

# THE COGS

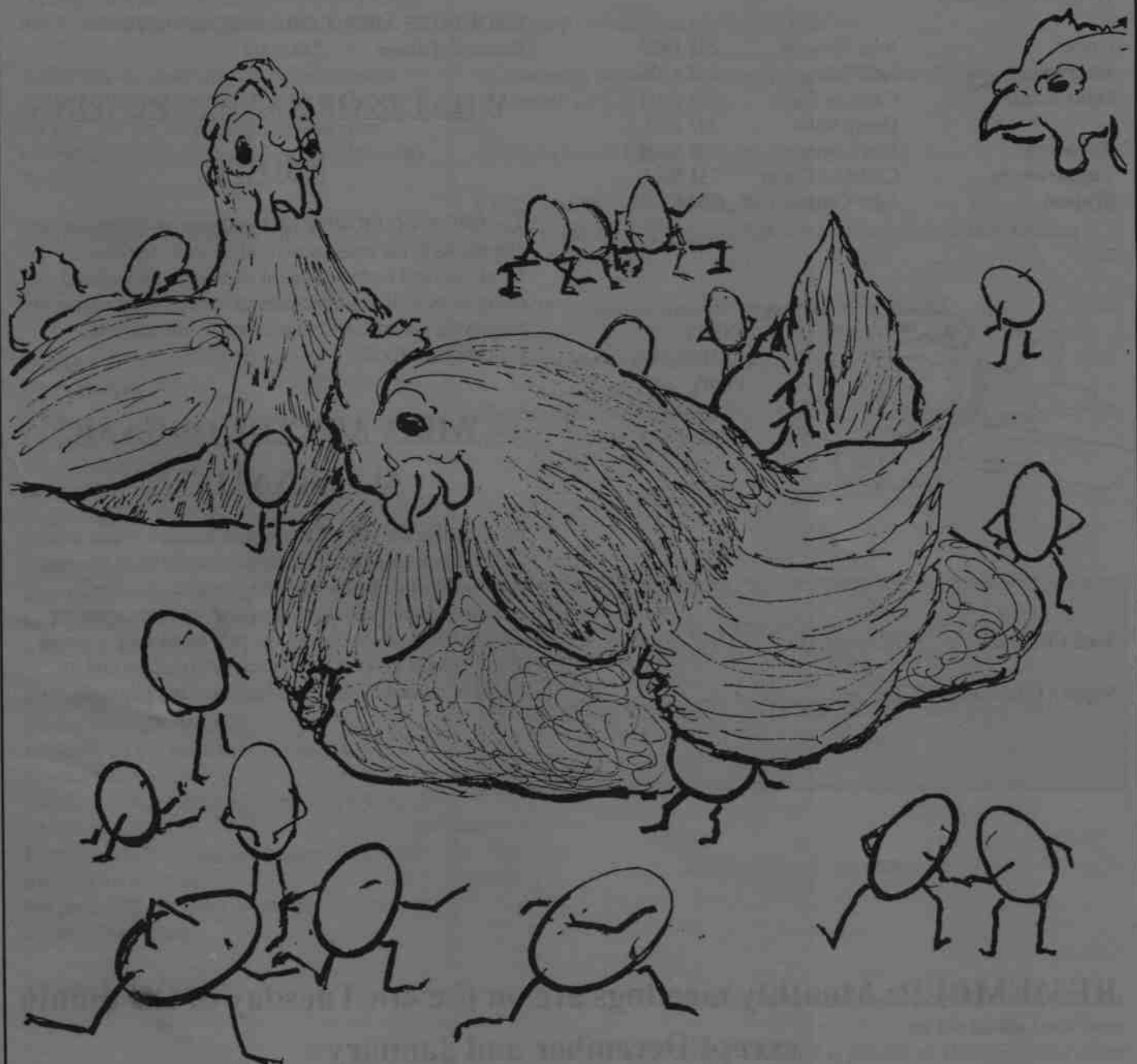


## QUARTERLY

VOL 4 no. 2

ORGANIC GROWING IN THE CANBERRA REGION

WINTER 1996



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CANBERRA ORGANIC GROWERS' SOCIETY INC., P.O. BOX 347, DICKSON ACT 2602

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## WHAT IS ORGANIC GROWING

### ABOUT

The ORGANIC MOVEMENT endeavours to provide an alternative to the mass of toxic chemicals, fertilisers, fungicides and herbicides used in modern agricultural methods by utilising more natural means of improving and preserving our soils and to produce nutritious, less contaminated food.

## WHAT ARE THE ORGANIC ALTERNATIVES?

By enriching the soil with compost, manure, green manure and mulches we avoid disease and control pests through non-chemical methods, including encouraging the presence of beneficial insects to feed on pests, growing companion plants to discourage pest attacks, by growing healthy plants to resist pest attacks and disease and by tuning in to nature with love, harmony and gratitude.

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## COGS QUARTERLY

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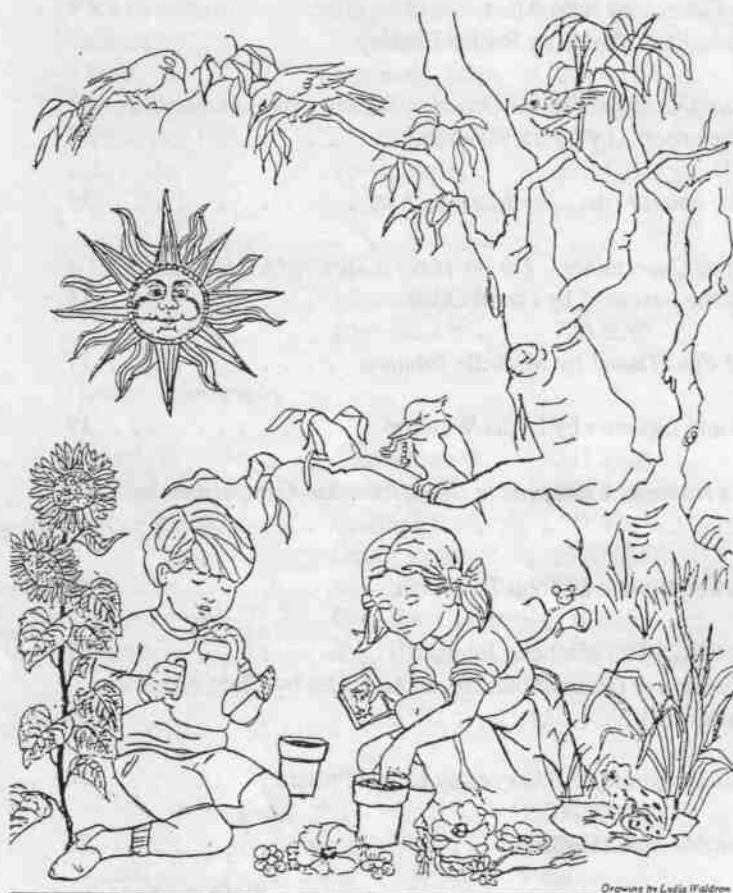
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Meeting Notices are on COGS NOTICEBOARD  
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# Sharing Your Garden With Children

by Jackie French

This article is condensed from Jackie French's forthcoming books: *The Tithe Garden* and *Growing Geraniums in Your Joggers*, both published by Aird Books.



Kids need gardens. Gardens are places to run and to imagine, places to go wild. Children need a bit of wildness. If they can't run free occasionally they can't find out just what they are.

Kids don't destroy gardens (it's important to remember this). They just wound them a bit. Gardens are living places, and damage repairs itself.

Yes, kids do leave great gashes on the lawn with their bicycles, trip over pots with roller blades, balance on garden edges so they crumble, pluck great handfuls of flowers and rip some up by the roots, pick all the daffodils so you don't have any to admire under the trees, clamber up trees and pick the fruit before it's quite ripe, especially that great big apple on the end you were keeping for yourself...

But none of this is permanent, unless they crack a pot or two. And you're giving kids much more than they (temporarily) destroy.

I still remember the first lemon I picked. I'd been taken to a neighbour's garden by my paternal grandmother. I'd never

seen lemons growing before. They were shown to me simply to admire..

I picked one when no one was looking. I couldn't help it. They were so big, so glowing: such giant, waxy fruits. I can still remember the feel and the smell of it.

I pretended that it'd fallen off in my hand. No one believed me but they said they did. I think the owner rather liked my lie. Or maybe just the way I hugged her lemon to me, as though I'd never let it go.

In a sense I haven't. It was then I realised what one of the essentials of life really was -- growing food, picking it, smelling the sweet scents.

That's what all children need. The knowledge of growing things: how things grow and why, being familiar with the complexity (because biological systems are incredibly complex, a whole expanding universe of complexity that you'll never finally understand).

Kids need to know too that food is grown. That they can grow it too. It gives kids a sense of power and belonging in the natural world to know that if needs be they can grow their own.

But more than anything, kids need a place to pretend -- to imagine they are in jungles, deserts, gardens of Eden. I spent days once pretending the green lawn was a tidal wave I was riding in my mother's old silk dressing gown.

Some books give instructions for showing kids how to make a garden of their own. This is a bit like making Native American or Jewish reserves where no one is allowed to put a toe across the border. It gives kids the idea that the rest of the garden isn't theirs.

And anyway, most kids will forget to look after their bit of garden and feel guilty about it when it gets covered with weeds. Which may well put them off gardens for good.

The only exception here is pots. Some kids love pots of things. My son Edward went through a phase of loving cacti - horrible great prickly things perfect for an adolescent male. If Arnold Schwarzenegger was a plant he'd be a cactus.

Now of course Edward prefers Cindy Crawford to Arnold Schwarzenegger, and has gone off cacti too, but we collected quite a range of them for a couple of years, especially those multi-coloured ones with red and yellow grafts like beanies on their heads.

Some kids like pots of bulbs -- secret pots, because they don't know what will come up. And many kids love to be given their own tree so they can watch it grow and fruit and flower and birds nest in it... but that tree is still part of the whole garden. It's just special to them.

## Things Kids Like In Gardens

### Big Trees.

Trees should be climbed. The world looks different up a tree. (In fact I strongly recommend tree climbing to everyone, not just kids. You get things in proportion among the branches).

As well as climbing big trees you can make tree houses in them. It's easy to make a tree house -- you just nail planks across broad branches and try not to fall off. A good tree house is more an idea than an architect's design.

Avoid really elaborate tree houses. The more work adults put into them the less magic there is for a child. It's part of the grown up world, not the child's imagination. The best walls and doors and tree house furniture are the ones that aren't there... except in the magic world somewhere where the flowers sing.

