

Canberra organic

**Community Gardens
funding boost**

A big worm count

**Community gardening —
history and benefits**

El Niño alert continues



The quarterly publication of the Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.

COGS respectfully acknowledges the traditional owners, the Ngunnawal people, and other Indigenous people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region, as the custodians of the land on which we grow, and pay our respects to the Elders, past, present and emerging.

I hope that, as you read this, spring will have truly sprung. It seemed to me to be a tough winter just past. We had a succession of minus 5 degree mornings in mid July that had even the hardiest brassicas looking askance. But then again I recall sitting on the verandah on 30 July in glorious sun with the ambient temperature at 20 degrees.

What sort of conditions can we look forward to this spring and summer? The last growing season was certainly strange: a wet and cold late winter and early spring put the brakes on growth and development, and it took until well into autumn for some crops to mature, if they managed to make it at all. Local gardening guru Jackie French wrote in her *Canberra Times* column in late June that she was 'Staring amazed at the cherry tomatoes outside my study window – the bushes are still unfazed by winter temperatures, and still giving a few blooms, though only four or five ripe fruit a week'. My own experience with variety Tommy Toe was similar. The times they are a-changin', no question. When did we last have a killer frost on Melbourne Cup Day, traditionally the earliest safe day for planting out tomato seedlings?

Looking ahead, Andy informs us in his regular weather report on page 24 of this issue that the Bureau



of Meteorology is forecasting an increased likelihood of an El Niño event this spring and summer. If that transpires it means hotter weather and less rain, and an increased challenge to all community gardeners. We need to be prepared, resilient, adaptable and making rational use of the resources available to us, the most important of which are soil and water, not forgetting effort and ingenuity.

Live in each season as it passes; breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influence of the earth.

From *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau (1817–62)

Keep building-up soil organic matter; it aids water retention and percolation,

as well as providing plant nutrients. The number of worms you turn over is a good indicator of how your plot is fairing organic-wise. To dig deeper on this, see Peter White's rigorous investigative report on pages 6 and 7.

Use mulches; on the one hand, they keep the soil surface open for water infiltration and, on the other, reduce evaporation. For your hose end, get a high-volume, soft spray watering wand, and water the ground, not the plant. While your plants may appreciate being nice and clean, their roots would be even more appreciative of the water. And don't forget the humble watering can, still probably the best means of measured, targeted irrigation ... its use gives you some exercise too.

Thank you to all contributors to this issue of *Canberra Organic*. Despite it being the quietest time of the year for gardeners, the response was hearty, yielding information of all-round interest. Elizabeth Dangerfield's account of the history and benefits of community gardening, for example, is full of enlightenment. I especially asked for information on tomatoes, that most popular of summer crops, and received more than there is space for here. The carryover will still be topical in the summer issue.

Read on!
Ed Highley

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FRONT COVER: Erindale Community Garden convenor Didi Sommer flies the *Canberra Organic* flag with Minister Vassarotti at the launch of Grow It Local.
Photo: Linda Booth

Welcome to the Spring edition of *Canberra Organic*. Spring is always an exciting time in Canberra as gardens come back to life, with daffodils and jonquils blooming and various wattles across Canberra out in force.

It is also a great time to be working your plot at a COGS garden or your vegie patch at home to get ready for your spring and summer plantings. All indications are it is going to be a warmer and dryer summer, so it is time to think about providing appropriate wind and sun protection for your plants, including mulch, and ensuring you have suitable watering regimes at your garden.

Spring is when our membership year begins, and you should all have received your invoices in early August. Thank you to all those who have already paid, and I encourage the rest of you to pay as soon as you can. The money we raise from membership and plot fees goes towards maintaining our gardens, to pay for our water consumption and our administration, and to pay for the production of this high-quality *Canberra Organic* magazine.

Spring is also the time for our Annual General Meetings (AGMs) at each of our 12 community gardens, with all the AGMs to be held during the month of September. The AGMs are an important time to come together as a garden community to reflect on the year just past, as well as to look to the year ahead. At the individual garden AGM both the convenor and the garden committee are elected by those present at the meeting or by proxy.

I ask each of you to consider putting your hand up either to fulfil one of these important roles or to help the convenor or committee in some other capacity. We simply can't function without our fabulous volunteers.

I will be stepping down as convenor of the Holder Community Garden – a role I have performed for the past 3 years. Over that time the garden has gone through some ups



and downs (as do all the gardens), but I have found being convenor to be a rewarding experience. The lowest points were the two times the garden was broken into, and lawn mowers stolen. Another low, or more a frustration (which I am sure other convenors will relate to!), is the number of times I had to remind people to turn off the water and to lock the gate! High points have been investing in improvements to the garden, including replacing all our taps and risers, purchasing new tools (including replacement mowers!) and the installation of new entrance gates. Other high points were finding contacts in the ACT Government to enable semi-regular wood mulch

deliveries and the resurfacing of the gravel driveway outside our gates.

The biggest high though has been meeting new people, from the very experienced long-term gardeners to the young and eager to learn. Talking to your fellow gardeners and sharing knowledge is perhaps one of the greatest strengths of the COGS gardens. As a relatively new vegetable grower, these conversations have been, to me, an invaluable learning experience. I found there is no such thing as a dumb question! I encourage each of you to strike up a conversation with your neighbouring gardeners and find out what they are growing, what works and what doesn't at your garden, or to see if your neighbour needs a helping hand.

Holder garden has had several very enjoyable social gatherings after working bees, with people going to lots of effort to make some delicious food, mostly from our lovely organic produce. Whether it is having conversations with your fellow gardeners or a social gathering at the garden this all helps to put a sense of community into your community garden.

Please consider getting more involved in the running of your local COGS garden. Enjoy the warmer weather.

Neil Williams



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

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

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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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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.

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COGS Life Membership

Do you know of any COGS member whose contributions to the society warrant their elevation to honorary life membership?

If so, now is the time to nominate them.

See page 10 for assessment criteria and other details.



Photo: Mike Gisick

Garden convenors covene

A meeting of COGS community garden convenors was held on Saturday 17 June at the Cook Community Garden. After a pause in face-to-face meetings in recent years, the gatherings are now back on track to be held twice yearly. The meetings give convenors the opportunity to discuss issues common to the 12 COGS gardens and to seek colleagues' advice on other matters relating to their roles. The convenors are a stalwart lot so, despite the chilly weather, most gardens were represented at the meeting. Discussion was led by Jo McMillan, COGS Gardens Coordinator, with the agenda covering items including the Convenors Information Kit, preparation for the upcoming COGS membership and plot fee renewal period, plot edging, garden security, and safety issues.

A new support player

There's a new kid on the block. At an event held at City Farm in June, ACT Minister for the Environment, Rebecca Vassarotti, announced that the ACT Government had signed a partnership with Grow It Local for two years.

Grow It Local (GIL) is an organisation whose aims and aspirations are in the same general field as those of COGS. It started in Sydney but now operates Australia-wide and is a year-round program for supporting councils and communities in meeting their aims in areas such as reducing food waste, climate change resilience, and health and wellbeing. Its overall mission is to get more people growing, sharing and eating locally grown foods. You can read all about GIL's many activities and join its free network at www.growitlocal.com.



Convenors of the Charnwood, Cook, Crace, Erindale, Kaleen, Kambah, Mitchell, Oaks Estate and O'Connor COGS gardens at their 17 June meeting. Photo: Debbie-Jo Dutton.

Community Gardens funding boost

Of more direct interest to COGS members will be the announcement, at the GIL launch event in June, that the ACT Government will boost funding from \$40,000 to \$100,000 for the next round of Community Garden Grants. Funding of up to \$10,000 per project is available to improve existing gardens or to establish small new ones, and up to \$20,000 to create new, large-scale food production community gardens

or for significant infrastructure. Several COGS gardens have benefitted from the grants over the years – the most recent one being the raised garden beds at Charnwood which featured as the cover story in the 2023 Winter edition of *Canberra Organic*. Your garden convenor/s can help with the details. Grant applications close 7 September 2023. Don't forget that COGS also has funds to allocate to COGS Executive-approved community garden projects.

