

# Canberra, organic

Winter 2022  
Vol 30 No 2 Issue 115

**Getting pickled in Melba**

**Our new Life Members**

**21 years of Cook community garden**

**The gardening miracle**

The quarterly publication of the Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.



## editor's note

Welcome to the winter 2022 edition of *Canberra Organic* and I am honoured to be back for another year as Editor to bring you more wonderful content from our members. The variety of information we receive to fill the pages of our quarterly publication never ceases to amaze me and I invite anyone who hasn't yet sent something in to consider doing so. We all learn so much from your articles.

A new COGS Executive Committee was appointed at the 2022 AGM, alongside the appointment of three

new Life Members of COGS. Andy, Neil and I were privileged enough to chat to Richard, Conrad and Narelle respectively, about what Life Membership means to them and what they think the opportunities are for COGS moving forward. We share their thoughts on pages 20–22.

In garden news, Cook community garden celebrated its 21st year of operation (page 5) and O'Connor had a very successful open day (pages 6–7). Charnwood shares the journey of their shelter build (pages 8–9) and Cathy has provided another



wonderful edition of 'Drawn to the garden,' this time highlighting the beautiful superb fairywren (page 24). These are just a few of the articles that fill our winter publication.

As mentioned in the last edition, for my gardening journey, I'd just moved into a house with a garden. Over the past few months, we've been revitalising the lawn and with the help of my father-in-law I've got our fruit trees and bushes (cherry, mandarin and gooseberry) out of their pots into the ground. We were also left with a lemon or lime tree in a pot by the previous owners (pictured), so I look forward to seeing which it is!

Stay warm and safe over the winter months and I look forward to bringing you more articles in spring.

—Rebecca Travers  
(article and photo)



*Left behind by the previous owners — is it a lemon or lime tree?*

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**FRONT COVER:** Holder pumpkins (photo by Matt Mawson)

## president's column

Dear fellow COGS members, welcome to the winter 2022 edition of *Canberra Organic*.

Our gardens are looking very green after the wet and mild conditions of the last 18 months. I am hearing reports of excellent harvests for some crops, but those that require hotter and drier conditions have not fared so well. There have also been reports of greater losses to rodents. The vagaries of the weather and pests are the frustrations and joys of gardening.

As we move into the quieter time of the year, please give some time to clearing and tidying up your plots and your wider community gardens so that our gardens are looking good and are ready for the spring plantings. I am aware that our gardens, especially those in more exposed locations, are constantly under review and being judged by our neighbours.

The COGS Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held on Sunday 27 March 2022 at the Charnwood community garden. There was an excellent attendance of almost 40 people. Thank you to Charnwood for hosting the meeting.

I am honoured to have been re-elected as President.

Thank you to all the people who nominated and were elected to positions on the Committee. The full list of the new Committee is shown on

page 3 of the magazine. I look forward to working with the new Committee over the coming year. COGS can only continue to exist due to the ongoing generosity of our people who volunteer their time to take on these leadership roles, both at the Committee level and at the garden level.

The President's Report to the AGM can be found on the 'Members only' section of the COGS website. Some key points in the report include how we dealt with the impact of COVID-19 and our strong financial result, reflecting the reduced water usage due to the wet and mild conditions during 2021. A summary of the financial result is in the Treasurer's Report on page 25 and the full financial statements can be found on the COGS website.

There are three other areas that I would like to highlight:

- **Possible new gardens:** As a result of the continued waiting lists for plots in COGS gardens, the Committee has been actively pursuing the Government to provide land for a new garden and there are promising signs that a site may become available in Casey. There are also promising signs of a developer-built garden in Denman Prospect. We are keeping our fingers crossed.
- **Infrastructure review:** The review undertaken during 2021 identified gaps and set priorities for funding to bring facilities in all of our COGS



gardens to a similar standard. A number of projects have already been built or approved for funding.

- **COGS Constitution:** A revised draft Constitution has been circulated to members and is open for comment until mid-May. It can also be found on the COGS website. Please take time to read through it and let me know what you think. A General Meeting of all members is being planned for mid-year to consider the amended constitution.

At the AGM, Life Membership (and certificates) were presented to Narelle McLean, Conrad van Hest and Richard Horobin, as a reflection of their contribution to COGS. I would like to again congratulate all three new Life Members and a profile on each of them is in this edition of the magazine.

The last three months, since the last edition of the *Canberra Organic*, have been particularly busy for the COGS Committee dealing with the ACT Government regarding possible new garden sites and putting in a submission to the *Government's Food and Fibre Strategy*. Most recently COGS, as an organisation and members of our gardens, are being invited to participate in a survey of community gardens by the Suburban Land Agency.

There has also been participation in a research project by the University of Canberra on the development of a methodology for the measurement of food production from gardens, as well as other research projects. There have also been discussions with other likeminded organisations.

Most pleasingly there have been, with the easing in the pandemic, several events in our gardens — Cook, O'Connor and Charnwood. The COGS Committee will be encouraging

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*The 2022 AGM was held at Charnwood community garden under their new shelter*



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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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## executive committee 2022–2023

<b>President:</b>	Andy Hrast
<b>Vice-President:</b>	Michele Barson
<b>Secretary:</b>	Jyl Thompson
<b>Treasurer:</b>	Neil Williams
<b>Membership Secretary:</b>	Bev McConnell
<b>Garden Coordinator:</b>	Jo McMillan
<b>Information Officer:</b>	Cathy Morison
<b>Magazine Editor:</b>	Rebecca Travers
<b>General Members:</b>	Deborah Hamilton Narelle McLean Teresa Rose Peter Weddell

## 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 — <a href="mailto:cornhill_convenor@cogs.asn.au">cornhill_convenor@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>Charnwood</b>	Teresa Rose — <a href="mailto:charnwood_convenor@cogs.asn.au">charnwood_convenor@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>Cook</b>	Peter Weddell — <a href="mailto:cook_convenor@cogs.asn.au">cook_convenor@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>Crace</b>	Peter Newbiggin — <a href="mailto:crace_convenor@cogs.asn.au">crace_convenor@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>Dickson</b>	John Robertson — <a href="mailto:dickson_convenor@cogs.asn.au">dickson_convenor@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>Erindale</b>	Didi Sommer — <a href="mailto:erindale_convenor@cogs.asn.au">erindale_convenor@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>Holder</b>	Neil Williams (Convenor) & Heather Campbell (Assistant Convenor) — <a href="mailto:holder_convenor@cogs.asn.au">holder_convenor@cogs.asn.au</a>
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<b>Kambah</b>	Barbara Jesiolowski & Allan Sharp — <a href="mailto:kambah_convenor@cogs.asn.au">kambah_convenor@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>Mitchell</b>	Narelle McLean — <a href="mailto:mitchell_convenor@cogs.asn.au">mitchell_convenor@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>Oaks Estate</b>	Karen James — <a href="mailto:oaks_estate_convenor@cogs.asn.au">oaks_estate_convenor@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>O'Connor</b>	Bev McConnell — <a href="mailto:occonnor_convenor@cogs.asn.au">occonnor_convenor@cogs.asn.au</a>

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gardens to organise more of these events as the worst of COVID-19, we hope, recedes.

While the winter months may be the quieter time in our gardens, it is the busiest time for administration — data needs to be collected to calculate plot and membership fees and invoices prepared and sent. This a significant workload for the convenors and the Treasurer and I ask for your cooperation in being decisive about your intentions with regard to plots for 2022–23 and prompt with the payment of your invoices.

Finally, I would like to share with you a paragraph from, of all places, the *Economist* magazine:

*The real joy of gardening is the time spent doing it. The deepest pleasure — as with cooking, writing, bringing up children or almost anything worthwhile — is in the work itself. A gardener's memories revolve not around the food produced, but around long summer afternoons with hands in the dirt, surrounded by family, if the garden is at home, or deepening acquaintances with friends and neighbours in an allotment or community garden. To garden is to patiently, lovingly and diligently help life flourish, in the ground and above it.*

The full article, "The joy of gardening", can be found at [www.economist.com/culture/2022/04/16/the-joy-of-gardening](http://www.economist.com/culture/2022/04/16/the-joy-of-gardening)

Happy gardening

—Andy Hrast (article) and  
Neil Williams (photo)

## Cook community garden — celebrating 21 years

Members and friends of the Cook community garden celebrated its 21st year of operation at a party on Sunday, March 20th. Originally scheduled for September 2021, the event was postponed several times because of the pandemic or the wet weather.

Despite these setbacks the garden was looking at its best for the event; members had spent several working bees preparing with the lawns mowed and snipped, storm damaged shrubs cleared, summer produce still hanging in abundance, cosmos, dahlias and marigolds in full bloom, and the refurbished pergola and extended under-paving awaiting its opening.

Peter Weddell greeted guests including the MLA, Tara Cheyne (who represents the Ginninderra electorate and holds several ministerial portfolios), foundation Convenor and former President of COGS, Keith Colls, current COGS executive members, COGS members, former Cook community garden members and friends of the garden.

