Spring 2022 Vol 30 No 3 Issue 116

O'Connor community garden – gardening styles

Janberra

The history and value of rocket 

**Reducing food waste** through worm farming

> **COGS** respectfully acknowledges the traditional owners, the Ngunnawal people, as the custodians of the land on which we grow, and pay our respects to the Elders past, present and

The quarterly publication of the Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.

emerging.



Welcome to the spring 2022 edition of *Canberra Organic* and I am pleased to be able to bring you another magazine filled with wonderful articles, stories and recipes from our members.

Whilst it's been a relatively wet winter, I hope you've managed to get out into the garden and start preparing for the spring growing season. When I think of spring, I often think back to Elizabeth Dangerfield's article (spring 2021) on pomegranates and their links to Persephone (goddess of harvest, grains and fertility) — the bringer of spring — when I see the bulbs bursting through the cold, hard ground. It reminds me of the endless gardening possibilities we have in the coming months





As we all burst back into action as the weather warms, make sure you take some time with a cuppa to enjoy everything on offer in this edition. In particular, Didi at Erindale community garden shares how they have managed to overcome an infestation of rats that have a love of gourmet food (pg. 7), Elizabeth discusses the history and value of rocket (pg. 18) and Greta shares her recipe for Palak Paneer or Aloo Palak (pg. 20) using silverbeet.

We've also got a feature on 'Antiquus Botanicus', a beautiful new garden store located in Fyshwick (pg. 16–17) and an update on what weather we can expect over the coming months (pg. 25).

In my garden, I've also started planning my spring plantings and was excited to pick up a new potting table last week made from recycled timber by a lovely gentleman down in Chisholm. It will make all the difference when it comes time to plant my seedlings. I've also been busy preparing my worm farm (pg. 22–23), aiming to do something more valuable with my food scraps and will keep you updated on how it progresses.

Wishing you all the best for the growing season ahead.

-Rebecca Travers (article and photo)

*My new handmade potting bench will be perfect for the upcoming spring growing season* 

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**FRONT COVER:** Rodolfo and the beetroots the rats weren't interested in! (See Erindale article on pages 7–9.) Photo by Didi Sommer.



Welcome to the spring 2022 edition of *Canberra Organic*.

I am writing this in mid-July on a beautifully clear and sunny, but frosty morning. The promise of spring is starting to become evident when I look out the window — the buds on the fruit trees are starting to swell and some of the early bulbs have already burst into flower.

It is a time to reflect on the annual seasonal cycle and plan for the coming growing season. While there are concerns with the latest variants of COVID-19, let's hope they reduce and we can all plan with greater certainty in our gardens and with our lives generally.

While it is a relatively quiet time in our gardens, the COGS Executive has continued the administration of COGS to enable greater certainty for the future. It is pleasing to see a number of gardens completing works and others developing plans for significant infrastructure development. This is possible without having to worry about how to pay for the works because of COGS' strong financial position

This strong financial position was also the basis for reducing COGS membership fees from \$35 per year to \$15 (and \$25 to \$10 for concession card holders) for 2022–23. Invoices for 2022–23 will have been sent at the end of July and I urge everyone to pay the invoices in a timely manner, without the need for Convenors to have to chase gardeners for payments.

Two gardens, Charnwood and Betty Cornhill, have applied for grants under

### Annual membership and plot invoices

Invoices for membership and plot fees have now been sent out.

## Payment is due by **31 August 2022**.

If plotholders have any queries, please contact your garden Convenor in the first instance. the ACT Government's Community Garden Grants Scheme for partial funding of projects for upgrades in their gardens. We wish them well.

Readers will have noticed at the start of the magazine, the recent inclusion of an Acknowledgement of Country. The COGS Executive, in deciding to include an Acknowledgement of Country in the magazine, on website and at the commencement of meetings, recognises that the twelve COGS gardens in which we grow are located on Ngunnawal land.

COGS considers that we all have a role to play when it comes to reconciliation, and in playing our part, we collectively build relationships and communities that value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories, cultures, and futures. The inclusion of the Acknowledgement of Country is a powerful and important symbol of reconciliation.

Like the Ngunnawal people, COGS members have a direct connection to the land, through the growing of fruits, vegetables and flowers in our community and backyard gardens and recognise the importance of nurturing the land. The COGS Executive is wishing to build on this shared interest in nurturing the land and is reaching out to elders of the Ngunnawal people and others in the Indigenous community with a view to establishing a Bush Tucker Garden. This is an exciting opportunity to put into practice the symbolism of the Acknowledgement of Country.

The General Meeting of COGS that was due to have taken place on 30 July 2022 to consider a revised COGS Constitution was postponed due to concerns about COVID at that time. The General Meeting will now be rescheduled for later in the year. The proposed Constitution addresses several ambiguities and outdated provisions and brings it into line with current regulatory requirements. It will put COGS on a sound legal footing going forward.

Coinciding with the revisions to the Constitution, a document that explains suitable inputs that can be used in COGS gardens has been



agreed by the Executive Committee and can be found on the COGS website. This document answers the commonly asked questions of what can be used in COGS gardens. I urge all members to read it.

The proposed Constitution is the culmination of nearly 18 months of work. A consultation draft was circulated to members in February 2022. All the suggestions received were incorporated into the proposed draft. Thank you to everybody who contributed and especially the sub-committee members who put in so many hours of work to develop the document.

Rats have been a major problem in all our gardens during the last growing season and into autumn and winter. There have been many reports of gardeners losing their entire crops, including cauliflowers and broccoli, to rats. The COGS Executive recently considered a paper on the control of rodents.

Unfortunately, there is no silver bullet to fix this problem. The COGS Executive reaffirmed its prohibition on poisons, as these are inconsistent with COGS values and raise concerns about the danger to other wildlife. Traps, if used humanely, are acceptable. There are various schools of thought on what is best to deter rats and an article appears in this edition discussing the various options tried at Erindale.

As you know, COGS community gardens don't run themselves. There is dedicated team of people in each garden that keep the garden running. COGS would not operate without them. Thank you to each one of you for the time that you so generously give.

Happy gardening.

- Andy Hrast, President

# Canberra. Organic

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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

www.cogs.asn.au

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### executive committee 2022–2023 🔎

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

### community gardens

Peter Weddell

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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### **Seeking volunteers** for Canberra Organic

Do you have a passion for creative writing or photography?

Curious about the publishing process or do you just want to get more involved with COGS?

The Editor of Canberra Organic is looking for volunteers to conduct interviews with gardeners and organisations, write articles and contribute to our quarterly publication.

Does this sound like you?

Contact Rebecca on editor@cogs.asn.au to have a chat about how you can get involved.



# Betty Cornhill community garden — growing new things

I like to try growing something different each year in my plots at Betty Cornhill Garden. In recent years I have grown the following:

#### \* \* \*

**Cucumelon**: This is a Mexican gherkin. I grew these in the summer of 2018. In an ideal climate the fruit is probably bigger than what I grew, which was the size of an olive. The vine can take over.



**Tomatillo:** I grew these in the summer of 2019. This is a small round fruit with a papery husk used to make salsa. I thought they might self-sow as there were so many fruits, many of which fell to the ground, but they didn't.