Ed Highley

Enriching soil carbon

The groups of volunteers who make up SEE Change (seechange.org.au) are working together on practical activities to create a more sustainable Canberra.

One of SEE Change's current projects is Roving Regenerators, which is "all about the importance of soil carbon in [mitigating] climate change and sharing some fun and easy things that we can do together to get more carbon back into local soils." They run educational events and working bees, centred around hands-on activities such as compost making.

Roving Regenerators ran a Community Garden Clean Up and Composting Talk event at the Holder COGS garden earlier this year, and is looking to hold similar events at other gardens. Further information is at seechange.org.au/rovingregen and, if your garden is interested in hosting an event, you can contact SEE Change at hello@seechange.org.au



Charnwood soil census reveals wealth of willing workers

Peter White and helpers dig deep and find a big, healthy and willing wormy workforce in his Charnwood Community Garden plot.

Did you ever stop to think when you are forking away in your COGS plot or backyard veggie patch, that it is a bit of a lonely task, that you could sometimes do with a bit of help and that your efforts are under-appreciated? Well, think about this. Beneath your feet you do actually have thousands of willing and uncomplaining workers, all toiling 24/7 to help you achieve bountiful beans, perfect pumpkins and tasty tomatoes.

I'm writing, of course, about earthworms, which are providing us with free and uncomplaining labour to enrich the raw material (soil) that provides us all with a bountiful harvest. With a little help from the COGS database, the Charnwood garden statistician has calculated that the 536 COGS members manage approximately 8 million of these willing workers toiling away under their feet, in plots and backyard veggie gardens

We all recognise the benefits to our garden of using worm castings and worm juice (liquid castings) and many of us have our own backyard worm farms. *Canberra Organic* has published, in recent times, two useful practical articles on backyard worm farming which you can readily refer to. Look at the articles in the Winter 2021 and the Spring 2022 issues on the COGS website at www.cogs.asn.au for good advice.

But while worm farms are great and, as a lazy gardener, I have always thought that nothing beats having lots of worms in the veggie garden soil, diligently working away for no effort on my part, in a moment of contemplation I did think that maybe I should be a bit more proactive and give a little more attention to my



Earthworms, 'free and uncomplaining labour', enriching soil. Photo: Peter White

wormy workforce. The answers to a few questions that came to mind follow.

Does my plot have a good complement of worms?

The only way to know for sure is to roughly count them. So I did.

How did I count my worms?

With a couple of conscripted youngsters we dug out 20 by 20 by 20 cm holes in several places in my Charnwood plot, spread the soil on a sheet and counted the worms. Deeper than 20 cm was stony subsoil, so this spade depth was sufficient to sample the deepest worms. Multiplying the number in a hole by 25 gives an estimated count of worms per square metre. The count for a number of areas gives you an idea of any variability in the worm population across the plot. My labourers were very impressed when I calculated that there were an estimated 36,000 worms working away below their feet in my plot!

How many worms should you have in your veggie plot?

How long is a piece of string? Experts suggest that 100 worms per square metre is not good, whereas around

500 per square metre is what you might find in good, fertile and moist pasture. I found an estimated average of 750 worms per square metre across my plot, with well over 1,000 in some places. Seems a lot? Well, no, I think that is a minimum number to aim for. This number is far lower than you will have in your home worm farm or a well-finished compost heap. Indeed, my labourers were getting bored finding only one worm every five minutes, but lots of other bugs found were exciting and educational for the kids too.

Lessons from the experiment?

I identified some parts of my plot that are underpopulated with wriggly workers and I can now focus on increasing the worm population by adding more manure and compost, particularly in those spots.

Is it possible to have too many worms?

In theory yes, but in practice I am not going to worry about that happening.

Can you use worms which are marketed for use in worm farms in your garden plot?

The short answer is no. The ones sold for worm farms are mainly red

wrigglers, tigers and Indian blues, which are selected for that specific job but are not well adapted to backyard or COGS vegie plots. I find that my normal compost heaps, when ready for use, are chock-a-block with garden earthworms that have just migrated from the surrounding soil and multiplied. I also leave some worm-filled compost to use at the base of a new compost heap, to start it off. You can easily grow your own worms by heaping a pile of manure on some open ground or grass, keeping it quite moist and covered. Build it and they will come.

Wormy hints

Following the '3 Ms' – Moisture, Manure and Mulch – will keep your worms happy and reproductive and, of course, it could remain unstated that we all use compost. My wormy friends would also like to remind you that they hate spades and much prefer garden forks, if you must dig up their home.



Soil sampling for the great Charnwood earthworm census. Photo: Peter White



georgia's column

A quiz

Hello everyone, it's Georgia here. This is my seventh article for Canberra Organic magazine (and my second as a columnist.)

I thought I would write about one of my favourite vegetables. Or is it a fruit? According to 'Dr Google', it is actually a fruit.

Can you guess what it is? I'll give you a few clues:

Its parent plant can grow to nearly 11 metres in height and the fruit itself was used as chewing gum by native Americans. It can be produced in various colours, including bluish-gray, purple, green, red, white and the most common, which is yellow.

If you answered "sweet corn", you would be correct. I wonder how many people got it right.

The tallest sweet corn plant on record measured 10.74 metres. There are about 800 kernels on each ear of corn.

Sweet corn is cross-pollinated by wind. That's why plants are usually grown close together: so even a light breeze can carry the pollen from the tassel at the top of the plant (the male part) to the cluster of silks (the female part) at the tip of the cob of a neighbouring plant.

An ear of corn always has an even number of rows.

This year I'm going to try to grow some corn but haven't decided which variety I will grow. I hope I can harvest the corn before the cockatoos get to it. (I'll let you know what happens.)

[That corn can grow to over 10 metres tall is truly 'amaizeing', Georgia. Ed.]

Erindale: a garden thriving on community

COGS Erindale Community Garden convenor **Didi Sommer** reviews a busy year just past, paying special tribute to its volunteers.

I feel very privileged and enjoy being convenor at our garden. I am indeed fortunate to be supported by and be part of a dedicated and enthusiastic group of plot holders (Linda, Anne-Marie, Young Ja and Markus) backed up by a team of enthusiastic volunteers.

Our volunteers – Claudia, Rodolfo, Mayra, Susan, Peter and Susana – are very much valued garden team members. Some can contribute a few hours per month for garden maintenance and odd jobs, others work on specific projects as needed (a special thanks to Rodolfo) and others volunteer many hours (a special thanks to Peter). Carlo, our newest volunteer member, spontaneously offered his time, car and trailer to collect a six-burner BBQ that was donated to us by Claudia.

I think I can speak for all of us when I say that we enjoy coming to our community garden, getting to know each other, sharing our gardening experiences, our successes and failures, and learning new skills. Even the most “boring” tasks can be fun when done with one or two others and we usually laugh a lot too.

Shelter from the storm

Our new shelter area that was sponsored by COGS Executive as part of the Infrastructure review has brought big benefits to our garden community. We had to give up a plot for the shelter area but it was definitely worth it. We now have a safe place to shelter from the sun or rain and to sit and relax and have a yarn.

We salvaged some second-hand chairs that were being thrown out. Susan worked wonders cleaning these up and we now have enough chairs for all of us. Markus and I recently



Peter and Markus, resident engineers, building a new trellis. Photo: Didi Sommer.

collected a second-hand timber table and Peter and Linda did a grand job restoring and repairing it. It is a great addition for our shelter area and has enough height to be used as a table for potting-up. Claudia, Linda and I used it when transplanting some lavender plants that were donated to us at an event for World Bee Day at the Belgian Embassy.