The celebrations commenced with the launch of the history of the garden, *Bush to Bounty*. In launching the book, Tara Cheyne acknowledged those members of

*Keith Colls and Peter Weddell at the 21st anniversary event*



*Janet Popovic and Raz Stephens entertaining attendees, including Tara Cheyne MLA*

COGS who had worked hard to carve the garden out of bush horse paddocks and all those individuals who had, over the 21 years of its operation, cared for and welcomed members of the community to the garden. She noted the important part that gardens such as Cook played in the health and wellbeing of Canberra residents.

Keith Colls, who was President of COGS at the time Cook was built and was the driving force behind its establishment, spoke passionately about the importance of these places to the health of the nation and encouraged COGS to continue with their advocacy role to ensure that places such as Cook were protected and linked to broader environmental movements.

Foundation garden members, Janet Popovic and Raz Stephens, entertained attendees with their reflections on the early days of the garden and how they and many other newcomers nourished the barren plots with organic matter to encourage production. The warmth and humour in Janet and Raz's discussion was one of the highlights of the event and demonstrated to those present how the garden gave

so much pleasure and pain to its members.

Peter Weddell then called upon another long-time COGS and garden member, Adrienne Fazekas, to open the pergola. Adrienne had built the original structure in 2002 and, with financial assistance provided by COGS, it had been refurbished and extended by a team of Cook gardeners led by Melvyn Dorrough. This was followed by a ceremonial cake cutting, led by Keith Colls.

After the speeches, it was time for all those attending to enjoy each other's company, renew friendships and feast on the abundance of food that was provided by garden members. It was a great day and provided a moment for all those attending to enjoy the beauty of the garden.

*Bush to Bounty* can be found on the COGS website at <https://cogs.asn.au/from-bush-to-bounty-cook-garden>. COGS members can obtain a hardcopy of *Bush to Bounty* by contacting the Cook community garden convenor, Peter Weddell (see COGS website for contact details). A video of the event can also be found at <https://cogs.asn.au>

—Julie Gorrell (article) and Richard Gorrell (photos)



## O'Connor community garden – sharing our paradise with the community

In March, O'Connor community garden members expressed their appreciation with gifts and cards to Bev, when she retired as Convenor, for her commitment and hard work. Bev McConnell revitalised the soil of several plots and at the same time revitalised the garden's relationship with the Uniting Church of O'Connor (UCOC). This is such an important relationship because COGS has the use of church land for free on the former tennis courts behind the church hall. As part of this relationship building, Bev formalised weekly donations of organic produce to Companion House to support refugees and the church's community outreach program. Bev also improved infrastructure — replacing taps and stand pipes, obtaining approval for a new shed and arranging for tree lopping — and updated the garden rules.

The new committee, with Deb as Convenor, supported by Phil, Vedanta, Dana and Nicki, has had a very busy time preparing for the

Open Day and Garden held jointly with the UCOC on 23 April 2022. The Open Day concept was planned between Bev and the UCOC in 2021 but was rescheduled to 2022 due to COVID-19.

We worked with the UCOC committee to bring the Open Day to fruition. The church invited users of their hall to present stalls and performances, and the garden arranged stalls and demonstrations by ACT for Bees, Capital Scraps composting, Canberra Seed Savers and Global Worming. Unfortunately, Global Worming had to pull out due to COVID.

The new committee had to quickly prepare for the Open Day in only 6 weeks. We replaced signs, made a new notice board and welcome sign designed by a member of the garden. We set up a virtual Working Bee throughout March and then a face-to-face one in April. In March, heroic efforts by Giovanni, Vedanta and Phil meant that the huge ivy was cut back as much as could be done safely by



*Julie Armstrong from ACT for Bees promoting our garden helpers (bees)*

hand. In early April — and in record time — 5 cubic metres of mulch from the ACT Government was spread on paths and some gardeners mined the soil on the paths and used it in their plots and compost. We also had to attend to a few plumbing issues and

*Our volunteer guides at the end of a very successful day*





begin the huge job of moving our big compost bins to make room for an extra shed we aim to install in June.

For the Open Garden, we arranged a one-way walk along the path and a handout, with a garden plan and descriptions of some of the varied garden styles on some of the varied garden plots along the path, with volunteer guides on hand to answer questions. An unexpectedly generous local donated a box of ripe feijoas which were handed out too.

We publicised the event widely — getting notices in City News, Canberra Weekly, posters in local shops, letter box dropping and sending brochures to many local groups, garden related groups and community groups as well as stall holders and schools. The church promoted the event via its networks too. All COGS members were invited to attend and the event was publicised on the COGS website and social media pages.

If numbers are a measure of success, counting 200 visitors to the O'Connor community garden must mean we had some success, but a more important measure is perhaps the time visitors spent in the garden and the conversations with garden members, which was rewarding for us. For the Open Day with the



*Our guides welcoming visitors*

church, maybe a measure of success was the number of sausages that were sizzled — 280! Mostly it was just a relaxed and happy occasion, with beautiful weather, and very engaged participants in the demonstrations of composting and seed bomb making.

A couple of great outcomes for the garden from the Open Day has been the offer from Capital Scraps and

Canberra Seed Savers of workshops over winter on getting the most from our composting and seed saving and protecting seedlings — it can be disheartening propagating seedlings only to find some critter has demolished them overnight.

Our next significant project is the extra shed and moving the old one, which we hope can be done with help from colleagues from the Cook community garden in winter.

The wonderful rain these past months has meant we have had a bumper season over summer and this is demonstrated by the volume of produce donated to Companion House, the produce made into preserves and dried to make herbal infusions and, as the photos show, the happy vibe of the Open Day.

The garden is of course a work in progress, and by the time you read this the Open Day will have been held, so we hope that any of you who paid us a visit found it interesting and rewarding. Finally, a massive thank you to all the volunteers involved in making the Open Day such a memorable and enjoyable day.

—Deborah Hamilton  
(article and photos)

*Canberra Seed Savers teaching us how to make a seed bomb*



## Charnwood community garden — building our shelter: from vision to fruition

As one of the oldest community gardens, the Charnwood community garden did not have a shelter to protect gardeners from frequently occurring rainstorms, destructive hailstorms, and the hot summer sun. Meetings and gatherings were always scheduled dependent on clear weather forecasts.

Therefore, the Garden Committee decided that we could design and build a shelter ourselves, using gardener expertise. We wanted a rustic shelter to compliment the relaxed atmosphere in the garden and provide a covered entrance to our existing shed. However, we needed money to do it. We were successful in obtaining a 2020-2021 ACT Community Gardens Grant to start the project. COGS matched this funding, and our gardeners raised further money from fundraising activities (Table 1).

The build involved:

- the design and building approval (BA) of a plan and cross sections;
- the costing, seeking of discounts and purchasing of materials;
- removal of four *Casuarina sp.* trees from the site;
- excavation of the site;
- installation of *Extenda* brackets and beam on the existing shed;
- survey set out of footings and pole positions;
- digging the footings, welding reinforcement, and pouring concrete for the footings;
- developing a jig to cut the pole recesses;



*The original shed before the shelter was built*

- installation of the rafters and strap bracing;
- installation of the roofing, and
- the final inspection of the footings and building to obtain the Certificate of Occupancy.

We commenced the project in October 2020 and finished it in January 2022, achieving the key milestones outlined in the Community Grant, but not the key dates. Much time was lost because we were required to engage a licensed builder to sign off on the building application. This was because our garden is located on ACT Government land.

The existing *Casuarina sp.* tree roots affected the footing locations that required much digging and reinforcement.

Added to this was the persistent La Niña wet and windy weather conditions that continually flooded the building site and increased OH&S risks. Restrictions on the number of gathered persons during the COVID pandemic prevented ‘team’ work, and there was the added urgency to raise more funds during the build to cover additional costs.

We finished the shelter and learnt that self-building was fraught with challenges. Patience was an essential trait, and the acquisition of new building skills and knowledge was an added benefit. Problem solving and resolution was sometimes

**Table 1. Summary of shelter income and expenditure**

Contributor	Income	Estimated In-kind contribution	Expenditure
<b>Income</b>			
Grant - ACT Government	\$4,558		
Matched - COGS	\$4,500		
Fund raising - gardeners	\$5,213		
Tree removal – ACT Government		\$1,700	
Plans drawn and approved - gardener		\$700	
Surveyor - gardener		\$3,400	
Project management, building and landscaping - gardeners		\$12,000	
Building inspections - Capital Certifiers		\$1,200	
Discounts – various suppliers		\$1,000	
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$14,271</b>	<b>\$20,000</b>	
<b>Expenditure</b>			
Licensed builder			\$2,750
Shelter materials and site works			\$10,230
Landscaping			\$622
<b>Total</b>			<b>\$13,602</b>





*The completed shelter and landscaping*

difficult with several people and the project may have progressed more quickly had the licensed builder been continually onsite.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, overall, we managed to work together well as a team to achieve our desired goal to complete the shelter. Rustic landscaping to complement the structure was in the form of a gabion retaining wall on one side using broken concrete and rocks from onsite and elsewhere and the area behind it planted with natives. The floor had donated pavers laid, as well as on the top of the gabion wall to create extra seating.

