

Autumn 2023
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Canberra organic

The nightshades

Warrigal greens

The importance of microbes for soil health

David Odell, 1932–2022

The quarterly publication of the Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.

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.

editor's note

Welcome to the autumn 2023 edition of *Canberra Organic* and as always it's packed full of wonderful articles from around our gardens and across the wider COGS community.

In this edition, we hear about Kambah community garden's 21st anniversary celebrations, celebrate Veronica's 100th birthday at Dickson community garden and remember David Odell, our former president who passed away in December 2022.

We also have some great tips and tricks for reusing items in the garden, hear about the importance of microbes for soil health and beyond and reflect on the renewal of some of our gardens following the devastating bushfires 20 years ago.

Sadly, the autumn 2023 edition is my last as Editor. Over the past few months whilst I've been growing roses, figs and veggies in my own garden, I have also been growing a tiny human who will be arriving



in the coming months. This unfortunately means I am unable to continue in the role.

It's been my absolute pleasure to put together *Canberra Organic* over the past four years. I have learnt so much more about organic gardening in this role. A big thank you must go to everyone who has contributed articles, photos and recipes over the past few years, as well as my regular contributors. I also couldn't put the magazine together without the support of my proofreaders Walter and Ed, our graphic designer Matt and our distributor Terry. Thank you for all your help.

For me, gardening is probably going to take a bit of a back seat for the next few months, but I can't wait to read the next edition of *Canberra Organic* when it lands in my mailbox and see what everyone has been up to.

Happy gardening.

—Rebecca Travers
(article and photos)



(left) Dwarf fig tree starting to produce fruit;
(right) My beautiful 'double delight' hybrid tea rose in full bloom

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president's column

What a mild summer we are having. Its mid-January and there have been only a few days where the temperature has exceeded 30 degrees. There is, of course, still plenty of summer to come for hot weather.

The cooler and wetter conditions have meant that our gardens are thriving and are looking great — even if some of the crops have been somewhat slower than usual to develop. I have not heard of anybody having tomatoes, grown in the open, ready to harvest by Christmas this year.

The heavy rain, as a result of three La Niñas over the past few years, has meant that there is a lot of sub-soil moisture. So, with judicious use of mulch, the need for watering has been kept to a minimum saving gardeners time and COGS the cost of the water.

The Weather Bureau is forecasting the end of La Niña and so we are likely to return in the coming year to more normal and drier conditions. Those gardens that have been flooded and water-logged will appreciate the drier conditions.

COGS finished 2022 in a strong financial position because of the low water usage over the past 3 years. It's in a position to meet future higher costs of water when there is the inevitable return to drought conditions.

Its pleasing to see that several gardens are, after the restricted COVID years, bringing forward projects

for funding and taking advantage of COGS's financial strength. Over the past twelve months COGS has, or is currently funding, projects at Charnwood (partly grant-funded), Betty Cornhill, Erindale, Cook, O'Connor, Kambah and Oaks Estate community gardens. If you have an idea for your garden, now is the time to bring it forward for funding.

The strong demand for plots in COGS gardens continues. Discussions with the ACT Government about additional gardens have so far been unsuccessful. On a more positive note, negotiations with the developers of Ginninderry, in west Belconnen, to include a community garden at Strathnairn are progressing well.

With the lifting of the COVID restrictions it was great to see gardens organising Christmas functions. Oaks Estate and Kambah community gardens also held successful open days in November. Well done to the garden committees in both gardens. I hope we will see more garden events in 2023.

The Kambah community garden open day was the celebration of their 21st birthday and part of the larger Tuggeranong *Southfest* festival. An estimated 500 people visited the garden including MLAs and Minister Vassaroti to cut the garden's birthday cake.

The social dimension and involvement with the wider community are a very important parts of COGS gardens.



Below is the notice of the COGS AGM to be held at 2.00pm on Sunday, 19 March 2023 at the Kambah community garden. All positions on the Executive Committee will become vacant.

COGS is a relatively large community organisation run entirely by volunteers. If we had pay for the work done by the volunteers our fees would have to be much higher. Please consider putting yourself forward for a position on the Executive.

The work on the COGS Executive is varied and interesting and includes financial management, editing the magazine, taking part in radio programs, website and other social media development and management, negotiating with developers and making representations to Ministers. It is very rewarding volunteer work.

The COGS Constitution limits the President to three consecutive terms and therefore my three terms will be up in March.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all the people who have been on the Executive Committee and the garden Convenors over those three three terms. Thank you. I am very grateful for all the work you do. You are the guys that keep COGS going.

Finally, a very special thank you to Rebecca, the editor of this magazine, who will be stepping down after four years in the position. You have done a fantastic job producing a very professional high-quality magazine. We wish you well as you move into your next stage in life, of motherhood.

Happy gardening everyone.

—Andy Hrast

Annual General Meeting

Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.

2pm, Sunday 19 March 2023

Kambah COGS Garden
Springbett St, Kambah

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

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The Canberra Organic Growers Society is a non-profit organisation providing a forum for organic growers to exchange information and supporting the adoption of organic growing methods in the community.

COGS encourages the use of natural methods to improve our soils, promote sustainability and produce fresh, nutritious food.

For information about COGS and organic gardening, visit the COGS website

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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 Hamilton Narelle McLean Teresa Rose Peter Weddell

community gardens

COGS operates 12 community gardens in the Canberra region, with the support of the ACT Government. The convenors and contact email addresses are listed below.

Betty Cornhill	Peter Rouse — cornhill_convenor@cogs.asn.au
Charnwood	Teresa Rose — charnwood_convenor@cogs.asn.au
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Kaleen	Fiona Dawes — kaleen_convenor@cogs.asn.au
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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 — occonnor_convenor@cogs.asn.au



Potential COGS Executive Committee vacancies

The COGS Executive is seeking nominees to the role of Treasurer and also Magazine Editor at the Annual General Meeting.

**For more information on these vacancies, please visit the COGS website:
<https://cogs.asn.au/>**

Charnwood community garden – Girl Guides get their pollination badge

The Charnwood branch of the Girl Guides visited the Charnwood community garden on 28 November 2022 to learn about pollination for their next badge.

About fifteen girls arrived at 6 pm and left at 7.30 pm. During this time, gardener Bill McDevitt spoke about the role of bees in pollination, Teresa Rose gave a lesson on where pollination fits into the reproductive cycle of plants, and Jo McMillan spoke about how flowers attract pollinators. The girls were very attentive.

We spent some time at Mani Teys plot and found a daisy plant that had seven different species of insect pollinators — *a...maaazing*. The girls left with smiles on their faces and the leaders left with parsnips and shallots. This is what COGS is all about — learning and enjoyment.

