

Spring 2024
Vol 32 No 3 Issue 124

Canberra organic

**COGS growing guides:
major upgrade**

**Call for life membership
nominations**

**Introducing Community
Gardens Australia**



The quarterly publication of the Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.

Did someone once say that you know you're getting older when the winters feel colder? No. Well, I'm saying it now. The latter half of June – early winter – seemed to me to be exceptionally cold and an even greater challenge than usual to gardening and gardeners in our inland, elevated part of the world. And indeed it was: in the final week of the month, we experienced six mornings with the temperature below zero, the lowest being -5.6°C , as compared with just two in 2023 and -3.3°C . And, what's more, the frigidty continued through July and much of August.

Inspired by the eloquent, anonymous ode 'To a turnip' that adorned these pages a couple of issues ago, I decided in the autumn to have a go at this root crop. I'm sad to report that the result has been an almost total disaster, the sole beneficiaries being the local rats and/or possums, either or both of which are clearly very fond of turnip. The foliage was good – 'turnip tops' are recognised as edible, though I gave them a miss – but the turnips were horrible, misshapen things, growing above ground, seeming to have an aversion to life in the soil. Where did I go wrong, I wonder. To see what's what, I'll be studying the turnip entry in the new growing guides that Fiona Buining of the Ainslie Urban Farm is writing for us (see story on page 6).



My early planting of broccoli, on the other hand, having been assiduously protected from the autumn maraudings of the Cabbage White Butterfly and snails, was a great success, with heads that could be described as artist's models – well, anyway, I think so. My second planting did pretty well too, effortlessly free from the aforementioned pests, their demise being one of the few blessings of winter.



Through its Kambah Community Garden, COGS is again this year participating in the Floriade Community program, which sees Canberra's annual celebration of spring spread from Commonwealth Park in the city into the suburbs. On two mornings in early June, members of the garden planted almost 500 tulip and iris bulbs, and an equivalent number of annual flower seedlings, including several viola varieties. Look out for pictures of the resulting floral display in the summer issue of *Canberra Organic*.

An article on page 16 details the diverse aims and activities of Community Gardens Australia (CGA), the national body, and highlights the strengths, benefits and burgeoning popularity of community gardening across the country. The 2024 ACT Community Gardens Gathering that CGA will be holding at Canberra City Farm on 12 October promises to be a great event (see invitation on page 11). Make sure you get your ticket, or volunteer to help on the COGS stall.

I am pleased to be able to report that Terry Williams has come out of retirement and rejoined the *Canberra Organic* team.

Here's looking forward to a bountiful spring and summer, aided and abetted by that wet spring that the BoM (see page 20) says might be on the way.

Ed Highley

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president's column

Welcome to the Spring 2024 edition of *Canberra Organic*. It has been a pretty cold winter!

Spring is associated with new life and new possibilities and COGS is also springing into new life with the launch of a new logo, a rebuilding of Oaks Estate community garden and other exciting projects in the works. The new logo, which features on the cover, was designed by Peter Sheehan, the convenor of Betty Cornhill garden – more about the new logo can be found at page 5.

A few months ago, COGS was approached with a request to name one of our gardens after one of our early pioneers. We have already renamed one of our gardens – the Cotter garden – in honour of Betty Cornhill, who is widely regarded as being the founder of COGS in 1977. After careful consideration, the COGS Committee has decided that the naming of the Betty Cornhill Garden should be a one-off. The committee considers that our remaining community gardens should continue to be named after their home suburb or location. Our gardens are an integral part of their community and their name should reflect that. We are continuing to honour people who have made a significant contribution to COGS and their community through our life membership awards. It is also open to garden committees to seek to honour their members in other ways

such as planting a tree or installing a plaque.

Speaking of life members, it is that time of year again when we ask you to consider nominating a new life member. Further details on how to nominate someone are included in the article at page 7. We currently have 24 life members. After a hiatus, we reinstated the awards in 2021. Since then, seven members have been honoured, only one of them female. Of the 24 life members less than half are women. I strongly encourage you, in making nominations this year, to consider female colleagues who have made a strong contribution to COGS.

During local politicians' visits, I have emphasised the important role COGS gardens play as part of their local community.

During the winter months we hosted several visits from local politicians. In May, Nicole Lawder MLA visited the Cook garden, and Jo Clay MLA and Adele Sinclair the Charnwood garden. Laura Nuttall MLA visited the Kambah garden in July, as did the Minister for the Environment, Rebecca Vassarotti MLA. A report on the latter visit is at page 7. During these visits I have emphasised the important role COGS gardens play as part of their local community. Many of our gardens donate produce to charities, partner with other like-minded organisations (see below),



have plots dedicated to people with a disability, host visits from schools, aged care and disability groups, and/or host open days.

Members will have received notice to pay their annual membership and plot fees during August. With costs continuing to rise, at some point fees may also have to rise. If inflation had been factored in for the past 3 years, plot fees would now be \$4.90. However, I am pleased that plot fees continue to remain stable at \$4.20 per square metre.

Finally, September means annual general meetings at our gardens. I hope you can attend your garden AGM to hear about what has happened over the past year, and you might seriously consider taking on a volunteer role to help with the running of your garden.

Neil Williams



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

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

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

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

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

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community 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.

Betty Cornhill	Peter Sheehan	cornhill_convenor@cogs.asn.au
Charnwood	Susan Wood & Angela Steele	charnwood_convenor@cogs.asn.au
Cook	Peter Weddell	cook_convenor@cogs.asn.au
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Mitchell	David Peel & Oliver Busst	mitchell_convenor@cogs.asn.au
Oaks Estate	Elisa Pevere & Suzanne Rogers	oaks_estate_convenor@cogs.asn.au
O'Connor	Paul Magarey & Joshua Causer	occonnor_convenor@cogs.asn.au

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.