A majestically sturdy and long-lasting structure, this shelter will provide much needed protection and be the

focus for many meetings and open days into the future. It also provides a peaceful and cosy ambiance for informal gatherings and a place for gardeners to sit and enjoy the product of their labour over a cuppa after working hard in their plots.

The Charnwood community garden hosted the COGS AGM in March 2022 in this space; however, we will officially celebrate the completion of the shelter on 1 May 2022 from 2 to 4 pm with those who donated, gave discounts, raised funds, and worked to bring this wonderful project from a vision to fruition.

— Teresa Rose and Ange McNeilly (article);  
tables and photos by Teresa Rose

*(l to r): Excavating the footings; cutting the poles; installing beams, rafters and strapping*





## Holder community garden — ‘Next-gen’ gardeners

During 2020–21, the Holder community garden had an influx of new gardeners. Many of these were from a younger generation or the ‘next-gen’ of gardeners. These are some of their stories, their trials and tribulations and successes. Hopefully they inspire each of us to have a go and to help the next generation and future of COGS.

### Katy



*Katy in her plot at Holder*

Like a lot of people, the first Coronavirus lockdown in 2020 gave me a renewed appreciation of the outdoors. During this time, I started to wish that my Weston backyard was less swimming pool and more garden so I could start a vegetable plot and learn how to grow more of my own produce.

I was vaguely aware there were some community gardens in Canberra, but I had no idea what was involved in joining COGS or how you went about getting a plot. With a quick search of the internet however, I discovered that the Holder community garden was the closest one to me. I signed my husband and I up as new COGS members and enquired about joining the garden plot waiting list. I expected that plots would be in high demand and that I would need to wait many months (even years) for a plot. I was very excited when only a few weeks later I was advised I could have a plot within a month or two. As I am a total gardening novice and work full time, I asked for a smaller plot and was lucky to be allocated a nice clear one that had been very well looked after and has gifted me potatoes, parsnips and amaranth.

Since August last year I have been on a steep, but highly enjoyable and immersive learning curve. During the week I plan on my phone what I am going to do at the plot so I

can make the most of my gardening time on the weekend. Time quickly disappears as I potter around planting, weeding, tending to and picking things. My favourite things to grow so far have been snow peas (so pretty), beans (so plentiful), spinach (so easy) and eggplants (so exciting when the flowers become baby eggplants). I am also still amazed at how many enormous zucchinis (or marrows) my plot has produced.

I have learnt just as much, though, from the things that have not gone so well, such as the woody tough carrots I planted too early, the split and bug-eaten tomatoes that I planted too many of too close together, and the corn cobs and Jack Be Little pumpkins that I impatiently picked too early. I also expect my battle with the orange stink bug invaders to be ongoing.

I enjoy looking at the other garden plots and how they are being used and I really appreciated the expert knowledge that other members of the garden have shared with me. I am cleaning out the plot ready to plant some winter crops and looking forward to seeing whether my Myoga (Japanese ginger) produces any flower buds that I can pickle to accompany sashimi. I am also investigating whether I have any chance of trying to grow non-grafted passionfruit and peonies later this year.

Joining the Holder community garden was definitely the most positive thing I did last year for my mental and physical health — it has provided me with a perfect mix of education, mindful escapism and productivity!

### Zara and Liz



*Zara (left) and Liz (right)*

I (Zara) grew up in a house with a big backyard and my mother would grow vegetables when I was younger (okay, mostly tomatoes and herbs) so knowing where our food came from has always been important for me. I have been living in apartments since moving to Canberra, so I have missed having that connection to the land, which



is how I ended up getting a garden plot in Holder. I share the garden plot with my friend Liz — we generally try to eat organic food as much as we can, so growing our own organic vegetables lends itself to that.

We found out about COGS through an internet search a few years ago, and it has been on my Canberra bucket list for a while. I am interested in sourcing food locally, so growing our own is a part of that lifestyle. Liz and I are also really trying to reduce our waste and move as close to a zero-waste lifestyle as possible, so we wanted to find an opportunity to use our compost rather than sending it into landfill. We have enjoyed growing our own food in the process.

Joining COGS has been a wonderful experience! We have met so many interesting people. My neighbouring gardener has inspired me to get out of my comfort zone and grow things that I wouldn't ordinarily have thought to grow — she has mastered corn, zucchinis and beans which I hope to plant when the season is right for them. I have also met a lot of generous people who have shared their produce with me which has been really lovely.

At first, I was naively ambitious and didn't plan the space well. I planted strawberries, tomatoes, pumpkins, silverbeet and beetroot. Needless to say, the pumpkins took over the plot and crowded out the other vegetables. We also seem to have copious amounts of parsnips from the previous plot owner which have been great.

Both of us have learnt a lot. We follow the seasonal guide on the COGS website — it is such a handy resource for knowing when to plant and harvest vegetables. Probably most useful though has been learning from the other gardeners and seeing how they have used their space. The community has a wealth of knowledge about the best way to grow organic vegetables. I learnt to add extra mulch under our pumpkins to protect from the frost, and to place pots around the seedlings in the early stages to protect them from the wind and bugs. When something doesn't work, we try a new approach and don't give up!

Overall, COGS has been rewarding, satisfying, and provided us with connection.

## Sarah

I grew up in Darwin in the Northern Territory on 5 acres of land. My mum loved gardening and growing tropical fruit trees and vegetables. We ate a lot of Asian-inspired dishes, growing Asian vegetables and making unique food such as chilli mud crab and curry magpie goose.

Moving to Canberra in 2018, I had to learn how to grow food in a completely different climate! I found it very frustrating how slowly vegetables grow here, compared to in the tropics. While living in Holder I would often drive past the COGS Holder community garden. After moving to a townhouse in Coombs and having less land to grow things, I applied to join the Holder community garden. I received my plot in winter and I just planted everything I could to see what would grow. I gained a virgin plot free of weeds, so I wanted to get growing as soon as I could. I would go regularly feeling like I was actually just feeding the wood ducks, who loved the young seedlings I planted.



*Sarah enjoying her garden plot*

After I had four weeks away, all of a sudden I had heaps of food growing on my plot! I was very successful growing spinach, potatoes, carrots, spring onions, leeks, tomatoes, spaghetti squash, snow peas, and pumpkins.

I managed to grow sweetcorn; however, my late crop was eaten by pests. I was also trying to grow watermelon with no luck. I am getting good at preparing food to avoid spoilage by freezing vegetables and making sauces.

Gardening is great for mental health and growing communities. I grow seedlings for charity with the Canberra Seed Savers and love to talk to people about plants. I hope to have a successful crop over the year and meet many other gardeners in Holder.

## Mary

At the beginning of 2020, I signed up to do an Introduction to Horticulture class, offered at the Canberra Institute of Technology in Bruce as an entryway into the full-time certificate courses offered there. I wanted to learn how to invest in my own future, to invest in the production of my own food year-round, and to invest in my skills and knowledge. I would like to say I thought a little wider than myself, but to be truthful, it wasn't very far. I just wanted to be a good and intelligent gardener, and maybe get a job planting seeds at the Botanic Gardens. I really loved the class. It was filled with people like me with a vague interest in gardening but not much knowledge or skill. We all wanted to know why our leaves were crinkly or the flowers were speckled, or the fruit kept rotting from the inside. I realised quickly I was not cut out to be a horticulturalist (none of us was), but I was extremely inspired to be a good gardener. The most valuable thing I gained from the experience was the courage to sign up to COGS.

When I was first allocated a plot at Holder and was shown around the garden, I felt electric with excitement. I was

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going to be a good gardener! During my induction with the Convenor Neil and Paulene (Holder Committee member), I felt the responsibility of being part of a community. I was sent the garden map filled with the names of my fellow gardeners and hoped each was a future friend. I was going to be a good and responsible gardener with heaps of gardening friends! I think that has become true (or mostly true), but it has not been easy. In fact, it has been much harder than I thought.

I received my plot in winter 2021 and spent a lot of time weeding and planning. Together, with my mother, we put down cardboard and mulch and old fence palings for walkways. I bought packets of seeds and read through planting guides. I wasn't quite sure what my plan was — just to have a productive garden, really. But all I ended up doing was coming to the garden to keep the dreaded couch at bay. I didn't have the knowledge or the drive to progress at all at that time. I was coming in just to pull out the weeds which were taking over. I began to feel disheartened.

At home though, it was a different story — having the plot made me a much better home gardener. I coaxed the lemon tree into fruiting, I got an avocado seed to sprout, I built a herb spiral, I reinvigorated the compost and re-potted the hydrangeas. At work too, I would regale my colleagues and customers about my plot and what was happening — what was thriving and what was struggling; what I was thinking for each bed next; what other gardeners were growing; and how the fruit trees were looking. I did notice all this stuff, I was taking note, but it was a bit of a façade. I had started to dread going to the plot — I was failing and was a fish out of water. I felt overwhelmed by the other beautiful gardens surrounding mine. I struggled to find time to come down to the garden — I was working two jobs and cannot drive due to a vision impairment.