—Teresa Rose (article and photos),
Jo McMillan (photos)

(right, top) Teresa giving a lesson on pollination and the reproductive cycle of plants

(right) Bee hives at Charnwood

(below) Jo talking about how flowers attract pollinators



Phoenix rising — a tale of renewal after Canberra's bushfires

After one of our wettest years on record in 2022, it is hard to fathom the events that occurred twenty years ago. On Wednesday 18 January 2023, Canberra marked twenty years since two large bushfires — that began in the Brindabellas and Namadgi — combined to wreak havoc on our western fringes. The Holder community garden was in the path of the fire, damaging the garden and leaving its mark on the lives of members and people in the surrounding community. Two years prior the Betty Cornhill community garden also suffered from a fire that was a portent of the bigger things to come (see separate insert).

For many Canberrans, Saturday 18 January 2003 began like any other Saturday with people going about their normal routines. But it was hot early, and the wind was picking up. We were aware of the bushfires to our west, but most of us didn't really give it a second thought. Around midday water bombing helicopters were flying over roof tops in Weston Creek, the sky grew dark and before too long people were on their roofs wetting their houses. By the end of the day over 500 homes had been destroyed and tragically four people had lost their lives.

Standing at Holder community garden the next day trying to make sense at what had happened, there was air of quietness with the pungent smell of smouldering smoke. The full reality of what had happened would hit most of the garden members in the following weeks. Holder garden convenor at the time Stephen Dean wrote in the 2003 *Canberra Organic* magazine autumn edition:

"Our deepest sympathies and support for three Holder gardeners who lost their homes in Duffy during the recent bushfires. The fires destroyed 12 of our plots, together with 35 expensive bales of straw, approximately 35 hardwood sleepers and several hoses and trickle irrigation systems. Another 12-15 plots suffered lesser damage with crops partially burnt or scorched. Our small orchard of fruit trees and our



Twenty years on, the Holder community garden is thriving again

windbreak bushes were all destroyed or damaged by the intense fires. Since the bushfires an aggressive 1.5m brown snake has taken up residence in our garden — extreme caution and long trousers and boots are now necessary!!"

Water bombing done in the area to save other structures such as the AFP complex across the road meant the garden was not destroyed. However, the surrounding area had a new landscape. The pine forest to the west of the garden was burnt out. The ACT Government decided to turn the former pine plantations into a housing division known as Molonglo — which now provides a source of new members for the garden. All the pines on John's Reserve were removed and replaced with mature casuarinas. A small bonus — the garden had access to some of the piles of woodchips!

The hot weather continued for the rest of the summer and rainfall was minimal. Water restrictions required careful watering of garden plants. With the surrounding forest gone, the garden was exposed for more than a decade while waiting for the new trees to fill the gaps. Now beautiful stone pines stand and offer some wind protection.

In 2008, with the new residential development happening nearby, the Holder community garden had a choice to move or stay. It was decided that the garden would stay, surrendering land for a bike path and a major road, but it gained extra land to the south and a carpark area to the west. In the past 20 years the garden has gone from being surrounded with pine trees, to open paddocks and new suburbs, but the garden is thriving in its niche.

The rise of the 'Phoenix Garden Group'

Many left behind in the Duffy community were surrounded by the destruction of homes and gardens. Our lives were confused and uncertain. But the community had already swung into action with donations of food and clothing and everyday provisions to share. Generosity was everywhere and overwhelming. Duffy Primary School was the centre of our community and the place where people could meet, find lost friends, connect with services and support. During those early days it was apparent that those dwellings left standing were housing traumatised people. There was no colour, no green life, no birds or

sounds, only black smouldering days, so that first belladonna lilly poking its pink flowered head from the charred remains, was a sign of hope that recovery was possible.

Gardening seemed the way to recovery for some of us who were horticulturists and friends. We were all fire affected in some way and doing something was the only option. We felt a great need to make our suburbs green again. We quickly became a small effective group, combining our skills and backgrounds, bringing together resources that could benefit our community. It was about 3 weeks after the 2003 fires that the 'Phoenix Garden Group' was born.

We quickly established the needs of individuals and were a listening ear. Many had fallen trees and burnt shrubs that they could not remove themselves. So, we formed small teams of volunteers to work together to assist the homeowner to begin recovery. Removal of burnt debris,



A bushfire memorial has since been erected in Stromlo Forest Park, to acknowledge the impact of the 2003 bushfires

pruning shrubs, and attempting to restore and begin again gave hope and encouragement. It became infectious and the volunteer numbers grew, enabling more assistance to those in need.

Part of our activities involved propagating and a small team met to grow using donated plants and to source plants from elsewhere. Local nurseries, as well as nurseries in Melbourne and Sydney, donated plants and potting mix. Large hardware chains donated tools and wheelbarrows, bagged supplies of compost and potting mix for us. The ACT Government came on board and donated mulch supplies and equipment enough for us to fill trailers. We had no funding and managed the project on goodwill, time and energy from many. The then CIT Weston School of Horticulture gave us the use of a large shade area with irrigation to grow and distribute plants to those in need.

The Phoenix Garden Group ran for two years. We met monthly to clean up, propagate and grow plants. We managed to grow over 10,000 plants in those years. Gardening and giving enabled many of us in the group to begin our own journey of healing and connecting to our community, and brought a sense of togetherness and hope for the future. Gardening led the way to recovery from dark black days and gave us the sense of renewal.

Now 20 years later we can look back with pride at our involvement in helping to heal the landscape and the people that live in it. We again live in a leafy community which has recovered.

With thanks to the contributions and recollections of Lesley Pattinson and Paulene Cairnduff (members of the Holder community garden and the Phoenix Garden Group), Conrad Van Hest and Jen Johnston. Thanks also to Andy Hrast for the BCG story.

2001 Bushfire – Betty Cornhill Garden

Christmas Eve 2001 was hot with a strong north westerly wind. A fire started somewhere to the west of the Coppins Crossing Road and quickly burnt towards the Yarralumla Woolshed and the Governor General's residence. Their protection was the primary, and successful focus, of the emergency services.

The Betty Cornhill Garden (BCG) was directly in line of the fire and was severely impacted. The contents of the garden shed were destroyed but the shed itself survived and is still in use. It's now known as the 'old shed'. Large pines on the northern boundary of the garden were burnt as well as a number of blue gums. The impact on the plots was significant with plantings, wooden garden edging and compost bins burnt. Immediately after the fire, gardeners worked on the plots to save their crops. Surprisingly much of the vegetable plantings although burnt survived and went on to produce a crop, albeit late and diminished.

Tools were replaced and some were able to be repaired. In the aftermath of the fire, ACT Parks brought in heavy machinery to make safe the areas around the burnt large trees and then cut them down. Over the following few years there was an explosion in the germination of blue gums and wattles creating dense copses.

In the longer term the fire proved beneficial to the garden. The large pines on the northern boundary which had shaded a significant part of the garden were removed providing more sun. That area has since been developed into additional plots. A planting of poplars in the neighbouring horse paddocks which had been proving invasive and sucking up water at prodigious rates from the nearby plots were killed by the fire and removed making these plots productive again.