Ground Cherry/Cape Gooseberry/ Poha Berry: I successfully grew these in the summers of 2018 and 2019. These berries belong to the

nightshade family. These are tasty and highly nutritious — a good source of vitamin C and good for digestion. They need a long hot growing season in Canberra, which we haven't had for the last two summers. They don't survive our frosts (but they might survive in a sheltered spot at home) so they need to be re-sown each year. This berry is known by many names including Golden Berry, Aztec Berry, Inca Berry or Peruvian Cherry. It is native to tropical South America and grows to around 1.5m high.



Asparagus or Winged Pea: I have grown these each summer for the last 5 years. They grow really well in a tropical climate, but they are difficult to grow in Canberra and slugs/bugs love them. I kept my plants in the hothouse for part of last summer and ended up with more fruit than other years. I mainly grow them for the challenge and the maroon flowers which are very pretty.



Last spring, I planted some **African Horned Cucumbers**. The first seeds didn't germinate so I put more in. The second lot did germinate, and the plants took off... and off. The vines were rampant but as the cold weather approached, I was doubtful that I would get any fruit off them, although they had flowered.

But as luck would have it, in May this year I found several fruit on the plants. I even got to sample a few! They are not as bitter as some cucumbers can be. So, here is a photo of the packet of seeds and my final product.



My cucumbers did not turn yellow like the ones on the packet, but they were still edible. They are good climbers! I will grow them again.

— Gabi (article and African Horned Cucumber photos); other photos from Can Stock Photos



## **Oaks Estate community garden — latest news**

### Working bee

After a few quiet years we held our first working bee on 25 June 2022, to catch up on some outstanding tasks at the Oaks Estate community garden.

Gardeners worked hard clearing out the old compost bays, cleaning up the shed and removing old metal edging from a vacant plot. Ewan's ute was put to good use taking the excess to the green waste facility at Queanbeyan.

We all enjoyed a morning tea in the winter sunshine, especially Robyn's delicious gluten free brownies. It was a great opportunity to catch up, meet some of the newer gardeners and talk about plans for spring.

We are hoping to put up a shelter as an extension of the existing shed and improve our storage for tools



*Sue and Jinglong clearing the compost bays* 

in the shed. We are even hoping to install a solar panel to charge battery operated equipment such as the new whipper snipper. It will allow us to move away from petrol equipment to lighter, easier to use, electric options.



Brian, John from TLC Fencing with Ewan

### New fence

Earlier in the year we were lucky enough to get a new fence for the garden, courtesy of an investment from COGS. John from TLC Fencing and a group of gardeners including Brian, Josh and Ewan successfully put up the new fence on three sides, which has greatly improved the appearance of the garden.

We are awaiting a new neighbour on the west side of the garden to complete the final side of the fence.

Finally, we are planning an open day at the garden in spring to invite the local neighbourhood and COGS members to visit and enjoy the delights of community gardening. We look forward to seeing you there.

— Karen James (articles and photos)



### **Erindale community garden — gourmet rats**

Last summer Erindale community garden experienced a rat invasion. It was devastating as most plot holders were impacted and lost much-treasured plants such as heritage tomatoes, Japanese heritage climbing cucumbers, climbing beans, pumpkins on trellises and corn cobs. To the amazement of our Korean gardener Young Ja, the rats even munched on her prized green and red chillies!

I have been a plot holder at Erindale community garden for several years and we had never experienced a rodent invasion at the garden, apart from the occasional mouse that was lurking around our compost stations and never caused any problem.

We had no clue what was going on. We noticed that mysteriously Markus' heritage tomatoes had some plant stems broken off. Then more followed every day. Markus had dedicated lots of time the previous winter and early spring to grow about 50 or 60 varieties of heritage tomatoes from seeds, then transplanted the seedlings in pots and nurtured them until the weather permitted that he brought them to the garden. They were growing strong and already had





The humane rat trap we initially tried

reached the over a metre in height. Markus generously shared the plants with other plot holders.

The damage was initially discovered on tomatoes in one plot, but once they were destroyed another plot became the target. We were still puzzled about what was going on as there were no obvious rat droppings to be seen. We never had seen a possum at our community garden before, so we were lacking experience in identifying, if a possum had been visiting. But then we saw the culprits during daylight running from one plot to the next, crossing through the garden.

Once we lost our tomato plants, we noticed that some of the beautiful Japanese heritage cucumbers on Markus' plot, my plot and the community plot went missing overnight. We had already harvested a number of them, and they were so tasty — so we relished every single one.

We grew the cucumbers up trellises and hoped the rats wouldn't climb up the trellis — we were so wrong! We saw the evidence about 1.5 m high where we found rat droppings on leaves and chewed up cucumber remains.

Once the cucumbers were decimated, the climbing beans that were hanging from trellises about 2m high disappeared. Again, we discovered more droppings on the leaves high up the trellises.

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On another trellis on one of our community plots, we grew some varieties of pumpkins. This plot has root interference from a big gum tree just outside the fence line, so we decided to put a big arch up made of ReoSteel mesh that was donated to us. We hoped that at least these pumpkins were safe as the mesh was wider in the opening — but no, we were wrong again. The biggest of the pumpkins on top of the arch had a big hole chewed in it.

Chris had just started as plot holder with us and grew some beautiful zucchinis that were very productive and had planted corn seedlings that were 2m tall and full of corn cobs. One morning, on our 'routine inspection' all but two corn cobs whad been munched on. I rang with the sad news that now her corn had also now been attacked, as Chris was away in Queensland at the time, and we were looking after her plot.

In the meantime, we decided to make some inquiries among the nearby townhouse complex. Did they have rats too? We discovered that there was indeed a rat problem and the owners had called in a professional to set up rat traps with poison around the housing complex.

Our garden has a metal chain link fence, which means the rats can easily get through without any issues, so obviously the rats had come in from outside to discover our little garden paradise! We think they might have read the COGS sign that

Hessian bags protecting our crops





Successful growing in second raised garden bed

says we are a community garden and being community rats, they wanted to share in our produce.

We knew we had to do something to address the problem, so we did some research on the internet as to how others coped with a rat infestation in their garden. There was lots of good advice out there., but we really wanted to deal with the rats without the use of poison.

As first option, I reluctantly bought a big trap so we could try to catch the rats alive. We set it up every evening where we anticipated the rats would visit, however over the first few days the cage remained empty, and our veggies were still eaten.

We did not know how many rats had come to visit from the neighbouring houses, but our garden must have been like a gourmet dinner for them — fresh organic veggies, no poison or chemicals around — 'rat paradise' so to speak.

As bait in the big trap, we were initially told to use peanut butter, but the rats ignored it and showed an appetite for juicy fruits instead.

Then one day Markus suggested to try some ripe mango. Gourmet rats might need special treats! As it was mango season, we managed to get a very ripe mango and carefully placed a small piece in the trap. We ate the rest of the mango — it was yummy, so we hoped the rats would like it too.

Bingo! The next day we had caught our first rat. Rats are intelligent animals and it had already started to make a nest before we arrived the next day to collect the trap. We disposed of the curious rat far away from the garden.

We realised that we would have to keep changing the rat menu and tried ripe banana and also ripe papaya we caught a few more rats!

As part of our strategy, we also tried onions. We bought bags of cheap onions, cut them in half and strategically placed them around veggies we wanted to protect from being eaten. It seemed to work as out of a large harvest of zucchinis only a few were nibbled.