‘Cross-pollinating’ activities

Our garden members have wide interests and, on occasion, attend outside events together, such as volunteering on an ACT for Bees stall. At Erindale we grow flowers, herbs and native plants to attract pollinators and beneficial insects to our garden.

We save all kinds of seeds at our community garden and enjoy sharing and exchanging seeds with the Canberra Seed Savers Cooperative (canberraseedsavers.org.au). As a project for the cooperative, Markus raised a specific variety of dwarf tomato seedlings for our garden, the aim being to make this variety more widely available to the Canberra garden community. As mentioned elsewhere in this issue of *Canberra Organic*, last summer was cooler and wetter than usual, and we didn’t get the results that we had hoped for. But, we’ll be trying again this coming summer.

Linda and I recently attended a very interesting workshop on “Gardening in small spaces”, run by Fiona

around the COGS gardens

Buining of Ainslie Urban Farm and organised by Communities at Work (commsatwork.org). We will be visiting Fiona at her garden to see her greenhouses and get tips and advice. We would very much like to have a greenhouse at our Erindale Community garden so we can grow more of our own seedlings, learn new skills, have more success with growing heat-loving plants, extend the growing season, and protect frost-sensitive plants during the cooler months.

Prolific, popular, parsnips

A notable success at our garden over the summer and autumn were the self-sown parsnips seedlings from our own plants. They were plentiful, and sweet and tasty. All our garden members harvested these delicious parsnips over many months and we are still harvesting the last ones. The story goes that frost makes parsnips especially sweet. Well, ours have been so sweet all these months already and no trace of woodiness.



Markus planting beans and cucumbers. Photo: Didi Sommer.

About Linda

Didi reports that Linda joined the Erindale Community Garden as a plot holder in October 2022, and that she has quickly become a much-valued member of the garden team. During her first summer in the garden, Linda has grown an abundance of zucchinis, beetroot, corn and tromboncini, sharing them freely.



For her part, Linda says that she has enjoyed a warm welcome as a new COGS member at the Erindale Community Garden, adding:

I love gardening, but only have a small area of garden to work with because I live in a unit, so was very happy when a plot became available at Erindale! On inspecting my new plot, I dug out some Jerusalem Artichokes. I quickly made a delicious Jerusalem Artichoke soup [see recipe on page 22]. I also love nature photography and macro photography. I couldn't resist taking photos of the bees, plants and insects enjoying our lavender and other flowering plants.

Photo: Linda Booth

Communal plots a drawcard

Most of our volunteer members enjoy the opportunity to participate with growing, planting and harvesting at our three communal plots and they enjoy picking the blackberries and raspberries that we grow on a communal berry patch. Some have time to join in with collecting autumn leaves while others engage in seed-saving activities, repotting plants ... and weeding – even that can turn into light work when done as a group.

Bright prospects

We are now looking forward to celebrating the end of winter and the beginning of spring.

With several keen and accomplished cooks among our garden members, we can look forward to a variety of dishes cooked up at our BBQ, including freshly harvested fruit and

(continued on following page)

(from previous page)

vegies from our garden. The BBQ comes complete with a wok burner. So we can even do a “paddock to plate” cook-up on it. There are no food miles involved with that and it is all healthy and fresh.

What a treat and how lucky we are to have access to our much loved community garden at Erindale and form friendships while gardening there together and enjoying the plentiful harvest.

About Rodolfo

Rodolfo, one of our much valued volunteers, is retired and a man of many talents. We are very appreciative that we can call on him for special projects. Rodolfo spent many hours

Under cover, the garden's Warrigal Greens survived right into winter.
Photo by Didi Sommer.



removing the unwanted nails from the donated second-hand timber decking panels that we currently use as flooring for our shelter. Rodolfo and Markus built a sturdy trellis for one of our community plots. They are both engineers, so this trellis is of A1 construction. Rodolfo changed all our water taps to ones that are easier to turn on and off, and erected timber pillars and holders for safe storage of our hoses so we can keep them off the paths when not in use. He also installed the two water tanks (300 L each) that collect rain water from the roof of our new shelter. The rain water is wonderful for our seedlings and we have already collected a goodly volume of it for our plants.

About Peter

Peter joined us last year as volunteer member after moving to Canberra to be closer to his daughter Anne-Marie and her family. Anne-Marie, who is a plot holder at our garden, introduced him. Peter is a handyman with many skills and a lot of experience. He gives a considerable of his time to projects at our garden. He keeps our garden paths in good order, clearing and mulching them and dealing with overhanging plants. Peter and



Linda's stunning early beetroot.
Photo by Didi Sommer.

Markus built another trellis on which we can grow cucumbers, pumpkins, peas and beans. We were rewarded with a plentiful harvest over many months.

Repair jobs are another forte for Peter and we are fortunate that he is a member of the local men's shed, with access to its tools and equipment. Peter also often helps with composting tasks and is happy to volunteer with bigger jobs that we couldn't manage otherwise, such as collecting, transporting and unloading at our garden large loads of compost and other materials from outside sources – labours of love!

COGS life membership: call for nominations

COGS life membership appointments celebrate the importance of volunteers to the society and the wider community, as well as recognising the considerable contributions of individuals. To date, more than 20 life members have been appointed (see list in members' area of the COGS website).

Life membership, provided for under the constitution, is an honour bestowed on members whose outstanding service and contributions to COGS have provided considerable benefit to the organisation over a long period. As a token of COGS appreciation, life members do not pay membership fees. They receive COGS magazine

gratis, but pay fees for garden plots they may have.

Nominations are assessed against the following criteria:

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

Written nominations can be made by financial members of COGS who should approach a committee member with information addressing the above criteria in support of

the proposed life member. The nomination form is available in the members' area of the COGS website. Only current financial members of COGS are eligible for life membership. The sponsoring committee member will ask the full committee to consider the nomination. Life membership awards will be announced at the 2024 AGM, and appointments, along with a summary of their contribution to COGS, published in *Canberra Organic*.

Life membership nominations for 2023 should be received by the COGS Secretary from the sponsoring committee member for discussion by the full committee before the end of October 2023.

One Kaleen community gardener's summer

A tale, in words and pictures, of the good life as an organic gardener, as told by Kaleen Community Garden's Richard Buker.

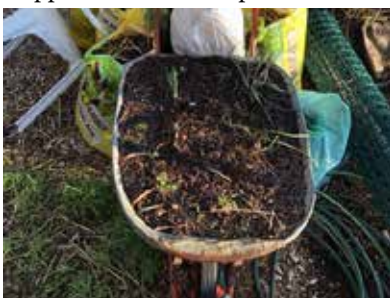
My season started with a plot renovation – new borders, weed exclusion and soil top-up followed by brewing up a hot compost heap for further soil improvement.



Annette helped me turn an abandoned and poorly producing plot into a productive pollinator garden ready for a new gardener this upcoming season.



Fiona, our garden convenor, led a working bee on Clean Up Australia Day in March. It resulted in a shed clean-up blitz and I scored an old wheelbarrow on its last legs. I hope that, after a bit of repair work, it can house a spring bulb display. The clean-up was kind of cleansing in another way, following as it did the break-in we had at the end of January when we lost our mowers, whipper-snippers and even the petrol can!



I helped Annette transport baled and loose straw from Alpaca Therapy in Giralang to the gardens. The straw was offered to plot holders, with all the proceeds going to Alpaca Therapy.



Countless hessian coffee bags, and kilos of coffee grounds and chaff have been supplied free of charge to several plot holders for soil improvement and weed suppression (see article on page 18).



Members of the Belconnen Garden Club and some CIT floristry students visited the garden during the year, and produce and flowers were shared. Much produce from several plots was shared with the St John's food pantry and the Belconnen Community Men's Shed. Annette did regular weekly runs to the food pantry at the peak of the season.



My carrot seeds sprouted poorly this year. All the old tricks of covering with hessian, a piece of wood and even a little sugar cane mulch produced poor rates of germination. Open sowing and watering twice daily seemed to work better. No pictures though – all too sad.

