

Canberra organic

Open days!
Being a convenor
Inheriting a beloved plot
**A ground-breaking
experiment**



editor's note

Welcome to the summer edition of Canberra Organic. It has been a pleasure to edit pages so full of activity around our gardens. Reports on open days, AGMs and working bees buzz with the spirit of the season. I hope you enjoy reading them.

I especially enjoyed the several meditations in these pages on the indeed quite miraculous events unfolding around us in the garden at this time of year. As the seed bank reveals its secrets, seedlings uncurl their necks, perennials rediscover their purpose, and flowers swell into fruits. This takes place under our care, but to rhythms most of us can only clumsily follow. To expand on

my favourite quote in this edition, the webs of life we tend are far cleverer than we are. It is a busy season, but sometimes good to pause and watch the garden do its thing.

And yet, for all the vernal wonders we may witness, I must admit that spring and early summer in Canberra are not my favourite seasons. The wind and its befogging pollen has seemed especially incessant this year, rain has been insufficient, and the temperature has veered from one extreme to the other, topped off by a late and damagingly hard frost on 12 November. My garden was lucky to be spared, and I hope yours was too, but I know that many were not.



On a personal note, this edition completes my first rotation around the sun as the editor of our magazine. I look forward to continuing in this role, albeit in a remote capacity, as my family and I prepare to move slightly overseas for a few years. I do plan to visit Canberra with some regularity and will of course make our COGS gardens my first stops, but this does leave our magazine more dependent than ever on contributions from our gardeners – those who send their stories and photos, as well as those who work behind the scenes to get these pages to press.

Among those, I would like to recognise the Yeoman's work of Terry Williams, who tends our mailing list and delivers the magazine from printer to post – sometimes in the sidecar of his Ural motorbike.

Until the next edition, I hope your garden is bountiful, and that you find the time and peace to enjoy its company.

– Michael Gisick

Terry Williams' Ural motorbike



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Front cover photo: Michael Gisick
Back cover photo: Lauren Campbell

president's column

Hello fellow gardeners. In the spring edition of Canberra Organic, Walter Steensby wrote about the importance of restoring our soils. My last few weeks have only reinforced this message – but more on that in a moment.

September was a busy month across COGS with each of our gardens holding their annual general meetings. New committees were formed and, at most of our gardens, the convenors and co-convenors put their hands up again. Babette Fahey was elected as convenor at Dickson Garden, after Michele England stepped down following a very successful stint. Allan Sharp and Charlie Wood became co-convenors at Kambah and O'Connor respectively. We're still on the hunt for a new convenor at Charnwood Garden. Susan Wood is kindly continuing in a caretaker capacity and is ably supported by the Charnwood Garden committee. Thank you to everyone who has stepped up to help run your local garden.

During spring, several COGS committee members and other volunteers helped run COGS stalls at some local events, including City Farm's 10th anniversary Open Day and the CIT plant sale in Bruce. Meanwhile, Crace and Kambah gardens have held successful open days. As the coverage of these events in this edition highlights, engaging with the community allows us to showcase the benefits of COGS and community gardening in general. It's also a great way to strengthen our communities.

New community gardens – the impact of densification of Canberra

Regular readers will be familiar with our efforts in recent years to lobby the ACT Government for more community gardens. This remains a work in progress. In her report on Cook Garden (see p.5), Michele Barson provides some information on a recent discussion we had with ACT Government officials. In a follow up to this, I submitted information to those officials detailing the suburbs where the members of our gardens live. A key trend in this data highlights the impact of new, more densely built suburbs. A clear example of this is at the COGS Holder, where the largest cohort of garden members now comes from the Molonglo Valley, with many living in apartments with no garden. Historically, the primary catchment area for the garden was Weston Creek. COGS Cook has a few members from the new suburb



of Whitlam, and the pressure on Cook will only intensify as Whitlam grows and the neighbouring suburbs of Bandler and Sulman are built in coming years.

While it has been over a decade since the founding of the last COGS Garden, and ten years since the establishment of Canberra City Farm, some new community gardens are being established – albeit on a small scale. One new, relatively large garden is being built in the Molonglo valley suburb of Wright by the developer. Café Stepping Stone is establishing a small 100 m² garden on land adjacent to its Dickson café, as part of their efforts in training migrant and refugee women. The Canberra Environment Centre has also been running another small community garden at its premises in Harrison, and several schools have small gardens. The point I make to politicians and officials is that COGS doesn't necessarily need more community gardens, but Canberra certainly does as it continues to grow and densify. With our well-honed

operational model, COGS is well placed to run larger community gardens once they are established.

The importance of soil

I was sad and surprised to learn of the sudden death of a former Treasurer of COGS and long-term member of COGS Holder – Dr Maarten Stapper. Maarten was a passionate advocate for improving our soil. You can learn more about Maarten's legacy on page 11.

I recently went on a tour organised by the Canberra Environment Centre of a farm in Bywong – Home Soil – which is run by Rachael and Damian. They operate a market garden selling their fantastic produce to Southern Harvest and to some local restaurants. They took us on a tour demonstrating their efforts to divert waste, make biologically rich compost, harvest water, save seeds, build soil and promote biodiversity both above and below the ground following regenerative practices. It was an inspiring morning.

Then, unexpectedly, I went on a road trip with my partner to a property run by Greening Australia on Wolgalu country near Adaminaby. Greening Australia have teamed up with investment partners to purchase and restore around 700 hectares of land near the Murrumbidgee River. On the day, I got to plant about 40 trees. Hopefully they will grow into big, beautiful trees.

Enjoy your time in the garden and remember to keep improving your soil.

– Neil Williams

The Home Soil farm in Bywong uses regenerative practices to fuel their market gardens. (Photo: Neil Williams)



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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.

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Community garden convenors

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

| | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
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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.

Lots on the boil at COGS Cook

Over the past 18 months, COGS Cook Community Garden has subdivided some of our larger plots and established three raised beds. As a result, the garden now hosts 48 plot holders.

Many of these attended the garden's Annual General Meeting in September. To broad acclaim, Peter Weddell was re-elected for his tenth year as Convenor, with a committee of 11 chosen to support him. Most of the committee members are responsible for a small team, each looking after one aspect of the garden's activities, such as plumbing, mowing, the orchard, bees and habitat biodiversity.

Peter outlined the garden's highlights for the past year. These included:

- Our very successful participation in the Open Gardens Canberra weekend, with more than 180 visitors coming through despite very heavy rain all day on the Saturday
- The appointment of Mario Serenellini as our third COGS 'life member'
- The many prizes awarded to plot-holder Graeme Davis's dahlias, including as supreme champion at the Sydney Royal Easter Show
- Four well-attended working bees followed by barbecues, along with a pizza night at the Cook pub, and celebrations for Australia Day, Anzac Day and the Winter Solstice

Recently, COGS Cook also hosted a visit by two staff from the ACT government's City and Environment Directorate,

accompanied by COGS President Neil Williams. This visit came in response to the government's election commitment to explore sites for new community gardens.

We discussed the history of COGS' efforts to secure sites for new gardens, our capacity to contribute to their establishment, and the site requirements for gardens to be viable. We also shared the long-held view of the COGS Executive Committee that planning for new community gardens should be incorporated into the establishment of new suburbs, a process that led to the creation of our youngest garden in Crace just over a decade ago. Our message appears to have sunk in, with the Suburban Land Agency currently consulting the community about establishment of a community garden in the new suburb of Lawson.