We used the 'cage' method to protect some of our veggies in which we placed big black plastic pots without a bottom over the plants and then put onions halves around. It seemed to work. The onion smell seemed to deter the rats and the pots gave extra protection. We also tried the 'potato flakes' method, where you add potato flakes and a separate small bowl of water out in a flat container. But it did not work for our gourmet rats and then it rained, and the rats were not interested in potato mash either!

We also tried to protect our veggies with hessian bags that we sourced for free. We wrapped some of the small cucumbers in them and used them to protect our big spaghetti squashes hanging from another trellis. This method was indeed very successful, and we were very happy to have found at least one way to trick the rats.

Unfortunately, we still had some more losses and couldn't believe our eyes when Young Ja showed us the number of chillies that were nibbled on each day. Young Ja's chilli plants were almost a metre tall and were grown in two plots in preparation to use them for her prized kimchi (we shared Young Ja's kimchi recipe in a previous edition of *Canberra Organic*).

So, we had to pull another magic trick out of our hat to better the rats. Claudia had researched a combination of equal parts of bicarbonate of soda, sugar and flour would be very attractive as the rats couldn't resist that smell. So, we placed shallow containers with this dry concoction among the chilli plots and found a few dead rats a few days after that! Success again! (Note: it only works on dry days and no water around in the garden).

So, after much trial and error, we found a few methods that seemed to work. I hope that our experience will help other gardeners in choosing a method that will work for you and suits your circumstances.

Fortunately, we found the rats were not interested in radishes, beetroot, parsnips, carrots, Jerusalem artichokes, little squash or herbs. We also found that the two raised metal garden beds (about 800 mm high in another small community plot), were also rodent proof! The rats did not seem to attempt or perhaps were unsuccessful in climbing up on that metal surface of that height.

We were so delighted that all the veggies we grew in these raised beds were untouched. We harvested lots of



Our harvest from the raised garden beds

yellow and green bush beans, some capsicums, spring onions.

We put some left over tomato seedlings in there from Markus's heritage tomatoes as a trial as it was rather late in the season by then to grow tomatoes, but they ended up being best tomatoes we had grown in some years in the garden. No bugs or diseases and so many tomatoes on these plants. We were all overjoyed! At last, some success (although it soon it got cold and some of the tomatoes were still green when the weather turned cold).

In preparation for this summer, we are now considering if on the community plot with the big arch, we should set up another raised garden bed, 800 mm high. It makes it much easier to attend to — no back bending and harvest should be guaranteed should we experience more rats this coming summer. We intend to participate in the Canberra Seed Savers trials to grow heritage dwarf tomatoes. The dwarf relates to the height of the plant but not to the actual tomatoes. These are very special heritage tomatoes. The raised garden beds would be ideal for growing the dwarf tomatoes without the fear of losing these precious tomatoes. We hope to grow some to save the seeds to share with other community gardens.

With all that said, the other day I noticed the tail of a rat disappear behind the raspberry bushes. I was alarmed as we thought the rats had all gone! But now that we have more experience in dealing with rodents in the garden, we will draw upon all our tried-and-tested methods, so we have a productive growing season this summer.

-Didi Sommer (article and photos)



## O'Connor community garden – gardening styles

T he O'Connor community garden is the smallest of the twelve COGS Gardens, being on the Uniting Church former tennis courts — the available space is tight. Our paths are mulched and just wide enough for a wheelbarrow.

The old tennis court surface under the plots seems to suck up water. We also have a lot of very large oak, ash and elm trees along three sides of the garden and a very large ivy on the one of the sides creating a lot of roots thirsty for water.

We have perimeter communal beds adjacent to the tennis court fences that are cared for by several gardeners. These beds contain annuals grown to donate to Companion House, as well as small sized fruit trees such as citrus, feijoa and pomegranate; perennials like rhubarb and artichoke which are shared amongst gardeners and donated to Companion House.

The O'Connor community comprises 23 plots distributed among approximately 20 plot holders, including a plot for Church members. Some gardens have been tended by the same plot holder since the garden's creation in 2005, while other gardeners have joined only in recent



Clearing the ivy

months. The garden plan shows the layout.

## Mix of gardening styles (part one)

The 2022 spring and summer editions of the *Canberra Organic* will showcase information about the mix of gardening styles at O'Connor community garden. This information is based on the handout provided to

Plan designed by Barbara Payne, OCG member and landscape architect (retired)



visitors to the O'Connor community garden Open Day held in April 2022.

**Plot 10.1** grew 'green manure' to prepare and rejuvenate the soil for spring plantings. Green manure is a ground cover crop of various plants, often legumes, which grow quickly. Now the crop has matured, it has been cut back and a layer of soil placed on top to help the green break down and enrich the soil.

The green growth naturally adds vital nutrients to vegetable growing, such as nitrogen, phosphorus and carbon, to the soil as it breaks down and adds structure to the soil. Worms and other microorganisms are attracted to the garden bed further improving the soil quality for the next season's crop. A 'green manure' crop takes around three months from sowing to planting the next season's crops.

**Plot 9** devotes half the garden to perennials: asparagus, espaliered dwarf apricot, thornless blackberries, black and red currants, and rhubarb to create a microclimate and uses no-dig methods make the gardening less arduous for an older person. The irrigation system helps an older person manage the garden in the heat. This garden uses bee attracting plants and herbs to help with pollination. Crops are grown from seed, rotated, seeds saved, and where possible companion plants used. The fruits are used in preserves and syrups, herbs are dried for cooking, lavender is stripped for lavender bags and calendula flowers used in infusions. Annual heirloom and unusual varieties are selected and grown from seed to manage food intolerances and bring zest to home cooking.

**Plot 14.1** (and **6.2** later along the path) use intensive gardening methods to deliver continuous crops throughout the year. Permanent netting structures provide protection from cabbage moths in summer and autumn, and hungry birds, and allows young seedlings to grow strongly.

The plot holder, who is of Italian heritage, strictly adheres to moon phase planting schedules, noting it has been used in farming in Italy for centuries. Moon phase gardening broadly relates to the impact of the moon phase on the light, moisture retention and gravitational pull on the earth. At its most simple, moon phase gardening says that that all aboveground crops should be planted when the moon is waxing, and that during the new moon is the



Produce grown at O'Connor

best time to sow or transplant leafy annuals, while the first quarter phase is good for fruits and foods with external seeds.

**Plot 8** is divided into five beds to allow crop rotation, with each bed 1.2m wide for easy-reach planting and harvesting. The 20cm high edging was originally filled with imported soil, improved over 15 years, giving adequate depth for most plants. The quick draining surface of the previous clay tennis court has required the reversal of the usual rule to water heavily and infrequently, with light, frequent watering required. Wicking beds have been installed in the two end beds. Wicking beds create a reservoir of water below the soil so that the water can be drawn up to the plants — similarly to a selfwatering pot. Most summer crops have now been cleared away and replaced with autumn/winter crops and a bio-fumigant green manure crop. Bio-fumigant green manures use plants with long tap roots to extract minerals from deep soil. When the leaves are dug back in, the minerals break down into the top soil.

— Deborah Hamilton (article and photos)

### The new shed

We had a few unexpected obstacles with installing the new shed at the O'Connor community garden, due to price rises and labour shortages, but the shed has now been installed and we are working on rearranging the area around the shed and planning storage inside.

