Summer 2022 Vol 30 No 4 Issue 117

Cook community garden — How will my garden grow in La Niña?

Three ways community gardens often exclude migrants and refugees — and how to turn this around

Canberra City Farm visit and tour

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 emerging.

The quarterly publication of the Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.



Welcome to the summer 2022 edition of *Canberra Organic*. As I write this, it doesn't feel like summer yet, but I am confident it will arrive and bring with it a productive growing season.

As always, we have another packed edition of the magazine, filled with stories from around our gardens and from our members.

I particularly enjoyed reading about how Charnwood community garden is inspiring our next generation of gardeners, Michele's shared recommendations for selecting inputs for use in our organic gardens, and the all-important weather report for the next few months. The COGS executive is also calling for nominations for Life Members, so please think about nominating one of your fellow gardeners for this award.

We have also included an interesting research article originally published in *The Conversation* that highlights the benefits of our community gardens being inclusive spaces, particularly for migrants and refugees. As we head into the warmer months and prior to the Christmas break, I encourage you to think about holding some get-togethers with

Produce from O'Connor community garden





your fellow gardeners, particularly now we can all socialise again.

In my own garden, I've resisted putting any seedlings in the ground yet, as it often resembles more of a lake than a garden bed, but I'm hoping the rain will stop long enough for me to plant and for the seedlings to survive. I'm aiming for lots of strawberries, tomatoes, zucchini and pumpkins, as well as some salad greens for summer side dishes. I hope to eat from my garden as much as possible next year.

—Rebecca Travers (article), Deborah Hamilton (photo)

> Do you know someone who isn't getting their magazine, either by post or by email? Or not getting COGS emails in general?

Please let me know at editor@cogs.asn.au and I'll pass a message on to someone who can investigate.

#### Contents

Editor's note page 2
President's column
COGS committee and garden convenors
Around the COGS gardens:
Betty Cornhill community garden 5
Mitchell community garden 6
Kambah community garden 7
Cook community garden / Report from the Treasurer 8–9
Charnwood community garden 10–11
O'Connor community garden12–14
Canberra City Farm visit and tour 15
Three ways community gardens often exclude migrants
and refugees — and how to turn this around 16-17

Recommendations for selecting inputs for use
in COGS organic gardens 18
Bee swarms
The history and value of sweet potatos ( <i>Ipomoea batatas</i> ) 20–21
2021 Strategic Planning workshop 22
COGS Life Membership appointments
Recipe: Strawberry oatmeal crumble bars
Recipe: Strawberry jam 24
Weather report
Summer planting guide 26
COGS community garden watering rules 27

**FRONT COVER:** Asparagus going to seed. Photo by Ange McNeilly.



Rain and more rain. And the forecast is for continuing wet weather. Our gardens are waterlogged and, in some cases, flooded.

This is a dampener (pun intended) on the start to our growing season. It is making it difficult to work the soil and germinate seeds that are sown. The overcast weather is also slowing the warming of the soil for the transplanting of the summer crops.

On the other hand, grass and weeds are thriving! I can only encourage everyone to try and keep on top of the weeds and the mowing. Once they get away the task becomes even more daunting.

Since the last edition of *Canberra Organic* there has been progress in several areas.

On Sunday 16 October 2023, members gathered at the Kambah community garden for a General Meeting to consider a revised constitution for COGS. I am pleased to say that the revised constitution was adopted unanimously and is now in the process of being formally advised to the ACT Government, as required by the regulations.

This was the culmination of an 18-month process that brings COGS up-to-date and on a sounder legal and administrative footing.

Thank you to everyone who came to the meeting, the Kambah community garden for hosting the meeting and everybody who contributed to this important reform.

September saw our gardens hold their Annual General Meetings. New convenors were elected at three gardens (Fiona Dawes — Kaleen; Josh Motbey — Oaks Estate; Debbie-Jo Dutton and Oliver Busset — co-convenors Mitchell). It's gratifying to see new people coming forward to take on these roles as part of the continual renewal of COGS to keep it operating and relevant.

Thank you to all the people who put their hands up and were elected as

garden Convenor or members of a garden committee. Without your willingness to take on these roles our gardens could not function. Also thank you also to the outgoing convenors (Narelle Maclean, Nick Potter and Karen James) for your years of contribution.

Neil Williams, our Treasurer, reports that there has been an excellent and timely payment of the annual fees. Thank you everyone.

COGS is now well resourced, and several gardens are taking advantage of this by bringing forward projects for funding. If your garden has an investment need, now is the time to bring it forward.

Several members of the Executive Committee have recently met with the Yeddung Mura Aboriginal Corporation in Tuggeranong to discuss ways COGS could be involved in helping them develop a community garden. These are ongoing discussions and I hope to be able to report more in the next edition.

I have previously written about the proposed Casey Community Recreation Park. The master plan for the park has been released and it is pleasing to see it includes provision for a community garden. Unfortunately, there is no funding to establish the garden at this stage. However, the COGS Executive will be meeting ACT Government officials to discuss a way forward.

The COGS Executive last year reinstituted the awarding of Life Membership. There is further information about how you can nominate a member elsewhere in the magazine and there will be an email to all shortly asking for nominations. COGS is wonderfully endowed with some many people who put in so much. Please consider nominating people who you consider should be publicly recognised for their contribution.



The record-keeping in COGS, like most community volunteer organisations, is, at best, haphazard. So it is pleasing to see a working group of Michele Barson, Cathy Morison, Peter Weddell and Terry Williams working to address this in COGS.

The first stage — the digitising of the magazine so that back copies can be easily accessed on the website — is now largely complete apart from missing editions. A streamlined process to deposit future editions in the National eDeposit Scheme has also been developed. This will meet COGS legal obligations to deposit its publications with the National Library of Australia within three months of publication.

The final stage is developing an integrated recording system that will save in an easily searched format for retrieval documents and decisions. Work on this well underway and will stand COGS in good stead.

Whilst on the subject of data, I would like reassure members that information held by COGS about members is not stored on individuals computers. COGS uses MYOB, which has encrypted entry, to store membership data records and any banking information is held on our banker's (Westpac) system. Nevertheless, the COGS Executive has instituted a review of both how data is held and what data needs to be held.

Since starting to write this the sun has come out and it is now a beautiful day. Let's hope we get some more sunny days going forward.

—Andy Hrast (article)

# Canberra. Organic

ISSN 2203-5125 (print) ISSN 2203-5133 (online)

#### Vol 30 No 4 Issue 117

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

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

Articles may be reproduced for non-profit, educational purposes or with prior permission from COGS.