I'm a bit of a fungus tragic, so when Harriet's newly renovated plot started to smell like a dead possum, it could only be one thing – a Stinkhorn fungus!



I kept an eye out for friends in the garden.



Espalier: two-dimensional fruit production

At the Kambah Community Garden's June meeting, **Anna O'Halloran** shared her knowledge and experience in growing espaliered apples at the garden. *Espaliering is a technique that is ideally suited to smaller spaces such as community garden plots.*

* * *

An espalier¹ could be described as 'a plant trained to one plane'. This leaves open many possibilities in creative design. The plant could be grown against a wall, or on a trellis or some other form of framework. Limitations relate to the normal growth form (morphology) and genetic make-up of the plant. These can be intuited to an extent through observation but also researched from reliable sources (see *Further reading*).

¹ The term 'espalier' can apply to the trellis or framework on which a plant is grown or to a plant so trained. Ed.

So, the first step is to choose a suitable variety. There are many of them, including Cox's Orange Pippin and Braeburn, and a host of varieties that may not be so familiar. Note that Golden Delicious and Jonathan fruit on the ends of growth so are not suited to espaliering. Granny Smith is both tip and spur bearing and so can be used, but will be less productive than some other varieties.

Horticultural matters

Probably the most important thing to understand about plant growth in relation to pruning and training is *apical dominance*. This refers to the fact that the leading shoot (the apical meristem) enjoys a high concentration of auxins (growth hormones) that favour its growth to the detriment of other growth points at the ends of side branches and of smaller branches along its length. The lead shoot thus dominates in access to sunlight and so the tree

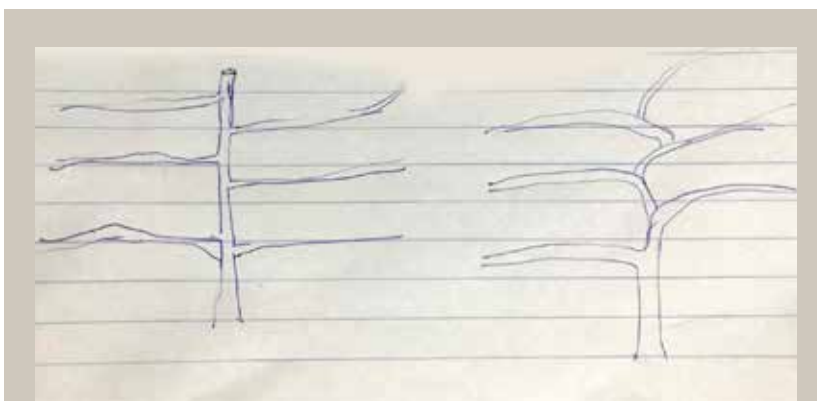
takes shape with a high point and lots of 'followers' in the lower branches. When we prune off this dominant shoot the other branches compete for dominance, sunlight being the key factor as to which wins. One outcome of all this is that there is a constant push for upward growth, which encourages foliage at the expense of flowers. Flowering on apples is encouraged by horizontal branching. So the aim of espalier is to manipulate the plant to keep producing flowers (and thus fruit) along the side branches and to curb upward growth (see *maintenance*).

Manipulating *light and shade*, especially letting in the sun to encourage flowering is critical. Espaliering is a way to maximise access to light and warmth by training into sunny spaces. If a side branch is too dense with leaves or overcrowded with old spurs, or too close to the branch above, thin out leaves and spurs. Don't let the top layer shade out the lower ones. Think about this and the local climate when you are positioning your espalier and don't let the top layer get too thick and dominant, which is what its hormones are wont to do.

Consider the *character of the plant* (its form and structure). Note the angle of attachment of branchlets. Where the leaves join there is usually a dormant bud. This is a potential growth point (hormones allowing). Plants have an innate signature. Learn to read growth patterns. Get a feel for the pliability, or otherwise, of branches.

Use of appropriate tools and practising *plant hygiene* are important when pruning. Make sure your tools are sharp and cut cleanly, and disinfect them with a cloth dipped in methylated spirits before use and when moving between plants.

Deciding when and where to make a cut is the major part of *maintenance* of an espalier. Ongoing pruning in the growing season is essential,



Two (of many) approaches to espalier

Horizontal Palmette

Prune out growing tip/leader to force side shoots which become the horizontal branches. Remove excess side shoots/branches. Tie down along training wires.

Zig Zag

Train from growing point/leader. Bend over to one side, tie down. A new shoot will develop from near the bend. Use this as new leader and when it's high enough, bend to opposite side to form another horizontal branch. A few side branches in between may need to be removed.



Vigorous upright growth is easily controlled with espalier. Shorten long shoots by half in summer, and prune back to one or two buds in winter. Photo: Ed Highley.

rather than just once a year in winter. After flower and fruit set, remove upward shoots several times through summer. You can decide to leave a few for future fruiting spurs but prune these back to two buds (leaves). Small shoots that appear in the 'wrong' places, such as along main trunk, can be 'rubbed off'. It is better to snap off any suckers from the root stock rather than to use loppers or secateurs.

Spurs form when branchlets are pruned just short of the branch – about two buds short. The stubby ends form spurs after about 2 years. The strategy is to fill the side branches ('arms') with these, spaced evenly, about 20 cm apart. Keep tying in extension growth of the side branches. It doesn't matter if they curl up a bit during the growing season. Tie them down when enough growth has been reached.

Don't be afraid to thin out the fruit as it is forming, so there is room for all to reach a good size. Note too that fruit that are touching are more likely to transmit diseases and pests such as the Codling Moth.

Construction of the espalier framework is more than a minor task. The uprights need to be firmly and immovably implanted – preferably concreted in for permanent sites. Star pickets can be used, but need to be inserted very deeply and/or braced to prevent movement in any direction. Wire of any type, such as clothes line wire, can be used for the horizontal runners (35–60 cm apart) but stainless steel with tensioners is best for a permanent structure. Chain link has been used as the links are convenient when using plant ties. The branches of the plant will firm up as they age but will need support when heavy with fruit. Sagging wires

can be replaced or re-tensioned during winter.

A branch can be trained by tying it to a bamboo splint and gently bending it as far as it will go. The extending growth will eventually run horizontally and can be fixed to a wire

Further reading

Varkulevicius, J. 2010. *Pruning for Flowers and Fruit*, CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Vic. [A complete guide. An electronic version can be purchased @ <https://ebooks.publish.csiro.au/content/pruning-flowers-and-fruit>.]

Brickell, C. and Joyce, D. 1996. *Pruning and Training*. Dorling Kindersley, UK (@ dk.com)

A good website for information is deepgreenpermaculture.com

The history and benefits of community gardening

Community gardening and the common good so arising have a long history. Crace Community Garden's Elizabeth Dangerfield tells their story here.

* * *

Gardening has deep roots. Gathering food from the wilderness was as important as hunting for most of the time we have lived on Earth because it was essential for survival. The detailed knowledge that indigenous people had of the plants in their areas helped them not only obtain food but also medicines and other useful products. Australian Aboriginal people tended their country to encourage particular plants such as the Yam Daisy; they transformed the landscape.

Ten thousand years ago, growing multiple plants in one area allowed people to settle down in one place, and villages and towns grew up

Gundaroo Common near Canberra, one of only a few proper commons in NSW, has been managed by a local Trust since 1870. Villagers can graze four cows on the common, originally so that they could have a milking cow and fresh milk.
Photo: Michael McFarlane

because of the success of gardening. Even so, many people continued to forage for wild plants to eat, and still do, despite the lure of the local shop or supermarkets. On the other side of the coin, gardens allowed people to escape from the harshness of the wilderness. Our word 'paradise' comes from a Persian word meaning 'enclosed park' or pleasure garden. This raises the issue of whether gardens should be a private or common good. In *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare's play, gardens are lauded as a common good when Mark Antony remarks about Caesar that in his will:

Moreover, he hath left you all his walks, his private arbors and new-planted orchards on this side of the Tiber; he hath left them you, and your heirs for ever; common pleasures, to walk abroad, and recreate yourselves.

