

Canberra Organic



Winter 2024
Vol 32 No 2 Issue 123

AGM news round-up

Our Dickson garden's inspiring mural

Call for community grant applications

Community gardens in Germany and NZ

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.

The quarterly publication of the Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.

Welcome to the Winter 2024 issue of *Canberra Organic*. I hope you're all up to date with planting your favourite cold season and spring crops. See our planting guide on page 26, and articles mentioned below, for things you might think about teasing the soil with in the next few months.

The lead article in this issue is a wrap-up of the proceedings of our AGM in March. Have a read of an overall good news story for the society. It is followed by informative and varied contributions from our Crace, Cook, Dickson and Erindale gardens. Thanks go to the garden convenors for those. There's also a note about welcome renewal at the Oaks Estate Community Garden.

There are two articles about community gardens in Germany and New Zealand. It's interesting to compare and contrast the circumstances in those countries with those here at home. The New Zealand model is fairly close to ours, whereas the German allotment garden is, in many ways, poles apart. Imagine having a 500 square metre plot, housing a comfortable shed with a solar panel on the roof, a fully equipped kitchen on site and many other amenities. I wish!

Back in early autumn, as an aficionado of *Solanum tuberosum* I was taken aback when reading a letter in the *Canberra Times* criticising the sale of hot chips at the kiosk of one of the local public swimming pools, and suggesting that they should be replaced



by healthier alternatives. This rankled. The impression could be had that potatoes are not good food, which is overall untrue. Indeed, the claim can be made that the potato is the only single cheap food that can support human life when fed as the sole article of diet.

I decided to attempt to set the record straight in an article extolling the multifarious health and other virtues of the spud, but I thought I'd first better check what has been written in past issues of *Canberra Organic*. I discovered no fewer than seven articles revealing just about everything you'd want to know the not-so-humble potato, the first from 1998, the most recent from the Summer 2017 issue, in which the redoubtable Elizabeth Dangerfield extols the health and nutritional virtues of potatoes, why you should grow your own, and how to harvest and cook them. What more could be said?

Another important message in this potato story is the ease with which I could find a substantial volume of existing information on our website using the index of *Canberra Organic* articles created by Peter White – an amazing resource. Thanks again Peter, and also to our web manager Cathy Morison for creating the additional search tool. I used the index again, to see if anything had been written on growing vegetables in the Canberra winter, a seasonally apposite topic. I found two informative articles: 'Fresh vegetables from the garden in the middle of winter', by Marjatta Asa (November 1993); and 'Winter vegetables', a very nice article that is, somewhat inexplicably, unattributed (November 2001).

I'm sad to report that Life Member Terry Williams is retiring as *Canberra Organic's* honorary dispatcher. This is his last issue. For some time now, Terry has been sending the broadcast email calling for contributions to each issue, collecting and mailing the printed copies, and emailing the electronic version. Thanks Terry for a grand job. You can come back any time you like.

Finally, those members who get the printed magazine in the mail will have noted that it came in a paper envelope, another small step in the big quest to keep used plastic out of the environment.

Ed Highley

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president's column

What a beautiful autumn, with long sunny days, we have experienced. At Holder Garden we progressively harvested a bumper crop of pumpkins from our plot during April which will help see us through the winter months.

Winter is a good time to grow a range of vegetables, particularly brassicas and leafy greens – see the planting guide on p. 26 and the growing guides on our website. It is also a good time to tidy up and clear your plots in time for spring plantings, not forgetting the rest of the garden as well.

In this issue, our editor provides a wrap-up of our Annual General Meeting held on 24 March at the Dickson Community Garden. It was a good turnout of over 30 people. At the meeting we were unable, unfortunately, to secure the services of a new Treasurer. The position is a vital one for the ongoing functions of COGS, so I am pleased to report that, after a search effort, Kasey Jordan has taken on the role. Kasey recently joined the Charnwood Community Garden and loves to garden with his daughter and other members of his family.

COGS is almost entirely run by volunteers. At the AGM I mentioned the vital work of all our volunteers, ranging from members of the Executive Committee, the garden committees, the editor, and contributors to *Canberra Organic*, IT services and other essential

activities. Without them COGS would not exist. I urge you to consider what you can do to help your local community garden and your local community more broadly. Our new life members Alan Timmiss and Peter Weddell embody this spirit.

Although he is not a volunteer – he receives an honorarium for his work – I would also like to give a shout out to Matt Mawson our magazine designer. Matt lives in Queensland, but this is no barrier to him working closely with the editor down here to create an attractive, informative and highly professional magazine – something he has been doing for 10 years – this issue being no exception.

In early March, my wife Lisa and I travelled across to New Zealand – our first overseas trip in over 5 years. A bit by accident, part of our road trip turned into looking for community gardens in the various small towns we visited. Our article and some photos from the trip are in this issue.

Last year COGS was approached by the Urban Treescapes arm of the ACT Government with the offer of 1,000 trees to plant in our gardens. We sought clarification on whether smaller native shrubs were included in the offer as we don't have much space for large trees which can create shading and root problems for growing fruit and vegetables. Fortunately, they had some and five gardens took up



the offer, ordering around 80 plants. Unfortunately, due to weather and other issues several of the plants were lost over the summer – greatly reducing the number of shrubs available. The remaining plants were delivered to Cook, Charnwood and BCG gardens in April. We hope that more plants will become available for these gardens and others that missed out.

The above is a good example of the continued support COGS has received from the ACT Government from both 'sides of the aisle' for many decades. This is an election year in the ACT and it is hard to miss your local MLAs and candidates discussing issues of importance to Canberrans around town. COGS continues to advocate for more community gardens across Canberra for the benefits they bring to local communities. If you see one of the candidates at your local shopping centre or at other venues let them know your thoughts.

Finally, I was very fortunate to attend the planting of 'Veronica's Orchard' at our Dickson garden in early May. I had a long chat with Veronica, who is 101, and has become a bit of an institution at the garden. The orchard is a lovely gesture of thanks from her fellow garden members. Look out for more on this in the next issue of *Canberra Organic*.

I hope you enjoy this issue of *Canberra Organic*. Let us know what you think of it and what topics and issues you would like covered in future issues. Send your thoughts to me or the editor.

Here's to a productive winter!

Neil Williams

A riot of autumn colour. Photo: Ange McNeilly



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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 garden convenors

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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Earlier this year, Susana Achondo (right) was able to share her enthusiasm for gardening at Erindale with her sister Christina visiting from Chile. Susana joined the garden in 2023 when she and her family arrived in Canberra on a posting. Photo: Didi Sommer



AGM news round-up

The members who attended the COGS 2024 Annual General Meeting, hosted by the Dickson Community Garden on 24 March, took in an all round good news story in glorious early autumn weather.

The President reports on a productive year

COGS President Neil Williams reported on what was a successful year for the society's 500 or so members, with many events held to promote the principles and positives of organic gardening, and the benefits of COGS membership.

A summary of the main points of his wide-ranging report follows.

The COGS Committee met eight times during the year, with strong participation by committee members.

The convenors of COGS 12 gardens continued their frontline work during the year, with new convenors stepping up at Betty Cornhill, Charnwood, Dickson, Holder, Kaleen and Kambah, bringing fresh ideas and new enthusiasm, while

convenors at the other gardens continued their great work. Several garden convenors took advantage of the open invitation to attend COGS Executive meetings.

During the year, as part of COGS submission to the draft Food Strategy (see *Canberra Organic*, Spring 2023 issue) and in meetings with relevant Ministers, the committee engaged with the ACT Government to draw its attention to the high level of demand for community gardens. COGS also engaged with developers in Ginninderry and Denman Prospect on their plans to build community gardens, but unfortunately nothing has come to fruition at this stage.

A key aim of COGS is to promote organic growing to members and the wider public. During the year, the following events and activities supported that objective.

- There were several successful open days, workshops and other events at Dickson, Oaks Estate and Kambah. Also, Crace held a well attended open day to celebrate its tenth anniversary.

- In October, Vice President Michele Barson and Mitchell garden hosted visitors from Penrith City Council who were seeking ideas for improving sustainability in their council area.
- Information Officer Mike Gisick provided engaging content on our social media platforms which led to the number of COGS followers growing by around 20 per cent.
- Website Manager Cathy Morison made substantial improvements to the site's functionality, so as to improve user experience, particularly for people accessing the website on mobile devices – this work is ongoing. Cathy also created online searchability for the index of Canberra Organic content developed by Peter White.
- Cathy and a small subcommittee worked to update content across a number of areas of the website, and remove barriers to access of information. Login to a members area is no longer required and information is available to all,

(continued on following page)

The AGM assembly. Photo: Mike Gisick



(from previous page)

including current and past editions of *Canberra Organic*.