Despite the very cold winter, gardeners have been enjoying good crops of brassicas, silver beet, and more recently asparagus, and are looking forward to the broad bean harvest. The recent unseasonal warmth encouraged some early October plantings of cucumbers, pumpkins and zucchini. The first tomatoes went in well before Melbourne Cup Day on 23 October, with fingers crossed against a late frost. However, on 12 November, Canberra was one of many places in southeastern Australia to experience its coldest November morning on record, with temperatures dipping below minus 2. Much replanting is now required.

– Michele Barson

(below) COGS Cook held its AGM in September in a scene similar to this photo from 2023. Peter Weddell, who also serves as COGS vice president, was re-elected as convenor. (Photo: Michael Gisick)



COGS Kambah Open Day ‘best yet’

COGS Kambah Co-Convenor Allan Sharp wraps up the garden’s seventh annual open day.

COGS Kambah Community Garden held another successful open day – its seventh – on Saturday, 1 November, raising nearly \$3,000 and drawing in close to 300 visitors for the annual event. Funds were raised from a bumper seedling and plant sale, a sausage sizzle, a raffle and a coffee and cake stall.

The weather was perfect. Visitors were heralded at the entrance by piper and plot holder Ken Fraser, who made an imposing figure decked in the Fraser tartan. Among them were David Smith, federal MP for Bean, his independent opponent at the last election, Jessie Price, and Brindabella MLA Caitlyn Tough. A representative from Senator Katy Gallagher’s office also stopped by, posting several clips about the event on the senator’s social media pages.

Presentations by Fiona Buining from Ainslie Urban Farm and well-known Canberra horticulturalist Jackie Warburton were well attended. Fiona and husband Michael Wilson use permaculture principles to grow over 50 fruit trees, nuts, berries and vegetables on their quarter-acre Ainslie block. Following her presentation, Fiona gave a demonstration of plot preparation and composting.

Jackie and husband Bret run Terra Solarus, a Canberra gardening consultancy. Jackie is also a columnist for *City News* and guest gardening presenter on ABC 666. Jackie talked about growing succulents, presenting some impressive specimens of her own and giving attendees a succulent to take home. She also answered general questions about gardening.

We were pleased to welcome back regular stallholders Canberra Seed Savers and Southern ACT Catchment Group, and several current and former plot holders

with stalls offering natural products. A newcomer was Lids4Kids, a volunteer project founded in 2019 by Timothy Miller to drop off plastic bottle lids and other hard-to-recycle objects like blister packs, corks and e-waste items.

The well-visited kids’ corner included a contest to guess the weight of a fine specimen of Banjo Pumpkin bred by one of our gardeners, and weighing in at more than 7.6 kg.

We were again indebted to support from local businesses which supplied generous prizes for our raffle – Bunnings Tuggeranong; Bellchambers Produce; Weston Cruise and Travel; Amberly Farm; Cool Country Natives; and Prospect Eatery at the Kambah Inn. There was also a prize of a teddy knitted by the 94-year-old mother of one of our plot holders.

The event was the culmination of months of planning – including growing seedlings, producing posters for display at local shopping centres,

Customers had plenty of choice at the seedling and plant sale. (Photo: Michael Gisick)



writing articles for community group newsletters, social media posts and media interviews.

‘We learn something each open day,’ said COGS Kambah Co-Convener Barbara Jesiolowski, ‘and the event is becoming a finely tuned operation. I think this year was our best yet. The open days are a great way of bringing our own garden community together and our members are very

enthusiastic. So many of them pitch in to help with the set-up and to be there on the day.

‘It’s also a great way of reaching out to the community. Many visitors say the event is now part of their calendar and they look forward to it every year.’

The garden has donated \$600 of the proceeds to OzHarvest.

Photos:

(below) Satisfied customers ready to plant!

(below left) COGS Kambah gardener Ken Fraser gave guests a mighty welcome to the garden’s annual open day.

(bottom photo) Ainslie Urban Farm’s Fiona Buining gave a well-attended workshop on soil preparation and compost, concluding with a practical demonstration. (Photos: Michael Gisick)



Crace opens the gates

COGS Crace Convenor **Peter Newbigin** reports on the garden's open day.

* * *

As Tom Lehrer would have it:

Spring is here, suh-puh-ring is here.

Life is skittles and life is beer.

I think the loveliest time of the year is the spring.

I do, don't you? 'Course you do.

What better way of encouraging the gardeners to shake off their post-hibernation lethargy than to have an open day?

The flower beds were built in mid-June and planted with a mix of tulips, daffodils, ranunculus and anemones. Winter then did its best to make the tulip bulbs feel like they were home in Kazakhstan.

Surprisingly the cockatoos and passing dogs did not dig up the bulbs from the fresh beds nor snip off the emerging shoots.

One of our gardeners, Barbara Hill, arranged for her students from Telopea Park School to create



The open day enjoyed fine weather.

impressive DNA sculptures and drawings of famous botanists. These harmonized with this year's Floriade theme of 'science and nature' and were installed around the garden.

The gardeners worked hard to make the garden look its best, which was

not helped by some rather trying weather and nine plot holders deciding not to continue with their plots.

The open day, on Saturday 11 October, was a fine sunny day if a little windy. The garden looked a treat; the sausages were sizzling on the BBQ; plants, seedlings and seeds were on offer and there was a cake to raffle. Gavin from ACT Snake Removals was scheduled to give a talk.

Timing is everything in show biz and our timing for the open day was a bit off as it was also the October long weekend, the last week of school holidays and the last weekend of Floriade.

The crowds did not come, so the cake remained unraffled, the plants and seeds were largely unsold and then Gavin cancelled at the last moment.

In spite of all that, potential and new plot holders were able to look around the garden and talk with our members, and we were able to relax in the sun with a premium sausage sandwich (thanks Mark S).

(All photos: Lauren Campbell)

Students from Telopea Park School created these cool portraits of famous botanists. From left are Charles Darwin, Georgiana Molloy, Gregor Mendel, Agnes Arber and Charles Darwin again – very famous.





Mark S helms the barbecue while visitors peruse the plant sale.



COGS totes and other merchandise are available on our Redbubble store.

(below) A well organised composting system.



Holder Garden – bringing in the help!

Story and photos by **Lisa Walkington**,
COGS Holder co-convenor

As COGS Holder Community Garden worked through the annual renewal process, it became apparent several gardeners in the northwestern section of the garden would not be returning for the 2025-26 gardening year. The Holder committee took advantage of the opportunity created by the vacant and adjoining plots to bring in a small digger to do some repair work.

We had two small plots which had been a little neglected, one of which had a line of three apple trees that had been planted at the commencement of Holder Garden. Unfortunately, they had become diseased and structurally difficult to work around. A few of the surrounding paths contained buried carpet and semi-buried plastic from back in the days when it seemed appropriate to use these materials to slow the growth of weeds along the edges of plots and pathways.

The skilled digger operator made short work of the fruit trees. What would have taken us hours if not days of work attempting to dig them out happened in 10-15 minutes!

Buried plastic and old carpet used as weed matting was removed from paths. Plastic weed matts are now banned at COGS gardens and must be removed as soon as possible. (Photo: Lisa Walkington)



Hiring a digger is a good way to quickly accomplish jobs that even many hands would take a long time to do. Old and unproductive fruit trees were removed to make way for an orchard refurb. (Photo: Lisa Walkington)

Clearing the pathways to remove carpet was made more challenging by a line of taps and associated buried irrigation pipes. The operator used the attachments to the digger with great skill to carefully scrape off the top layer of grass and weeds and then the carpet. It was obviously a woollen carpet. As the digger scraped

you could see the long strands of wool being unravelled. The pile of carpet and soil was huge. This was eventually sorted out and the carpet remains taken to the tip as part of a recent working bee.