New logo new look for COGS

COGS was founded in 1977 and, not long after, members were asked for ideas for a logo, but it took until 1988, and a competition among members, for a design by Jeanetta Main to be selected as our inaugural logo. Her design originally lacked 'Est. 1977' at the bottom, so then President David Odell asked for this to be added to provide a historical note. It was originally in black and white, but was updated to colour about 10 years ago.

Over the years there has been some discussion by the COGS Committee to update the logo or design a new one. Earlier this year we commissioned Peter Sheehan, the Convenor of the Betty Cornhill Garden, to design a new logo. Peter is a professional illustrator and designer.

The initial brief given to Peter was to design a new logo that had something about it that could be identified with Canberra, as well as something that suggested COGS is essentially about people. The design went through several iterations. Initially, Peter submitted a design depicting a gardener's hat, with a Gang-gang Cockatoo's feather in the brim, in combination with a network of roots of a plant underneath. With feedback from the committee and Ann Smith from Betty Cornhill Garden, the design evolved to the final version. Key features of the design are:

- the Brindabella Range, which forms the backdrop to our gardens, representing Canberra
- soil rich with life, which is the foundation for everything we grow
- roots representing the network of our gardens and our members
- fresh produce of fruit, vegetables and flowers – the harvest of our labour
- bees that help pollinate our plants



- our full name, with an emphasis on COGS as we are colloquially known.

The logo is illustrated as digital art in Adobe® Illustrator® software. It is vector artwork created in such a way that the linework can be separated from the colours and the image and be enlarged or reduced to any size without losing detail. Peter has supplied both black and white and colour versions that might be used in publications and on T-shirts, websites, business cards, garden signage, letterheads or anything that might need a COGS logo in the future.

Neil Williams and Peter Sheehan



Betty Cornhill Garden Dance

To celebrate the end of the year, Christmas, the beginning of the summer growing season and our fabulous COGS community, members of the Betty Cornhill Community Garden are organising the inaugural Betty Cornhill Garden Dance, to be held at the Yarralumla Woolshed on Saturday 7 December, 6–10pm. Music will be provided by the legendary Paverty Bush Band.

Tickets, at \$10, are restricted to members and their associates, and are available until mid September, with free admission to children under 5.

Book your tickets at humantix.com. Numbers at the venue are limited to 200.

The COGS Committee and the BCG Committee look forward to seeing you there.

Updating the COGS Growing Guides and Seasonal Planting Calendar

COGS is delighted to report that it has engaged Fiona Buining of the Ainslie Urban Farm to undertake a major project to update and extend its seasonal planting calendar and growing guides. Ed.

The first aim of COGS under its Constitution is to provide information on community gardening and demonstrate and promote organic growing techniques for COGS members and the wider public.

The seasonal planting calendar and associated growing guides are the most popular pages on the COGS website, attracting from 300 to 800+ unique visitors per month. Trumping this, Andy Hrast says that during his time as president we got up to 2,000 'hits' per week to the calendar/guides. Other organisations that point their members to the COGS website for planting and growing information include Canberra City Farm and Canberra Urban Homesteaders.

While there is an abundance of information on planting and growing available on the internet and printed publications, much of it is not tailored to Canberra conditions.

The information we provide, however, has significant gaps. In particular, of the 54 crops listed on the planting calendar, just 24 have an associated growing guide providing instruction on how to grow the crop under Canberra conditions.



The Ainslie Urban Farm's Fiona Buining ran a popular hands-on seed-raising workshop at COGS Kambah Community Garden's 2023 Open Day. Photo: Ed Highley

The existing guides are the result of work by members over the years. In recent times, we have sought to get members to draft new guides, but the whole job is a big, time-consuming exercise requiring a great deal of specialist expertise and experience.

This is the background against which the COGS committee decided to significantly invest in a timely further development of our guides and calendar, and we are fortunate in attracting Fiona to the task, during which she will:

1. develop and write new growing guides for the missing 30 guides
2. review the 24 existing growing guides to bring them up to date (cognisant of climate change, new varieties/types etc.)
3. review the planting calendar to ensure it is up to date and that timings are still valid
4. consider if new varieties of fruit or vegetables could be included on the calendar/guides and develop associated guides.

She hopes to complete the work by the end of the year. Make sure that you consult our new planting guides while you are planning and planting your spring and summer crops.

Fiona has extensive, practical knowledge in growing and teaching about food and, as a First Class Honours graduate in plant ecology and physiology from Macquarie University, knows the theory too. She will be known to the many COGS members who have attended her composting workshops and other presentations across several of our gardens. 🌱

Reminder: COGS membership and plot fees

Our treasurer has sent out invoices for membership and plot fees, which were due by the end of August. Please send your remittance if you haven't already done so. If you have not received an invoice, contact the treasurer by email (treasurer@cogs.asn.au) or consult your garden convenor.

Minister briefed on need for new community gardens

The benefits of, and the need for, new community gardens and how to overcome the current impediments to their establishment were topics for discussion during a visit to COGS Kambah Community Garden by Environment, Parks, and Land Management Minister Rebecca Vassarotti on 1 July, where she met with COGS President Neil Williams and local garden members.

As highlighted in the government's recently released Food Strategy, the demand for community garden plots is high and likely to increase in line with the increasing population of apartment dwellers and aged-care residents, many of who are seeking to maintain some connection with gardening. Most COGS gardens have a waiting list of members seeking plots. It is now over 10 years since the latest COGS garden opened: at Crace, as a facility created by the land developer.