The dense copses of wattle were subsequently cleared and the area now makes up a large part of the 25 plot extension of the garden. The thick blue gum growth has been thinned and forms the park-like central area of the garden which is being developed as the communal area of the garden.

—Neil Williams (article)

Kambah community garden – celebrating our 21st anniversary with a bang

Kambah community garden celebrated its 21st anniversary on Saturday, 5 November 2023, with a highly successful open day. With the garden looking its best after recent rain and a working bee the week before, even the weather smiled on the occasion, with a warm sunny day.

Among the guests was ACT Environment Minister, Rebecca Vassarotti, who made a short speech about the important role of community gardens and did the honours of cutting the birthday cake. Brindabella MLAs Jonathan Davis (Greens) and Nicole Lauder (Liberal) also dropped in and mingled with visitors, as did members of the COGS executive.

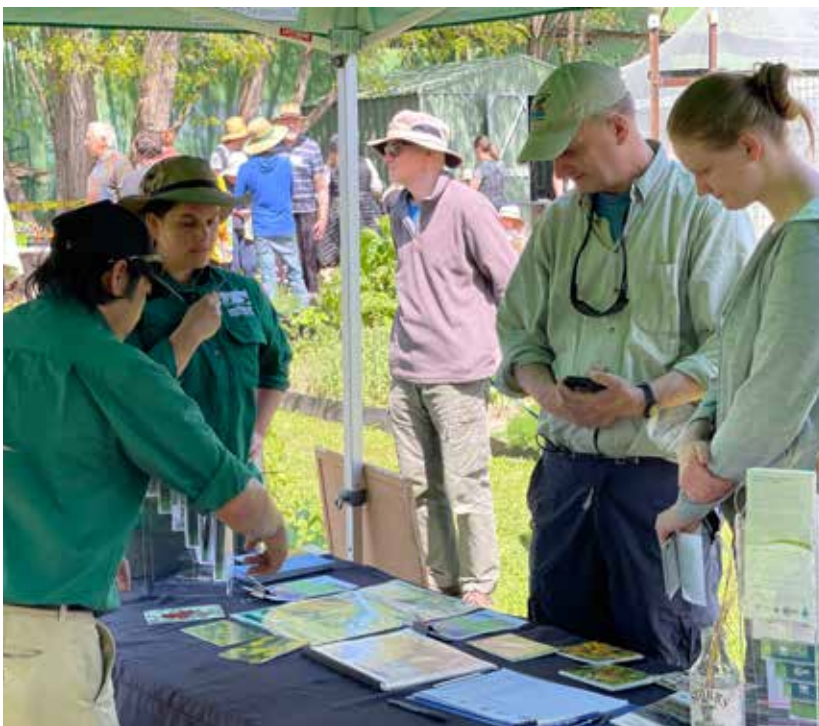
More than 350 people flocked to the event during the day to buy seedlings raised by Kambah gardeners and listen to talks on topics such as seed saving, bee keeping and composting. There was also a lusty performance by the LDK Choir and stalls to visit including the ACT Southern



(above) Minister Rebecca Vassarotti cuts the birthday cake;

(below left) The Southern ACT Catchment Group drew much interest at the open day;

(below right) Master of ceremonies for the day, Geoff Pryor, from Kambah Garden



Catchment Group, ACT for Bees, Seed Savers and Food2Soil.

A sausage sizzle, run by Kambah gardeners and coordinated by 'BBQ meister' Jonathan Patrick, and a van selling coffee and delicious wraps did brisk business.

The open day was included in the official program of *Southfest in the Suburbs* festival, a month-long celebration of the Tuggeranong community during November, with *Southfest* providing posters, signage and promotion through its website and social media.

The event was publicised in local media, including the *Canberra Times* in an article by gardening columnist Susan Parsons.

There were generous raffle prizes donated by local businesses — a gardening starter kit and trolley from Bunnings, a voucher from Pialligo nursery Cool Country Natives, and



COGS president Andy Hrast, Environment Minister Rebecca Vassarotti and Kambah co-conveners Allan Sharp and Barbara Jesiolowski

a much-admired drawing of a Blue Wren by Kambah plot holder and COGS Information Officer Cathy Morison.

The event raised more than \$2350 for the garden.

—Allan Sharp (article), Tony Battaglio (photos)

A Midsummer Day's Dream

I've been dreaming about writing a story about a vegetable. And I was wondering if it had a name. Colin the Carrot? Peter the Pumpkin? And then I had a better idea.

I've also been watching the climbing beans sprout in my Grandpa's greenhouse and was amazed that they can grow up to five centimetres in one day.

The tale of Jack and the Beanstalk came to me. It was all about a little boy called Jack.

Jack was a poor country boy, who trades the family cow for a handful of magic beans. These grow into a beanstalk reaching up into the clouds. Jack climbs the beanstalk and finds himself in the castle of an unfriendly giant.

I didn't want to steal someone else's idea, but I was hoping to find someone with a handful of magic beans and then I might be able to trade one of my cats for them. But which cat? Annabelle? Richard? Kali? No, I don't think that's a great idea.

But I happen to have a packet of climbing beans in my pocket and I also have a brother called Jack. And it's also my birthday tomorrow. I think I know what I want. Maybe I'll get my birthday wish...

—Georgia (article) and Grandpa Ken (photo)

(right) Sadly, this is not actually a beanstalk. They are in fact two Jerusalem artichokes which my Grandpa is growing in his Kambah community garden next to the climbing beans. These artichokes can grow up to three metres tall (not quite as high as Jack's beanstalk.)



Dickson community garden – celebrating Veronica Dunphy’s 100th birthday

*Gardening has taught me a lot about life and the challenges we face”
—Veronica Dunphy, 2016*

In March 2023, the Dickson community garden is delighted to celebrate with Veronica Dunphy the occasion of her 100th birthday. After our usual working bee we will down tools, share stories and sing ‘happy birthday’ to our much loved eldest plot holder. Our garden will be open to family and friends on March 19 to share in this very special event.

When I interviewed Veronica for the COGS magazine, I was amazed by her life story. Veronica grew up on a farm in New Zealand and understood at an early age the need for resilience, patience and working hard. Her family’s farm supported

a large family and eked out a living with numerous animals and growing edibles — what you might call a small holding; everyone mucked in.

These valuable personal traits have served Veronica well in her service in the L’Arche (French for The Ark) community over many decades, growing their food and forming friendships. We are lucky indeed to have Veronica’s compassion and care for others now growing at the Dickson community garden.

I recall several years ago coming across Veronica knee deep in a trench as she double-dug her plot. That season the corn and beans grew high and were bountiful. Veronica shows us all that through strength of character, determination and

hard work great things can grow and prosper.

Happy Birthday Veronica. With love from the Dickson gardeners.

—Michele England
(article and photos)

Note: For those who would like to learn more about Veronica, two articles have appeared in previous editions of *Canberra Organic* — Autumn 2016 and Autumn 2020. Past copies of *Canberra Organic* are available in the ‘Members’ section of the COGS website.

