

# Canberra organic

Autumn 2025  
Vol 33 No 1 Issue 126

**Kids in the garden**

**Weeds minimised –  
produce maximised**

**Growing together**

**Trialing a new berry**

**Snake bite at Holder**

The quarterly publication of the Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.







My first column as editor of *Canberra Organic* must begin by saying goodbye to my predecessor, Ed Highley, who passed away in January, not long after delivering his sixth edition of this magazine.

Ed and I both joined the COGS Executive Committee two years ago, shortly after I had taken a plot at COGS Kambah, where Ed had gardened for a decade. As it turned out, our plots neighboured. So even if Ed and I only saw each other in passing, I was in a good position to know him well from his work, both with this magazine and in the garden.

In both places, Ed was organised, skilled and exacting. His rows were neat, his spacing precise. His broccoli was always among the best. He ran *Canberra Organic* with similar care and pride. Call this magazine a newsletter in his presence and you would be swiftly corrected.

Ed's reprimand, however, always came with a glint in his eye. He meant it, but in everything Ed did there was a subtle but unmissable current of fun running just beneath the surface. That spark can be discerned in his swansong to *Canberra Organic*, on page 21, a comparison of the nutritional value of Apple and Potato, *Pomme and Pomme de Terre*, that is as rigorous in its methods and precise in its prose as it is mischievous – and even a bit subversive – in its premise.

As Allan Sharp's fine tribute to Ed (page 20) notes, Ed worked hard to the end, and he leaves a formidable legacy at COGS Kambah. His presence will be missed there, just as his voice will be missed by readers of this magazine, and his editorial judgement by those good enough to supply its stories and photos.

To that latter group I am entirely indebted for this edition. With little warning and a very tight deadline, COGS members provided more than enough content to bring this issue to press roughly on time, and with the talent and diversity of our community very much on show.

This edition mourns the passing of a valued member of that community. It also tells a tale of adventure with a new crop, offers tips for renewing an old bed and starting seeds, considers the best way to recycle kitchen scraps, relates a lifethreatening encounter with local wildlife and the heartbreaking toll of extreme weather, and relates the experiences of young Canberrans finding community in one of our gardens. If its theme can be summed up by a line of text from these pages, it would be a quote from Ryl Parker's thoughtful piece on welcoming children to the garden. Their presence, one of her fellow gardeners thought, completes "the circle of the garden community."

As the joyful photo of Ed sharing a moment with Ryl's young son (page 20) can attest, he would have appreciated the sentiment.

– Michael Gisick (photo: Natalie Gisick)

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**Front cover:** Children bring a joyful and irreverent spirit to the garden, as Ryl Parker writes on p. 6–7. Her son Kai demonstrates this by watering ... something. (Photo: Ryl Parker)

**Back cover:** Dahila's bring joy to the garden too. (Photo: Michael Gisick)

Hello to all our readers. I hope you enjoy this Autumn edition of *Canberra Organic*.

Firstly, I would like to pay tribute to our former Editor, Ed Highley, who sadly passed away in January this year after a short illness. Ed was a fabulous Editor over the last two years, bringing a down to earth and sometimes quirky approach to the job.

When you first met Ed, he could come across as a little gruff, perhaps reflecting his Scottish roots. But behind that exterior was a very kind and gentle man with a sharp mind. A funny anecdote about Ed that my fellow Committee members would attest to – the Executive Committee of COGS typically hold our meetings via Zoom. The faces of Committee members would pop up as they logged into each meeting and invariably Ed would pop up and start railing against the technology and why it wasn't working. We would collectively say to Ed that we could both see and hear him!

When it came to editing this magazine, however, Ed was thoroughly in his element, and he will be missed. Our sympathies go out to his family and friends. In his honour, and on advice from the family, COGS donated \$200 to ACT Wildlife given his love for animals.

Thank you to Michael Gisick for taking on the Editor role. Michael has been doing a great job as our Information officer and lifting the profile of COGS through our social media pages.

#### Bush Dance

Late last year the Betty Cornhill Garden Committee put on a fabulous event – the inaugural Betty Cornhill Garden Bush Dance. Unfortunately, I could not attend, but by all accounts, it was a great night. One attendee told me she had an excellent time, that it was a great event and that there were some really good dancers! Well done to the BCG team that put the event on – you can read more about the night in this issue.

#### COGS Policies

In addition to the COGS General Rules (Appendix 2 of our Constitution) and garden specific rules, COGS has long had a number of general policies applicable across all our gardens. These include our watering policy – which bans the use of sprinklers – and our netting policy which is consistent with ACT Government regulations. Currently, there is a two page summary on the COGS website, and the Convenors have access to the full set. To improve transparency the Committee has decided to publish the policies in full on the COGS website. A new policy on the use of plastics will be published. Amongst other things, this bans the use of plastic weed mat. Please familiarise yourself with the policies.

#### COGS Annual General Meeting

Below is the notice of the COGS Annual General Meeting (AGM) to be held at 2:00pm on Saturday, 22 March 2025 at the Oaks Estate community garden. Come along to hear about what has been happening over the last year, to meet members of the Executive, see the rejuvenated Oaks Estate garden and enjoy some afternoon tea. We will also induct new Lifetime Members rewarding them for their work for COGS over many years.

Consistent with our Constitution, all positions on the Executive



Committee will become vacant. I would like to thank members of the Committee for their support in 2024. I intend to stand for President again, which would be my final year.

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

Finally, Cook Garden will be holding open days as part of the ACT Open Gardens scheme on Saturday and Sunday 29–30 March 2025. Look out for details on our Facebook page nearer to the time.

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

– 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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Editor: Michael Gisick  
Designer: Matt Mawson  
Proofreaders: Peter Sheehan,  
Walter Steensby, Susan Wood,  
Megan Bainbridge  
Reader services: Terry Williams



**The Canberra Organic Growers Society** is a nonprofit 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

[www.cogs.asn.au](http://www.cogs.asn.au)

**Enquiries**  
[info@cogs.asn.au](mailto:info@cogs.asn.au)

**Postal address**  
COGS  
PO Box 347  
Dickson ACT 2602

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## Committee

<b>President:</b>	Neil Williams	<a href="mailto:president@cogs.asn.au">president@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>VicePresident:</b>	Peter Weddell	<a href="mailto:vicepresident@cogs.asn.au">vicepresident@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>Secretary:</b>	Jyl Thompson	<a href="mailto:secretary@cogs.asn.au">secretary@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>Treasurer:</b>	Kasey Jordan	<a href="mailto:treasurer@cogs.asn.au">treasurer@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>Membership Secretary:</b>	Bev McConnell	<a href="mailto:members@cogs.asn.au">members@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>Gardens Coordinator:</b>	Narelle McLean	<a href="mailto:gardens@cogs.asn.au">gardens@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>Information Officer:</b>	Michael Gisick	<a href="mailto:media.canberraorganic@gmail.com">media.canberraorganic@gmail.com</a>
<b>Editor, Canberra Organic:</b>	Michael Gisick	<a href="mailto:media.canberraorganic@gmail.com">media.canberraorganic@gmail.com</a>
<b>Members:</b>	Michele Barson Richard Buker Dietlind Sommer Cynthia Wilkes	