Cost and access to land are the main impediments to the establishment of new gardens. While there might be no shortage of suitable land, aspects of its control and administration in the ACT are complex and difficult to navigate. COGS recommended establishing a central point of contact with the capacity and authority to help identify suitable land and to deal expeditiously with requests from community organisations such as COGS.

Different models of community gardens were discussed, including allotment style gardens similar to COGS gardens as well as a 'commons' approach close to public housing or aged-care facilities. Establishment costs for new gardens are high and well beyond the resources of most, if not all,



Minister Vassarotti (centre right) in discussion with (L-R) COGS web manager Cathy Morison, President Neil Williams and Kambah garden co-convenor Allan Sharp.

community organisations. Creating a new fenced garden similar to COGS Kambah, which is around 2,000 square metres and has around 30 members, would be \$100,000 plus and need government funding, though COGS would be willing to contribute to some establishment costs of new gardens it took under its umbrella.

Developers are another potential source of funding and they may find there are benefits as well as costs in incorporating community garden space in their planning and promotions. COGS Crace Community Garden could be promoted to them as a low-cost, utilitarian model. 🍃

COGS life membership: call for nominations

COGS life membership appointments celebrate the importance of volunteers to our society and the wider community, as well as recognising the considerable contributions of individuals. To date, 24 life members have been appointed (see adjacent list). Life membership, provided for under the COGS Constitution, is an honour bestowed on members whose outstanding service and contributions to COGS have provided considerable benefit to the organisation over a long period.

Nominations are assessed against the following criteria:

- long service to COGS
- specific achievements that further the aims and aspirations of COGS
- provision of valued leadership and/or service as an outstanding role model to members

- service reflecting favourably on and bringing great credit to COGS.

Written nominations can be made by financial members of COGS by contacting a committee member (see page 4) and providing information addressing the above criteria in support of the proposed life member. The nomination form is available on the COGS website (with examples of previous nominations). Only current financial members of COGS are eligible for life membership. The sponsoring committee member will ask the full committee to consider the nomination. Life membership awards will be announced at the 2025 AGM, and appointments, along with a summary of their contribution to COGS, published in *Canberra Organic*. Life membership nominations for 2024 should be received by the

COGS Secretary from the sponsoring committee member for discussion by the full committee before the end of October 2024.

COGS Life Members

Margaret Allen	Vance Barrell
Peter Carden	Shirley Carden
Keith Colls	Betty Cornhill
Emsie DuPlessis	Adrienne Fazekas
Mary Flowers	Richard Horobin
Andy Hrast	Michelle Johnson
Gordon Laws	Narelle McLean
Barney Molnar	David Odell
Elizabeth Palmer	Walter Steensby
Steve Sutton	Alan Timmiss
Conrad Van Hest	Rose Walters
Peter Weddell	Terry Williams

COGS Kambah garden aiming for best-yet open day

Kambah Community Garden's popular annual open day and seedling sale is back on Saturday 2 November, from 10 am to 3 pm, the organising committee reports.

This will be the fourth year the open day has been held, and the number of visitors to the event is growing each year. This year we are aiming to make it bigger and better than ever!

Entry is free and there is ample parking adjacent to the Kambah Woolshed.

Visitors will have a chance to inspect over 40 plots and a common herb garden and flowerbed. We'll have our popular plant and seedling stall, with plants aplenty for sale, ornamental as well as edible, all grown by our garden members. Packets of green manure seed to revitalise your soil will also be on sale.

ACT for Bees, Seed Savers, the Southern ACT Catchment Group and SEE Change will be among gardening-related stallholders on the day.

Guest presentations will include:

- growing delightful dahlias, by Richard Buker from COGS Kaleen Community Garden

Richard Buker's photo of some of his delightful dahlias, which he will be showing you how to grow at the open day this year.



There was a rush on seedlings for sale at last year's open day. We hope to deliver an even better offering this year. Photo: Ed Highley

- hand pollination of zucchini and pumpkin, by Arian from Seed Savers
- Indigenous plant use, by Aaron Chatfield from Dreamtime Connections.

Other attractions will include a sausage sizzle and egg-and-bacon burgers, with eggs donated by garden

members, and a tea and coffee stall offering home-baked treats.

No open day would be complete without the ever-popular raffle. Generous prizes have been donated by local businesses. Also, Kambah plot holder and much-admired artist Cathy Morison, whose wonderful bird drawings have been adorning *Canberra Organic*, is donating a commissioned work, framed by a local business, as a prize.

There will be music. The skirl of the bagpipes played by the Kambah garden's very own Ken Fraser will herald the start of festivities, with local choir 'Seasoned Voices' entertaining visitors during the day.

As an extracurricular activity on the day, SEE Change, which runs the Canberra Electric Bike Library, will give you the chance to test ride an eBike.

Profits from the day will be shared between a donation to OzHarvest and funding of future improvements to the garden.

The final open day program will be available soon on the COGS website and Facebook page. 🍃

Hard yakka at Oaks Estate

As reported in the winter issue of *Canberra Organic*, there's a new management team at COGS Oaks Estate Community Garden. It has its work cut out with a range of major tasks ahead of it, with which the COGS Committee is providing strong support.

The first task, which was completed during July, was the removal of hazardous metal edging and posts present on almost all plots and in some common areas. This was no mean task as the accompanying photos show.

Garden co-convenor Elisa Pevere reports that about 200 m of metal edging was initially pulled up, producing three loads for recycling. That was the easy part, she says. Still to be dealt with was 1 m long rebar and 60–100 cm high edging, some of it set in concrete, and proving too stubborn for manual removal.

