

Canberra organic

Dickson garden opens its gates

Crace gets new plots

**Lessons from the 'Harvest Garden'
community initiative**

Beating Cabbage White Butterfly

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.

Ah! the weather, a topic surely in the running for number-one popularity when two or more people get together ... most especially gardeners like us. The weather can sometimes be our friend, at other times hostile, but usually unpredictable and becoming more so. Who would have thought that, given the dire predictions last spring of an impending hot, dry summer due to the arrival of El Niño, we've instead had a not so hot and, early on at least, wet summer, but I sense while I write this column in mid February that things might be hotting up. Opinions will be aired that the summer just passed was unusual, but my experience from living many decades in Canberra is that every summer here is in some way 'unusual'.

Back in the middle of last year we decided at our community garden to install two 2,100 litre water tanks to harvest rainwater from the roof of our beautiful shelter. I recall the scepticism of some of our members that the tanks would ever be filled, given that El Niño was forecast even at that earlier time. [I must confess that I had my own doubts, despite strongly supporting the project.] It was a punt, but we were 'lucky': since they began service, our tanks have overflowed at least twice and gardeners are taking advantage of



the bounty — and we're reducing the water bill.

And it's a bounty of not only quantity but also quality. Rainwater, whether from the sky or a tank, is better for plants than is tap water. The boost to plant growth after substantial rainfall, as compared with even heavy hose irrigation, must surely have been observed by most dedicated gardeners. Rainwater contains no chlorine or fluoride, chemicals that may impede plant nutrient uptake, and is generally not alkaline, again to the liking of plants. Importantly too, it is usually much richer in nitrogen (N) and N-compounds — key nutrients, especially if it encountered a thunderstorm on its way to earth.

Two good stories in this issue about the importance, value and just plain good policy of making friends. In her column, young Georgia reports

on her interview of local hero Rocco, a great friend of her garden, and our Dickson garden made many new friends when it opened its gates last November. And speaking of friends, tell all yours about our freshly blooming website with its bountiful information freely available to all. Let's keep growing the 'community' of our community gardens.

Guilty! Your Honour. It was reported in an article the Summer 2023 issue that you could put plastic plant pots labelled PP5 in your green recycling bin. Sorry, this is not so. Apparently, and confusingly, there are two PP5s – one good, one bad – and plant pots are the baddies, so should be taken to a recycling point set up to receive them, such as one at Bunnings Belconnen mentioned in the article.

This summer, for the first time, I planted *Lycopersicon* (syn. *Solanum*) *esculentum* var. 'Rouge de Marmande', a French heirloom variety, in my plot. What a beautiful tomato this is, in all ways – flavour, looks, size, productivity and, surprisingly to me at least, given its morphology, ease of peeling for fashioning into a delicious sauce or relish. See photo at the foot of page 4. I'll be growing this gem again.

Many thanks to all contributors to this issue.

Ed Highley

Contents

Editor's note	2	Book review: <i>The Compost Coach</i>	17
President's column	3	Weather report:	18
COGS committee and garden convenors	4	Recipe: Fire cider	18
Around the COGS gardens		Drawn to the garden: Australian King-Parrot	19
Dickson	5	Organic pest control: Cabbage White Butterfly	20
Crace	6	Autumn planting guide	21
Charnwood	7	Recipe: Bush capers	22
Betty Cornhill	8	COGS Community Garden watering rules	27
O'Connor	9		
Erindale	10	FRONT COVER: Gita Curnow has been working her large and productive plot at Charnwood Community Garden since 2005. Photo: Ange McNeilly	
Young Georgia's column: Rocco, a gardener for all seasons	11	BACK COVER: Some unusual crops from the Erindale Community Garden. Clockwise from top left: Cucamelon, Shiso, Tomatillo, Yacon. Photos: Didi Sommer	
Tips and tricks: Garden edging; use of coffee grounds ...	12		
Lurching from glut to glut	13		
'Harvest Garden': a community organisation produce garden	14–16		

president's column

Despite predictions for a hot dry summer, the conditions over the past few months have been more like the La Niña conditions over the previous few years. Personally, I am relieved we did not experience those hot 40 degree Celsius days. Overall, it has been good growing weather, with many gardeners thumbing through their recipes to find new ways to make use of cucumbers, zucchini and other summer crops.

The relatively wet weather has seen our water bills remain relatively low, resulting in another financial surplus for 2023. COGS is in a strong financial position and will be able to withstand higher water bills in future years and invest in worthwhile projects in our gardens.

Unfortunately, some of our gardens have experienced break-ins during the year, with produce and equipment being stolen. COGS self-insures, which means we cover from our fees the costs to fix broken fencing and replace stolen equipment. Taking out insurance would be prohibitively expensive and, in any case, we would most likely have to fund replacement of most items due to 'excess' arrangements under any policy. The Executive is investigating what more can be done to deter would-be thieves.

Draft Canberra Region Local Food Strategy: an update

In the Summer 2023 edition of *Canberra Organic* we provided a copy of COGS' submission to the draft Food Strategy. The ACT Government has prepared a 'listening report', which is on its 'Have Your Say' website. The report highlights the main themes arising from public consultation on the draft strategy, including support for more community gardens. The final strategy will be released later this year. In the meantime, the government has set up a community reference group to provide further input into the development and implementation of the strategy. I am participating on this reference group on behalf of COGS. The initial focus is on:

- investigating ways to provide more support for community groups, including more training on growing food in Canberra
- considering the use of heritage sites such as Lanyon Homestead
- reforming Land Management Agreements with rural landholders
- exploring options for a 'food hub', which could act as: a distribution, processing and retail centre for growers in the region; an incubator space for emerging small businesses; a commercial kitchen space to train people in food preparation; a centre for community education; and a food garden.

COGS Annual General Meeting

Below is the notice of the COGS Annual General Meeting (AGM) to be held at 2:00 pm on Sunday 24 March 2024 at the Dickson community garden. Come along to hear about what has been happening over the past year, meet members of the Executive, see the Dickson garden and enjoy some afternoon tea. We will also induct two new Life Members, rewarding them for their work for COGS over many years.

Consistent with our Constitution, all positions on the Executive



Committee will become vacant. I would like to thank members of the Committee for their support in 2023. I intend to stand for President again.

COGS is a relatively large community organisation run entirely by volunteers. If we had pay for the work done by the volunteers, our fees would have to be much higher. There are likely to be some vacancies on the Executive Committee, so please consider putting yourself forward for a position on the Executive. The work on the COGS Executive is varied and interesting and is very rewarding volunteer work.

Happy gardening everyone and hope to see you at the AGM.