## 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.

<b>Betty Cornhill</b>	Peter Sheehan	<a href="mailto:cornhill_convenor@cogs.asn.au">cornhill_convenor@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>Charnwood</b>	Susan Wood & Angela Steele	<a href="mailto:charnwood_convenor@cogs.asn.au">charnwood_convenor@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>Cook</b>	Peter Weddell	<a href="mailto:cook_convenor@cogs.asn.au">cook_convenor@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>Crace</b>	Peter Newbiggin	<a href="mailto:crace_convenor@cogs.asn.au">crace_convenor@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>Dickson</b>	Michele England	<a href="mailto:dickson_convenor@cogs.asn.au">dickson_convenor@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>Erindale</b>	Didi Sommer	<a href="mailto:erindale_convenor@cogs.asn.au">erindale_convenor@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>Holder</b>	Lisa Walkington & John Hutchison	<a href="mailto:holder_convenor@cogs.asn.au">holder_convenor@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>Kaleen</b>	Richard Buker & Annette Lock	<a href="mailto:kaleen_convenor@cogs.asn.au">kaleen_convenor@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>Kambah</b>	Barbara Jesiolowski & Sarah Peters	<a href="mailto:kambah_convenor@cogs.asn.au">kambah_convenor@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>Mitchell</b>	Olivier Itours & Ken Omari	<a href="mailto:mitchell_convenor@cogs.asn.au">mitchell_convenor@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>Oaks Estate</b>	Jinglong Chen & Ewan Maidment	<a href="mailto:oaks_estate_convenor@cogs.asn.au">oaks_estate_convenor@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>O'Connor</b>	Paul Magarey	<a href="mailto:oconnor_convenor@cogs.asn.au">oconnor_convenor@cogs.asn.au</a>

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.



## A dangerous reminder: We garden with wildlife

It was a reminder that we would rather have not had! One of our gardeners was bitten on the finger by a brown snake in mid-January. This is the first time in almost 25 years of the Holder Garden that someone has been bitten. Luckily there were other people at the garden who were able to assist. The gardener ended up having a night in the hospital but has since recovered and is back gardening.

The snake was in a compost bin, probably hunting for a frog that was known to live in the bin. It was frightened by a jet of water being directed into the compost bin. It is not the first snake that has been known to live in and/or around the Holder Garden. Given the area surrounding the Holder Garden is not built up, there is permanent water in the channel nearby, we grow food and attract wildlife and rodents we are, therefore, likely to attract snakes.

When a snake is sighted in the garden it will not usually be removed unless it is trapped in netting or wire being used in the garden. However, this snake was removed from the garden by a professional snake catcher.

Advice from the bitten gardener about the first aid kit which might be relevant to other gardens.

- Please take the wrappers off the compression bandages. If you are trying to move quickly to apply the bandages the last thing you want to be doing is trying to cut or tear off a plastic cover.
- Make sure the instructions for snake bite (Holder uses a St John Ambulance Australia Fact Sheet) are easily accessible. Holder Garden is now going to have a separate container for snake bandages with the instructions taped to the lid. Our original instructions had become buried under the first aid box contents as people hunted out band aids.
- Make sure your snake bite kit (maybe on the fact sheet) has the address of the garden clearly



written on it. And relevant instructions for the ambulance officers to find you.

### Actions

If you or someone in the garden is bitten when you are there:

- Call for an ambulance. Call 000.
- Keep the person immobilised (still and lying down), reassured and under constant observation.
- Apply pressure bandaging with immobilisation as per the instructions.

If you see a snake in the garden

- Do not approach the snake, do not try to capture it and do not try to kill it. Leave it alone.
- Stamp on the ground or squirt some water nearby, being careful not to threaten the snake.
- If the snake does not move away or moves towards you, then leave your plot for a while. Go home, sit by the shed, talk to someone else.

- Alert others who are present.

### Best Practice in the Garden

- Scan paths and open spaces as you enter and leave the garden for snakes.
- If your garden is overgrown or there are plants (e.g. pumpkin) which provide places for them to hide, make sure you create vibrations by hitting the ground so a snake knows you are there and can leave.
- Remove piles of weeds from your plot.
- Keep up with the mowing around your and neighbouring plots.
- Ensure compost bins are dug into the ground and have a lid and are turned regularly to prevent rodents (which will attract snakes) from living in them.

– Lisa Walkington, Co-convenor, Holder Garden

## Kids in the garden: a community perspective

*Children in the garden can be a source of joy – as well as, occasionally, frustration, distraction and even destruction. Ryl Parker surveys her fellow gardeners at COGS Kambah in search of the right balance in welcoming the next generation.*

\*\*\*

There's something special about the way children bring life to a garden. Their curiosity, laughter, and energy add a unique vibrancy to the space, completing what one of our COGS members calls the "circle of the garden community." It's a delight to watch them engage with nature, to see them inhale the early lessons of gardening, and, occasionally, to hear their innocent wisdom.

Community gardens are shared spaces, which means different people value them in different ways. Some gardeners welcome children as part of the natural rhythm of the garden, while others prefer it as a quiet retreat from daily responsibilities. The presence of children brings both joys and challenges, and finding a balance that respects everyone's needs is key to maintaining harmony in these spaces.

### The joy of young gardeners

For many, the presence of children in the garden is a beautiful thing. As Shirley shared, even passersby have remarked on the joy of seeing kids play in the garden. Their enthusiasm can be contagious, and their experiences in these spaces can shape their future perspectives on nature



*Even a modest play space like the small sand pit at COGS Kambah can help kids feel welcome and stay busy. (Photo: Ryl Parker)*

and sustainability. Christine E. sees gardens as an essential opportunity for kids, especially as access to green spaces becomes less common. She believes we're "raising the gardeners and environmentalists of the future."

Ken echoes this sentiment, noting that gardens teach us valuable lessons about patience, cycles, and our connection to something greater than ourselves. He shared a quote

that resonates with him: "Gardens and children need the same things – patience, love, and someone who will never give up on them."

For some families, the community garden is more than just a place to grow food – it's a space that fosters deep connections. As Amie shares: "As a young family who moved to Canberra, leaving behind most of our hometown support, our children



### 80th birthday barbecue for Narelle McLean

**COGS Mitchell  
8 March  
3pm till sunset**

**Bring some food to share  
Alcohol permitted**

**All members and family/friends welcome  
RSVP: [cogsmitchellconvenor@gmail.com](mailto:cogsmitchellconvenor@gmail.com)**

All COGS members are warmly invited to COGS Mitchell on March 8 for an 80th birthday party BBQ for Narelle McLean. Narelle has been a long term member of the garden and the COGS Executive Committee, serving in many roles including, at present, as Gardens Coordinator. Her hard work, kindness and love for gardening have made a lasting impact on our community, and this celebration is a way of showing appreciation for everything she has contributed over the years.



have found a beautiful community of adoptive aunts, uncles, and grandparents through the garden. It has brought immeasurable joy to us all. You know it's truly special when the first thing they ask upon waking is whether they're going to the garden today."