Veronica is a much-loved member of the Dickson community garden, In March 2023, the garden will celebrate the occasion of her 100th birthday.



Cook community garden – from waterlogged to thriving

For many gardeners at the Cook community garden, the past 12 months have been a challenge to offset the waterlogged conditions with a planting regime for the summer and autumn seasons. The rainfall chart below clearly shows the rainfall pattern of the past two years and the subsequent run off problems caused by the sheer volume of water over the past two years. We are hopeful the La Niña weather pattern is now easing.

At the time of writing this report (mid-January) ground conditions have improved remarkably and the usual summer crops, of tomatoes, capsicum, beans, pumpkins,

zucchini and cucumber are thriving, although a little behind the usual schedule. Plantings of brassicas are also well underway. Several new gardeners have recently joined the garden and are very busy with rehabilitating/improving their plots and seeking out advice and seedlings from our established gardeners. The summer working bee focused on weeding and mulching the orchard and entrance areas and was well supported and the ensuing BBQ was very much enjoyed.

—Peter Weddell (article and photos)

Cook community garden rainfall record (mm) 2019–2022

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
2019	58	29	81	9	49	21	6	22	39	22	18	0	354
2020	12	80	99	71	26	62	38	143	51	162	67	48	859
2021	92	102	153	1	75	132	79	50	138	49	204	122	1197
2022	141	94	49	101	112	27	26	140	90	252	78	37	1147
Garden average	76	76	96	46	66	61	37	89	80	121	92	52	

Mario's capsicums (left) and tomatoes are growing well at Cook community garden



Cook community garden — biodiversity: how does your garden grow?

The Cook community garden in Bindubi Street, is on the lower slopes of Mount Painter Nature Reserve. Much of this area was leased for grazing until 1996 and is largely covered by weeds and native and introduced grasses. However, there are some old eucalypts (Yellow Box and Red Stringybark) that date from the time before European settlement, and an excellent variety of native wildflowers and grasses amongst the rocky areas on the steeper slopes.

The area known as the 'wildflower triangle', on Bindubi Street just north of the garden, supports native woodland with understory plants and a grassland area, and is adjacent to native woodland on the hillside immediately adjoining the suburb of Cook where there has been no grazing since the 1960s.

The reserve is managed by the ACT Government. Tree and shrub planting in 1996 and the early 2000s, and ongoing work by the Friends of Mount Painter is helping to re-establish an open woodland on the cleared areas. This work will maintain and improve the belt of native vegetation linking the Murrumbidgee River corridor to other reserves.



(above) Blue-tongue Lizard;
(below) Bearded Dragon (photos: Peter Weddell)



When the Cook community garden was established 22 years ago, native shrubs were planted along the Bindubi Street and rear fences. Some are now reaching the end of their life span, and gardeners over the last couple of years have started replacing these with shrubs indigenous to Mount Painter. Native herbs and grasses are also being added to improve the habitat for birds, insects and reptiles.

Birds regularly seen by gardeners in and around the garden include Australian Ravens, Crimson, Eastern Rosellas, Double-barred and Red-browed Finches, Gang Gang Cockatoos, Kookaburras, Magpies,



(above) Eastern Rosellas (photo Mervyn Durrrough);
 (below) Kookaburra (photo Peter Weddell)

Red-rumped Parrots, Red Wattle birds, Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, Superb Fairy Wrens, White-winged Choughs, Willie Wagtails and Wood Ducks. Gardeners are often alerted to the presence of Wedge-tailed Eagles and Nankeen Night Herons on dead trees in the adjacent horse paddocks by the alarm cries of smaller birds.

Reptile visitors include Blue-tongue Lizards, Bearded Dragons and the occasional Brown Snake. The resident 2-metre Brown Snake has now not been seen for several summers.

There are wonderful 360-degree views across Canberra from the summit of Mt Painter and it is well worth the short, but in parts steep, walk to enjoy these.

COGS gardeners are not the first to grow vegetables on Mount Painter. Colloff's book, *Landscapes of our Hearts*¹, notes that Ralph Edge, who arrived in Sydney in 1836 and was employed as a hut keeper and shepherd at Ginninderra, had a 'splendid vegetable garden' near Mt Painter, then called Round Hill.

—Michele Barson (article) and Mervyn Durrrough and Peter Weddell (photos)



Brazilian Bolo de Fubá (Cornmeal cake)

Last year, two gardeners who were new to the garden, Aline and Simon, joined a long-term gardener, Paul, on a plot in the O'Connor community garden.

Aline says “we grew corn with Paul in his plot, and I let it dry for a couple of weeks, then milled it to flour and made this very cake. It was delicious! Simon and I are currently growing a variety of maize which is specific for milling in our plot; I can't wait.”

Fubá is the Portuguese word for stone ground cornmeal. It is pronounced 'foo-BAH'. Fubá began to be used in post-colonial Brazil as an alternative to wheat flour. Corn had been cultivated by the Indigenous Brazilians for thousands of years, and cornmeal was already a common ingredient. It was expensive for the Portuguese colonizers to import wheat flour to Brazil, so they started to experiment with native ingredients and fubá was one of them. Today fubá is very present in many dishes across Brazil and the Americas in sweet and savory forms.

Fresh corn can be dried and then milled into flour (photo: Aline Lorieri)



© Can Stock Photo / rhjphotos

Ingredients

2 cups of milk
2 eggs
50g parmesan
1 pinch of salt
1 cup of white sugar
1 tbsp butter
1 tbsp all purpose flour

½ tbsp baking powder

¾ cup stone ground corn meal (as fine as possible)

Method

1. Pre-heat the oven to 180°C.
2. With butter, grease a Bundt tin and coat it with cornmeal (do not use tins with removable bottoms as the batter is very runny).
3. Add milk, eggs and butter to a blender and blend to combine.
4. Slowly add all dry ingredients (except for the baking powder) and blend until well combined.
5. Add baking powder and pulse a couple of times. Do not over blend.
6. Transfer the mixture to the baking tin and bake for 40–50 minutes or until the top is a deep golden colour.
7. Once cool, flip it onto a plate and enjoy it!

Note: It's very important that the cake cool down completely before removing from the tin, or the layers won't separate. A warm cake will also collapse, as it is half pudding texture.

— Aline Lorieri (article)

'Get Better' soup

I've been making variations of this soup for a few years every time someone in our family is sick or a little bit run down, and generally as the weather gets cooler. If someone has a very sore throat, it can be nice to add extra water and just have the broth. Vary the vegetables to whatever you have harvested or like.

Ingredients

A brown onion (or some variant, spring onions or leeks for example) finely chopped

4–5 cloves of garlic, finely chopped

1 large red capsicum, chopped

Celery (a couple of cups, chopped)

Potato (a couple of cups, chopped)

Zucchini (a couple of cups, chopped)

Jar of tomato passata

1–2 tbsp olive oil

Water (about four cups or more — depending on how much broth you want)

A small handful of thyme (lemon thyme is nice but whatever you prefer)

A sprig of rosemary

A sprig of sage (6–8 leaves)

A cup of fresh parsley chopped

Optional: Pinch of salt and some pepper or chilli powder

Method

I use a knife, a chopping board, a peeler, wooden spoon and a large pot.