A ladder is a great thing for tree houses though. Ladders are like drawbridges -- you can draw them up when you feel unsociable and let them down when you sense a friend.

Yes, kids can fall off tree houses and fall down ladders. But they probably won't. I'm not sure the world should be made too safe for kids anyway. The world isn't a safe place and if they don't get the confidence to pit themselves against it in their own backyard they may well have to fight battles in more frightening surroundings. The odd broken toe isn't a great price to pay for physical independence. And besides, the more kids challenge themselves, fall and climb and explore the more they generally learn to land on their feet in an accident.

(When I was a kid we all had grazed knees most of the time, and happily compared scars in the school yard. Most kids nowadays don't have scratched knees, though they may have the odd bump from roller blading. Their lives are lived in front of the TV, not up a tree.)

If you're planning a garden or renovating one, stick in a big tree. The climbable sort. Even if you don't have kids or grandkids, some child in the future may bless you.

Good climbing trees include loquats, mulberries (I spent a large part of my childhood up a mulberry tree -- it had a long broad branch perfect for lying on and reading and hiding from the world below and occasionally reaching up to eat a mulberry); Chinese elms -- pretty, dappled bark and a horizontal, well-spaced geometry of branches; pittosporums -- very fast growing; avocados -- lovely dark canopies to hide under and make cubbies; pepper trees for more adventurous climbers; wattles -- fast growing but short lived. Plant a wattle as soon as the kid's conceived and it'll be ready for them to climb when they go to school.

Tall straight palm trees are good too. Most kids won't ever learn to climb one -- but the triumph is extraordinary when they do.

### Cubbies

The best cubbies are ones designed and executed by kids. Pre fab cubbies look sweet -- but how many do you know that are used regularly?

Give kids a hedge to make a nest under; a bit of fence down the back behind the shed to roof over with branches; a few planks and some corrugated iron when they're ten or twelve and they'll make themselves a cubby that they'll use... and that will evolve as they grow older.

Cubbies have to be private -- lots of greenery around. They need to be undisturbed, even if the occupants have trampled your dahlias in the process. (Note: I'm not saying here that kids shouldn't learn to respect flowers and plants loved by other people. Just before you weep for your dahlias decide whether it's more important in this instance to teach them about other people's flowers or enjoy their cubby without guilt. And if you do decide to weep for your dahlias, bung it on real good. No half-hearted scenes here. Kids don't respect whingers... but they do appreciate a good tragedy. They'll weep with you too -- then won't do it again. Whereas a whine or two will just make them resentful and resentment breeds revenge.)

### Animals

This includes wild birds. If you don't want the birds et al for yourself or for their own sake, lure them to your garden for the kids.

### Tools to pretend

Branches to ride and imagine they are horses; feathery leaves to stick out as peacocks' tails; ferns to make antlers -- encourage kids to pick and pretend. Don't make them ask you every time they want to harvest something. A garden shouldn't be like a tidy lounge room. It should be a living place of change and excitement.

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Contact Lydia Waldron on 241 7334 if interested (Venue cost to be discussed).

## Pretty things

Both sexes like pretty things -- though there may be a time in a male's life when he won't admit it. Rose hips, golden beetles, coloured leaves -- one of my favourite memories is my grandmother showing me how the afternoon light glowed on the grass. I've seen light and shadows differently ever since. Share your pretty things with kids, let them pick them. Show delight too when they come running in with something exciting that they've found.

## Magic

I used to spend hours feeding the banksia men when I was small. Of course they were real -- they sipped up the water didn't they? Maybe the reason I never quite took to the 'Snugglepot and Cuddlepie' stories was that I could never see banksia men as bad. Banksia men were my friends.

If you want to feed banksia men get a cup of water and a spoon and dry banksias. Spoon the water through their lips -- and like all living things the water will eventually come out the other end.

We used to play tunes on gum leaves too. You fold a green and supple leaf in half and sort of hum and sort of blow, a bit like playing a kazoo. If you can feel your lips tingle you're on the right track. I haven't done it for years and I never really did get the knack -- but some people become virtuosos of the gum leaf with a huge and varied repertoire played with rare skill and expression.

Watch sunflowers follow the sun (except they often don't, especially new cultivars with lots of heads) and lawn daisies sulk and close up when the sun goes behind a cloud and a hydrangea change to pink when you lime it and beans always go round a post the same way (or do they?).

Try tying a bit of string round a zucchini as it grows to make a ridiculous shape. Or paste brown paper over a green apple in the shape of a kid's name then when it's ripe peel away the paper and their name will be indelibly on the apple. See also *Growing Parsley in Your Joggars* for dozens of bits of garden magic to show kids.

## Edibles

Kids like eating. (A great part of my son's homesickness when he went to board in Canberra for high school was having to eat only in the dining room. I hadn't realised how much he relied on just reaching out and picking as he played. Luckily he found an apple tree in the corner of the school grounds. It allayed his homesickness long enough for him to settle down.)

Food is more fun when you pick it yourself. Note: if kids won't eat their veg let them steal it from the vegie garden instead - we rarely get any snow peas or podded peas because we all nibble them straight from the vine. Kids

love raw carrots, ferny heads and all washed under the tap; crunching baby beetroot, sweet Japanese turnips crisp as apples, sunflower seeds so they can spit out the shell.

There are games you can only play when you eat outdoors -- who can spit the plum stones furthest, who can catch a cherry stone in their hands. Place fresh apple pips on the table and press with your fingers and see which flips the furthest. Actually this is an ancient Roman form of divination. The apple pips were given names, say of the horse in a race to see which one would win, or contenders for a generalship or even Caesar.

It doesn't matter how much mess you make cracking macadamias or walnuts if you do it with a rock or half a brick outside.

## Knowledge

Gardening is something that can't be learnt from books (even mine). You have to get your fingers dirty to learn how to garden, see what a mealy bug looks like when it's sucking at a lemon twig, watch how the tops of carrots change as they ripen. Books can lead you to new experiences in gardening and give you information and new perspectives: but they can't give you the real thing.

Most of the passionate gardeners I know learnt gardening from their grandparents. Gardening, like red hair, can skip a generation. And often kids whose parents are avid gardeners see gardens as their parents' domain, not their own or just hard work, weeding the gerberas or watering the lawn on Sunday afternoons.

The simplest lessons can be the ones that stay with you: I remember my grandfather showing me how to take a cutting (snap it off, stick it in the ground and keep it moist and shaded) or my grandmother Jannie showing me how wind and sunlight browned a camellia.

Forget about systematic instruction: just show kids bits of magic. It's those bits that stick.

## Work

Children need to learn to work. It is perhaps the hardest thing of all to teach - the satisfaction of working hard, and achieving a result.

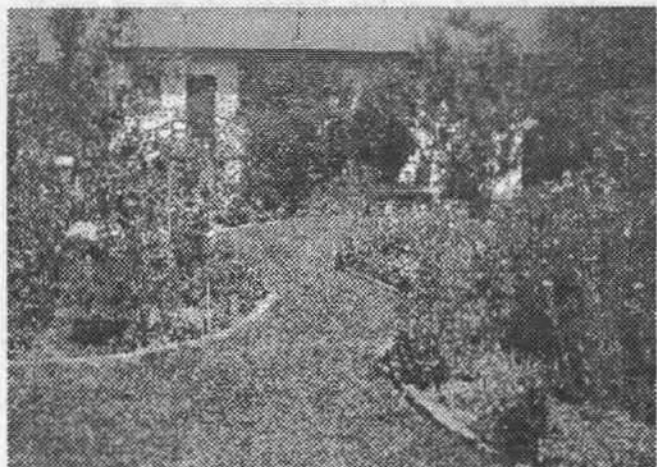
This is something kids can learn in gardens. Mowing the lawn (lots of noise and machinery for young macho males) shows a quick and dramatic result. Digging ditto, picking fruit (especially if they can eat as much as they like and get given some to take home or to give to their own friends at school).

Someone once said that the greatest joy was the ability to work long hours at something you really love. A garden is a good place to start.

# The Bio-Dynamic Preparations in the Home Garden

by Terry Forman

reprinted with permission from *News Leaf*, NO25 p16-17, the newsletter of the Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening Association in Australia.



Lyn West's Bio-Dynamic Home Garden in Queanbeyan

The Home Garden means different things to different people. For some it is an ornamental garden of lawn, flowers, shrubs and trees surrounding the house either on a farm or a suburban or town block.

There is usually a mixture of native and exotic plants. For others it is a vegetable and herb garden, perhaps also with fruit trees and a few flowers, which provides more or less of the household's needs of fresh and preserved products during the year. However, for most people the home garden is a combination of these things. It will often contain some poultry and perhaps bees as well. If not their domestic form then birds and insects usually come in profusion to the home garden because, by its diversified nature it serves a great attraction for these creatures.

It is also because of the diverse nature of the home garden that it lends itself so well to the application of Bio-Dynamic methods, even if, because of its size and location it can't become as self-supporting as a farm can with the use of manure from its own animals. However, if it is at all possible it is worthwhile to make a place for poultry and other small animals (such as a milking goat or sheep) in the home garden. This is not only because of the produce and manure they provide - which is balanced to some degree by the feed you will probably have to provide from outside the garden - but also for what the animals teach us about life. The fact is that in Australia, within the various BD groups, there are as many people applying Bio-Dynamic methods in the home garden as there are applying them on farms.

Probably the most straight forward of the BD preparations to use in the home garden are the compost preparations - 502-507. There are usually a couple of main clean up times in the garden, often spring and autumn, when large amounts of waste plant material such as weeds and leaves and prunings are available and it is at these times when it is good to start a compost heap.

If you don't have any of your own poultry or other animal manure and can't readily acquire it from friends or neighbours, then blood and bone are a good substitute. Sprinkle a few shovels full over every 15 to 30 cm of plant material and water it in. Crushed basalt dust is also very good to use in this way if you can obtain it. Composts can also be made without using animal manures but they do add something to the completeness of the natural cycling as Steiner describes in the Agriculture Course.

The compost preparations 502-507 can now be added to the heap. Accumulation of kitchen scraps and garden scraps can still be added to the heap from time to time as they are available. You might choose to turn the heap a few weeks before starting to use it, so as to incorporate the later material, but you don't need to add another set of preparations. Alternatively, any uncomposted material can be taken off the top of the heap and used in the next heap. Using BD Fish Emulsion or cow pat pit preparation is also a good way of extending the use of the preparations 502-507 beyond what you can imagine with the compost.