Beyond social connections, gardens also offer unique learning opportunities. For Amie's family, their community plot has become an extension of their children's education. "As apartment dwellers and homeschoolers, the garden has provided countless new learning opportunities for our children, she says. "It has allowed me to shape my eldest son's curriculum around his passion for plants – something that wouldn't have been as feasible without our plot."

As someone who grew up with a gardening mother, I know firsthand the impact an early connection with plants can have. My love for nature shaped my career choices and provided me with a strong sense of direction. Gardens are not just places where things grow – they are spaces that nurture ideas, passions, and lifelong interests.

### **The challenges of sharing the space**

Of course, the presence of children in the garden isn't without its difficulties. While many gardeners enjoy their company, others see the garden as a quiet retreat. One gardener said she appreciates that children are welcome in the garden but prefers not to engage with them personally. "It is my quiet, away-from-all-obligations relaxing space," she explains. "While I'd be polite to any children who approached me in the garden, I'd also send them back to find their parents."

Similarly, one gardener points out that while many parents want their children to learn about gardening, young kids often have a short attention span for actual garden work. This can sometimes make visits more work than relaxation. He's found that creating a dedicated play area has been a great way to help



*Nothing like getting your hands (and face) dirty! (Photo: Ryl Parker)*

kids feel comfortable in the garden while also learning to respect the space. His daughter, for instance, now enjoys simply spending time in the shelter reading her book, which has made her more eager to engage with the garden itself over time.

### **Finding the balance**

The key to a positive experience for all gardeners – young and old – lies in mindfulness and mutual respect. Supervision is crucial to ensure that children engage with the space responsibly, as another gardener points out. "There will be times when the kids step on our seedlings or pick a nearly ripe vegetable, but kids are kids," she says. "Supervised well, they are a wonderful bonus for us to enjoy."

Another gardener also emphasizes the role of parents and carers in modeling considerate behavior. When adults set the tone for respect, responsibility, and engagement, children learn by example.

Ultimately, community gardens serve many purposes: they are places to grow food, to connect with nature, and to share space with others. Kids are a part of that equation, and while their presence requires thoughtful management, they also bring an irreplaceable energy and future promise. By working together, we can create a garden that welcomes everyone – including the gardeners of tomorrow.

## Weeds minimised – produce maximised

As a co-convenor at COGS Kaleen, **Richard Buker** has a bit of experience giving old plots new life. Here he shares his recipe for success.

\* \* \*

Has your plot gotten away from you or have you been allocated an abandoned plot? In under two hours you could go from a plot full of weeds to a plot ready to produce a bounty of vegetables.

First things first, loosen the surface of the soil with a fork and pull out the weeds. Luckily, the plot pictured did not have any couch grass!

Once your plot has all its weeds removed, apply blood and bone as per the manufacturer's directions. The reasons for applying blood and bone are twofold: one, to feed your summer crop and, two, to feed the bacteria that will be doing the work on the mulch for next year's spring crop.

Rake the blood and bone into the surface of the soil at the same time adjusting the levels of your plot to ensure the water is retained on your plot and does not run off.

Don't be afraid to call in extra assistance to remove those pesky curl grubs.

As we've had a very dry spring, and it is a raised bed, it's time to water, water and water some more.

Now it is time to apply a barrier that does two key jobs. The first is to prevent the weeds from coming through, and the second is to provide food for organisms and worms that in the long run will benefit your plot.

The material chosen is wet newspaper. Not just a couple of sheets but the whole *Canberra Times* of the day. Make sure each *Canberra Times* is overlapped by at least 2 to 3 cm as this ensures the wet paper will stick together like papiermâché. This helps to prevent the weeds from poking through the joints.

Additionally, I chose to follow up with some old Hessian bags, which had been used to cover a compost heap. It has been my experience that worms just love damp Hessian bags and, in this case, the bags will also be inoculated with all those lovely composty micro-organisms. This is then followed up with a layer of aged woodchip. The wood chip is aged in order to minimise any nitrogen drawdown.

A thick layer of coffee mix was also applied. This is a mix of coffee grounds and coffee chaff/skin from the green coffee bean. I believe this has two benefits. One, it is highly moisture absorbing and will capture any rainfall, and two, it contains a high level of nitrogen which will feed any microbes that start to breakdown the woodchip. [See Richard's article in the Spring 2023 edition of this magazine for more of his ideas on using coffee byproducts in the garden.]

As mentioned, this barrier reduces the weeds by limiting the space where they can grow, as they will be restricted



If your plot looks anything like this, you've come to the right article. Step one is to clear the weeds.



With the weeds cleared, an assistant can be enlisted to help with the curl grubs.

to the small area reserved for the veggies. However, couch grass will attempt to invade especially around the raised edge of the bed. Fortunately, this barrier tends to make the couch grass grow in long surface runners and these can be easily pulled out by the roots and from under the barrier. This will need to be done each time you water or the couch grass will get away from you. The barrier also acts as a mulch keeping the soil cool, reducing nutrients and moisture loss.

You will have noticed there are two narrow slots left between the newspapers running down the middle of the bed. This is where you plant and water your veggie bounty. This plot will be growing corn, beans, pumpkin and watermelon.





Now let's fast forward to next spring. By then, the newspaper will have been eaten away by both worms and microbes. This duo will also have made a great start on the hessian and the woodchip as well as the coffee grounds. This partially decomposed mix can then be dug into the surface of the soil adding organic matter to the plot with little effort from the gardener. And then it's time to plant next year's crop!

*(right) Nontoxic biodegradable materials are used to suppress weeds and provide food for beneficial soil organisms. Seedlings can be planted in the gaps.  
(above) With luck and some water, by early summer your plot will look something like this. (Photos: Richard Buker)*

## A hot night out at BCG bush dance

*Betty Cornhill Convenor Peter Sheehan reports on the garden's inaugural Bush Dance held in early December.*

\* \* \*

The Betty Cornhill Garden Dance was held on December 7th at the Yarralumla Woolshed. The Paverty Bush Band had the whole room up and dancing from the moment they started playing.

Whole families, young couples and more than a few friends of members joined in the fun. Many contributed excellent food to the shared spread and helped put away the chairs at the end of the evening. A lot of fun was had by all.

It was a very hot evening, but not so hot as to spoil the event. If it is to be held again it has been suggested that harvest time in Autumn, when the weather is cooling down, may be better suited to dancing.

Only about half the available tickets were sold, and a lot of people who bought tickets didn't show, which ensured plenty of space on the dance floor for twirling partners and doing the Hokey Pokey. Thanks to everyone who helped make the evening such a great success.



## Growing together

COGS O'Connor gardener **Josh Viljoen** explains why young people facing the cost of living crisis should consider joining a community garden – and how doing so can contribute to more than just financial wellbeing.

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Against a backdrop of record rents and rising prices, skyrocketing grocery bills make the cost-of-living crisis a day-to-day reality for young Canberrans like me. That's especially true in the produce aisle, and even more so if you're including to shop organic. As a 24-year-old, I never imagined myself looking at staples like lettuce, tomatoes and avocados as luxuries. But lately, that's what I found myself doing.