— *Julius Caesar*, Act 3, Scene 2, at the Forum

So, even in Roman days, access to gardens may have been political.

In early England, access to gardens for growing food was particularly important when almost everyone

lived at a subsistence level. The use of land for gardening and keeping a few animals was essential for survival. In Anglo-Saxon times in Britain, ordinary people, 'commoners', were able to graze a few animals on commons set aside for that purpose and they were allotted plots of land to grow fruit and vegetables and maybe keep a few small animals such as hens. Allotments were usually around 50 m by 5 m.

In early England, access to gardens for growing food was particularly important when almost everyone lived at a subsistence level.

In the early Middle Ages, the feudal system resulted in the land around villages or manors being divided into strips. A 'fief' or section of land could be granted to common people for their temporary use if they became vassals. This was a mutually beneficial exchange, whereby the commoner, who owned no land, received the use of the fruits, or *usufruct*, in exchange for fealty to the lord. In fact, many grants of land usage became hereditary.

In the Middle Ages, land was usually owned by the nobility, with large areas of forests and woodland set aside for





© Can Stock Photo / Hannamariah

hunting of large and small game. Common people were excluded, with severe penalties for poaching. This caused much resentment as it altered the balance between the lord and his vassals. At the end of the 16th century, common land on estates started to be enclosed for the exclusive use of the landowner. This was devastating to tenants who relied on access to common land to scratch out a living. In Scotland tenants were forcibly removed from the laird's land during the clearances. People were replaced by sheep, and many were forced to emigrate.

At the end of the 16th century, common land on estates started to be enclosed for the exclusive use of the landowner.

This loss of rights went on for the next two centuries. The English Parliament recognised the cost this imposed on commoners by passing laws to compensate for the loss of common land. These specified that allotments of land should be attached to tenant cottages. In 1845 the *General Enclosure Act* made provision for field gardens to be set aside for the landless poor, a recognition of the importance of gardening in

providing sustenance to ordinary people, but not a lot happened as a result. Then the *Small Holding and Allotment Act 1907–1908* made it the responsibility of councils to provide allotments if there was a need.

Many of the old English laws to do with land, including those to do with commons and allotments, were incorporated into Australian law. In 1828, the laws of England were officially received as the laws of New South Wales. So, a number of towns and villages had commons set up under English law. The village of Gundaroo has a large common which was originally established to enable villagers to graze a milking cow but now enables village commoners to graze four head of cattle and provides a place for villagers to walk their dogs and ride their horses. Villagers can become commoners for a small fee.

In 1828, the laws of England were officially received as the laws of New South Wales. So, a number of towns and villages had commons set up under English law.

Many European countries had allotments available for people to rent at a very reasonable rate. In Australia, when the quarter-acre

block was the norm, most people grew vegetables and maybe fruit trees in their backyard and perhaps had a few chooks for eggs and eating. Of course, many people lived in apartments, but if they were lucky they could access community gardens which were being set up in a number of places along allotment lines.

One advantage of allotments is that you can share tools, tips and plants. In Crace, here in Canberra, the community garden was set up by the developers of the suburb and is run by the Canberra Organic Growers Society. Plot holders have different approaches to gardening, but it is wonderful to be in the company of people who love to get their hands dirty and nurture plants. Any excess produce is donated to a charity shop for distribution to those in need. Like many community gardens there is a waiting list for plots.

Community gardens give landless people the opportunity to grow their own food, especially in times of scarcity. But they also have many other benefits. They promote physical

(continued on following page)

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and mental health, socialising and community spirit. They also increase our awareness of where our food comes from, the importance of nurturing the earth and recognition that we are stewards of the land.

Community gardens give landless people the opportunity to grow their own food, especially in times of scarcity.

Many more people now are aware that we need to nourish the land and fight back against the destruction of the natural environment, both in the country and in our cities. By growing as much of our food as possible we can reduce our reliance on supermarkets and reduce waste and the miles the food has to travel, and therefore the energy expended, before it reaches our table. We also gain control over what we are eating and can grow our food with fewer chemicals than are usually used by large agricultural ventures. We can also grow a mixture of plants, so that our gardens are not a monoculture and encourage beneficial wildlife. When we get our produce home we can make meals from scratch and support the concept of *slow food*. And it should also make us ponder the value of gardens as a common good.

When you look around cities and towns there is often space that is abandoned, derelict or unused and which presents the opportunity to turn it into some sort of productive garden. Guerrilla gardeners are activists who take over empty public spaces to grow food in order to increase food security and increase the ability of the community to survive should things go wrong. The organisation *Growing Forward* is dedicated to setting up community gardens in underutilised public spaces, aiming to do free work for the community and providing free produce to vulnerable people.

A well-known venture using public land is Costa Georgiadis' verge garden. Nature strip or verge gardens can turn a boring area into something

productive and beautiful. People in the same street can come together to grow vegetables and fruit for distribution to people in need. Verge gardening is a shift from gardening as a private benefit to one of public gain. It also provides environmental benefits for birds and insects; and becoming more self-sufficient in food also helps the environment.



Pomegranates (photo by Ange McNeilly)

Nature strip or verge gardens can turn a boring area into something productive and beautiful.

The use of public and even private land, such as neglected or abandoned building sites, in this way, is based on the assertion or allocation of some sort of right according to Oliver Brown in the *Foragers' Year*, Sept. 22, 2012. This idea of rights over land that you do not own is related to the concept of *usufruct* – a mediaeval concept that has persisted.

Thomas Jefferson said in 1789 that “earth belongs, in usufruct, to the living”. Which Wikipedia takes to mean “that human beings have the right to use the earth for their own benefit and derive profit from it, but only to the extent that their actions do not impoverish the earth's bounty for future generations” – and I would add “for other living things”.

Usufruct is often used as a justification for foraging, guerrilla gardening and digging up the nature

strip. However, in more formal terms it means a system in which a person, or group of persons, can use real property, such as land, for their own use when they don't own the land. Their interest in the land needs to be sanctioned by the owner. Of course, if the owner of the land, such as the local council, does not approved of the venture things can be difficult

but more and more councils are valuing the social, health and environmental benefits of promoting community gardens.

... fundamentally, community gardens are based on the concept of equity – anyone should be able to grow their own food and all gardeners are equal.

Because community gardening is about using a resource you don't actually own but is provided for the public good I think community gardening should be about nurturing the soil, plants and beneficial insects. It should be a sharing with other plot holders, those who don't have access to fresh produce and also other living things. I think it should

also be the antithesis of rampant consumerism by being on the frugal side – for example, collecting seed, growing cuttings and seedlings, swapping plants with neighbours rather than going to the nursery and buying an expensive showy plant or patented seeds. It should be about growing a diverse range of plants and conserving old varieties of vegetables that don't make it to the supermarket shelves. It should be about sustainability in that, with proper management, you should be able to keep growing plants in your plot forever. And it should be about conservation by reducing the miles food is transported, reducing packaging, reducing food waste, and preserving excess food.

Of course gardening and eating homegrown food will improve your health. But, fundamentally, community gardens are based on the concept of equity – anyone should be able to grow their own food and all gardeners are equal.

Regenerative agriculture – lessons for community gardening

Geoff Pryor, avid experimentalist at Kambah Community Garden, outlines his online and on-ground investigations of regenerative agriculture and related concepts, and his own initial foray into practical application.

The title of an article in *The New Daily* in July this year – “Australian farmers ‘lead world’ in sustainable agriculture” – may have surprised many readers. The article reported, among other things, that Australian “growers were found to have a better nutrient balance on their land and make greater use of sustainable cropping practices such as no-till”.