Michael, from Canberra Mini Diggers, provided us with a great service. We had booked him for a set period, but he worked faster than we expected, and we took advantage of the time available to also remove the stumps of three old, diseased and non-productive fruit trees from the main orchard area. One of our gardeners had taken branches off the trees a few weeks earlier so it was a bonus to have these stumps removed as well. This is the first stage of a long-term project to rework the orchard. We will be progressively removing old, diseased and overly large trees so we can plant some new trees which we might be able cover more successfully.

And because we are a community garden, Michael then only charged us for the actual time he worked rather than the minimum of three hours!

Remembering Dr Maarten Stapper – a passionate advocate for healthy soil



Dr Maarten Stapper, giving his talk at a COGS members meeting in 2019 (Photo: Margaret Stapper)

COGS President and previous COGS Holder Convenor Neil Williams remembers a remarkable contributor to our community.

On 31 August this year, Maarten Stapper ‘signed-off’ from his 11 productive years at COGS Holder Community Garden. Sadly, just 20 days later, Maarten died following a brief illness.

As he departed the garden, Maarten noted that his plot was left with a full foot of aggregated topsoil in much better condition than when he and his wife, Margaret, had started. This was no surprise. For Maarten, soil was his life’s work and passion. Healthy soil meant healthy food and, in turn, healthy people.

Maarten was born in the Netherlands. He lived, studied and worked there and in Canada, the United States, Iraq, Syria, and Australia. He had a degree in agricultural engineering from Wageningen University in the Netherlands, and did his PhD on wheat production systems with the University of New England, Armidale. Maarten worked with the CSIRO from 1983 to 2007. After his career there, Maarten undertook various consultancy roles and was a passionate advocate for biological-organic farming systems.

Maarten believed soil quality was being degraded by the increasing use of fertilisers and chemicals. He wrote and spoke extensively about the need to increase and protect carbon in soils through regenerative farming. Higher organic

carbon content in soils means higher natural soil fertility, substantially reducing the need for synthetic fertilizers. More organic carbon means a better soil structure and a bigger, more effective ‘sponge’ that holds more water and nutrients, leading to better yields. Maarten wrote an article on this subject in the Spring 2019 edition of Canberra Organic, which is available on the COGS website. He presented on the importance of soil health all over the country, including to COGS gardeners on several occasions. He was featured in the ABC’s *Australian Story* in 2009.

In addition to his advocacy for healthy soil, Maarten and Margaret made significant contributions to COGS. As COGS treasurer in 2015-16, Maarten led the modernisation of our fiscal operations, transitioning our system to the accounting software we use to this day. Margaret, meanwhile, was the convenor at Holder Garden in 2018-19.

Together, Maarten and Margaret practiced what he preached -- both in their plots at the community garden and at their townhouse in Holder, where they gardened organically, following permaculture principles, in their extensive home garden. The home has two tanks, one 4000 litres and the other 8000 litres, one draining into the other. A pump directs water to four major garden beds, with drippers. Effectively, no rain leaves the property.

Like many gardeners, Maarten and Margaret loved cooking, and ate well from their bountiful, soil-rich gardens. Our condolences go to Maarten’s wife, Margaret, his family and friends.

Miracle of a seed

Penny, a gardener at COGS Mitchell, sends along this lovely reflection on her time at the community garden.

I started as a volunteer at COGS Mitchell and now have a plot and help with the donation garden.

It's a lovely garden surrounded by grasslands. One early morning, I saw a clutch of black furry balls which, I soon discovered, were baby quails. Sometimes a patch of weeds may be unsightly but provides a useful home for baby birds. There are blue wrens, kookaburras, parrots, blackbirds, chuffs and ducks. There are also rabbits and snakes and kangaroos.

Being new to growing vegetables, I am blessed with so many wonderful gardeners who offer their knowledge, their time and help, and their enthusiasm and delight in sharing produce. Oli and Jing shared their sweet potato seedlings, which was a treat for me. They also introduced me to gooseberry plants. I have received mizuna, carrots and shallots.

COGS Mitchell supports the Gungahlin Community Pantry and deliveries are made when produce is available on a Wednesday. This spring, lettuce has been the main feature: lettuces the size of dinner plates and plenty of them. Coriander has also been plentiful.

In the donation garden, there is silverbeet, red giant mustard, leeks, garlic, broad beans, fenugreek, onions and kale. Gardeners also donate their excess produce when available.

Tomato seedlings are ready to be planted; bean seedlings and potatoes have sprouted. It is wonderful how seeds transform into plants.

I planted some kang kong last year and have pumpkin, zucchini, beans and beetroot started in my own plot. Our gardeners also have splendid plantings of asparagus, rhubarb, Tony's Portuguese cabbage, bitter melons, and zucchinis from Hasan. Several of our gardeners will soon begin growing tall and majestic maize. Syed shares long melons which are much loved by the Community pantry.

I have visited COGS Crace, Kambah, Charnwood, Cook and the City Farm. I aim to visit more COGS gardens in future to meet and learn from other gardeners.

Happy gardening and may your seeds turn into bountiful harvests.



*(above) Red giant mustard and leafy greens were abundant in spring.
(below) Freshly harvested onions at COGS Mitchell Community Garden.
(Photos: Penny)*



Inheriting Jen's plot

The last edition of this magazine included an inspiring remembrance of Jen Johnston, a founding member of COGS Holder and a talented and passionate gardener. At the recent COGS Kambah open day, I got to talking with **Ruth Cornforth**, who told me she had inherited Jen's plot. I imagined that she must have felt very fortunate but also perhaps a bit daunted to inherit such a plot, and suggested she write a short reflection on her experience. I'm pleased she did! Please do note, however, that planting fruit trees in allotments is no longer permitted under COGS rules. – Editor

In August 2025, a year after joining COGS Holder Community Garden, I inherited an allotment that had belonged to Jen Johnston.

Jen had been gardening here since the garden's inception, and as the previous edition of this magazine noted, she was an incredibly accomplished gardener, horticulturist and scientist. Taking on her plot, I felt a mix of trepidation and excitement, but mostly a sense of good fortune. Jen's allotment is already amazing, with so much of her skill and hard work in evidence. It's a stark contrast to what some



(above) What looks to be the American black raspberry already at 3 metres long.
(below) Freshly netted heritage apples with one of Jen's cottage flowers (Scottish harebell?) in the foreground. (Photos: Ruth Cornforth)

gardeners find when they take over an abandoned and weedy plot.

However, the couch was on the attack, especially from the rear, so I gave everything a haircut and added generous scoops of chicken manure, potash, Epsom salts and worm farm juice. I mulched the couch and the pathway in.

Several old railway sleeper logs were immovable, but I did manage to inch a couple of them back from the front edge where the raspberries were tunnelling under and trying to invade the pathway. Then, after moving my purple sprouting broccoli, adding my own cottage flower plants, and with consistent watering, I waited to witness the magic.

Jen's Allotment has three miniature heritage fruit trees, each about 20 years old, as well as two currant bushes and a collection of raspberry canes, including the American black raspberry. Rhubarb, parsnips and Italian borlotti

seed pods were also among my inheritance, and the plot's seed bank has thus far produced lettuces, kale, cabbage, leeks, parsley, potatoes and cottage garden flowers such as Jumping Jack viola, King Henry viola, daffodils, love-in-a-mist, and Scottish harebells. This wonderful seed bank is a testament to Jen's approach as a natural gardener, allowing plants to complete their life cycles and re-sow themselves.