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Another view of Lyn's Garden

The use of the spray preparations 500 and 501 is not quite so straight forward in the home garden because you are not working on an individual crop or paddock basis but rather the garden as a totality. It would be unreasonable to expect of ourselves that we do a stirring of preparations every week during the growing season to continue with all the different growth cycles in the garden. A specialist full time gardener might be able to manage it but there are few specialist full time gardeners.

My own approach has been to use the 500 and 501 preparations in the home garden to coincide with the main planting and harvest times. It mainly refers to vegetables, but it can also be extended to fruit trees as well as annual and perennial ornamentals. It is also relative to a tableland environment so it would be modified according to your situation.

### 500 Application

First: With early garden working in Spring, to coincide with the planting of peas, root vegetables, leaf vegetables and transplanting of onions and leeks.

Second: Late Spring to coincide with the planting of frost sensitive plants eg corn, zucchini, beans, tomatoes, potatoes, etc.

Third: Late Summer, early Autumn to coincide with the planting of "winter" vegetables - cabbage, cauliflower, onions, garlic etc.

### 501 Application

First: Early Summer - peas in pod, carrot roots filling out, lettuces hearting. The Summer vegetables (zucchini, tomatoes) have usually just begun flowering and setting fruit. If they have been well composted and are not stressed for water, the 501 is very helpful for them at this stage.

Second: Early to Mid-Autumn - as the Summer vegetables are ripening and especially for those such as potatoes, pumpkins and root vegetables which will be stored or held in the ground over the cooler months.

The important thing is to read your local conditions and associate yourself with the growth cycles of the plants you are working with, while keeping in mind that the 500 is connected with expansive growth and the 501 with contractive growth. The Astro-Calendar is a very helpful guide for action and observation.

The home garden is probably more than any other place a reflection of the relationship a culture has with its environment. It serves as important a role in the cities, suburbs and towns as it does on farms. I think we would almost say that the home garden represents the heart of our environment. For most of us it is the most immediate place from which our experience of nature is felt and expressed.

On Friday 31 May 1996 at 7.00pm Terry Forman will present "Bio-Dynamic Agriculture an Introduction" At the Orana School, Hickey Court, Weston ACT.  
Cost: \$5 Individual, \$10 Family

This is followed by a field day on Saturday 1 June 10am- 3pm at 30 McIntosh Street, Queanbeyan (BYO Picnic Lunch)  
Cost: \$20 Individual, \$30 Family

Topics covered include-  
Application of BD500, Composting  
BD preparations  
Use of flowforms

Contact Lynette West 297 2729 to register



# The Internet Column

By **John Allen**

Email: [jallen@pcug.org.au](mailto:jallen@pcug.org.au)

COGS WWW Home Page URL: <http://www.pcug.org.au/~jallen/cogs.htm>



If you are on the Internet, and you haven't yet let me know, send me a message and say hello! We currently have 13 COGS members on the Internet. Since 24 October 1995, the COGS Home Page has been accessed 2060 times.

## New Information on the COGS page:

- Address of WWOOF Canada
- WWW link Canada's Office of Urban Agriculture
- Where to get seeds in Australia
- WWW link Canada-Ontario Agriculture Green Plan
- IRC Garden Channel open for discussion
- WWW link Australian Correspondence Schools
- Suppliers of Organic Produce in Canberra

## This Month's Interesting Site:

From Sal Schettino's Home Page - *Don't Panic Eat Organic*

<http://www.rain.org/~sals/weeds.html>

## WHAT IS A WEED?

By **Rachel Findley**

([rfindley@berkeley.nature.edu](mailto:rfindley@berkeley.nature.edu))

There seem to be different perceptions on what role weeds play in farming systems. I'd like to ask a fundamental question--What is a weed?--and challenge [you all] to work toward a more sophisticated view of weeds in farming systems. My apologies for making this so long.

### Weeds Conserve Soil

In some farming systems, having something fill that niche may be far better than nothing. The exchange between Tracy and Sal illustrates this. While no-till might conserve soil in the corn belt, heavy use of herbicides in orchards on the steep slopes in Sal's area has led to serious erosion, even in no-till systems.

Another place where this is a serious problem is the humid tropics. During the Hawaiian rainy season, I watched soil washed down the slope of a coffee and macadamia nut grove that was no-till but kept free of weeds by herbicides. In a semi-arid subtropical perennial system, like Sal's farm, an understory is needed to keep the soil from washing away when the rains finally come after a long dry season. Someone who is criticizing Sal's observation from the perspective that the whole world grows corn and soybeans misses his point. But even in the semi-humid to

humid temperate zones that characterize most of the US east of the 100th parallel, one should consider and critically evaluate the role weeds and tillage systems play at conserving resources.

Most organic farmers that I know don't even own a moldboard plow. While tools differ from soil to soil, and even season to season, most will use cultivation implements like chisels, rippers, disks, rotary hoes, spaders, as well as tool-bar devices like sweeps and shovels. A few of the more adventurous row-croppers are working with permanent beds with buried drip irrigation, following the Sundance (Arizona) system. Sundance still uses herbicides, but have found that their rates have been greatly diminished with a permanent bed with minimal disturbance, and improved water control.

Others have eliminated herbicides entirely. One can argue whether the use of any or all of these tools are minimal till. Not only do they suppressing weeds at a critical time, but also aerate the soil and allow soil preparation for annual crops.

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### **Weeds Conserve Water**

In arid, semi-arid and Mediterranean climates, where water conservation is arguably a more serious and persistent challenge than soil conservation, weeds play a role in helping water penetration, storage and shade, conserving soil moisture that matches or outweighs water competition. Savory covers this in rangeland management systems. Tap-rooted plants create macropores as their mass slowly decomposes. These pores are destroyed by tillage, but herbicides in a no-till system can prevent the tap-rooted of these plants from ever forming. The result, especially in sun-baked alkali conditions is a hard cap that prevents water from penetrating. Water puddles on the surface, rather than penetrates, and thus is evaporated rather than stored and made available to the crop. Ralph Jurgens of New Era Farm Services in Tulare has two photos of walnut orchards following a rain, one with bare ground the other with a ground cover.

### **No-till doesn't mean Herbicides**

While most vineyards still french-plow, an increasing number of orchards have found that no-till without herbicides works best. A well-managed ground cover plays several important roles that bare soil can't match. To review: legumes fix nitrogen; these and other crops can "mine" other nutrients unavailable to the tree's root system; flowers attract beneficial insects; roots hold soil in place; increased organic matter increases water field capacity; chlorophyll absorbs sunlight and stores energy, while bare soil reflects it, causing sunburn; plants moderate both high and low temperatures. During the 1990 frost, weed scientists predicted that organic citrus and avocado groves would be damaged worse because the ground cover would raise the frostline. Instead, the ground cover moderated the day- and night-time swings in temperature, saving both fruit and whole trees. It was a disaster either way, but organic farmers didn't seem to have to replant as many trees, and certainly weren't any worse off, as weed scientists thought they'd be.

I know that this might be focusing too much on perennial crops, but growers are also using no-till without herbicides in field and row crops. Lundbergs, for example, have been experimenting with no-till rice without herbicides, and have made some progress.

### **No-Till Isn't Always**

#### **Environmentally Sound**

The San Joaquin Valley has a mandatory plow-down for cotton to maintain a host-free period for pink bollworm and boll weevil control. The program has been very successful, but recall a few years ago, before the end of the drought, a dust-storm came and kicked up enough dust to cause a major pile-up on I-5, the main artery between LA & SF. Plow-down was generally acknowledged to be the culprit. More rotation into winter small grains and hay, with buffer strips of alfalfa (used for lygus control as well as for erosion) would have helped, trees planted as windbreaks even moreso, but choosing between no-till or no pink bollworm and no boll weevil is a trade-off

California farmers have chosen to make in favor of plow-down, which IMHO was the far lesser of two evils.

### **Toward a New Weed Science**

A stone-fruit and grape grower who still uses herbicides on johnsongrass once told me a story about weed science. He found an interesting-looking plant in his peach grove, and called extension to have them come out and identify it. They knew what it was, and immediately told him of about 20 herbicides he could use to kill it. But he didn't really want to kill it without first knowing. Why was it there? What was it doing? Was it competing? Would it attract beneficial insects? What kind of organisms co-exist within its root system? Are these organisms beneficial, pathogenic or neither?

These questions the weed scientists could not answer, so the plant lived, with no apparent deleterious effect on the orchard. I recognize that there are a few really noxious weeds: bermudagrass, johnsongrass, field bindweed, purple nutsedge, for example. Expanding the list beyond that is possible, but debateable. Some might be noxious in some situations, but beneficial in others, like sandbur or lamb's quarters. Still others are almost never harmful to crops, like sweet alyssum, ageratum, or poppies. Some of these are actively sown to attract beneficial arthropods.

Yet there is an imperative to show domination of nature through complete elimination of every non-crop species planted in what are almost always fields planted to monoculture. This does not always make economic sense. Giving up herbicides is often hard for a farmer who has been told that a measure of his or her management is how controlled the system is. At the risk of making a sexist generalization, I've found that women farmers have less of a "hang-up" about weeds than men. I talked to the daughter of a prominent organic farmer in North Dakota, who told me that herbicides were difficult for her father to give up, not because the economic damage of weeds or soil erosion was so great, but because his father thought he was mismanaging the farm by the number of weeds in a field. Bankers have also been known to make snap judgements about the economic viability of a farm based on whether or not they see weeds, regardless of what the balance sheet shows.

But fathers and bankers aside, the people who seem hardest to change are the weed scientists. Weed scientists haven't learned the lesson that entomologists learned with IPM--that killing every weed is not economically efficient. After a certain threshold, weeds aren't worth killing. Anybody seen articles on economic thresholds of weeds? If so, I'd like to read them. If not, I would posit that just as insects and micro-organisms in farming system are not always pestiferous or pathogenic, non-crop species of higher plants do not always compete with crops at levels that justify control. When they are found at levels that justify control, herbicides are never the only and not always the "best" tool for the long-term management of

the problem. When a plant becomes a "weed" it is the symptom of a larger problem. As Alan Savory points out in *Holistic Resource Management*, herbicides treat the symptom, not the problem. Cultural modification can be cheaper and more effective in the long-run, but herbicides offer a quick fix and dramatic results.