At the suggestion of President Neil Williams, Gary from COGS Holder Community Garden brought in his Kanga Loader to tackle the job but it proved too much even for it, so he sought quotes from and engaged



(above) The big guns engaged; (below left) extracting buried rebar; (below right) one of several loads of metal edging headed for recycling. Photos: Elisa Pevere

a local contractor to do the job. This work produced a further 1.3 tonnes of metal for recycling.

There's much more work to be done and an invitation is extended to all COGS gardeners to help. As Elisa

notes: 'We only have 11 members, so it was a big effort for them to show up every working bee and spend 2 hours pulling out metal. For our small garden it was lot of work to do? They've done a grand job. 🍀



Erindale less ordinaries – Part 2

Four less-common vegetables grown at the Erindale Community Garden – cucamelon, shiso, tomatillo and yacon – were featured on the back cover of the Autumn 2024 issue of Canberra Organic. In the Winter 2024 issue, Erindale convenor **Didi Sommer** told of the garden's experience in growing cucamelon and shiso. Here, she completes the story for tomatillo and yacon.

Tomatillo

The tomatillo plant (*Physalis philadelphica* and *P. ixocarpa*), common name Mexican Husk Tomato, is a member of the Solanaceae family, home to a range of important food plants, including tomato, potato, peppers and eggplant. Under the same roof is the Deadly Nightshade – nature can be bizarre. The plant bears small, spherical, green or green-purple fruit. Tomatillos are a staple of Mexican cuisine. They are eaten raw or cooked in a variety of dishes, but especially *salsa verde*. Tomatillo is a perennial plant, but is generally grown as an annual.

The summer of 2023–24 was the second year we experimented with tomatillo plants at our garden. Markus had grown the first plants for us from seed. This year we actually did not get around to grow seedlings but we had several tomatillo plants come up between some corn and along a trellis. We were quite excited to see the tomatillo grow this year again as we had much success growing it the previous year.

They grow quite tall, up to 1.7 m or higher, so it's a good idea to stake them. They are a no-fuss plant, not like tomatoes. The edible part of the plant looks like little green lanterns with a tiny bauble inside, covered by the 'leaves' of the lantern. Once the fruit inside grows and ripens, it fills up the skin and often pops open. That's a good indication that the tomatillo baubles are ready for eating.



Tomatillo. Photo: Didi Sommer

The tomatillo turns yellowish at this stage from green before. The tomatillo has a refreshing taste when eaten raw. It is a staple in Mexican cooking for salsa. On page 19, Mayra, one of our gardeners who originally hails from Mexico, shares her favourite recipe for tomatillo-based *salsa verde* as a sauce for chicken enchiladas. We can highly recommend planting tomatillos in your community garden too.

Yacon

The yacon (*Smallanthus sonchifolius*), common name Peruvian Ground Apple or Earth Apple, is a species of daisy (family Asteraceae) cultivated for its crisp, sweet-tasting, tuberous roots. As its common name indicates, it originated in South America (as did so many of our important food

plants) but, interestingly, it has a local parallel, the Yam Daisy or Murnong (*Microseris lanceolata*), which was widely and intensively cultivated as a staple by our Indigenous people.

For just about all you need to know about yacon in general, go to Ange McNeilly's article 'Yacon – cultivation and health benefits' in the Summer 2020 issue of *Canberra Organic*.

The yacon was an accidental plant in our community garden, growing from some tubers left behind by a previous plot holder. When we first discovered the shoots emerging in spring, we did not know what plant was growing but curiosity got the better of us and we let the plant grow. We added some of our home-made compost on top and a bit of manure,

and mulched with sugarcane straw. The plant grew exceptionally strong and had many stems pop up. Eventually we identified it as a yacon. We now have two big clumps of yacon growing but intend to grow even more of it.

It grows up to 2 m tall and is not invasive, but it needs to be staked and tied to protect it from wind damage. The yacon develops large, thick stems that are covered with lush, velvety green leaves, which can be eaten cooked as a substitute for spinach.

If the summer is hot enough, the yacon develops small yellow flowers. It did not flower in the 2023–24 summer but the plants nevertheless look very healthy.

Yacon tubers contain no starch and can be eaten raw. It tastes sweet with a crunchy texture similar to a nashi pear. The tubers are usually harvested mid autumn to early winter: we waited until the first frost. The thick stems are cut off at about 10 cm high, which makes it easier to dig up the clumps and divide them. Take care not to damage the tubers if you intend to store them for eating later. It is important to separate the crowns (with the shoots) from the large tubers below. The crowns with the shoots attached can be replanted straightaway and covered with some mulch. We like to mulch with sugarcane or lucerne hay and deciduous autumn leaves that we collect.

Space the crowns at least 1 metre apart as they are a vigorous plant. In spring, give the plants a good application of compost and some bagged manure. Yacon survives the winter well in our garden.

The big tubers are for eating. Brush any soil off the tubers and set them up to dry for about 2 weeks so they will store well and avoid mouldiness. The tubers can be eaten raw or sliced and added to a salad or baked in the oven or boiled. Yacon tubers can also be juiced to make a syrup. We recommend that you try the yacon in your community garden. 🌱



Yacon. Photo: Didi Sommer

2024 ACT Community Gardens Gathering

Community Gardens Australia (see article on page 16) invites ACT community gardeners to come and experience a fabulous day at Canberra City Farm with their fellow gardeners on **Saturday 12 October** from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm.

We will have speakers, workshops, lots of fun, cooking demonstrations, and a community lunch.

We are working to put together an amazing program for you that will include a tour of the farm, a session on how to promote your garden more effectively and a community gardens forum.

Morning and afternoon tea as well as lunch is included in the ticket price of \$35 (book at <https://events.humanitix.com/2024-act-community-gardens-gathering>). Please bring your own water bottle, and keep a cup and bag for some goodies. Also remember you will be spending some time outdoors so dress appropriately for the weather and don't forget your sun protection.

