuals. Most survived despite the usual predations of cockatoos.

This has been the second year Kambah has participated in Floriade Community and looks forward to doing so again next year — and to another blooming spring.

— Allan Sharp (article and photos)



(continued from previous page)

convenor, gets regular waste from them). I've done composting at my previous home but never really went to the trouble of sieving it all — I can tell you it is well worth the effort!! We also started setting up our communal worm farms, getting them ready for the season to come.

It wasn't all work though. Didi had thoughtfully brought along organic fruit and nuts etc. to share so we were able to take a break. I learnt a bit about some of the more 'exotic' plants grown there by one of the Korean born members — plants I had never seen or tasted before.

I'm keen to venture further along this path — learning and growing more. Erindale has some great future plans including having a pergola built and putting in a more permanent table/chairs setting, along with more communal gardens. The people in



*(left) colourful scraps fill the compost heap at Erindale;
(right) leaves are added to cover the compost*



the neighbouring houses regularly walk past on their way to the Erindale shopping centre or play with their dogs in the open space next to the

garden — everyone is very friendly and it has a great community feel!

—Chris Kemp (article),
Didi Sommer (photos)

Holder community garden – A time of renewal

As is the case for many other COGS gardens, things have not been as busy at the Holder community garden due to the lockdown. As the COVID-19 situation in Sydney worsened, we made the decision to defer our 20th anniversary celebration which was scheduled for 18 July 2021. We hope to hold this celebration by the end of the year.

As part of the annual membership renewal process a number of our gardeners gave up their plots, including some that downsized their holdings but remained in the garden. Sadly, one of our original members from 2001 also left the garden, leaving her two 45sqm plots.

We took the opportunity from people leaving the garden and those downsizing their holdings to bring in new gardeners from our waitlist. We were able to split holdings of 90sqm into two 45sqm plots to enable two people off our waitlist to join the garden. In some cases, we split a 45sqm holding into two plots for those that wanted a smaller plot. Overall, nine people left the garden



Solarising some of the plots at Holder

and 12 people — plus their partners — joined the garden and we have a few vacant plots.

A few of our plots had been abandoned and had become overgrown with weeds. We are now in the process of solarising these plots by covering them up with heavy black plastic to kill the weeds. We

hope to be able to offer up these plots in the new year to new members.

Spring was also a time for renewal for our bees. In early October some bees left the existing colonies in our hives at the southern end of the garden and two swarms formed on trees nearby. Eric, our resident beekeeper, was able to get down to the garden quickly and scoop them up and put them into a temporary hive to ‘calm them down’ before moving them into a permanent hive.

Finally, we had good news that our application for a grant from the ACT Government to replace our taps and risers has been successful. The Government sought applications in June this year for the next \$40,000 round of its Community Gardens Grant scheme¹. Replacement of the taps and risers at Holder was seen as a high priority as part of the recent COGS Infrastructure Review (see separate article). The Cook community garden was successful last year in receiving a grant from the ACT Government for a similar project.

—Neil Williams (article and photos)

¹ <https://www.environment.act.gov.au/cc/be-part-of-the-solution/Community-Gardens-Grants>

Bees swarming on a nearby tree



Strategic planning workshop – implementation of recommendations

At the February workshop¹ participants identified priority actions for the four main issues discussed. The following is a summary of progress to date as at 5 October 2021.

The primary purpose of COGS

Recommendation 1: review Constitution to clarify our objectives and ensure that it is in line with current legislation.

COGS' constitution was initially written in the early 1980s. A small committee is meeting regularly via Zoom to discuss the updates required and to draft material to be provided for legal review. The aim is to have the revised Constitution ready for consideration prior to COGS' AGM in March 2022.

Recommendation 2: more direct engagement of the Executive with gardens and their members to revitalise communication and increase member support for COGS.

The Vice President and Treasurer visited all gardens to meet with convenors (and where available, garden committee members) during the infrastructure review. The Treasurer met with convenors to discuss invoicing and the payment process for 2021. Executive Committee members hope to attend garden AGMs either via Zoom or in person when possible and open garden days over the next few months as COVID restrictions permit.

Recommendation 3: increase COGS' education and advocacy roles through expansion of our social media presence, and by partnering with likeminded organisations.

COGS now has an Instagram presence. As COGS' main point of contact with the public is now through our online growing guides (41,000 visits over the last 12 months), the Information Officer has established an online form² to encourage members to share their experience by uploading information on their favourite vegetables and fruits. Initial discussions have been held



Holder garden (photo by Matt Mawson)

with the City Farm regarding future outreach activities and follow up will be undertaken as opportunities arise.

Management of COGS

Recommendation 1: increase volunteering at Executive and garden levels.

Options include adopting a targeted approach to succession planning, mentoring apprentices in committee roles, obtaining paid administrative support to make Executive positions more attractive, and approaching members who had identified skills on their membership applications.

Initial discussions held with City Farm regarding sharing a paid administrative position need to be followed up. Further work on succession planning (including development of a short strategic plan to guide COGS' activities in the next couple of years and preparation of brief position descriptions) is being undertaken in the context of the constitutional review. Life membership awards have been invited (see winter edition of *Canberra Organic*) to celebrate the importance of volunteers to the Society and the wider community, as well as recognising the considerable contributions of

these people who had a major role in establishing COGS gardens.

What we want our gardens to look like

Recommendation 1: complete a review of COGS' existing garden infrastructure as input to future funding decisions and to advise on the potential for increasing the number of plots available.

The report which was discussed and accepted at the August Executive meeting, is a comprehensive stocktake of COGS' infrastructure resources, including the potential for increasing plot numbers and expanding the boundaries of existing gardens. The report, which will guide COGS' investment decisions, identified improvements to the Oaks Estate fencing and shelters at the Betty Cornhill Garden and Erindale as high priorities for funding. COGS is currently in a strong financial position and has the capacity to fund some projects. The Executive agreed a proforma for bringing forward proposals on a quarterly basis for funding. The onus is on gardens to develop their proposals for funding. The first round of proposals will be considered at the November Executive meeting.

The report identified that several gardens adjacent to ACT leasehold land could have some potential for expansion. Investigation of soil suitability and water availability would be needed, along with discussions with the ACT Government regarding access to the land. There were limited opportunities within existing gardens to develop more plots. Sub-division of larger plots in a few gardens may be possible over time. Initial discussions have been held recently on the possibility of COGS assuming the management of a small existing garden in Gungahlin, these will be followed up when the current lock down is over.

Recommendation 2: develop a standardised process for funding applications made to COGS.

This has been completed (see above).

Recommendation 3: improve the sustainability of our gardening activities.

To be addressed.

Engagement with the community

Recommendation 1: expand COGS' role in education.

See comments above on the expansion of material available via our social media and website.

Recommendation 2: maintain good relationships with ACT Government and its bureaucracy.

Meetings have been held with Andrew Braddock MLA for Yerrabi and the Minister for Environment, Rebecca Vassarotti to discuss COGS' role and operations, as well as the need for consideration of community gardens in the ACT's land planning processes. A meeting with Minister Steele has been postponed until early 2022.