While one can argue whether one-in-a-million or one-in-five cancer risk is a more reasonable way to set public policy, the fact that any herbicides are found in water shows that they are not being used efficiently--they do a farmer no good to control weeds in his or her field if they're in the river or the well. My brief foray into weed science in grad school was pretty disappointing. I found that herbicides kill weeds pretty darn good, and that these cultural methods don't kill 'em nearly as well. End of story. The last time I looked, weed scientists seemed to all learn their craft from General Sheridan--"The only good weed is a dead weed," or Arlo Guthrie at the draft board in Alice's Restaurant, "I want to kill, Kill, KILL!" I haven't picked up a weed science journal in a few years. I hope the next time I do, I'll be pleasantly surprised to find at least some articles on the benefits of weeds in agro-ecosystems. Weed scientists are going to need to learn the roles that non-crop plants play, both positive and negative, in order to make a contribution to sustainable farming systems.

Tero Laakkonen yo! a couple of months ago I posted here asking if anyone knew which deep-rooted plants I should grow to "mine" P & K in order to leave it for plants with not very deep roots?

Robert Kourik's *Designing and Maintaining Your Edible Landscape*

*Naturally* describes "dynamic accumulators" as "plants that amass a greater than usual amount of a particular nutrient in their foliage," because they:

- (a) accumulate an element in higher concentrations than other plants, even on soils deficient in that element?
- (b) thrive on soils with high concentrations of the element or
- (c) send their roots down to layers where the nutrients are in abundance. Your question relates to (c) which is harder to measure than the concentration of elements in the leaves.

Dynamic accumulators of phosphorus include legumes, buckwheat, and mustard (Brassica). Phosphorus is often in the soil in a form that is not available to plants; growing alfalfa in a field over a number of years steadily increases the amount of available phosphorus. Buckwheat and mustard solubilize phosphorus and subsequently excrete it from their roots. Other dynamic accumulators of phosphorus are bridal bower, calamus, caraway, chamomile, chickweed, dandelion, dock, garlic, lamb's quarters, lemon balm, licorice, marigold, meadow sweet,

pigweed, purslane, sarsparilla (sassafras), skunk cabbage, sorrel, watercress and yarrow.

Potassium may also be present in a form that isn't usable to plants, so liberating the potassium present in the topsoil may be as important as bringing it up from the subsoil. Green bracken ferns were used as a source of potash for washing in England. Other potassium accumulators include bridal bower, calamus, cattail, century plant, chamomile, chickweed, chicory, coltsfoot, comfrey, dandelion, dock, eyebright, lamb's quarters, mullein, stinging nettles, oak, parsley, peppermint, pigweed, plantain, sanicle, silverweed, sow thistle, creeping thistle, vetch, watercress, waywort, and yarrow.

Oak leaves have high levels of calcium even when there are low levels of calcium in the soil. I don't know what this means in terms of calcium "mining." Maybe the deep roots bring calcium up, or maybe the upper roots strip calcium from the surface soil. Kourik doesn't have any numbers. He refers to several books that might be more statistically oriented:

Joseph Cocannour, *Weeds Guardians of the Soil*  
Ben Easey, *Practical Organic Gardening*  
Stuart Hill, *Weeds as Indicators of Soil Conditions*  
Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, *Weeds and What They Tell*

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# MAGIC ELASTIC: Or, Extending the Growing Season without extending yourself in the process

by Lydia Waldron

Sometime ago, this household toyed briefly with the idea of buying a small greenhouse. We were keen to extend the growing season of our most-favoured vegetable friends, the solanaceae family (capsicum, tomatoes, chilli and eggplant). These jolly attractive vegetables seem consistently pricey when the shortage of garden supply necessitates their purchase. For us, this was an ongoing problem as the House Chief has a fondness for Mediterranean cuisine. Producing more solanaceae would surely offset, long-term, the costs of a modest greenhouse?? Well so it seemed. Brochures were obtained through relevant magazine advertisements, literature read and advice sought from those who already ventured onto Planet Out-of-Season-Production. This is what we found.

## GREENHOUSES

These have been fairly popular items around the ACT due to a combination of truly cold weather (unusual in this country) and financial wealth (set to become increasingly unusual in the ACT). These days they are generally made of polythene film stretched over a framework.

Glass, polythene film and other plastics transmit light wavelengths at varying efficiencies. This has the effect of altering the colour balance of light reaching the plants relative to that of ordinary unfiltered sunlight. This results in differing amounts of various nutrients in the produce. Apparently vitamins are present in significantly smaller amounts in greenhouse vegies. Plastic is a worse offender than glass.

Greenhouses are generally used to grow a smaller range of vegies than the open garden. They are (logically) retained for the growth of select vegies. But this makes it difficult to arrange a good, disease-preventing crop rotation. The alternative is to pasteurise the soil with steam (!) or exchange the soil every few seasons.

The extra heat in a glasshouse means that more attention must be paid to watering. Air circulation is reduced, and this significantly increases the risk of fungal disease. Although more watering is required than is used in the open garden, drip irrigation renders this increase minimal.

The increased temperature also means a higher plant metabolic rate. In consequence the humus in the soil is used up at a higher rate also. To counter this, one must use twice the amount of compost one would outdoors.

Someone suggested installing some of our 5 compost heaps inside the greenhouse to raise the carbon dioxide level. This would result in an even higher growth rate. Installing one's hens in the greenhouse over winter would also raise the CO<sub>2</sub> level, and one can imagine the girls would find the balmy conditions quite convivial.

The closet environment of the greenhouse is an invitation to pest outbreak. The most common pest is the greenhouse whitefly which can be destroyed with a dilute liquid soap solution spread in a misting fashion, or sticky traps. These traps are made of plastic/paper squares coloured yellow

and coated with something sticky (toddler's fingers?). Possibly treacle or such-like. But these traps must be placed no higher than the crop you are trying to protect, as the tiny parasitic wasps that predate on the whitefly are found just above the height of the crop.

Greenhouses are often painted with whitewash to reduce heat gain during the hottest months of the year. Shadecloth makes a reusable alternative that does not wash off in the rain.

A well-maintained greenhouse will most definitely ensure a near year-round supply of prized vegetables, even in the challenging climate of the Southern Highlands. For this household however living in suburbia on a small shady block with limited finances and many, many demands on our time, as greenhouse would not really be worthwhile.

## PLANTS FOR SALE

by COGS member

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## TUNNELS

A simpler approach is to use polythene tunnels with closed ends to cover the crops already growing in the garden. While these cannot be given supplementary heat as a conventional greenhouse, they do have several advantages. Their capital cost is much lower and they can be moved from place to place as required. An early crop of carrots can be forced in July/August followed by sweetcorn when the weather has warmed slightly and finally tomatoes somewhat later. The result is an earlier harvest of several crops rather than only the one. Also crops are covered with the device for only a short time and removed totally before crop maturity, so that negative effects due to changes in light balance are lessened.

These tunnels generate extra heat and again attention to watering may be a concern. Sheet composting evidently works a treat in these conditions - rapid breakdown of the compost used as a mulch, and a concomitant release of CO<sub>2</sub>. The polythene tunnels can be purchase or home made. Many of the commercial types are designed as half circles of metal that are shoved into the ground and the plastic is attached to this frame. Homemade versions need to incorporate some means of ventilation that can be propped open on the side away from prevailing winds. This facilitates a degree of heat control inside the tunnel and a means of lessening the likelihood of pest build-up in the otherwise closed environment.

Polythene becomes brittle in sunlight and when used continually will last about 5 years. If you store your polythene tunnels out of direct sunlight when not in use, you can expect to double this lifespan.

**CLOCHE:** These simple structures are open ended, do not allow any appreciable heat build-up and as a result are of little use to our poor solanceae.

However these protective structures are able to keep certain plants growing during even the coldest months. Lettuce, spinach, broccoli etc will respond most favourably to the protection from cold rains, winds and hard frosts.

Using a design similar to the more elaborate tunnels, bend metal strips into half hoops, or used upturned wire baskets as supports depending upon the height of the crop you are trying to protect. Over this frame can be stretched pieces of transparent plastic sheeting. Weigh down one side of the plastic with a garden stake and stretch the rest over the top and make fast with another stake.

Wind can be a problem unless the edges of the plastic are buried in earth or held down by these stakes. Even this may be insufficient in high wind, and the addition of a few bricks or rocks will hold the structure more firmly. Again, sheet composting is the ideal here. The composting processes will be slower but still protective. The

established autumn crops will continue to produce many weeks into winter.

## EARLIER SEED GERMINATION:

The other means of ingressing into the cold period is of course to raise one's seedlings earlier. Even without artificial heating, it is possible to create germinating and growing conditions which are similar to spring. Evidently spring-like conditions can be brought forward by 2-3 months even on the Southern Highlands.

You can simply germinate seeds by sowing them in the conventional manner and raising them indoors. Or by popping the punnets under the cloche. Some people cover their cloche with old sacks on particularly cold nights, and especially if frost threatens. Rocks or cans or water inside the cloche will also hold more heat than the soil. Water holds twice as much heat as rocks, per unit of volume.

Other small scale devices for forcing seed germination include large plastic bottles with the bottom cut off; old windows suspended on bricks; punnets slipped into plastic bags that are then inflated like a balloon and tied - and so forth.

A simple cold frame makes a good place to raise seeds and seedlings. The cold frame is an old window sash that sits atop a wooden base that is flush with the ground. The window sash is hinged to the base and can be propped open for ventilation. The frame should face north, and should not be too deep or the seedlings, once on their way, will receive insufficient light and become weak and spindly.

## HOT FRAME HALF-WAY HOUSE:-

We opted for a more elaborate hot-frame system to suit our locale. The conventional hot-frame uses manure and/or other rapidly decomposing material (mulched bark or leaves, lawn clippings) in a pit under the cold frame as a source of supplementary heating.

The soil is excavated to a depth of 45-60cm and replaced with the manure etc. It must be trampled down or the heat will be excessive. The temperature rises for some time before declining slowly.

In our situation no area of bare sunny earth presented itself. But an expanse of nasty concrete in a sheltered, sunny zone in front of our garage, did.

The frame was constructed directly onto the concrete with a view to using the latter as a heat sink. The glass of the window sash has been replaced with a piece of polycarbonate, set into the hinged frame. The window sits at an acute angle - almost, though not quite, perpendicular to the ground to capture the rays of a winter sun much lower in the sky. It has a north facing aspect.

It is lined with old fibreglass insulation batts. In its base sits sand (more insulation and to weigh the beast down) and atop the sand are plastic bottles of water, side by side like tinned sardines.