Editor: Layout: Proofreading: Ed Highley

Rebecca Travers Matt Mawson Walter Steensby



#### **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

Enquiries info@cogs.asn.au

**Postal address** COGS PO Box 347 Dickson ACT 2602

#### executive committee 2022–2023

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

Betty Cornhill	Peter Rouse — cornhill_convenor@cogs.asn.au
Charnwood	Teresa Rose — charnwood_convenor@cogs.asn.au
Cook	Peter Weddell — cook_convenor@cogs.asn.au
Crace	Peter Newbigin — crace_convenor@cogs.asn.au
Dickson	John Robertson — dickson_convenor@cogs.asn.au
Erindale	Didi Sommer —erindale_convenor@cogs.asn.au
Holder	Neil Williams (Convenor) & Heather Campbell (Assistant Convenor) — holder_convenor@cogs.asn.au
Kaleen	Fiona Dawes — kaleen_convenor@cogs.asn.au
Kambah	Barbara Jesiolowski & Allan Sharp — kambah_convenor@cogs.asn.au
Mitchell	Debbie-Jo Dutton & Oliver Busset — mitchell_convenor@cogs.asn.au
Oaks Estate	Josh Motbey — oaks_estate_convenor@cogs.asn.au
O'Connor	Deborah Hamilton — oconnor_convenor@cogs.asn.au



### **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 — planting my cupboard

My new little garden at the Betty Cornhill community garden is coming into its second summer. I am still sorting out the infrastructure for the plot — if you can call paths, beds and trellises on 25 square metres 'infrastructure'!

Last summer was all about the flowers, especially zinnias, and it was a lot of fun to grow different varieties from seed bought very cheaply from the internet. This summer, the focus is on legumes.

I'm a vegetarian and legumes are among my favourite foods — you've got to love that tasty protein. So, I've raided my food cupboard to find out what will grow. Even though it's a bit risky because the freshness of the seeds is unknown, getting the answers is part of the experiment. Because I didn't know which seeds would germinate, I decided to grow them in punnets so that I could keep an eye on them and encourage them from the sidelines.

The chickpeas were first to germinate, and I am looking forward to trying them fresh as well as drying some. The beans which were sold just as 'white beans' and which are either cannellini or Great Northern beans are starting to break through, but no sign yet of the adzuki, black turtle or kidney beans. Early days yet, we shall see!

Among the seeds that have already germinated are some from another Betty Cornhill gardener, Gabi, who shared seeds from her beans last autumn, so I'm looking forward to continuing their acclimatisation. I am missing a few beans from my cupboard, so I'm going to shop for some soybeans and also borlotti and Greek giant beans, all of which I should find in our Indian or Lebanese shops if Coles and Woolies let me down. Maybe I'll try something else that catches my eye. It's still spring, so there is time to get them up and running.

Because beans tend to self-pollinate, I can look forward to saving seeds from anything that is especially successful and delicious. So, beans it will be in 2023 and I'll let you know how the experiment turns out. In the meantime, I will make sure there's room to grow plenty of zinnias!

-Mez (article and photos)

Seedlings are sprouting in Mez's garden







### Mitchell community garden — the past seven years

I have been a Convenor and committee member of the Mitchell community garden since joining in 2015. This year I stepped down and am happy to welcome Debbie and Oliver to the role and wish them well in their journey as Co-Convenors of our beautiful COGS Mitchell community garden.

I joined the garden after retiring from full-time work because I found that I had so much time to fill and as gardening has been enjoyable to me, I considered volunteering at our local community garden.

After meeting the Convenor at my first meeting, it didn't take him too much time to convince me to take a plot and join the garden full time. Luckily for me, the previous plot holder had left some broccoli, cabbage and spinach so I was encouraged to grow straight away.

Within weeks I had formed some enjoyable and valued garden

friendships and welcomed the working bee days and planting days held at the garden. These friendships meant I spent more time in the garden than I possibly needed to, as we would create flower gardens and sit and chat about improving the whole garden space. We did a bit of daydreaming too and fortunately some of those dreams eventually became a reality.

We planned a new shed build, a greenhouse build, large new compost bays and wider, clearer and more user-friendly pathways throughout the garden. We also dreamed of more plots.

It wasn't long before I took the Convenor role and started to put those plans in place. Not only was the role of Convenor challenging at times, but it provided me with an avenue to create and explore what is possible in a community setting.

We also have a donation garden, and it warms my heart to know that

we can offer fresh organic veggies to those members in our wider community, who are not in a position themselves to grow for their families. While there are different gardens throughout the COGS community and in the wider community, we all have that sense of value for our crops and our garden friends. I am forever grateful that Ian Mitchell, the Convenor of the day, encouraged me to join the Mitchell Garden seven years ago.

My thanks to COGS and all the members of the Mitchell community garden — past and present — for allowing me to play a role in the care of our garden and I encourage others to think about putting their hand up for a committee role. It's surprising just how enjoyable it is by creating spaces in the garden for others to share and enjoy.

—Narelle McLean (article and photo)

Narelle McLean, outgoing Convenor at Mitchell community garden.





### Kambah community garden – Floriade blooms again

2022 marks another year that Kambah community garden has bloomed again in the suburbs for Floriade. Beginning in 2020 following a shift in plans due to the pandemic, community groups were invited to get their hands on Floriade's signature bulbs and annuals in the Canberra regions, creating the Tulip Trail.

Being involved with the Floriade Community project has been a rewarding experience for us. This is our third year participating in Floriade Community — and our enthusiasm grows each year. People passing by often make favourable comments about the blooms and many come in for a closer look, giving us an opportunity to talk to them about what we do at COGS gardens.

— Barbara Jesiolowski (article and photo) and Allan Sharp (article)



Floriade blooms again at Kambah community garden

## The turnip — a plant for all seasons

I wonder why turnips are so unpopular. Maybe it's because that hundreds of years ago if you called someone a 'turnip', you meant that he or she was a fool.

I think that's a bit unfair on turnips. As you can see, they are quite interesting.

The photo shows turnips that I harvested from my grandpa's garden. To me, they taste like carrots and they seem to be much easier to grow.

A swede is a Swedish turnip. They are bigger, tougher skinned, yellow fleshed and much hardier than a turnip. What we call turnips are the smaller ones, with smoother skin and white flesh.

I am learning to speak Italian and when I first tasted a turnip, I thought it was troppo piccante (too spicy.)

So why don't you give yourself a treat and try growing (and eating) some turnips for dinner?

—Georgia (article) Grandpa Ken (photo)



Georgia proudly showing her freshly-harvested turnip



# Cook community garden — how will my garden grow in La Niña?

I know I was lucky last November to harvest a bountiful garlic crop in great condition despite the record 204Ml of rain recorded at Cook community garden while the crop was maturing. Somehow the luck continued: I had planted tomato seedlings in the mild, mid-October 2021 conditions (the first time in years I had done this before Melbourne Cup Day), and despite those seedlings turning a sickly blue-grey due to being waterlogged, they came good and produced a reasonable summer crop.

The zucchini seeds planted direct despite the wet, produced a wonderful glut, the cucumbers (at the third go) were the best I had ever grown, and the late summer plantings of brassicas also produced wonderfully — quick growing sugarloaf cabbage, broccoli and kale were a great winter harvest — no hand watering required!

But the regular unseasonable heavy rain persisted in winter and spring, and in mid-October 2022 the warmer temperatures are only just starting. Continuing La Niña conditions are forecast. Will I be lucky again with the garlic harvest this November? Can I possibly grow summer crops in my large garden at Cook? It is basically a bog!

Although as much as 70% of the Cook community garden site has been heavily inundated, it is good to see that many plots are currently thriving. The area most affected by boggy conditions is the central basin, where runoff from Mount Painter both under and above ground is severely challenging for several plot holders, including me! You have to feel for the farmers who are struggling with rain falling on already sodden ground in much of eastern Australia.