Fortunately, I've also found at least a partial solution in joining my local community garden. There are many such gardens around Canberra. Some, like most of those managed by COGS, are decades old and home to well established communities of knowledgeable growers. In addition to easing the strain of food costs, they offer the opportunity to build skills and to reconnect with nature and our community elders – all while contributing to the sustainability of local food systems.

### Doing the maths

A bit of simple maths will help to illustrate the cost savings.

I share my 22.5m<sup>2</sup> plot with my partner and a close friend. Between a plot fee of \$92 and membership fees of \$10 each, that works out to about \$40 a year for each of us. We grew seedlings this year from seed kindly donated by another COGS member and a few packets purchased from Canberra Seed Savers at \$2 each. For additional soil fertility we relied on inputs sourced from small business compost scraps around the area. As for labour, we each try to spend between one and three hours at the plot per week, mostly in the mornings before work or study.



*Josh Viljoen and one of his gardening associates at their plot at COGS O'Connor. For people with busy schedules, taking a plot with a few friends can be a great way to share the work and benefits of community gardening. (Photo: Josh Viljoen)*

In the early summer, we had been harvesting plentiful leafy greens and spring onions each week for more than 12 weeks. This saved us at least \$8 a week in produce we would otherwise purchase from Colesworths, for a total savings of about \$96 – almost covering our plot and membership fees even before the summer harvest had begun. We planted three varieties of beans, zucchinis, tomatoes, pumpkins, corn, kale, and an experimental crop of watermelons.

As of the end of summer, we've added eggplants, cucumber (from our plot neighbours' overwhelming bounty!) and tomatillos to that list. Despite our corn and pumpkins failing to deliver, we're now bringing in roughly the same per week worth of produce from the garden another 12 weeks later – I'll let you do the maths.

And that doesn't even come close to quantifying the mental health benefits of just enjoying the space!

### Health and wellbeing benefits

With mental health issues on the rise among younger Australians, the benefits of spending time in nature cannot be overstated. Gardening is a form of mindful exercise that can promote physical health while simultaneously supporting mental and emotional wellbeing.

Engaging in gardening can lower stress levels, improve mood, and help alleviate symptoms of anxiety and depression. Studies have shown that simply spending time in nature, particularly in green spaces like gardens, can significantly reduce cortisol (the stress hormone) and improve cognitive function. The act of planting, nurturing, and harvesting also fosters a sense of achievement and satisfaction – boosting self-esteem and helping to combat feelings of isolation, which can be particularly difficult for young people during challenging times.

Moreover, gardening offers an opportunity to disconnect from screens and be present in the moment. In an age where many of



us are glued to our phones or laptops (myself included, by absolutely no fault of my own of course), spending time with your hands in the soil can be a grounding, restorative activity that supports mental clarity and relaxation. It certainly has been for us!

Physical health is also a major benefit of gardening. The tasks involved, such as digging, planting, weeding, and harvesting, can help to improve cardiovascular health, increase flexibility, and build strength. And for those living in urban environments where access to open spaces may be limited, community gardens can offer a rare opportunity to get your hands dirty in the soil.

### **Strengthening communities and social connections**

While community gardens are often viewed as spaces for growing food, they are also powerful hubs for social connection. The cooperative nature of these gardens encourages young people to work together, build relationships, and create a sense of belonging.

In a time of social isolation and uncertainty, particularly following the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on young Canberrans, community gardens become places where people of all ages, backgrounds, and cultures come together, creating a rich, diverse social environment. Young people in these spaces can form strong networks, creating lasting friendships and support systems that extend beyond the garden. Coming to Canberra from Sydney, I know I feel closer to the community with COGS than I've ever felt in this home away from home.

Participating in a community garden also allows us young people to develop a sense of ownership and responsibility, contributing to something larger than ourselves. It fosters a sense of pride and achievement when you can see the fruits of your labour – quite literally – transform into fresh food that nourishes you and your community.



*O'Connor Community Garden*

In a society where individualism often prevails, gardening together helps cultivate a stronger sense of collective purpose.

### **Contributing to environmental sustainability**

The environmental benefits of organic community gardening are significant. With climate change posing a serious threat to Australia's agricultural systems now and into the future – yet another crisis for us to inherit – supporting local food production through organic gardening can help create more resilient food systems. Organic gardening methods avoid the use of harmful pesticides and chemicals, which can contribute to soil degradation and water pollution. Instead, gardens like those run by COGS communities focus on maintaining healthy, living soils that, indirectly, can absorb carbon and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Community gardens also help reduce food miles, cutting down on the carbon footprint associated with transporting food from distant farms to urban areas. By growing food

locally, gardens contribute to a more sustainable food system and reduce reliance on industrial agriculture, which is often associated with environmental harm.

For young Aussies like me and my mates who are extremely concerned about climate change, organic community gardens offer a truly impactful and direct way to make a positive impact. Whether it's composting food scraps, planting native species, or learning about water conservation techniques, we can actively contribute to environmental stewardship while cultivating our own food sources.

### **Conclusion: Join COGS, save big, live better!**

After all that, I hope you're convinced. Joining your local community garden may not be a get-rich-quick scheme, but the economic, social, mental health and environmental benefits add up. Think of it more like superannuation: investing in yourself and your community now to reap the benefits later!

## Seeds of wisdom: what I've learned from sowing my own

*In the first of a series of four articles on hard-won lessons from the garden, Kambah gardener and previous co-convenor Ryl Parker reflects on the challenges of starting seeds – and the wisdom gleaned from learning to trust nature.*

\*\*\*

Gardening demands patience – a trait I'm still working on. Despite careful planning – choosing the best seeds, preparing the soil, and waiting for ideal conditions – I often find myself questioning if I've missed something. I recently sowed seeds from a well-regarded company known for its impressive 95% germination rate. Yet, my seedlings took three weeks to show signs of life. The soil was warm, the rain frequent, and the soil well prepared. And still, the wait stretched on.

### The waiting game

I often over-think every decision, worrying I've sown too many varieties, too densely, or at the wrong time. The more effort I put in, the more I fear failure. But one thing I've learned: it's okay to give up my need for control and just have a go. Despite my best efforts and all our technological advancements, when it comes to gardening a small plot, nature still calls the shots. And since I can't control nature, I'm learning to work with nature.



In the past, I thought consistency in gardening meant obsessively checking my plants, watering too much, or trying to force growth. Now, I understand that it's about being mindful of the seasons and trusting the process. As Shane Parrish, the bestselling author whose popular newsletter focuses on productivity, creativity and mental wellbeing, writes, "*Persistence isn't about pushing harder. It's about finding new ways when the old ones don't work.*"

### Letting nature do its work

One strategy I've adopted is sowing seeds just before rain. Rain does

more than hydrate – it neutralizes the pH of the soil, adds nitrogen, and pushes seeds deeper into the ground, increasing their chances of survival. Though note this: While rain can contribute small amounts of nitrogen, excessive rainfall can also leach nutrients from the soil, so balancing watering and soil management is key.

I used to worry constantly, unsure if I was watering enough or doing things right. But now, I trust that the rain and the natural world will do their part. Seeds are smarter than we give them credit for – they know how to grow when the conditions are right.