Everyone is welcome. Fully accessible.

We thank our sponsors – WaterUps, Koh and PiP Magazine – for their generous support. 🌱

Dickson looking to fruitful years ahead

COGS Dickson Community Garden convenor **Michele England** reports on the creation of a new orchard honouring a long-time member.

At Dickson garden we have created a celebratory garden for one of our gardeners, and who else but Veronica Dunphy, who is now 101! While our garden is small, we've still managed to fit in a fruit-tree orchard, named 'Veronica's Orchard' to celebrate her long life in which gardening of productive and pretty plants has been a mainstay.

Many of us met on a miserable, cold and rainy 5 May to plant several fruit trees and bring a bit of sunshine into our lives. We answered Veronica's request to buy some of her favourites – Moorpark apricot, Blood Plum, green and red apples (Leprechaun and Gala) and a black mulberry tree. We also planted a few citrus plants, including a lemon, grapefruit, and a mandarin, that will be espaliered on the walls of two buildings.

We were delighted that COGS President Neil Williams could also join our gathering and we thank the COGS committee for generously supporting our plans and purchases for Veronica's Orchard.

In the weeks leading up to planting day, all the holes were dug and we enriched the soil with compost. That took the edge off the work on our happy planting day.

Veronica inaugurated proceedings by planting her favourite fruit tree, the Moorpark apricot, without a spade of help from anyone else: impressive! Then we all swung into action and planted the remaining trees, the rain helping to bed them in. After planting the fruits, we added other goodies, like a bed of comfrey leaves under the bark mulch. Afterwards we enjoyed a serious morning tea and good cheer.

Soon we will be installing an arch, seat and paths to complete this special spot. We are all looking forward to many fruitful years to come. 🍃



*The happy planters of Veronica's Orchard. Photo: Daniel Conte
Job done! Veronica with COGS President Neil Williams. Photo: Michele England*



Vale Veronica Dunphy

We are sad to report that Veronica died in hospital on 17 August after suffering a stroke. An article celebrating Veronica's life will appear in the next issue.

Cook garden a hive of activity

COGS Cook Community Garden has been busy on both new and ongoing projects during the winter, one of the most exciting being to welcome a beehive to the garden. Our convenors allocated a portion of space behind the orchard for the development of a movable bee garden growing a variety of long-term flowering native and non-native plants that will provide blossoms all year round. The hive sits protected by the garden surrounding it, which keeps gardeners and children at a distance. This is to ensure no one gets hurt while working or playing in the area and likewise to prevent any disturbance to the hive. The project is managed by Lachlan Wilkes, an enthusiastic Cook gardener who has completed various beekeeping courses and undertaken personal research, gaining the knowledge to ensure that any issues arising can be readily dealt with.

To prepare the area for the new beehive, Cook gardeners came together for the autumn working bee to whipper-snip the perimeter fence line, lightly prune of the surrounding



trees and lay the cardboard and mulch that provides the foundation for the bee garden.

The installation of our beehive, along with the most recent winter working bee and the garden's winter solstice get-together, were very successful and enjoyable events, hosting many gardeners and offering a wonderful opportunity for children of different ages from various plot-holding

families to come together and play around the garden; a beautiful sight that seems to be happening more and more throughout the year.

Homemade non-alcoholic mulled wine and Estonian pavlova were particularly popular food choices at the winter solstice morning tea and disappeared very quickly.

– Cynthia Wilkes

Frost at Holder? No worries

Ruth Cornforth is a new member at COGS Holder Community Garden, moving from a warm-temperate, maritime environment (Warners Bay, NSW; lowest ever temperature recorded 3.3°C) to the dramatically cooler climate of Canberra (lowest min. -10°C). She relished the challenge to grow 'frost-tolerant vegetables' and came up a winner. She reports that her seeds germinated in February and just kept on growing 'just loving those harsh morning frosts'. Pictured here is our happy gardener's mid July picking of parsnips, beetroot and swedes. Well done!



Crace worms love their coffee

Mark Hosking of Crace Community Garden reports that earthworms thrive in a mix containing coffee grounds, providing more evidence that managed coffee grounds can be a beneficial soil additive.

* * *

Mark uses a tumbling composter to mix coffee grounds with stable sweepings and the existing soil, about one part of each. The sweepings are a mix of the sawdust and other organic matter from horse stables. Earthworms thrive in this mix and quickly spread nutrients through the soil. The accompanying photograph shows that the worms in the mix are mainly juveniles.

For the winter, Mark planted a mixture of broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, carrot, lettuce, snow peas, spinach, garlic, spring onions and white turnips in a natural pattern (randomly mixed). The white turnips (one pictured) were his most successful vegetable and he recommends them to other gardeners as a winter crop. They are a key ingredient of Cornish pasties, a favourite winter food of the Hosking family. 🍃



Local Food Strategy launched

The Canberra Region Local Food Strategy was launched by Minister Vassarotti on 12 June. I was there as COGS representative and as a member of the reference group established to provide advice to the government on implementation of the strategy. Also present was COGS committee member Didi Sommer, who represents the Tuggeranong Community Council on the reference group.

The strategy aims to increase the capacity of the local food system to improve access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food. It also provides incentives and economic opportunities, including job creation and supporting strong community participation and inclusion. The government has committed around

\$0.5m to implementation of the strategy in its the first year, primarily on four areas:

- a scoping study on the establishment of a 'food hub'
- a study into local supply chains
- further work on identifying sites for food production, including heritage sites
- development of a website to provide information on growing local food.

On the last point, I advised the Minister's chief advisor about the major project we have commissioned (see article on page 6) to update and extend our planting calendars and growing guides. These will be accessible via the new food strategy website.