I am an optimist. Over the 20 years I have gardened at Cook, I have found that if one crop is a disappointment



Janet's plot at Cook community garden

another is a wonderful surprise. Rarely do I leave the garden emptyhanded — there's always some silverbeet, garlic chives, some self-sown lettuce or some unexpected side-shoots of broccoli, maybe some previously overlooked potatoes or carrots.

For the past few months however, the soil has been so boggy you could sink right in up to your bootlaces and I had purposely let the pathways between beds grow turf — to keep the soil together and provide shelter for the worms. Fortunately, our wonderful convenor Peter and some fellow gardeners arranged the bulk purchase of bargain-priced rain-spoiled lucerne hay that a local farmer was no longer able to sell as horse feed.

Over the years, lucerne and sheep manure have been my favourite soil improvers ('new soil makers' in fact) but this year I am really depending on the lucerne to rescue my plot! I have spread it thickly over all the beds that will be planted this season to absorb the rain and give the worms a home during waterlogged conditions. I have also laid the lucerne over the weeded paths, both to smother new sprouting grass seed and weeds but also to protect against soil compression when it is essential to move through the wet garden. The alternative was to raise the beds, as some fellow-gardeners are doing, but I am trialling the lucerne coverage as a less energy-intensive approach.

I am hoping that with such extensive coverage of lucerne I can use the 'Esther Dean' approach to establishing no-dig gardens, especially as I do not ordinarily dig or turn the soil over; rather I keep adding mulch and compost and only use a hand shovel to make a planting hole or seed row as required.

At home I have started a variety of seeds for summer, including tomatoes, capsicum, zucchini, pumpkins, cucumber. These have been slow to germinate but I am now nursing the seedlings along and will plant them only when they are strong and the temperature warms substantially. I propose to plant individual seedlings into the lucerne, each with some compost and the seedling soil ball from their growing pots. I am hoping this will sustain the seedlings until they are strong enough to put their roots into and survive in the wet but rich soil underneath.

In the boggy conditions of the last few months, I have been singularly unsuccessful in germinating seeds directly in the garden beds in the way in which I have been able to do in normal seasons. Three successive sowings of carrots and beetroot have



*Potatoes emerging through the lucerne* 

simply drowned, and I have had 1 of 20 snow peas and 0 of 20 or so sweet pea seeds germinate.

I have at last germinated carrots in a 'raised bed' comprising an old metal garbage bin, minus the eroded base. I screwed the bin into the ground, then mostly filled it with the dug-up pathway turf still attached to great clods of earth and teeming with worms.

I then added some 25 cm of a commercial organically certified compost, topped with seed-raising mix into which I placed carrot seed tape. The carrots have sprouted! Hopefully they will have a good depth of soil to grow in and good drainage to be able to withstand the forecast deluges of rain.

The sprouting carrots, and the juicy shoots of asparagus (white because they are emerging through the thick lucerne coverage) are giving me hope, as are the emerging potato plants. The garlic looks okay, though it will be a matter of warmth for maturation versus rain for rotting. The broad beans are going into production and the red and black currant bushes have survived the wet and are making berries! I have left in the Brussels sprout plants that were too waterlogged to make sprouts for two positive reasons - they are holding the soil together until the cucurbits are ready to be planted, and they are flowering and should let the pollinators know it is still worthwhile coming to my garden!

— Janet Popovic (article and photos)

# Report from the Treasurer — annual invoicing process

The annual invoicing process for 2022–23 has gone relatively smoothly. This year the membership fees were reduced by around 60% to \$10 (concession) and \$15 (full fee), while plot fees remained the same at \$4.20 per square metre.

Around 500 invoices were sent out (some were later cancelled where members advised they were no longer renewing). As at 22 October 2022, approximately \$62,500 had been received — with a handful of invoices outstanding. About 80% of the revenue was

received by the due date of 31 August and by end of September, this had risen to around 98%.

The bulk of COGS annual revenue is received during this period, which is then spent throughout the rest of the year on water, day-to-day garden expenses, tools and infrastructure — like new shelters at Erindale and Betty Cornhill — and administration. Thank you to those members who paid promptly.

-Neil Williams



# Charnwood community garden — encouraging gardeners of the future

The Charnwood community garden recently hosted a visit by 14 preschoolers from a Catholic preschool just up the road from our community garden. These delightful 4-year-olds were learning about food and where it comes from at school, and a visit to a community garden is one good way of giving a little glimpse of that important matter.

When you think about it, this is really a profound issue and one which we need to make sure our urban children know about and understand. One student noticed a plot with lots of plastic milk bottles cut in half that were protecting seedlings from frost and asked if we grew milk in our garden. I think that perfectly illustrated this point. Thinking about making the most of a school visit for the visitors is important. There is little point in giving 4 year-old's a talk about organic gardening, seed saving, garden rules and procedures, watering, planting seasons or the myriad of other things - all important of course. But 4-year-olds need hands on, not a talk from an oldie. So if you're hosting a visit in your garden, plan out your visit to give the most from it. Perhaps talk to the teacher in advance to clarify what learning experiences the children can gain from coming to your garden.

Our visitors came in early spring which is a hard time for a school visit, probably at peak harvest time in March–April might be better. Still,

Peter White giving a garden tour



we were able to give them all some hands-on gardening experiences. Every child picked a carrot and gave it a wash under a tap. Back at school, a big bunch of carrots is a good basis for talking about green carrot tops and sunlight, watering, how plants grow, and the reason for lots of little rootlets visible. Two and three legged carrots reinforce memories of the lesson. All kids like carrots, so chopping them up and eating them at school is also something you can do which you can't easily do with a lot of other vegetables.

Luckily, we had a plot that had been recently composted, so all the kids were able to dig and find lots of worms. Wriggly worms are a great opportunity for a learning experience for 4-year-olds. You need to have lots of garden trowels to run this activity and make sure the worms go back into their homes. If you have a plastic worm farm on hand that might also be a useful talking point, but not as good as digging in the soil.

One of our gardeners was planting out onions, so this is another activities kids can experience. Here, they were able to watch how it was done. Far preferable for little kids is to get them to plant seeds and seedlings themselves, but this is very hard to do with a lot of kids at once and in a short time period.

We have a number of beehives at the Charnwood community garden, so to see these — from a suitable distance — is another good experience for little kids. We could have had a honey tasting but didn't think of that one in advance.

So this sort of school visit is a fun and useful activity for COGS gardeners — when else would you get asked if we have a watermelon tree in our garden?

—Peter White (article and photos), Jo McMillan (photos)



*Teresa Rose helping the preschoolers get their hands dirty* (below left) Jo McMillan and the preschoolers harvesting carrots









## O'Connor community garden — do you dig it?

There are a variety of ideas about gardening at the O'Connor community garden and we can be quite passionate about our personal approaches. Several gardeners use the no-dig method very successfully, and here, the lovely Vedanta and Phil provide some pointers for not digging it.