### Lessons from the garden

Shane Parrish's idea of persistence driven by imagination has become a guiding principle for me. He writes, "*Energy without imagination is force. Energy with imagination is persistence.*" Gardening is about trying different methods when things don't work, just as persistence in life means trying new ideas when the old ones fail. Success in the garden – and in life – isn't a straight path; it's a winding journey that requires patience, resilience, and a bit of creativity.





## COGS Crace hit hard by hail

A damaging storm swept through Canberra on 5 February, taking an especially heavy toll on northern areas. Unfortunately, COGS Crace was hard hit with large hail and up to 45mm of rain in less than 15 minutes.

Crace gardener Lauren Campbell, who sent along these photos, reflects on the disheartening result.

“It’s so sad to see what the hail has done,” she writes. “It’s basically wiped out the remainder of all the zucchini and squash plants and people’s bean vines are in shreds too. The lucky few who had netting up escaped the carnage and it’s really easy to see the difference when comparing to the covered crops. Our tomato plants look very battered, and we lost so many cherry tomatoes that were dislodged onto the ground.”

If there’s a silver lining, it’s that netting does appear to have been effective protection. But with a recent UNSW study documenting an increasing frequency of hail across southeastern Australia over the past few decades – probably caused by changes in the climate that have also increased the propensity for larger and more damaging hail – extreme weather is likely to continue testing the resilience of plants and gardeners alike.

– Michael Gisick





## Dickson open day and plant sale partnership

It seems like ages ago we had our Open Day, our second one, but it was only in November. We made some changes to this event drawing from our experience in 2023. The opening was shorter – from 11am till 2pm, instead of 10am to 3pm and we reduced the amount of food available, particularly the sausages. The other change was to sell raffle tickets before the Open Day (each plot holder was asked to sell 20 tickets) and have a person actively selling tickets on the gate.

Some of our attractions included two workshops – one by me where I told attendees the virtues of a No Dig approach and ran them through making a lasagna bed. The other was on soil life by Leo who is studying this topic at the ANU. We are lucky to have a beautiful picnic table undercover that Ray, a former plot holder, made for us. Here people gathered to talk plants and we hosted a sausage sizzle (vegan and meat), had baked goodies and drinks for sale. Dickson is fortunate to have a large glasshouse on site and inside there were lots of plants for sale. Unfortunately, quite a few were left over, but we had a brainwave (more on that later). Overall we were very happy with our Open Day and made \$287, after expenses, for garden projects

Next time we have an open day we will run it in early Spring, as it was pretty hot. This means we can grow lots of veg for the home gardener to buy alongside other garden plants. Also, we could have asked more for the tickets as we had heaps of very good prizes. We sold them for \$1 each or 3 for \$2. Another possibility is to have the Open Day every second year as it is a lot of work for a portion of the plot holders at the garden.

So... what did we do with all those left over plants?

We have been building a relationship with Dickson Stepping Stone Café for a couple of years. Stepping Stone is a social enterprise that supports women through skills development and job training. You may have heard of them as the café's co-founders were recently named Australian of the Year Local



*Plant sale at Stepping Stone*

Heroes. We have been growing seasonal vegetables, mostly in the warmer months, and delivering them weekly which they add to their menu. In return we relieve them of coffee grinds and egg cartons. These goodies are used to build compost for our garden.

In the lead up to Christmas we asked Stepping Stone's owners if we could sell our plants at their café and they were very enthusiastic about the idea. We set up a table outside and priced all the plants. Café goers could pay by cash (tin kept inside near register) or use PayId. We decided to split the proceeds with Stepping Stone, and so far we have made \$450. The plant sale has been so successful that it is still going. Perhaps you know a business that might like to host a plant sale table and bring in some money for your COGS garden?

– Michele England (story and photos)

*Julie selling baked goodies*



*Leo talking soil life*





## Erindale update

COGS Erindale Convenor Didi Sommer reports a strong growing season with cucurbits and taro enjoying the warm conditions.

Erindale garden has a strong commitment to supporting pollinators and other insects, as attested by one very heavily laden bee. Didi is also excited to report the garden's first ever sighting of what she identifies as a Giant Green Slantface, spotted on some temporary shade cloth. She wonders if other gardeners have seen this quite amazing creature.

All photos courtesy of Didi Sommer except as noted.



COGS Erindale was sad to farewell Susana Achondo, a wonderfully engaged member of the garden, who has returned to Chile with her family following her husband's posting in Canberra.



Rodolfo Ferrari and Claudia Woods harvest some parsnip seeds. (below) A cornucopia of Cucurbits, and thriving Taro.



A happy bee. (Photo: Marcus Dirnberger)  
(below) Has anyone else spotted this insect around the garden?





## The Hungry Bin: a review

*The Hungry Bin is a home vermiculture product available online and at various retailers for about \$400 new. There is a big premium compared to traditional worm farms, but **Fiona Dawes** of COGS Kaleen explains why it might be worth it for some gardeners.*

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I decided to invest in a Hungry Bin about six years ago. My experience with the traditional worm farm was that moving the stacked trays to access the worm castings was a real chore. The trays were heavy, and I had little space on my balcony for them.

When I learned of the continuous flow system of the Hungry Bin, I saw the potential for managing food waste more easily. The Hungry Bin is also rodent proof and looks like a household garbage bin, so I thought the aesthetic was more appealing to passersby.

The principle (and advertising slogan) of the Hungry Bin is that veggie scraps go in at the top and worm castings come out at the bottom. There is a clip on either side of the bin which releases the bottom tray. I can manage the weight of the tray with two hands. A friend of mine loosens the clips and then eases down one side to the ground followed by the other. In this way, she avoids holding the full weight of the tray. My friend agrees the system is more manageable than the stacked trays of the traditional worm farm, which need to be lifted off to access lower trays for harvesting worm castings.

Worms are forgiving and will tolerate a range of environments. The worm farm should not smell like decomposing veggie waste, rather the smell is like very nicely turned, ready for topdressing compost. I am learning that tending the worm farm is similar to creating compost. The balance of aeration, water, nitrogen (greens) and carbon (browns) are key. For the right mix I add coco



*Food scraps go in at the top. The bin's funnel shape is designed to compress worm castings as they flow downward. (Photo: Fiona Dawes)*

coir once a week. The coco coir helps to make fluffy worm bedding, preventing anaerobic decomposition. The funnel shape of the Hungry Bin works well to contain the bulk of the material. Sometimes I need to use a trowel to coax out the layer of worm castings from the bottom. Sometimes I need to gently aerate the contents manually from the top of the bin to promote air flow as the material compacts down. The worms move towards the top of the bin, living in the top layer.

The symbiotic bacteria slows down in winter, so I have a place for the bin that gets shade in summer and sun in winter. With the 30+ degree days I place some ice packs in the top of the bin in the morning, and in the evening I find the worms gathered there under the cool packs. I feel good when I am looking after the worm's environment, and the

periodic harvest of lively potting mix makes it worthwhile.

All in all, I enjoy the simplicity of managing the Hungry Bin, and I appreciate that direct contact with the worms is kept to a minimum. I recommend the Hungry Bin to anyone interested in managing food waste and worm farming, especially those with less upper body strength. If you are new to worm farming, however, you may want to consider trying a traditional setup, which can often be found secondhand for little or nothing, before investing in a more expensive option like a Hungry Bin.