1. Chop onion and garlic. Put them in the large pot with the olive oil on a very low heat and let them cook until translucent.
2. Add chopped celery and capsicum and sauté in the oil, stirring regularly.
3. Pre-boil the water in a kettle or separate pan.
4. Add the rest of the vegetables, passata and boiling water to the large pot and bring almost to the boil then put on a low heat.
5. Add rosemary, thyme and sage.
6. Cook on a low heat for about 20 minutes to half an hour and check. Cook a bit longer if needed. If you have added beetroot or carrot, it might need longer.
7. When the vegetables are cooked it is ready. Throw in the parsley at the end, while it is still hot

Serve on its own or with bread, rice, yoghurt, cheese, chopped chilli, ground black pepper or whatever you like.

—Lara Doolette (article and photos)



(right, from top) sage, rosemary, parsley flowers

Gardening in our slice of NSW

We live on a rural property outside Canberra and have a large food growing area on creek flats about 300 m from the house. We had intended that this area would produce most of our fruit and vegetables; however, high rainfall and excessive weed growth has made spring plantings unviable for the past two years. We have therefore decided to use that area mainly for the perennial crops we have been establishing over the last few years — bramble berries, grapes, asparagus, rhubarb, Jerusalem artichokes and a selection of fruit trees. We grow strawberries elsewhere in wicking beds made from old bathtubs.

For annual crops, we have recently built a number of vegetable planters using old metal rainwater tanks cut into three sections. We filled them with a base layer of prunings, followed by layers of straw, topsoil, more straw and finally a mix of topsoil and mushroom compost. We have 15 planters altogether — mostly 1.8 metres in diameter — including one for our two-year old grandson Jack — maintained by his Grandma between visits! Planting from seed and seedlings started in November last year.

It is so pleasant gardening in these planters compared with the creek flats — there's no bending, very little weeding and it's easy to net crops. We can visit several times a day to check that things are going as planned and watering is simple, with a dedicated tap and short hose for each pair of beds.

The plantings include Swiss chard, lettuces, annual herbs, potatoes, eggplants, chillies, zucchini, pumpkins, cucumbers, peanuts, sweetcorn, dwarf beans, asparagus peas, carrots, beetroot and, of course, lots of tomatoes. We grow the latter around the outside of a cylindrical frame made of ringlock-style fencing (with 6–7 plants per frame).

New crops (for us) this year were the asparagus peas (also known as



(above) Grandson Jack's garden; (below) At the start of our crop journey



winged beans) and peanuts. The low-growing asparagus peas have grown well and have beautiful red flowers. They are an excellent ground cover and would make a good green manure crop. The peanut plants will probably be dug in as green manure — we are not anticipating actually harvesting any peanuts in our relatively short growing season!

—Geoff McFarlane and Sheridan Roberts, Nanima, NSW

David Odell, 1932–2022

In December 2022 David Odell passed away at the good age of 90. He was our most often- and second-longest-serving president, in 1985–86, 1987–89 and 1990–1993, a steady and progressive leader, guiding COGS through some important transitions and developments.

David was born in Bedfordshire in 1932 (Odell is an ancient Anglo-Saxon name, originally Woad-Hill), and grew up during first the Depression and then WW2. Those difficult times of scarcity and deprivation, which didn't end when the war ended, were a very deepening experience and affected his whole outlook on life.

As a schoolboy, aged 14 or 15, he worked for local farmers: picked potatoes and peas, drove tractors, learnt to do stooking and build traditional haystacks. He was taught the skill and art of digging properly — Dig for Victory — a skill which many people lack. He raised chickens and rabbits for sale, and learnt to kill and dress poultry. In addition, he was sent to do the shopping because he was responsible, able to account for cash, ration points and coupons together. The Depression taught him to abhor waste, to throw nothing away because one day it might be useful.

He migrated to Australia at age 16, coming out with the Big Brother Movement. Fortunately, the families



he was assigned to were of good character and he did well. His parents followed 18 months later. David went to Bathurst Teachers College in 1951, taught at Garfield near Bega, moved to Canberra in 1966, quit teaching shortly afterwards, worked at a variety of jobs while tackling a law degree (which took 8 years to finish), and in 1983 bought land overlooking Bungendore. He lived there ever since with his small herd of beloved cows.

David had always been organically minded — and thought everybody else would be if they were sensible at all! When he discovered COGS he found that it was in tune with all the ideas he'd had, and now he could expand them. He got into an executive position very quickly, vice-president in 1984 and

president in 1985, which coincided with a lot of public interest in organic growing.

COGS expanded from 62 members to over 300, a big jump in numbers and it almost became 'in' to be part of COGS. In those days organic agriculture was poorly understood and regarded as all 'muck and mystery.' A lot of the members were ladies and he told them, "You are the people who can influence what you eat because it's for your children. You've got to tell people what you want. If you believe in organics you've got to start." Somehow or other, that seed must have germinated — organic agriculture has since gone mainstream, and much broader than just COGS!

His legal background was useful in drafting the formal Constitution, adopted in 1985. A small but important step was a competition for the COGS logo. Jeannette Main designed it, but David insisted on having the date included.

As president David found that he had to think of ways of keeping 300 members happy. Community gardens were one activity, but COGS had other activities like seminars and field days where we developed our own local expertise and sources of information: at that time there were no other sources to call on. COGS also provided the umbrella organisation for the formation and expansion of the community gardens, not only to promulgate organic ideals but also to provide a single voice to government for applications and grants.

David was a quiet, capable achiever, contributing more than many of us realise to the success of today's COGS. Many thanks, David, for all you have done and given.

David was farewelled by many family and Bungendore community at St Phillips Anglican Church in Bungendore on 9 January 2023. David is survived by 6 children, 20 grandchildren and 26 great grandchildren.

—Walter Steensby
(article and photos)



A use for spare seedling pots

Do you accumulate dozens of small pots from all those seedlings you enthusiastically buy at nurseries and plant sales? Do you resist putting them in the landfill bin? I certainly do — some get re-used in propagation, but not enough.

Here is one use for them — protecting irrigation fittings from Canberra's frosts and UV, both of which degrade the plastic fittings. I cut along one side and slip them over the small taps in my irrigation lines. The photos demonstrate how simple this is.

This only uses a handful, but I also use them to support old fly screens that I place over new seedling or seed plantings in vegetable beds. They can be re-used endlessly. The taller pots are better for this.

— Sally Stephens (article and photos)



(above left) An example of the pot and the type of irrigation fitting;

(above right) The pot slipped over the line, protecting the tap from frosts and UV

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Warrigal greens

Warrigal greens is a traditional bush tucker plant that is now widely used in high-end restaurants and home cooking. Its fresh, grassy flavour with a mildly bitter aftertaste makes it a popular spinach alternative and it can be used in any recipe that calls for spinach or leafy greens. Once established, it spreads easily and is tolerant of neglect.