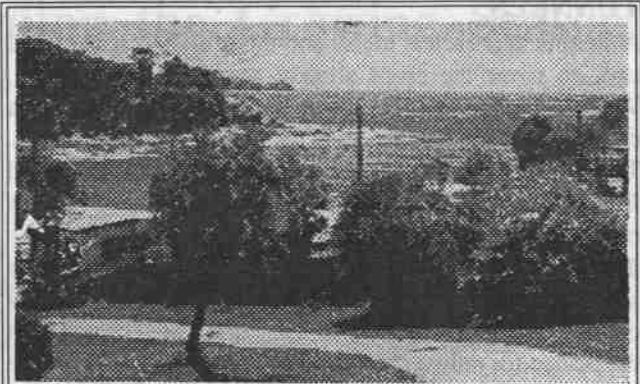
Trays of punnets of germinating seedlings sit atop these bottles. After germination the eventual seedlings are potted on into small pots which are then placed on the shelves above the water bottles. The plants can reach a healthy size in this hot box due to the headroom afforded by its cathedral-like roof.

A sack is placed over the polycarbonate at dusk and removed as soon as we emerge in the morning.

The polycarbonate was the only additional outlay involved as the remaining materials were scrounged.

We have seedlings so advanced, they could join Mensa. But they still need to be planted out at some stage! The departure of the *Solanaceae* from the protection of the hot-frame will necessarily have to be delayed until they can all but crawl out of their own accord.

For us, the cloche will be the logical next step. We have decided to leave the other-wise excellent greenhouse and tunnel ideas to the commercial growers, or those with the time to maintain them adequately. WE subscribe to that school of gardeners who prefer everything close "dead easy", Yorkshire accent or not.



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## What can I do about FROST...

by Marietta Asa



There are a few things we gardeners can do. Move to tropics and never worry about early tomatoes any more or never plant any frost tender vegies. Most of us take another view. We grow some frost tender vegetables trying to adjust planting time and last spring and first autumn frosts.

There are a few things we can do to help frost tender plants to prosper in the Southern Tableland's climate. One is the use of cover for frost protection.

A light weight material is available to cover vegetables and it is used extensively in northern Europe. Lets call it "spun polyester". It can be thrown over plants when frost is threatening in the evening and taken out in the morning after air has warmed up. It can also be used permanently over a vegetable bed and then works in a similar way to a cold frame.

If you want to leave it permanently over a bed it needs to be anchored down to prevent wind taking it away. This can be done by putting rocks along the edges or burying the edges under soil. I prefer rocks because it is then easy to take up for harvest, weeding etc.

You do not need to take it off for watering. Water penetrates through it. It also allows light to get through for plant growth.

Spun polyester gives a few degrees protection. If temperature drops to  $-2^{\circ}\text{C}$  this material should prevent frost damage.

Even though spun polyester was developed for frost protection it is also great in preventing many kinds of nasties getting into your crop; birds ripping lettuces, cabbage butterflies laying their eggs on brassicas etc.

Spun polyester is available from: Joyce Wilkie and Michael Plane on 236 8173



## **The Certainty of Uncertainty -- Do We Have a Survival Kit for the Challenge of the Nineties?**

The first uncertainty -- and one everybody talks about -- is of course the weather. Not that one can do much about it, and as my grandmother used to say 'What can't be cured must be endured', and we must accept the fact that global warming and ozone depletion will bring about long term changes which now are beginning to become evident. We are experiencing longer periods without rain (mini-droughts) followed by heavier falls than usual including episodic storm damage and other natural disasters.

Apart from the immediate damage created by storms, floods and bushfires there is the longer term cost of land degradation and vegetation stress which will have its impact on succeeding generations unless we can overcome the present attitude of doing too little too late.

As I said we can't do much about the weather but we can adopt strategies to ameliorate those extremes such as water harvesting for storage and irrigation, cultivation to enhance microbial activity, tree planting for shelter and renewable resources and the installation of climate modifiers (for this region) such as low-tech. heating systems for plastic igloos in order to give an extension to the season and beat the restrictions of frost.

The second uncertainty I wish to examine is the changing economic situation particularly in the Canberra region where localised cut backs in the public sector are imposing a dampening recession mentality on the recovery from 'the recession we had to have'. But here again if we accept that the eighties philosophy of 'greed is good' was ill conceived and that economic growth and prosperity cannot last forever, we are well prepared to live within the guide-lines of our own self-sufficiency.

I learnt my self-sufficiency in England during the Second World War. The island nation was hostage to the German U-boat, food was rationed and many essentials were non-existent or in short supply so we were exhorted to 'make do and mend', 'waste not' and 'dig for Victory' so we all had our home gardens. I also had a garden at school and my father had an allotment nearby.

We also kept poultry and rabbits in the backyard and if we couldn't eat our own stock due to sentiment we would swap them for something similar with a friend. We would make excursions to pick fruit, go potato-picking and earn extra money collecting acorns for pig food (3d a lb) (which translates in pre-decimal terms as threepence a pound).

The home kitchen transformed bounty and excess into bottles and preserves and as we didn't have the benefits of refrigerators or freezers we would hang onions in strings, salt the beans and store root vegetables in earth clamps. We became our own best customers but any surplus could always find a welcome home. The food was always

freshly grown using natural manures as fertilisers and if at times it was plain it was wholesome and nutritious.

Our means of transport and distribution was the bicycle (sometimes with a trailer attached) because even if we could have obtained petrol (rationed for essential services) we didn't have a car so it was the bike, public transport, or 'shank's pony' (walking) for getting about.

Louis Bromfield, the American author, after a sojourn in France made the observation that the French peasant was able to live well and comfortably from his two acres in spite of the turmoil which often raged about him because of his situation in the corridor of European conflict. In such times of conflict the small-holder would preserve his independence and rely on self-sufficiency to tide the family over until better times arrived.

Whether we have a backyard, access to a community garden or a small-holding we can all practise a degree of self-sufficiency but most importantly we have contacts through COGS for advice and support should we need to make a start in this area.

The only certainty we can be sure of is uncertainty - but this in itself can be exciting and challenging if we use our initiative and be more flexible in approaching the problem of survival in an uncertain world. For example, is it possible to harness the development of more sophisticated communication technologies with the integration of like-minded peoples into active communities of supportive self-sufficiency?

This, it appears, is a long-winded introduction to what has been happening at ROCKYGLEN since last I spoke to you. It really began with an old-fashioned conversation with Greg and Moira Dalla from Royalla when they came to look over Wattle and her bull calf (Bam Bam). Greg was telling me about a government scheme whereby he had contracted to employ four long term unemployed people for six months in order to train them in organic food production and self sufficiency.

The immediate benefit for Greg and Moira was to overcome that backlog of jobs which always builds up on any small holding but in the longer term they envisaged the prospect of becoming commercially viable to the extent they would be in a position to employ labour. The advantages to the participants were that they were in a position where they received training in skills in the expanding organics industry so that they could either be employed directly at the conclusion of the project or find employment on a similar farm. Alternatively they may be in a position to set up their own small-scale operation and supply produce directly to friends and neighbours.

This sounded like an exciting prospect which could assist farmers such as myself make the transition from a one

person operation into a commercially viable proposition. Later, when discussing these ideas with Geoff Foster (Brooks Valley) and Liane Shields (Baringa) we envisaged a situation where the three farms could combine into an informal cooperative and rationalise some of our operations and marketing.

For instance, if I reared the chickens for Liane's poultry farm she could specialise in the marketing of eggs knowing that she was assured of a certified source of stock while for my part it made sense to concentrate on what I did best without competing with her for the egg market. Again, if Geoff and Liane shared the distribution of produce (Thursday and Monday) this would save a doubling of travel and make sure that the customer enjoyed a more regular delivery service. If we could add to these ideas the prospect of employing some trainees in order to build up a trained workforce and overcome our present limitations in infrastructure.....well, it seemed to have a lot of potential so I was commissioned to explore the possibilities.

Greg supplied me with copies of his papers and further details which enabled me to contact the Queanbeyan office of the CES to make an application under the New Work Opportunities program for six long term unemployed people to be given training in 'Food Production Using Sustainable Agricultural Methods'. In the first instance I had to submit an outline of the proposal and when that was approved in principle to submit a full application to show details of the course, trainers' qualifications and budget costings.

The Area office for the ACT/Illawarra region approved our application, contracts were signed, interviews conducted, candidates selected and paperwork completed in time for six participants to begin on 11 March. Our interviewees became people; those people have become a team. On our staff we now have Broni, Pepper, Johan, Will, Bruce and Michael and perhaps, later on they can tell their own stories.

After familiarisation with each of the three farms we have now settled into a routine whereby each host farm has two workers for a period of two months on rotation except for delivery days when some variations occur and for Fridays when we all meet at one or the other of the locations for group sessions and combined activities. So far some of the group activities have been building a chicken shed at Baringa,, making the frames for igloos at Brooks Valley and a demonstration of making compost at Rockyglen. Of course every second Friday is popular because that is payday.

We are now approaching the half-way mark of the project and looking back over the past months we now realise we not only grow produce, we grow people. These participants came to us with differing backgrounds, skills and experiences but all had one thing in common - they had all been unemployed for eighteen months or longer - and shared with us the conviction their fortunes could be turned around given the training we had in mind. I'll have more to tell you about this project in the next Quarterly.

Getting back to the question I posed at the conclusion of my long-winded introduction I wonder whether the format we stumbled upon contains part of the answer to alleviating some of today's economic problems. Downsizing wasn't the answer - we were already downsized and lacked the skilled workforce to enable us to become viable. We knew the market would take all we could produce but as individuals we were no more effective than large backyarders so, as like-minded people, we formed an informal cooperative for our mutual benefit where Liane uses her skills in marketing liaison, Geoff brings a scientific approach to production while I can coordinate the office and handle the legals.

We now have the participants as a team training in self-sufficiency skills which, in the future, we should be able to call upon as partners in our enterprises either directly on our farms or through their own efforts in contracting or growers' agreements. In such a diverse operation where we have three farms, five tutors and six participants effective communication is essential, primarily for OH&S but also for general information, so for this purpose we have the telephone, mobiles (which aren't always effective in this area) and two-way radio sets as base stations, vehicle installations and hand-held sets. Next we shall explore the use of modems to link our computers so that we can exchange such topics as marketing information.

There's only one small snag as far as I am concerned - I left the office to take up farming but now I find myself back in the office.