If you are feeling a little squeamish about worm farming and want to get started I recommend reading Amy Steward's *The Earth Moved: On the remarkable achievements of Earthworms*, published in 2005 by Workman: United States.



## Scenes from Charnwood



Ange McNeilly sent along these snaps of happenings at COGS Charnwood. Clockwise from top left:

*Tilley and Thomas helping Mum, Alison, water their plot.*

*Jo watering her floriferous plot.*

*Susan showing off an impressive harvest.*

*Susan and Angela admiring Bill's formidable pumpkins*





## Diary of a haskap plot: a year of experimentation

*Two years ago, gardeners at COGS Kambah decided to plant what would be among the first haskap berries in mainland Australia. Ryl Parker reports on their progress (and explains what a haskap berry is).*

\* \* \*

Some garden experiments start with a grand plan. Others, like our haskap berry adventure, begin almost by accident.

Our story starts in March 2023. My son was born on March 2, and not long after – March 13, to be exact – I found myself learning about a plant I'd never heard of before: the haskap berry. Blue and tart like a Blueberry, full of nutrients, and beloved in Canada, this plant immediately caught my attention. And what great timing! Previously this plant has only been grown in cold climates, but thanks to an intrepid nursery based in Tasmania, several warmer-weather varieties have been bred that show promise for Australia.

We didn't know whether the plant would fruit in mainland Australia, let alone Canberra, and we wouldn't know for four years! Barbara and I decided the wait was worth it, so that same day (13 March) she ordered



*Haskap berries are derived from wild berries native to northern reaches of Asia, Europe and North America. Cultivated mainly in Japan, Russia and Canada, they have been successfully grown in Tasmania. (Photo: Michael Gisick)*

twelve haskap plants for our COGS plot. Each cost \$13.50, and we waited eagerly for their arrival.

And waited. And waited some more. Months passed, and we were left wondering what to do with our plot in the meantime. The plants finally

shipped from Hobart on November 27 and arrived on November 30, bundled in bubble wrap rather than pots. We received six different varieties to improve pollination and increase the chance that at least some of the varieties would cope well with Canberra's climate. All varieties began with the letter A, and try as I might, I'm still not sure whether I got the names right, or assigned them to the right plants. You see, the plants weren't labelled as clearly as they could be, and labels were handwritten, so ... here's my best guess for what the varieties are called: Amber, Anemone, Advanced Aria, Amemoross, Allegro, and Amati.

Barbara and I became part-time haskap parents, each taking six plants home to fuss over. We potted them up and kept a close watch until they were ready for planting. Meanwhile, the weather misbehaved, refusing to provide the consistently cool weather that we wanted. Eventually the weather calmed down and on 16 March 2024 we planted them





## What are haskap berries, anyway?

*Lonicera caerulea*, or haskap, is a coldhardy honeysuckle that thrives in temperatures as low as  $-45^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Native to Canada, Japan, and Russia, it produces long, thin, blue berries that ripen even before strawberries. Though they resemble blueberries, they have their own unique tangysweet flavor. The name “haskap” comes from the Ainu people of Japan and translates to “many fruits on branches.” It’s said to contain three times the antioxidants, four times the anthocyanins, and five times the flavour of a blueberry – a bold claim, but one we hope to test for ourselves.



into our prepared plot, carefully mounding them up for drainage. Compost and manure had already been worked into the soil, setting the stage for success.

As we planted, my son, now a one-year-old, decided to “help.” He enthusiastically yanked one plant right out of the ground, leaving behind most of its soil. Annoying? Yes. But also revealing. It gave me a rare glimpse at the root ball, which looked dry, compacted, and wrapped in a matting that hadn’t fully decomposed. This was a problem – it was blocking root growth and preventing moisture absorption. So, I removed the matting, loosened

the roots, and gave the plant a dose of Mykos (*Rhizophagus intraradices*) to encourage root development. A year later, I can confidently report that this plant is ... completely indistinguishable from the others. Oh well.

Meanwhile, Shirley, another gardener, ordered her haskap plants a few months after we did. When hers arrived, they seemed noticeably healthier. Maybe the nursery had learned a few lessons by then. Despite her plants receiving much more attention than ours, they’ve grown at about the same rate.

Our plot isn’t in the best location. It’s close to *Casuarina cunninghamiana*

trees, which likely steal moisture from the soil, and being at the garden’s edge means it doesn’t benefit from the protective microclimate of the more central plots. Even so, we did everything we could to set the plants up for success: watering with rainwater from the tank (rainwater is rich in nitrogen, an ideal pH for most plants, helps flush out salts and minerals which otherwise hinder root growth, and also helps nutrient absorption, root penetration, aeration and drainage. Rainwater is free from chlorine, fluoride and other chemicals). Mulching generously, keeping the weeds at bay, and giving them the occasional dose of Seasol also helps. A year later, they look happy and healthy.

No fruit yet, but that’s to be expected. Haskaps take a while before they start producing berries, and it’s still unclear whether they’ll thrive in Canberra’s warm, dry climate. But while we wait, our plot is far from empty – we’ve got asparagus, kiwi vines, berry canes, flowers, zucchinis, tomatoes, beans, peas, and potatoes keeping things interesting.

For now, our experiment continues. Will the haskaps survive? Will they bear fruit? And most importantly – will they actually taste good? We’ll have to wait and see.

*While the haskaps grow, they share their plot with a variety of other fruits and vegetables. (Photo: Michael Gisick)*



## Vale Ed Highley

Kambah Garden lost a pillar with the death of long-standing member Ed Highley on 16 January after a short illness.

The garden was one of Ed's great loves and for more than 12 years he was unstinting in his support for the community. Ed was always among the first to volunteer for, or lend his support to, garden projects. His lasting memorial is the Kambah Garden shelter. Ed supervised a team of 'enthusiastic amateurs' in the exacting task of assembling the shelter, which has become a focal point of garden activities for meetings and social occasions.

Ed took on the editorship of the COGS magazine *Canberra Organic* in 2023, producing six highly regarded issues up to the time of his final illness. Ever the professional, he took great pride in the magazine and the breadth of articles he published.

Ed was a meticulous gardener and was always generous in sharing tips or helping others with their plots. The high regard in which he was held is reflected in this comment from a Kambah gardener:

Ed always shared his knowledge freely, was always kind and warm and caring. He worked hard right until the end. I hope that I can live as good a life as he led. He will live on in our hearts. The shelter he worked so hard to install has enabled countless get-togethers. Signs of him remain everywhere. We miss you Ed. Thank you for sharing your life with us.