#### Phil and Vedanta's tips for a no dig garden

- 1. When harvesting your winter vegetables leave roots undisturbed to rot below soil.
- 2. Layer a good 2 to 3 inches of compost or manure and straw onto these cleared areas
- 3. Time to cut and cover with cardboard or old underfelt (to block out the light) over any winter green manure crops.
- 4. If planting seeds directly or seedlings, clear back any mulch and plant into a row or handful of compost
- 5. Remember to lay down some organic slug pellets (ferric phosphate) with all this wet weather
- 6. Frost cover over the seedlings also helps keeps the birds from pulling up the seedlings.

(below) Phil and Vedanta's no-dig garden at O'Connor (photos by Vedanta Nicholson)







O'Connor community garden looking bountiful (photo by Deborah Hamilton)

# Garden background — from dry tennis courts to verdant food producing abundance.

Are you familiar with the O'Connor community garden (OCG)? Located in Jarrah Street, the OCG was established within the tall fences of former tennis courts on land volunteered by the adjoining Uniting Church. Since its beginning in 2005, it has become a rich and abundant landscape comprising shared fruit trees and beds of herbs as well as individual plots. We currently have 23 plots distributed across about 20 plot holders and two community plots. Some members have gardened in the same plot since the garden's creation in 2005, while others are new this year. We have recently worked on community consultation and updating our garden rules to help clarify and refresh our shared values and needs so that the garden can continue to thrive.

#### **Compost and community**

A small group of experienced compost makers at OCG have been meeting to discuss how we can get the best product from our communal composting system to share with gardeners. Our existing pallet compost bins have been a familiar sight since the garden began 17 years ago and have helped keep garden nutrients on site, but we are now looking at how to make the system more effective by introducing a hot composting bin and a bin for finished compost.

We recently discovered termites in the pallets and learnt that pallets are often chemically treated. Importantly, our existing bin design makes turning the compost a job only the young and fit can do. As many of our members have health conditions or are older, we need to redesign our

system to make it accessible for more of us to be involved in making compost at the quarterly working bees.

We are researching options and hope to prepare a funding submission to replace the pallet bins with bins designed to make compost turning easier, use longer lasting materials, and build up the skills of members in making beautiful compost.

#### Sharing the harvest — Outreach

We are very pleased with the ongoing connection between Companion House and O'Connor community garden outreach.

Garden member Nicolette Bramley facilitates the collection and donation of garden produce weekly or fortnightly depending on the season. She says that in the middle of summer 2021–22, we recorded eight boxes of tomatoes and zucchinis in one delivery and that "the produce is always received with gratitude and delight at the marvellous assortment of different vegetables and fruit".

It's great to know that the produce the garden members are collecting and sending off is finding a good home.



Some of the produce shared by OCG to Companion House (photos by Deborah Hamilton and Nicolette Bramley)

#### The garden as a place/ the longest day

Our family has had a patch at the O'Connor community garden for several years now. Especially when we were moving between rental properties, being able to build up the soil, plant, let things self-seed and watch the seasons change in a place was important.



Ancient Ceremony on the Longest day by Paul Summerfield

Our patch, sheltered by the big, deciduous tree that overhangs it and cradled by the tree's roots that grow up into it a little, became a place of significance for all of us.

It didn't have much light in summer until the branches were chopped back earlier this year, but it wasn't important. We let the soil rest a bit during that time and grew things that appreciated a bit of shade. Asparagus appeared in one area where the light came through, and we happily let it grow and spread. For a long time, we had a spontaneous food forest style. Now we are trying rows.

Over time we've become familiar with the cycles of the place, like when things grow and flower, different insects visit, how the breeze blows through, and the way the light falls in a particular way at different times of year.

Paul created this artwork inspired by being in the garden on the longest day of the year, December 22nd.

— Lara Doolette (article)



### O'Connor community garden — Gardening styles (cont.)

If you read the spring edition of the *Canberra Organic*, you might have seen part one of our article featuring the mix of gardening styles at O'Connor community garden (OCG). Compiled by garden member Dana Nipperess, this information was provided as a handout to visitors at our Open Day held in April 2022 and is continued here.

Plot 7 uses permaculture principles to create a flourishing garden. Permaculture is a broad field of gardening based around engaging and working with the environment and surrounding ecosystem, rather than imposing on the landscape or garden. In this garden, the plot holder encourages 'volunteer' plants (plants that grow without being intentionally planted), strictly avoids purchasing any new plastic and plastic consumables (though re-purposed or re-used materials that were other peoples' waste make their way into the watering system) and undertakes soil layering to build healthy, microbe rich soil.

On plot 6.1, the raised beds in this plot are narrow and oriented northsouth. The beds are slightly raised for drainage (especially important for garlic) and their narrow width permits easy access to each bed from either side. The north-south orientation seeks to maximise sun exposure to all the plants. The Western Australian Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development recommends orienting raised beds north-south 'which maximises the chances of uniform crop development across the full width of the bed'. This advice is intended to apply to broader scale cropping. The plot holder decided to experiment on a much smaller scale and test this approach because it utilises a north-south orientation perpendicular to the plane of the equator and allows both sides of the bed to receive sunlight during the day. Working with nature in this way, the taller plants are less likely to shade out the shorter ones. There are, of course, other considerations when orienting a garden bed such as slope and drainage - neither of which



The plan for this garden was designed by Barbara Payne, who is an OCG member and landscape architect (retired). The map shows number labels for the various plots that correlate to the numbers in the article.

is really an issue in a level area such as a former tennis court. Crop rotation is practised and vital soil improvement is through the addition of compost and green manure.

Plot 5.1 is the most compromised plot in the garden, suffering from shade and extensive root competition from the 60-year-old adjacent oak and elm trees. Despite the compromises it has become a productive garden by adjusting to the environment. Firstly, soil quality is paramount — if there isn't as much sun, everything else needs to be top-notch, so mulch, compost and extra worm products have been added to supplement the soil. Second, intentional selection of plants means longer harvest plants like cauliflower or large tomatoes aren't an option. Smaller tomato varieties, leafy and root vegetables and sprouting or smaller head broccoli perform well. Lastly, planting locations are chosen based on sun needs, with shade tolerant veg and flowers, such as broad beans, root veg and kale, planted closer to the compost bin.

Plots 11 and 12 use 'no dig' gardening methods. In 'no dig' gardening a layer

of organic matter is added over the soil such as manure, compost, straw, etc. approximately 5cm-15cm (2"- 6") thick. This is in effect 'sheet composting', where the garden beds become large composting areas. Through the action of earthworms, bacteria, fungi, algae nematodes and insects, the organic matter is slowly broken down and released into the soil, providing nutrients to the garden. Seedlings and seeds are planted by just poking a hole through the mulch layers. Each time a crop is taken out root systems are mainly left to break down and a new layer of organic matter is added and planted into straight away. By not disturbing the soil structure a complex and very delicate ecosystem teeming with life is maintained. Beneficial soil microorganisms flourish, nutrient rich humus builds up, moisture is better retained, water and air movement through the soil increases and plant health and growth are improved. This is how nature works.

Whatever your approach, we hope you are enjoying gardening and community as the weather warms.