The cottage flowers sprang up quickly and the apple trees flowered – so beautiful! Now the black raspberry is flowering, and I have just put fruit net bags on at least a 150 baby apples.

Jen's allotment is a treasure! To those of you who knew her well over the years, her joyful efforts in the garden are still blossoming. Looking ahead, my plan is to honour Jen's legacy while also making the plot my own. I intend to continue building on her foundational work by mixing cottage garden flowers with vegetables and herbs and allowing them all to continue self-seeding. I look forward to tasting the apples and stewing them up mixed with rhubarb and currants.



Growing in confidence – views from the top

Readers of this magazine may remember 'Young Georgia's' column from previous editions. We're pleased to announce that Georgia has been promoted to junior correspondent and will be digging for news at our gardens going forward.

* * *

I was talking with my Grandpa Ken recently about gardening. He told me he had just attended the AGM at COGS Kambah Community Garden. He explained to me how garden convenors get elected, and that on this occasion only two people, out of around 40 gardeners, had put their hands up for the job.

This got me thinking why so few gardeners seemed to want to be a convenor. It seems to me like a fairly important job.

When I stood for school captain this year, I had to make a speech as to why I would be a good school leader. I began to wonder what skills and qualities garden convenors felt they needed to succeed in their role. I decided to approach three present and former convenors about it: Allan, Shirley and Barbara.

I asked them what qualities a good convenor might need, what skills they each brought to the role, what they had learned about gardening and people as a convenor, and if they could recall any memorable moments during their time in office. The following is a summary of what they told me:

Barbara Jesiolowski (current co-convenor)

A garden convenor should be friendly, open-minded and have good people skills, so that everyone feels comfortable being at the garden. Convenors need to be organized, in order to keep track of things such as waiting lists, vacant plots, membership renewals, and purchases for the garden. It is important, too, to be available and responsive. We



Georgia – If you've got a story idea for our junior correspondent, send it along to editor@cogs.asn.au, attn: Georgia. (Photo: Michael Gisick)

don't need to be on call 24/7, but we must respond in a timely manner and do the things that we say we will do. A convenor needs to be firm but fair, ensuring COGS and garden rules are followed. But we need to remember that convenors are not bosses; we should be coordinators and organisers.

I think my best attribute is that I like meeting and learning from new people. I try to make new gardeners welcome, offering them as much assistance and support as they may want, and introducing them to fellow gardeners when possible. I listen to people, take on board any concerns or issues they may have about the garden, and always aim to ensure the garden is a welcoming place for everybody.

For me, being a convenor has reinforced that everyone is different and has different needs and priorities, including when it comes to gardening. Respect for our differences, our shared interest in growing vegetables and other plants, and in nurturing the soil, brings us together.

Some of the most memorable moments for me as a convenor have come at the end of our annual open days. After everyone has packed up and most of the visitors have gone home, the gardeners get together for a "happy hour", to relax, unwind, and congratulate each other on another good day. Everyone has had a long day, and are weary, but have enjoyed helping out, supporting the garden and being part of the COGS Kambah community.

Shirley Bolton (former convenor)

In my view, a garden convenor needs to maintain a happy, welcoming and friendly environment within the garden. They need to love gardening and get on well with people; to be organised and willing to share knowledge. The ability to manage 'up' and 'down' is also important.

I have a sense of humour and light-heartedness and this quality, combined with some determination, helped me to lift the spirit and prevailing negativity that was in our garden prior to my appointment as Convenor. I also have confidence in my basic administration and leadership skills.

I have learned that friendly persuasion and example will get results and bring joy. And also that one never stops learning and that the bugs in the garden are cleverer than I am.

I have had many memorable moments. These include organising several successful open days; seeing the vacant plots quickly taken on by keen new gardeners; receiving praise and appreciation from members of the public as they watched our garden improve in tidiness, productivity and friendliness; and organising the building of our shelter, which has been such a welcoming asset for our members.

Previous COGS Kambah Convenor Shirley Bolton continues to contribute her people skills and organizational acumen to the garden community. (Photo: Michael Gisick)



COGS Kambah Co-Convenors Allan Sharp and Barbara Jesiolowski sharing their expertise with Federal MP David Smith at the garden's open day on 1 November.

Allan Sharp (current co-convenor)

I believe a convenor needs to be responsive to the concerns, needs and suggestions of all garden members. Regular communication with members is also important. Tact and understanding are necessary, especially if a gardener is neglecting their plot or infringing rules. This can be difficult because you may be friendly with the person concerned. However, you need to put such considerations aside and treat

everyone fairly according to COGS and garden rules.

As co-convenor, I hope I'm seen as friendly, approachable and helpful. I also hope I'm fair when it has been necessary to deal with problems such as neglected plots. People respond well if you're approachable and friendly, but you also need to be firm on the rare occasions that it's necessary to be so.

Gardening is a great community-building activity, and one of the best things about COGS Kambah is the friendliness and readiness of gardeners to help one another and share knowledge.

I was co-convenor at COGS Kambah for four years and recently returned to that position. For most of the 10 years I've been at the garden it's been an enjoyable, relaxing place, with a great sense of community. There have been many memorable moments: our successful open days; the construction of the shelter and, more recently, the new compost enclosures; our participation in the Floriade Community; and the willingness of so many gardeners to turn out when the need arises. All these reflect the strong sense of community at COGS Kambah. It's great to see parents now bringing their kids to the garden – something that really enhances the community feel of the place.

COGS visits City Farm

A COGS contingent spent an unfortunately inclement, but otherwise lovely day with our friends at Canberra City Farm for their 10th anniversary open day on 26 October. Turnout was good prior to the arrival of cold winds and rain, and we had steady foot traffic at our table throughout the morning. This gave us a chance to chat with visitors about our community gardens, answer questions on organic practices, and bemoan the perpetually shocking nature of Canberra weather. It was also nice to catch up with folks from organisations like SEE-Change, Canberra Seed Savers, ACT for Bees and others.



(above) ACT Greens MLA Laura Nuttall (right) stopped by for a chat with COGS volunteers. From left: COGS Kaleen Co-Convenor Richard Buker, COGS Membership Secretary Jo McMillan, and COGS Holder member Pam Roberts.
(below) Little Green Thumbs celebrate their first harvest.

Tucked away on the site of a former Dairy Farm adjacent to Jerrabomberra wetlands, City Farm runs a range of educational and demonstration programs on organic food growing and sustainable living, as well as offering allotments.

This school term, my kids and I are having a great time at the Farm's recently launched 'Little Green Thumbs' program. The chance to garden with other kids using kid-sized tools has been great motivation. We've planted carrots, peas, corn, tomatoes and have already harvested a nice crop of radishes. Thanks to that perpetually shocking Canberra weather, we'll have to replant the corn and tomatoes – but that's all in the name of learning.

– Michael Gisick



Year 9 students promote COGS



their approval. Once the designs were approved, we distributed the flyers and cards throughout different areas of Canberra, including Narrabundah, Kaleen, Barton, Gungahlin and Amaroo.

Overcoming obstacles along the way, this was truly an incredible opportunity for the four of us. We all enjoyed the experience, and it was quite fun to open up the creative side of ourselves and design as a team. Many of our individual skills were used at different stages of this wonderful journey, and each of us learned something new along the way, from skills such as time management to journaling.

The areas where we all improved were our communication skills and teamwork. Even though some minor disagreements arose, everyone found a way to get through them, and of course, we couldn't have done it without the members of COGS. Being able to communicate with members of an organisation outside of school was a great learning experience. The COGS members we worked with along the way were very friendly and supportive, always giving us feedback and ways to improve, and helping us to bring out the best in our work. We are so extremely thankful for this opportunity and the people we were so lucky to work with.