– Allan Sharp



*(above) Ed on a chilly day at COGS Kambah (photo: Michael Gisick)*

*(below) Ed always enjoyed passing along his knowledge to younger gardeners (photo: Ryl Parker)*

*(below left) By general acclamation, the King of Broccoli (photo: Anna O'Halloran)*





## Apples vs potatoes: who wins the nutrition stakes?

Apples have a generally good press – an apple a day keeps the doctor away, the saying goes. That’s a big call, mind you. The potato (*la pomme de terre*, the earth apple), on the other hand, often suffers a bad press; sometimes justifiable it has to be said, usually because of how they are prepared. Their consumption is often cited as a cause of obesity because, among other things, they contain ‘too many carbs’. But then again, maybe this is the result of ‘too many potatoes’ and, as noted below, fat rather than carbs. What is the truth: how do the two actually compare in terms of important nutritional and health values? Information provided below shines, I hope, some light on the answer to that question.

The values given are averages for 200 g of each, those for potato being for unpeeled potato boiled without salt. It should be noted that there are significant differences in nutritional values between potato varieties. Red potatoes are the healthiest, according to US Department of Agriculture data, followed by white, russet and sweet potatoes in that order, the last named being a crop unrelated to *Solanum tuberosum*.

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**Energy** Potato 727 kJ/Apple 425 kJ. Potatoes are a high-energy food. Consumption of 200 g provides about 9 per cent of daily energy requirements.

**Protein** Potato 3.8 g/Apple 0.48 g. Potatoes are a good source of protein in the diet. Consumption of just 200 g will provide between 7 and 11 per cent of daily protein requirement.

**Carbohydrates** Potato 40.2 g/Apple 26.8 g. Potatoes contain more carbohydrates than apples, but the level is not too excessive and includes a much lower sugar component than in apples. Around 75 per cent of the carbohydrates in apples are sugars, as against around 5 per cent in potatoes. Potatoes are low in sugar, and while sugar levels in apples are much higher, since they are naturally occurring in fruit, in contrast to the ‘free’ sugar added in, for example, soft drinks, they are not considered as high a risk.

**Fibre** Potato 3.6 g/Apple 4.7 g. Both are good sources of fibre in the diet.

**Fat** Potato 0.4 g/Apple 0.3 g. Potatoes, like apples, are low fat, but the method of cooking potatoes can markedly change this. While 200 g boiled potatoes contain just 0.4 g of fat, roasted potatoes have 10 g, ovenbaked chips 12 g, deepfried chips 20–38 g, potato chips 68 g.

**Water** Potato 154 g/Apple 167 g. Water makes up much of most living things.

**Sodium** Potato 5.3 mg/Apple 2.0 mg. High sodium intake may lead to high blood pressure. While the sodium content of potatoes is higher than that of apples, it is not excessive. Salt added in cooking is likely a greater contributor to risk.

**Vitamin C** Potato 24.7 mg/Apple 9.2 mg. Perhaps surprisingly, potatoes contain significantly more Vitamin C than apples. Consumption of 200 g of boiled potatoes will provide over half an individual’s daily requirement.



Apple and potatoes: ca. 200 g of each. Photo: Ed Highley

**Niacin (Vitamin B3)** Potato 2.73 mg/Apple 0.18 mg. Potatoes are a good source of niacin, a vitamin with many essential functions in the body. Indeed, potatoes contain more niacin than many of the common legume crops recommended as dietary sources of this vitamin.

**Potassium** Potato 944 mg/Apple 214 mg. Potatoes are a good source of potassium, a mineral that is essential for the healthy function of body cells. Consumption of 200 g of boiled potatoes will provide almost a third of an individual’s daily requirement.

**Iron** Potato 2.0–3.0 mg/Apple 0.2 mg. Potatoes are a good source of iron, deficiency of which in the diet may lead to anaemia. Iron is primarily obtained from red meat in omnivorous diets. Potatoes can therefore be a valuable part of predominantly vegetable diets.

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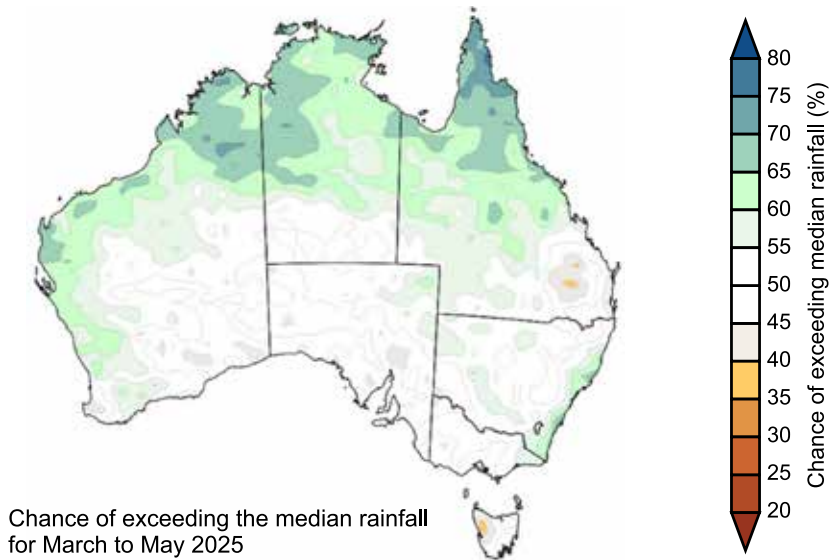
To summarise then, potatoes are a good source of energy and essential nutrients and can be a valuable component of a healthy, rounded diet, provided due attention is given to level of consumption and method of preparation – rein in those potato chips! With those provisos they hardly warrant a bad press and, I’d say, give apples more than a run for their money. What’s more they are an easy and productive crop for a community garden plot.

– Ed Highley

## The Bureau of Meteorology March to May 2025 forecast

The Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) long range forecast issued 6 February 2025 for March to May shows:

- Above average rainfall is likely across much of northern Australia, parts of Western Australia, and some regions along the eastern coastline. Elsewhere rainfall is likely to be within the typical range for March to May.
- There is an increased chance of unusually high rainfall for large parts of northern Australia, and small parts of the southwest of Western Australia.
- March is more likely to experience above average rainfall than April and May.
- Warmer than average days are likely to very likely across much of Australia with an increased chance of unusually high daytime temperatures, particularly for southern parts.
- Warmer than average nights are very likely across Australia, with an increased chance of unusually high overnight temperatures nationwide.



Model ACCESS-S2  
Base Period: 1981–2018

Model run: 03/02/2025  
Issued: 06/02/2025

Sea surface temperatures for the Australian region during January 2025 were the warmest on record for all Januarys since records began in 1900 with highest anomalies off the Western Australian coastline. This will contribute to increased atmospheric moisture and energy that may increase the intensity and frequency of weather systems.

Water storage levels in the Canberra region and capital cities		
	Feb '25	Feb '24
ACT storages	92%	100%
MurrayDarling Basin	65%	84%
Burrinjuck Dam	55%	90%
Blowering Dam	39%	73%
Sydney	96%	94%
Melbourne	83%	95%
Brisbane	87%	77%
Adelaide	40%	62%
Perth	43%	43%

*Cirrus cloud (photo: Matt Mawson)*



The El Niño–Southern Oscillation remains neutral. Since late December 2024, the tropical Pacific has been more La Niña-like, with signs of interaction between oceanic and atmospheric indices. However, this response has not consistently met the Bureau’s La Niña thresholds.

All international models surveyed forecast neutral conditions (neither El Niño nor La Niña) from March until at least June.