## Organic Vegetables and Eggs

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# WHERE CAN I FIND THEM?

by Michelle Johnson

*From time to time I've been asked where members can buy seeds or seedlings for particular fruit or vegetable, herb or flower. Recently I was asked about potato varieties and ornamental corn, and having found a source for these I thought I would share this information with readers, along with some other. If you come across a source for unusual seed/seedlings please let me know and I will pass on this information in future issues of the Quarterly. While I have located the sources for seeds or seedlings discussed below, I have not personally dealt with them and therefore cannot offer any personal recommendations.*



## POTATOES:

John Hodgkinson runs Hodge Podge Farm, a BFA certified farm at Dorrigo, where he grows an ever - widening range of seed potatoes. For those of us interested in growing something different and certified organic, he has provided us with an update of the list of seed potatoes that he has available for sale. The original list was published in The Seed Savers' Network Autumn Newsletter, and contains conventional production varieties (P), more traditional (T), some rare (R), and fingerling varieties (F). John would welcome any other old varieties, such as Guyra Blue which he thought he was growing until it was identified recently as Mottled Manhattan. He would also appreciate comments and feedback on those listed.

ATLANTIC (P) Rough skin, round, flat. Bake/roast, crisp, microwave

BINTJE (T/P) Dutch, yellow/waxy. Boil, excellent salad, outstanding roast/bake, microwave

BISMARCK (T) Cylindrical tubers, purple eyes. Avail. in LQ July 1996

BLUE BISMARCK (F)(LQ) Steam, mash, bake, microwave. A beautiful potato

BRODICK (P) Cylindrical, pink highlights. Roast/bake, chip

DARGO MINEFIELDS (R) (LQ) Vigorous, high yield. Misshapen tubers, dusky pink

DESIREE (P) Gourmet all rounder. Best steamed, salad, microwave. Scab susceptible.

EIGENHEIMER (T) (LQ) Dutch. Similar to Bintje. Avail. July 96.

EVANS (P) High dry matter variety, therefore chip/crisp, also roast/bake

FOXTON (P) Red skin, yellow flesh, oblong. Roast/bake, chip/crisp

IRISH WONDER (T) (LQ) Rough skin, round flattish. Excellent roast/bake

KATAHDIN (P) steam/boil, roast/bake, salad. Scab resistant

KENNEBEC (P) (LQ) Not suitable to steam/boil, good roast/bake, excellent chip

KING EDWARD (T)(LQ) English. Mash, steam, superb roast/bake, chip. Scab resistant

KIPFLER (T) High yielding, brilliant nutty flavour

LYON BLANCHE (T)(LQ) Very good all rounder, especially roast/bake

MOTTLED MANHATTEN (T/R)(LQ) Spectacular banded blue/cream. Stunning microwaved. All rounder

PINK EYE Abundant yields, superb steamed or baked

PONTIAC (P/T) Steam/boil, roast/bake, salad. Mashers well. Stable in storage

PURPLE CONGO (F)(T/R) Stunning blue-black, many eyed novelty. Good mashed/steamed. Prolific yielder

RED CRAIGS ROYAL (T)(LQ) Large cylindrical tubers. Very good roast/bake, good chip

RUSSET BURBANK (P) Netted skin. Very good chip. Good roast/bake

SEBAGO (T)(LQ) Very good all rounder. Best mash, steam/boil, roast/bake

SKERRICK (T)(LQ) Blue skin. Tapering tuber. Avail July 96

SPUNTA (T) Dutch. Huge tubers. Good in sliced potato dishes. Superb roast/bake and chip

TOOLANGI DELIGHT (P) Pretty purple all rounder. Best boil/mash. Good for gnocchi. Poor yielder

WON'T SCAB (P/R) Good all rounder. The partial answer to alkaline or scab infested soils

Note: LQ= Limited Quantity.

Cost: \$2kg + postage

### Contact:

Hodge Podge Farm,  
PO Box 436,  
Dorrigo, NSW 2453

ph: 066 573 326 (A/H)  
fax: 066 572 304

## CORN:

A member requested information on where she could obtain ornamental black corn. Propitiously, I had just been lent a copy of the Fruit Tree Catalogue 1995 for Avocadoland Tropical Fruit World from Peter Cornhill (thanks Peter!). Its "BITS n'PIECES" section lists Black Aztec corn, which I presume the member was seeking.

According to Dr Judyth McLeod in "Heritage Gardening" on page 168:

"**Black Aztec**" is a variety reputedly grown by the Aztecs 2000 years ago. The medium sized ears grow up to 20cm (8in) long, each with 8 to 10 rows of glossy kernels. The kernels are white when young, and glossy dark blue-black when mature. It is a good roasting corn, or can be used for corn on the cob when still milky-white. The dried corn is ground into a sweetish bluish-purple cornmeal."

The Catalogue also lists Autumn Gem Corn, a hardy multi-coloured corn, and Bloody Butcher Corn, the later being recommended for hot climates.

The Catalogue also has an impressive range of tropical fruit trees which are very interesting to read about, as well as a range of vegetables in the "BITS n'PIECES" Section.

### Contact:

Avocadoland Tropical Fruit World  
PO Box 43,  
Kingscliff,  
NSW 2484  
ph 066 777 222, or 066 741 623  
fax 066 777 363

## CHINESE ARTICHOKE:

I came across an Article "Chinese Artichoke: New Life for an Ancient Vegetable" by Trish Arbib in "Grass Roots" April/May 1996, describing this unusual and fairly rare (in Australia) vegetable and thought some readers might like to give it a go.

It is not related to the Jerusalem or Globe Artichoke. It is a winter root vegetable, with tubers planted in winter or early spring and harvested late autumn. Any tubers left in the ground can sprout next Spring so be careful or they could become invasive. Only dig as required however as they lose their crispness within a day or two of harvesting.

The tiny tubers (2-5 cms long) are white when first picked, with a spiral sea shell like appearance. They apparently have a crisp, crunchy texture, with a delicate nutty flavour. They can be eaten raw or cooked briefly in stir fries.

They are hardy, easy to grow and probably require frost. The supplier given below is growing them successfully at Bundanoon.

**Supplier:** Bundanoon Village Nursery, PO Box 83, Bundanoon, NSW 2578. ph 048 836 303  
\$25 for 10 tubers + growing information + recipes + p&p.

## PROCESSED FOODS:

It is encouraging to see the much wider range of processed foods available now that are certified organic.

I noticed the following range at Joseph's at the Fyshwick Markets. Other organic retailers probably carry a similar line, and some items are becoming available in supermarkets - Uncle Tobys Weetbix being one of the better known items.

The list was:-

Tea - looseleaf and teabags  
Coffee

Milk  
Cheeses - 12 different kinds  
Yoghurts - 10 different kinds

Honey  
Jams & Marmalade  
Macademia Spread  
Almonds

Dry Tomatoes  
Tomato Sauce

Dry Apricots  
Dry Mangos  
Dry Dates  
Snap dry Apples  
Snap dry Bananas  
Snap dry Apricots  
Sultanas  
Prunes

Multigrain  
Wheat Bran  
Rolled Oats  
Fruitless Muesli  
Gluten Free Baby Cereal  
Baby Porridge

White Rice Flour  
Stoneground Whole Wheat Flour  
Stoneground Light Flour  
Stoneground Self-raising Flour

Long Grain Brown Rice  
Short Grain Brown Rice  
White Rice

Pasta - 5 different kinds

Remember, one of the best ways we can support organic agriculture is as consumers.

Let me know if you come across other items and we can update the list from time to time.

# Fabulous Fruity Liqueurs

by Lydia Waldron



As a confirmed teetotaler, I refuse to drink any alcoholic beverage (unless I've made it myself). Since the removal of the illicit still in the Big Raid, I have now taken to making fruity liqueurs using mostly garden produce and commercially-produced brandys and so forth. These are easy-peasy to make and cost far less than their commercial equivalents.

## Citrus Liqueur

Use only the cheapest brandy for these liqueurs. It's nice to think that when making these liqueurs that you actually end up with twice the original amount plus a delicious dessert fruit to eat with yogurt or ice-cream.

4 oranges (4 oranges or 3 grapefruit)  
2 cups sugar  
1 cup water  
1/2 bottle cheap brandy

Cut the fruit in half and squeeze out the juice; retain. Cut the peel into bite-size pieces and remove any pith. Make a sugar syrup by dissolving the sugar, orange juice and water and simmer 15 minutes. Put the peel into wide-mouthed sterilised jars and pour the syrup over. Top the bottles up with the brandy. Seal, label and store for 2 months.

## Berry Gin

This lovely pale pink liqueur is a very special gift for any time of the year and any occasion. It can be sipped or used as a flavouring for berry deserts. Berries that can be used include strawberries, raspberries, boysenberries and mulberries.

4 cups berries  
1 1/2 cups sugar  
1/2 - 1 bottle gin

Clean and hull the berries and pack into a wide-mouthed sterilised jar. Pour the sugar over and top the bottle up with gin. Store 1-2 months or until berries lose their colour. Strain the liquid through muslin and pour into a sterilised bottle and store for another month.

## Quince Vodka

This is a delicate pale colour and makes a snappy aperitif. The whole of the quince is used to macerate in the vodka and sugar for months and then strained to make a clear liqueur.

2 quinces  
1 cup caster sugar  
1/2 - 1 bottle vodka

Use ripe yellow quinces. Wash them and remove the fluff. Remove the stalks and cores but not the skin. Cut into small pieces. Put them into a wide-mouthed sterilised jar. Pour the sugar over and top the bottle up with vodka. Seal and store for four months (you could try it after 3; It's up to individual tastes). Strain the liqueur off into a sterilised bottle and seal.

## Using more exotic fruit.....

### Passionfruit liqueur:

This can be drunk as an aperitif or used spooned over ice-cream or yoghurt.

2 cups of passionfruit pulp  
1 cup brown sugar  
4 cups white rum

Put the passion fruit in a sterilised jar. Make the syrup by putting the sugar and rum in a saucepan over a low heat and dissolving the sugar.

Do not let it come to the boil. Pour the syrup over the fruit and seal. Do not open for at least 2 months.

### Pineapple liqueur:

There are few fruits that don't produce a good reserve. Keep this one for at least 2 months before opening and you will certainly be rewarded.

1 pineapple, peeled and finely sliced  
1 1/2 cups sugar  
1/2 bottle brandy

Chose a jar that will contain the pineapple, layer on layer, with about 2.5 cm left from the top. Put the fruit in the sterilised jar, following shape of the pineapple, and add the sugar. Cover well with brandy, making sure there are no air bubbles. Seal, label and store.