The huge ivy has been trimmed, and our new pump and upgraded taps for rainwater are working well. Our large communal compost bins are being moved and we are sourcing secondhand meeting furniture, as we have none, so we are set up for spring. We are planning to hold a spring compost workshop with Brook from Capital Scraps to improve our communal compost.





# Charnwood community garden — our newest crop of gardeners

Charnwood community garden has seen an influx of new gardeners over the past two years. Here are some of their stories.

### **Karina Hilton**

I've been gardening since I was a kid growing up in Newcastle — we had great fruit trees including peaches, mandarins, mulberries and beans were my favourite vegetable to grow. Chokos were my least favourite, but we always had hundreds of them!

I started growing a lot of vegetables at home when we moved to Dunlop 14 years ago and we also have fruit trees — lemon, apples, fig and peacharine. After attending an open day at Charnwood community garden, I put my name down on the waiting list for a plot — it was the perfect solution, we were running out of garden space at home, and I had concerns with the constant spraying of 'roundup' by the council and neighbours around our block. Having grown my very first pumpkin at home in early 2020, I needed more space because we wanted more pumpkins!

In August 2020, a plot vacancy opened, and I started with potatoes - a fantastic crop of Dutch cream for my chip loving kids (and husband). I planted one Queensland blue pumpkin plant from seed, and it must have liked the conditions because I ended up with over 30 huge pumpkins! Other successes were corn, garlic, onions, spring onions, sweet potato, and leeks. As the plot is quite exposed, I have had lots of failures, and it's a constant battle with the slugs so I tend to grow tomatoes, broccoli and cauliflower at home. Herbs grow really well at Charnwood but it's a little inconvenient when you need a small amount for dinner. The lemon balm took over while we were on a month-long trip to the NT in 2021 and I had enough for all of Canberra to make tea! This



Karina

year I'll be planting lots more sweet corn and making the most of the wet conditions.

Joining the community garden has been so great to meet likeminded others who enjoy organic gardening and growing vegetables. I have great plot neighbours and always enjoy a chat in the garden. It's also a relief to know that my vegetables are herbicide- and pesticide-free. My Mum loves gardening and has been a big influence, always coming to see the garden on her visits.

Each year is different, and I try to grow something new I haven't tried before. I don't need to save any tomato seeds any more as all sorts of varieties appear in the compost each year — the only issue is that I don't know what they are until fruiting. My method of gardening is highly experimental — throw it in and see if it grows. I use organic manure and have a steady supply of chook manure from our 10 chickens. I'm very good at sprouting seeds, but our chickens are also very good at eating seedlings if they aren't protected so I have to monitor them carefully. I'm looking forward to spring in the garden and enjoying some warmer weather outdoors.

— Karina Hilton (article and photo)

### **Kirsty Willcox**

This is my first time as a member of a community garden, so I'm really excited to be able to learn the ropes and hopefully contribute!

At home in Macgregor the aspect is just not right for productive growing, nor are the possums — hence I thought I'd try an 'allotment'. I'm also looking forward to meeting likeminded organic growers. I've been a vegetarian since I was 13, so you can imagine that veggies are a big thing for me.

I have been gardening to one degree or another for as long as I can remember. My Mum has been my biggest influence — she helps run the Bundanoon community garden in the Southern Highlands. We studied Horticulture together several years ago because we had always wanted to, then I ran a garden design business alongside my full-time job.

I also have qualifications in Environmental Science, so throughout my life it has all been related. Despite the environmental qualifications, I have a bit of a thing for historic English gardens and plants, especially medieval and apothecary herbs — but that's not to say that I don't love the Australian bush too!

I am keen on companion planting, have saved seeds and made preserves. I'm also interested in producing essential oils (I have a small alembic still) but that takes a lot of plant matter!

I am pretty time poor, but I thought I would give this a go anyway. I have a love for anything productive,



Kirsty

including cut flowers (especially old-fashioned scented roses, which I do manage to grow a bit at home). I think I am a bit of a plant collector to be honest. But I'm looking forward to getting stuck in!

— Kirsty Willcox (article and photo)

Andrew's partner, Annie



### Andrew Hazi

We've been at the garden since the start of the year but have tried gardening a few times over the years.

Living in an apartment makes gardening a bit trickier, so COGS seemed like a great way to get started. Charnwood community garden were very friendly, responsive, and happened to have a plot available when we were looking!

We wish to learn a bit about growing food, spend some time outdoors with the community and hopefully, cook some meals with the food we grow. Lots of our extended family grow food, so that has been an influence on our decision, as has the appeal of cheap access to healthy food.

We have been experimenting with different things and learning from our mistakes. The only things we've eaten so far since starting are some turnips, kale and lettuce. We are looking forward to trying some pumpkins and tomatoes but are happy to try just about anything. We haven't saved any seeds as yet, but who knows what will happen at the end of the season!

— Andrew Hazi (article and photo)



## Kambah community garden — growing in gratitude

Hi, it's Georgia again. I'm in Year 3 at Fadden Primary School, where I have decided to start up a class gardening project. Currently we are growing broad beans, peas, pansies and violas. They are growing really well.

In one of our integrated classes, we are studying soil and rocks, which we collected from a natural environment. We are also looking at what type of rocks there are, such as igneous, sedimentary and metamorphic.

I also spend time at the Kambah community garden, where my grandpa has given me my own patch to manage. I'm growing broad beans and peas and learning about other plants. At the moment my favourite plants are sunflowers and foxgloves.

I am passionate about gardening and grateful to the Kambah Garden Club for helping me develop my skills.

-Georgia (article), Grandpa Ken (photo)

Georgia gardening at Kambah community garden



### In memoriam — Kate Brennand

The Mitchell community garden sadly lost one of its members in late June.

Kate Brennand passed away from a heart attack as result of an autoimmune illness she'd had for many years.

Kate, her partner Jon, and their daughter Emily joined the Mitchell community garden in 2017 and very soon became welcome contributors at working bees and, later, as members on our garden committee. Work

and family commitments meant Jon was often away, so Kate became the main gardener for the family.

During the years, Kate's illness dominated her time and activities, but she never gave any indication that she needed our concerns. She would go above and beyond whenever she could and tried not to let the illness dominate her life. While it was a part of her life, she never let it define her.

Even though we knew of her illness, it was a shock to her family, her friends and those of us who



knew her well, when she passed so suddenly.

Kate had an overwhelming love of animals and nature. She had a dog, several cats and other animals at home (bees and chickens). Jon said she was very close to her cats.

Kate's knowledge of gardening, environmental and community issues, was a real help to many of us. She provided invaluable advice to the committee on many issues including her knowledge relating to supporting people with physical and mental health concerns. She generated a warm and accepting persona to all.

She attended many COGS events including AGM, and so many COGS members including those outside of the Mitchell community garden remember her friendliness and their conversations with her.

She loved her 'long black' coffee, so she and I would often meet at one of her favourite coffee places, to hold some of our committee discussions. She is sadly missed

by our Mitchell members and will be remembered for her kindness and friendliness to other plot holders and her valuable contribution to our garden committee.

"Thank you Kate for joining our Mitchell garden and helping me navigate those many ideas that popped into my head and decisions, that needed your sound advice".