Recommendation 3: identify opportunities to progress shared interests with other ACT organisations.

An initial meeting has been held with the City Farm. Follow up will occur as opportunities arise.

—Michele Barson (article)

¹ cogs.asn.au/strategic-directions-workshop-feb-2021

² cogs.asn.au/organic-gardening/growing-guides/local-grower-form

Review of the COGS Constitution

One of the recommendations from the Strategic Planning Workshop held in February was to review and revise the COGS Constitution to meet the requirements of the recently updated *Associations Incorporation Act 1991* (ACT).

According to *From Bare Earth to Bounty* (the story of COGS), the (then) Canberra Organic Growers adopted our first formal Constitution in 1981. A new Constitution was drafted in April 1985 to facilitate incorporation and the name changed to Canberra Organic Growers Society. A longstanding member recalls that there was a further update around 1990, undertaken to meet the needs of the introduction of the 1991 legislation.

A small working group consisting of Andy Hrast (President), Michele Barson (Vice President), Peter Weddell (Past-President); Bev McConnell (Membership Secretary) and Dana Nipperess (a member of the Executive Committee with a legal background) has met via Zoom, to discuss the revisions required.

Discussions have been assisted by the Model Rules for Associations, which will ensure that all the necessary topics will be covered in the revised Constitution and changed as needed for COGS purposes. The COGS objectives are being modified to reflect our present aspirations and operations as discussed at the February workshop, and administrative activities will be updated to account for developments in banking and communication technologies.

The completed draft will be forwarded to a legal adviser for comment. A document is being prepared to make it easy for members to compare the existing Constitution with the changes proposed. It will also explain the reasons for the proposed changes. Under the *Associations Incorporation Act 1991* changes in associations' objectives and rules need to be done by special resolution of the association. The proposed revised Constitution will be made available to members both in hard copy and electronically. It is anticipated that a General Meeting to discuss the proposed changes to the Constitution will be held after the 2022 Annual General Meeting, at a date yet to be decided.

—Michele Barson (article)



Magpie waiting for Richard to dig up worms in Charnwood garden (photo by Jo McMillan)

Extract from *From Bush to Bounty: A short history of the COGS Cook community garden*

A history of the Cook community garden is as much about the growth of the Canberra Organic Growers Society (COGS) as it is about the garden itself. It is a testament to the hard work, enthusiasm and commitment to organic gardening principles of particular individuals who were invested in the benefits of a community-based enterprise. The people critical to the establishment of Cook also had major roles in COGS as office bearers, or as COGS garden developers, and often this was undertaken concurrently with the establishment of the Cook garden and their day jobs. The Cook garden mirrors the growth of COGS and is now a well-established feature of the Belconnen landscape, continuing to attract gardeners of all ages and abilities but who share a common interest.

The location for the Cook garden was identified by a COGS member, Keith Colls, during a pre-retirement walk. Keith thought the area at the southern end of Bindubi Street would be ideal. Many residents of Aranda and Cook were attracted to these suburbs because of its leafy urban landscape but this had drawbacks for growing fruit and vegetables in open sunny positions. Establishing an allotment garden for these purposes was seen not only as a way to enhance the COGS membership but also a useful resource for residents of the Cook and Aranda suburbs.

An approach to the ACT Government by COGS to provide funds to establish a garden in Cook was initially rejected but further negotiations resulted in a grant of \$33,000 to COGS to develop three gardens! In addition to Cook, two other sites were chosen; one in Holder and the other at Kambah. The grant to COGS was provided under the ACT Department of Urban Services' Social Capital Program to expand the community garden initiative from the six already established at Cotter (Curtin),

Charnwood, Northside (Mitchell), Oaks Estate, and Tuggeranong. The garden in Theodore had, at this time, closed (although it was later reopened for a short period).

Before the funding arrangements were finalised, the ACT Government undertook consultation with the community but there was a pocket of resistance from some Cook residents who believed that the community garden would not be an attractive addition to the landscape, seeing potential for it to deteriorate into an urban eyesore and for plants grown in the garden to eventually escape into the surrounding bushland.

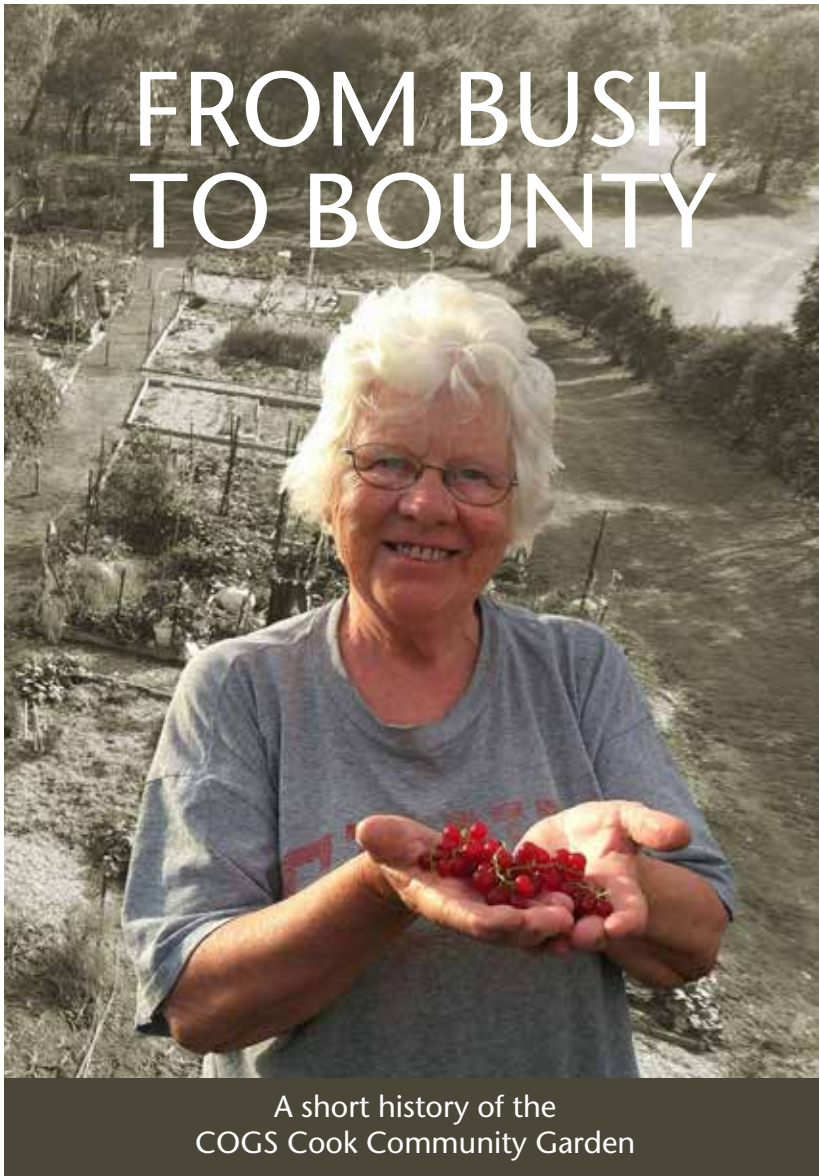
In early 2001, despite these reservations, the then President of COGS, Steve Sutton, reported that 'funding has been acquired ... from the government's Social Capital Program for setting up of three new community gardens in Canberra. Over the next six months, things will be pretty hectic in establishing these gardens.' At that stage, for the sites in Cook, Chifley and Kambah, there was only permission given by the Government to use land for Cook, at the south-east corner of horse paddock No 2. The entrance was to be off Bindubi Street. Steve invited 'all people who would like to participate in the Cook garden to a meeting on Sunday 18 February' and 'to contact Keith Colls, who had agreed to lead the project. COGS was aiming to have all three gardens operating by the end of June 2001.