### Homemade "ADVOCAAT"

Admittedly little to do with fruit, but a most excellent way to use up otherwise unneeded eggs.

1 can sweetened, condensed milk  
6 tablespoons pure vanilla essence  
1 cup gin  
1 cup brandy

6 eggs at least. More if you wish.

Simply mix everything up together until smooth. The drink will be thicker, if you use only egg yolks. It is also best stored in the refrigerator.



## YOUTHHAVEN'S

### NATIONAL CHAMPION

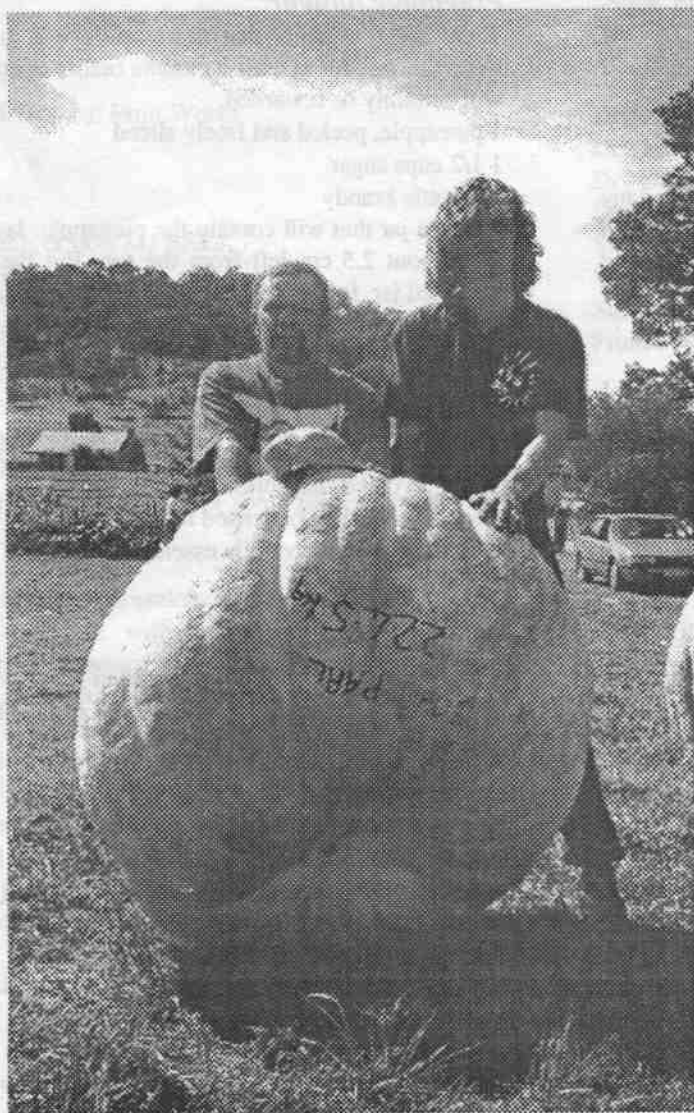
### IN GIANT PUMPKIN COMPETITION

By John Brummell

John Paal of Youthhaven Horticulture Project in North Kambah has won the National Giant Pumpkin Competition for 1996. His 224.5 kilo entry won the ACT section and then beat Western Australia's entry of 208 kilos to win first place in the Australian interstate competition. Another success for organic growers!

John has been a grower at Youthhaven for three years and pampered his vine with liquid comfrey, maxicrop and other organic fertilisers.

A large contingent of COGS members visited the Horticulture Project on the afternoon of Saturday 2nd March and were impressed by what has been achieved there by growers....in addition to big pumpkins!!



*National pumpkin growing champion John Paal (right) with fellow Youthhaven Horticulture grower David Lambert, with John's almost quarter ton of pumpkin.*

# MITCHELL GARDEN UPDATE:

By John Tuxworth

Dear Members/Supporters,

This is an update on our progress towards establishing our Mitchell Garden.

## MEETING SUNDAY 16th JUNE AT 10am (SEE MAP)

To date we have:

- \* Received approval for the new site at Mitchell
- \* Stockpiled manure and soil at adjacent Parks & Gardens site
- \* Arranged for quote to install water meter and run water supply to site
- \* Received COGS approval to transfer Watson garden materials (shed, tools, taps, etc) to Mitchell
- \* Produced a garden design for the Mitchell site
- \* Promoted the new garden at the Canberra Show as part of the COGS stall. This resulted in new members/supporters.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

Progress has been steady since our last meeting at the site in February. We met with the Dept of Urban Services on Friday 19th April. The purpose of the meeting was to talk about our move from Watson to Mitchell. They had directed that we vacate the site by end of July 1996. They had also undertaken, in writing, to assist us in cash or kind with the move.

At our meeting the manager failed to appear and we spoke to a subordinate, in charge of Land Sales. He immediately made it clear that we would receive no financial or in kind assistance from Urban Services.

He did however promise to write to Sport & Recreation in support of our Grant Application. This application will be forwarded by COGS on our behalf some time in June. The Grant monies do not become available until December 1996, assuming our application is successful.

He also agreed to write to his colleague at Parks and Gardens to urge them to assist us where possible with our move to Mitchell.

The future of our Garden depends very much on us. We can expect only minor support from the ACT Government.

### THE VIABILITY OF MITCHELL WILL BE DISCUSSED AT THE MEETING, ON SITE ON 16th JUNE

Agenda items will include:

- \* How we will fund the move
- \* Fencing and water supply costs
- \* Number of active members

Please be there if you want the Mitchell Garden to become a reality.

Names and contact numbers of Steering Committee Members follow:

John Tuxworth 2575441

Anna Perkins 2472710

Ross Annels 2489224

Jo Hammond 2576315



## COGS joins ORGAA

by Michelle Johnson

At a recent committee meeting the decision was made that COGS would take out regional group membership with ORGAA (The Organic Retailers & Growers Association of Australia, Inc.).

We were considering joining ORGAA after becoming familiar with the work it has done previously - its newsletter, packages and the Organic Advisory Service. The arrival of a letter from Chris Alenson, the President of ORGAA (*see reprint opposite*) provided the catalyst for us to make the decision to join.

In the letter, ORGAA asks us to consider regional group membership of ORGAA so that we could, in particular, show our support for their proposal to become the national umbrella organisation for the organic/biodynamic industry in Australia.

COGS has long held that we have an obligation to support the whole organic industry, although this support is most often expressed through involvement with local issues. Unification seems essential if the industry is to expand and make its voice heard. The committee therefore felt we could indeed give our support to ORGAA through regional group membership.

We were also conscious of the need to look at the benefits which would come directly to COGS members (see list below of benefits). We were interested in receiving ORGAA's publication "Organic Farmer" and having access to their information packages and papers.

We were very interested, however, in the access by members to the Organic Advisory Service (OAS), which will offer free advice to members on matters pertaining to organic growing. Please note however that if the OAS sends information to a member the member would be required to cover the costs associated with the request. The advice, for example, could be an interpretation of the results of soil analysis carried out on the farm or garden. The OAS can be contacted at the address and telephone number given on the letter from Chris Alenson (opposite). If necessary a member can ring Chris directly on 059 683 040 - **but only after 8pm** -.

This will prove a very useful contact for both the COGS committee and individual members.

### BENEFITS OF REGIONAL GROUP MEMBERSHIP OF ORGAA

- \* Membership Certificate
- \* Certification Information sheet
- \* ORGAA membership list
- \* Industry contacts & ORGAA Committee
- \* Latest Organic Farmer Magazine
- \*\* Access by your members to the services of the Organic Advisory Service
  - \* What can OAS do for you
  - A six page brochure outlining the work of OAS
- \*\* Organic Advisory Service Update (contents list of journals and papers received by OAS)
  - \* Conversion to Organic Farming - an introduction
  - \* List of OAS information packages available
  - \* Collection of key papers relevant to organic farming
  - \* Latest newsletter
  - \* ORGAA Business plan
  - \* Book List
  - \* Soil Analysis information sheet
  - \* Organic Farming - recommended book references
  - \* List of inputs allowed under the National Standards
  - \* List of allowable pest controls
  - \* WWOOF Brochure

ORGANIC RETAILERS &  
GROWERS ASSOCIATION  
OF AUSTRALIA INC.  
PO BOX 12852,  
A'BECKETT STREET POST OFFICE  
MELBOURNE 3000  
TEL (03) 386 2999

**Subject: Unification of Organic Industry in Australia**

Dear Friends,

It is clear to all connected with the organic/biodynamic industry that the division that has kept it fragmented for over a decade or more has been to its detriment. For too long it has been unable to stand up for its rights against the more conventional agricultural industry and Federal and State governments that continue to grant us only "lip service".

At a consumer level it has been extremely difficult to effectively market produce with the number of certification logos and levels that currently exist.

ORGAA believes it is time that we stripped ourselves of whatever motivations might have kept the industry divided, and ask ourselves do we really want a united, vibrant industry? One that offers growers and marketer's alike, the opportunity to derive their income from ecologically based production systems while producing safe and nutritious food and fibre for our consumers? To answer anything but yes to this question would seem almost unthinkable.

Last year ORGAA wrote to all certification bodies suggesting that ORGAA might be in a position to fill the role of umbrella organisation due to its cross industry involvement and the fact that it did not compete in the area of farm certification. To date ORGAA has received positive support from NASAA, TOP (Tasmanian Organic Producers), and many regional groups around Australia.

One of ORGAA's key objectives has been the unification of the organic/biodynamic industry in Australia. The committee believes that ORGAA can fill this role.

For one reason or another previous attempts have failed to create this umbrella organisation and ORGAA has always believed that for the umbrella organisation to be floated successfully it must have the total support of the industry without egos or self interest distracting the overall aim of unification.

ORGAA's mission has been, and continues to be, the development and promotion of the organic/biodynamic industry in Australia. We have always worked well with all organisations and promoted the industry as a whole and not just a particular organisation.

ORGAA's membership consists of growers, retailers, wholesalers, consumers and regional organic groups. Three sub committees presently manage these sectors to ensure that their interests are adequately catered for.

ORGAA believes that it will be possible to accommodate certification bodies in the fourth sub committee thereby ensuring that all accredited certification bodies retained their autonomy and represented the interests of their own membership.

ORGAA is an incorporated body and has been operating for the benefit of the industry for ten years. It offers its membership a wide variety of benefits from newsletters to grower technical support and a Retail Trading Scheme.