This certainly surprised me, but the reference to no-till was of immediate interest. Because of my wonderful neighbouring plot managers, and despite their good-hearted ribbing, I am trying this approach on my plot at Kambah.

I started down this road because of an interest in regenerative agriculture. Australian farmers are very mixed about this term, as evidenced in an ABC News article (<https://ab.co/3O6j7rC>). Farming Professor Nick Gill, who has spent a career assessing the term and its evolution in Australia, defines it as a ‘... form of agriculture in which farmers go beyond seeking to be sustainable to regenerate agriculture ecosystems that have been adversely affected by agriculture in countries like Australia over long periods of time.’

The question in my mind is whether we as community organic gardeners ought not be trying harder to achieve the same sorts of land management outcomes as are being achieved in broad-acre farming. When it comes down to it, there are many community gardeners, and gardening in a regenerative manner might be very important for our community as a whole.



No-till! Photo: Ed Highley

My interest in the subject was further piqued by an article entitled ‘Is Regenerative Agriculture profit-able?’ (ecofarmingdaily.com). The article puts it nicely: ‘[The] increasing attention (on regenerative farming) has tended to emphasize the agronomic, operational, environmental, consumer and climate-level benefits, while the economic outcomes of transitioning to regenerative agriculture have garnered far less attention’ or, to put it another way, ‘if the economic outcomes don’t exist, we won’t be able to scale the transition to regenerative agriculture.’

The article concludes that, for farmers moving to regenerative farming, there is a likelihood of a less profitable interim during the transition but, after this, profitability will increase compared with traditional farming.

On the biological front, a comprehensive Oregon State University Extension Service article, ‘Understanding soil health and biota for farms and gardens’ (<https://bit.ly/46DIfNy>), notes that ‘Reduced-tillage or no-till systems and increased organic matter inputs

support microbial diversity, (while) ... reduced- and no-till systems protect soil fungi and larger biota, such as earthworms. They protect long-term carbon pools from consumption by other soil microbes.’ Other issues I have been thinking about and for which no-till gardening might be helpful are:

- forecasting hot weather where water use will be precious
- protecting crops from birds who love specific batches of crops e.g. garlic
- dealing with flying insects with their larvae depositing habits e.g. Cabbage White Butterfly on brassicas.

I am sure there are many gardeners well ahead of me in this thinking. It would be interesting to hear from other gardeners with their views and experiences in grappling with these types of issues. The results of this discussion could help advise to the ACT Government on how to get its employees on top of the issue.

Some words of warning! No-till doesn’t mean no work! Maybe this is where I go wrong.

Coffee waste to grow vegies – really!

‘Have you ever considered for every coffee you drink there is more to recycle than just that coffee cup and lid? That café is also producing a new, recyclable “black gold” from behind the counter’, Richard Buker, COGS member and HSOC Neutrog Coordinator, reports.

* * *

A search of the internet for what uses can be made of coffee grounds comes up with a plethora of ideas. Some should remain on the internet: coffee grounds around seedlings to keep snails away – not really, university studies show a very low success rate; coffee grounds spread on garden beds will feed your soil – well, sort of. I suggest thinking of coffee grounds like grass clippings: a little worked into the top few centimetres of the soil is fine but any more and there is a risk of the soil souring and becoming hydrophobic. Mind you, a thick layer of coffee grounds can produce some spectacular slime moulds!

My experience is that to get the best value from the black gold of coffee grounds they should be composted in a balanced mix of ‘greens and browns’, water and aeration.



(Photo: Matt Mawson)

Moreover, by using a hot composting system, you could be feeding those composted coffee grounds to your plants and veggies within 6 weeks! In another use, coffee grounds mixed with coffee chaff (skins from the roasted bean) or wood shavings are excellent spread around the garden as a mulch to control weeds and encourage worms.

COGS Kaleen Community Garden, and previously COGS Mitchell, as well as the Horticultural Society of Canberra’s (HSOC) Bruce Display Garden, have for several years been

using coffee grounds as an additive to their composting systems or mixing with coffee chaff (also known as ‘silver skin’) as a soil additive/mulch.

For composting, garden green waste, manures, coffee grounds etc. are gathered over time. Once the volume is sufficient, a hot compost is processed, all the while collecting for the next compost pile. Twenty-five to 30 kilograms (wet weight) of coffee grounds are collected daily from up to three local cafes, two in Kaleen and one in Lawson and occasionally further afield, e.g. from Cowra, NSW, on a daffodil road trip! Not all the coffee grounds go into the compost pile. Some is shared free of charge with up to six plot holders at the COGS Kaleen and several HSOC members.

While I have not measured the weight of coffee grounds collected over the past few years, it must be quite substantial. The benefits to the environment from reduced landfill, carbon capture, vibrant vegies etc, also extends to a good workout from collecting, mixing and turning the compost.

(below, left to right) Compost heap with 6 days of coffee grounds added; Coffee grounds and chaff mix as a garden bed edging to suppress couch grass and other weeds; Coffee chaff used to balance kitchen scraps in a cold compost system. Photos: Richard Buker



Preserving your tomatoes – one picking at a time

When that bumper harvest of tomatoes starts rolling in in summer you need to be ready to deal with the surplus. Crace Community Garden's Elizabeth Dangerfield shares her experience on handling the crop.

* * *

At the beginning of spring, many gardeners lust after juicy, red, homegrown tomatoes, and optimistically plant seeds or buy seedlings at the earliest possible time. Some of them will be shrivelled up by frost but some will make it to summer and start to produce abundantly so that by mid-summer you are swamped by the juicy fruit and can't give them away. The trick is to be prepared to preserve your tomatoes in small batches as they ripen.

Freeze them

One of the easiest ways to preserve tomatoes is to freeze them. It is more convenient than bottling, as you can freeze them as they become available and package them in snap-lock bags to suit your future cooking needs, and it takes no time at all. You can thaw your frozen tomatoes to make purees, sauces, chutneys and the like, at your leisure.

Be careful with hygiene, as you don't want any contamination with botulism-producing soil microbes. Make sure your hands are clean and that you have scrubbed the soil from under your 'gardeners' fingernails'. Always keep everything clean, and choose firm, ripe tomatoes without blemishes. Roma or egg-shaped tomatoes work especially well. Wash and dry the tomatoes and cut a small cross in the skin of the tomatoes at their base. Add them to boiling water and blanch for 3 minutes. Drain and cool quickly in icy water. Cut out the core and peel off the skin of each tomato.

Whole or chopped – you choose

You can freeze the tomatoes whole; you can also cut the tomatoes in half and remove the seeds and juice if you just want to preserve the flesh. You can chop them, crush them or puree them once they have defrosted; or you can do this before freezing them.

To freeze whole, place the tomatoes on a tray covered with non-stick baking paper or freeze film and place in the freezer until frozen. Once frozen remove and place in snap-lock bags or plastic containers and label. They should last around 6 months and even longer if you vacuum seal them.

Minimally processed

If you would like even tastier frozen tomatoes, cut the tomatoes in half, gently remove the seeds and drain cut side down for half an hour. Place them in a baking dish lined with baking paper, sprinkle them with olive oil, seasonings and herbs if you like and then roast them in a moderate oven until cooked but not burnt. When cool, squeeze the tomatoes out of their skins and pack them in containers and freeze.



A sauce for all seasons

You can also make and freeze a tomato sauce or purée as a base for dishes such as spaghetti bolognese or lasagna. This is a good way of using up less than perfect tomatoes. You can make the sauce flavoursome with herbs, paprika, anchovies, olives, a hint of lemon, a teaspoon of sugar, a splash of wine, a dash of Worcestershire sauce or a drop of balsamic vinegar or keep it plain. Here is a basic recipe.