COGS allocated \$10,000 from the grant to Cook with the remainder allocated to Kambah and Holder. Once the funds were awarded, work commenced on the laying out of the gardens. Keith Colls says of this period that 'those involved in establishing this garden somewhat underestimated the work involved' but that there was no shortage of COGS volunteers.

The initial work of laying out the boundary was relatively simple as the existing fence line boundaries were used. The internal road was determined by a survey undertaken by Telstra. The exterior fence was built, trenches were dug to lay irrigation pipes to the water main at the boundary and the plots were marked out. The work attracted interest from passers-by and many of the future plot holders were introduced to COGS and the garden in this way. Indeed, anyone who had shown an interest in the development of the garden was 'invited' to assist with its construction and there were many future plot holders who assisted in the construction of the wire fencing. The only professional assistance provided to the enterprise was from a licensed plumber to connect the water pipes and a draftsman to draw the plans.

The garden covered an area of approximately half a hectare and it was divided into forty-six individual garden plots plus a communal area. Prior to work commencing on the plots, the area had to be cleared of all the bush. The plots were laid out in a grid pattern and varied in size; 30, 40 and 50 sq metres, with a metre between each. In total it took only three days to finalise all the essential hard landscaping. Most of this had proceeded relatively smoothly with the only significant delay coming with the consultations with the then National Capital Authority (NCA) on the colour of the shed. The NCA insisted that the colour blend in with the surroundings so as not to be obvious if viewing the landscape from Black Mountain. The location of the shed was determined by the need to avoid the tree root system extending from the large gums that were to the southern boundary.

The forty-six plots were gradually taken up after the garden's establishment although it was not until 2005 that all plots were occupied.



A short history of the
COGS Cook Community Garden

Initially, the soil lacked fertility, but organic gardening techniques gradually increased the amount of organic matter and biological activity making it more suitable for vegetable growing. Coincidentally, the ACT Government's Urban Services was cleaning out one of its deposits and offered a load of semi-composted show straw which gardeners eagerly used on their newly cleared plots. Shrubs were initially only planted on the western fence line to provide a windbreak. These plantings continued around the boundary over the next few years with extensive mulching undertaken. Despite this, many of

those original plants died during the millennial drought years.

The infrastructure was developed further in 2003 with the construction of the pergola. The garden's convenor at that time, Keith Colls, reported that the pergola 'magically appeared' thanks to the efforts of Adrienne Fazekas. Adrienne, who had also helped setting out the garden, had pre-fabricated the pergola in her garage before transporting it to the garden. Holes for the uprights were dug during a working bee and Adrienne, assisted by Garry Ridgway, finalised the structure. Vines were planted to provide summer shade although their growth was slowed by

the later addition of shadecloth. The paving beneath was undertaken four years after this in 2007 providing for 'more comfortable BBQ events'.

A few years after the pergola was installed, a glasshouse was erected. Donated by Sue and Steve Adams, a concrete slab was poured and the structure erected by Adrienne, Keith and Ilya Popovic. Unfortunately, the glasshouse was later so severely damaged by vandals, who had thrown sleepers through the structure, that the remaining structure was removed.

At this point, the garden was fully operational with Keith Colls reflecting—

The garden is in a very pleasing location with horse paddocks on one side and nature reserve on the other. It is an open sunny spot which is very pleasant on calm autumn and winter days but on windy spring days it closely resembles a freezing wind tunnel. To minimise the cold wind exposure native shrubs have been planted around the exposed boundaries but it will take some time before they are tall enough to have much effect. The planting of the windbreak is just one of the activities which have been undertaken through working bees. Most working bees are held in the cooler months as it is just too hot during the summer. Besides general maintenance work, working bees have established a communal herb garden, a plot for producing seed for the COGS seed saving group, communal fruit trees and grape vines have been planted and a small pergola has been constructed. These facilities are now available for all plot holders to enjoy.

The final structure erected was the second shed and this was undertaken in 2016 with a grant provided by the ACT Government for this purpose. The shed was built on the site of the glass house and like all of the other structures, the construction crew were Cook gardeners. So, some 15 years after its foundation, the Cook garden had reached its current form.

—Julie Gorrell (article and photos)

Moth

I'm (Moth) out of hibernation as spring has sprung and am noticing keen gardeners also coming out of lockdowns. Happy gardening.

—Michael Calkovics
(article and photo)



The dark-spotted tiger moth (Spilosoma canescens)



Butterfly enjoying the stinging nettles

Native butterflies and exotic plants

When I first arrived at the Betty Cornhill gardens my plots were overgrown with multiple exotic weed species — including stinging nettles.

Over time I noticed that something was chewing away at the nettles. So I let some grow to see what it was. However leaving the nettles on a part of my patch did cause angst with some other plot owners. Eventually I noticed this native butterfly species was flying about the nettles and laying small yellow eggs on and under the leaves.

I have since introduced the stinging nettles to my property in Lyons to support this beautiful native butterfly — and yes the effort has been very successful. This butterfly isn't commonly seen here, so you have some room at your urban home block or at a COGS plot then please consider leaving a patch of wilderness for our native insects to enjoy.

—Michael Calkovics (article and photo)

Metamorphosis of the Striped Marsh Frog

The Striped Marsh Frog (*Limnodynastes peronii*) is a predominantly aquatic frog native to coastal eastern Australia. With frogspawn in the backyard fishpond and never having seen tadpoles turning into frogs, an experiment was set up to observe this metamorphosis over time. It was a fascinating experience!

—Ange McNeilly
(article and photos)



Sawdust and coffee grounds — not just waste!

Recently I attended the Belconnen Community Men's Shed Annual General Meeting (AGM) and clean-up where I picked up four bags of sawdust, a regular by-product from all that woodwork that goes on inside the shed. Just prior to attending the AGM I read an article about a Canberra-based social enterprise that was proposing to mix sawdust and coffee grounds to make a compost/garden additive. I regularly (2-3 times a week) collect coffee grounds from SV Coffee and Bakery, a Lawson café, and my interest was sparked by the opportunity.