Neil Williams

Annual General Meeting
Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.
2:00 pm, Sunday 24 March 2024,
Dickson COGS Garden,
in the grounds of Dickson College,
corner of Phillip Avenue and
Majura Avenue, Dickson

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

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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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executive committee

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Secretary:	Jyl Thompson
Treasurer:	Nick Sifniotis
Membership Secretary:	Bev McConnell
Garden Coordinator:	Jo McMillan
Information Officer:	Mike Gisick
Editor, Canberra Organic:	Ed Highley
General Members:	Richard Buker Narelle McLean Teresa Rose Peter Weddell

community gardens

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

Betty Cornhill	Peter Sheehan — cornhill_convenor@cogs.asn.au
Charnwood	Susan Wood & Angela Steele — charnwood_convenor@cogs.asn.au
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Crace	Peter Newbiggin — crace_convenor@cogs.asn.au
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Kaleen	Richard Buker & Harriet Easterbrook — kaleen_convenor@cogs.asn.au
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Mitchell	David Peel & Oliver Busst — mitchell_convenor@cogs.asn.au
Oaks Estate	Josh Motbey — oaks_estate_convenor@cogs.asn.au
O'Connor	Vacant — oconnor_convenor@cogs.asn.au



Rouge de Marmande tomatoes. Photo: Ed Highley

Gates open at COGS Dickson Community Garden

Dickson opened its garden to friends and visitors for the first time on Saturday 25 November 2023, coinciding with the inaugural National Community Gardens Open Day. Noel Thomas reports on the event.

It rained heavily in the morning but the sun came out and we had a beautiful day. Our Dickson garden is located near a bike path that is also a favoured doggy walking route to the Dickson playing fields. Passers-by, on foot and two wheels, often stop on their journeys, showing interest in our garden and plots. We took advantage of this and made a big banner advertising our event. Michele, our convenor, who is keen at sewing, gets ours thanks for that. Other gardens are welcome to borrow this banner, but your event will have to be on a Saturday!

Although we are a small garden, I have to say that we put on a great event. On offer were: plants for sale that we had propagated – sales were brisk; garden tours showing plots and community beds; information on our worm farm production and compost bays. Canberra Seed Savers came



Babette ran the seed-raising mix workshop in our greenhouse. Photo: Michele England

with loads of seeds – our considerable thanks to Cathy and Michelle for the display and information. Two workshops were conducted: one all about wicking beds and the other on making and sowing in seed-raising mix. Thanks to Sarah and Babette for their enthusiasm and knowledge. Both these workshops were of keen interest to our visitors. I wonder how those sunflower seeds are growing?

Food was on offer. The obligatory sausage sizzle, with chefs Noel, Leah and Andrew, was well patronised. Sally, Michele, Tess, Gaby, Veronica and Fiona contributed to an array of fresh salads, baked goods and refreshments made in part from the produce of members' plots.

A raffle to raise funds for small garden projects was well supported. Our thanks go to Canberra Rock Climbing, Rainbow Dreams, the Garden Dickson and Cafe Stepping Stone for the fine prizes they donated.

A colourful new mural painted by Dickson College art students was, unfortunately, not quite finished for the day – it just needed some tweaks – like antennae for the ladybugs! We are being given a lovely and inspiring visual legacy by these talented students. All will be revealed in the next issue of *Canberra Organic*. Stay tuned.

A big thank you to all our helpers and visitors for making it a terrific day. It was a lot of work, but we learnt a lot, which we'll be putting to good use in planning for another open day this November. The \$520 we raised on the day will go towards purchase of outdoor furniture and building new raised wicking beds. 🍃

Sarah facilitated our wicking bed workshop. Photo: Michele England



Crace men go DIY to build four new plots

The Crace Community Garden committee tried for 3 years to get what it considered to be reasonable quotes for two new garden plots, before deciding to go it alone. John Myszka reports on the project.

Crace has had a long waitlist for several years. After the COGS infrastructure review in 2021, it was decided to build some new beds at the top of the garden to help reduce the waitlist. These were to be two sleepers high and filled with garden soil. Many contractors were called but only a few responded. One quote was for over \$13,000!

At 2023 Crace AGM, we asked the COGS delegate if we could seek society funds along with money we raised at our 20th Anniversary for the materials required and provide our own labour. COGS agreed, so we drew up a plan and costed the materials needed at \$3,500. Our proposal was passed by the COGS committee in mid November 2023.

The plots were made of arsenate-free pine sleepers fitting into Ridgi (H) 900 by 50 by 50 mm galvanised-steel posts. The steel posts will last for many years as support for the

sleepers. The sleepers themselves simply slip into the H-shaped steel posts. The inside walls were lined with plastic sheeting to stop water and soil leaking out of the plots and to provide some extra protection to the sleepers themselves.

A small group of plot holders began work within a week of approval and started to dig the holes for the supports with a hand-operated 150 mm post-hole digger. Stephen Holey purchased a battery operated post-hole digger after the first days work and will be using it at his new property when he moves to Queensland.

The last hole to be dug was solid shale. We borrowed a jack hammer from a former plot holder and eventually dug it to the required depth.

Taking advice from the COGS committee members, for the base of the plots we decided to start with a layer of eucalypt mulch which we were able to source at no cost from a local tree-pruning business. We topped this with a layer of well-rotted stable sweepings obtained gratis from the Canberra Racecourse. Using the mulch and compost reduced the original estimate of garden soil

required from 20 to 15 cubic metres – a nice saving. What remained was to add the garden soil. Now there lay a problem.

Fifteen cubic metres of garden soil is the equivalent of 150 full brickies wheelbarrows, each weighing 75–100 kilograms. Not many of our plot holders would be able to put in the many hours required to complete this task, so it was decided to see if a bobcat and driver could be hired. We placed an advertisement on ‘hipages’, an online tradie marketplace, received three quotes and selected the cheapest. The work will now be done in a couple of hours rather than weeks, with the project still completed within budget.

We should be able to welcome four new plot holders very soon.

Project participants were John Myszka (foreman), Peter Newbegin, Alan Timmiss, Mark Hosking, Stephen Holey, Joe Agostino and Hung Lee.

Note: COGS is interested in people's ideas on materials other than plastic that could be used to line raised beds. Please send such to me in the first instance. Ed.

The large plot with have three beds of 12 square metres each.



Stephen, Alan and Joe using a crowbar on the final hole, solid rock – score: hole 1, men nil. A jackhammer was finally successful.



Sunflowers rule at Charnwood garden!

*Clockwise from top left:
Ma with freshly picked
produce; Geoff and Angela;
Peter and his three boys;
Co-convenor, Angela;
Co-convenor, Susan
(all photos by Ange McNeilly
unless otherwise indicated);
Ange and Mani (photo by
Phil Teys)*



Changing of the guard at Betty Cornhill

Peter Rouse has stepped down as the convenor of the Betty Cornhill Garden in Weston after serving 3 years at the helm.