Neil Williams

Growing tomatoes in winter

Hi everyone,

I wonder how many of you have attempted to grow tomatoes in winter. I mentioned in my last column that this was my challenging project.

This year was my first attempt and I have to say that it was less than 100 per cent successful. Here's what happened.

With my grandpa's help, I bought two LED Grow Light lamps online (see photo). The instructions were very brief but you had the option of leaving the lights on for a 12-hour period daily and I chose to do that.

I had seven plants in all, which I had grown from seed and I placed these into plastic pots on a large tray and brought them inside. The soil was a mix of horse manure, compost and tomato food.

I watered the plants in thoroughly – and this was probably my first mistake. While the grow lights provide adequate light, the room temperature was consistently low. This meant that the soil remained moist for a long period.

One day I noticed that one or two leaves on each of the plants had gone white. I discovered that this was probably powdery mildew, caused by too much water and not enough heat.

My second mistake was that I didn't record the variety of tomato that I was using. After thinking about it, I realised that a cherry variety might have had a greater chance of success than a larger one.

After some 9 weeks (in late July) I removed six of the plants and placed them outside in full sun, bringing them in each night. This was to find out whether plants will grow better under natural (winter) sun than under lamps. The seventh plant I left inside next to a north-facing window.

You can see by the photos that I have had some success with the experiment. Two plants did quite well, while the other five grew only slowly. I have learned that in future I need to choose my tomato varieties carefully, make sure that the instructions for the growing lights are adequate and that I do not over-water.

In the meantime I will continue to care for the healthy plants and hope to be able to plant them out when the weather warms up and the frosts are over.

I checked the tomato plants on the morning of 25 July and the first flower buds have appeared on the two healthiest plants (see photo).

Photos: Grandpa Ken



The LED lamps, May 31st



June 28th



(above and below) July 25th



Community Gardens Australia: who we are and what do we do

Community Gardens Australia (CGA) President Naomi Lacey outlines its journey to building an organisation that supports the growth and needs of community gardens around Australia, providing them with education, support, resources and sustenance to continue their work, and delivery of the benefits they bring to their communities.

Community gardening activities have long been known to benefit people and the wider community in many ways. They improve physical and mental health, increase consumption of organic fruits and vegetables, reduce waste, increase community connectedness, provide green spaces in our towns and cities, increase consumption of local food thereby reducing food miles, help cool the urban heat island and contribute greatly to community cohesion and welfare.

Community Gardens Australia (CGA) is a not-for-profit, volunteer-



COMMUNITY
GARDENS
AUSTRALIA

run organisation that exists to support, provide resources to, network and advocate for community gardening activities in Australia. We currently have over 800 gardens, including COGS gardens, listed in our online directory, but believe this number could easily double or triple if we could locate all of the community gardens out there, many of which have no online presence or listed phone numbers.

Recent survey data have shown that an average of 20,425 people a week visit and participate in their local community garden in Australia, contributing an average of 15,718 hours of volunteer time per week. These numbers are not small and

show that community gardening is very important to many people, with 83 per cent of survey respondents stating that they had experienced an increase in their health and wellbeing since they became involved in their garden.

To support its national gardening network, CGA has a wonderful cohort of volunteers, all keen to spread the word about community gardening. These dedicated people keep the board up to date with what is happening around the country and support gardens to establish, grow and thrive. If you are interested in joining the team, please get in touch.

Our website (communitygarden.org.au) contains a wealth of resources to support the establishment and ongoing management of gardens and assist local government with policymaking. It also contains abundant gardening knowledge and advice, information on relevant events and networking opportunities for community gardens and, very importantly, a directory of community gardens in Australia so that the wider community can readily access contacts for gardens.

We have two fabulous national ambassadors – Costa Georgiardinis and Hannah Moloney from ABC's *Gardening Australia* program – who actively support CGA by hosting our events and making guest appearances at our online gatherings. We also have many other supporters who actively encourage community gardening and inspire people to get involved.

(continued at foot of page 17)



CGA President Naomi Lacey

Celebrating pollinators

First held in 2015, Australian Pollinator Week is an annual spring event to recognise and acknowledge the vital role of insect pollinators – bees and many other species – in plant production and the maintenance of biodiversity. It's a week, this year 9–17 November, when communities, businesses and organisations can come together to raise awareness of the importance of pollinators and how to support them.

Group activities during the week seek to engage communities in schools, retirement villages, art groups, gardening clubs, community gardens, local council areas, Landcare groups and neighbourhoods to observe and increase awareness of the role of pollinators and act on the knowledge gained. Go to australianpollinatorsweek.org.au for more information and details on how to participate.

It's a big thing. Reliance on pollinators extends from home and community gardens to over three-quarters of the world's food crops, which together yield 35 per cent of global crop production.

Pollinators also support biodiversity. Almost all species of wild flowering plants depend to some degree on pollen transfer by insects, and not just bees.

In summary, pollinators provide essential ecosystem services in the natural landscape over and above their massive contribution to agriculture, horticulture and the urban environment. Think seriously before you dispatch that six-legged critter in your garden: it may be a friend. Get to know who the friends are.

One of the week's activities is a photography competition to encourage people to get out and capture images that



Even flies can be pollinators. There's a whole group of flies called flower flies or hoverflies that provide essential pollination services. Photo: Ed Highley

provide information on bees and other pollinators in a range of local environments. Prizes are on offer for the best images. The competition opens for entries on 23 September.

Ed Highley

CGA's goals in supporting community gardens include:

- running annual state and national gatherings to enable gardens to connect and share with each other
- providing advice and support to community gardens, new and established
- delivering a suite of current, up-to-date resources, available online
- providing regular educational workshops to all gardens around the country to build capacity and enhance the skills of garden leaders

- building relationships with all levels of government in order to advocate for community gardens and garner greater support for them.