- Charnwood Community Garden's Peter White developed an index to key articles and information published in issues of *Canberra Organic* from 1993 to 2023. The index will be updated regularly.
- Production of *Canberra Organic*, a high quality, informative magazine for members and the wider public, continued under a new editor.
- COGS activities were promoted via a stall at a Canberra City Farm Open Day.
- The President was interviewed several times on ABC 666 and 2CC to highlight COGS work and discuss the ACT Government's draft Food Strategy.

The President paid tribute to and thanked COGS many volunteers – the Executive, convenors, garden committees, helpers at working bees, *Canberra Organic*'s production team and contributors; and those who maintain our website, email members, process membership applications, invoice and pay the bills, and more – without whom COGS could not exist.

Treasurer reports sound financial position

Treasurer Nick Sifniotis presented the society's financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2023.

The bottom line for the year was a surplus of \$19,897, a turnaround from the previous year's deficit of \$5,461. The society's net assets at the end of the year totalled \$186,173, almost all as cash at bank. Figures presented for the past 5 years show a steady, significant increase in net assets year on year.

A fall in membership fee income following their reduction was more than offset by income from other sources.

Water is the biggest single expenditure item for COGS. The bill for the year was, fortunately, less than anticipated, given the BoM's early prediction of a very dry summer – \$12,382, as compared with, for example, \$25,443 in the



President Neil Williams presents his report at the AGM. Photo: Ed Highley

2019 drought, in which year a deficit of almost \$6,000 was recorded.

Capital invested at various of the 12 community gardens totalled \$12,403.87, the largest items being:

- \$4,235 for a new gate at Holder garden
- \$2,200 on new raised beds at Crace
- \$1,980 for two water tanks at Kambah (paid for by fundraising from the garden's Open Day)
- \$1,372 for a new lawn mower at Kaleen.

Election of committee

Former President Andy Hrast presided over the election of the new committee for the year ahead. Neil Williams was re-elected as President unopposed.

Peter Weddell was elected as Vice President, following the retirement of Michele Barson, who had held the position since 2020–21. He was previously an ordinary member of the committee and Michele remains on the committee as an ordinary member.

Nick Sifniotis resigned as Treasurer and there were no nominations for the position at the meeting. After a wide search subsequently, Kasey Jordan from Charnwood garden has been appointed as Treasurer.

Narelle McLean was elected as Garden Coordinator, following the retirement Jo McMillan from the position. Narelle was previously an ordinary member of the committee.

Dietland (Didi) Sommer and Cynthia Wilkes were elected as new ordinary members. Teresa Rose resigned from the committee.

Full membership of the committee can be found on page 4.

New Life Membership awards

For exemplary contributions to the work of the society, two Life Membership awards were announced at this year's AGM – to Alan Timmiss and Peter Weddell.

Alan Timmiss

Alan was one of the founding members of Crace Community Garden in 2013. He was contributing even before it opened: the landscape architect for the garden consulted him to ensure that organic gardening principles were incorporated into the design. He served on the garden committee for 4 years and, with his wife, established the collection of excess produce from the garden to the Gungahlin Uniting Church's 'Mustard Seed' food pantry. Alan also helped establish, and maintains the collection of stable sweepings from the Pegasus Riding School for

the composting system and regularly takes green waste not suitable for on-site composting to the Mitchell green waste depot.

He is an outstanding role model for garden members and has helped several gardeners establish their plots. He is a regular volunteer at working bees and can often be seen manning the BBQ at these and other events at the garden. Alan contributes more broadly to the Crace community through his work with the local landcare group and was involved in the development of a sensory garden along the Crace ponds, using organic principles.

All said, Alan is a local hero at the Crace Community Garden.

Peter Weddell

Peter is well known to COGS members, having served as President in 2019–20. Peter has been an active member of the COGS Executive Committee since 2016, as Secretary and an ordinary member as well as President.

Peter took on the role of President at a difficult time, due to sudden resignations. He led COGS through two legal cases, showing strong leadership, judgement and compassion. Peter also led COGS through the early lockdowns of



Veronica Dunphy, 101 years young. Photo: Ed Highley

COVID, successfully advocating for the gardens to remain open to allow COGS gardeners to remain active.

Peter is also a highly respected and effective Convenor of the Cook Community Garden – a role he commenced in 2017. As Convenor, Peter has shown strong leadership in the running of the garden and in obtaining funding for infrastructure upgrades, including a new pergola, water infrastructure and raised beds. Peter also helped to organise

the successful 20th anniversary celebrations for Cook community garden in 2021, which included assisting Julie Gorrell to complete *From Bush to Bounty*, the published history of the Cook garden (available on the COGS website).

Gardening 101: a big birthday

The meeting was delighted to acknowledge the attendance of COGS most senior member Veronica Dunphy, a member of the Dickson community garden. What's more it was Veronica's birthday the day before and she was looking chipper, having just reached 101! We all sang happy birthday and gave her three rousing cheers before tucking into some lovely afternoon tea and chatting with friends old and new in the glorious surrounds.

Dickson garden convenor Michel England reports:

Veronica Dunphy is a grand person who loves gardening, and trees most of all for their stature and small beginnings. Veronica has been at the COGS Dickson garden for almost 10 years (see *Canberra Organic*, Autumn 2020 issue) and is an inspiration for her positive attitude, gratitude, energy and gardening prowess. We are most fortunate to have Veronica at our garden; 101 years young and still digging, nurturing and admiring all that plants offer. 🌱

New COGS Life Members Peter Weddell (left) and Alan Timmis with President Neil Williams (centre). Photo: Mike Gisick.



Relections on my time at Crace Community Garden

New Life Member Alan Timmiss reflects on the benefits and pleasures of his 12 years at Crace.

It was an unexpected honour to receive Life Membership of the Canberra Organic Growers Society (COGS) at this year's Annual General Meeting. As I looked around the meeting at all the members who step up each year to undertake the Committee positions that are essential for COGS to function, I felt somewhat embarrassed by my award.

The award made me reflect on the past 12 years since our move to Crace and, in particular, the positive influence of the Crace Community Garden. We had lived in Macgregor for the previous 37 years, having bought a new home on a 'bare,' quarter-acre block. Like most Canberrans in those days a lot of friendships were formed through the school communities in the suburbs. In Crace there is no school and no community hall due to its proximity to the adjacent suburb of Palmerston.

Fortunately, the 'developer' of Crace had the foresight to appoint a Community Liaison officer to assist the new residents of Crace to establish some community connections. One of the initiatives of the developer, in consultation



Crace Community Garden in autumn. Photo: Ed Highley

with the ACT Government, was the creation of a community garden within the suburb, the establishment and management of which would not have been possible without the support of COGS.

In 2013 the garden was officially opened and has proved to be a successful component of the social fabric of Crace. The membership of the Crace Community Garden reflects a harmony characteristic of the culturally diverse residents of Crace and its surrounding suburbs. We have children from the local Child Care and residents from the Goodwin Retirement Village participating in our garden. It has been a pleasure to see how the garden has developed, with people from

various cultures learning from each other different methods of growing fresh, organic vegetables, herbs and fruit. From a personal perspective it has also been a great way for Maudie and me to meet many of our other neighbours as we distribute the excess produce from our garden plot on a seasonal basis.

The friends and connections we have made through the Crace Community Garden have also helped facilitate the establishment of active and successful Landcare and ParkCare groups within the suburb.

Crace is a great community to be part of, and the ACT Government should be encouraged to support COGS in its role in the management of this and its other community gardens. 🍃

New team at Oaks Estate Community Garden

At a meeting on 4 May, members of the Oaks Estate Community Garden elected a new management team, with Elisa Pevere and Suzanne Rogers as co-convenors, supported by committee members Jingling Chen, Robyn Hodgson and Ewan Maidment. Much work is planned to renew the garden. To complete it, wider COGS support and financial assistance will likely be needed and sought. High priority tasks are:

- removal of metal edging and metal posts present on almost all plots and in some common areas, also carpet and artificial grass from several pathways and elsewhere
- dealing with infestations of couch and other weeds
- consolidation of many tiny, scattered plots into more desirable medium- and large-size plots
- importing the soil and compost needed for the refurbishment of vacant plots and the creation of new plots
- obtaining new equipment, including a wheelbarrow and a power grass trimmer.