Rest in peace Kate — you are missed.

— Narelle McLean and Jon Naughton (article), Jon Naughton (photo)



## Cauliflower

Cauliflower is one of several vegetables (including cabbage, broccoli, brussels sprouts and kale) in the species *Brassica oleracea* in the genus Brassica, which is in the Brassicaceae (or Mustard) family.

It is an annual plant that reproduces by seed and is considered to be relatively difficult to grow compared to cabbage. Cauliflowers form a compacted head of undeveloped white flower buds called the "curd". A tight encasing of heavy green leaves surrounds these buds. These leaves protect the cauliflower from the sun and prevent the development of chlorophyll to give it the creamywhite colouring.

The word "cauliflower" derives from the Italian *cavolfiore*, meaning "cabbage flower". The ultimate origin of the name is from the Latin words *caulis* (cabbage) and *flos* (flower).

Cauliflower's exact origins are unknown. Cauliflowers are a descendant of a wild cabbage variety that is native to coastal regions of the Mediterranean and was widely spread across the Mediterranean and the Middle East in ancient times. The two areas considered as most likely origins are the Middle East (Syria) or Cyprus.

The first record of cauliflower is in texts from Arab botanists in the 12th and 13th centuries. Over time, cauliflower was domesticated and introduced throughout Europe,



The Fractal spiraled Green Romanesco cauliflower

and by the 15th century, Italy was commercially cultivating the species for culinary use.

Cauliflower was brought to England and France in the early 17th century, and England later spread the plant to the United States in the late 17th century and India in the 19th century.

Today, cauliflower is extensively bred and cultivated worldwide, and there are four major groups within the species, consisting of Italian, Asian, Northwestern European biennials, and Northern European annuals.

In 2016, global production of cauliflowers (the statistics combine the production of cauliflowers and broccoli) was 25.2 million tonnes, led by China (10.2 million tonnes) and India (8.2 million tonnes) which,

combined, produce 73 per cent of the world total. Other major producers are the United States of America, Spain, Mexico and Italy.

In addition to the common white cauliflower, it is grown in three other colours:

- Orange cauliflower, which originated from a natural mutant plant found in Canada. It contains beta-carotene as the orange pigment. Cultivars include 'Cheddar' and 'Orange Bouquet'.
- Green cauliflower, sometimes called broccoflower. It is available in the normal curd (head) shape or with a fractal spiral curd called Romanesco broccoli.
- The purple cauliflower, caused by the presence of anthocyanins, water-soluble pigments that are found in many other plants and plant-based products, such as red cabbage and red wine.

For the mathematicians: cauliflowers have a distinct fractal dimension, calculated to be roughly 2.8. Other fractal properties of cauliflowers are that every branch, or "module", is similar to the entire cauliflower and the angle between "modules," as they become more distant from the centre, is 360 degrees divided by the golden ratio.

—Andy Hrast (article and photos)

The four colours of cauliflower





### Back to the gardens of old with 'Antiquus Botanicus'

Adjacent to Dirty Janes (80 Collie St, Fyshwick), located in 'The Barn' is a gorgeous boutique garden store called 'Antiquus Botanicus'. Opened in February 2022, it's the product of the hard work of Tracey Johns and Jess Varley and provides a fantastic alternative to your larger commercial garden centres.

'Antiquus Botanicus' developed out of a friendship between Tracey and Jess, whose children go to school together.

Jess already had a shop inside Dirty Janes selling preloved, upcycled

and boutique fashion using natural textiles. Towards the end of 2021, after getting into gardening herself, Jess started stocking a few garden products and created hampers in the lead up to Christmas. The positive response encouraged her to think more about other opportunities in this space.

Tracey, who has a Cert 3 in Horticulture (and is working towards her Diploma), lives nearby and had connected with Jess during lockdown through a 'Seed and Cider Co-op', in which neighbours shared veggie seedlings and stories. They saw that one of the buildings adjacent to Dirty Janes was up for lease, so put in an application. Whilst not getting the initial space they wanted, they were offered 'The Barn' and the idea grew from there.

When asked about the name 'Antiquus Botanicus', Tracey and Jess said the name reflects their desire to create a botanical feeling "going back to the gardens of old". It also echoes their passion for all things vintage.

The store itself, beautifully styled, is full of upcycled furniture lovingly created by themselves. In the middle





products sourced locally and designed to be long lasting.

The benefits of doing as much of the propagation as they can themselves, is that it also encourages us to keep visiting, as they try to have something new and different all the time.

After a quiet winter, Jess and Tracey are looking forward to the warmer weather as more of us get back into our gardens. Tracey will also be busy with a work experience placement at the National Arboretum, after being named the recipient of the Jake Keller Scholarship which is awarded to an outstanding CIT horticultural student. This valuable experience will no doubt enhance the experience you get at 'Antiquus Botanicus'.

So, if you're looking for something different to do on a weekend, why not venture out to Fyshwick and take in the atmosphere of this gorgeous new store. Trust me, you won't be disappointed.

—Rebecca Travers (article and photos)

stands a potting bench, made from recycled pallets and the service counter, also handmade, proudly displays gorgeous, pressed copper that was initially destined for the tip. Sustainability is at the heart of this shop, and it shows everywhere you look.

Filled with greenery, it also has a warm, welcoming feel. When I visit, it's a cold and grey day outside but the warmth from the fire and their passion for their project radiates across the store.

'Antiquus Botanicus' aims to provide a personal touch to your gardening journey. Selling seedlings and plants that are suited specifically to the Canberra climate, Tracey and Jess are also happy to share advice, if required, on when and where to plant — making gardening accessible to everyone.

Whilst not formally certified as organic, they do as much of the propagation themselves following chemical-free permaculture with organic principles.

In a bid to reduce plastic, they also encourage a focus on quality tools and products, with most garden





### The history and value of rocket

This humble salad herb packs a big punch both in terms of taste and health. It has a strong peppery flavour and is rich in minerals and vitamins. It is native to the Mediterranean and the Middle East where it is very popular in salads.

In the past, rocket had a reputation as an aphrodisiac. Indeed, the Romans enjoyed rocket especially as it was thought it stimulated sexual feelings. None of this worried Charlemagne who, in 802 AC, included it as a pot herb in his list of plants that should be planted in gardens throughout his kingdom. It may have been exiled from monastery gardens in the Middle Ages because of worries about it arousing desire in celibate monks. Most plants were associated with some sort of property in those days, often based on association or appearance. It has only since botany became a science that we have been able to verify, or not, the efficacy of particular plants in promoting health.

Rocket is a member of the cabbage family and has many common names often from Italian words derived from its genus name *Eruca*, for example, arugula, ruchetta, rugula, roquette. There seems to be some confusion over the scientific names for rocket. Some refer to the 'wild' variety with its narrower, smaller and pointed leaves as *Eruca vesicaria* and the garden variety with its rounded,



bigger leaves as *Eruca sativa* or sometimes they are just described as varieties of the same plant.

I find it best to grow rocket in autumn and spring, as it quickly goes to seed in summer and can be knocked around by frost in winter. As it seeds easily, self-sown plants will abound. In India and Pakistan the seeds are collected and pressed to make taramira oil used for pickling, and once treated, as cooking oil and the seed cake used as animal food. Rocket can also be used in pastas, pestos, soups and fried in oil and garlic.