In 2019 I was blessed with a Churchill Fellowship, which gave me the wonderful opportunity to learn from community garden networks around the world. Our Queensland State Coordinator Gavin Hardy used his 2020 Churchill Fellowship to investigate the potential of community food forests and orchards. Our fellowship reports, which can be found on our website, are helping to drive ongoing development of CGA's strategy.

This year we are holding network gatherings in each state and territory and are currently planning the 2024 ACT Community Gardens Gathering, which will be held at Canberra City Farm on 12 October. There will be some great speakers, cooking demonstrations, workshops and more. See invitation on page 11 and, for updates, our website and social media pages. We are also holding a National Community Gardens Gathering, hosted by Costa, on 9–10 November on the Gold Coast. Tickets for both events will go on sale soon. Don't miss out! 🍀

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo

Our resident artist Cathy Morison captures in watercolour this abundant Canberra woodland resident with a mixed reputation but loads of personality.

My decision to paint the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo (*Cacatua galerita*) for this issue was easy once I saw the outcome of my photography excursion to the Conder Wetlands. Not only was the pose and expression of this bird so quirky, the setting of the photo in the vicinity of a (possibly) future nesting hollow produced a challenging and interesting textural backdrop for the painting.

The Sulphur-crested Cockatoo is without doubt one of Australia's most emblematic native birds. It is large (up to 50 cm long) and imposing, and when travelling and foraging in a large flock can leave a trail of destruction in a suburban environment. Considered

a pest in some (usually agricultural) regions, cockies can use their very powerful beaks to bite through tree branches as well as urban structures (such as wooden verandahs and polystyrene shopping centre signage) and their dexterous tongues allow them to consume large amounts of planted grain.

As gardeners, there would be a few amongst us who would not dread the onslaught of a flock of sulphur-crested marauders just as the garlic shoots are at their sweetest and most vulnerable.

These highly intelligent birds have assimilated extremely well into the suburban environment, both as wheelie bin marauders and as cherished family pets. A captive cockatoo can live for many decades, often 20 or more years longer than their wild counterparts. When I published this painting on social media, a cousin of mine sadly told me that their pet had recently died

at the age of 68! They readily learn to mimic our language: there would not be many pet cockatoos that haven't learnt to utter that age-old phrase 'Hello Cocky'.

Like all other Australian parrots, the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo breeds in rotted-out hollows in (mostly) native eucalypt trees. They use their beaks to shave material from the walls of the hollow, both increasing its size and making soft bedding in which to lay their 2-3 eggs. Both parents will share the raising of their brood, regurgitating 'crop milk' to feed their offspring. Once fledged, young cockatoos will stay with their parents for many months.

I have given this painting the title 'Hollow Promise', because I wanted to highlight the importance of nesting hollows, and the length of time it can take for a hollow to become a useful nesting site.

(continued at foot of page 19)



Chicken enchiladas with salsa verde

Erindale gardener **Myra Escobedo** hails originally from Mexico and this is her recipe, a favourite in her former home country. Salsa verde (trans. 'green sauce') is made with fresh herbs and, in this recipe, tomatillos (see page 10). Myra notes that the salsa verde also makes a great dipping sauce for your favourite tortilla chips.

The sauce

Ingredients

340 g tomatillos (about 8 medium tomatillos, husks removed and well washed)
 2 serrano peppers or 1 jalapeño pepper (chilli)
 1 garlic clove
 ⅛ medium white onion
 4 cups water
 ½ cup fresh coriander

Method

Place tomatillos, peppers, garlic, onion and water in a large saucepan over high heat.

Bring to the boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 15 minutes or until

tomatillos are cooked. Allow to cool, then remove cooked contents from saucepan using a slotted spoon, and place in a blender with 1 cup of the cooking water. Blend until smooth. Add coriander and blend until uniform texture.

The enchiladas

Ingredients

2 tablespoons of oil for frying
 12 corn tortillas
 2 cups shredded cooked chicken
 ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
 ¼ teaspoon onion powder
 Salt and pepper, to taste
 Fresh coriander for garnish

Method

Heat the oil in a large frying pan (skillet) over medium heat. Using a pair of kitchen tongs, dip the tortillas one at a time into the oil for a few seconds each to soften them. Transfer them to a plate lined with paper towel to drain excess oil.

Season the chicken with salt and pepper, onion and garlic powders.



Image: Vecteezy

To assemble the enchiladas, place chicken (1 tablespoonful or more) into a tortilla, close to its edge and roll to form an enchilada. Place the enchilada side down. Repeat this process with the remaining tortillas and chicken.

Spoon the salsa verde over the enchiladas.

Garnish with fresh coriander, and serve. 🌿

The Wilderness Society provides the following information about the use of tree hollows.

- Small hollows can take 120–150 years to form. Their narrow entrances are suitable for small animals, such as the Eastern Pygmy Possum.
- Medium hollows can take over 200 years to form. These are favoured by animals such as Leadbeater's Possum and the Swift Parrot.
- Large/deep hollows are found only in old and over-mature trees (deteriorating, dying or dead). They're occupied by Glossy Black-Cockatoos and other larger animals such as Masked Owls.

The Sulphur-crested Cockatoo is about the same size as a Glossy Black-Cockatoo.

So, rather than asking readers to keep a safe, pet-free region of the garden to encourage cockies to visit (which is probably not something most would want to encourage), I would implore everyone to be aware of old hollow-bearing trees and, wherever possible, lobby to protect them.