There are busy times ahead for our friends at the Oaks Estate garden.

– Narelle McLean

All go at Cook Community Garden

Convenor **Peter Weddell*** reports that the garden provided a bountiful summer season of tomatoes, capsicum, corn, zucchini, eggplant, beans and pumpkin, and that its gardeners are now well on the way to provide produce for the winter months with extensive plantings of brassicas, garlic, silverbeet and fennel.

* * *

Much else has been achieved or underway. The garden is looking in good shape, helped by a renewed effort by gardeners to tidy up plots, restore garden edging and mulch pathways. Our working bees have been well attended and have contributed greatly to the look and feel of the garden.

Social activities have included a pizza night at 'To All My Friends' restaurant at Cook Shops, an Australia Day morning tea and, more recently, an Anzac Day morning tea with a good selection of Anzac Biscuits.

Due to the improved weather, we have been able to reopen a 40-square-metre plot that was taken out of commission due a bad infestation of oxalis. The plot was solarised for 3 years using heavy-duty black plastic and, more recently, straw and Dynamic Lifter® were added



Photo: Peter Weddell

to the mix. We are very pleased with the results – oxalis infestation has been countered. The plot has been divided into two 20-square-metre plots.

We have undertaken a downsizing of some larger plots as they become vacant, which has allowed us to cater for an influx of younger gardeners joining our community. They are participating enthusiastically in many of our activities.

In other developments, plans are afoot to introduce a bee colony to the garden, in a

hive adjacent to the existing orchard, and a contract has been let to repair storm-damaged fencing and the main gate. Unhappy news is that we have seen a period of produce thefts since Christmas, targeting immature Butternut Pumpkins. A double-locking system is now in place and we hope that this will prevent further garden incursions.

A community garden plot has been successfully growing produce for donation to various charities: most recently it supplied the fresh-food stall at the Canberra City Care facility at Charnwood. This past summer the plot was

bountiful in growing various pumpkin varieties, including Jap, Butternut, and Queensland Blue, alongside smaller crops of tomatoes and rocket. Thankfully, we noted no thefts from this plot, so we were able to maximise our donations.

During the past 8 months, a small team of volunteers has upgraded and is maintaining the formerly depleted herb patch located at the portal to our garden. The productivity of the patch has thus considerably improved. The team used on-site resources such as mulch and transplantings from other gardens, but also generously purchased some very interesting herbs along with the main culinary essentials. The herbs have already been harvested and used on many occasions, not just by fellow gardeners for personal use, but also for working-bee lunches and barbecues.

Recently gardeners have also teamed up to build communal compost bays to store horse manure and spent mushroom substrate blocks from a local organic mushroom farm. They teamed together to pick up and transport said materials to be stored and available to gardeners on demand at the garden.

* Peter has been convenor at Cook since 2017. Recognising this and many other contributions to COGS, he was elected a Life Member of the society at this year's AGM. Peter briefly tells his own story in the adjacent box. Ed.

My times with Cook and the Committee – Peter Weddell's story

Once I finally retired from fulltime work I took up an opportunity to join the Cook Garden. I was keen to get back into growing vegetables and along the way I absorbed the basic principles of organic growing and learned of the crucial role COGS had played in promoting them across the Canberra community. I was soon roped in to taking on the convenor role at Cook and later joined the COGs committee. This led, in turn, to spells as Secretary for 3 years and a year as President ... and now I'm back as Vice President.

My main focus as convenor at Cook has been to provide opportunities for new gardeners to experience the challenges of growing their own food organically. Plot sizes are slowly being reduced, so as to provide opportunities for more members. This also fits in with the limited time for gardening that some members have. I enjoy the company of my fellow gardeners and we try hard to keep the garden in shape through our working bees and special projects. The regular social events we have during the year get people together, talking and sharing ideas.

The Dickson garden celebrates its inspiring mural

Did you hear about the beautiful mural that was painted at our garden? Read on to get the news. In July 2023, the Dickson Community Garden approached the Art Department of Dickson College to seek student interest to update the existing garden mural. The mural wall was first painted in 2014, envisaged as an activity for art students to flex their creative talents and brighten up the garden. It is a large brick wall approximately 8 m by 3 m. It faces a busy bike path, so gets plenty of passing eyeballs.

Three student artists – Sophie, Indie and Josie – were keen to fit in with their Year 12 studies. The Dickson garden started the process by supplying a brief of preferred motifs and ideas related to life in the garden. We were keen to see pollinators and colour in the design. The artists provided a few designs. We chose one but asked for some elements from others to be included. The artists were happy to accommodate our request.

The first step was a clean canvas for the artists, so Andrew and Michele scrubbed the wall and applied two coats of undercoat over the old mural, thus ensuring that the colours of the new design would really pop. The artists then spent about 3 months



The finished art. Photo: Michele England

hand-painting all the different design elements with acrylic paint. A final clear coat was applied to ensure longevity.

Sophie, Indie and Josie said of the mural:

We really enjoyed painting the mural for the Dickson Garden, it was a great opportunity to work on a large scale, learn new skills and collaborate with others. The design was inspired by the vegetables, fruits and insects we found in the garden. We chose a range of bright, lively colours,

which has created an eye-catching and colourful mural. We hope the community enjoys the new mural as much as we enjoyed creating it!

Much more than enjoy, we love the mural and are so grateful to the young artists. We wish them the very best with their future creative pursuits. The mural was completed in November just in time for our inaugural Open Day at which it received great praise. The Dickson garden thanks the COGS committee for providing funds for all materials used.

— Michele England

(below, L to R) The artists, Sophie, Josie and Indie (photo: Sophie); Andrew applying the wash (photo: Michele England); Sophie and Indie at work on the mural (photo: Michele England)



Erindale less ordinaries – Part 1

Four less-common vegetables grown at the Erindale Community Garden – cucamelon, shiso, tomatillo and yacon – were featured on the back cover of the autumn issue of Canberra Organic. Here, in the first of two parts, Erindale convenor **Didi Sommer** tells of the garden's experience in growing cucamelon and shiso.

* * *

Cucamelon

The cucamelon plant grows as a vine to about 2.5–3 m tall. It is a member of the Cucurbitaceae family – the pumpkins, squashes and gourds. Cucamelons look like tiny watermelons, about grape size. They are said to taste a bit like cucumbers, but with a hint of lime. The plant is native to Mexico, Central America and parts of South America. The plant's scientific name is *Melothria scabra*. As well as cucamelon, it is known by several other common names: mouse melon, Mexican sour gherkin, Mexican miniature watermelon and Mexican sour cucumber. Cucamelon plants are drought tolerant but, like most plants, are more productive when well watered. Cucamelon seed is readily available and, in Canberra, can be planted in spring, with protection for the frost-tender seedlings.

This was the first season that we planted cucamelon at Erindale. Susana knew the cucamelons from Chile, her home country, and volunteered to grow the seedlings for our community plot.

She reported that the seedlings took a long time to develop, most likely as it was too cold. Once the soil had warmed up a bit, we planted the tiny seedlings on one of our climbing trellises and inter-planted them with climbing beans. This proved to be a good combination. The cucamelons grew very well, although at first we did not even notice them among the beans. They grew to the top of the trellis, which is about 2.5 m high. They looked very pretty, like a tiny



Cucamelon

watermelon, but with the size of a big grape. They have a hard skin, are crunchy to eat and taste somewhat like a cucumber. Frankly, we were not so impressed with their taste but they are definitely a curiosity to plant and grow, and look very nice cut in half in a mixed salad. They don't take up much space to grow so it was lovely to see them emerge among the beans.

Shiso (also called beefsteak plant)

Shiso (*Perilla frutescens* var. *crispa*) is a herb in the mint family (Lamiaceae) grown primarily for its leaves, which find wide use in primarily Japanese but also other Asian cuisines. In Japanese cooking, for example, the leaves can be battered and served as tempura, as sushi wraps and, when dried and powdered, as a garnish, but these are just a few of this herb's uses.

At Erindale, our South Korean gardener Young Ja loves to grow shiso and introduced the plant to our community garden. Shiso is easy to grow from seed, sowing it in spring after any danger of frost. Just throw the tiny seeds (the size of sesame seeds) on your plot, say in a few rows, and the seed will happily start to grow without much attention. Once shiso is established in your garden, it will self seed and pop up among other plants without any special attention. It is



Shiso

not invasive. It grows to 1.5–1.7 m high. It is a most welcome plant in our community garden. The bees and other pollinators love them too once they start to flower. Shiso has very pretty hairy flower stems about 10–12 cm long, with a sweet scent of sesame. Once they finish flowering tiny seeds develop inside individual seed-pods and can be collected and saved for next year, once they are dry.