Here are a few of our designs, which we distributed to noticeboards and mailboxes.

– Elisha, Sanugee, Sybella & Hajra

We are four girls from Telopea Park Schools in grade nine. As part of our curriculum, we were tasked with creating a project in which we could take action to help the community. We collectively decided to reach out to a community garden in hopes of advertising it in a way that could benefit the community.

The reason we chose a community garden is that gardens have many benefits. Environmental benefits include improved sustainability, carbon sequestration, stormwater management, and cooling the microclimate of urban areas. Community benefits include improved social connections, new learning experiences, secure access

to healthy and organic produce, and enhancing the neighbourhood with greenery. Joining a community garden allows people to take a breath, relax and do something they genuinely enjoy, which can improve mental and physical health.

When we were looking for a garden that matched our expectations, we discovered COGS, which operates 12 gardens throughout the ACT. To our delight, the COGS community members we contacted (the co-conveners of COGS Kambah) agreed to work with us on our project. Working as a team, we designed many different brochures, flyers and posters, and sent these designs to the COGS organisation for



A ground-breaking experiment

COGS Charnwood gardener *Angela Anchugova* has enlisted a tough plant called Burdock in the hard work of breaking up Canberra clay. She reports some promising results.

* * *

Burdock, also known as gobō or greater burdock, is a biennial native to Eurasia. It is cultivated in Japan, Taiwan and Korea for its edible taproot, which also contributes an earthy, anise-tinged flavour to the Dandelion and Burdock drink consumed in the British Isles since the Middle Ages. In my plot at COGS Charnwood, however, I have been growing it to see if this taproot might serve as a natural clay-breaker.

Like many Canberra gardens, some parts of my Charnwood plot have only a thin layer of loam that abruptly gives way to heavy clay. Being a lazy gardener, I thought I might outsource the digging to burdock, and in spring 2023, I transplanted ten burdock seedlings along the shallowest side of the bed, where the spade gives up in protest.

I had heard the young plants might fall victim to the usual suspects of earwigs, slugs and slaters, but to my surprise they were entirely unbothered. Through frosts, cold wind, hot wind, and a good amount of my neglect, the plants persisted and simply carried on. Finally, after terminating the crop and digging up the root, I've found the taproot now acting as a highway for worms to tunnel down where they once could not – down into the clay. It appears the ground has been quietly enriched with worm castings from below!

There is, however, one note of caution: I regret letting the burdock go to seed. The artichoke-like flowers, although pretty, have tenacious hooks that easily stick to clothes, fur, hair – you name it! No wonder they were the inspiration for the invention of Velcro.

If you're looking for an easy-to-grow plant that will break up clay, give burdock a go and you might just find yourself breaking new ground!



(above) The hook-and-loop fastener (aka Velcro) was invented by a Swiss engineer after examining the burdock burs that stuck to his clothing and his dog's fur during a hunting trip. (Photo: Wikipedia)

(below) Burdock seedlings proved to be survivors. (Photo: Angela Anchugova)



Haskap update – berries!

Gardeners at COGS Kambah have been excited to see the first berries on their now two-year-old Haskap berry plants.

Haskaps are cold-loving shrubs native to northern regions of Eurasia and North America and have been grown successfully on a small scale in Tasmania. Their delicious, oblong, blue-to-purple berries are even more nutrient-dense than blueberries, and they are reported to be less susceptible to pests and disease and tolerant of a wider range of soil ph.

This could make them a great addition to Canberra gardens if they can tolerate our hot summers. At Kambah, the Haskaps have been planted in a spot shaded from the afternoon sun, and the first fruits are a hopeful sign of things to come.

See the Autumn 2025 edition of *Canberra Organic* for more.

– Michael Gisick



Holiday Accommodation

Breakaway at Bastion

Mallacoota (Far East Gippsland, Victoria)

Located in Mallacoota within Croajingalong National Park, this pet-friendly property is the perfect getaway to explore some of the most biologically diverse ecosystems in Australia, including pristine sandy beaches, colourful heathlands, tall eucalypt forests and ancient rainforests.

Breakaway at Bastion offers two large living areas, four-bedrooms and two-bathrooms and is just a short walk to beaches, the town centre, golf club, bowling club and boat launching facilities.

Since the Black Summer bushfires devastated over 1.3 million hectares of landmass within Far East Gippsland, the Friends of Mallacoota and the Victorian Botanical Gardens have come together and propagated over 100 rare, endemic or endangered species to create the Mallacoota Endemic Garden.

This is a garden of reflection, education and cultivation which showcases vegetation from Lowland Forests, Warm Temperate Rainforests, Coastal Scrub, Rocky Outcrop Shrublands, Granite Rivers, Heathlands and Gabo Island.

For further information on **Breakaway at Bastion**, contact Mallacoota Real Estate on 03 5158 0600 or email holidays.mallacoota@gmail.com.

— Advertisement —

Growing zucchini

Start from seed: Oct–November

Optimum soil temperature for germination: 21–35°C

Plant seedlings: Nov–December

Plant spacing: 50–60 cm

Days to maturity: 45–55 days

Introduction

Zucchini, *Cucurbita pepo*, also known as courgette, belongs to the Cucurbitaceae family, which also includes cucumbers, melons, and pumpkins.

Zucchini originated in Central and South America, where it has been cultivated for thousands of years. It was brought to Europe in the 16th century and became particularly popular in Italian cuisine, which led to many of the varieties we know today. The name "zucchini" comes from the Italian word "zucchino," meaning small squash. This explains why they are often referred to as squash.

The plants are large, sprawling, somewhat prickly bushes with large, broad leaves that often have a distinctive mottled pattern. They produce bright yellow flowers that are also edible. Botanically, the zucchini fruit is classified as a berry, specifically a "pepo," which is a type of berry with a thick rind and many seeds.

Site and soil

Zucchini can be easily grown outdoors in Canberra with proper variety selection and timing. Being a fruiting plant, zucchini requires at least six

hours of full sun per day. Choose a warm, sunny, sheltered location protected from strong winds.

Prior to planting, prepare the soil by adding compost and complete organic fertiliser. Zucchini prefers fertile, well-drained soil with a pH between 5.8-6.8. Raised beds can help improve drainage in heavy soils. If growing in pots, it is very important to use a high-quality potting mix boosted with complete organic fertiliser. Choose a container at least 40-50 cm in diameter and depth to accommodate the plant's extensive root system.

Planting seeds and seedlings

Zucchini can be started from seed or purchased as seedlings. If starting from seed, sow direct into the soil outdoors after all danger of frost has passed (usually mid-October to early November in Canberra). Alternatively, seedlings can be raised indoors for planting out 3–4 weeks later. This method leads to earlier fruiting. If there is danger of frost or you want to start them early outdoors, plants can be protected by covering with caterpillar tunnels. The optimum soil temperature for germination is 21-35°C, with little to no germination occurring below 15°C. Seeds should germinate within 10 days under optimal conditions.

When direct seeding, sow 2-3 seeds per position and thin to the strongest seedling once they develop their first true leaves. For transplants, harden off seedlings by gradually exposing them

to outdoor conditions over a period of 7-10 days before planting out.

Space plants 50-60 cm apart to allow for adequate air circulation and the sprawling growth habit. After planting, water thoroughly with a seaweed solution to reduce transplant shock and promote root development.