At a get together in November, a goodly gathering of plot holders roundly applauded Peter for all his hard work to ensure that the garden was in constant great shape. Capeweed has never had a more formidable adversary than Peter! He has done an amazing job removing it and other noxious and invasive weeds from the garden. Also in his time as convenor Peter oversaw the fixing of a major drainage problem, the resurfacing of the garden driveway, the planting of numerous fruit trees, and the construction of a new glasshouse and a very fine pergola. Peter will continue to serve the garden as a member of the committee, in company with Andy Hrast, Kara Chalson, Ann Smith and Helen Ludellen.

Peter Sheehan, a relatively new plot holder at Betty Cornhill, is the new convenor. Peter started organic gardening in 2016 at Crace Community Garden, where he served on the garden committee, moving house to Deakin and membership of the Betty Cornhill Garden in 2020.



(top right) Betty Cornhill garden committee members: (rear) Peter Rouse and Andy Hrast; (front) Peter Sheehan (convenor) and Kara Chalson.
(lower right) Betty Cornhill garden committee members: Helen Ludellen (left) and Ann Smith (right). Photos: Peter Sheehan.

Oh no! not more zucchini


Peter White reports on the repercussions of a fateful misidentification and cooks up a solution.

* * *

A minor disaster for my plot at COGS Charnwood this year was the success of an unintended zucchini crop. To fellow plot holder Phil, I proudly showed my splendid crop of cucumber seedlings planted from a punnet purchased at the megastore starting with B. 'No Pete', Phil said, 'definitely zucchini not cucumbers.' My heart sank – I already had two thriving zucchini plants from an earlier purchase from the same megastore, and the produce from two

healthy plants is as much my kitchen can stand. Everyone grows zucchini, so giveaways don't work.

Am I going senile that I can't tell the difference between zucchini and cucumber seedlings, or was it just inattention during a hurried planting? The latter, I hope. I did recall a similar problem in the previous season when a punnet of incorrectly labelled 'Butternut Pumpkins' from the same megastore turned out to be tiny yellow squash that refused to climb up the growing frame. Kilos of tiny yellow squash pose a similar disposal problem to surplus zucchini. I did briefly think of taking the mound of zucchini to the nice ladies on the megastore garden checkout as a gift of 'Bunnings cucumbers'.

But then I thought, yes! *Canberra Organic* will have an answer as to what to do with a zucchini glut. So, on the COGS website at cogs.asn.au I went to the *Canberra Organic Index 1993–2023*¹ where the recipe section had some suggestions. It pointed me to nine past issues of the magazine with zucchini recipes. Clearly, zucchini surpluses are not uncommon. In the Summer 2014 issue page 18, I found suggestions for using zucchini: soup, salads, fritters, pasta, stuffed, pickled, preserved etc. Then in the Autumn 2019 issue page 16, there were recipes for zucchini loaf and zucchini soup. Perfect, but if all else fails, the surplus goes to the chooks or the compost heap. 

¹ Bit of sneaky self-promotion here since it was Peter himself who produced the index.

Vale Vedanta Nicholson

2 September 1951 –
14 December 2023

*The members of COGS O'Connor Community Garden were saddened to hear of the death of their garden's convenor Vedanta last December. Fellow former garden convenor **Bev McConnell** reflects here on Vedanta's contributions to the garden and her passion for gardening, and on the loss of an esteemed colleague.*

* * *

Vedanta joined COGS and the new O'Connor garden in February 2006. She and her partner Phil Woodhill were the inaugural joint ploholders at the garden. They were inducted by the first O'Connor convenor, Alan Robertson, who had managed the construction of the garden on two disused tennis courts owned by the O'Connor Uniting Church.

Vedanta was elected garden convenor at O'Connor in 2007 and 2008, to the garden committee in 2022 and 2023, and again as convenor in May and September 2023.

Together with Phil she was known for her hard work and commitment to organic gardening principles, to the garden and to the community. Always generous in sharing her wide-ranging knowledge and experience and often coming to the garden at least daily, even occasionally for a family picnic. She was a regular participant at garden working bees, joining with others to improve the communal areas for the benefit of all. An active member of the local community and a qualified teacher in yoga and meditation, she held pre- and postnatal yoga classes at the O'Connor Uniting Church Hall hub for local community groups.

Vedanta will be greatly missed by members of the O'Connor garden and beyond and will be remembered as a passionate gardener.



During the COVID lockdown, Vedanta wrote in the Spring 2020 issue of *Canberra Organic*:

Come the autumn relief, the advent of winter and finding ourselves in the depths of lockdown, we came once again to remember, and be forever grateful for what we receive from the garden. That place to be down on one knee connected to the earth, hands in the soil caring and tending new growth. Reminded that everything has its season and being aware of the need to rest and replenish before harvesting again. Where warm rays of winter sun at once touch

your skin and coax tiny seedlings to unfurl their bright new leaves, kissing away the cold gloom of social isolation and filling one's heart with an unspeakable joy. The place where the temptation of instant gratification steps aside to enable the bounteous reward that will surely come in the fullness of time, with a little effort and patience. Where the mind becomes somehow stilled enough to see more easily what to cultivate, what to weed out and what will bear the most fruit in one's life. Where one feels in one's soul beyond doubt ... I am a gardener. 🍃

Two tales from Erindale

The Erindale Community Garden recently welcomed Louise, an enthusiastic new member of COGS. She tells her story here.

* * *

Working in my garden is a steadfast joy to me and it's wonderful to join like-minded people to share the delightful experience of nurturing a green space. Didi, the Erindale convenor, couldn't have made me more welcome or been more generous, and I look forward to meeting all of the Erindale members and other COGS gardeners.

I've passed by many COGS gardens in the past and peered curiously through the fence at the plethora of vegetables and flowers, so I'm excited to be a part of COGS. While I'm not a plot holder, COGS still offers me so much that can be shared and enjoyed. There is always something new to see and to learn. The vibrant people and their plots inspire me, and I go home with plenty of ideas to use at my place.

My own garden has been organic for many years, and I've seen an amazing increase in biodiversity in it. When I sat in the garden as a young woman, I just admired the flowers or pretty views, but I've really grown to appreciate the fact that, at its best, a green space is a home, a sanctuary and a food supply for many creatures, from bees and wasps, butterflies and moths, beetle, worms and spiders to birds, lizards and bats and more. Nothing gives me greater pleasure than to see that I can share this space with so many living things. It's a privilege to watch them go about their everyday actions, just as I go about mine. This feeling



A bee on a salvia flower. Eastern Spinebills love this plant too!
Photo: Louise Gardner

is one of contentment and goodwill. Not only can I pick food for my family and enjoy the space but all these creatures can too. I nurture the garden and it nurtures me. What a beautiful friendship. And having an organic garden is essential to this.

Community is important. We enrich our lives with friendships. If we can work together in harmony on something bigger than ourselves, work towards a shared goal, then we share that peace in our community. Our shared experience in the COGS gardens can have benefits far beyond their gates.

Happy growing together!

Making calendula oleate oil

Erindale garden member Susana Achondo tells us how to make a soothing balm using the petals of the common marigold.