Name: Warrigal Greens, Native Spinach, Botany Bay Greens, New Zealand Spinach (*Tetragonia tetragonioides*).

Height: 20 cm.

Plant type: perennial herb (annual in cold climates).

Climate and position: cool and warm temperate, sub-tropical, tropical. Position in full sun to part shade.

Soil: moist and well-drained, enriched with organic matter.

Plant warrigal greens in the veggie patch where it can be easily harvested, but avoid planting it next to any small herbs or vegies as it will take over. It's also great in pots or hanging baskets. Use it as a substitute for silverbeet or spinach, or in any recipe that calls for leafy greens (<https://www.bunnings.com.au/diy-advice/garden/planting-and-growing/how-to-grow-warrigal-greens>).



Warrigal Greens and Parsley Pesto

Ingredients

250g blanched warrigal greens leaves, chopped
 250g parsley, chopped,
 Juice of 3 lemons
 125ml honey
 200 g macadamias
 4 cloves garlic
 100g grated parmesan
 250ml extra virgin olive oil (plus extra to cover)
 Coarse salt and cracked black pepper

Method

(Note: Warrigal greens contain oxalic acid and should be eaten fresh only in small quantities, otherwise blanch leaves to remove the toxic element).

1. Blanch warrigal greens in a large pot of boiling water for 1 minute, rinse in cold water, and drain well.
2. In a food processor, pulse garlic cloves, salt and a third of the macadamias until crumbly.
3. Roughly chop the blanched greens and parsley, add to food processor and blend with lemon juice and a little olive oil until the greens are roughly pureed.
4. Add the rest of the macadamias, lemon juice, and honey.
5. Continue blending slowly, while drizzling in the remaining olive oil resulting in a coarse pesto.
6. Add parmesan and pulse to incorporate, add salt and pepper to taste.
7. Transfer to sterilised jars ensuring there are no air bubbles, cover surface with olive oil and seal tightly.
8. Store it in the refrigerator for up to 3 months. (Makes about 750g).

—Ange McNeilly (article and photos)

Solanaceae (the nightshades)

The problem with being sessile is that you can't move. It is like having a sign around your neck, saying "Eat Me!" Plants are stuck in one spot, they can't run away or hide in a hole. Sessile animals can develop a hard outer shell, brightly coloured bodies that say "beware", or an array of spines, or artful camouflage. But, like the odious cane toad or the diabolical Borgias, one of the most effective way plants keep their enemies at bay is by poisoning them. The nightshades are particularly good at deterring predators with poison.

The nightshades or Solanaceae is a large family of annual and perennial plants that have spread round the globe. The family contains around 2,700 species, the majority of which are found in Central and South America. Some of most common plants we eat, decorative plants we grow in our gardens or weeds that invade our plots belong to this family. Many contain potent alkaloids such as tropanes, scopolamine, atropine, hyoscyamine, and nicotine. These compounds can be highly toxic and dangerous for humans to ingest.

Consider nicotine used in the manufacture of e-cigarettes and used for centuries to kill pests in glasshouses. According to the *Chemnovatic* website, we like it because it acts on the brain stimulating or calming the nervous system. It relaxes, relieves stress, improves mental processes, but is a highly addictive substance. Pure nicotine is a highly dangerous neurotoxin that must only be handled by experts. It is so lethal that a 500ml bottle, if not properly contained, could kill several hundred people in its vicinity because pure nicotine is so easily absorbed through the skin or the lungs.

Datura stramonium (thornapple) seedpod (Unsplash)



Solanum melongera (eggplant flower) (Unsplash)

Solanine is a bitter tasting alkaloid which is found in plants in this family. It is present in the leaves, fruit, and tubers of potato and tomato plants but usually only in small quantities. However, I do remember visiting two friends who had just come back from hospital after having their stomachs pumped out. There was nothing in the cupboard to eat the night before, except for a couple of potatoes which were a bit green, so they cooked them and mashed them up. After about 8 hours they began to experience the unpleasant symptoms of solanine poisoning — diarrhoea, vomiting, abdominal pain, hallucinations and headaches and had to ring for an ambulance. They were lucky, solanine poisoning can be lethal.

The amount of solanine in potatoes varies with varieties, exposure to sun, and storage. Never eat a green potato and when growing them keep the tubers well covered with soil and mulch. Also, avoid *Solanum nigrum*, or European black nightshade, an introduced environmental weed with black fruit a bit like dark tiny tomatoes. The green fruit and leaves can be particularly toxic and can affect humans and livestock. It has a long history of use for medicinal properties and some varieties have edible ripe berries, but you really need to know what you are doing to be safe.

Some deadly nightshades have valuable pharmaceutical properties, for example, a number of plants in the family produce tropanes such as atropine, cocaine, scopolamine and hyoscyamine. They are found in nightshades such as

crop feature

mandrake (*Mandragora officinarum*), belladonna (*Atropa belladonna*), devil's snare (*Datura stramonium*) and the seven species of *Brugmansia* known as Angel's Trumpets with stunning large pendulous flowers. Tropane comes from the name of the Greek Fate, *Atropos*, who had the responsibility of cutting the thread of life – which gives an indication of the dangers of these compounds. Tropanes are very powerful compounds in inhibiting neurological signals transmitted by the neurotransmitter acetylcholine. They can stop many allergic reactions, but an overdose can cause hallucinations, convulsions, coma, and death. They can be useful drugs in extremely small amounts and atropine is widely used in ophthalmology to dilate the pupils, in surgery to reduce saliva and mucus production. It helps reduce the nausea of sea sickness and chemotherapy and can even help people exposed to organophosphate pesticides and chemical warfare agents. These drugs can be used safely because the purity of the drug is known, the dosage is known, the pharmacology of the drug is known, and it is administered by experts. Some people have experimented with deadly nightshade plants because they have heard of their hallucinogenic properties and mistakenly think that taking a dose from a natural source will have less severe effects than a manufactured drug. Apparently, it is not a good experience.

In December 2022 around 200 Australians were poisoned by baby spinach that was contaminated by leaves of the

Brugmansia (Angel's Trumpets) (Can Stock Photo)



Solanum nigrum flower (black nightshade variety) (Unsplash)

annual weed *Datura stramonium*, also known as the thornapple, devil's snare and jimsonweed. Not long after eating the leaves they experienced thirst, dilated pupils, high temperatures, weak or rapid pulses, incoherence or hallucinations, vomiting, breathing problems and convulsions. Even so authorities had to warn people not to seek contaminated spinach in order to get a high. The plant was introduced into Australia in the early 19th century as a garden plant and in the early days it was used to treat mania and epilepsy. It escaped from the confines of gardens and has been making a nuisance of itself ever since. Every part of the plant is toxic to people and animals and children are particularly susceptible. Even touching the plant can cause symptoms in some people.