Applying organic mulch such as straw, lucerne, or sugar cane mulch will help conserve moisture, suppress weeds, and regulate soil temperature.

Cultivation

Zucchini plants are frost-sensitive, so seedlings should only be planted out after the danger of frost has passed and the soil has warmed. In Canberra, this is typically from mid-November onwards. If a late frost is forecast, protect young plants with cloches, frost cloth, or upturned buckets.

Consistent watering is essential for zucchini production. Aim to provide 2-3 cm of water per week, applied directly to the soil rather than overhead to prevent foliar diseases. Water deeply and less frequently rather in preference to frequent, shallow watering to encourage deeper root growth.

Plants may need a side dressing of complete organic fertiliser when the first fruits begin to form. A monthly foliar spray with seaweed solution; a mix of worm juice, seaweed and compost tea; or trace elements will help boost growth and resilience to pests and diseases.

Harvesting

Harvest zucchini regularly, ideally every second day, once plants begin producing. Younger, smaller zucchini (15-20 cm long for elongated varieties, 5-7.5 cm in diameter for round types) have the best flavour and texture. Regular harvesting encourages continued production.

To harvest, cut or gently twist off fruits when they have reached the desired size. Use a sharp knife or secateurs to cut the stem about 2-3 cm above the fruit, being careful not to damage the plant. Handle fruits with care to avoid scratching or bruising.

New growing guides now live

The growing guides on these pages are among 30 new guides produced for COGS by Ainslie Urban Farm's Fiona Buining. These guides are now live and available free for everyone on our website – cogs.asn.au. Over the coming months, Fiona will be bringing our existing guides up to this same standard, as well as updating our planting calendars. Thanks to Fiona's fine work, and the support of our members, these guides represent a comprehensive resource for growing organic vegetables and many fruits in our climate and conditions.





Some varieties, like 'Striato d'Italia', grow long before increasing in girth, allowing them to be harvested at a good size before becoming too large. Others, like 'Ronde di Nice', are round and should be harvested when they reach 5-7.5 cm in diameter.

The flowers are edible and are a gourmet delicacy. Harvest male blossoms (with thin stems) or female blossoms (with thick stems and a round swollen immature fruit at the base) in mid to late morning when fully open. If you also want to harvest fruit, only pick male flowers, leaving a few for pollination. If fruit production is excessive some female flowers can be removed.

Common issues include:

- **Wilting leaves during the day:** It is common for the leaves to wilt during the day. As long as they perk up again in the evening it is not a problem. If not, you need to give them more water.
- **Poor fruit development:** If fruits start to develop but then wither or blacken this generally indicates insufficient pollination, which can be an issue early in the season when fewer pollinators are active. To improve pollination, you can hand-pollinate by transferring pollen from male flowers (with thin stems)

to female flowers (with small fruits at their base) using a small brush.

- **Powdery mildew:** This fungal disease appears as white powder on leaves. Ensure good air circulation by proper spacing, avoid overhead watering, and apply milk spray (1 part milk to 9 parts water) or seaweed spray as a preventative measure. Select varieties that are less prone to powdery mildew.
- **Downy mildew:** Yellow spots on leaf surfaces with grey-purple fuzz underneath. Improve air circulation and apply organic copper fungicides if severe.
- **Bacterial wilt:** Caused by cucumber beetles, plants wilt suddenly and don't recover. Remove and destroy affected plants and practice crop rotation.
- **Cucumber beetles:** Small yellow and black striped beetles that feed on leaves and spread disease. Protect young plants with floating row covers until flowering.
- **Squash bugs:** Gray-brown shield-shaped bugs that suck plant sap. Check undersides of leaves for bronze-coloured egg clusters and crush them. Remove adults by hand.
- **Vine borers:** White larvae that tunnel into stems, causing wilting. Look for sawdust-like frass at entry

holes. Cut out of vines and hill soil over the wound.

Recommended varieties

Several zucchini varieties perform well in Canberra's climate:

- **Striato d'Italia:** Sweet and nutty flavour with attractive striped fruit. Plants are vigorous and produce throughout the season. Fruits grow long before increasing in girth. Resistant to powdery mildew.
- **Ronde di Nice:** Round zucchini with excellent flavour, particularly good for stuffing or grilling. Earlier to produce than some varieties. Resistant to powdery mildew.
- **Black Beauty:** Traditional dark green zucchini with straight fruits and reliable production. Prone to powdery mildew.
- **Cocozelle:** Italian heirloom with striped dark and light green fruits. Compact plants suitable for smaller spaces. Resistant to powdery mildew. Seemingly less productive than some other varieties.
- **Golden:** Bright yellow fruits with a slightly nutty flavour and softer skin than green varieties e.g. yellow crookneck, Gold Rush.
- **Romanesco:** Distinctive ribbed fruits with excellent flavour and firm texture. Resistant to powdery mildew.

Growing tomatoes

Start from seed: August–September

Optimum soil temperature

for germination: 30°C

Plant seedlings: Nov–December

Plant spacing: 40–50 cm

Days to maturity: 45–87

Introduction

Tomatoes belong to the Solanaceae family, which also includes eggplant, capsicums and chillies. They derive from wild plants native to Central and South American and were cultivated as staple crops by the Incas and Aztecs. The name comes from the Aztec *tomatl*. Following their introduction to Europe in the 16th century, tomatoes were initially grown mainly as ornamentals due to their association with other, highly poisonous Solanaceae. This stigma did not last, of course, and tomatoes subsequently became staples of Mediterranean – and above all, Italian – cuisine.

Tomatoes are grown as an annual and have an erect growing habit with hairy stems and deeply lobed leaves. The star shaped yellow flowers are self-fertile which means the seeds grow true to type. Botanically the fruit is a fleshy berry that comes in a huge variety of colours, shapes and sizes.

Site and soil

Tomatoes can be successfully grown outdoors in Canberra. Being a fruiting plant, tomato requires at least 6 hours of full sun per day. Choose a warm, sunny, ideally north facing, site.

Prior to planting add compost and a complete organic fertiliser to the soil. They like a fertile, well-drained soil with pH of 6.5. If growing in pots it is very important to boost the potting mix with complete organic fertiliser.

Planting

If starting tomato from seed this should begin in mid-August. The optimum germination temperature for tomato is 30°C. Therefore, the most successful method is to plant seed into cells or trays and provide bottom heat by using a heat mat or hot water bottle wrapped in newspaper or a tea towel. Warm, sunny indoor places near a window are also suitable for germination.

To maximise germination a soil temperature probe and thermostat are useful to ensure the soil temperature is maintained between 24–32°C. Germination will occur without heat but is likely to be much slower.

As soon as the seeds have germinated, they need full outdoor daylight or the equivalent provided by grow lights. Once the seedlings have developed true leaves, and are around 4–5 weeks old, they will grow better if transplanted into a pot to give the roots more space and allow them grow on before planting outdoors. Advanced plants will fruit earlier. Remember to protect your seedlings from the cold.

Prior to planting, all seedlings should be hardened off. This process takes about one week and involves gradually increasing the length of time that the plants are exposed to full sun. If this is difficult to do prior to planting, an alternative is to make a shade cloth cover over the garden bed containing the tomatoes and gradually reduce the amount of cover over a week or two.

Plant seedlings approximately 40–50 m apart. After planting, it is a good idea to water them in with a seaweed solution. The soil and plants will benefit from being mulched with organic matter such as spoiled lucerne, pea straw, sugar cane mulch or leaf mould.