Being the compost-maker at the Horticultural Society of Canberra's Bruce Display Garden, volunteer compost instructor at the Sutton Primary School, member of the Belconnen Garden Club and Canberra Organic Growers Society



as well as SV's gardener, when I saw the four bags of sawdust 'waste' it seemed an opportunity too good to miss. Sometimes the stars align even

further as my son's workplace was throwing out a quantity of suitably sized bags — waste not, want not! Fortunately (or unfortunately due to the COVID-19 lockdown) I now have a steadily growing stack of bags in my carport filled with a mix of coffee grounds and sawdust ready for adding to compost or to the garden. Once we can meet in person again, I will be offering this resource to plot holders at the Kaleen community garden (look for the sign on the gate) as well as to the Belconnen Garden Club as part of the trading/fundraising table and to Belconnen Community Men's Shed members. I am always looking for more sawdust to go with the coffee grounds, so if you know of where to find any, let me know.

— Richard Buker (article and photo)

Eternal seeds

I often grow the year's tomatoes from seeds. So as time has passed, I have accumulated quite a few packages of partly used seeds. Now this year, as I have been inside more (and because I watched Marie Kondo) I decided to start cleaning up. I have discovered that apparently some seeds are eternal. I planted seeds for an unusual black radish, that had a use by date in 2017. The 'expired' seeds germinated, and French radishes are on the way. Of course, it may not have worked out that way, and if germination had failed, at least I would have been able to remove one package from my stash. Marie Kondo would smile.

Some of the tomato seeds had also not received the message and there are Black Krim seedlings (pictured) which come from a batch that were also supposed to have expired in 2017. So whatever you have at home, you may still be able to grow plants.

—Patricia Georgee (article and photos)



Black Krim seedlings growing from seeds with a use by date of 2017

Artichoke tea

My family has enjoyed artichoke tea for years. Each year we would buy artichoke tea from Dat Lat in the central highlands of Vietnam through a network of friends in Ho Chi Minh City. However, we did not know the origin of the tea, or how the farmers grew and processed the artichokes.

In 2019 in Australia we received several bunches of artichoke from a friend in Bairnsdale, Victoria, to grow in our plot in the Charnwood community garden. We were so excited to see the first crop with several flower buds appearing and then enjoyed a second crop in January 2021, with over sixty flower buds. We shared them with some friends so they could make soup and kept some to make tea. We learnt how to make the artichoke tea from a friend on Facebook. There are simple steps to follow:

- 1: Cut the fresh plump artichoke flower buds before they ripen and remove the stems.
- 2: Slice the artichokes finely.
- 3: Place the finely cut artichokes in a dehydrator – heat them at 45°C, then increase to 55°C, then to 65°C over a period of 12 hours.
- 4: Put the dried artichokes into airtight bags, seal, and label.
- 5: Place one bag full in the thermal boiler and boil the water at 90°C.

This tea is very healthy and good for the hair, lungs, and the immune system.

—Dr Van Kien Nguyen
(article and photos)



Dr Van Kien Nguyen cutting fresh artichoke flower buds



Slice the artichokes finely



Dehydrate the artichokes



Seal and store in an airtight bag



Add to boiling water to make the tea

Tomatoes

History

The tomato is the edible berry (it's technically a berry rather than fruit) of the plant *Solanum lycopersicum*, commonly known as a tomato plant. The species originated in the north-west of South America where it still grows wild.

Aztecs and other peoples in Mesoamerica were the first to domesticate the tomato and use it as food. The word 'tomato' comes from the Aztec word 'xitomatli'.

The Spanish brought tomatoes from Mexico to Europe and the earliest mention of them in Europe is in 1544 by an Italian botanist who named the plant 'pomi d'oro' or 'golden apples'. The French called them 'love apples' (pomme d'amour) for their supposed aphrodisiac qualities. The Spanish introduced them to the Philippines from where they spread throughout Asia, and they have become incorporated into the local cuisines.

The tomato was initially grown as an ornamental plant in Europe. Tomatoes were regarded with suspicion as a food because they belong to the nightshade family and are a relative of the poisonous belladonna. This fear was exacerbated by the way the acidic tomato juice blackened the commonly used pewter plates.

Tomatoes were being used as food by the early 17th century in Spain but were considered unfit for eating for many years in Britain and its North American colonies. By the end of 18th century the Encyclopedia Britannica stated the tomato was 'in daily use' in soups, broths, and as a garnish. By 1820, tomatoes were described as "to be seen in great abundance in all our vegetable markets" and to be "used by all our best cooks" for exotic Italian or Jewish cuisine.

Plant breeding

Tomatoes have undergone a massive evolution from their original pea size and relatively sour taste. Much of the



© Can Stock Photo / Shaiith

focus of the breeding has been on developing the size and the sweeter flavours. There are now more than 7,500 varieties worldwide. There are currently no GMO tomatoes.

Interesting tomato facts

Tomato family: Tomatoes are part of the Solanaceae family, also known as the potato or deadly nightshade family which is one of humankind's most utilised and important plant families. It contains some of the world's most important food plants, such as the potato, tomato, capsicums and eggplants.

Biggest tomato: According to the Guinness World Book of Records, the largest tomato weighed 4.896kg when weighed in Walla Walla, Washington on 15 July 2020. The weight was authenticated by the Great Pumpkin Commonwealth. The tomato was the 'Domingo' cultivar.

The largest tomato plant, reaching 19.8m in length, was grown hydroponically in the UK in 2000. It was a 'Sungold' cultivar.

A 'tomato tree' growing inside the Walt Disney World Resort's experimental greenhouse in Florida has been recognised by a Guinness World Book of Records with a harvest of more than 32,000 tomatoes weighing 522 kg. The vine grew golf ball-sized tomatoes, which were served at Walt Disney World restaurants. The tree developed a disease and was removed in April 2010 after about 13 months.

Tomato production: Worldwide tomato production in 2020 is estimated to have been about 177m tonnes. The largest producer is China (56m tonnes) followed by India with 18m tonnes. Australian production was about 405,000 tonnes.

—Andy Hrast (article)

Citrus trees — in pots or in the ground?

For many years, I have grown citrus trees in terracotta pots and despite the extra maintenance required, it saved space, they looked good and the fruit was easy to pick. Annual topping with new soil, well-rotted sheep manure, and the occasional citrus and liquid fertiliser kept them happy and productive.

However, with the COVID-19 lockdown this year, I decided to plant out some of the citrus into the garden with my son Jamie's help. These were three Meyer lemons; two Navel oranges; one grapefruit; two Imperial mandarins; one kumquat with small round fruit; and one Lemonade. Lately, these particular trees were showing signs of reduced growth and fruit production, an indication that they were getting severely root bound. Two citrus trees continue to grow in very large pots; one is a Nagami kumquat near the front steps and the other is a very productive Meyer lemon growing behind the garage. Can I say that I am very fond of citrus!

What a job it was to remove the trees out of the pots! A useful tip: do not plant citrus in terracotta pots that do not have straight sides or that have in-curving edges because getting plants out of them is incredibly difficult! Densely packed root balls filled each pot tightly. Unfortunately, due to the amount of force and exertion needed, one of the expensive pots got broken while a few acquired new chips. The trees were planted in large holes dug along the fence line of the veggie garden however before replanting, the

bottoms of the root balls were cut to bed the trees down more easily and to encourage production of new roots. Soil was backfilled, watered and topped with sugarcane mulch and citrus fertiliser added one week later.