Rocket is good for you as it contains a lot of phytochemicals, anti-oxidants, vitamins and minerals. For example,



it is rich in folate, vitamin K as well as vitamin A, vitamin C and calcium, magnesium, potassium, phosphorus, and manganese. Eating one cup of rocket a day is a good way to get the benefits of eating crucifers without having to cook them. Rocket like other crucifers (cabbage family) have been found to reduce the risk of some cancers, and diabetes 2. It could also offer some protection from cardiovascular problems, due to the fact that crucifers contain high concentrations of polyphenols and organo-sulphur compounds. It is also possible that rocket could have anti-inflammatory properties because it contains 3-carbinol and erucin, although more studies are needed to verify this.

As with all claims of superfood status it is important to consider how much of a particular food you would have to eat to get sustained benefits, whether there are better sources of the health benefit and what you have to give up eating in order to eat more of the superfood. But there is no doubt that rocket is good for you, it is easy to prepare, tastes delicious, and is very easy to grow. And once you have planted it, you will have it for ever.

— Elizabeth Dangerfield (article) Unsplash (photos)



## Spanakopita

Wondering how to use your silverbeet before it goes to seed? Make some spanakopita (savory triangles) to have with drinks next time you are entertaining.

#### Ingredients

- 1 medium bunch silverbeet (or a mix of silver beet, kale, or spinach)
- 1 medium onion, chopped finely
- butter
- 3 eggs, beaten
- 3 spring onions, chopped
- 250g feta cheese, crumbled
- <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> tsp nutmeg
- 2 tbsp parsley, chopped
- pepper and salt, to taste
- 250g (1 packet of filo pastry preferably fresh, not frozen)
- 125g melted butter

Method

- 1. Wash and chop the silverbeet leaves. Cook over a low heat until wilted. Cool, drain thoroughly and press to remove excess liquid.
- Fry the chopped onion in a little butter until softened. Combine eggs, spring onions, cheese, nutmeg, parsley, salt, and pepper and mix in onion and silver beet.

#### Fresh silverbeet





Homemade spanakopita

- 3. Remove pastry from packet and lay the sheets flat on a damp tea towel and cover with another damp tea towel so they don't dry out while you are working. Cut each sheet of pastry into halves lengthwise, brush the lower half with a little melted butter, fold in half lengthwise again. Put a generous teaspoon of filling at one end of the pastry strip, fold one corner of the pastry over filling until it meets the folded edge to form a triangle. Fold triangle over and over until the whole strip is folded. Repeat until all the filling is used. Recipe makes approximately 36 small triangles.
- 4. To store for later use, freeze in a single layer in plastic containers. When ready to cook, brush tops with a little more melted butter, put on an ungreased oven tray and bake in a moderate oven (180°C) until puffed and golden about 15 minutes. Leftover filling can be added to an omelette or used in a vegetable frittata.

Note: The filling can also be used to make a family sized pie. Lightly grease a shallow tin (around 18 cm x 28 cm), add 5 sheets of filo pastry, brushing each layer with melted butter. Add filling then a further 4 buttered sheets. Tuck the overhanging pastry edges onto the filling and finish with a final sheet of pastry folded in half and brushed with melted butter. Score top layer of pastry lightly with a sharp knife into serving portions, sprinkle a little cold water on top to stop the pastry curling. Bake in a moderate oven for about 45 minutes until puffed and golden. Remove from oven and stand for 5 minutes before serving.

-Michele Barson (article and photos)



## Palak Paneer (cheese) or Aloo Palak (potato)

If you are looking for a great way to use silverbeet, go no further than the Indian style Palak Paneer (using cheese) or Aloo Palak (using potato). I used potato recently because I had a great crop!

#### Ingredients

- 1 x bunch silverbeet (sliced)
- 2 tomatoes (sliced)
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1 tsp black mustard seeds
- <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> tsp turmeric
- 1 tsp coriander seeds (ground)
- 1 tsp cumin
- 1 tsp garam masala
- 1 tsp cloves
- <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> dried chilli or 1 small fresh chilli (sliced)
- 1 inch ginger (finely sliced)

#### © Can Stock Photo / paulbrighton

- 1 tbsp cream or coconut cream (optional)
- Olive oil

For Palak Paneer: 1 x block of tofu or palak (Indian cottage cheese) (cubed)

For Aloo Palak: 3–4 medium potatoes (cubed)

#### Method

#### If making Palak Paneer

1. Chop the block of tofu or palak into small cubes. Pan fry and set aside. Continue at step 3.

#### If making Aloo Palak:

2. Chop the potatoes into small cubes and steam until soft, drain and set aside. Continue at step 3.

#### For both recipes:

3. Wash the silverbeet and slice the leaves.

- Add olive oil and garlic into a large pan over medium heat. As they start to brown, add silverbeet until wilted and sliced tomatoes.
- 5. In a frying pan, fry the black mustard seeds, turmeric, coriander seeds (ground), cumin, garam masala, cloves, dried or fresh chilli and ginger in oil until the flavours are release (don't burn).
- 6. Add the spices to the silverbeet mixture and blend until smooth (I use a stick blender).
- 7. Add silverbeet mixture to the tofu, paneer or potatoes and salt to taste.
- To make a creamier consistency, add 1 tbsp of cream or coconut cream (optional).
- Enjoy with rice or chapati.
- -Greta Nielsen (article)





## Spring planting tips and tricks

This quarter, we are delving into the archives and bringing you some tips and tricks to help you with your spring planting.

## Organics in the news

## UK considers organic air ban

The UK's Soil Association - responsible for organic certification in Britain - is considering a controversial plan to restrict or ban produce imported by air. Demand for organic food so outstrips UK farmers' ability to supply that in 2005, 34% of organic food sold in supermarket was imported, raising concerns about encouraging carbon emissions and greenhouse warming. Other suggestions being contemplated include appropriate food labelling or insistence that flights be carbon offset.

### When is organic not organic?

The International Herald Tribune reported on the current deliberations of the US Department of Agriculture - responsible for organic regulations in the US - to approve a list of 38 non-organic ingredients (half are food colourings) that can be used in food that is certified organic. To wear the USDA's label, 5% of a product can be non-organic if it comes from an approved list of ingredients - based on whether the organic form is commercially available.

## New York's yellow cabs to go green

New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg unveiled a plan to introduce 1000 hybrid taxis into the iconic yellow fleet by late 2008 and to completely replace the city's 13 000 cabs by 2012. The taxi initiative is part of a broader plan for a more environmentally friendly New York, which includes a 30% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030.

### DIY soil?

The Cooperative Research Centre for Contamination Assessment and Remediation of the Environment is looking to develop a new Australian industry - making soil. Researchers are looking at ways to create artificial soil from wastes that other industries and sectors including manufacturing, farming and urban waste now throw away.

## Newman chooses organics over Oscars

The Ecorazzi website reports that screen legend Paul Newman has announced he is leaving acting to focus on organic pursuits. Newman, whose business interests include an organic farm and restaurant and the Newman's Own line of organic dressings and sauces, has already raised almost \$250 million for charity from proceeds of his food products.

And lastly, a study at Southampton University has linked high IQ with vegetarianism. Researchers discovered that people who were vegetarians by age 30 are likely to have had five IQ points more at age 10. More reason to eat your greens?