Cultivation

Since tomatoes are cold sensitive, seedlings, whether purchased or raised yourself, should be planted out after the danger of frost has passed and the soil is warm. In Canberra this is usually sometime in November. If the overnight temperature is forecast to be 2°C or less, cover plants with frost cloth or an upturned bucket to protect from frost. Covering plants can make a difference of 5°C. The ideal temperature for fruit set is between 18–29°C. Very little fruit set occurs below 16°C or above 32°C. Covers can be used to increase yield and extend the season into late Autumn.

If seedlings do not “take off” after a couple of days a foliar (leaf) spray can be very beneficial. This involves spraying the leaves of the plants in

the early evening with a solution of seaweed, seaweed and worm juice or a trace element-based product. You should notice an improvement in the plants with 24–48 hours after applying a foliar spray. Feeding plants in this way stimulates plants to produce carbon rich root exudates which feed soil microorganisms who in turn provide mineral nutrients to the plants. Foliar sprays can be applied monthly during the growing season.

Chilling can induce early flowering. This is called vernalisation. It must be done when the first true leaves are opening up and the plant is 4 cm tall. Nighttime temperatures of 10–13°C for 2–3 weeks is effective.

Weeds can compete with crop plants, therefore weeding at the seedling stage is beneficial. Mulching will suppress weeds to some extent. Weeds will be less problematic once plants form a canopy shading the soil.

Staking is not absolutely necessary; however, it makes the plant easier to manage, keeps them upright, maintains air circulation, helps reduce disease and keeps the fruit off the ground. Tomatoes can also be trained to grow up strings suspended from above, or trained on a trellis, such as basket weave trellis.

Tomatoes can be vigorous growers and will produce lateral (side) shoots at every node. The node is where the branch joins the stem. These lateral shoots (also known as suckers) should be gently pinched off or pruned away with tomato pruners or secateurs. If they are left to grow, you can end up with plants with a significant amount of vegetative growth at the expense of fruiting. Abundant laterals also make the plant hard to manage. Alternatively, you can let tomatoes follow their natural habit. You will still get fruit but you may have to battle foliage to get to it.

Plants may need to be fertilised mid-season using a side dressing of complete organic fertiliser.

Water is the number one requirement for plant growth. Newly planted seedlings will generally need to be

watered once or twice a day. The easiest way to gauge whether plants need watering is to insert a finger into the soil. If it is wet and soil adheres to the finger it does not need watering. If it feels dry it needs watering. Soil should feel cool and moist. Try and maintain soil in this condition by regular watering.

Harvesting

Harvest fruit when it reaches the desired colour. Fruit in Canberra will probably not get as large as tomatoes you are used to seeing for sale, so do not worry if the fruit is small. Late in the season they may not ripen to red, orange or yellow.

Fruit can be removed from the plant using a gentle upward pull, or they can be cut off with secateurs or a sharp harvest knife. As is usual with fruiting plants, harvesting regularly will stimulate more flowers which means more fruit. Tomatoes can continue producing well into autumn.

Problems

There are numerous pests and diseases that can affect tomatoes. Here are a few of the most common:

- **Blossom-end rot** affects tomatoes. The symptom is brown, sunken, watery areas at the bottom (blossom) end of the fruit. The cause is an inadequate supply of calcium resulting in plant tissue break down. Inadequate watering, waterlogging, over use of fertilisers or low soil pH can all reduce the availability of Calcium leading to this condition. Prevention involves maintaining a soil pH of around 6.5; deep and regular watering; using organic fertilisers; ensuring your soil is not calcium deficient; mulching plants; and avoiding severe pruning. Some varieties seem more prone than others to blossom-end rot.
- **Sunscald** is the equivalent of sunburn. Fruit develops papery blisters which can lead to secondary infection and pest infestation. It can be avoided by selecting varieties with good leaf cover or by shading plants in periods of intense bright light.
- **Tomato russet mite.** If the leaves start dying off from below, curl



(Photo: Lauren Campbell)

downwards, dry out and turn bronze, and the stems lose their hairs, get out your magnifying glass and see if you can see the tiny mites above the damaged part of the plant. The mites move up the plant creating havoc on their way. Predatory mites are a natural predator. A solution is to spray with wettable sulphur, lime sulphur or tomato dust. The odour from the sulphur kills the mites. It is important to act quickly on this one as plants can die within a week. At the end of the season keep affected plants and mulch out of the compost to break the life cycle.

- **Queensland fruit fly** has become a problem in Canberra mostly affecting larger fruit late in the season. Exclusion using fine netting over plants or around individual fruits is successful. Traps, lures and spinosad sprays are also effective when used together.
- **Tobacco Mosaic Virus.** Tomatoes are vulnerable to diseases spread by tobacco users such as Tobacco Mosaic Virus. It is therefore best

if tobacco users avoid handling tomato plants.

- Avoid planting tomatoes near **walnut trees** because they are extremely sensitive to the toxin Juglone which is exuded by walnut tree roots.

Recommended varieties

There are two types of tomatoes: determinate and indeterminate. Determinates are also known as bush tomatoes. They grow upwards, then stop and have a limited number of flowers resulting in all the fruit ripening at the same time. Indeterminates continually grow upwards and produce trusses of fruit along stems throughout the growing season. Their growth habit resembles that of a vine which is why they can be easily trained to grow up a string.

Since there are over 10,000 varieties available and everyone has their favourites, it is hard to recommend specific varieties. If fruit fly is a problem, grow cherry style and other small tomatoes and avoid growing large fruited varieties.

November 2025 to January 2026 BoM forecast

Issued: 23 October 2025

Rainfall

Rainfall is likely to be above average (60% to 80% chance) for eastern parts of Queensland, much of NSW, central and northern Victoria, and eastern Tasmania, as well as parts of the Top End of the Northern Territory. Elsewhere there is roughly equal chances of above or below average rainfall.

Temperatures

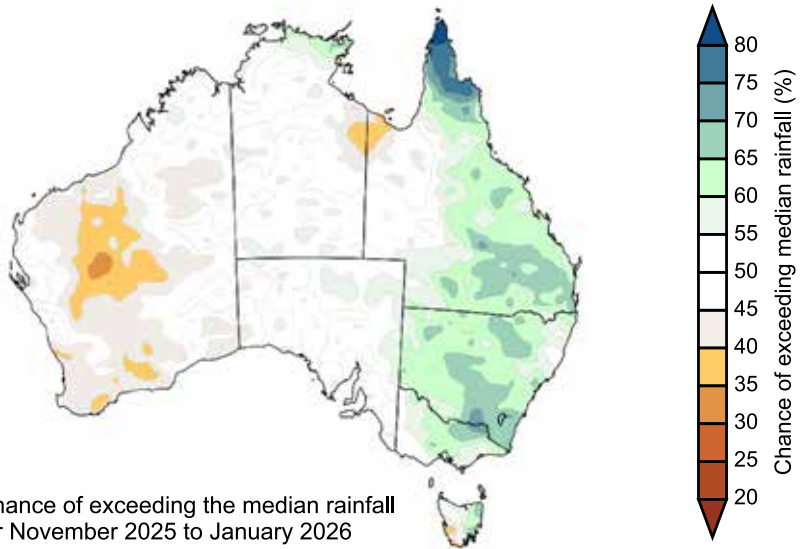
Maximum temperatures are likely to be above average (60% to over 80% chance) across most of Australia. For parts of coastal New South Wales, maximum temperatures have around an equal likelihood of being above or below the average.

There is an increased chance of unusually high maximum temperatures (over 50% chance) in parts of Victoria, Tasmania, and central-west Western Australia.

Minimum temperatures are also likely to be above average (60% to over 80% chance) across most of Australia.