**A Plea for your support**

ORGAA will do everything in its power to represent the interests of the entire industry. Every suggestion as to how we might better promote and develop the industry will be listened to with genuine interest and concern.

The organic industry has lost many opportunities for development over the last ten years. Have we the will and the purpose to push organic agriculture forward with a united front for the benefits of all Australians?

**What Can Your Group Do?**

If your group believes like we do that the unification of the industry is absolutely essential, then please show your support for this initiative by contacting ORGAA and by joining our association as a regional member. The benefits to your group and your members is outlined on the enclosed membership letter.

ORGAA will publicise the groups in Acres Australia that are supporting this move thereby putting pressure on the remaining certification organisations to get behind the unification of the organic industry in Australia.

If you would like to speak to me to discuss this initiative further please contact me on (059) 683 040 after 8pm..

We have already wasted too many years and many opportunities have been lost to advance the industry. If your group is in agreement then please contact ORGAA as soon as possible.

ORGAA looks forward to your response and your support.

Yours Sincerely,

CJ Alenson

PRESIDENT, ORGANIC RETAILERS & GROWERS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

# Wwoof INTRODUCES MAJOR CHANGES

by Lionel Pollard

Hand in hand with the growth in usage of the existing Wwoof network by the backpacker fraternity have come many requests from backpackers who would like to visit places which are not farms, and some enquiries from potential hosts who are NOT ORGANIC growers, maybe not even GROWERS at all.

Wwoof has created a new list, aimed at those people who are seeking something different. A recent report about backpacking put out by the Australian Tourist Commission claims that backpackers are seeking, among other things, contact with friendly people, exciting places to visit, unspoilt scenery, natural wonders, good value for money, different lifestyles, and many Wwoof hosts already provide or have ready access to most of these things. In terms of their activities, backpackers want to meet some real locals, explore the countryside, attend local fairs and festivals, see the wildlife, watch a sunset, and take pictures. Many of these things are already a part of a Wwoof itinerary, but the organisers feel that they can broaden the experience of backpackers by enlarging the list of hosts on offer, and have a wider range of hosts sharing the benefits.

In creating this new list, the aim is firstly to continue the established Wwoof pattern of offering food and accommodation in exchange for some work. Secondly it is to offer Wwoofers a wider range of choices - so they can satisfy the preferences stated above more fully. A final aim is to be able to improve the organic list which provides the training ground which Wwoof is identified with.

## THE NEW ACELIST

The new list is Wwoof's Australian Cultural Experience - the ACE list. The old list will be known as the OZ list, and will contain only Organic growers. Hosts may be listed in the ACElist if they are keen to share in cultural exchanges with travellers, but will have to identify as Organically committed to get into the OZList. Thus Wwoofers who wish to learn more about organics, biodynamics or Permaculture above all else will need to use OZList, while those for whom the cultural exchange and holiday atmosphere is more important will choose the new ACElist. In its early stages the ACElist will not be much different from the OZList, but as the word gets around no doubt the new list will grow just as the original Wwoof list did.

Invitations are being sent out to past enquirers as it is felt many did not join because they did not measure up as

Organic Farms. Well now it won't matter. But additionally Wwoof is appealing for new hosts who may never considered joining before - people who may not be farmers at all, or who may farm but not organically. People who run a small business from home such as a nursery, writer, mail order, advisory, guest house, or whatever. If you have a need for odd jobs to be done, around the house or garden of even within your business, why not consider taking a Wwoofer. If you enjoy the company of other people, like talking about other countries and cultures, and like talking about yourself (who doesn't?), and have some space for a visitor to sleep, then there is no better way of getting those odd jobs done than by taking in a Wwoofer.

## THE PRACTICALITIES

Wwoofers expect to stay a minimum of two nights, but the maximum is as agreed between you. They are expected to contact you (most usually by phone) before coming, and you have control over who, when and for how long. You may need to be able to pick them up from a nearby bus, train or tram terminal, but many have their own transport. Indoor accommodation is most usual, but provision of a cabin of small house (the one you lived in before you built this one), whether as family of self contained, would be fine, and space to use their own camper van, caravan or tent is all some need. 4-6 hours work is seen as fair exchange for a days keep, varied according to the type of accommodation, the seasonal workload, etc. Food would be expected for the s/c situation, but any condition you wish to put in is acceptable as long as it is in the listing. For your small subscription you will be listed in either or both lists until the end of next full calendar year, get a copy of a list, and get Wwoof's 6 monthly newsletter.

Accuracy in listing is one of Wwoof's main requirements. There is nothing worse for a Wwoofer than to arrive at a hosts place and find that things are not as described in the list. There was one host who wants to charge Wwoofers a few dollars towards their keep, and, while this is not to be encouraged (it seems a bit too much like bed and breakfast) it is accepted because it is in the list. The main point is that information is provided so Wwoofers can make a choice, so they may feel reasonably confident in what to expect before travelling the miles to your place.

If you want more information on becoming a host, please write to Wwoof, Buchan, Vic 3885. Please mention this magazine when you do. The subscription rate for a host is \$20, while for Wwoofers it is single \$25, and couples \$30, (this includes our accident insurance).



### Asparagus

Prepare your bed before you buy the crowns to plant late Winter - early Spring. Since this is a perennial which can last for up to 20 years it is well worth the effort of establishing properly. It needs good drainage and can be planted very successfully in a raised bed. It likes compost and well rotted manure. Seaweed is an excellent mulch.

The crowns are planted in a trench, but with the roots straddling a ridge. Cover so dormant shoots are about 4cm below surface.

Do not harvest spears the first year, and only harvest for a few weeks the second year. Remember this is a longterm investment!

### Broad Beans

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

### Kohlrabi

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

### Lettuce

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

### Onions

Mid season varieties are often sown late Autumn early Winter and longkeeping varieties in Winter.

## WINTER VEGETABLE PLANTING GUIDE

|             | JUN | JUL | AUG |
|-------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Asparagus   |     | T   | ST  |
| Broad Beans | S   |     |     |
| Kohlrabi    |     |     | S   |
| Lettuce     |     |     | S   |
| Onions*     | ST  | S   | S   |
| Peas        |     |     | S   |
| Rhubarb     |     |     | T   |
| Silverbeet  |     |     | S   |
| Spinach     |     |     | S   |

**S = Seed Sowing**

**T = Transplanting**

NB 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. The microclimate of your garden will also influence the times when you plant.

### OTHER POSSIBILITIES

Growers may wish to start a number of crops in late winter rather than early Spring if the winter is mild or if they have a sheltered garden bed. Such crops include Artichokes (Globe and Jerusalem), Beetroot, Cabbage, Carrots, Potatoes and Radish.

Frost-sensitive vegetables such as Capsicum, Eggplant and Tomatoes can be started early in August but may need a heated glasshouse or warm spot to germinate and will almost certainly need protection when planted out.

*Don't forget the soft fruits!*

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

strawberries:- plant certified stock or propagate from runners (not from plants more than 2 years old however) in a soil enriched with compost or well rotted manure. On old plants remove the old leaves and burn or throw them in the garbage in case they are infected with a virus.

### Berries:

raspberries, youngberries etc can be planted and old canes removed. Remember these bear fruit on canes grown in the previous year only.

Currants:- These are easy bushes to grow in Canberra as they withstand very cold weather and don't mind heavy clay soil. They produce a fruit rarely available commercially. They need to be pruned in winter to remove dead wood and allow for good air circulation.

Gooseberries:- Like similar conditions to currants.

However, the timing of mid or late season varieties is well worth experimenting with by making successive plantings to determine the best time in your specific locality.

### Peas

The yield from peas planted in August could be diminished if there are severe late frosts affecting the blossom.

### Rhubarb

This is a perennial, but plants generally only produce well for a few years, and then fresh plants need to be started from subdivided crowns planted late winter or early spring.

It is very hardy, but it is a gross feeder.

# COGS NOTICEBOARD

## MAY GENERAL MEETING:

Tuesday, May 28th, at 7.30pm in Room 4, Griffin Centre.

The speaker will be **Tony Bray** who will speak on "The Great Conversion", where he will tell us about his change to organic gardening. Tony is well known for his promotion of the Giant Pumpkin Competition in the ACT each year.

The library, book sales and produce table will be available.

Could anyone run the supper for the evening? If you can please ring Geoff Foster on 238 1109.

JUNE MEETING; Speaker Richard Odell on Organic/Biodynamic Meat (Title TBA)

JULY MEETING; Speaker Jeremy Wilson on Biodynamics (Title TBA)

**Next Committee Meeting:** Tuesday, 18th June at 7.30pm at the Environment Centre.

**Mulchers:** These are available for use by COGS members.

Ring John Ross 241 4063 - Northside and Bungendore and

Richard Blyton 231 6219 - Southside

## ORGANIC FARMING COURSE AT CIT:

Increased interest in organic farming has created the need in this region for a comprehensive course in the philosophy and techniques of organic farming. In response to this need the Faculty of Applied Science in the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) will offer a Certificate Course in "Organic Farming", commencing in Semester 2, 1996 and taking 3 semesters of part-time study to complete. The course focuses jointly on the development of the **technical skills** and knowledge required to operate a farm and on the **management skills** necessary to devise a whole-farm management program. The farm management program takes into account both sustainability issues and the enhancement of the profitability of the farm.

The topics covered will include:

- \* Organic farming principles
- \* Ecology of organic farming
- \* Soil ecology for organic farming
- \* Managing plants organically
- \* Managing animals organically
- \* Organic farming conversion
- \* Enhancing profitability of organic farms
- \* Managing organic farms

Teachers for the course will be drawn from staff in the Faculty of Applied Science at CIT as well as from those with direct practical experience as organic farmers. The course has the endorsement and support of the Canberra Organic Growers and will feature visits to organic farms in the region. CIT is currently exploring different delivery options to ensure that the course will be available to as wide a range of clients as possible. It is anticipated that the course will run with a small group of between fifteen to twenty to ensure individual attention for all clients.

**If you are interested in more information on this course, please contact Lyn Gallimore, Head of the Department of Animal and Rural Studies on 207 4139.**

## A plea from the Membership Secretary...

Over the past 12 months, I have had to send out about 150 membership renewal reminders. This consumes a lot of my time and has also consumed nearly \$70 in members funds on postage. These costs would be saved if members would PLEASE check the label on COGS Quarterly and Flier publications for an annual subscription reminder and try to pay before the due date. Two reminders are given, two months and one month before membership expires.

Thank you.

John Allen

Membership Secretary