When I did make it down, I was easily discouraged by my raggedy efforts. I was nervous to see the other gardeners happy in their plots and scared to go down there without a helper. So, I decided to enlist my family. My niece and nephews became slug catchers, my sister a weeder, my brother a digger, my mum a whipper-snipper extraordinaire! Things became easier. I also met some of my fellow plot-holders, who were friendly and encouraging, refusing to let me put my efforts down. Their work ethic and knowledge became fascinating, their different methods of gardening intriguing — I stopped feeling scared to go into the garden if there was someone else there. Then after a while, when spring was warming the earth, the seeds I'd been scattering started to sprout and I had some seedlings! I felt hopeful.

As they grew, I began to feel happier. Plants want to grow! Things were appearing everywhere. It was easier to relax in the garden. Every time I visited there was something new, something bigger and healthier than before. The sunflowers, the borage, the spinach, the carrots. I put in tomatoes, eggplant, sweet potato, zucchini, squash. So many herbs, too. Some things grew, but some things didn't. Some things came up by surprise — I've grown to love and appreciate Russian comfrey and to absolutely



Mary with her helpers (her niece and nephew)

adore amaranth. I didn't plant it and I don't really know how to use it apart from a baby leaf salad, but the heavy hanging ooze of red flower filled me with admiration. I put in two little pumpkins, which grew and grew and grew! They made the garden feel full and real with their creeping vines and huge leaves — and when the sunflowers opened, my plot was finally beautiful. A bit mismatched and messy and full of weeds, but beautiful. I felt so good I invited a friend to come by while she was in town from Melbourne (I had been a bit afraid to let any friends in before then). The whole garden invigorated her; "this truly is paradise" she said, surveying the garden from my plot "this is what people live for". And it was true — what we live for and how we live. The crops started to come in and I was providing for everyone. Rainbow carrots for the kids, eggplant for my sister, spinach for my brother, beetroot for me, scraps for the chooks, and zucchinis and pumpkins for everyone.

So, while it has been hard, I feel that it's been a good year of gardening. I feel excited for the next year. I still have much to learn about my plot and what I want to grow, but it doesn't feel as daunting anymore. I feel ready to get to know the soil and the seasons. I've learned a bit more about my own habits — it is always going to be tricky to make time for the garden, but I know that I can have a garden that can survive despite that. I know what veggies I want to eat, and I am getting better at remembering when to plant them (and how many!). I don't sweat the small stuff — what will grow will grow. I feel more comfortable asking for help — from my family and from the other gardeners. I feel ready to listen without judging myself. And I know I have my little slice of paradise, and I am getting to be a good gardener.

—Neil Williams (article) and Katy, Zara and Liz, Sarah and Mary (article and photos)



## Erindale community garden — preparing for winter

Life in Erindale community garden continues to be busy and productive. Three members of the garden (Claudia, Markus and I) travelled across Canberra recently to attend COGS O'Connor Open Day. Well done to O'Connor for such a wonderful occasion. We stayed for several hours, and it was very well organised and interesting. We were given advice on how to grow giant sweet carrots and give one as present. We are now keen to grow this variety of carrot called Red Chantenay!

We met members of community groups who had a stall outside the garden. Markus and I are members of ACT for Bees and Other Pollinators, and Claudia has an interest to join too. At Erindale we grow lots of herbs and flowers to attract more bees and pollinators to the garden. We will also assist with the ACT for Bees stall at the Farmers Market AT EPIC on World Bee Day (21 May 2022) and with a display at the Belgian Embassy. At O'Connor we also learnt how to make 'seed bombs' with Chrissie at the Canberra Seed Savers stall and will use that technique to use up older seeds that we collected at



*At the ACT for Bees stall (l to r): Stephen, Vicky, Julie Armstrong (founder of ACT for Bees), unknown, Didi and Markus*

Erindale. Then we had a chat with Arian, who invited us to participate in spring with the Dwarf Tomato growing project. We are very excited about being part of this project to help save seeds, so more growers will have access to the seeds. This will mean these special dwarf varieties will be available to ACT gardeners in the future.

Back at Erindale, we have had a wonderful growing season, harvesting capsicums, chilli, Jerusalem artichokes, yacon and much more. We have two big pineapple sage, which provide welcome food for the bees during autumn. They are frost sensitive plants and become dormant or even die off during winter, but with some frost protection we have managed to get the plants through previous winters. They are in full bloom from March for several weeks — a constant buzzing from the bees can be heard all through the day.

We also have a flourishing stevia plant, from which we intend to save the seeds. The plant is also frost sensitive, but we managed to get it through the past two winters by protecting the plant with frost cloth. Hopefully we will be able to collect the seeds before the frost arrives and share with others.

As the weather starts to cool, the garlic has now been planted for the winter months and things will start to slow down a little, but it won't be long before spring is here and we get to do it all over again.

—Didi Sommer (article and photos)

*Claudia admiring the veggies at O'Connor*





## COGS submission to the ACT Government's *Capital Food and Fibre Strategy*

COGS made a submission to the ACT Government's *Capital Food and Fibre Strategy* in February. The following is a summary of the main points; the full submission is available for members at <https://cogs.asn.au/capital-food-and-fibre-strategy-submission/>.

COGS supports the development of a roadmap for a sustainable, resilient, and secure agricultural system for the ACT and surrounding region. We recommend that the 2012 background paper, *Food in the ACT*, be updated. The paper identified an increasing interest in local food production, sales and consumption as well as community concerns about the social, economic and environmental impacts of food. Further work is needed to address the knowledge gaps outlined in this document.

The following identifies opportunities to contribute to the proposed goals:

- 1. Transition to ecologically sustainable food and fibre production supported by strong environmental stewardship to ensure the region has healthy soils, water, and air.**
- 2. Build the drought and climate change resilience of the ACT farm sector by identifying and encouraging practices that best fit the region's conditions.**

The report, *Vulnerabilities to climate change in the Murray-Darling Basin*, predicts with a high level of confidence that temperatures will rise and, in the southern Basin, winter rainfall will decline. As projected reductions in water available are exacerbated by other impacts of climate change, maintaining existing levels of productivity and sustainability in the Australian Capital Region (ACT) will be challenging.

Integrated approaches to on-farm soil, vegetation, and water management (sometimes referred to as



*Kambah community garden (photo by Matt Mawson)*

regenerative agriculture) are needed to improve soil health, air quality, water availability and quality. Wider adoption of regenerative agricultural land management practices across the ACT appears to offer the best opportunity to transition to sustainable food and fibre production and build the drought and climate change resilience needed for future farming. Many farmers will require encouragement to start this process. In the ACT this could come in the form of increases in the security of tenure or reduction in changes to lessees who have planned and initiated a regenerative approach to their land management.

Programs recently announced under the *National Soil Package* will provide opportunities for farmers to improve their soil and vegetation management practices. Monthly reporting on ground cover status against regional targets prepared for the ACT, will provide an indicator for progress towards environmental targets. The adoption of this reporting in the ACT's *Land Management Agreements* would provide valuable feedback to managers and help set goals for improvement.

At the urban level there is a need to translate developments in soil biology into practical local advice on soil management for home and community gardeners, particularly in relation to improving soil structure, retaining moisture, and building soil carbon. The ACT Government could partner with local research institutions to prepare guides to improving soil management and monitoring soil health.

The ACT Government is phasing out single use plastics to reduce plastic pollution. Many gardening items, while not always single use, are not recyclable in the ACT, and when discarded add to plastic pollution. Garden City Plastics have a recycling service via bins at nurseries around Australia. The ACT could participate by partnering with a local business to establish a collection point.

- 3. Increase the capacity to produce food and fibre locally to shorten supply chains and reduce reliance on external supply**

Suitable land with access to water will need to be identified, if the ACT's production capacity is to

## from the Executive

be increased without substantial investment in infrastructure for indoor growing. Most rural land is used for extensive grazing; therefore, a soil survey is needed to identify if there are areas of higher quality land for commercial, more intensive agriculture and horticulture.

Within urban areas there is significant demand for more community gardens. COGS strongly recommends that the ACT Government identify sites for more gardens on unused leasehold land, and where opportunities exist, include garden space on land being redeveloped. Retrofitting gardens in urban areas can be difficult; it is recommended that the ACT require developers to include community gardens in the open spaces for new suburbs.

#### 4. Support innovation in the food and fibre sector through the adoption of diverse practices,

#### business models and new technology

The ACT Government is to be commended for the introduction of the *Food and Garden Organics* collection pilot, and it is hoped that the program is extended to the rest of the ACT. The availability of another quality local compost will be welcomed by Canberra gardeners. Could the food waste, combined with green waste and material from regional livestock or poultry operations provide a commercial basis for more locally prepared soil mixes and mulches? These could replace some of the garden products on sale in the ACT trucked in from distant locations.

#### 5. Enhance participation, knowledge exchange, employment opportunities and financial viability across the food and fibre supply chain

Currently, access to land constrains increasing participation in the ACT's supply system for urban gardeners and possibly for more commercial operations. Are there opportunities to enhance participation through government support for more school gardens and land-share sites?