With the recent rain, all the trees are now sporting new growth and will continue to thrive and be productive and beautiful for many years to come. I have been getting lemons from niece Julie's incredibly productive tree and reciprocate with seedlings of flowers and vegetables. There is a clear difference in productivity between citrus grown in the ground and those grown in pots!

I hope that the horrible bronze-orange citrus bugs do not find them as when handpicking them off one year, got squirted in the eye by the toxic fluid from one that caused a dreadful burning sensation that lasted for days. Therefore, another lesson well learned is to wear eye protection and gloves when dealing with these 'stinky' pests!

Why all these lemons you may ask? I consider lemons to be an essential ingredient and always have them in the house. My preferred drink is black tea with lemon and sugar and, in winter, hot water with lemon juice and honey. I use lemon juice in tabouli; in Thai hot and sour soup; on baked or crumbed fried fish and chicken and for making lemon curd — I could go on! The vitamin C in citrus is so healthy, their fragrance is so uplifting, and they look stunning in a bowl! What is there not to like?

—Ange McNeilly (article and photos)

One of Ange's citrus trees



Homegrown Brussels sprouts for dinner next winter?

Did you try roasted or sauteed sprouts over winter? Would you like to try growing them? If so, now is the time to start planning a space for them in your garden and getting seeds ready for planting.

Brussels sprouts grow well in Canberra's cool frosty winters, but they need space and a long growing period. For the best results, plant seeds in trays or in the ground in early summer in a sunny spot. Seedlings should go in by January and be planted about 90cm apart for easy harvesting.

They like a rich soil, so add compost, well-rotted manure and a little lime if your soil is acidic. Plants ready to harvest are tall (80cm) and easily blown over, so plant your seedlings firmly and deeply in a small depression, so the soil can be mounded up around the stems as they grow. On windy sites, plants may need to be staked to assist with stability.

Inspect your plants regularly to remove aphids and caterpillars. Covering the sprout bed with veggie net or an old net curtain will deter white cabbage moths from laying their eggs on the leaves, as their green caterpillars can be hard to spot.

Sprouts will be ready to harvest in 6–7 months. In Canberra they are at their best just as our early broccoli and cauliflowers are finishing. Start picking bite sized sprouts from the bottom of the plant while still tight and bright green. Brussels sprouts contain high levels of Vitamins K and C. They are delicious raw, sautéed or roasted and some suggestions for their use are listed below:

Brussels sprout salads

Finely shred sprouts, add chopped toasted nuts such as walnuts or pine nuts and julienned apple, or finely sliced radish or celery. You can also add some sultanas or dried cranberries. For a more savoury



Brussels sprouts growing in Elizabeth's garden

salad, add fried pancetta or bacon, or some crumbled blue cheese, feta, or shaved parmesan with shredded sprouts. Add French dressing with plenty of mustard and serve with some good bread.

Roasted sprouts

Add washed, trimmed and halved sprouts to a baking paper lined tray with other vegetables such as cauliflower florets, pumpkin or sweet potato, parsnip and cooked and peeled beetroot. Toss with olive oil, sprinkle with chopped garlic and

roast in a 180°C oven for about 40 minutes. Add broccoli for the last 10 minutes of cooking.

Sautéed sprouts

Lightly steam washed, trimmed and halved sprouts, then sauté in olive oil or butter. Add macadamia nuts, almonds, or hazelnuts for crunch or stir in chopped garlic and anchovy to the warming oil before adding the sprouts.

—Michele Barson (article) and Elizabeth Dangerfield (photo)

Green house effect

This article was first published in *The Monthly*, April 2021 and is reprinted here with permission.

Joost Bakker's vision for sustainable housing is taking root.

When he was nine, Joost Bakker and his family moved to Australia. They did so because the world in which they lived was falling apart.

"We migrated to Australia because Holland was fucked: dead fish floating in the river, acid rain, forests were defoliating, and the smog in Europe was out of control. If you fell in the canals as a kid, you'd be straight to the doctor or the hospital. That's how toxic it was."

Ever since, Bakker has wanted to save the world.

In Holland, his father was a farmer who also owned a pub that was a hub of community life and drew farmers from miles around. His mother was an artist. The family moved to Monbulk, on Melbourne's outskirts in the Dandenong Ranges, and set up a flower farm. When he was 12, Bakker first began to imagine what a sustainable home might look like.

All of the ingredients for what would come later – his passion for transforming the way we grow things, the power of the hospitality industry for bringing people together, and the deep understanding of aesthetics passed on by his mother – were in place. In 1993, he started his own business exporting flowers he grew organically in Monbulk to the Philippines, Hong Kong and New Caledonia. He shared a warehouse space in South Melbourne with a mushroom importer, whose business attracted a steady stream of famous chefs. Bakker left quite an impression on them.

It was a time of great change and excitement in Melbourne's hospitality scene, as liquor licensing laws were relaxed and money flowed through the industry like never before. In no time at all, Bakker became something of an artistic director for restaurants and cocktail bars, supplying flowers and sometimes transforming spaces into

art installations that combined botany with recycled materials.

On a visit to the races in the early 2000s, Bakker was stunned by the conspicuous consumption, the waste and the pavilions built for just four days of bacchanalian pleasure. It reconnected him with his childhood dream: he decided it was time to build the house of the future.

The idea was to develop a prototype "green house", a sustainable building that grows its own food. The first version, sponsored by Macquarie Bank, was a rustic affair, with a floor made from recycled tyres. While he played around with the form such a house would take, he quickly realised that food was central to everything that he was trying to achieve.

"The most destructive things on Earth are our food systems – transport, chemical use, landclearing, the deforestation, desertification," says Bakker. "That system worked when there were a billion people on Earth. It's not going to work for eight billion."

Despite having no experience as a restaurateur, Bakker established the sustainable dining project Greenhouse, armed with an address book filled with celebrated chefs and no little sense of confidence. It took on many guises – a pop-up version in Melbourne's Federation Square in 2008, a multi-award-winning version in Perth, a Sydney Harbour pop-up, and then a return to Bakker's home city for the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival. He tinkered with each venue's specifics, adding rooftop vegetable gardens, waste composting and vertical walls on which food was grown.

To reassure people that sustainability doesn't have to mean sacrificing culinary excellence, Bakker hired some of Australia's best chefs, among them Matt Stone, Douglas McMaster and Jo Barrett. But Bakker quickly realised that his restaurants had done too good a job: everyone was focusing on the food, rather than on the urban food systems he was developing.

"I'd spent half the time talking with journalists about how we have to make

our urban areas more productive and sustainable," he says, "but they didn't write anything about it. 'Imagine a house that grows its own food' – that was the motto. Then it became all about restaurants."

The awards and the media focus on the end product meant little to Bakker.