* * *

Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*) is a wonderful flower, which grows in abundance in our community garden. It is beautiful, attracts pollinators, serves as a companion plant to deter pests, and has other useful properties. We use it to make our own oleate oil, yet another way to profit from the produce of our garden.

Here's how to make it. First, the flowers are harvested and left to dry in a place out of direct sunlight. Once dried, only the petals are placed in a clean glass jar with oil. I suggest olive

or almond oil. The petals should be submerged in the oil. Leave the jar, covered and in a dark place, for a month. After this time strain the mixture through a clean cloth, collecting the oil in another clean jar. Store the oil away from sunlight and extreme temperature changes.

Calendula oleate oil has healing, anti-inflammatory and moisturising properties and can be used safely by everyone, from children to the elderly. You can use it directly on the skin or put a few drops of it in beaten coconut oil and make a hand cream.

Oleate oils can also be made from rosemary, lavender and plants. Why not do some research and report back to our readers? 🌱



Marigold flowers. Photo by Ed Highley

Rocco: a gardener for all seasons

One of the great things about having a COGS plot is that you get to meet so many interesting and talented people ... like Rocco.

Though not a member himself, Rocco is well-known to the plot-holders of the Kambah Community Garden. There would be few members who have not experienced Rocco's generosity and kind words when he brings armfuls of his home-grown seedlings and other garden produce as gifts for lucky plot-holders.

I was very pleased then, when Rocco agreed to be interviewed for Canberra Organic magazine. The following is what I found out when I talked to him in his wonderful home garden.

My first impression of Rocco's garden was the large number of plants growing in pots in the driveway. I learned that these were all chillies. The next thing I noticed was a huge grapevine, from which hung abundant bunches of ripening grapes.

Rocco appears quiet until he begins to talk about gardening and then you begin to see where his passion lies. Before long he has filled a large bag with home-grown plums, which he presents to me.

I was dying to get to my question list but Rocco was soon talking about all

his favourite things ... like passata, which he uses to make his favourite Italian dishes.

I learned that Rocco was from a little village in the south of Italy called Nitili, and he had his first garden when he was 'about 10 or 12 years old'

When I asked him why he is so passionate about gardening, Rocco said that it makes him feel strong and fit. He doesn't tell me his age but I can see he is much older than I am. He came to Australia in 1969 and has been back to Italy for holidays about six times since then.

I was keen to learn some of Rocco's gardening secrets and had my pencil ready to write down some of his words of wisdom. For example, is it better to water your plants in early morning or late afternoon? 'Always in the afternoon,' says Rocco. 'Much of the water evaporates if you water the garden too early.'

And what about seeds? 'Always use your own,' he says. 'In this way, you know what you are getting.' And he shows me several small boxes of tomato seeds which he has harvested.

And Rocco is very definite about the most effective way to dig a garden. 'Dig the soil when it's dry - not when it's wet'...and he shows me his latest patch of freshly dug ground. The soil



Rocco

looks beautiful and (as my grandpa might say), it has good tilth.

'What will be your main crop this winter?', I ask. 'Broccoli, for sure,' he replies.

I glance over to another part of the garden and see about 10 pots of strawberry plants. 'You must have some of these,' he says and thrusts six or seven of the scarlet berries into my hand.

I can see that as well as being garden-wise, Rocco is a very generous man. I can't remember any of the Italian words which I've been practising so I'll finish my story with two sentences in Italian: 'Rocco, molte grazie. Sei un grande giardiniere.'

Rocco working the soil for his next crop Rocco's chillies and herbs in pots [All photos by Ken Fraser]



A winning edge for plots

Installing some form of long-term edging around your community garden plot helps keep things tidy, aids in controlling invasive weeds such as couch and last but not least generally looks a lot better than an untended perimeter.

For an economical and attractive edging material that is easy to work with and install, makes for a relatively easy DIY job, I recommend rough-sawn pine planking that is readily available from Pinus Sawmills in Queanbeyan. They sell it as 'catwalk', with dimensions 150 by 25 mm and in 5.4 m lengths.

For the corners and where planks need to be joined, suitably long and robust hardwood stakes or pegs can be used. They're available at your local warehouse. 'Surveyors Pegs' are the best option for corners.

The garden bed in the accompanying photo measures about 8 m by 4 m. The total cost of the project, including delivery of the timber, would have been about \$150, but a bit was saved by three of us ordering timber and sharing the delivery fee.



*Effective, economical, neat and tidy: garden edging of untreated, rough-sawn pine.
Photo: Ed Highley*

Rough-sawn pine is, of course, untreated in any way, as it has to be for our organic gardens. It is therefore more prone to rot than more expensive, treated timber. In

my experience, however, you should get a least 5, and maybe up to 10 years useful life from edging made from it.

Ed Highley

More support for coffee grounds

The previous two issues of Canberra Organic saw a discussion on the pros and cons of coffee grounds as a soil additive. Crace garden's John Myszka supplements the story here.

* * *

One of our plot holders has been using large volumes of coffee grounds mixed with stable sweepings in his garden and his vegetable crops are growing very well. That his soil is full of worms testifies to its health. Among their other attributes, coffee grounds are high in nitrogen, potassium and carbon.

On an ABC TV *Gardening Australia* program in August 2018, the presenter explained how retired

research scientist and keen gardener Stuart Rodda used coffee grounds to advantage in his garden.

Coffee grounds on their own are too acidic to use straight on the garden, so Stuart mixes them with organic waste. He has several 'trial' mixes on the go, but his most successful version uses sawdust.

- 2 shovel loads of coffee grounds
- 2 shovel loads of sawdust, avoiding black walnut and any treated timbers.

Mix these together. Stuart uses a cement mixer but you can turn smaller quantities by hand in a wheelbarrow, a large tub or a compost tumbler.



Green sawdust should be left for at least a year to fully rot, otherwise it will rob your soil of nitrogen as it breaks down.

Once mixed with other organic matter such as cured sawdust, manures or organic garden waste, coffee grounds can make a fantastic compost for use in the garden. 🍃

Lurching from glut to glut

COGS member **Sheridan Roberts** and **Geoff McFarlane** report on the abundance and diversity of output in a typical year in their garden just over the border in Nanima.

We have lived on a rural property near Canberra for nearly four decades and strive to be largely self-sufficient in fruit and vegetables. Our property has several growing areas for perennial and annual crops. In late 2022, we started vegetable gardening in above-ground planters made of old metal rainwater tanks (this was the subject of an article 'Gardening in our slice of NSW' in last autumn's edition of *Canberra Organic*). We are now in the third year of using these planters and find they make gardening very easy.

We grow most of our perennial crops and space-hungry annuals, such as cucurbits and sweetcorn, on fertile creek flats. Strawberries are grown in wicking beds made from old bathtubs – they love the reliable moisture.