## Top Tips for SPRING

### O Rock and rotate

Crop rotation is an important tool for breaking disease and pest cycles and for meeting nutrient demands. Move crops around the garden bed so that plants from the same family are in a different place in successive seasons.

### Is Frost protection

Protect your frost tender seedlings from spring frosts by making your own cloches. Try plastic bottles with the bottoms cut out for individual plants and shade cloth row covers for larger plantings.



### Weed out weeds

Pull out your weeds before they get a chance to seed and spread. In these times of water restrictions, you'll also be saving precious moisture for your vegies.

## O Try your hand at heirlooms

Those striped tomatoes, purple potatoes and pink carrots are likely to be heirloom or heritage varieties of your favourite vegetables. Heritage seeds have often been passed from farmer to farmer, are grown for their added nutrition and taste and are an investment in plant diversity.

### O To market, to market

If your spring garden is still a blank canvas, a trip to your local market will give you a chance to see, smell and sample the best fresh produce that spring has to offer.

"Our descendents are highly unlikely to thank us if it is ultimately found that we have been guilty of treating Nature merely as a laboratory and not as a vast, integrated living organism."

Charles Windsor, organic gardener and Prince of Wales.



## Reducing food waste through worm farming

I m sure we've all been there — just before we go to do a grocery shop, we check the fridge for what we need to buy and find a limp bunch of celery or a head of lettuce lurking at the back of the shelf and curse ourselves for not eating it while it was fresh.

Despite a conscious effort to meal plan and only buy or grow what we need, this had become an all too familiar sight in our household as inevitably 'life' gets in the way of the best laid dinner plans!

I'd been keen to explore getting a worm farm at home for a little while, with a desire to reduce food waste going to landfill and do something with the countless teabags I went through each day. I also wanted to reap the benefits that worm castings and worm tea would provide for my garden — but I had no idea where to start.

I spent some time researching the benefits of worm farming, inspired to see that worm castings are claimed to be "nutrient rich, help aerate soil, improve drainage and increase water retention"<sup>1</sup>. It was also promised to be a low maintenance exercise, which means anyone can do it at home.

Research shows worms will eat up to 3-4kg of your kitchen waste every week<sup>2</sup> (less in the Canberra winter as their metabolism slows) and it is a very efficient way to process organic matter.

After a bit more research into the types of worm farms available, I decided on a free-standing, above-ground worm farm rather than digging one into the ground — because unfortunately ground space is at a premium in many Gungahlin suburbs.

However, an above-ground set-up would mean that the worms will be more exposed to the elements and temperature fluctuations, so I made sure to choose a protected and shady location, next to the garden shed.

I opted for a premade worm farm set-up from a local garden centre, which enables adding more layers to the worm farm over time. As I knew it would still be exposed to some elements, this seemed the right choice as it is designed to be free draining, eliminating the risk of liquid building up and potentially drowning the worms. Given the recent rainfall this winter it seemed like a safer option.

Once the worm farm was constructed, I lined it with old pieces of cardboard and added a worm bedding block to a large bucket filled with water. The bedding expands as it absorbs the water and provides the base layer for the worm farm. I sprinkled it over the cardboard to create the 'home' tray and added my new friends. From this 'Wormita' the worm farm was born.



<sup>2</sup> https://tumbleweed.com.au/pages/worm-farming-information



'Wormita' the worm farm

The next step was a to add a worm blanket over the top of the 'home' tray. The blanket is made from breathable, 100% natural fibres, which keeps the worms warm in winter but still provides an aerated environment in which they thrive. A worm blanket is also seen to increase activity in your worm farm and needs replacing every couple of months, as it breaks down over time.

Once nicely tucked into their new bedding, I left 'Wormita' alone for a week to allow her worms to settle in. Curiosity often took over, sneaking outside to lift the blanket and check the worms were still alive — which they always were.

During my week of waiting, I invested in a benchtop 'scraps bin' to leave in the kitchen, where we could add food scraps as they were generated. I opted for one with a replaceable charcoal filter which reduces odours, as my very curious cat likes to eat anything accessible and is a particular fan of carrot peelings — we think its how his coat stays bright ginger.

We started to add bits into the scraps bin as we cooked, careful to check if its something the worms could eat and making an effort to crush eggshells and chop scraps into small pieces.

I then added my first bucketful of scraps to the worm farm. It's recommended to concentrate all the scraps in

one corner, so the worms move to that section to eat. As that section is consumed, they move to the next area and so on, providing rotation within the worm farm. Once full, you can just add another tray on top with a little more bedding or organic compost and add more scraps. The trays have holes in the bottom which enable the worms to migrate up to the next tray where more food is located.

I was surprised at how low maintenance an exercise it really is. The setup is easy and the only real ongoing care is to sprinkle some worm farm conditioner across the trays once a week to ensure the pH levels in the worm farm are balanced. The conditioner also helps your worms digest larger quantities of food waste.

Whilst 'Wormita' the worm farm is really in its infancy at our house, I am excited about the possibilities it provides for our family. Not only does it provide a better option for our food scraps and the limp lettuce in the fridge, but it also provides us with fertiliser rich with nutrients for our garden. I also hope in time it might provide a valuable lesson for my family on sustainability — however based on Mr 12's initial reaction to being told we now have pet worms;



*The worms all snuggled into their fresh bedding* 

it might mean he needs a little more time to embrace the idea.

If you've ever thought about getting a worm farm at home, I strongly encourage you to do so. If not only for the food waste and fertiliser benefits, but also for the look of horror on the kids and grandkids faces!

—Rebecca Travers (article and photo)

NOT SURE WHAT YOU CAN ADD TO YOUR WORM FARM?		
THIS HANDY LIST WILL KEEP YOU ON TRACK		
THINGS I CAN ADD	THINGS I CAN'T ADD	
☑ fruit scraps	🗷 onion	
☑ vegetable scraps	🗷 garlic	
☑ teabags	🗷 chilli	
☑ coffee grounds	🗷 dairy	
☑ crushed eggshells	uncooked potato skins	
☑ small amounts of bread	🗷 citrus fruit or peel	
☑ small amounts of cooked rice or pasta	🗷 meat, bones or fish	
wet cardboard or newspaper	☑ oils or grease	



## Galah

There is so much more information on the Australian Galah than any species I have attempted to date which admittedly isn't really that many. But it should probably come as a no surprise. These beautiful pink and grey birds are widely loved, even though their name has become synonymous with 'clown', probably due to their highly amusing antics:

"Whether they are hanging upsidedown on a telegraph line, bobbing their heads in a dance or playing soccer with pebbles on the ground, you will see why 'galah' is Aussie slang for a silly person." (https:// backyardbuddies.org.au/backyardbuddies/galahs).

From the family Cacatuidae (which also includes several white cockatoo species), the galah (Eolophus roseicapillus) is found in almost all parts of Australia. It would also appear - based on my cursory research on YouTube — that they are a popular pet in the United States. I have only found one reference to region specific variations in galahs (https://galah. galahs.com.au/), which identifies Eastern, Northern and Western subspecies. The only apparent difference in these sub-species is the appearance of the ring around the eye (pink, grey or grey-red) and the intensity of the colour of the plumage.