- O'Connor community garden



### **Canberra City Farm visit and tour**

ardy COGS members gathered at the Canberra City Farm in Fyshwick on a cold and wet Sunday afternoon in October for a visit and tour of the Farm.

John Peters, President of the Canberra City Farm, provided an entertaining presentation - which he said was mainly true - of the history of the site on which Canberra City Farm is located.

Archeological digs in the area show that the site was a favoured meeting place for Indigenous people from the coast and inland areas, as there was a lake there caused by a land slip on Black Mountain damming the Molonglo River.

After European settlement it was initially used for grazing. Since the creation of the ACT, it has had a chequered career — being developed as a concentration camp for aliens during WW1, used as an outdoor school for problem children, an educational outdoor program site, and as a dairy farm.

Canberra City Farm inherited various building which have been repurposed and in one case rebuilt by SEE-Change to demonstrate environmentally efficient building techniques. Orchards and vineyards have been rehabilitated and are now proving productive.

The site is also used by the Australian National University to study snakes. The location is described by researchers as 'snake heaven'. The 30 plus gardeners who have garden plots there regularly encounter snakes and, according to John, there is an amicable relationship between the gardeners and the snakes. No snakes were spotted during the COGS visit.

The presentation and tour were followed by a pleasant afternoon tea that allowed informal discussion with John and between COGS members about community gardening.

The visit was arranged by COGS as part of its plan to recommence whole-of-COGS events now that the worst of COVID-19 is over. The next event is the open day at Kambah Garden on 5 November as part of SouthFest.

— Andy Hrast (article and photos) COGS visitors enjoyed a cold but informative visit to Canberra City Farm





# Three ways community gardens often exclude migrants and refugees — and how to turn this around

This article, originally published in The Conversation in August 2021 (prior to another COVID-19 lockdown), highlights the findings of research into social inclusion in community gardens.

With millions of Australians enduring lockdown yet again, you may be seeking solace in gardening. For migrants and refugees in Australia, gardening can be particularly meaningful when shared in community spaces.

But community gardens aren't always sites of inclusion. In our recently published research, my colleagues and I highlight the ways migrants and refugees are excluded from community gardens — and how to change this.

When community gardens are socially inclusive, everyone benefits. Culturally diverse community gardens can not only deepen crosscultural social connections, they can even help develop the skills to adapt to change and crisis, such as from climate change.

#### The benefits of community gardens

Waiting lists to join community gardens are extremely long in many parts of Australia, with some gardens requiring up to an eight-year wait. Advocacy groups consistently call for more sites and greater financial support to meet this demand.

There are good reasons for their growing popularity. Improved mental and physical health and wellbeing regularly tops the list of their positive impacts, as they promote more exercise, greater access to nutritious food, strengthen community connections, and more.

The food grown in community gardens can also help improve food security. During lockdown, these sites have been vital to meet the everyday needs of many suffering from financial hardship.

For refugees and migrants, communal gardening sites can be therapeutic, safe spaces.

When immersed in supportive communities that share a commitment to productive gardening, migrants and refugees can improve their self-efficacy. The ability to grow culturally familiar foods can also maintain their connections to homelands, easing the resettlement and migration process.

This is why it's so important to improve these opportunities and remove any barriers excluding these gardeners. Our research reviewed

Would you like to own a living 'dinosaur'? The second release of Wollemi Pine Trees from the Friends of the National Arboretum Canberra (FNAC) are available for sale. These healthy robust trees are over two and a half years old and have been grown locally from seed collected from the Arboretum's forest. They are only available for purchase on the Friend's website https:// friendsarboretumcanberra.org.au



The Friend's project is to continue the preservation of this rare and critically endangered iconic Australian species and to raise funds to support future approved Arboretum projects. Buy one of these spectacular conifers as a Christmas tree, as a gift, or to grow it as a feature in your own backyard! worldwide studies of community gardens, and found common barriers to refugee and migrant participation revolve around three key areas:

## 1. Physical and material features of gardens

This includes high membership fees, inability to easily travel to gardens and insecure land tenure.

Site design that limits gardeners' autonomy and ability to grow familiar foods is also a problem. This can happen where there's communal, rather than individual, plot cultivation, putting pressure on new gardeners to grow foods already well known to existing gardeners.

Another barrier is a lack of available space and small plot sizes, which can make it harder to grow culturally important crops, such as maize.

#### 2. Garden management styles

Inclusive practices are often not embedded into information sharing and decision making, such as not translating information.

For example, community gardens often rely on formal management meetings, but these may not take into account different languages, cultural traditions and unequal power relations.

Relying on community gardens for food security can also be a big problem for refugees and migrants, especially for new arrivals. This can lead to gardens replacing more holistic social support programs.

# 3. Privileging particular values and aesthetics

The way we care for gardens and ideas about how a productive garden should look, are often shaped by whatever cultural norm is dominant. Uniform, neatly mulched raised beds, free of weeds and overhanging vegetation, are often favoured by risk averse councils.

Migrant and refugee gardening styles can be at odds with accepted



Checking the crop at Tugun community garden (photo: Matt Mawson)

expectations and values like these. Many are used to cultivating directly into the soil and prefer to grow a wide variety of plants together that may not look neat, but can increase biodiversity. They may also leave more space between crops to improve yield.

This means these familiar, productive and culturally appropriate ways of gardening for refugees and migrants can be devalued and excluded, along with their skills and knowledge.

The good news is we can make community gardens more socially inclusive places. To do this, there needs to be more investment from governments and local councils in resources (including land and financial support) for the largely volunteer groups developing and managing these sites.

These resources need to assist migrants and refugees to:

- develop social and ecological connections that engender a sense of belonging
- contribute to the design and management of gardens in culturally and linguistically inclusive ways
- make choices about how to tend their plots that enable some connection to their homeland

- engage with other garden members from all backgrounds to share knowledge and lessons
- not have to rely on the garden as a primary source of food or income generation.
- gardens are better when migrants and refugees are included.

Community gardens are currently off limits to many under lockdown. When we return to COVID-normal, the lessons from socially inclusive gardens could help communities better prepare for future disruption, particularly from climate change.

Resettlement in a different country involves ongoing adjustments to new social, ecological and climate conditions. We can all learn from migrant and refugee skills, knowledge, and the ways they adapt, as adjustment to unfamiliar environments often comes with careful tinkering and trial and error.

When it comes to food gardens, past research has shown this experimentation can lead to boosting biodiversity and expanding diets, due to the variety of crops grown. One example is the introduction of maize to produce maize flour in many gardens throughout Australia. This is a diet staple for many African nations. The desire to grow culturally relevant foods means tinkering with soil and growing conditions, as well as the plants themselves. This enables the plants to adapt to unfamiliar conditions, which will become increasingly variable under climate change. Learning how to grow tropical plants in frosty parts of Victoria or on marginal soils are a couple of good examples.

What's more, gardeners from diverse backgrounds can increase a community's repertoire of safe, low-tech cultivation and pest management techniques. This includes how to make the most of the waste from culturally familiar foods, such as Japanese gardeners' use of tofu residue as a soil conditioner.

Not only will bringing together culturally diverse community members foster more meaningful connections, but it will also strengthen our shared ability to adapt to the uncertainty of a changing climate.