Our year seems to be programmed by what's in season in the garden, and many of our crops produce an almost embarrassing abundance. I suspect that it shouldn't be that way – we should be carefully controlling our

output by, for example, successive plantings, or thinning or planting several varieties that produce at different times.

And we do all of those things to an extent – but still the gluts arrive.

Despite feeling some guilt about our crop mismanagement, we look forward to the abundance. It starts with asparagus in late September, which we relish to the point of (our) exhaustion about two months later. Broad beans start a bit later than the asparagus, then we have masses of boysenberries from early December to about Christmas. Also in December, in a good year we will have a huge crop of apricots. New potatoes start appearing in December, with the main crop coming later and lasting in the ground for many months.

Tomatoes start in earnest from early January (though we got the first one this season at the end of November). Summer herbs and vegetables, including the, many think accursed, zucchini, start producing well from early in the new year. Masses of sweet corn start arriving in late January and keep us busy for several months.

Tree fruits – apples, plums, quinces and nectarines – are picked in summer and autumn but quantities

are limited by bird feeding (and, this year, by hail damage).

Our main winter crop is broccoli – a very useful vegetable and the chooks love any heads that have got through to flowering. We also enjoy beetroot, carrots and potatoes during the cooler months.

I guess we're also not supposed to let things self-seed to live another day but we do. We've had massive – and at times very welcome – crops of self-seeded silverbeet, potatoes, asparagus, tomatoes and leeks. However, I'm a bit ambivalent about the excessively successful self-propagation of mint, dill and rocket!

And what do we do with the surplus? We give a fair bit away, dry some, freeze a lot, and preserve some as jams, jellies, chutneys, pickles and syrups.

I have started roasting tomatoes before freezing and it works really well – the flavour is concentrated and they thaw well. Boysenberries also freeze very well and last for ages. Other preserving successes include tarragon vinegar and spiced quince syrup. The latter is very easy to make from whole fruit in a slow cooker, and has a variety of uses.

Here are some preserving ideas:

Roasting tomatoes for freezing: halve small-medium tomatoes, roast in a low oven on lightly oiled trays until shrunk but not burnt, freeze on trays, on a sheet of baking paper, then put in labelled containers and keep in the freezer.

Freezing boysenberries: wash, let dry and freeze individual fruits on trays, on a sheet of baking paper, then put in labelled containers and keep in the freezer.

Tarragon vinegar: wash a heap of tarragon sprigs, let it dry and pack as much as you can into a full bottle of white wine vinegar. Keep in the fridge; it will last about a year. This is absolutely fabulous mixed with mayonnaise for a potato-salad dressing.

Happy gardening and preserving! 🍃

A profusion of potatoes growing in tanks, some self-propagated, all perfectly fine in form and taste. Photo: Sheridan Roberts.



‘Harvest Garden’ – a community organisation produce garden

*Based on their experience with Canberra City Care’s ‘Harvest Garden’, COGS members **Greg Blood** and **Julie Fenech** provide insights into the development and management by a community organisation of a garden growing fresh produce for distribution.*

The objectives of Canberra City Care (CCC) through its Harvest Garden project are, in summary, to:

- supply seasonal produce for an onsite kitchen
- supply seasonal produce to customers through its summer harvest stall
- provide volunteers with opportunities to assist CCC and learn about growing produce in a garden that is easy to manage
- grow organic produce using environmentally friendly practices
- educate CCC clients and interested groups about growing produce locally and organically.

The success of the project was dependent on strong management support and the provision of a range of resources, including land and finance for construction, plants, fertilisers, mulches, water and equipment, and for paid staff managing volunteers.

Land

CCC owned a suitable and substantial area to develop a produce garden at its site in Charnwood – the former Charnwood High School. The fenced area is approximately 400 square metres. Another important factor was easy access to mains water.

Raised beds

Through government and community grants, Harvest Garden has transitioned from ground level to raised garden beds, for the following reasons:

- they are easier to garden on

- they provide better drainage and aid soil warming in spring
- less walking on the beds reduces soil compaction.

Produce planning

For several reasons, the Harvest Garden is primarily aimed at spring to autumn planting and harvesting of produce.

- Summer yields a higher volume of vegetables for the kitchen and harvest stall.
- Winter produce requires more management and resources, are generally not grown; e.g. brassicas (cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage etc.) need more pest control and additional fertilisers and netting for high productivity.
- The winter period is used to rest the beds and improve the soil through digging in discarded vegetable scraps and general garden maintenance.
- Volunteers are often away from Canberra during winter.

Planning begins in winter to determine what seedlings to produce and plant in spring and where to plant. Planning is based on the following factors:

- Crop rotation – record is kept each season of the location of produce and their success or failure. This is important to record if there is a change of volunteers managing the garden.
- Growing requirements – this is particularly important for seedlings such as tomatoes, cucumbers, zucchini, basil that require frost protection in spring, plants that like the heat, such as capsicums, chillies and eggplants, or plants that might require vertical support, e.g. growing pumpkins along a fence.
- Ease of picking – beans and cucumbers are planted on the

edges of raised beds for easy harvesting.

- Hydroponics – a donated system is used to grow leafy produce such as lettuce, silverbeet, pak choi, dill and coriander – the season determines what is grown.
- Produce that has high and constant yields during the season is preferred.
- Produce that can be stored over several months, such as onions, garlic and pumpkins, are grown as they can be used by the kitchen over several months after harvest.
- New vegetables – every season we trial a vegetable that may be preferred by some CCC clients from a multicultural background. Okra has been grown but the season was too wet and cool for it to be successful. This season we are trialling Asian melons.
- Seedlings are grown by the volunteers, obtained from Canberra Seed Savers, local suppliers or purchased commercially.

Overall, our plan is centred on *yield* and *quality*.

Produce grown

Produce grown includes:

- Summer – dwarf beans, cucumbers, tomatoes, capsicums, eggplants, corn, chillies, chives, zucchini, squash, pumpkins, basil, raspberries, dahlias
- Winter/Spring – garlic, onions, silverbeet, fennel, beetroot, broad beans
- Herbs – parsley, chives, oregano, rosemary, thyme
- Permanent – rhubarb, lemons, raspberries, dahlias.

Fertilisers and composting

Practices to improve soil health include the following:



Fresh produce at the weekly summer harvest stall ready for distribution.
Photo: Greg Blood.

- In winter, trenches are dug and filled with vegetable scraps. Sugarcane mulch is also dug in.
- Most beds have worm buckets added – a large round container with a lid and holes drilled in the sides and bottom. The lid can be lifted to regularly add vegetable scraps. This method means that rodents are kept at bay.
- In early spring, cow manure purchased commercially is added just before planting and the soil forked over.
- Seamungus® product (made by brewing seaweed, fish, humic acid and manure) is applied around the base of seedlings after they have been planted.
- Sugarcane mulch is applied once plants are established; this breaks down over the season and improves the soil.
- Seasol® is applied to seedlings to minimise transplant shock and strengthen the root system.
- Weak, diluted Bokashi tea and worm leachate is watered on plants as a tonic.