We grow two varieties of shiso, mainly the green-leafed variety but also a red-leafed variety that has a more intense scent of sesame. The red leaves can be used to make a refreshing beverage called 'aka shiso juice' (red perilla juice).

Young Ja recommends using the green leaves in stir-fries or marinating the fresh green leaves in your favourite light Asian sauce with a bit of sliced fresh chilli. The leaves can then be stored in a jar in a fridge. She then uses the marinated leaves as a wrap for cooked rice. This is truly delicious. You can find many recipes online, especially under Japanese cooking. Young Ja tells us the leaves are very healthy and good for our bones.

We have been growing shiso for several years now and can highly recommend it. 🌱

How to grow Lauki

Lauki is the Hindi name for Bottle Gourd, a popular vegetable crop in North India, grown by **Rashmi Malik** on her plot at Crace Community Garden. Husband **Ramesh** tells the story.

The Bottle Gourd originated in Africa but is now grown in many tropical and subtropical countries, not only as a food plant but also, the mature gourds are fashioned into, for example, water bottles, dippers, spoons, fancy ornaments, lamps and musical instruments.

A range of health benefits – including promotion of weight loss and regulation of blood pressure – is claimed for their consumption and much information about these is readily available online.

Soil preparation

Before planting *Lauki*, augment soil organic matter with manure, peat moss and compost.

Planting time

For summer growth, sow seeds in spring when the risk of frost has passed. Sow directly in the garden or in a container or pot.



Young lauki. Photo: John Myszka

Growing from seed

- *Lauki* can be grown in Canberra between September and March using seed previously collected from a mature fruit or purchased from a local nursery or online.
- After soil preparation, sow the seeds directly in shallow holes, and water-in well.
- For best growth, make sure the planting site receives an abundance of sunshine.
- Germination should be evident in 7–8 days.
- *Lauki* is a climbing plant that grows up to 3–4 metres tall, so a frame will be needed to support it.
- To encourage more leaves, pinch off the young plant's growing tips.
- After 2 months, side shoots that give rise to male and female flowers will appear.
- Tiny gourds can be seen at the base of female flowers after pollination.
- If there is an excess of male flowers, some can be removed manually.
- Depending on when it is harvested and how it is grown, *Lauki* gourds can vary in size and shape. Short, round, elongated, curved, cylindrical and bulbous are some of its possible shapes



Lauki (*Lagenaria siceraria*) is, like cucumbers, pumpkins, squashes, melons and zucchini a member of the Cucurbitaceae plant family, commonly known as cucurbits. An article by Ange McNeilly in the Spring 2019 issue of *Canberra Organic*, accessible on our website, gives a good overview of the range and attributes of gourds, including the Bottle Gourd. Ed.

Fully-grown lauki, one metre long. Photo: John Myszka

Footnote:

When you get to cooking the Lauki you've grown, a recipe for Lauki Ki Sabji (Bottle Gourd Curry) at hebbarskitchen.com sounds good. Ed.

A penchant for pumpkins

Betty Cornhill Garden's **Greta Nielsen** discovers the virtues of the Jarrahdale

One of the reasons I was so keen to get plots at BCG in the first place was my frustration with lack of solar access at my home to grow pumpkins. My first season at BCG, I tried the small, short-season pumpkins, including Golden Nugget and Buttercup. They grew and matured into beautiful, yellow-orange pumpkins, but alas, the mice and rat plagues gutted them overnight, leaving me disappointed.

Two seasons ago, I mail-ordered seeds for Jarrahdale pumpkin. Jarrahdale hit a sweet spot in being a different variety to the ubiquitous Jap or Queensland Blue, but with similar qualities. They're larger than the ones I'd been growing, with thicker skin, but a not overly long season, and the fruit grow quickly. The plants are hardy, and the flowers are amazing in attracting pollinators. I recommend growing this variety.

Do not be afraid about planting pumpkins on messy plots and growing them in leaf or compost bins. I've had two successes growing them that way. My plots have a lot of chopped up former crops on them, and are rampant with beans, nasturtiums, calendula and dahlias. The water retention is excellent and the riot of flowers seems to encourage beneficial insects.

This is my fourth season in, and I've harvested a good crop of pumpkins that will store through winter. I use



The ugliest one. Photo: Greta Nielsen

every part of the fruit, not just the flesh. I give the seeds to a colleague who processes them for flour, and feed the cooked rind to my dogs (they love it) – only the pulpy and inedible parts go to home compost.

The ugliest pumpkin gets eaten first: the one in the photograph made excellent curry. 🍃

Overrun by pumpkins?

Have a bumper pumpkin harvest this autumn? Not sure what to do with them? Here are two recipes from **Michele Barson** to help you make the most of your bounty.

Spicy pumpkin soup

Serves 4–6

Ingredients

1 large onion, chopped
600 g butternut pumpkin, chopped
3/4 cup of red lentils, washed
1 tbsp grated fresh ginger
1–2 tbsp of red curry or harissa paste
3 tsp sugar

3 cups water
2 tablespoons rice bran or olive oil

Method

Soften the onions in hot oil, add ginger and curry paste, stirring for a couple of minutes. Add the remaining ingredients and simmer until the pumpkin is tender. Allow to cool slightly then purée.

Pumpkin and seafood soup

Serves 4–6

Ingredients

1 onion, finely chopped
1 clove garlic, finely chopped
1 tsp fresh ginger, finely chopped

1 tbsp coriander leaves, chopped
800 g pumpkin, chopped
3 cups chicken stock
1 tbsp chilli sauce (or chopped fresh chilli to taste)
300–400 g green prawns, peeled (or crab meat)
juice of half a lime
100 mL cream (optional)

Lightly fry onion, garlic and ginger in a little oil. Add coriander and set mixture aside. Cook pumpkin in stock until tender. Add onion mix and chilli to cooked pumpkin and puree. Gently reheat, adding lime juice and prawns. Simmer gently until prawns are cooked. Season to taste with salt and pepper and stir through cream.

Applications called for new round of community grants

It's time to take action on improvement projects at your COGS garden. The ACT Government has put out a call for applications for funding under Round Ten of the Community Garden Grants program, **with applications closing at 5 pm on Thursday 11 July**. Garden convenors should consult the COGS Executive on application procedures. Total funding of \$100,000 is available, split across two funding streams, for projects to be completed within 18 months of funding.

Stream One provides \$40,000 in funding for minor improvements, expansion of existing gardens, or establishing small, low-impact

gardens. The minimum funding is \$2,000 (GST exclusive), with a maximum of \$8,000 (GST exclusive) funding per eligible organisation/s.

Stream Two provides \$60,000 in funding to support establishment of new Canberra community food gardens, or for garden infrastructure that will significantly enhance food production at established gardens. The minimum funding is \$8,000 (GST exclusive) and the maximum \$30,000 (GST exclusive) per eligible organisation/s.

The funding streams for 2024–25 aim to support the development and expansion of community gardens across Canberra. The program priorities for this year are:

- providing benefit to the wider community and encouraging social inclusion
- promoting healthy living of people and the garden environment
- demonstrating principles of the circular economy, eco-friendly gardens and zero emissions.

The Community Garden Grants website provides guidelines, information on eligibility and land use requirements, different types of gardens, and how to apply through the SmartyGrants online platform.

[<https://www.climatechoices.act.gov.au/policy-programs/community-garden-grants>]

Go green manure

Rather than leaving all or part of your plot fallow during the winter, why not plant a green manure crop? There's still time to do so.

Green manure crops (also known as cover or compost crops) are grown to be dug back into the soil to add organic matter and other nutrients to the soil. Green manure can refresh soil that has been planted with demanding crops like brassicas and get it ready for hungry crops such as corn. Its addition also improves soil structure and water retention, and draws minerals up from deeper in the soil profile, increasing their availability to plants.

Common seeds in green manure mixes are peas, beans, fenugreek and oats, but there are many others. The first three listed here are legumes that fix atmospheric nitrogen and add it to the soil. Black mustard seed is sometimes included because it has attributes as a soil fumigant effective against root nematode worms and fungal pathogens.