The author would like to acknowledge Jessica Abramovic and Cathy Hope who helped compile the research upon which this article is based.

—Bethaney Turner, Associate Professor, Centre for Creative and Cultural Research, Faculty of Arts and Design, University of Canberra



# Recommendations for selecting inputs for use in COGS organic gardens

rganic growing is a cultivation system that uses biological fertilisers derived from animal and plant wastes and nitrogen fixing cover crops, and ecologically based pest control instead of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Organic materials such as animal manures, compost, straw, and other crop residues are applied to the soil to improve both soil structure and moisture-holding capacity and to nourish soil life, which in turn nourishes plants. Chemical fertilisers feed plants directly. Biological pest control is achieved through preventive methods, including diversified planting, crop rotation, the planting of pest-deterrent species, and the use of integrated pest management techniques.

Australia's National Standard for Organic and Bio-Dynamic Produce (the Standard) (September 2016) provides a framework for the commercial production, processing, transportation, labelling and importation of organic produce. The Standard's Appendices B and C list permitted materials for soil fertilising and conditioning and plant pest and disease control. There is no formal requirement for COGS gardeners to comply with this standard, as produce grown in COGS gardens is not for sale, but the tables provide a useful guide to current thinking on the suitability of various materials for organic gardening.

There are six accredited certifiers for various organic products in Australia. In the ACT a wide range of garden inputs including mulches, composts, fertilisers and pest control products, mostly certified by The Australian Certified Organic Standard (2021) is now available. The bud logo (see next column), usually accompanied by a label which states that the product contained is an Australian Organic Registered Garden Product or is an Input for Organic Gardens, makes it easier for gardeners to identify



© Can Stock Photo / Elenathewise

inputs that meet organic standards. It should be noted that while individual products are certified, there may be some products in a company's range that currently do not meet the required standards or have yet to be certified.



Appendix B of the National Standard, "Permitted materials for soil fertilising and conditioning", notes that animal manures are permitted materials with specific conditions for use. If manures are applied by sheet composting (a thin layer added on top of the soil), two green manure crops must be grown before the area is planted to crops for human consumption. Alternatively, the organic matter must be fully composted before use.

In COGS gardens, the most used manures are horse (often obtained as stable litter, i.e., mixed with straw), sheep, cow and poultry manure, with alpaca manure occasionally available. Where possible these should be obtained either from sources known to be managed organically or be certified as organic to reduce the risk of contamination by agricultural and/or veterinary chemicals. COGS gardeners are encouraged to compost all fresh manures well before use to reduce the risk of introducing more weeds. If composting is not an option, it is strongly recommended that sheep and alpaca manures be applied as liquid manures by soaking the pellets in water to make a manure tea and diluting this before application. Using manure teas will avoid contamination of the soil by weed species that are almost impossible to eradicate, such as Oxalis (pink or bent wood sorrel). The use of sheep manure heavily contaminated with Oxalis bulbs has made one of COGS' plots unusable for the foreseeable future.

Mushroom compost (a mix of straw and chicken manure), sometimes used by COGS gardeners, is generally weed free but often very alkaline, as is fresh poultry manure.

Given ongoing concerns about the pollution of soils, waterways and the ocean by plastics, it's recommended that COGS gardens review the use of plastic materials in the garden and, where feasible, identify suitable biodegradable alternatives. It is strongly recommended that gardens consider banning the use of plastic weed mat which breaks down into many very fine pieces which are difficult to remove from the soil.

-Michele Barson



### **Bee swarms**

W<sup>hy do bees swarm? Good</sup> question!

European bees swarm usually at the beginning of spring this is how they populate areas. The bee population in a hive expands and contracts throughout the year. The highest number of bees in a hive is at the summer solstice and lowest number at the winter solstice. At this time of the year bee numbers are climbing rapidly to collect the nectar and pollen being generated by the local plants.

European bees are used to long cold winters with lots of snow, so they have evolved to collect a large amount of food in anticipation of this winter.

Some hives run out of room as the population is expanding, so the hives decide to split into two groups. The first group will remain in the hive while the rest including the queen swarms to go find a new location. This is the swarm of bees that you may see flying by as a cloud of bees or at rest as a large group of bees usually hang from a branch on the tree.

I have collected six swarms so far this year; the largest so far was 5.42 kg. The bees that remained in the hive have queen cells and will raise a new queen to replace the one that left with the swarm. The swarm of bees forms a ball around to queen to make sure she is safe as she is the future of the new hive.

This swarms' goal is to move far enough away from the original hive as not to compete for the same resources of the original hive. But the queen may not have been out of the hives for a year or two, which means she cannot fly very far. The bees will stop and let her rest and form this ball around her.

Each time they stop they send out scout bees looking for a new home; these scouts come back and do a bee dance, this dance tells the swarm and other scout bees which direction to head and how far to go.



Bee swarm on a hot summer day (photo by Matt Mawson)

The bees navigate by using the ultraviolet light from the sun. They have two primary eyes to see the world around them and three little eyes on top of their head that detects this ultraviolet light to use it like a compass.

As for distance, when they waggle their tails in a bee dance, the duration of shaking their tail is 750 meters per second of shaking. The other scouts know how far to go and what direction to help in finding a new home for the swarm.

The bees in a swarm state are usually gentle because they have no home, young bees, or honey to defend. I find a swarm is awesome to walk through when they are flying, or to just walk up and inspect when they are resting.

Mark Paterson (article)

*Beekeeper, educator, advocate, and a member of ACT for Bees* 



# The history and value of sweet potatoes (*Ipomoea batatas*)

What vegetable comes in white, yellow, orange, red and purple? Sweet potatoes of course! — wonderfully coloured tubers of goodness. The sweet potato genome evolved over thousands of years and is an example of a naturally transgenic food crop with hundreds of varieties.

Sweet potatoes, or *Ipomoea batatas*, are members of the morning glory family or Convolvulaceae and have been cultivated by humans for 5000 years or more. Typical of morning glory, sweet potatoes grow on a vine that spreads over the soil. They like it hot and humid, like their place of origin somewhere between Mexico and Venezuela, near the equator. In these areas people not only eat the starchy root but also the young leaves and shoots.

The sweet potato is one of the most well-travelled vegetable plants in history. It turned up in Polynesia before the Spanish expeditions to Central and South America. It arrived in the Cook Islands between 1200 and 1400 CE and spread throughout the Pacific as far away as Easter Island, Hawaii and New Zealand. Polynesians really were amazing seafarers to undertake such long voyages.

When the Spanish arrived in the New World in 1492, they ate sweet potato, and it was taken back to Europe. The Spanish introduced the sweet potato to the Philippines between 1521 and 1594. From there it was introduced to China in 1594 and was introduced to Okinawa in the early 1600s by the Portuguese. It arrived in Korea in 1794 to provide sustenance in time of famine when the rice crop failed.

Sweet potatoes provide excellent sustenance because they are nutrient dense. Because of this they have been labelled a superfood. They are a very high energy source and a source of fibre. Compared to other common staples such as rice and potatoes, sweet potatoes rank very highly



Juno-jo pink skinned sweet potatoes (Unsplash)

nutritionally, along with soybeans which complement sweet potatoes making a very good combination for vegetarians.