The Indian Ocean Dipole is neutral and has little association with Australian climate from December to April.

– Andy Hrast



## Baked zucchini and squash tacos

Serves 4 | Prep Time: 15 minutes |  
Total Time: 60 minutes

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It's the time of year when it seems that every community gardener has a glut of zucchinis or summer squash that they just can't give away! Our families, neighbours and colleagues are all cucurbit-fatigued, but it's not in our nature to waste good food. We came up with this recipe as a fun twist on your typical baked zucchini or squash – a healthy, summery taco that is frugal and satisfying. It's vegan, nut free and can easily be made gluten free.

### Baked Zucchini and Squash

- 2–3kg of zucchini and/or summer squash (we use cocozelle zucchinis and Gelber Englisher Squash)
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 2 Tbsp soy sauce (substitute tamari for gluten free)
- 1 tsp liquid smoke
- 8 cloves of garlic, minced (or a good heaped Tbsp of minced garlic from a jar)
- 1 tsp onion powder
- 2 tsp cumin powder
- 1.5 tsp smoked paprika
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ tsp black pepper



### Fresh tomato salsa

- 3 medium tomatoes, diced – whatever you are growing!
- ¼ of a red onion, finely diced
- A small handful of coriander

### Quick Guacamole

- 2 avocados
- 2 cloves of garlic, minced (or a heaped teaspoon of minced garlic from a jar)
- 1 Tbsp lemon juice (you can substitute lime juice)
- 1 tsp smoked paprika
- 2 tsp hot sauce of your choice (tabasco works fine, we like Zab's St Augustine Style available at most Supabarn stores)
- ¼ of a red onion
- Taco sized tortillas. For gluten free, Mission white or yellow corn tortillas come in packets of 12 and can be easily warmed in the microwave in a stack for 90 seconds

### Preparation

1. Preheat oven to 200°C.
2. Dice your zucchinis and squash and place in a large mixing bowl; about 2cm dice for the zucchini and 1.5cm dice for the squash so they cook through at the same time. You can use two bowls if you have too much, just remember to spread the ingredients in step 3 across both bowls.
3. Add the olive oil, soy sauce/tamari, liquid smoke, garlic, onion powder, cumin, paprika, salt and pepper to the bowl and mix through until the vegetables are completely coated.
4. Spread onto a lined baking tray and bake for 45 minutes or until they are charred and cooked through, turning halfway.
5. Make the salsa by combining the salsa ingredients in a bowl.
6. Make the guacamole by mashing the guacamole ingredients together in a bowl.
7. Take the vegetables out of the oven and place in a serving bowl.
8. Warm the tortillas and serve. Build each taco with some guacamole, a layer of vegetables, some tomato salsa, and your favourite hot sauce.

– Lauren Campbell



## Wedgetailed eagle

For this issue, resident artist **Cathy Morison** takes as her subject a bird often spotted high above if rarely in our gardens. Whether it's descending from Mount Painter over COGS Cook, or circling COGS Kambah from their home in the Brindabellas, sighting a wedgetailed eagle or two is likely to be a highlight of any gardener's day.

\* \* \*

It is a bit of a stretch including the wedgetailed eagle (*Aquila audax*) as a species that is drawn to our gardens. The largest of Australia's raptors has a wingspan greater than any human (at least anyone that I have met!), the longest reported being 2.84m.

It is almost impossible to imagine such a bird being drawn to our average suburban backyard. In fact, if you own a pet weighing less than 4kg (your average cat or tiny dog) you should be on your guard if these magnificent eagles are in the vicinity. Celebrity vet Dr Chris Brown has documented proof of pets being seriously injured or killed by wedgetailed eagles in the fringes of the suburbs.

All the same, it is hard to imagine anyone not being awe-struck by the beauty and majesty of these great birds of prey as they soar and hover in the skies above us. Even the meaning of its botanical name is awe-inspiring. 'Audax' means bold, a name befitting one of the largest raptors in the world and one that is earned by the wedgetailed eagle's ability to hunt cooperatively and overcome prey as large as adult kangaroos. While capable of hunting much larger prey, the largest component of a Wedgetail's diet consists of rabbits and roadkill.

Equally as awesome as the bird itself is the nest constructed by a breeding pair. A wedgetail's nest is generally located in the tallest tree in its territory and is maintained for many years. It can measure almost 2 metres across and 3 metres deep, weighing



*Magnificent in Namadgi*, watercolour. Photo reference: Tony Clark (ACT)

up to 400kg. As wedgetailed eagles mate for life, they are able to invest the time into building and maintaining a nest. Given that an eagle can live for over 30 years, it should be a worthwhile investment. The permanence of a nest could be affected by the sustainability of the pair's territory, which averages at least 4km from other nests. Encroaching urban development and climate change affect the viability of an eagle's territory. A pair of eagles will normally only raise to maturity one chick per year.

Wedgetailed eagles are seen and photographed regularly in Namadgi National Park. The pair of eagles in this painting are (presumably) a mated pair and were photographed in Namadgi by Canberra photographer Tony Clark (I acknowledge Tony's generosity in making this amazing photograph available for me to use as the inspiration for this painting). The larger of the birds is the female, generally up to one-third larger than her mate.

– Cathy Morison

## The good, the bad, and the fungi

*Our eleven-year-old correspondent Georgia is back to tell us about the strange and wonderful substance her grandfather found in the garden, and to give us an update on her tomatoes.*

\* \* \*

I was at my grandpa's place a few weeks ago when he rushed in from his garden excitedly, saying "Georgia, look what I've found. I've just taken a photo of it."

The item of interest (see photo) looked pretty boring to me. "It's just like white sand," I said.

Grandpa said he first thought it was garden lime but had never used lime on this part of the garden before. "Let's look it up on Google," he said.

We discovered that this white substance (and there was lots of it) is a fungi called Mycorrhiza. These are beneficial fungi growing in association with plant roots, and exist by taking sugars from plants 'in exchange' for moisture and nutrients gathered from the soil by the fungal strands.

I believe this is called a symbiotic relationship and I am in the process of learning a bit more about this amazing process.

On another topic: you may remember that in March last year, as an experiment, I planted some tomato seeds to grow indoors in winter, using a heating lamp system. The results were mixed. Four of the seven plants withered and I planted the remaining three in my grandpa's COGS garden at Kambah.

Two of these plants did not thrive but the third one did. Here is a photo of the first tomato I picked. It was around 10 cms in diameter and tasted delicious. (I didn't make a note of the variety when I planted the seeds.)

Maybe I will give the growing lights another try this winter – and this time I will make a note of what type of tomato I am growing!



(above) *The fungus in question*

(below) *Can anyone help Georgia identify her tomato? (photos: Ken Fraser)*







# autumn planting guide

## Brassicas

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

## Peas

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

## Lettuces

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

## Leeks

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



## Onions

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

## Spring flowers

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

## Green manures

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

Green manure crops suitable for planting in Canberra are:

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

**Nonlegumes:** Barley, oats and rye.

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

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

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

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

S = seed sowing; T = transplanting

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

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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 handheld 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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[globalworming@mail.com](mailto:globalworming@mail.com)  
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