Watering

Installing underground irrigation was one of the first tasks in establishing the garden. Water is now delivered by drip irrigation to all beds. Costs are thereby reduced and the garden can be watered in the absence of volunteer – important during Christmas periods. There

are two water tanks with inbuilt pumps, irrigation system using tank water and moving to mains water when required. There is an irrigation timing system that allows us to regulate irrigation depending on garden use and weather.

Plant protection

Weather can affect produce growth from seedling to harvest. In January 2020, a significant hailstorm in Canberra devastated the garden. In Spring 2022, commercial, 70% shade cloth was installed over seven major beds. This has already been beneficial as Canberra has had several hailstorms since its installation. In addition, it has allowed earlier spring planting of seedlings, affording some protection from late frosts.

Used plastic milk containers are used to protect seedlings. The bottom is cut off and the container placed over a small bamboo stake and the seedling.

As extreme weather events appear to be becoming more common in Canberra, plant protection has become more important if high yields are desired.

Weed and pest control

Harvest Garden is an organic garden. We have implemented several environmentally benign practices to reduce weeds and pests.

Weed control

- Paths – early on in the development of the garden,

weeds in the garden beds and surrounding paths were a major problem and took up a great deal of volunteers' time and effort. All the paths are now covered with high-quality weed mat and large tan bark.

- Garden beds – sugarcane mulch is applied to reduce weeds and soil evaporation. During winter, some beds are covered with large, repurposed awning canvas to reduce weeds and money spent on costly mulches.

Pest and disease control

- Disease control is undertaken through crop rotation and management of early growth: leaf growth of tomatoes near the ground is removed, mulching to reduce soil fungal diseases, and removal of diseased leaves or plants.
- Staking plants: this helps to reduce plants touching the soil or other plants and thereby reduces the risk of spread of disease.
- Drip irrigation reduces water on leaves minimising the risk of fungal disease.
- Pests are currently not a major problem in the garden. This could be because the garden is removed from other local vegetable gardens. However, past pest problems have included:
 - Snails and slugs – we have tried organic home-made snail traps, organic snail bait and physical collection. It has been found that the mulching of garden beds and tan bark on paths have vastly reduced the snail and slug population.
 - Slaters have attacked new seedlings. Bottomless old milk carton around seedlings and removing mulch around seedlings has helped.
 - Cockatoos are often attracted to the garden particularly in winter. Garlic is netted and the beds covered by shade cloth appear to deter invaders.

Produce distribution

There are four primary means of distribution:

(continued on following page)

(continued from previous page)

- Kitchen – uses seasonal produce particularly in summer and autumn.
- Harvest stall – weekly harvest stall from January to April. Customers are charged a small fee – \$1 per kg or container for produce. This income supports the management of the garden – fertilisers, mulches, seedlings and water.
- CCC Hand Up food pantry – distribution when harvest stall is not in operation.
- Small container gardens are supplied to clients for growing produce at home.

Volunteers

Most community produce gardens cannot afford to employ a gardener. As a result, volunteers are the most critical component – without volunteers nothing happens. The garden needs to be an attractive not daunting environment for volunteers. In 2024, there are four regular volunteers, and they have a range of skills and interests.

Raised beds, mulched paths and protective shade cloth at the Harvest Garden. Photo: Greg Blood.

Grants

Since it was established in 2016, CCC has obtained grants for its development: ACT Government Community Grant for its establishment (2015/16), LDAT (Local Drug Action Team) (2019), IMB Bank (2022), Rotary Club of Hall (2023) and ACT Government Community Grant (2023/2024). These grants have assisted in constructing raised garden beds and purchasing a trailer. There are many government and community grants programs available to assist in an establishing and developing a community organisation produce garden.

Community support

Since established, the Harvest Garden and its volunteers have been able to develop fruitful relationships with many individuals and organisations, including Canberra Seed Savers, the Ainslie Urban Farm, and the Canberra Organic Growers Society's gardens in Charnwood and Cook. Engagement with the community is important for a successful and viable community organisation produce garden.

Education

The Harvest Garden has had an education role through:

- students with an intellectual disability helping in the garden
- local primary school students learning about the garden and cooking in the kitchen
- garden tours for CCC clients, Life Unlimited Church community, and garden groups
- at the harvest stall, volunteers provide garden advice when distributing produce and some visitors swap organic produce and share ideas.

Conclusion

Establishing a community organisation produce garden has many benefits for the organisation, its volunteers and clients. However, the community organisation needs to have a strong commitment to the produce garden to attract and retain the volunteers that will be its lifeblood. This article has outlined how CCC has developed a productive and successful produce garden. We hope that it may inspire other community organisations to consider the benefits of establishing a produce garden.

This is an abridged article. A fuller account on the CCC Harvest Garden operation and principles can be obtained from Canberra City Care manager@canberracitycare.org. 🍃



The Compost Coach, by Kate Flood, Murdoch Books, an imprint of Allen & Unwin, 2023, 264 pp, RRP \$39.99.

An online search for books on practical aspects of compost and composting yields more than 50 titles currently available, so a publisher launching a new entrant to the market might be considered a tad brave. I think such courage will pay off for the publisher of Kate Flood's *The Compost Coach*, which recently hit bookstores and libraries, because it's a truly worthy offering.

From my perusal of the work, I can safely say that the author provides an answer to just about any question a reader is likely to ask about the business of composting and the uses and properties of compost, and does so in a lucid and engaging manner. The author, who styles herself 'Compostable Kate', delivers very easy access to information for not just beginners but 'experts' too will, I'm sure, discover hidden gems.

Her coverage of the topic, theory and practice, is encyclopaedic. Her chapter titles foreshadow this: The What; The Why; The How; The Kit; The Worms; The Who; The Scraps; The Soil.

Consider 'The Who': they're the myriad organisms – insects and other arthropods, annelids, molluscs, crustaceans, bacteria, fungi, protozoans and nematodes – that beaver away in your compost to produce the black gold you seek for your garden. They all need to be looked after: *The Compost Coach* tells you how.

I used to think that worms were the be all and end all of composting, a reflection of my erstwhile relative ignorance of the complex interactions and inter-relationships of the compost heap's flora and fauna. Kate acknowledges that 'Worms often receive all the attention as the major decomposers within compost. They're fabulous, don't get



me wrong, but its bacteria and fungi that do most of the heavy lifting, multiplying and eating your waste'. Balance is provided by a full chapter on the business of worm farming '... a composting system with optimised conditions for special worms, which become the chief composters'.

A very handy section of the book details the A to Z of compostable materials. It confirms that you can, among other tricky things, compost lemons, dairy and onions. The idea is to cut things up into small pieces to increase the surface area for all those microbes to do their thing on, and like a lot of things in life introduce them in moderation.