"I came to the conclusion that the idea was too crazy, that there was too much going on. People walked in and there were rooftop gardens, a compost bin right next to where people waited for a table, there was art – it was sustainability on steroids. So I just thought, *Fuck that. I'm going to open a restaurant without a rubbish bin.*"

In 2012, Bakker unveiled Silo in Melbourne's Hardware Lane. It looked like any other cool, inner-city Melbourne cafe. But Silo was the world's first zero-waste restaurant. And just as Bakker had hoped, Silo launched a worldwide movement.

Yet he remained restless. Changing the way restaurants function was one thing. Changing how we live and grow our food was another altogether.

When Silo, later revamped as Broth, closed in a dispute with the city council over the cafe's compost bin in 2015, Bakker began planning an entirely self-sustaining house in the heart of the city. Five years in the planning, six months in the building, the latest version of Greenhouse has overlooked the Yarra River from the south side of Melbourne's Federation Square since late 2020. It is an occupied residence but open for tours, and hosting boutique dining events using only self-grown produce.

Everything about Greenhouse is sustainable and a monument to low-impact living, from the ethically sourced building materials to the natural glues that hold the dining table together, the onsite gardens that will supply nearly 300 different foods and the renewable power sources. There's a self-sustaining, naturally functioning ecosystem in the stairwell, a devilishly clever closed-loop system that both recycles waste to produce the methane used for cooking and relies



Detail of Joost Bakker's green house at Federation Square, Melbourne (photo, Kathie Thomas, gardenimagery.com.au)

on aquaponics and aquaculture to deploy nutrients for growing food. The house has even been constructed so that it doesn't penetrate the earth but is instead weighted down by the soil in the gardens.

Exploring the house with Bakker is to wander into a madly exciting vision of our future. It can be difficult to keep up. When speaking about the mid 20th-century Green Revolution that saved the world from hunger, Bakker points out that the use of synthetic fertilisers stripped essential nutrients from the soil. "Our food is empty," he says. "We're overfed, but undernourished." Then he puts it another way: "The past hundred years were about oil. The next hundred are about soil."

He cites studies that link the use of chemicals in agricultural systems with growing crises in public health. He rails against the monoculture plantations used for so-called sustainable timber certification. And he despairs at how we're wiping out the world's tuna, and how 70 per cent of the fish that Australians eat is imported.

For all that, Bakker is determined to remain positive. "You can't beat the system, so let's be the system. This is the start of a 10-year plan and I'm hoping

that by 2030, urban food production is a mainstream idea."

For every look into the future, Bakker takes one look back. "They say that 60 per cent of the world will be living in cities by 2030. That makes sense to me. When my dad lived on a farm, there were 30 people living on 6 acres. All I heard my dad talk about was how socially it was so awesome. There were lots of people doing lots of work – and it was hard work – but it was all about social interaction and seasonality. It was the singing, people working together. It's like the old shearing stories in Australia. Now you've got one guy driving a tractor on 2000 acres, on his own. No wonder kids don't want to go back on the land. We're social beings, which is what makes urban food systems so important."

Bakker doesn't think he's asking for too much. "I'm big on encouraging people to retrofit," he says, against the backdrop of a no-rubbish-bin flag made from a recycled Damascus tablecloth. "I don't want to pull down everything that's there. It's about modifying it. I just want people to know that there is a solution, and it's a simple solution. It's about making food that can be grown in an urban environment desirable and showing that we can transition."

Bakker sees Greenhouse as a prototype for a world where, by 2030, there will be no supermarkets, people will grow their own food and essential items will be delivered by drone. He is also convinced that before long our city skyscrapers will be transformed. "I did a proposal in 2008 to put a single-glazed second skin on the outside of Melbourne's Rialto building. Some 450,000 litres of water, grey water, leaves that building every day, so I was proposing to upcycle and treat it. We could grow enough tomatoes for the whole of Melbourne. And then that building will become the coolest building in Melbourne. Most of their energy consumption is because they're trying to keep that building cool. By adding a skin on, you're capturing that heat to grow things, so there's a huge energy reduction as well."

Bakker pauses for a moment and his gaze returns to the house he has created.

"We all live in a house. We all have the opportunity to do this. It's just that I've still got the naivety of a child. Otherwise, this place wouldn't be here."

— Anthony Ham *writes about wildlife, conservation and current affairs for magazines and newspapers around the world.*

2021 infrastructure review

An outcome of the Strategic Workshop earlier this year was for the COGS Executive Committee to undertake a review of infrastructure at our twelve community gardens. The review has now been completed and was conducted by Vice President Michele Barson, Garden Coordinator Jo McMillan and myself in my capacity as the Treasurer. We conducted site visits of all the gardens to review the current infrastructure and sought the assistance of all convenors to provide a comprehensive inventory of our assets (sheds, tools, equipment, irrigation, fencing etc).

With the certainty of our ten-year licence with the ACT Government taking us through to 2030 and our relatively strong financial position (see below), now is a good time to invest in priority infrastructure to put our gardens in a good position for the next several years.

Baseline infrastructure and differences across gardens

Each garden is at various stages of infrastructure development, depending on their size, age, organisation, location, uses of the garden (e.g. open days, presentations, workshops) etc. Overall, the twelve community gardens occupy around 3.5 hectares or 8.6 acres. There are around 450 plots leased out to around 360 members (see separate insert on the annual renewal process).

It is not proposed that each garden should have exactly the same infrastructure. Infrastructure should be adequate for the purpose of each of the gardens — primarily for the benefit of individual members tending their plots. The Executive Committee have agreed each garden should have:

- Storage — adequate facilities for communal tools (e.g. mowers, spades);

- Access to shelter for periodic meetings/gatherings of members (shade, rain);
- Irrigation — taps, pipes etc., to enable watering of all plots;
- Fencing — secure fencing to protect from outside incursion; and
- Signage— the standard COGS sign.

Overall, our gardens are in pretty good shape and are fit for purpose. However, not all gardens meet the above 'baseline' standard. For example: three gardens currently have no shelter; one garden has a poor standard of fencing; and some gardens need repairs to critical water infrastructure.

Financial position of COGS

In light of three key factors, COGS is currently in a relatively strong financial position. These factors are:

2021–22 annual renewal process

Each year as we look to the new growth of spring, COGS embarks upon the renewal of our annual membership base. COGS membership year and billing period aligns with the start of spring each year, running from 1 September to 31 August.

In June, I asked convenors at each of the gardens to work with current plot holders to see if they would be continuing with their current plots, or whether they would be downsizing or giving up their plots. Members leaving the gardens provided an opportunity for some convenors to make in-roads into their waitlists. A separate outcome of the Infrastructure Review was to see where we could either expand the number of plots at our gardens or make better use of existing plots (e.g. splitting them) to help with our waitlists. There were limited opportunities, but Holder and Dickson were successful in creating opportunities for new gardeners. The COGS Executive continue to look for opportunities for new gardens, particularly in the Gungahlin area.

In total over 450 invoices totalling around \$69,000 were drawn up and sent out to plot holders, people on our

waitlists and other members in late July for payment by 31 August. The majority of invoices were paid on time. At the time of writing this, at the end of September, I was working with convenors and the Membership Secretary to chase up outstanding invoices of around \$3,000.