The green manure business is easy: you just sow, grow, mulch the crop before seeding, and dig it in, but to get the full story on why, when and how to grow a green manure crop, go to the comprehensive article in the Autumn 2008 issue of *Canberra Organic*, readily accessible on our website.



(above) A green manure crop in a COGS garden, almost ready for 'harvest'

(below) In the crop mix are vetch, barley, dun peas, oats and lupins



No sting in the tale

It's a sad thing when a delinquent in the tribe gives the whole mob a bad name. So it is with the European Wasp (*Vespula germanica*), an invasive species, known for its aggressiveness and potentially dangerous stings.

Paper wasps (*Polistes humilis*), a native species and a different beast altogether, are what we have down at our community garden. These social insects build their nests high up under the ridge cap of our beautiful steel shelter. They do no harm as they go about their business, which is about keeping out of our way, making more paper wasps and doing good deeds. Nevertheless, they were obviously a source of anxiety to one or more garden members, who decided to remove the nests.

While their action is to a degree understandable, it is more so unfortunate, because it is a decision based on poor information. Paper wasps are not only non-aggressive insects, they also deliver big benefits



A paper wasp's nest: a small architectural wonder. Photo: Cathy Morison

to the garden. As adults, they feed only on nectar, so are effective pollinators as they move from flower to flower. The developing larvae, ensconced in their paper nests, are fed on caterpillars and other small

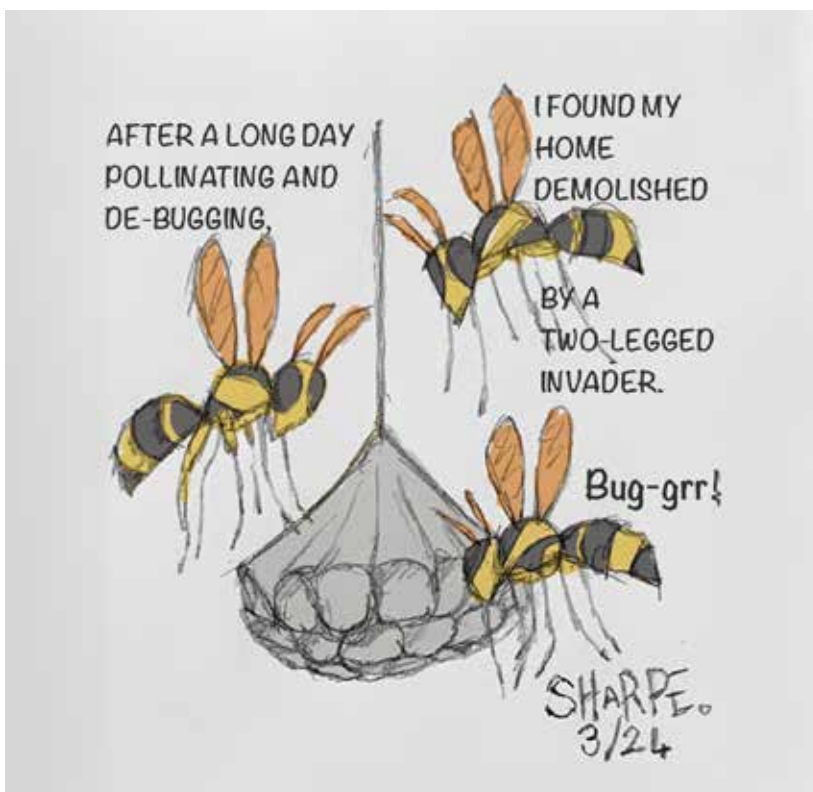
insects, some of them garden pests, industriously collected by the adults. A reasonable assessment is that the benefits of their presence far outweigh the risks. While it is true that they sting, you have to work hard to get them to do so.

Considering wasp species in general, and there are countless thousands of them around the world, very few present any risk to humans. In Australia alone there are estimated to be over 12,000 species. Wasps occupy critical niches in their ecosystems and thereby contribute to a healthy, robust and stable environment.

For more information about the many six-legged good guys in the garden, visit 'Beneficial Insects' on our website.

Returning to our delinquent – the European Wasp, I have to observe that 20 or so years ago, nearer the time of their initial invasion of the ACT, which was probably in the early 1980s, they were quite common around our way. I cannot recall seeing one for some years now. Even more good news is that our paper wasps are rebuilding. Hallelujah!

— Ed Highley



Thought for food

“This is a challenge to Canberra planners: make the next suburb an urban farm.”

So wrote Jackie French*, organic gardening guru and champion, in her regular *Canberra Times* column on 7 April 2024. A big call but, as Jackie reminds us, securing our food supply is a challenge to all of us given the state of the planet.

Our food supply is threatened on many fronts, including climate change, competition for resources, war, disease and technology glitches, all with increasing potential to disrupt the food supply chain.

“It is vital to engage the community and its resources to meet the challenge”, Jackie says in promoting the establishment of what she calls “redundancy gardens”, to ensure that we will still eat well if the food truck can no longer get through or has little to bring.

Here, in outline, is a nine-step plan that Jackie proposes to turn the city into a broad-acre community garden.

- Give every resident 10 fruit trees from a choice of about 30 varieties.
- Legislate to allow tenants to plant appropriate fruit trees.
- Give a 5 per cent rate rebate to residents growing edibles year round.
- Remove the GST from anything that will help local food growing.
- Establish designed street orchards.
- Plant a chain of parks throughout developments with vegetables and vines.
- Implement community “potato parks” where once a year potatoes are dug and bags of them given away.
- Create gardens devoted to the original “bush foods” of the region.



Collage by Matt Mawson

- Make car parks useful and more user friendly: legislate to have them trellised and covered with suitable vines.

“How much of a community’s food could be grown in one Canberra community?”, Jackie ponders, adding “How much more ‘community’ would be created by picking and snacking on it together, or putting out boxes of surplus marked ‘Free – please help yourself’”.

COGS and its predecessors share and, for the past 47 years, have been working to these aims and aspirations. Even on a local community scale, however, we have been unable, despite earnest lobbying, to obtain the land needed to establish new gardens to satisfy the increasing demand for spots of the good earth. It is now over 10 years since the opening, in Crace, of the youngest COGS garden.

All that is needed for a new community garden under the COGS umbrella is a securely fenced, modest area (around half an acre) of suitable land, a connection to town water and, perhaps, a simple shelter for when it rains. The rest can be developed by COGS and the local community. The government can ensure, much

like Jackie advocates, that developers in new suburbs work with COGS, other like-minded organisations and the local community to develop something suitable for the area. Despite some promising discussions with developers in Denman Prospect and Ginninderry over the past 2 years, our efforts to date to try and meet the demand for more community gardens have not come to fruition.

So, what chance of flight has Jackie’s grand plan? *The Castle’s* Darryl Kerrigan might respond ‘Tell ‘er she’s dreamin’, but dreams sometimes come true. Here’s hoping, because it’s more an imperative than a dream. Readers are encouraged to let us know what they think about how we can get more community gardens off – or should it be ‘on’ – the ground.

— Ed Highley
(with presidential input)

**Jackie is no stranger to COGS, though we haven’t heard from her for a while. She provided the Foreword to From Bare Earth to Bounty, by Bethany Turner, Walter Steensby and David Pearson, a history of COGS published in 2013. A good read accessible on our website.*