Blanch tomatoes in boiling water for one minute then drain, cool in cold water, drain and peel as soon as possible. Roughly chop each tomato after removing its core. Allow to drain while you fry some diced vegetables. For every 2 kg of tomatoes you use, sauté until soft (without browning) one onion, a stick of celery, one carrot and a clove of garlic (make sure the garlic is translucent because uncooked garlic can cause off flavours in the frozen sauce). Cook the tomato pieces in a heavy-based casserole or saucepan until tender. Wait till they are a little cooler and then purée them in a food processor. You can add the fried vegetables if you would like them puréed too. Process a little or a lot depending on how smooth or chunky you would like the sauce.

Put the tomatoes and vegetables along with seasonings back in the casserole or saucepan. Simmer the sauce until it is quite thick, being careful not to let it burn. It will start to bubble and splatter. Let it cool down with the lid on and then spoon into plastic containers, label and freeze.

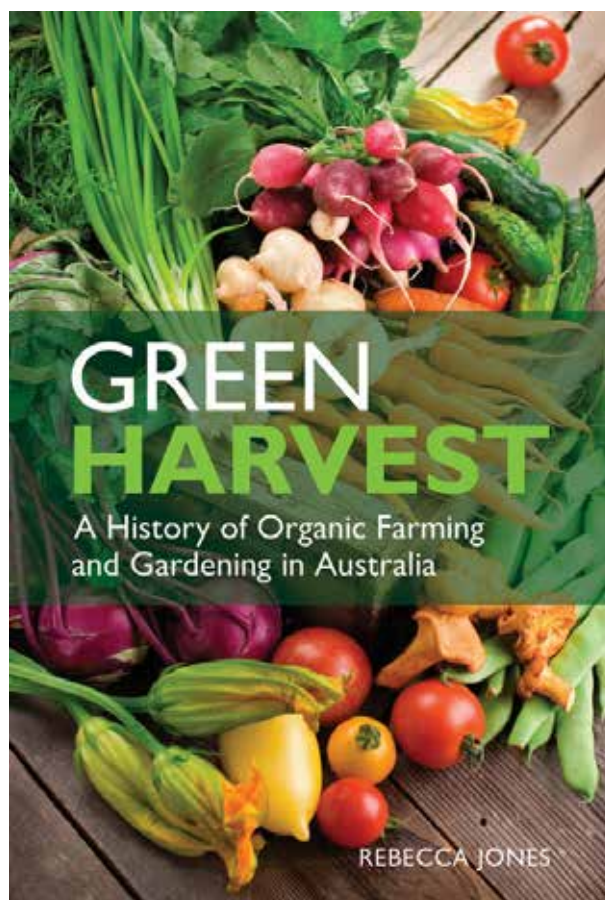
Some history and all about tomatoes

A few of us are looking to rejuvenate the COGS website, and I was given the task of researching new entries for the links and references. I had a good harvest. Here, as another inducement to sample the wealth of information on the COS website, are brief details of two of the publications I unearthed. Both are available through the ACT public library service. Ed.

Green Harvest: a history of organic farming and gardening in Australia, Rebecca Jones, CSIRO Publishing, 2010.

Farmers and gardeners have been growing food in Australia using methods they describe as organic since the 1940s, during which decade the first active organic societies were established in three states, the Victorian Compost Society being a prominent pioneer. Since then, the movement has become a revolution, and this book tracks its development in detail, under three pillars – soil, chemical free, ecological wellbeing – and the influence of the ‘Back to the Land’ movement that was promoted in the first issue of the magazine *Earth Garden* in 1972 and grew in strength during the 1970s and 80s. Each of these four strands is elaborated in a detailed case study, the last of which will no doubt be of greatest interest to our organic gardeners: the creation by the inimicable Jackie French of her paradigm of self-sufficiency in the Araluen Valley.

I’m disappointed to report that there’s no mention of COGS or even Canberra in *Green Harvest*, but then we have our own history, *From Bare Earth to Bounty*, by Walter Steensby, Bethany Turner and David Pearson. You can get it on our website.



Tomato know sow grow feast, Penny Woodward, Janice Sutton and Karen Sutherland, Self-published, 2018.

I am not usually prone to hyperbole, but I feel obliged to write that this book is a truly amazing achievement on all fronts. The three authors cover, respectively, sow and grow, know, and feast. Each field is accorded exhaustive treatment. Under sow and grow, for example, a ‘Problems and solutions’ section has information under the following subheadings: cultural solutions; garden hygiene; biological pest control; crop rotation; nutrient deficiencies; tomato troubleshooter; diseases: bacterial, fungal, viral; pests; other problems. The ‘know’ section covers the full gamut of information on heirloom tomatoes including, under the headings type, description, use, flavour, notes, history and seller, details of over 200 varieties, together with a photograph of each. The ‘feast’ section deals with all aspects of selecting, cooking, processing and preserving tomatoes. The recipes presented are indescribably enticing and I’ll be coming back to this book in summer, when the crop I’m hoping for is in the kitchen.

Brew your own liquid fertiliser

For a few years now, I've had good results using a 'solution' of the organic fertiliser and soil conditioner 'Dynamic Lifter'. My formula is to load about 400 g of the pellets into a 2 L milk container (so, 200 g per L), add water, give it a good shake, then let it 'mature' for a while, giving it another good shake from time to time and when you come to use it. You could add 40–50 mL Seasol for added plant health. I use about 500 mL of my 'concentrate' per 9 L watering can. I cannot vouch for any pure science for the quantities in my recipe, only an observation that the plants and soil biota appear to appreciate it. I put solution in inverted commas at the start of this note because the mixture is not a true solution: it contains a lot of suspended solids, so don't bother with a rose on your watering can, it'll only get blocked. An added tip is that it makes life a lot easier if you use a wide-throated funnel when loading the pelletised fertiliser into your container.

Ed Highley



FOR SALE

Eco-friendly House and Garden

House in Evatt is an ex-govie, 3 bedroom, 1 bathroom/laundry. Double garage has been converted to workshop and office. A vine-covered pergola provides shade in place of a carport. 3 kW solar panels. Samsung 7.2 kW / 5 kW solar battery and inverter unit. Solastat-Eco solar hot-water system. Underfloor, roof and wall insulation. Gas heater. Electric stove.

Block is 830 sq metres. Garden includes: 2 x 10,000 litre watertanks, pump, connected to taps in front and back yards; 1,000 litre capacity watertank for gravity watering of back yard; greenhouse/garden shed attached to NE wall of house; partially dismantled chook run with 2 chook houses or sheds; established fruit and nut trees, berries, currants; raised vegetable beds in back and front yards; native and exotic shrubs and trees; vines over rear pergola with pond and outdoor wood heater.

Please contact Donna 6258 9845 or pass this information on to anyone you think might be interested in purchasing and retaining it. I'd love to sell to someone who will value the garden. Price \$800,000+.





Jerusalem Artichoke soup

Linda Booth, who recently joined the COGS Erindale Community Garden, shares her recipe for Jerusalem Artichoke soup.

Ingredients

- 350–400 g Jerusalem Artichokes
- 3–4 French shallots, finely diced
- 2 potatoes
- 50 g butter
- 1 litre vegetable stock
- ½ tsp lemon thyme
- 1 tsp lemon zest
- 2 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 medium apple
- 1 tablespoons olive oil
- 8 scallops with roe on
- 40 g butter (for scallops)
- salt and cracked pepper to taste
- 2 tbsp lemon juice
- sprigs of parsley or chervil, to serve

Method

Scrub artichokes very well and slice into thick rounds. Slice potatoes (I used Pontiac) into thick rounds.

Heat a large pot over medium high heat. Add the butter and, once melted, add the shallots, artichokes and potatoes. Toss over medium high heat until artichokes and potatoes caramelize slightly. Add the vegetable stock, lemon thyme, lemon zest and salt.

Continue to cook until the potatoes and artichokes are very tender. Once cooled slightly, blend the mixture smooth. Add the lemon juice. Add more seasoning if needed to taste.