Small amounts of additional income is also collected during the course of the year from new members and plot holders, fundraising, donations and government grants, but the annual renewal process is what sets us up to pay our expenses for the rest of the year. Our main expenses each year are for water (around \$25,000); investment in garden infrastructure (around \$20,000); magazine production (around \$8,000); Administration (IT, insurance etc \$5,000); and general garden expenses (around \$10,000 – \$15,000). These fluctuate from year to year. For example, water bills have been higher in drought years, but subdued in the last 18 months. We should plan for higher bills in coming years, in part due to climate change.

Over last few months our waitlist reduced from over 90 to 60. Demand continues to remain high in the northside (Crace, Dickson, Mitchell, and O'Connor in particular), but some gardens (e.g. Holder) have a few vacant plots.

Thank you to the convenors and to members.

—Neil Williams (article)



clockwise from top left): current meeting place at the Betty Cornhill Garden; neatly stored tools at Dickson; fence at Oaks Estate; leaking taps at Holder

- the plot fee increases agreed in 2019 (\$2.45 up to \$3.45) and 2020 (\$3.45 up to current \$4.20), which were put in place after COGS had sustained financial deficits or operating losses for the previous 4 years;
- Increased membership (in particular, a 26% increase in the last 18 months); and
- COVID-19 which led to a significant reduction in capital expenditure and subdued general garden expenditure in 2020.

As at the end of September COGS had \$169,000 in its bank account, reflecting the recent annual renewal process in which \$69,000 worth of invoices were sent out (most of which have been paid). *See insert on annual renewal process, which details what we spend our money from membership and plot fees on.*

Key priorities identified

We identified priorities worth over \$100,000 and ranked them from high to low. COGS needs a buffer in our accounts to fund unexpected items and increases in expenses over time, so we cannot afford to fund everything. Other sources of funding such as government grants and fundraising may need to be considered by garden committees to fund projects or to supplement COGS funding.

The following list details those items ranked as high and which could be funded over the next year or so. Replacing the current fencing at Oaks Estate was seen as the highest priority across all the gardens.

High priority infrastructure

- BCG – shelter
- Charnwood – water taps/risers; sump replacement

- Crace – new garden beds
- Erindale – new irrigation, taps and risers; shelter and seating
- Holder – water taps/risers; front gate replacement
- Oaks Estate – fencing; shelter.

Infrastructure projects (e.g. new sheds, pergolas, shading etc.) were identified across most of the gardens and can be considered for funding over time. Individual garden committees will continue to be responsible for bringing forward individual proposals to the Executive Committee to make decisions to commit funding. The Executive Committee have agreed to consider infrastructure proposals on a quarterly basis (November, February, May and August) and have also agreed on a standard template for proposals.

—Neil Williams (article)



Magpies

It is a common occurrence in the COGS community gardens that a gardener will pick up a shovel only to be joined by one or a family of the local magpies looking to reap the bounty of the freshly turned soil. They are happy to receive a handout of an unwelcome (for us) scarab grub, and they won't turn their nose (beak) up at a worm or spider. Having resident magpies in the garden will reputedly help keep snails away. However, territorial by nature, they may also keep away other welcome bird such as rosellas and other parrots.

As a species, magpies are very congenial and are happy to befriend their human gardeners. They are almost universally good at begging for handouts — particularly when they are trying to share the load of a nest full of hungry mouths. They will knock on doors and windows and are happy to enter your home looking for their regular donations. While feeding them does make us feel like we are doing a good turn, magpie-lovers should probably be aware that they could be 'killing them with kindness'.

"People do feed them in their backyards but technically they are doing the wrong thing ... The main things people will feed them is mince or dog kibble, but both are not good for magpies. Mince is too high in different nutrient levels — often too much fat — as in the wild, they are feeding on leaner foods."² (Shannon Muir, Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary).

Magpies usually nest in suburban trees, so their young can often be seen on the ground before they can fly. According to WIRES (Wildlife Information and Rescue Service) "baby magpies leave the nest without being able to fly properly. For the first week or so they will just be able to flutter and rely on their parents for protection and food. Day by day their skills at flying and feeding will improve. If you see a baby magpie sitting on your lawn don't rush out and grab it. Keep pets and people away and watch carefully to see if parents are in attendance. If the parents are attending to it and the chick is in no immediate danger, it should be left with its parents"³.

If you would like to attract more magpies to your garden, install a birdbath and regularly change the water. If the birdbath is shared with smaller birds, don't make it too deep or provide refuge footing in the middle of the birdbath. Magpies also love to forage under mulch and leaf litter. Adding these to your garden helps both you and your visitors.

Drawing this magpie allowed me to spend many hours focussing on the details of the feathers, beak and legs. They are a strong bird that combines a little bit of fierceness with intelligence and loyalty, a sense of humour and enviable parenting skills. They are the consummate suburban avian.

— Cathy Morison (article and illustration)

One thing I believe most gardeners have in common is a love of birds. I have loved birds for as long as I can remember. I kept and bred birds for many years and, after learning that my bird photography skills were mediocre at best, I recently began dabbling in drawing them instead.

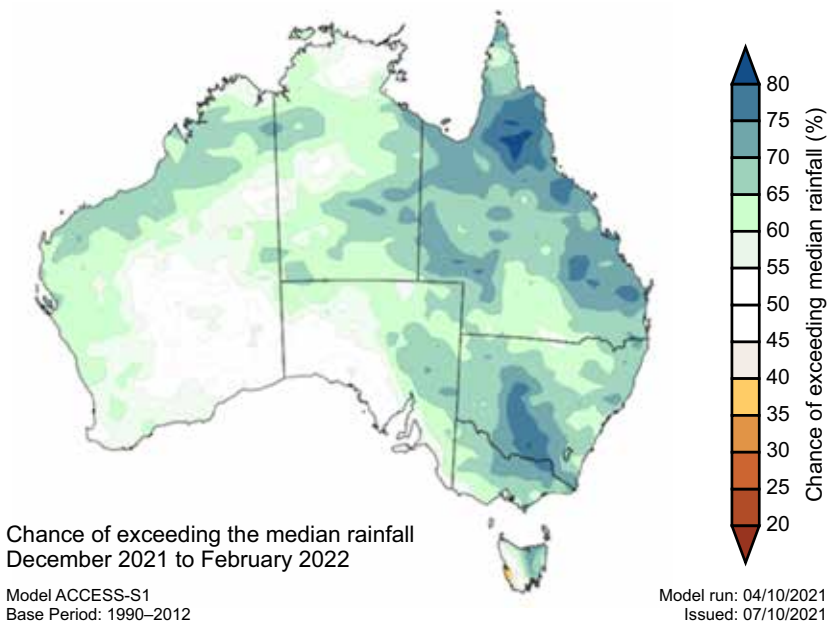
To combine my love of both birds and gardening, I have planned a series of articles called 'Drawn to the garden'. It is a corny play on words, but it sums up what I would like to achieve — drawing the native birds that gardeners in our region regularly see in the garden and including some information about their benefits and how they can be attracted to our backyards and gardens. While I will acknowledge that not all our backyard bird visitors are totally welcome in the veggie plot, this article's feature species — the magpie — should be.