In Canberra we are most familiar with the Eastern variant of the galah species, which exhibits a pinkish skin around the eye (periophthalmic ring). The gender of the bird can be identified by the colour of the eye (female galahs have a pink iris, the males have brown). Juvenile galahs can also be identified by the wash of grey on their plumage.

Unlike most of the other birds featured in 'Drawn to the Garden', there is a body of information on galahs as pet birds. I am choosing to omit most of this, given that this article primarily highlights the benefits of wild birds in the garden.

However, an interesting fact that emerged was the variation in the expected lifespan of a captive, well cared for galah (up to 40 years https://genomics.senescence.info/



species/entry.php?species=Eolophus\_ roseicapilla) and its wild equivalent (around 20 years).

Despite the benefits we perceive from sharing our environment with galahs, the reverse is not necessarily true. There is a high attrition from living in proximity to humans (death on the roads, feral animals and pets, and the inevitable decimation of their natural environment).

To counterbalance this, I did come across one endearing website (https:// galah.galahs.com.au/) that summarises some of the similarities between galahs and humans:

- Galahs forge a lifelong bond with their mates (they are probably better at it than we are!)
- Both the male and female galahs share the responsibility of raising their young.
- Galahs belong to complex social groups that change as they get older.
- Galahs are also a fun-loving animal that likes to muck about and be happy.

Galahs are seedeaters, and my research indicates that this is one of the major benefits of maintaining our strong galah community in your neighbourhood. They play an important role in the dispersal of native seeds, ensuring plant species are distributed and continue to evolve. This fact unfortunately contributes to them being considered a pest in grain-producing districts, where they can be trapped, shot or poisoned (Galah - Facts, Diet, Habitat & Pictures on Animalia.bio).

If you want to attract galahs to your backyard, plant locally native grasses, bushes and shrubs in your backyard to provide them with a food source. Provide a safe source of clean water. Placing seed out for galahs, as with other wild birds, should be as an occasional treat rather than as a permanent food source. If you have large trees, installing a nest box may attract galahs or other native hollownesting birds.

Galah pairs will continue to return to the same nest site every year and will defend it from other galahs or animals (backyardbuddies.org.au/ backyard-buddies/galahs). The beautiful reference photo for this drawing was taken by Merryl Watkins, a local photographer (www.facebook. com/MerrylWatkinsPhotography). She documents the story of this tree ("The Hollow") and the territorial disputes over its ownership. In this photo, the galah is clearing out any evidence of other occupation and claiming it as his own.

- Cathy Morison (article and drawing)



The Bureau of Meteorology's recent report says that all climate models indicate negative Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) conditions are likely for the remainder of winter and spring. A negative IOD usually indicates above average winter-spring rainfall for much of Australia.

The Bureau also says that there is about a 50% chance (double the normal likelihood) of the other main climate driver, La Niña, forming later in 2022. This is due to the persistence of La Niña-like conditions in the

## Dam levels in the Canberra region and capital cities

	July '22	July '21
ACT storages	100%	100%
Murray-Darling Basin	89%	68%
Burrinjuck Dam	89%	95%
Blowering Dam	98%	96%
Sydney	100%	95%
Melbourne	87%	76%
Brisbane	89%	62%
Adelaide	49%	46%
Perth	49%	42%

### Above average rainfall likely until at least the end of October



atmosphere and a restrengthening of ocean indicators of La Niña. Four of seven climate models predict a La Niña returning in the southern spring with the remainder showing neutral conditions until the end of 2022.

La Niña events increase the chance of above average winter-spring rainfall across much of northern and eastern Australia.

-Andy Hrast (article)

Adult NORAS 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 wriggler, 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

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Canberra Organic Spring 2022



Spring is the main planting season in Canberra. The timing of some plantings may need to be varied depending on the particular year.

Be prepared to protect your frost-tender seedlings, as harsh frosts can occur right through spring. Make your own cloches from plastic bottles with the bottoms cut out, or use row covers for larger plantings.

#### Using seeds

When direct planting with small seeds — e.g. carrots bulk out first by mixing the seeds with sand. You can help the plants pre-germinate by keeping them in moist sand for about four days before planting out (do not let them actually germinate).

When planting out large seeds — e.g. pea or corn — soak overnight in a weak seaweed solution prior to planting; alternatively, keep seeds moist between two pieces of kitchen paper for 3 to 4 days until seeds germinate, then plant out carefully. This is particularly useful if you are not sure of the seeds' viability.

Check your seed packets for their use-by date as poor germination may result from planting after that time, or plants may show a lack of vigour when the seedlings come up.

A seed should be planted at a depth 2 to 3 times its diameter, although it is better to plant too shallow than too deep.

#### **Crop rotation**

Remember to rotate the crops you grow in a particular garden bed. Crop rotation is a most important practice for organic gardeners. Successive crops should not come from the same plant families nor make the same demands on nutrients; i.e. follow heavy feeders with light feeders.

Also, successive crops should not share the same diseases or attract the same pests—this prevents a build up of disease problems, and reduces losses from pests.

There are numerous crop rotation schemes used, but try to keep to at least a 4-year rotation period and do not grow members of the same plant family in the same bed in consecutive years; e.g. tomatoes, capsicums, eggplants and potatoes are all from the Solanaceae family.

#### **Plant varieties**

It is important with crops such as cabbage and lettuce to choose the appropriate variety for the time of year. Lettuce varieties best suited to early spring are cos, salad bowl, butterhead and mignonette.

	SEP	ОСТ	NOV
Globe artichoke	т	т	
Jerusalem artichoke	т		
Asparagus	S	S	S
French beans		S	S
Beetroot	S	S	S
Broccoli			S
Brussel sprouts		S	S
Cabbage	ST	ST	ST
Capsicum*		S	ST
Carrot	S	S	S
Cauliflower			S
Celery	S	ST	ST
Cucumber*	S	S	ST
Eggplant*	S	S	т
Endive			S
Leeks	ST	ST	т
Lettuce	ST	ST	S
Melons	S	S	ST
Onions	т	т	
Parsnips	S	S	S
Peas	S	S	
Potatoes	S	S	S
Pumpkins*	S	S	ST
Radish	S	S	S
Rhubarb	т	т	
Silverbeet	S	S	ST
Snow peas	S	S	S
Spinach	ST	ST	
Squash*	S	S	ST
Sweet corn		S	ST
Tomatoes*	S	S	ST
Turnips (white)	S		
Zucchini*	S	S	ST

#### S = seed sowing; T = transplanting

\* When planting these seeds before November, the seed should be started in punnets indoors and the young seedlings kept in a warm sheltered place. Plant out the seedlings once the soil has warmed and the danger of frost has passed.



Tamarillos (photo by Ange McNeilly)

### 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
⅓ page	\$9 (\$7)	\$30 (\$25)
¼ page	\$18 (\$15)	\$60 (\$50)
½ page	\$36 (\$30)	\$120 (\$100)
Full page	\$72 (\$60)	\$240 (\$200)

Please contact editor@cogs.asn.au

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### Want to contribute? We'd love to hear from you! Please send contributions to: editor@cogs.asn.au

#### Deadline

Autumn mid-January Winter mid-April Spring mid-July Summer mid-October

Published ry mid-February mid-May mid-August eer mid-November

### COGS Community Garden Watering Rules

W ith 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.



Gourds at Charnwood community garden (photo by Ange McNeilly)