Slice the apple into matchsticks. Place in a small bowl, and toss with a splash of olive oil, salt and pepper, and a squeeze of lemon juice.



Dry scallops very well with paper towel, then sprinkle with salt and pepper. Drying them well, will help them caramelize rather than stew.

Heat a frypan on high heat. Add the butter and, once foaming, add the scallops. They should take only a minute each side. Remove from pan immediately once cooked. Keep butter from pan.

To serve, add apple matchsticks and scallops to each bowl of soup. Drizzle some of the scallop butter into each bowl. Squeeze some lemon juice into each bowl, and top with parsley or chervil.



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Insalata Caprese

The O'Connor Community Garden's **Lara Doolette** relates that a few years ago she met some Italian artists who were visiting Australia and they invited her to visit them in Italy. She continues:

I was already planning to visit my mum's family on its farm in Latvia, so I went to Italy too, for a month in the middle of summer. One of my favourite memories is of the neighbour who would drop around most mornings, full of warmth and kindness, and distributing her homegrown vegetables. My Italian was basic, but I quickly learned some more words from her, including *e caldo!* (it's hot!), *pomodoro e basilisco* (tomato and basil), and *insalata* (salad).

This is a salad that we ate chilled, sitting outside under olive trees on the hot summer evenings and which I like to make every summer since then. It's very simple, but especially with home-grown tomatoes and basil, is delicious.

Ingredients

Prepare it with cool ingredients and serve it straight away.

- Fresh tomatoes
- Fresh basil leaves
- Bocconcini cheese
- Olive oil
- Freshly ground black pepper
- A sprinkle of salt

Method

- Slice the tomato and bocconcini
- Break the basil into individual leaves



Photo by Lara Doolette

- Lay the tomato slices on a large plate with the sliced bocconcini on top
- Top with fresh cracked pepper and a sprinkle of salt
- Decorate with the basil leaves
- Drizzle with olive oil

There are many variations to this recipe on the internet. Some suggest drizzling balsamic vinegar or balsamic reduction too. I like to add this if the tomatoes or basil don't have a strong flavour.

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El Niño Alert continues; positive Indian Ocean Dipole possible

Andy Hrast's regular weather forecast for the next few months.

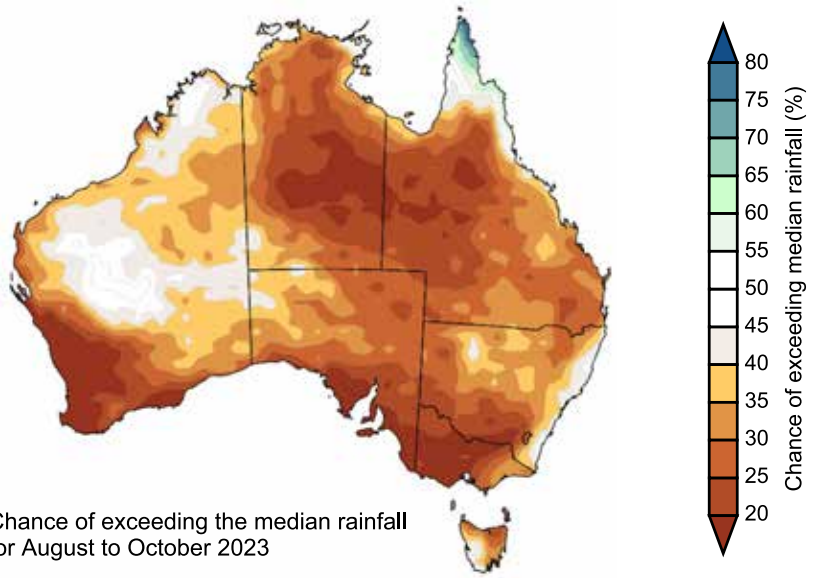
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Unlike the World Meteorological Organization, which declared on 4 July the onset of an El Niño with a 90% probability, the Australian Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) has maintained a lower level of expectation continuing with an El Niño Alert. BoM reports that when El Niño Alert criteria have been met in the past, the event has then developed at around 70% of the time. El Niño typically suppresses winter-spring rainfall in eastern Australia.

Central and eastern Pacific sea-surface temperatures are exceeding El Niño thresholds, and models indicate further warming is likely, with sea surface temperatures remaining above El Niño thresholds until at least the end of the year.

BoM adds, however, that sustained changes in wind, cloud and broad-scale pressure patterns towards those characteristic of El Niño have not yet been observed. This means the Pacific Ocean and atmosphere have yet to become fully coupled, as occurs during El Niño events.

A key indicator, the Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) has shifted back to neutral levels during the past month.



Chance of exceeding the median rainfall for August to October 2023

Model ACCESS-S2
Base Period: 1981–2018

Model run: 10/07/2023
Issued: 13/07/2023

Unfortunately, this does not change the long-range forecast of warmer and drier conditions across much of Australia for August to October as shown in the map above. BoM's climate model takes into account all influences from the oceans and atmosphere when generating its long-range forecasts.

The Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) is currently neutral. All models suggest a positive IOD is likely to develop in late winter or early spring. A positive IOD typically decreases winter-spring rainfall for much of Australia.

Dam levels in the Canberra region and capital cities

	July '23	July '23
ACT storages	99%	100%
Murray-Darling Basin	88%	89%
Burrinjuck Dam	77%	89%
Blowering Dam	83%	98%
Sydney	95%	100%
Melbourne	92%	87%
Brisbane	74%	89%
Adelaide	74%	49%
Perth	45%	49%

One for keen weather watchers

Richard Horobin, a COGS member at the Betty Cornhill Garden, reports that members of the public can submit weather observations to our Bureau of Meteorology (BoM), or even send it a constant stream of data, using the Weather Observations website of the UK Met Office, with which BoM has an arrangement to host our observations.

This means you can perhaps see observations made much closer to home than the Canberra Airport. In Tuggeranong, for example, observations of air temperature, dew point temperature, wind speed, rainfall, pressure, humidity and wind direction made within the previous hour are given for eight sites from Kambah to Conder. The same information

is provided for 13 sites in Belconnen–North Canberra, one in Hughes, and two in and near Queanbeyan.

When visiting the site at <https://bom-wow.metoffice.gov.uk> It is interesting to see, among other things, how much variability there is between locations that might be just a few kilometres apart.

Ed.



spring planting guide

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

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

Using seeds

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

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

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

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

Crop rotation

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

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

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

Plant varieties

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

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

S = seed sowing; T = transplanting

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

Hail to kale chips

When the chips are down, make sure they're kale – not that I've got anything against potatoes, I hasten to add. But, that aside, kale chips are delicious, nutritious and easy to make with the expenditure of not too much energy.

I currently make my kale chips from Curly Leaf Kale, which I have determined is the best, but I have used other varieties in the past.

Method

Collect your organically grown kale, wash it if needs be but, whether you do or don't, make sure that the leaves are absolutely bone dry before proceeding any further.

Break the leaves into bite-size (say, 3–4 cm) pieces after removing their tough central stems and place in a large bowl.

To the contents of the bowl add 1 teaspoonful (no more!) of olive oil, then, using both hands (don't muck



Kale chips ready for the oven

about!), massage the mixture until every nook and cranny of all the kale has a thin coating of oil.

Sprinkle with sea salt and, if you wish, freshly ground black pepper and perhaps some garlic powder (highly recommended), and mix in. You could add small amounts of other spices to your liking – be adventurous.

Spread the kale on a baking tray (baking paper recommended) and bake in a 150 degree C oven for 15–20 minutes. Keep an eye on things, and get the chips out when they're crisp and still green.

Enjoy with a chilled, organic IPA from a reputable craft brewery – or whatever takes your fancy.

Ed Highley

(left) Kale, a winter stalwart; (below) Enjoy! All photos: Ed Highley



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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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A willing worker in the great Charnwood worm count — story page 6. Photo: Peter White.