The burgeoning interest in local food supplies shown by some ACT restaurants and independent grocers, as well as consumers, could provide support for additional small horticultural operations supplying seasonal herbs and vegetables (assuming water availability). Buy local could be linked to corporate social responsibility (providing local employment, reducing the distance travelled by goods and the time to market). The ACT Government could consider partnering with retailers to promote locally produced goods.

—Michele Barson (article)

## COGS' digital archive working group

At the March Executive Committee meeting, COGS decided to establish a Digital Archive Working Group to maintain and improve members' long-term access to COGS' records. The records the group intends to capture include Annual General Meeting minutes, Committee and Life Membership appointments, ACT Government and other licensing arrangements for our gardens, the Constitution and policy documents.

The Working Group will recommend the types of documents to be prepared for online storage (some are likely to be only available in hard copy, more recent material will be electronic), and how best to set up the storage to make access easy.

The first task, initiated by Information Officer Cathy Morison, has been to digitise past copies of our quarterly *Canberra Organic* magazine (digital copies date back to 1997). Most of these are now available for members at <https://cogs.asn.au/members-area/members-magazine/>. At the time we had 15 missing editions, however these have all been located, digitised and will be added to the website.

Our main tasks, other than recommending on what should be stored and how, will be chasing up material that may be stored in the boxes of COGS' records held at the ACT Heritage Library or trawling through



electronic records provided by previous COGS' Committee members to fill gaps in the records.

The Working Group currently comprises Michele Barson, Julie Gorrell, Cathy Morison and Peter Weddell and additional volunteers are welcome. Please contact [vicepresident@cogs.asn.au](mailto:vicepresident@cogs.asn.au) if you would like to join this group or have records you think might be useful.

—Michele Barson (article)



## The history and value of persimmons

In the early sixties, I moved with my family to a small farm outside Windsor, NSW, where my father had decided to try his hand at growing mushrooms in sheds. The mushroom industry was just beginning to expand, as more controlled conditions inside sheds meant a better yield than growing them the old-fashioned way in rows of humped up compost and peat moss covered in straw and hessian. A great place for snakes to hide out over winter as we had already discovered! I didn't like mushrooms at the time, but the farm had a small persimmon orchard, and my father gave me one of the beautiful orange fruits to try. I liked it even less than mushrooms and as the inside of my mouth puckered up, I spat it out in disgust.

In those days the only persimmons you could get in Australia were very astringent and bitter when unripe. You had to *blet* (overripen) them before they became edible. This meant picking the fruit and letting it over-ripen until the flesh reached the consistency of orange jelly. Without this treatment, eating a persimmon was like gnawing on an iron bar. Fortunately, *bletting* persimmons doesn't go as far as the process for medlars, which are picked and left to go brown before eating — they look like they are rotten, but aficionados say they taste sweet and pleasant. I haven't been game enough to eat a persimmon since, not even the non-astringent varieties you can now buy, but over winter I love looking at the



Persimmons (photo credit: Gabrielle Clare Marino, Unsplash)

fruit hanging on its bare tree like Chinese lanterns.

Indeed, persimmons originated from China, India and the northern part of former Indochina about 2000 years ago. At a market near the Great Wall of China I saw dried persimmons for sale. Who would have thought that, according to Wikipedia, the Oriental persimmon, *Diospyros kaki*, is among the most commonly human-grown fruit trees on Earth. In 2019, China produced around 75% of persimmon fruit. It is also interesting that the persimmon fruit is actually a berry, a bit like a tomato, and the trees are usually either male or female (dioecious). The name persimmon seems to be derived from an American Indian (Powhatan) word for the American persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*) native to the eastern States and means *a dried fruit*.

Persimmons are not only beautiful but, like most fruit, packed full of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants including high levels of vitamin A (one serve is equivalent to half the daily recommended intake), vitamin C and the mineral manganese (which helps blood clot) as well as vitamins

E, K, B6, B1, B2, folate, beta carotene and the minerals potassium, copper and phosphorus. The peel of persimmons contains lutein and zeaxanthin (carotenoids) which help protect against eye disease and a range of flavonoids which have antidiabetic and antioxidant properties. The soluble fibre that persimmons contain slows down digestion of carbohydrates and therefore helps to reduce spikes in blood glucose levels. As a package, the nutrients in persimmons are useful in reducing the risk of heart disease and lowering cholesterol levels and can reduce the risk of other diseases such as cancer, inflammation and strokes.

If you are unfamiliar with persimmons, try a non-astringent variety that doesn't need bletting and can be eating when crisp. Slice it up for salads, add to your cereal or smoothies, roast it the oven with a little honey and serve it with ice cream for a dessert or as an accompaniment to a roast. If you have persimmon tree you can make your own fruit leather from the ripe or bletted fruit or dry it in a dehydrator. You can order dried persimmons online, however.

—Elizabeth Dangerfield (article)

Persimmon tree (photo credit: Yoonbae Cho, Unsplash)



## Beetroot Chioggia

If you are after a relatively carefree and easy to propagate crop in Canberra, then beetroot fits the bill. When I first tried growing beets, my first choice was one of the readily available red varieties. I love them raw in salads, roasted, barbequed, in soups and raw in a veggie smoothie. But oh, the mess when harvesting and preparing them. The beautiful red colour ends up EVERYWHERE. Then one day I saw a seed packet with a beautiful pink and white striped beetroot on the cover. I was introduced to the Chioggia beetroot, and I haven't looked back. I would almost go as far as to describe them as the perfect crop for a vegetable garden in Canberra.

Firstly, they are incredibly easy to propagate, and I have sown the seeds almost all year round. If you sow them in Autumn, you can harvest in late Spring/early Summer. If you sow in Spring, you are eating beets for most of the summer. I usually plant them in high density and then thin them out — replanting the thinnings very successfully.

Secondly, pests do not seem to be at all interested in them. In a season

*Beetroot Chioggia has a light red skin with red and white flesh on the inside*



*Cathy's homegrown Beetroot Chioggia*

like the one we have just had where almost every crop is being decimated by snails, slugs, slaters, earwigs, caterpillars and so on, nothing has touched the Chioggia beetroot.

Thirdly, they produce a very sweet and mild tasting bulb which can grow incredibly large. When cut open, it is beautiful to behold. It doesn't bleed, so there is no mess. You can even eat the green tops when the plant is young — the leaves are very similar in appearance to chard.

I mostly use the bulbs in soups (you can use a regular beetroot soup recipe, but the resulting soup isn't red) or — my favourite — marinate slices or fingers (like chips) in a bit of oil and soy sauce and sauté, roast or barbeque them. Done on the barbeque, they are an irresistible dish that would have any non-veg eater coming back for more.

I have modified the following soup recipe from my Thermomix favourite. Enjoy!

—Cathy Morison  
(article and photos)

### Beetroot Soup

- 500g raw beetroots, peeled, cut in pieces
- 700g water or stock
- 150g white wine
- 2 tsp (heaped) vegetable stock paste
- 25g plain flour
- ½ – 1 tsp salt, to taste
- 2 pinches ground nutmeg
- 1 pinch ground black pepper
- 100g double cream
- 1 tbsp white wine vinegar (optional)

Peel beetroots and cut into smallish cubes.

Combine water/stock, white wine, vegetable stock paste, flour, salt, nutmeg and black pepper and cook for 25 minutes (or until cooked).

Add cream and white wine vinegar (if using) and blend using a stick blender.



## Getting pickled in Melba

There have been many times recently, as I picked, pickled and dried the season's abundance of produce, I had cause to think — be careful what you wish for!

Since adopting a wholefood, plant-based diet, my vegetable garden has become an even bigger part of my lifestyle. I get a lot of satisfaction out of growing food, so every year I aim to improve my skills and yield. It's a big experiment with an equally big agenda of ideas and plans. I've only just started a plot at Charnwood, so this story of bounty comes from my home garden in Melba.

Investing in a greenhouse last year allowed me to start early and grow large quantities of seedlings. Generally, my approach is to grow more than I need — using saved seed — to cater for loss and experimentation along the way.

I have to admit... I got carried away. Eighty tomato seedlings are over the top and with seven varieties, my only disappointment was eating so few grape tomatoes, as the Tigerillas are just so tasty! I staked most of



*What to do with an excess of zucchinis and cucumbers*

the plants, but let others do their own thing. I find I lose about the same amount of fruit either way. I've also thought about netting them but for the small amount I lose, it might not be worth the effort. I did use paper bags this year and all the bagged tomatoes were perfect — but

the sheer quantity of tomatoes put a stop to this. With a freezer full of fruit, various chutneys, and vats of dried roma strips in olive oil, my enthusiasm for tomatoes was well rewarded.

The zucchinis and cucumbers tell a similar story. This was my first year of preserving both and I am now officially a pickler. Yes, I got carried away here as well. Four zucchini plants don't sound like much but when the fruit double in size overnight or they get too big for the fridge, it's possible to wish they would stop! And soon enough they do. But what a bounty! Who knew pickled zucchini was so tasty, especially with ginger and fennel seed?