A long-lived bird with an average lifespan of 25 years, *Gymnorhino tibicen* (literally the bare-nosed flute player) is artfully adapted to co-habiting in the backyard with people. In fact, magpies can reportedly recognise 100 human faces and are able to store that information under the category 'friend' or 'threat'¹. That will explain why the infamous dive-bombers will swoop some people and not others.

A La Niña ALERT has been issued as the tropical Pacific continues to cool

The Bureau of Meteorology's Outlook issued 12 October 2021 has raised the chances of a La Niña to ALERT level. Historically, when a La Niña ALERT has been issued, La Niña has subsequently developed around 70% of the time. A 70% chance is approximately triple the normal likelihood.

The increase to ALERT level is due to continued cooling in the tropical Pacific Ocean and an increase in the number of climate models showing sustained La Niña conditions over summer. Most oceanic and atmospheric indicators are currently within the neutral range, but some



have shifted towards a La Niña-like state.

Sea surface temperatures in the central tropical Pacific Ocean are neutral but have cooled over the past 3 months and are supported by cooler than average waters beneath the surface. Some atmospheric indicators, such as the Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) and cloudiness near the International Date Line, are approaching La Niña levels.

Six of the seven international climate models surveyed by the Bureau meet La Niña criteria from November.

The negative Indian Ocean Dipole has weakened, but the residual pattern in the Indian Ocean typically favours above average rainfall for parts of Australia. Other climatic indicators are also favouring wetter than normal conditions over the summer months.

As a result, November to January is likely to see above median rainfall for the eastern half of Australia, below median daytime temperatures and above median night time temperatures.

—Andy Hraat (article)

Dam levels in the Canberra region and capital cities

	July '21	July '20
ACT storages	100%	85%
Murray-Darling Basin	88%	56%
Burrinjuck Dam	93%	80%
Blowering Dam	95%	77%
Sydney	94%	94%
Melbourne	85%	72%
Brisbane	56%	61%
Adelaide	75%	67%
Perth	59%	47%

Birds in suburbia – post-script

After much patient observation the nesting 'burrow' of the pair of Spotted Pardalotes — seen in the garden in July (and mentioned in the spring 2021 edition of *Canberra Organic* — was discovered. It is located deep in the space between two rocks on the edge of the top pond and is almost inaccessible for closer inspection without actually going into the pond (not that keen). The birds dug out the soil which trails down the side of the pond. It is so intriguing, and they have been in the burrow for weeks now. I wish I had a tube camera!

—Ange McNeilly (article and photo)



Young Ja's kimchi

Ingredients

- 1 Large Napa cabbage
- 1 cup Korean coarse or sea salt (preferred)
- 5 cups water
- 1 Korean radish
- 3 – 4 scallions (optional)
- 1 tbsp glutinous rice powder (*mix it with ½ cup water, simmer over low heat until it thickens to a thin paste and cool — yields about 3 – 4 tablespoons*).
- ½ cup Korean red chili pepper flakes - adjust to your taste
- ¼ cup salted oyster, finely chopped (optional)
- 3 tbsp fish sauce
- 3 tbsp garlic, minced
- 1 tsp ginger, grated

Method

1. Cut the thick white part of the cabbage in half, lengthways. Slowly pull apart by hand to separate into two pieces. Do the same for each half to make quarters.
2. In a bowl, dissolve ½ cup of salt in 5 cups of water. Thoroughly bathe each cabbage quarter in the salt water one at a time, shake off excess water and transfer to another bowl.
3. Using the other ½ cup of salt and starting from the outermost leaf, generously sprinkle salt over the thick white part of each leaf. Repeat with the rest of the cabbage quarters. Try to salt all the cabbage quarters with a total of ½ cup salt (but you can use a little more if needed). Pour the remaining salt water from the first bowl over the cabbage. Set aside for about 6 – 8 hours, rotating the bottom leaves to the top every 2 – 3 hours.
4. The cabbages are ready to be washed when the white parts of the leaves are easily bendable. Rinse thoroughly 3 times, especially between the white parts. Drain well, cut side down.
5. Mix the rice powder with ½ cup water and simmer over low heat, stirring occasionally until it thickens to a paste. Cool.
6. Prepare the garlic, ginger and chili mix. Combine all the seasoning ingredients, including the rice paste and about ½ cup water and mix well. Set aside until the red chili pepper flakes dissolve slightly and become pasty.
7. Cut the radish into sticks, transferring to a large bowl. Cut the scallions diagonally into 1-inch-long pieces. Add the prepared seasoning mix to the radish and mix well by hand.



Young Ja preparing the kimchi

8. Add the scallions and mix everything lightly. Let it sit for about 30 minutes to allow the flavours to meld nicely. (You can add salt, more oysters or fish sauce, as needed).
9. Cut off the tough stem part from each cabbage quarter, leaving enough to hold the leaves together. Place one cabbage quarter in the bowl with the radish mix. Spread the radish mix over each leaf, using 1–2 tablespoons for large leaves.
10. Fold the leaf part of the cabbage over toward the stem and nicely wrap it with the outermost leaf. Place it, cut side up, in a jar or airtight container. Repeat with the remaining cabbages. Once all the cabbages are in the jar or airtight container, press down hard to remove air pockets. Rinse the bowl that contained the radish mix with ½ cup of water and pour over the kimchi.
11. Leave it out at room temperature for a full day or two, depending on the weather and how fast you want your kimchi to ripen. A half day is recommended during hot summer days. Store in the fridge.

—Young Ja and Didi Sommer
(article and photos)



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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
Brussels 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



COGS Community Garden Watering Rules

With the warmer months ahead, gardeners are reminded that all plot holders must abide by the COGS watering rules. The rules are based on the ICON Water Permanent Water Conservation Measures and include extra requirements specifically for COGS garden plot holders as follows:

- The use of sprinklers is not permitted in COGS' community gardens at any time.
- Watering must be by:
 - a hand-held hose fitted with a trigger nozzle;
 - a bucket or watering can; or
 - a drip irrigation system.
- Plants must be watered without causing pooling or runoff.
- Tap timers are not to be used.
- Nozzles must not be removed while watering.
- Unattended watering is not allowed.
- Filling trenches is not allowed.

Thank you for your assistance with adhering to these rules.



Are your details up-to-date?
Please remember to email members@cogs.asn.au with any changes to your email or postal address, or correspondence preferences.

Let's talk about gardening

Our social media community is growing every week.

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

Visit us on Facebook at 'Canberra Organic Growers Society' and 'like' the page or follow us on Instagram @cogs_act.

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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.

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	Deadline	Published
Autumn	mid-January	mid-February
Winter	mid-April	mid-May
Spring	mid-July	mid-August
Summer	mid-October	mid-November

Ange's front path
(photo, Ange McNeilly)