An innovation (to me at least) in *The Compost Coach* is the information accessible via QR codes scattered

throughout the book. When you scan each one of these with your smartphone camera, a short-form video from the author's Instagram page pops up, featuring a clip that brings to life the topic you're reading about. Like the rest of the book, they're great! But be warned: you could spend hours looking at them.

This is not a book to read from cover to cover. My strategy would be read the early chapters to understand the rules of the game then come back from time to time for coaching to lift your game or for troubleshooting. I've been composting for many years, with mixed results. I'm happy to say that, even in the short time I've had this book, my game has been lifted!

Ed Highley

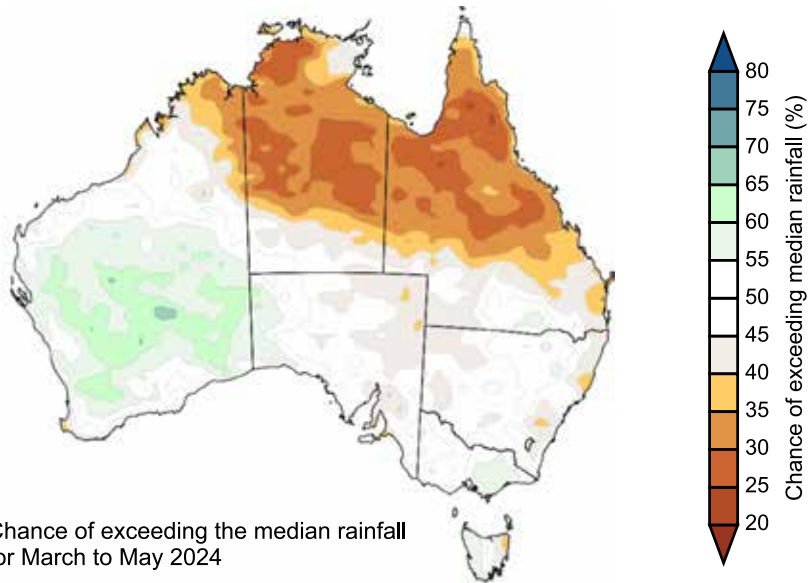
El Niño past its peak and Indian Ocean Dipole returns to neutral

Andy Hrast's regular weather forecast for the months ahead.

* * *

The Bureau of Meteorology update released on 6 February 2024 says that sea-surface temperatures in the central tropical Pacific have peaked and are now starting to fall.

They are expected to return to neutral (neither El Niño nor La Niña) levels in the 2024 Southern Hemisphere autumn. Six of seven models predict a return to neutral by May, and the seventh model by June.



Water storage levels in the Canberra region and capital cities		
	Feb '24	Jan '23
ACT storages	100%	100%
Murray-Darling Basin	85%	96%
Burrinjuck Dam	93%	98%
Blowering Dam	74%	95%
Sydney	94%	95%
Melbourne	96%	96%
Brisbane	73%	81%
Adelaide	64%	81%
Perth	44%	54%

Most tropical Pacific Ocean atmospheric indicators are now close to normal levels.

The Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) has returned to neutral. IOD events typically break down at the end of spring as the monsoon trough shifts south into the Southern Hemisphere. The breakdown of the positive IOD in 2023 has been later than usual, likely due to the strength of this event and an active El Niño.

The majority of forecasting models predict that the IOD will be neutral until at least April, consistent with its annual cycle.

For February to April, below average rainfall is likely (60–80% probability) for most of northern Australia, extending into western WA, SA, and western and eastern parts of NSW. There is no consistent indication of wet or dry conditions for much of south-eastern Australia.

fronting the chill

Fire cider: a foil to winter colds and flu

Fire cider, which draws on natural ingredients, was one of a range of traditional formulations for preventing and managing winter illnesses covered by Christine Elwes in a talk to fellow Kambah Community Garden members. With winter not too far off, here is the gen on its ingredients and how to fashion them into a beneficial tonic.

* * *

Versions of the tonic called fire cider have been long used to boost health, and to prevent and treat colds and flu. All of its ingredients are easy to grow or source.

Apple cider vinegar is used to extract the minerals from the other ingredients. Honey is used for flavour and is both antifungal and antimicrobial. Chilli or cayenne peppers stimulate the circulatory system and promote healing. Garlic is antibacterial, antifungal, antimicrobial and an expectorant. Horseradish stimulates digestion and helps reduce sinus and lung congestion. Ginger is antiviral and anti-inflammatory and boosts the immune system. Onions are full of nutrients, improve immune function and are also antibacterial.

Combining all of these ingredients creates a powerful tonic that can be used in many ways to boost your immunity and help you through the cold and flu season.

Ingredients

- ½ cup freshly grated horseradish
- ½ cup freshly grated ginger
- 10 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 medium brown onion, chopped
- 1 lemon, zest and juice
- 2 chillies or ¼ teaspoon cayenne
- Apple cider vinegar
- ¼ cup raw honey

To a turnip

All hail noble turnip,
 Much more than a swede
 Denied by poor makeup,
 From the love that you need.
 Shunned by the masses,
 Ignored by great chefs,
 Bereft of a champion
 Endowed with some heft.
 But your day will come,
 Of that I am sure,
 When the tastes of the
 gourmands
 Are truly mature.
 And then they will see,
 From all prejudice free,
 That the turnip organic
 Makes a great recipe.
 Roast them or mash them
 For luncheon or tea,
 Or even for breakfast
 If you're besotted like me.
 And at your next dinner party
 Your guests will agree
 That your herby dressed
 turnips
 With roast chicken are free
 Of pretentions, an experience
 new,
 And will consider themselves
 blessed
 To have been invited by you.
 — Anon.

Method

Add horseradish, ginger, garlic, onion, lemon and chillies/cayenne to a sealable, wide-mouthed 1 litre jar. Add apple cider vinegar sufficient to cover the herbs. Seal and leave in a cool, dark place for at least 4 weeks to infuse, shaking the tonic daily. After 4 weeks strain the herbs from the vinegar and add the honey. Mix well and store in the fridge.

Use

Fire cider can be used in various ways. Two tablespoonfuls can be taken every morning, straight or diluted with water. It can also be added to soups, used as a marinade or poured over vegetables.

The recipe given here is for a basic fire cider. To it you can add other ingredients, such as oregano, thyme, turmeric or orange, to flavour it to your particular liking.



Australian King-Parrot

Our resident artist **Cathy Morison** captures the King Parrot, one of the flashiest of garden visitors.

Despite sporting beautiful bright-red plumage on their breast and, in the case of the adult male, also on the head, you are more likely to hear the Australian King-Parrot (to give it its standard common name in full) before spotting it. Its calls are a loud, high-pitched whistle and, when in flight, a rolling 'carr-ack'.