My other great success this year was basil. Besides eating tomato and basil every day for months, I wanted to grow enough for a supply of vegan pesto. You need a lot of basil for pesto, so I planted about 40 plants. Some died, others didn't like where they were planted but most provided multiple pickings and seed for next year. Blended with nuts, garlic, lemon juice and olive oil, I froze in small portions. There is simply no comparison between home grown

*Dehydrating the celery I grew in an old bathtub!*







*Having a greenhouse allowed me to grow from seed on a large scale*

and shop-bought basil and with dozens of pesto blocks at hand, I will happily be reminded of that for some time to come.

While these were my most successful crops this season, I've had little wins across the garden and each one has improved my confidence to continue pushing the boundaries. I grew two plots of corn (with a free lesson on the right time to pick) and marvelled at my blemish-free eggplants and capsicums, visible through their protective net. Loving salad, I grow a lot of greens, mostly by tossing seeds around the place, though I've yet to master carrots and beetroot. The pumpkins threatened to consume my beehives, but considering they were pelted by hail early on, I will be happy with any fruit I find beneath the overgrowth. I'm also trying to grow wild rosella and having the greenhouse allowed me to do better with them this year. I should be soon able to harvest some acclimatised seed for next season and a hopefully a handful of fruit to mix in a tea.

My greenhouse is also the new winter home for my chilli bushes, which previously overwintered in my living room. I love chilli and am pleased to say I'm self-sufficient in

growing them — and pleased to see them move outside permanently! I eat chilli often, so it's quite rewarding to grow and preserve enough to last

*My verge garden*



me a year until the next crop ripens. Once chopped, I freeze them, or soak them in vinegar overnight and store in olive oil.

Next spring, besides becoming more accomplished in growing carrots and beetroot, I will experiment with beans. I particularly like borlotti beans and the only real hindrance so far has been space. So, I need to expand my trellising skills and aim high! This season I grew yellow and purple bush beans and while the slugs and I had enough to eat, I don't have any stores of frozen or dried beans (though quite a few slugs ended up in the freezer — but that's another story).

Growing organic food is a big part of my lifestyle. The warm days of chopping, salting, heating and bottling are now a pleasant memory of a bountiful season. With a smudged notebook of observations and recipes, a seed bank for next spring, and a new plot at Charnwood, my growing ambitions are only temporarily slowed by the impending cold. With garlic and onions my main focus for winter, I'm sure to get carried away again!

—Kathleen (article and photos)

## Our new Life Members — Richard Horobin, Narelle McLean and Conrad van Hest

At the 2022 Annual General Meeting, Life Membership of the Canberra Organic Growers Society was presented to Richard Horobin, Narelle McLean and Conrad van Hest in recognition of their contribution to COGS.

Andy Hrast chatted with Richard, Rebecca Travers sat down with Narelle and Neil Williams interviewed Conrad about what it meant to them to be a Life Member of COGS.

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### Richard Horobin

Andy says *“I first met Richard when he took up a plot the Cotter (now Betty Cornhill) Garden in 2010. The awarding of Life Membership is a fitting recognition of the contribution he has made to the garden and to COGS generally.*

*While Richard was convenor of the Betty Cornhill Garden he organised a new shed, expanded the garden by 25 plots and initiated a name change of the garden to recognise the founder and former gardener in the garden, Betty Cornhill. Richard also provided his skills to help develop the current COGS accounting system.*

*I met Richard for this interview at his home in Curtin where he showed me his chickens — his girls as he calls them — and around what is clearly a gardener’s yard. It is a garden he and his wife, Patricia, can be proud of.*

*Thank you, Richard, for your contribution to COGS (and for the eggs!)”*

—Andy Hrast

### How and when did you first get involved with gardening and with COGS?

I first grew watermelons as a nine-year-old in Western Australia. Patricia and I took up a plot at the Cotter Garden — now called Betty Cornhill Garden — in 2010, after

a course by Keith Colls on organic gardening. We joined the Cotter Garden because it was the closest to home and had a vacant plot available. Trevor Bruhn, the Convenor at the time, was very welcoming. I have learnt a lot from Trevor and other gardeners over the years. There is a wealth of gardening knowledge there, which is passed on to new gardeners.

### Why is organic gardening important to you?

It’s the connection with the soil. Like every gardener I like having my hands in the dirt.

### What do you particularly enjoy growing?

I like growing berries and broccoli. Broccoli in particular tastes so much better from the garden plot and other high value crops but I am not much of a fan of leafy greens. I also like to grow dahlias.

### What do you think are the opportunities for COGS?

The current high demand for community garden plots is a wonderful opportunity for COGS. It should be an incentive to increase the number of gardens. Another area I think COGS should consider, is the better utilisation of the skills of COGS members. We have such wealth of experience and knowledge among us.

### What does it mean to you, to be a Life Member of COGS?

It’s pleasing to be recognised for the work Patricia and I have done at Betty Cornhill and COGS generally.

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### Narelle McLean

Rebecca says *“Narelle was one of the first people I met when I joined COGS in 2017, so I was delighted to sit down with her again and chat about becoming a Life Member. Narelle*

*has been the convenor at Mitchell community garden for over six years. Members at Mitchell nominated her for her work with Gwen Bates in revitalising the garden not long after they joined. This included a big project to have rubbish removed, trees lopped, reorganisation of the garden and many other improvements.*

*Narelle has also been proactive in making connections with the local Mitchell business community, government agencies and neighbours to support the garden. She has set up fundraising, through Bunnings, to build the shed and finance other garden projects. She has taken care to nurture the relationship with Bunnings through various staff changes and the pandemic and has welcomed and encouraged the public and volunteers to the garden, notably NDIS participants (a program now to be set up across COGS).*

*She was nominated for her unfailing promotion of the values and aims of COGS, demonstrated most recently through participation in an ABC Radio interview providing a virtual tour of the Mitchell Garden and outlining its connection and relationship to COGS. A go-getter by nature, Narelle is always exploring ways in which to improve and maintain the garden (and following through), as well considering the welfare of other gardeners, with offers of support (and firm reminders) when needed.”*

### How and when did you first get involved with gardening and with COGS?

I retired in 2014 and was still living in Sydney at the time. Retirement was a bit of a shock to the system, and I was finding it difficult with nothing to do. I moved to Canberra for family reasons and had always loved the outdoors, so thought I might try and find a local community garden. I had



little experience with gardening at the time.

I met with the then Convenor at Mitchell and within an hour was talked into taking a plot. The garden itself was in a bit of a mess but working together with Gwen (Bates) — until she retired from the garden — we began to revitalise it. It also provided me with something to do and something to keep thinking about and learning from. I'm usually there at least five days a week now, if not more.

### **Why is organic gardening important to you?**

For me it's all about the health benefits. I need to be healthy and over the years I have realised vegetables are where I'm going to gain the most benefit. I also feel that we have a responsibility to look after the land. Mitchell community garden is located in a nature reserve, so growing organically is the right thing to do.

### **What do you particularly enjoy growing?**

Tomatoes! There is nothing better than growing your own. I also always have chilli and rocket growing because they are both so useful and versatile. I like to try different things, like this year I grew pumpkins over a trellis archway. The two things I've never had much success with have been Brussels Sprouts and Wombok — they always seem to go to flower early, or the birds get to them.

### **What do you think are the opportunities for COGS moving forward?**

COGS is an organisation with over 40 years of experience. At a basic level, there is the opportunity to help people to grow organically. However, with such a diverse group of people as its membership, there is a real opportunity to provide education to the local community. By working with other local environmental groups and organisations (e.g. compost experts, seed savers), COGS can add another level to the community engagement.

COGS is also a well-respected organisation and has an opportunity



*(l to r): COGS Life Members Narelle McLean, Richard Horobin, Conrad van Hest*

to be a stakeholder that the local government always wants to engage with. From my recent conversations, our local Members of the Legislative Assembly are really starting to recognise that. We can provide expertise, as well as using our position to lobby the government to obtain more land or promote ideas such as community garden spaces linked to aged care services. We can also act as a consultant to groups who want to set up their own gardens and provide advice through each step of the process.

We also can provide a safe place for others within our gardens, whether that is providing a place for those who find it good for their mental health or by facilitating visits from NDIS or aged care clients. Many migrants who have recently moved to Australia have a natural connection

to the land, so our gardens can provide a positive environment in which to learn, communicate and integrate. There is so much we can do to support others.

### **What does it mean to you, to be a Life Member of COGS?**

I'd like to start by thanking COGS and those who nominated me. After I got over the initial shock, I recognised that it was about being given an award and an amazing opportunity from a wonderful group of people. From a practical perspective, it means that what I have been doing is of value and has made a difference, which means I'm on the right track. It made me realise I have been adding value to the Mitchell

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community garden and to COGS and that was reassuring.

Volunteers are the heart of this organisation, and many people will be surprised at the work that goes into running COGS at the Executive level, as well as in each individual garden. I feel privileged to have been able to contribute to that and look forward to doing more of it in the future.