Food for thought

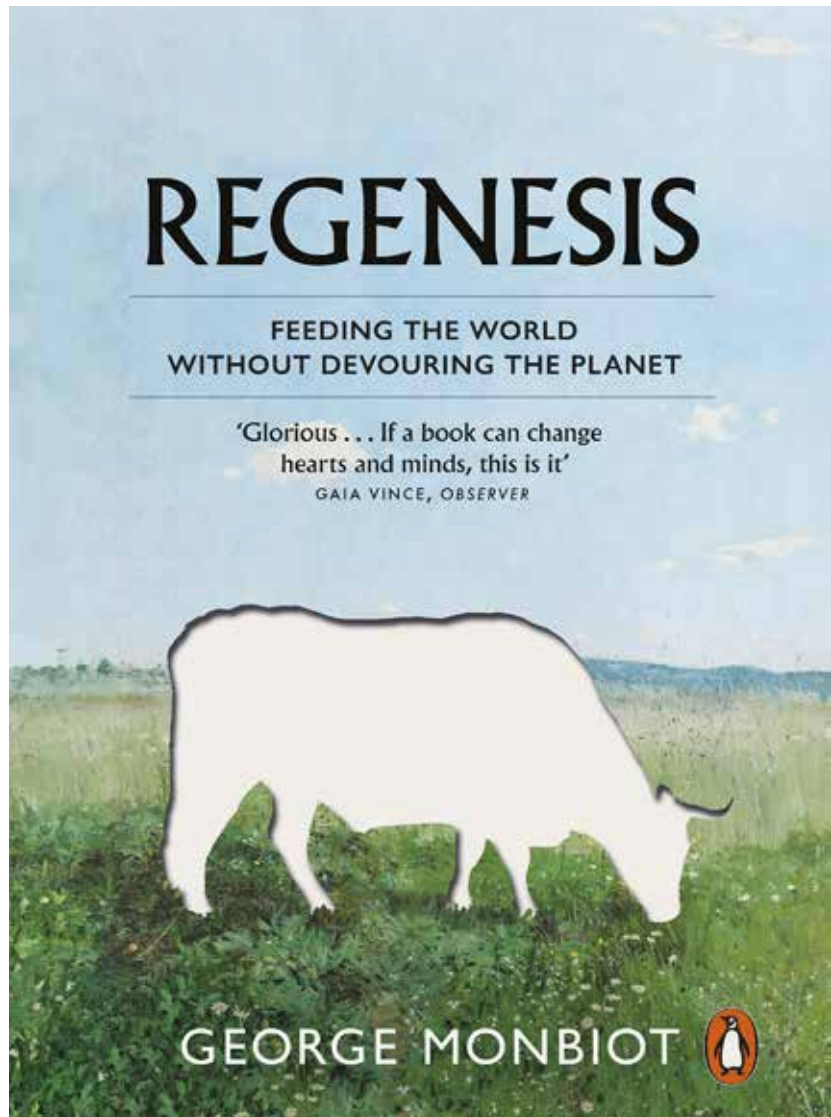
*Regenesi*s: how to feed the world without devouring the planet, by George Monbiot, Penguin Press, 2023, 304 pp. RRP \$24.99.*

George Monbiot studied zoology at Oxford University and is a British author and journalist as well as a political and environmental activist. He has written several books on environmental and social issues including *Heat: how to stop the planet burning* (2006), and *Feral: searching for enchantment on the frontiers of rewilding* (2013). He has won several awards for his writing.

*Regenesi*s begins with Monbiot describing the soil of an orchard that is part of an allotment in Oxford that is divided into 220 plots. His description of the ecosystem living within the soil is of a thing of beauty: each plant and creature he finds plays its own unique role in keeping the soil alive and healthy. It is only fitting that the book begins from the ground up, pun intended, as healthy soil is the key to successful gardening.

The book then looks at the damage that modern agriculture is causing to the environment and humanity, both directly and indirectly. As with most environmental based books, the bad news comes before the good.

Monbiot then balances out the bad news by visiting a 7 hectare farm run by Iain Tollhurst, located on the banks of the River Thames. Over a 33 year period of working on this farm, Tollhurst has transformed the depleted soil, which now supports a highly fertile and productive farm. Over a 12 month period 120 tonnes of produce was harvested! This was achieved without the use of pesticides, herbicides, mineral treatments, animal manure or any other type of fertilisers. Not only has soil fertility increased dramatically using his farming techniques, a diverse range of wildlife has returned in abundance to the farm. So impressed by the techniques used



on this farm, I will be implementing some of them myself in spring.

The subject then shifts to our modern diet and how Ultra Processed Foods (UPF) are making us sick. With the cost of living crisis many of us are currently facing, the cost of fruit and vegetables does nothing to help us to improve our diets. Unfortunately, if we keep farming as we are now, access to fresh produce will only cost more to us and to the environment. This is where growing fruit and vegetable in our own gardens can help. Having access to a piece of land in which to grow produce is something I am grateful for. Thanks COGS!

The book finishes up by looking at the future of food production, and you may be surprised at the example given. With the current state of our environment, alternative methods for food production and sustainable agriculture are essential, if we are to feed the world without devouring the planet.

Overall, *Regenesi*s gives us plenty of food for thought. I'll stop with the puns now.

Christine Elwes

* Libraries ACT holds two copies for lending. Ed.

An allotment garden in Germany

*This story by **Judy Horton** first appeared in Our Gardens, the magazine of The Garden Clubs of Australia. It is reprinted here with the kind permissions of the author and publisher. Judy also took the photos and is the editor of Our Gardens.*

In May 2023 my husband and I spent a week with our friends Matthias, Annette and their 13-year-old son Jannis in Germany. The family lives in Unterföhring about 10 km from the centre of Munich.

Their upper floor apartment has no garden and they have space for just a few indoor plants and some potted herbs on the balcony. Therefore it's easy to understand why keen gardener Annette was so thrilled when she was able to join a well-established community allotment garden within an easy bicycle ride of their home.

The garden, which sits on land that is owned by the local municipality, was first established in the 1980s. Unlike our more common concept of a community garden where participants work together on communal beds, each allotment in the Unterföhring garden is an individual plot that is controlled by the current lessee. This long-established arrangement dates back to the mid-nineteenth century in Germany and is still protected and governed by federal legislation.¹

Water is supplied to each garden and communal toilet and bathing facilities have been installed by the committee that oversees the running of the entire project. Many of the plots contain buildings that store tools and gardening equipment. While almost all of these, like Annette's, are large enough to sleep in overnight they are regarded as a no-housing area by the government and permanent habitation isn't permitted. The relative size of building to garden – one third building, at least one third edible plants and possibly one third ornamentals or lawn – in each plot is governed and limited by the Federal Allotment Gardens Act. Private solar panels for electricity can be installed but their surface area is limited to a maximum of one square metre, again to prevent people moving in on a long-term basis.

Annette had her name on a waiting list for some time until approximately eight years ago when an established garden became available. The previous elderly lady owner had relinquished it when maintenance became too difficult for her. Annette has since altered the garden to fit in with her own principles. 'It was what I'd call an old-fashioned garden with things like straight rows of marigolds. I wanted something



Annette watering her growing lettuce



Each plot in the garden has its own style



The garden in full spring growth



Growing vegies have been protected from late cold snaps

¹ I sought further information on the extent of the allotment system in Munich and the size of individual plots. There are more than 260 ha of allotment gardens in the city, population about 1.5 million. The Unterföhring garden described in this article is outside the city perimeter. Plot sizes vary between 100 and 500 square metres, with the average somewhere between 200 and 300 square metres. Readers should note too that there is no overall commitment to organic growing principles in the allotments. Ed.

community gardens abroad

far more natural. I've also removed all the plastic sheeting below the mulch and we are committed to avoiding the use of pesticides as much as possible, especially with vegetables,' Annette explains.

Annette pays about €200 per annum for her plot. There are 123 plots in the allotment area and there's a substantial waiting list. In COVID time many people applied for allotments, which led the municipality to open up some smaller plots near the allotment garden. 'Some people don't realise how much work goes into gardening, particularly growing food plants,' Annette conjectures. 'Perhaps these smaller plots provide an opportunity to see if they want to move onto a more substantial garden or if they decide that gardening's not for them.' As we walk around the outside perimeter of the allotment, it's easy to identify the keenest growers in the smaller trial plots.

The allotment garden is public open space and the door is always open. Just near the main entry gate there is a community hall which can be booked for use. Here Annette, Matthias and Jannis hosted Matthias's 50th birthday party a couple of years ago. There are also two open playgrounds for young children.

It's easy to see why this busy working couple gain both mental and physical health from their allotment. Of course, all is not perfect in the garden. As Annette and Matthias explain, there are the usual difficulties of getting people to serve on the management committee and of reconciling the differing positions of those involved.

But it was spring when I visited and the gardens were just waking up after their winter sleep. The birds were singing, the flowers were starting to bloom, the early grapes were ripening and the tomatoes were heading for their supporting trellis. This idyllic scene seemed to provide the almost perfect green solution to some of the problems associated with our increasing trend to big city living. 🍃

National support

There are close to one and a half million allotment gardens in Germany.

The *Kleingarten* movement of small allotment gardens dates back to the mid-19th century when many rural populations migrated from the country to work in the rapidly industrialising cities. Poor city living conditions encouraged some communities to make plots of land available where the neediest families could grow food and have space in the open air. These allotment gardens took on extra significance during the food shortages of the 20th century world wars. In 1919 the first government laws were passed to regulate allotment gardens. The Federal Allotment Gardens Act (*Bundeskleingartengesetz*) of 1983 has been amended over time but still oversees the *Kleingarten* nationally, with local organisations responsible for their day to day running.