As well as being 25% carbohydrate and 2% protein, sweet potatoes contain many vitamins and minerals in the flesh as well as the skin. The orange variety of sweet potato is loaded with beta carotene which is changed into vitamin A by the body. Sweet potatoes also contain high levels of manganese and vitamins B1, B2, B3, B6, B9, C and E. They contain copper, iron, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, sodium, and zinc. Sweet potatoes may help to improve blood sugar regulation if you boil them because boiled sweet potatoes are low on the glycaemic index unlike most potatoes and white rice. They may also have anti-inflammatory, antibacterial and antifungal properties, although more studies are needed to confirm this.

Carotenoids in sweet potatoes might lower your risk of cancer. Purple sweet potatoes contain anthocyanin which may lower your chances of getting bowel cancer. Research also shows that sweet potatoes can lower 'bad' cholesterol which is good news

for your heart. Of course, many of us were told that eating carrots (which contain beta carotene) is good for seeing at night; be that as it may, the large amount of beta carotene in sweet potato could lower your chance of macular degeneration. But best of all, purple sweet potatoes may help keep fat cells from growing which may help you lose weight. Sounds too good to be true even for a superfood but may be worth a try as sweet potatoes are delicious to eat anyway.

When having a meal of sweet potato, it is a good idea to add some fat such as olive oil or butter to help the body absorb the beta-carotene. A teaspoon of olive oil per person is plenty.

The Okinawan purple sweet potato has 150% more antioxidants than blueberries. The traditional diet of people who live on the semi tropical Japanese Okinawa Island includes lots of purple sweet potato. It contributes to their health and is thought to be one of the reasons why they were some of the longest living people in the world. In 1980 Okinawa had the highest average life expectancy with men generally expected to reach a least 84 and women to reach 90. As well as eating sweet potato and only small amounts of white rice, Okinawans traditionally ate lots of other vegetables, tofu and fish, and only small portions of meat. People also did a lot of physical activity. They ate only small portions and lived peaceful family and community orientated lives. The concept of ikigai meant that people spontaneously and willingly did activities that they were passionate about, and which gave them a feeling of accomplishment and fulfillment.

The island was once called the land of the immortals but no longer. Unfortunately, modern life has overtaken Okinawa. People have less time for socialising and contemplating, pursuing outside activities, relaxing and the diet has changed with more fast food and less healthy choices. Interestingly, the life expectancy of people in Okinawa is falling significantly.

It is possible to grow sweet potatoes in Canberra. You can now buy pots of orange and purple sweet potatoes at nurseries ready for planting. Sweet potatoes do not tolerate frost, so place some floating covers (obtainable from good garden suppliers) on top of the plants at the beginning and end of the growing season. Some 90% of sweet potatoes grown in Australia are the orange variety Beauregard which matures early. You can let the tubers sprout in late winter and then plant. If the season is long and warm a good crop of tubers should be produced in 90-100 days. Keep your plants quite moist in spring and then reduce the amount of water but do not let them dry out completely. Sweet potatoes do not like heavy soil, and do not use manure high in nitrogen (e.g. chicken manure pellets) as you will get lots of leaves and no tubers. Then pray for hot weather and be patient.

— Elizabeth Dangerfield (article and photo), Unsplash (photo)

Two sweet potato plants bought recently at the Heritage Nursery Yarralumla





# 2021 Strategic Planning workshop — update on implementation of recommendations

 $\mathbf{P}$  articipants at the 2021 Strategic Planning workshop identified priority actions for the four main issues discussed. The following is a summary of progress in the last 12 months.

#### The primary purpose of COGS

**Recommendation 1:** Review COGS Constitution to clarify our objectives and ensure that it is in line with current legislation. A special general meeting was held on 16 October 2022 at the Kambah community garden where the revised Constitution (dated 14 June 2022) was unanimously agreed. The new constitution is now available on COGS website.

**Recommendation 2:** More direct engagement of the Executive with gardens and their members to revitalise communication and increase member support for COGS. Executive committee members now regularly attend garden AGMs and garden functions, including open garden days.

**Recommendation 3:** Increase COGS education and advocacy roles through expansion of our social media presence, and by partnering with likeminded organisations. COGS now has an active Instagram presence.

The online form https://cogs.asn.au/organic-gardening/ growing-guides/local-grower-form/ encourages members to share their experience by uploading growing information on their favourite vegetables and fruits. Opportunities for outreach activities with the Canberra City Farm have been limited by ongoing COVID-19 concerns.

#### Management of COGS

**Recommendation 1:** Increase volunteering at Executive and garden levels. Life Membership awards (three made in 2021) have been reinstituted to celebrate the importance of volunteers to COGS and the wider community. Further work on succession planning for COGS committee members and garden convenors is needed.

#### What we want our gardens to look like

**Recommendation 1:** The review of COGS garden infrastructure was completed in August 2021, providing a stocktake of infrastructure resources, including the potential for increasing plot numbers and expanding boundaries of existing gardens. The report identified priorities for investment, and a proforma has been used to bring forward proposals on a quarterly basis for funding. Projects funded to date include fencing at Oaks Estate community garden, raised beds at Charnwood and Cook, a shed and shelter at Erindale, and a new shed and road resurfacing at Betty Cornhill.

Several gardens adjacent to ACT leasehold land were thought to have potential for expansion subject to investigation of soil suitability and water availability and discussions with the ACT Government regarding access to the land. Ongoing flooding at Cook and Mitchell makes expansion of two of these sites impractical. There were limited opportunities within existing gardens to develop more plots; subdivision of larger plots in a few gardens is now occurring.

COGS has been involved in discussions with developers re a garden at Denman Prospect which is likely to go ahead, and has been providing advice to government agency staff on a garden proposed in the ACT Government's plan for community facilities at Springbank Rise, Casey.

**Recommendation 2:** Develop a standardised process for funding applications made to COGS. This has been completed. See Recommendation 1 above.

**Recommendation 3:** Improve the sustainability of our gardening activities. To help members choose fertilisers, mulches, composts, and pest control products that meet Australia's organic standards, a document has been developed that will assist in selecting inputs for organic gardens and published in this magazine. It will also be available on the members section of the COGS website. Other opportunities to improve the sustainability of COGS garden practices including reducing the use of plastics in gardens, building better soil health, and increasing habitat biodiversity for native birds and insects are yet to be investigated.

#### Engagement with the community

**Recommendation 1:** Expand COGS' role in education. See comments above on expansion of material available via social media.

**Recommendation 2:** Maintain good relationships with the ACT Government and its bureaucracy. In the last 12 months meetings have been held with Minister Chris Steele (Transport and City Services) and his staff and Suzanne Orr (Member for Yerrabi) to discuss COGS' role and operations, opportunities to establish new gardens and the need to identify suitable sites for additional community gardens in the ACT's land planning processes.

Minister Shane Rattenbury (Attorney-General and Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction), Yvette Berry (Deputy Chief Minister) and Jo Clay (MLA for Ginninderra) have participated in functions at COGS gardens. Recently the Minister for Environment, Rebecca Vassarotti and staff visited our Charnwood community garden to present the ACT's 2022 Community Garden Grants.