\* \* \*

## Conrad van Hest

Neil says *“Conrad was nominated by members of the Holder community garden for his long and dedicated service to COGS over the past 20 years, in which he has been instrumental in the establishment of gardens, served on the Executive Committee and been the Convenor at Holder community garden. Conrad is currently a member of the Holder Garden Committee and is the Garden’s ‘Mr Fix-it’, conducting repairs and maintenance and composting across the garden. Conrad leads by example — his quiet ‘can-do’ attitude is something that endears him to Holder Garden members.”*

—Neil Williams

### What does it mean to you, to be Life Member of COGS?

Firstly, I like to thank those who nominated me for Life Membership. I’m honoured to receive this accolade and I appreciate that my contribution and tireless involvement to COGS and Holder community garden has been acknowledged.

This voluntary work can be interesting, enjoyable or tedious but the community spirit makes it worthwhile.

### How and when did you get involved with gardening and with COGS?

I joined COGS in 1997 after reading an article in *The Canberra Times* whilst looking for a new interest. Between 1998 – 2004 I was on the COGS committee as general member, Secretary and Vice-President. I was also involved in sub-committees for magazine distribution, COGS Backyard at Xeriscape Garden and Xeriscape Garden council.

I had a plot at Theodore Garden for a short time, before moving to Holder community garden. I needed more space as my home vegetable garden was small and overshadowed by mature apricot tree.

My interest in gardening comes from when I was growing up, my father had vegetable patch and orchard, while my mother had her roses and perennials.

### What do you particularly enjoy growing?

I grow the staples — tomatoes (bottling and eating), potatoes, beans, cabbage, onions, garlic, pumpkin, and other seasonal vegetables. I have perennials (hollyhocks, Russian sage, herbs, currants, etc) which add aesthetic, provide produce, and attract beneficial insects.

I like to have my plots working all seasons either by cropping, green manuring, and composting, I feel no soil should be left fallow.

### What was your involvement in establishing the new gardens?

I was on COGS committee when Keith Colls proposed a new garden at Cook, which eventually morphed into four new gardens by the end of 2001.

My involvement at Holder was help put up the fence and dig water trenches and at Kambah help with the fence. As founding member of the Holder Garden, I’ve seen it grow from bare ground to a flourishing garden. I recall looking at my plots in early days wondering where to start and wondering why I left Theodore, which had lovely alluvial soil.

### What challenges have you seen at Holder community garden?

The garden has faced many challenges in early years, a barren paddock, sits in a frost hollow, suffered superficial damage from the firestorm, various break-ins and thefts, loss of radiata pines, wax and wane of plot holders, prolong drought, water restrictions and Molonglo infrastructure works.

### What are your involvements in the Holder garden community?

My role and interest in how the garden has evolved. I’ve done countless working bees, sat on the Garden Committee, been Garden Convenor 2006–2010, done maintenance work

on the fence and taps, built and maintained compost bins, pruned fruit trees, constructed communal garden beds, water reticulation works and plot measurements.

### What was your involvement in Holder community garden expansion?

The garden faced pressure between 2008–2012 with the Molonglo development. The garden had the option to stay or move to the former CIT orchard in Weston. The garden members agreed to stay and put up with the challenges from major infrastructure works.

I was involved with changes to the north section of the garden (including handing garden land over for a bike path and future roadworks), but the south section extension was handed over to other garden members, with the foundation laid. I was asked later to cost and help with the water reticulation project, which involves relocating the water stop valve and laying pipes and taps for the south end.

### Why is organic gardening important to you?

Organic gardening to me is where I can grow seasonal vegetables and preserve or store for later, restore health and balance to the soil by composting and green manuring, composting organic material for microbe healthy humus.

Organic gardening methods are needed to adapt and attune to the increasing changing environmental conditions.

### What do you think are the opportunities for COGS moving forward?

For COGS to move forward it needs to establish more community gardens, provide a forum to promote the benefits of organic gardening to wider community and support similar community groups.

There needs to be more growing method information that is relevant with ever changing environmental conditions. This information can be provided through the web page or social platforms.

Finally, I’d like to acknowledge past and present plot holders for their contribution in making Holder community garden what it is today.

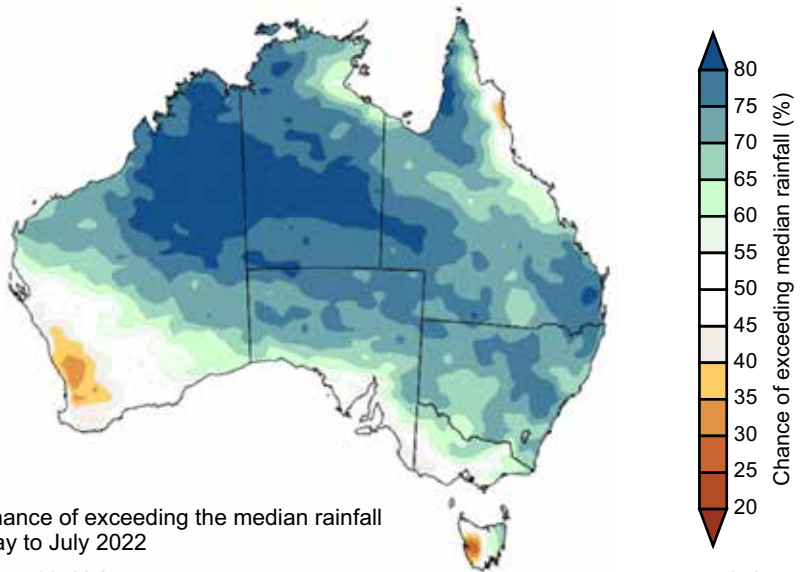


## La Niña remains active, but expected to weaken

The Bureau of Meteorology's Outlook issued 14 April 2022 says that the 2021–22 La Niña continues but is showing some sign of weakening.

Climate outlooks continue to indicate a return to neutral conditions — neither La Niña nor El Niño — during the late southern hemisphere autumn or in early winter. Even as La Niña weakens, it will continue to influence global weather and climate. La Niña events increase the chances of above average rainfall across large parts of eastern Australia during autumn.

Atmospheric and most oceanic indicators are persisting at La Niña levels. Sea surface temperatures



Chance of exceeding the median rainfall May to July 2022

Model ACCESS-S2  
Base Period: 1981–2018

Model run: 11/04/2022  
Issued: 14/04/2022

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

	Oct '21	Oct '20
ACT storages	100%	100%
Murray-Darling Basin	86%	55%
Burrinjuck Dam	92%	87%
Blowering Dam	94%	78%
Sydney	100%	96%
Melbourne	85%	72%
Brisbane	89%	64%
Adelaide	47%	46%
Perth	48%	39%

remain cooler than average along the equator. Compared to two weeks ago, surface waters have cooled slightly in the eastern half of the equatorial Pacific. Trade winds remain stronger than average in the western Pacific. Other atmospheric indicators also remain at La Niña levels, with decreased cloudiness persisting along the Date Line and a positive Southern Oscillation Index.

The Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) is neutral. It typically has little influence on global climate patterns from December to April due to the influence of the monsoon. Outlooks for the IOD indicate potential for a negative IOD to develop in the coming months. However, at this time of year model outlooks have low accuracy for outlooks beyond autumn.

—Andy Hrast (article)

Quince harvest (photo by Ange McNeilly)



## Superb Fairywren

*The Superb Fairywren (photo reference for drawing: Ian Davies, The Cornell Lab of Ornithology)*



dense bush to another. They often seem oblivious to humans in their proximity as they busily go about their foraging business. This level of focus can present a danger to these tiny garden visitors if your backyard is also the home of a cat or dog.

There is no perceivable downside to having the Superb Fairywren share your outdoor space or garden. They expect little in return for brightening up your day other than the opportunity to partake in the insect buffet under leaf litter and inhabiting the shrubbery. In fact, there could be a considerable upside:

*“Unlike other fairywrens, it appears to benefit from the urban environment and has out-competed the introduced House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) in one study on the grounds of the Australian National University in Canberra.”<sup>1</sup>*

It does not take much to attract this beautiful little avian to your garden. Low, dense bushes and thickets of shrubs with prickly branches provide a safe refuge and nesting site. Leaf litter or mulch under bushes provides a plentiful source of insects, which make up the main part of the wren’s diet. Fresh water in a shallow birdbath is also welcome, particularly in summer, both for drinking and bathing.

Most of all, having a space that is a haven from predators means that wrens that visit will survive to return another day. The numbers of Superb Fairywrens — as is the case with most Australian birds — is dwindling, so keeping a pet-free area for visiting birdlife will help to preserve this little beauty.

—Cathy Morison  
(article and drawing)

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.beautyofbirds.com/superbfairywrens.html>

With his flashy blue and black plumage, it is not hard to see why the Superb Fairywren (*Malurus cyaneus*) was the most recently voted Australian Bird of the Year (September 2021). You will notice I said ‘his’, because ‘hers’ is a rather understated tawny brown. While universally admired for his stunning appearance, the male Superb Fairywren would seem to fall short in character in comparison to his beige mate. Research on this pocket-sized beauty indicates that the male Superb Fairywren is quite promiscuous and doesn’t take on his fair share of the domestic chores.