The cottage is equipped with its own kitchen



Seedling tomatoes heading for the string supports



Some of the smaller plots are very well cared for



Compost in the making

Community gardens across ‘the Ditch’

Holder Community Garden Convenor Lisa Walkington and COGS President Neil Williams report on the many community gardens they visited in New Zealand earlier this year.

* * *

In March this year we travelled to the deep, deep south of New Zealand. Our first stop was Rakiura (Stewart Island) off the tip of the South Island – a place the locals like to call ‘the third island’. We were blown away by the scale, remoteness, and beauty of the island. While on the island, we stumbled upon what appeared to be a local community garden. A friendly local (who made great coffee) told us it is a nursery for plants native to the island and is run by volunteers. This encounter sowed a seed for our travels back on the South Island. It sprouted and grew quickly when we drove past a small community garden in Tautapere on the south-west coast near Te Waewae Bay. From there we tracked down community gardens in many of the small towns we passed through on our 10 days driving between Tautapere and Dunedin and in their surrounding regions.

The gardens vary in size, locations and how they operate. The Tautapere Community Garden clearly identifies that it is following organic permaculture as much as possible. The Lumsden Community Garden is on an urban house block which had been donated to the Northern Southland Community Resource Centre Charitable Trust (NSCRCCT). The small Gove Community Garden is on the grounds of the Baptist Church. The large Northeast Valley Community Garden in Dunedin is on ground behind a local school and incorporates school plots. The tiny Te Mahinga Kai Student Garden at the University of Otago in Dunedin is on a small corner block in a very urban area and is managed by students.

Most gardens are open to the local community. A number have food pantries to give away excess produce. In the absence of gardeners to speak to it was not clear how many have individual plots or are managed communally.



Tautapere Community Garden



Gove Community Garden food pantry

Signage for Riverside, Northeast Valley and Te Mahinga Kai community gardens



community gardens abroad



Northeast Valley Community Garden

The Riversdale Community Garden incorporates a small orchard with a sign describing it as 'a living archive of the early settlers' orchards 1860–1920'. It was not until we returned home that we realised this was part of a much larger project known as the Open Orchard Project [www.sces.org.nz/open-orchard-project]. The project has led to the identification of over 80 heritage varieties and the planting of more than 8,000 trees, including in school orchards and community gardens.



Riversdale Community Garden

The biggest and most impressive garden we discovered was on the outskirts of Oamaru, north of Dunedin. The Waitaki Community Gardens include a food forest, communal and individual plots, herb gardens, greenhouses, workshop spaces and a mission to teach sustainable life skills, including the growing and cooking of healthy food. We were fortunate to find the convenor on site and she told us that the Waitaki Gardens are run by a charitable trust and the convenor's is a paid position. Neil quickly poured cold water on the idea of Lisa's efforts as Holder Garden Convenor being paid for!



Waitaki Community Garden

The funding for the Waitaki Gardens comes from local government and donors, including the NZ Lottery. Several of the other gardens we saw in NZ also had sponsors from the local business community.

Most local councils in New Zealand have guidelines for setting up a community garden and, like Australia, require some form of licence to use public land and a group to be formed to manage the garden and ensure any licence conditions or regulations are met.

Balclutha Community Garden

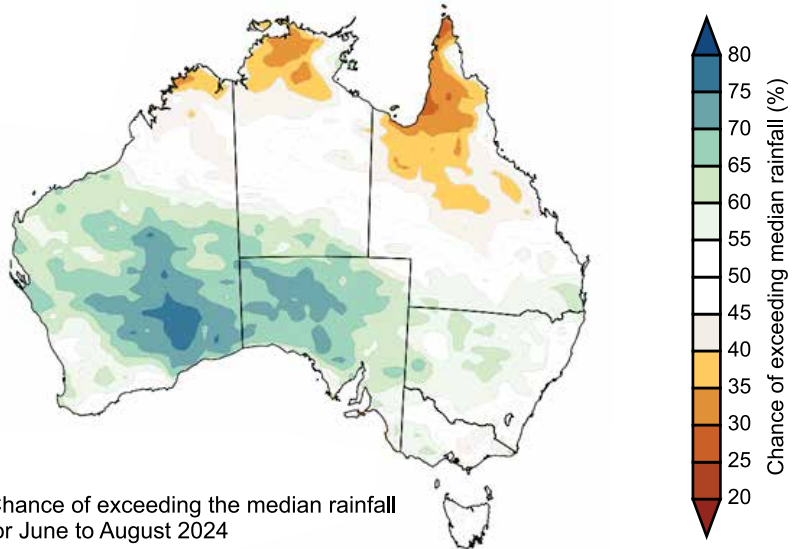


Some signs of La Niña developing later in 2024

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

The Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) outlook released 14 May 2024 says the El Niño/La Niña indicators are currently neutral but there are some early signs that a La Niña might form in the Pacific Ocean later in 2024. As a result, the Bureau's outlook has shifted to La Niña Watch. When a La Niña Watch has been declared in the past, a La Niña event has subsequently developed around 50 per cent of the time.

Sea-surface temperatures in the central Pacific have been steadily cooling since December 2023. This surface cooling is supported by a



Chance of exceeding the median rainfall for June to August 2024

Model ACCESS-S2
Base Period: 1981–2018

Model run: 06/05/2024
Issued: 09/05/2024

Water storage levels in the Canberra region and capital cities		
	May '24	May '23
ACT storages	99%	99%
Murray-Darling Basin	75%	88%
Burrinjuck Dam	67%	77%
Blowering Dam	71%	83%
Sydney	99%	96%
Melbourne	88%	91%
Brisbane	84%	81%
Adelaide	44%	60%
Perth	37%	47%

significant amount of subsurface cooling in the central and eastern Pacific. Recent cloud and surface pressure patterns are also neutral.

The Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) is currently neutral and recent observations of sea-surface temperatures suggest that development of a positive IOD may have stalled.

The BoM notes that global sea-surface temperatures have been the warmest on record every month between April

2023 and April 2024, with April 2024 temperatures warmer than April 2023. The global pattern of warmth is affecting the typical historical global pattern of sea-surface temperatures associated with El Niño/La Niña and the IOD variability. As the current global ocean conditions have not been observed before, inferences of how El Niño/La Niña and the IOD may develop in 2024 may be unreliable.

safety tip

A reminder to cap metal star pickets

It is a COGS policy that gardeners 'cap' all their metal star pickets. This is to reduce the risk of injury to gardeners and visitors. A Holder gardener recently introduced us to the caps that are designed for electric

fence systems (see photo). While they are plastic, and we want to reduce plastic use across our gardens, they are much sturdier, easier to use, and slower to deteriorate than the caps typically sold by our large retail hardware stores. Their longer life will reduce overall plastic waste. Their smooth surface also protects nets from snagging and tearing. COGS gardeners are creative in other ways, topping their stakes with such things as tin cans, tiny terracotta pots, and suitably doctored discarded tennis balls.

– Neil Williams



DIY 'organic' spot weeder

I recently went to our local warehouse to find a non-glyphosate weedkiller to deal with various types of intruders growing between our pavers at home.

There were various products on offer, including one whose active ingredients were acetic acid (270 g/L) and sodium chloride (120 g/L), in other words 'vinegar' and common salt, what you might put on your fish and chips. It was priced around \$15 for a 1 L container, to be diluted 1:3 with water for final use. Wow! I thought, I'll make my own: I can buy 2 L of cleaning vinegar at the warehouse for about \$2 and the cost of the salt needed would be negligible.

The concentration of acetic acid (an organic acid, formula CH_3COOH) in vinegar is around 10 per cent, or about



Broadleaf (above) and grass (below), before and after treatment



the same as the diluted commercial product. So, to make my homegrown weedkiller, I dissolved 40 g (about 1.5 tablespoonsful) of salt in a litre of vinegar. To customise my product, I added a few drops of dishwashing detergent as a putative wetting agent.

I re-used an empty spray pack for my product and attacked the weeds, giving them a good overall soaking. It worked! Broadleaf weeds were more susceptible than, say, grassy weeds, but it was effective on both, just takes somewhat longer on the latter. Amazingly, when the accursed couch was sprayed, I detected damage, but I need to make more tests and observations on that front. On dandelion-type weeds, the effects of the weedkiller were evident within 24 hours.

The accompanying photographs show two of my results.

– Ed Highley



Photo: Matt Mawson

About words and my winter experiment

We are just entering winter and I'm working on my winter plot with my grandpa, trying to decide whether to grow Kipfler potatoes or Dutch Creams this year.