Although the deadly nightshades certainly have a very effective way of deterring animals and humans munching on them, they are not all bad. Some of my favourite plants belong to the family — the *Capsicum* genus gives us chillies, peppers and, of course, capsicums; the *Physalis* genus gives us *P. peruviana*, cape gooseberry and *P. philadelphica*, the tomatillo. *Lycium barbarum* is the goji berry. And of course we have potatoes *Solanum tuberosum*, tomatoes *S. lycopersicum*, eggplants *S. melongera*. It must be said however, that Europeans were very suspicious of both tomatoes and potatoes when they were first brought back from the New World. But how could we live without these deadly nightshades now?

— Elizabeth Dangerfield (article)

Eastern Spinebill

I first saw this beautiful little honeyeater from the window of my 'drawing room.' OK, so that may be a little too pretentious a name for the art table I have shoved up against an east-facing window at the back of the house, but it does look out onto the large flowering native bush that, over the last few years, has attracted quite a few new visitors to my garden.

I had never seen an Eastern Spinebill before they set up nest in my 'art tree'. In fact, I heard them quite a few times before I went in search of a pair of binoculars to get a better look. The flash of the white breast draws the eye, but these active little birds don't sit still for very long. So, I went off in search of photographic evidence of their beauty. Deepak Karra (Karra's Bird Photography) has captured this gorgeous image of an Eastern Spinebill in its element — amongst the nectar-bearing flowers of a native tree.

As their name implies, the Eastern Spinebill is native to the eastern and south-eastern regions of Australia. Its distant cousin, the Western Spinebill, is similar but bears very distinct differences in its plumage. Our eastern local is a much more refined, sophisticated looking bird with its richly coloured golden markings artfully blended with the white and black (male) or grey (female) of the breast and wings.

The long, elegant bill from which this beautiful little bird derives its name is specifically suited to its primary diet: "Eastern spinebills are primarily nectar-feeders and use their highly adapted, tubular beak to forage from tubular flowers. Their specialized beaks are hypothesized to be the result of a close co-evolution with the tubular flowers they feed upon."¹



The level of specialisation of the beak of the Eastern Spinebill is such that it only feeds on a limited range of flowers, increasing the efficiency of this little guy as a pollinator and resulting in much less cross-pollination:

"It feeds primarily on the nectar of plants such as gums, mistletoe, heath, correa, banksias and grevilleas, but has been known to feed from some introduced plants such as fuschias. It's a pollinator of many native plant species."²

While nectar is their primary source of nutrition, Eastern Spinebills will supplement their diet with insects, particularly during the breeding season or when nectar is scarce. Their hatchlings are fed exclusively on insects. Because insects and nectar are most bountiful early in the morning (apparently a plant's production peaks at dawn), that is the Spinebill's busiest feeding period. Parents feeding chicks in the nest however will continue to feed them at 10–15 minute intervals throughout the day.

While reading up on how to attract the Eastern Spinebill to your garden, I got an understanding of why they

have arrived in our garden. The two plants recommended are Native Fuschia or Common Correa (*Correa reflexa*) and Common Heath (*Epacris impressa*), both of which are planted profusely in our garden. If you are interested more in attracting small honeyeaters than birds in general, stick to plants like those listed above. "Avoid hybrid native plants, particularly ones with large flowers that flower most of the year. These attract larger aggressive birds such as Noisy Miners, who will drive the Spinebills away."³

As always, a fresh water supply and a garden area free of predators is a great way to start attracting our native birds into your environment.

—Cathy Morison
(article and drawing)

Photo reference: Deepak Karra
(Karra's Bird Photography)

¹ (ADW: *Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*: INFORMATION (animaldiversity.org))

² (<https://www.bayfonw.org.au/species/bird/eastern-spinebill>)

³ (<https://www.bayfonw.org.au/species/bird/eastern-spinebill>).

The importance of microbes for soil health and beyond

Food2Soil is a for purpose, for profit, business. They take commercial food and coffee waste and turn it into a high quality, concentrated biofertiliser by fermenting it. Much like you do with wine and beer! This way the product has the nutrients of the food waste and is full of good bacteria and fungi which gardens need.

Food2Soil was created out of a desire to do something about the huge amounts of food waste going to landfill that Josie and Annabel had seen in their respective roles as dietician at a hospital and for Annabel, firstly in hospitality and then for both, in their roles as sustainability waste consultants. Annabel says, 'it's such a tragic waste of good nutrient that should be being cycled back through our growing systems!'

It's our way of being part of the many solutions to climate change and providing our community with a product that is actually good for the environment.'

For a long time, soil was thought of as something we walked on, built on, buried things in, dug up, and something we grew plants in. But recently, the vital role soil plays in human and planetary health is being recognised. A lot of this "vital role" comes down to the diverse microbial ecosystem in soil, or as we like to call it, 'subterranean workforce'.

Though we cannot see, hear, or feel microbes, they are essential for all life on earth, due to their huge diversity in form and function. Nowhere is this truer than in soil, where they are essential in preventing soil erosion, conserving water, promoting plant resilience and growth, and breaking down environmental pollutants. They also help fight climate change by capturing and storing atmospheric carbon.

These factors alone are reason enough to sing the praises of microbes, however research is also showing how the soil microbiome



can positively impact human health, by boosting our immunity and the nutritional density and flavour of the food we eat.

Historically, soil was associated with its negative impact on humans such as through pathogenic organisms (viruses or parasites), toxins (such as lead or arsenic) or problems in soil causing nutrient deficiency in crops (such as low iodine and iron). However, in the process of finding solutions to these problems, scientists looked to soil microbes to protect us. One good example is that the majority of antibiotics actually originate from soil microbes.

There is evidence that suggests children raised on farms have lower rates of allergy and asthma than urban children, with the main difference being the rich microbe environments of farm and animals. These conditions help regulate the immune response and play a key role in determining the nutrient content of food.

There are many interactions which take place between soil microbes and plant roots. Plants secrete

compounds to feed nearby microbes, in return microbes enable plants to capture essential nutrients they need from soil (such as nitrogen, and phosphorus) and produce a series of chemicals called phytonutrients, more commonly known as antioxidants.

It's these chemicals that protect plants from pests or other stress factors, and give food its flavour, smell and colour. Research shows these chemicals also benefit humans by regulating hormones, stimulating the immune system and slowing the growth of cancer cells. It's been said 'healthy soil equals healthy people'.

It is now widely accepted by soil scientists all over the world that soil with a diverse microbial community promotes plant growth, compared with soil with a limited microbial makeup which suppresses growth. It is also understood microbes communicate and operate in communities and work together in unison with their environments. They can even prewarn a plant that drought conditions are coming!¹

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Unfortunately, modern agricultural practices (such as tillage, chemical-based fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides) have been destroying microbial populations in soil, to a point where the nutrients in the food we eat today are said to be 30% lower in nutrients than in our grandparents' time.