*“Both mum and dad will often disappear to neighbouring territories, before the sun rises, for romantic forays with other fairy-wrens. Mum may seek out a suitor who recently gave her a pretty flower as a gift, while dad fairy-wren may disappear to court other females. This unashamed infidelity isn’t just a one-off, it is so*

*common that up to three quarters of all the fairy-wren broods can be sired by other males. It’s not surprising that they have the title of being the most unfaithful birds in the animal kingdom!”* (Susanna Bradshaw, CEO, Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife)

Despite what appears to be a free sharing of genetics in their offspring, Superb Fairywrens lives in stable family groups consisting of a dominant male bird, several adult females and a collection of juvenile males and females. These youngsters participate actively in the raising of subsequently hatchlings.

The Superb Fairywren is a common sight in Canberra and can be found throughout eastern Australia and Tasmania to the south-eastern corner of South Australia. Family groups tend to be quite active and vocal, hopping along the ground on their extremely long, fine legs or flitting from the cover of one low,



## Treasurer's report to the AGM

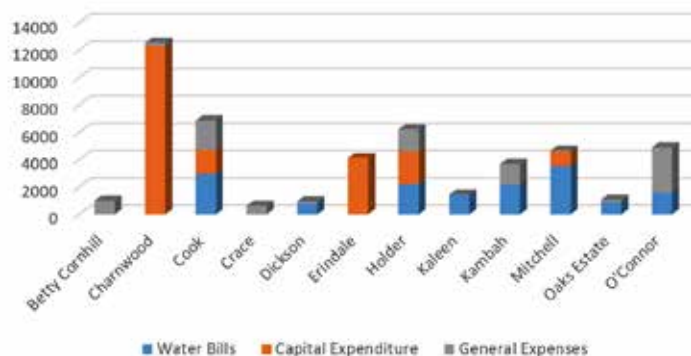
This is a summary version. A copy of the full report from the Treasurer tabled at the 2022 AGM is available on the COGS website.

The calendar year 2021 was another strong year financially, with a net surplus of \$20,121 (down from last year's surplus of \$33,398). The surpluses over the last two years follow on from combined deficits for the preceding four years of \$62,029.

The surpluses in 2020 and 2021 saw COGS cash at bank, at the end of December last year, rise to just over \$161,000. Our stronger financial position has been driven in part by a significant increase in our membership during the pandemic (up 18% from the end 2019), fee increases in 2019 and 2020, and a significantly reduced water bill (around \$16,000 during 2021 which is \$8,000 less than the average for the last four years), reflecting the above average (more than 150%) rainfall across Canberra. This contrasts to the very hot and dry conditions in 2018–19 — we should plan for hot/dry weather in the future.

Capital expenditure of just under \$20,000 in 2021 was up to historical levels, compared to 2020 which was significantly reduced in the first year of the pandemic. Key investments

Expenditure by Garden 2021



were the new shelters at Charnwood and Erindale community gardens, and improvements to the pergola at Cook.

The highest priority investment identified in last year's infrastructure review was to replace the fence at Oaks Estate. Three sides were replaced in February 2022 and a decision on replacement of the final side will be made later this year. Major investments flowing from the infrastructure review should result in a lower surplus (or a possible deficit) for 2022 and a decline in our cash balance (it was down to around \$125,000 by end March 2022).

— Neil William, Treasurer (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 Warming

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# winter planting guide

## VEGETABLES

### Asparagus

Prepare the bed before you buy the crowns to plant in late winter/early spring. Since this is a perennial crop which can last for up to 20 years it is well worth the effort of establishing properly. Asparagus needs good drainage and plentiful food and can be planted very successfully in a raised bed enriched with compost and well rotted manure. Seaweed is an excellent mulch.

The crowns are planted in a trench, but with the roots straddling a ridge. Cover so dormant shoots are about 4 cm below the surface. Do not harvest spears the first year, and only harvest for a few weeks the second year.

Remember this is a long-term investment.

### Broad beans

Late plantings of broad beans in June may be very slow to germinate. Better results are usually achieved with an autumn or early spring planting.

### Kohlrabi

Prepare the soil well with lots of organic matter. Needs rapid growth for flavour.

### Lettuce

Plant only winter varieties of lettuces (cos, salad bowl, oakleaf, butterhead and mignonette varieties).

### Onions

Mid-season varieties are often sown late autumn or early winter and long-keeping varieties in winter. However, the timing of mid- or late-season varieties is well worth experimenting with by making successive plantings to determine the best time in your specific locality.

### Peas

Peas can be planted in August/September for an early summer crop but may be very slow to germinate if the ground is still very cold or wet.

### Rhubarb

This is a perennial but plants generally only produce well for a few years, then fresh plants need to be started from subdivided crowns planted in late winter or early spring. It is very hardy, but it is a gross feeder and will appreciate lots of compost or well-rotted manure and plenty of water.

### Other possibilities

Growers may wish to start a number of crops in late winter rather than early spring if the winter is mild or if they have a sheltered garden bed.

These crops include artichokes (Globe and Jerusalem), beetroot, cabbage, carrots, potatoes and radish.

Frost-sensitive vegetables such as capsicum, eggplant and tomatoes can be started early in August indoors but may need a heated glasshouse or warm spot to germinate and will certainly need protection before being planted out in spring.

## FRUIT

Winter is the usual time to plant and prune soft fruits including:

### Strawberries

Plant certified stock or propagate from runners (not from plants more than two years old) in a soil enriched with compost or well-rotted manure. Remove old leaves and excess runners to tidy up the plants in winter.

### Berries

Raspberries, youngberries, boysenberries etc. can be planted during winter while they are dormant.

Remember, these bear fruit on canes grown in the previous year so to prune remove all the old canes in autumn or winter making sure to leave the current season's growth for next year's fruit. Autumn fruiting raspberries bear on the current year's growth so are cut to the ground in winter after they have fruited.

### Currants

Red, white or black currants are easy bushes to grow in Canberra as they withstand very cold weather and don't mind heavy clay soil. Currants produce a fruit rarely available commercially. They need to be pruned in winter to remove dead wood and around a third of the oldest branches to encourage new growth and allow for good air circulation.

	JUN	JUL	AUG
Artichokes		T	T
Asparagus		T	ST
Broad beans		S	S
Kohlrabi			S
Lettuce			S
Onions			T
Peas	ST	ST	S
Rhubarb			T
Silverbeet		T	S
Snowpeas			ST
Spinach	T	T	S

S = seed sowing; T = transplanting



# What's on



## Advertising in Canberra Organic

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

### Advertising rates

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

Size	Issue	4 Issues
1/8 page	\$9 (\$7)	\$30 (\$25)
1/4 page	\$18 (\$15)	\$60 (\$50)
1/2 page	\$36 (\$30)	\$120 (\$100)
Full page	\$72 (\$60)	\$240 (\$200)

Please contact [editor@cogs.asn.au](mailto:editor@cogs.asn.au)

Articles in the magazine do not necessarily reflect the views of COGS. Advertised products and services are not specifically endorsed by COGS.

**Are your details up-to-date?**

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.

## 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.

OUR FOLLOWERS –

 **facebook 3945**

 **Instagram 526**

**Want to contribute?**  
We'd love to hear from you!  
Please send contributions to:  
[editor@cogs.asn.au](mailto:editor@cogs.asn.au)

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

## 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.

# The gardening miracle



Photo: detonn, CanStockPhoto

There was a boy called Freddy. He was really good at gardening, but he wasn't patient at all. Freddy went out one day with his dad and did some gardening. He was asking all afternoon "are the plants ready now?"

His dad said, "they're going to take at least a couple of months because there are so many."

That night the boy went to bed and dreamed about the vegetables becoming huge. He couldn't stop thinking about the plants. He was so excited for them to pop up.

The next morning, he woke up so excited to see if the plants were ready. He asked his mum if there was such a thing as gardening fairies. His mum said "yes".

A couple of days later he woke up and was going out to water the plants. The vegetables were huge! The carrots were even taller than him and the lettuces looked so juicy. He ran up to his dad and said "Dad, Dad, it's a gardening miracle. Look at the vegetables. They're huge."

His dad was trying to pick the vegetables, but they were so heavy. So, he got the whole town to help him.

The boy's mother cooked up a storm. A couple of days later she was feeding the whole town. The boy figured out that the garden fairy had been to his place and made the vegetables huge.

"Mum, Dad, the gardening fairy has been to our place like you said."

Two weeks later, Freddy said, "oh I'm sick of vegetables."

"What are we supposed to do with them?" his mother replied.

\* \* \*

## Author's note

*Hi. I hope you like the story about Freddy. I got the idea from the famous Findhorn Garden in Scotland. This garden has been going for about 50 years and the people who began the garden said that they really were helped by fairies. (You can Google the story of Findhorn if you like.)*

*In my class at Fadden, I introduced the idea to my teacher and pupils. We have since begun a class gardening project and have planted mini-pansies and violas.*

—Georgia (article)