The Wilderness Society lists the following species that rely on hollows to survive as threatened or of concern:

- Swift Parrot (critically endangered, Tasmania – for breeding/nesting season)
- Leadbeater's Possum (critically

endangered, Central Highlands, Victoria)

- Superb Parrot, Powerful Owl (under state legislation; not listed federally) and Greater Glider (vulnerable, eastern and south-eastern Australia)
- Carnaby's Cockatoo (endangered, south-west Australia)
- Yellow-bellied/Fluffy gliders (vulnerable, Queensland and NSW)
- Western Ringtail Possum (critically endangered, south-west WA).

Source

<https://www.wilderness.org.au/protecting-nature/endangered-animals-and-plants/hollow-bearing-trees-explained>

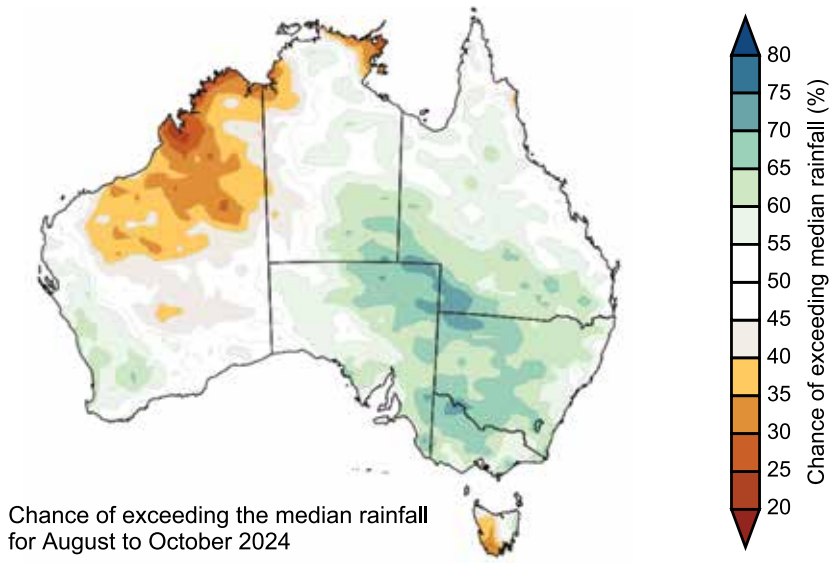
Increased chance of a wet spring

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

The Bureau of Meteorology (BoM), in its report released on 23 July, says Pacific conditions are currently neutral – neither El Niño nor La Niña. Sea-surface temperatures in the central Pacific Ocean have been cooling since December 2023, however. Deep waters surfacing in the central and eastern parts of the ocean are sustaining this surface cooling but, since June, the rate and extent of cooling both at the surface and at depth have slowed. Atmospheric patterns, including cloud and surface pressure, are currently neutral.

BoM says conditions are likely to remain neutral until at least early spring. Four of seven climate models suggest that the La Niña threshold could be reached by October. Compared with earlier forecasts, the potential for La Niña development is now later in spring. BoM has continued its outlook as La Niña Watch, rather than La Niña Alert. La Niña Watch indicates that there is about an equal chance of either the El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO) remaining neutral or La Niña developing during the remainder of 2024.

The Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) is currently neutral. The latest model outlooks indicate that the IOD is



Chance of exceeding the median rainfall for August to October 2024

Model ACCESS-S2
Base Period: 1981–2018

Model run: 15/07/2024
Issued: 18/07/2024

likely to remain neutral until at least the end of winter. Three of five climate models suggest that negative IOD development is likely during spring. A negative IOD tends to bring rain to southern and south-eastern Australia. Global sea-surface temperatures have been the warmest on record for each month between April 2023 and June 2024. July 2024 sea surface temperatures are comparable with 2023 but are much warmer than for any other July on record. The current global pattern of warmth differs from historical patterns, meaning future predictions may not be reliable.

Water storage levels in the Canberra region and capital cities

	July '24	July '23
ACT storages	97%	99%
Murray-Darling Basin	79%	88%
Burrinjuck Dam	77%	77%
Blowering Dam	76%	83%
Sydney	100%	95%
Melbourne	87%	92%
Brisbane	82%	74%
Adelaide	46%	74%
Perth	37%	45%

Based on those conditions BoM's long-range forecast for August to October suggests:

- wetter than average conditions are likely for areas of eastern and central Australia, and drier than average in parts of the north.
- rainfall is likely to be within the typical seasonal range for most of the eastern coast of the mainland, and much of north-eastern Australia and southern WA
- warmer than average days and nights are likely to very likely across most of Australia, but it is the cool season, so periods of unusually cold weather are still possible.



Photo: Matt Mawson

A nifty little digger

The Power Planter™ comprises a suite of compact soil augers of various sizes. They make the holes for planting. The power comes from your cordless drill, which needs to be tradesman-standard, lithium-battery driven, to get the job done.

The combination makes a great tool for planting seedlings or bulbs using one of the smaller augers. I can report that its use made planting the hundreds of bulbs for Floriade Community at COGS Kambah garden over the past 2 years a relative breeze.

Inserting a larger, long-shafted auger turns the tool into an effective, no-back-bending implement for turning the soil. Conversely, going back a step, use of a smaller auger for planting might attract those gardeners intent on maintaining good soil structure by adopting 'minimal till'.

*(right) Digging the hole
(below) The combination
(below right) Job done*

Photos: Allan Sharp





spring planting guide

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

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

Using seeds

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

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

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

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

Crop rotation

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

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

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

Plant varieties

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

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

S = seed sowing; T = transplanting

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

Want to contribute?
We'd love to hear from you!
Please send contributions to:
editor@cogs.asn.au

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

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1/2 page	\$36 (\$30)	\$120 (\$100)
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Please contact editor@cogs.asn.au

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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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