Thankfully there is a growing popularity for land regeneration practices that protect topsoil, producing food with more antioxidants and building diversity and density of soil microbes (biostimulants such as Food2Soil fall into this category).

Rotating crops and grazing animals, resting pasture, and using cover crops (plants grown to keep soil covered in the off-season) are also valuable ways to reduce topsoil erosion.

The UN reports that if we were to take 2 million of the 5 million acres of degraded land and practice regenerative agriculture, we could pause climate change and give ourselves another 20 years to come up with climate solutions. When



Josie Grenfell (left) and Annabel Schweiger (right) Co-Founders of Food2Soil

I first read this, it was a WOW moment.

So, we know we need to stop practices that are bad for soil and start doing things that we know preserve and protect topsoil and our unseen, underground heroes the 'microbes'. But how do we get change to happen sooner rather than later?

At Food2Soil we are on a mission to educate people about the connection between soil and health and to change the public perception of soil.

We want to ensure soil is seen, not just as dirt, but rather as a wondrous, alive ecosystem that is essential for human health and all life on the planet.

To find out more, visit food2soil.com.au

— Josie Grenfell (blog post) and Annabel Schweiger (article and photos)

¹ Matthew Evans, *Soil*, Murdoch Books, 2021, ISBN 9781922351418.

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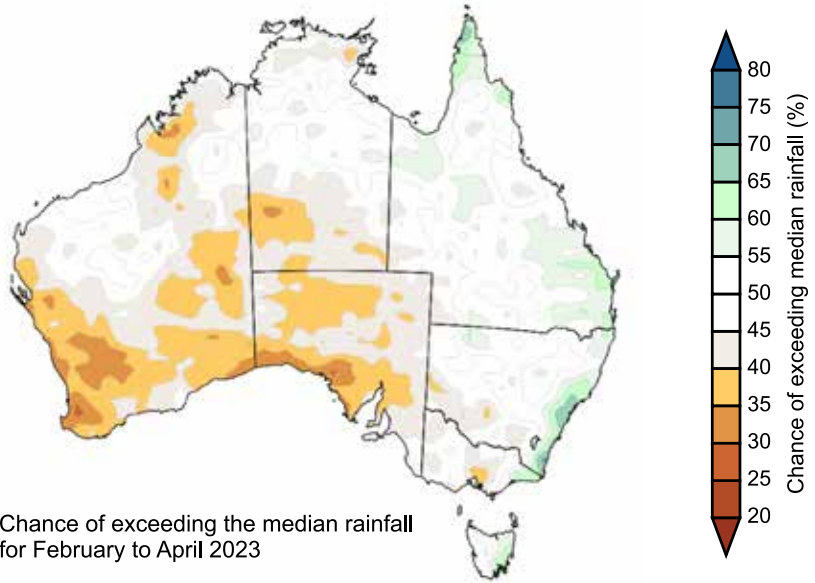
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La Niña anticipated to ease over summer

The Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) report released 17 January 2023 says that the La Niña continues in the tropical Pacific but has weakened from its peak in spring 2022. Though ocean temperatures have warmed in recent weeks, atmospheric indicators are largely unchanged and remain at La Niña levels.

Long-range forecasts suggest that tropical Pacific Ocean temperatures will continue to warm and be at neutral levels (neither La Niña nor El Niño) during February, with a change in atmospheric patterns towards neutral levels likely to follow. However, the BOM warns that the accuracy of models is generally lower for long-range forecasts made at this time of year and that outlooks that extend past autumn should be viewed with caution.

The Indian Ocean Dipole is neutral and has little influence on Australian climate while the monsoon trough is in the southern hemisphere (typically December to April).



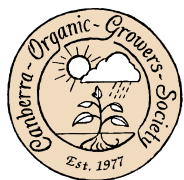
Sea surface temperatures remain warmer than average in the western tropical Pacific and to the south and south-east of Australia from the Eyre Peninsula to waters east of New Zealand. Warmer Australian waters, especially in the tropics, can result in greater evaporation, humidity, cloudiness, and rainfall.

—Andy Hrast

Dam levels in the Canberra region and capital cities		
	Jan '23	Jan '22
ACT storages	100%	100%
Murray-Darling Basin	96%	91%
Burrinjuck Dam	98%	92%
Blowering Dam	95%	94%
Sydney	95%	97%
Melbourne	96%	90%
Brisbane	81%	71%
Adelaide	81%	61%
Perth	54%	55%

Cucumbers (photo by Kathleen)





autumn planting guide

Brassicas

Late plantings of brassicas in March may be successful, but summer plantings are usually more reliable. In autumn, it is already too late to grow from seed. Take care too with the varieties chosen. It is too late to plant savoy cabbages, but the smaller ball-headed varieties should be successful.

Peas

Sugar snap peas may be sown in early March for a winter harvest, but the crop could be lost if there is an early severe frost affecting the blossom. Peas sown later in April–May will be ready for a spring harvest.

Lettuces

Only plant winter varieties of lettuces (cos, salad bowl, oakleaf, butterhead and mignonette varieties).

Leeks

Leek seedlings may be planted in early March for small leeks in winter, although summer plantings are more reliable.



Onions

Early varieties can be sown in April to early May to be harvested from spring to early summer. Mid season varieties are often sown in late autumn or early winter and long-keeping varieties in winter or early spring. It is worth experimenting with the timing of mid- or late-season varieties by making successive plantings to determine the best time for your specific garden.

Spring flowers

Remember that many spring flowering plants are best planted in autumn so they can establish before the winter cold, and then start growing in the early warmth of spring. Stocks, pansies and poppies can be planted as seedlings in March and early April. Others such as Virginia stock, candytuft, larkspur and sweetpeas can be sown direct throughout autumn.

Green manures

Autumn is the time to plant green manure crops so they can establish well before the frosts.

Green manure crops suitable for planting in Canberra are:

Legumes: Broad beans, field peas, lupins, sub clover, tic peas and vetch.

Non-legumes: Barley, oats and rye.

Legumes are very useful as they fix nitrogen in the soil while the non-legumes provide bulk organic matter.

Cut or dig in the green manure in spring, at least 4–6 weeks prior to planting your summer crops.

Flowering crops need to be dug in before flowering; cereal crops before producing a head of grain.

	MAR	APR	MAY
Asian greens	ST	T	
Brussel sprouts	T		
Broccoli	T		
Broad beans		S	S
Cabbage	T		
Cauliflower	T		
Chicory	ST	T	
Chinese cabbage	T		
Corn salad	ST	ST	
Endive	ST	T	
Garlic		S	S
Kale	T		
Kohlrabi	ST	T	
Leeks	T		
Lettuce	ST	ST	ST
Peas	S	S	S
Onions		S	S
Turnips	T		

S = seed sowing; T = transplanting

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

Want to contribute?
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Please send contributions to:
editor@cogs.asn.au

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

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COGS Community Garden Watering Rules

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.



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Corn hung to dry
(photo: Aline Lorieri)