I've also been watching a language program on You Tube about British regional accents and I discovered quite a few unusual names for winter vegetables. For example, in parts of Scotland, potatoes are known as tatties, turnips are neeps and onions are ingins (ing-ins).

That got me thinking about the ways in which we use the names of vegetables to describe other things. For example, 'as cool as a cucumber', 'two peas in a pod', to 'veg out', to be 'full of beans', or to get 'a plum job' (like a magazine editor*).

In my research I came across a couple of Australian expressions, also based on the garden: 'She's apples' (meaning things are really good) and 'the tall poppy syndrome' (which I hadn't heard of).

I'm doing an experiment at the moment, which is trying to get tomato plants to produce fruit over winter; for example in a plastic greenhouse, or inside the house.

As you can see from the photo taken by grandpa, I have grown quite a lot



Me, with the tomato plants that will be in my experiment over winter, to try to get them to grow, fruit and ripen. Photo: Grandpa

of those plants and I am curious to see what might happen. I might ask Mum if I can bring some of them inside, where it will be warmer. Tomatoes need lots of heat and light, so maybe I will have to buy a 'grow light' or LED light.

I also need to report on my last experiment, which was to grow Sweet Corn in the Kambah Community

Garden. Things were progressing quite well I thought, until I visited the garden one day to find every plant eaten (no doubt by cockatoos). Maybe I'll use a net next time.

That's all for this column. It's time I veged out (at least for a little while). I am hoping that my tomato experiment will bear fruit!

* *Georgia, you're dreamin'. Ed.*

Book notice: *What gardeners grow*

In its 300-plus pages, *What Gardeners Grow* contains contributions from more than 250 of 'the world's greatest plantspeople'. It's an enjoyable book to dip into and read of other gardeners' views of your favourite plants and how they grow them. While most entries focus on ornamentals, the following vegetables receive attention: borlotti beans, broad beans, calabash cucumbers, celtuce, chard, chilli, Chinese artichoke, Chinese mustard, earth apple, garlic, kale, loofah, onion, peas, potato, pumpkins and squash, radicchio, runner bean, taro and tomato.

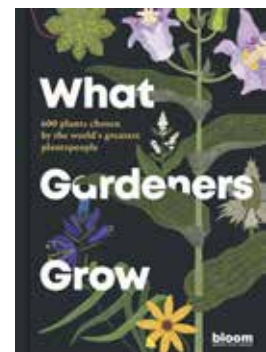
Each entry gives a description of the plant, followed by details of the expert contributor's approach to growing and maintaining it.

Being eternally in thrall of the potato, I was drawn to its entry

in the book, by one Madeline McKeever, a farmer and seed grower in from where else but County Cork, Ireland, to where Sir Walter Raleigh brought the potato from the New World in 1589. She writes, inter alia: 'This is such a satisfying plant to grow, whether it is in a field or a grow bag, it comes up quickly and enjoys all kinds of weather except frost. *Unearthing the potatoes is like finding jewels underground.* [my italics]. Marvellous.

There are hundreds of gems like this in *What Gardeners Grow*, as well, of course, as the real information you seek. ACT Libraries has it on its shelves.

Ed Highley



Willie Wagtail

Our resident artist **Cathy Morison** captures the Willie Wagtail, the garden 'gossiper'.

* * *

The Willie Wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*) is so familiar that you may not have stopped to consider what a complex little creature it is.

While known primarily by its most common moniker, the Willie Wagtail is often referred to as a flycatcher or fantail (the largest of the Australian fantails). Less scientifically, it is also called a 'gossiper' (by Indigenous Australians), the 'shepherd's companion' and the 'werewolf of the bird world'. This last reference has been verified by scientific studies into its nocturnal singing during a full moon. This behaviour appears to be limited to the male wagtail and, as it occurs regardless of whether or not he has a mate, can probably be attributed to defence of his territory.

Back in the daytime, the Willie Wagtail is engaged a constant flurry of activity. Its incessantly wagging tail aids in its search for insects, sweeping the ground as if dancing. When not serenading us gardeners with a song that has been described as resembling 'sweet pretty creature', it is scolding anyone who dares enter its territory or approaches too close to the nest. With courage that belies its 20 cm frame, a territorial Willie Wagtail will take on cats, dogs, Wedge-tailed Eagles and kookaburras.

This pretty little black-and-white bird has distinctive white eyebrows and little white whiskers. In the male wagtail, the white eyebrows can be flared to make his appearance more threatening to a competitor. Interestingly, when a wagtail submits in a territorial battle, his white eyebrows are withdrawn so that they can't be seen.



Willie Wagtail in watercolour (Photo reference: Perry Cho)

The Willie Wagtail is regularly seen accompanying grazing animals – chasing down and catching insects and small creatures disturbed by their hooves, hence the reference to the 'shepherd's companion'. This name could probably be extended to 'gardener's companion', as wagtails are regular visitors to most gardens. They are found throughout all of Australia's mainland states.

As well as being a good-natured garden visitor, the wagtail will help with the control of insects in your lawn and garden. In return, they appreciate lots of leaf litter to forage in and a fresh

water supply. As always, keep a part of your garden pet free if you would like to attract native birds. While the wagtail will harass cats and dogs when protecting their nests, they are very vulnerable to predation while they are foraging for food.

I thank Perry Cho for his permission to use his reference photo for this painting. As well as an accomplished photographer, Perry is himself a very avid gardener, producing a large volume of edible plants in his 'food cube' farm. Stayed tuned for an article on Perry and his progressive gardening techniques in a future magazine. 🌱



winter planting guide

VEGETABLES

Asparagus

Prepare the bed before you buy the crowns to plant in late winter/early spring. Since this is a perennial crop which can last for up to 20 years it is well worth the effort of establishing properly. Asparagus needs good drainage and plentiful food and can be planted very successfully in a raised bed enriched with compost and well rotted manure. Seaweed is an excellent mulch.

The crowns are planted in a trench, but with the roots straddling a ridge. Cover so dormant shoots are about 4 cm below the surface. Do not harvest spears the first year, and only harvest for a few weeks the second year.

Remember this is a long-term investment.

Broad beans

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

Kohlrabi

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

Lettuce

Plant only winter varieties of lettuces (cos, salad bowl, oakleaf, butterhead and mignonette varieties).

Onions

Mid-season varieties are often sown late autumn or early winter and long-keeping varieties in winter. However, the timing of mid- or late-season varieties is well worth experimenting with by making successive plantings to determine the best time in your specific locality.

Peas

Peas can be planted in August/September for an early summer crop but may be very slow to germinate if the ground is still very cold or wet.

Rhubarb

This is a perennial but plants generally only produce well for a few years, then fresh plants need to be started from subdivided crowns planted in late winter or early spring. It is very hardy, but it is a gross feeder and will appreciate lots of compost or well-rotted manure and plenty of water.

Other possibilities

Growers may wish to start a number of crops in late winter rather than early spring if the winter is mild or if they have a sheltered garden bed.

These crops include artichokes (Globe and Jerusalem), beetroot, cabbage, carrots, potatoes and radish.

Frost-sensitive vegetables such as capsicum, eggplant and tomatoes can be started early in August indoors but may need a heated glasshouse or warm spot to germinate and will certainly need protection before being planted out in spring.

FRUIT

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

Strawberries

Plant certified stock or propagate from runners (not from plants more than two years old) in a soil enriched with compost or well-rotted manure. Remove old leaves and excess runners to tidy up the plants in winter.

Berries

Raspberries, youngberries, boysenberries etc. can be planted during winter while they are dormant.

Remember, these bear fruit on canes grown in the previous year so to prune remove all the old canes in autumn or winter making sure to leave the current season's growth for next year's fruit. Autumn fruiting raspberries bear on the current year's growth so are cut to the ground in winter after they have fruited.

Currants

Red, white or black currants are easy bushes to grow in Canberra as they withstand very cold weather and don't mind heavy clay soil. Currants produce a fruit rarely available commercially. They need to be pruned in winter to remove dead wood and around a third of the oldest branches to encourage new growth and allow for good air circulation.

	JUN	JUL	AUG
Artichokes		T	T
Asparagus		T	ST
Broad beans		S	S
Kohlrabi			S
Lettuce			S
Onions			T
Peas	ST	ST	S
Rhubarb			T
Silverbeet		T	S
Snowpeas			ST
Spinach	T	T	S

S = seed sowing; T = transplanting

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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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