**Recommendation 3:** Identify opportunities to progress shared interests with other ACT organisations. COGS prepared a submission to the ACT Government's *Capital Food and Fibre Strategy* being developed to guide planning and management of the region's agricultural production. The COGS Executive committee has met with a group interested in establishing cooperative agricultural activities for the region. COGS members attended an open day to learn more about the operation of the Canberra City Farm. Further follow up is planned as opportunities arise.

-Michele Barson (article)



### **COGS Life Membership appointments – an invitation**

COGS Life Membership appointments celebrate the importance of volunteers to the Society and to the wider community, as well as recognising the considerable contributions of individuals. To date, twenty Life Members have been appointed (see the full list on the COGS Members' webpage).

Life Membership, provided for under the Constitution, is an honour bestowed on members whose outstanding service and contribution to COGS has provided considerable benefit to the organisation over an extended period. As a token of COGS appreciation, Life Members do not pay membership fees and receive a copy of the COGS magazine *Canberra Organic* — they pay normal fees for plots they may have.

Nominations are assessed against the following criteria:

- service to COGS over a long period of time
- specific achievements that further the aims and objectives of COGS
- provision of valued leadership and/or being an outstanding role model to members
- service reflecting favourably and bringing great credit to COGS.

Written nominations can be made by financial members of COGS, who should approach an Executive Committee member with information addressing the above criteria in support of the proposed Life Member.

Only current financial members of COGS are eligible for Life Membership. The sponsoring Committee member will ask the full Executive Committee to consider the nomination. Life Membership awards will be announced at the 2023 Annual General Meeting, and appointments, along with a summary of their contribution to COGS, published in the magazine.

Life Membership nominations for 2022 should be received from the sponsoring Committee member for discussion by the full Committee before 18 November 2022.

-Michele Barson

Pumpkins in Holder garden (photo, Matt Mawson)





## Strawberry oatmeal crumble bars

Adapted from a recipe from California Strawberries.

#### Ingredients

Filling 2 ½ cups strawberries, chopped 2 tbsp lemon juice 3 tbsp maple syrup Crust and crumble 1 tsp tapioca/arrowroot flour ⅓ cup coconut oil 1 cup oat flour 1 ½ cups rolled oats ⅓ cup maple syrup 1 tsp vanilla extract Pinch of salt

#### Method

- 1. Preheat the oven to 180°C.
- Place strawberries in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Bring to a boil, stirring every few minutes.
- 3. Once the strawberries start to boil, add the lemon juice and maple syrup.
- 4. Using a potato masher, mash the berries, leaving some in small pieces.
- 5. Cover and let simmer for 10 minutes.

## Strawberry jam

#### Ingredients

- 1 kg fresh strawberries, green tops removed
- 4 cups white sugar
- ¼ cup lemon juice

#### Method

- 1. Crush strawberries in a wide bowl in batches until you have a large bowl of mashed berries.
- 2. Combine mashed strawberries, sugar, and lemon juice in a heavy-bottomed saucepan; stir over low heat until sugar is



- 6. Add the tapioca/arrowroot flour to the strawberries, and simmer for another 5 minutes until thick.
- In a large bowl, combine all the crust and crumble ingredients. Mix until well incorporated and a dough forms.
- Lined a 20 x 20 cm or 22 x 12 baking dish, add <sup>3</sup>/<sub>3</sub> of the oat mixture, pressing down the dough to create a crust. Reserve the rest for the crumble.
- 9. Bake the crust for 10 minutes.

- 10. Remove crust from oven and spread the filling strawberry filling on top of the crust.
- 11. Crumble on the rest of the oat mixture on top of the strawberry filling.
- 12. Bake for an additional 20-25 minutes, until the crumble is golden.
- 13. Let cool for 10 minutes before slicing into bars.
- -Rebecca Travers (article)

dissolved. Increase heat to high and bring the mixture to a full boil. Continue to boil, stirring often, until the mixture reaches 105°C.

- 3. Check the texture after 10 to 15 minutes by dropping a small spoonful of jam onto a frozen plate. Let sit for 1 to 2 minutes; if jam appears to gel, it is ready. Continue cooking if jam appears thin and runny.
- 4. Transfer jam into hot sterile jars, filling to within half a

centimetre of the top. Top with lids and screw rings on tightly.

- 5. Place a rack in the bottom of a large stockpot and fill it halfway with water. Bring to a boil and lower jars 2 inches apart into the boiling water using a holder. Pour in more boiling water to cover jars by at least 1 inch. Bring to the boil, cover, and process for 10 minutes.
- 6. Remove the jars from the stockpot and let rest, several inches apart, for 12 to 24 hours. Store in a cool, dark area.
- -Rebecca Travers (article)



### La Niña continues in the tropical Pacific

La Niña is underway in the tropical Pacific. This weather pattern increases the chance of above average rainfall for northern and eastern Australia during spring and summer. Both atmospheric and oceanic indicators are consistent with an established La Niña.

Modelling by the Australian Bureau of Meteorology weather agencies indicate that La Niña may peak during spring and return to neutral conditions early in 2023. Sea surface temperatures in the tropical Pacific have already weakened a little compared to two weeks ago.

The other main driver of weather in eastern Australia at this time of year is the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) which when negative typically increases the chance of above average spring rainfall for most of the eastern two thirds of Australia. It has been negative since June. Australian and international modelling indicate that the negative IOD is likely to persist at least until late spring.

When La Niña and negative IOD conditions combine, the likelihood of above average rainfall over Australia is further increased, particularly for the eastern half of the continent.



Other lesser drivers of our weather, the Southern Annular Mode (SAM) and the Madden–Julian Oscillation (MJO) are both in a state that enhances the chances of rain in eastern Australia at this time of year. In short — there is no let-up in the

wet weather for the next few months. What a contrast to this time in 2019 when we were in severe drought conditions.

—Andy Hrast (article)

# Dam levels in the Canberra region and capital cities

	Oct '22	Oct '21
ACT storages	100%	100%
Murray-Darling Basin	95%	88%
Burrinjuck Dam	94%	93%
Blowering Dam	97%	95%
Sydney	98%	94%
Melbourne	95%	85%
Brisbane	88%	56%
Adelaide	85%	75%
Perth	61%	59%

Rainclouds gather on the northern outskirts of Canberra (photo, Matt Mawson)





# Summer planting guide

#### Mulch and compost

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

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

#### **Heat protection**

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

#### Watering

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

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

#### Weeds

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

#### Pests

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

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

#### Harvesting

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Want to contribute?

We'd love to hear from you! Please send contributions to:

<u>editor@cogs.asn.au</u>

### 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)
<sup>1</sup> ⁄ <sub>4</sub> page	\$18 (\$15)	\$60 (\$50)
½ page	\$36 (\$30)	\$120 (\$100)
Full page	\$72 (\$60)	\$240 (\$200)

#### Please contact 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.

## 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.



Global Worming Bungendore Road, Tarago NSW 2580

globalworming@mail.com Mobile 0408 496 767 Instagram: @global\_worming

# Kathleen's tomato crop

(photo by Kathleen)