King Parrots (*Alisterus scapularis*) are a regular visitor to Canberra. They are particularly common in the older established suburbs where there are large street and yard trees and established fruit trees. Interestingly, when foraging for food they are subservient to many of the other common suburban birds. Their Wikipedia entry notes that they are

near the bottom of the pecking order. At a source of food such as seed, it puts Sulphur-crested Cockatoos at the top of the pecking order, followed by Rainbow Lorikeets, magpies, corellas, galahs, King Parrots, and Crimson Rosellas.

The male King Parrot I've drawn here – which I am thinking of christening 'King Tom' – is seen making a meal of unripened cherry tomatoes in the photographer's garden. It is a timely reminder that the savoury and nutritious produce we grow for ourselves are also very attractive to parrot and cockatoo foragers. If you are netting your garden to prevent losing your crop, please remember to use wildlife-friendly netting.

Acknowledgment

I thank photographer Richard Frieser for generously allowing use of the reference photo for my drawing.

Cabbage White Butterfly: bane of the brassicas

Brassicas (cabbages, cauliflowers, broccoli, kale etc.) are the favoured food of the caterpillars of the Cabbage White Butterfly (CWB), known to science as *Pieris rapae*, the species name 'rapae' derived from the same root (excuse the unintentional pun) as that evidenced in *Brassica rapa*, the turnip.

A bit of natural history: CWB females lay their eggs on the undersides of their host's leaves. The eggs hatch into caterpillars after about 4 days. These caterpillars then eat for 17 days, before pupating for 8 days, after which, following metamorphosis, they emerge as adult butterflies. Cabbage white butterflies usually produce three generations per year, starting in mid spring and ending with the arrival of frost.

For their two and a bit weeks of life CWB caterpillars are voracious feeders on brassicas and can annihilate seedlings within a few days. Current autumn plantings for winter brassica crops need protection. For organic gardeners, there are two main options: netting/enclosure or *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt). Forget the plastic butterfly waving on a stalk; it doesn't work.

Bt, formulated as Dipel® Bio-insecticide Spray and retailed as 'Nature's Way® Caterpillar Killer', is a bacterium that kills caterpillars when they ingest it. It is specific to caterpillars, is harmless to all the good guys in the garden (pollinators and pest predators and parasites) or your plants, and is a certified 'Input for Organic Gardens'.



My experience is that Dipel® is very effective when used as directed. It is important to understand that it is not a contact insecticide: its effect depends on caterpillars ingesting it, following which it takes a little time to act (you may have to accept a little damage). Consequently, respraying will likely be needed at intervals (5–7 days recommended) as successive waves of caterpillars hatch, more frequently if rain washes the spray

deposit – usually evident as a white powder – from the leaves. Also, take care when watering: water the soil not the plant. Don't wait until you see evidence of caterpillar feeding: apply Dipel® from planting time onwards.

You can find everything more you might want to know about Bt at <npic.orst.edu>, the website of the US National Pesticide Information Center. I couldn't find much of relevance at the APVMA site.

Ed Highley

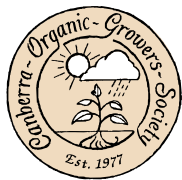
Regenesis

George Monbiot is a British writer known for his environmental and political activism. He writes a regular column for the *Guardian* newspaper. Greta Thunberg says he 'is one of the most fearless and important voices in the global climate movement today'. The latest of his several books is *Regenesis: feeding the world without devouring the planet*. The title tells you that it will be of especial interest to all committed organic gardeners.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, host of the acclaimed *River Cottage* series on television, writes of the work:

Monbiot rolls up his sleeves and pulls on his boots for an uncompromising session of agricultural dragon-slaying. Unafraid to propose a new world order for farming and food production that is kinder to both people and planet. *Regenesis* is rigorous and restive, but also witty, original and humane. Let us hope it is read, digested and acted on by people, politicians and policymakers the world over.

A review in the next issue of *Canberra Organic* will explore its content and messages.



autumn planting guide

Brassicas

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

Peas

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

Lettuces

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

Leeks

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



Onions

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

Spring flowers

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

Green manures

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

Green manure crops suitable for planting in Canberra are:

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

Non-legumes: Barley, oats and rye.

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

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

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

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

S = seed sowing; T = transplanting

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



Bush capers: an enduring recipe

It is often said you can take the girl or the boy out of the bush but you can't take the bush out of them. Kids born and raised in the country tend to be resilient, tempered by the weather and seasons, usually pragmatic, resourceful and self-reliant, sometimes quiet or taciturn; and above all else used to eating different food and meals to city born shop-accessible children.

My rural upbringing in Queensland in the 1940s and 50s, with two periods of living on coastal islands, included the absence of electricity, using a fuel stove, rain water from tanks (with frogs and possums contributing) and wells when the rain didn't come (and turned the copper-boiled sheets brownish), outside toilets, milking cows by hand and separating milk to make daily hand-churned butter kept

cool in an evaporative safe, feeding the pigs, and growing and eating all the essentials.

Potatoes, pumpkin and corn were among the staples but green leaf vegetables were harder to cultivate. However, necessity is the mother of many ingenious culinary and other inventions. Until my mother's demise she enjoyed a cheese sandwich with young nasturtium leaves and a light salad that often included the mustardy flavour of nasturtium flowers. Here is another treat also made from the nasturtium plant, an Australian bush recipe for poor person's capers.

Pickled nasturtium buds

- Pick the nasturtium buds or seeds when dry on a sunny day
- Rub any large buds to separate into two or three sections

- Brush or wash them to remove any dried material or hidden small insects
- If damp, dry in the sun or in a cool oven
- Use sufficient vinegar, a rounded teaspoon of salt per litre, a few bay leaves and crushed peppercorns or ground pepper (adjust volume to suit jars) into a saucepan and boil
- Cool the spiced vinegar
- Pack nasturtium buds into jars with a some of the bay leaves and pepper
- Top up with cold vinegar and seal
- Label and leave to pickle for at least 3 months and preferably longer.

We made some of these pickled nasturtium 'capers' recently and have enjoyed them in salads and with cheese and meat dishes. And if instruction is required on hand-milking or the construction and use of pit latrines, correspondence should, in the first instance, be directed to the editor!

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Full page	\$72 (\$60)	\$240 (\$200)

Please contact editor@cogs.asn.au

Articles in the magazine do not necessarily reflect the views of COGS. Advertised products and services are not specifically endorsed by COGS.

COGS Community Garden Watering Rules

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.



**Liquid castings
 (worm juice)**
\$10.00 (1 litre bottle)
\$40.00 (5 litre jerry can)
\$90.00 (15 litre drum)

Adult WORMS for sale

**Packs include juvenile worms
 and worm capsules (eggs)**

1000 worms (0.25 kg) \$30.00

2000 worms (0.5 kg) \$50.00

4000 worms (1.0 kg) \$90.00

- Pack contains adult composting worms consisting of three varieties; Red wiggler, Tiger and Indian blue
- Worms will consume over half of their body weight in a day
- Worms produce a casting (vermicaste) that is rich with nutrients and full of microbial activity

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