Climate drivers

Since July 2024, sea surface temperatures in the Australian



Chance of exceeding the median rainfall for November 2025 to January 2026

Model ACCESS-S2
Base Period: 1981–2018

Model run: 20/10/2025
Issued: 23/10/2025

region have been the warmest or second warmest on record for each respective month. Similarly, global sea surface temperatures remain substantially above average, with September 2025 the third warmest on record.

Forecasts for November to January show warmer-than-average sea surface temperatures are likely around most of Australia, especially

to the south-east. Warmer oceans can provide increased moisture and energy, that can enhance the severity of storms, cyclones and rain systems.

The Bureau's model predicts sea surface temperatures in the tropical Pacific are likely to just meet La Niña levels during spring, before returning to neutral during summer.

A negative phase of the Indian Ocean Dipole is underway. The Bureau's model predicts the negative event to continue throughout spring, with a return to neutral in early summer, consistent with all international models.



Water storage levels in the Canberra region and capital cities

| | Oct '25 | Oct '24 |
|----------------------|---------|---------|
| ACT storages | 96% | 92% |
| Murray-Darling Basin | 69% | 73% |
| Burrinjuck Dam | 62% | 72% |
| Blowering Dam | 47% | 67% |
| Sydney | 98% | 96% |
| Melbourne | 73% | 89% |
| Brisbane | 80% | 81% |
| Adelaide | 45% | 49% |
| Perth | 46% | 48% |

Eastern rosella

COGS artist-in-residence **Cathy Morison** donated this painting as a raffle prize at the recent COGS Kambah open day. It's a lovely rendition of one of our more familiar local birds – and a good reminder how lucky we are to have such spectacular wildlife in our gardens.

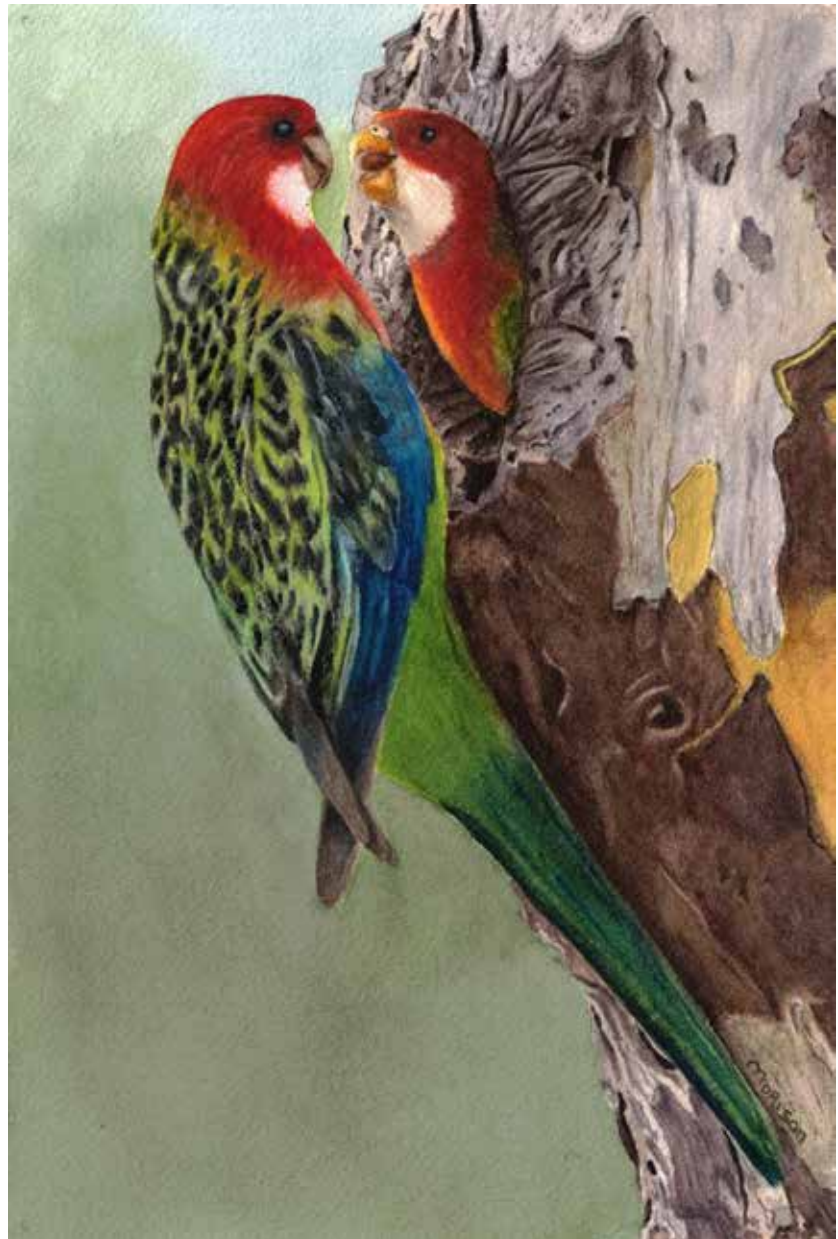
* * *

We are in an enviable position when you consider the abundance of local wildlife in Australia. Especially in Canberra, native birds and animals are very accessible, and some varieties reside with us in the suburbs. When it comes to our local bird species, the regularity with which we see and interact with them can lead us to underestimate their beauty.

The Eastern Rosella (*Platycercus eximius*) is an example of such beauty. A relatively common species in Canberra, this brightly coloured parrot can usually be seen partaking of native seeds and flowers either in the trees or on the ground in grassland. It wasn't until I started taking bird photography seriously that I really took the time to appreciate its aesthetic quality.

Starting with a bright red head (slightly less pronounced in the female) with bright white cheek flashes, the colouring sharply changes to a lemon-yellow breast, blending eventually through lime green to an almost iridescent blue/green in the tail. Cobalt patches on the wings give way to the distinctive black and yellow/green colouring on the back of the wings.

In this painting I depict a little tableau that I spotted while out picnicking at a popular Canberra gathering place. It was such a surprise to spot this female Eastern Rosella returning to a nest located so close to people and to see her almost-fledged chick emerge for its meal. I was so disappointed to have been there without my camera that I returned first thing the following morning and successfully photographed the scene. It is a great pleasure for me to be able to paint birds from my own photos. It was also



Title: Nested Medium: watercolour

a pleasure to donate this painting to the COGS Kambah Community Garden as a prize for their Open Day raffle (congratulations to the winner – Oliver Bennet from Queanbeyan).

In this painting, the chick is waiting to be fed by its mother. Both parents will feed the chicks while in nest, and the male will feed the female while she remains on the nest during the incubation of their eggs. The meal is called 'crop milk', which consists of the regurgitated seeds, flowers and

insects that have been consumed by the parent. A bonded pair of rosellas will mate for life and raise 4-5 chicks per clutch.

Eastern Rosellas can generally be seen at quite close range in the suburbs, but if you would like to attract them to your garden, plant flowering native plants and trees. Fresh water is a great way to attract many varieties of birds, but feeding them is discouraged by the Canberra Ornithologists Group.



summer planting guide

Mulch and compost

In summer it is a good idea to mulch your garden beds to help keep the soil cool and moist. One experiment showed that a 4 cm layer of straw reduced evaporation by 73%. Be careful not to lay down a thick layer of sawdust or lawn clippings that can pack down to form an impenetrable barrier to water.

Soil with lots of compost contains all the nutrients your plants need for strong, healthy growth. In addition well-composted soil retains water and acts like a sponge to keep your plants moist through dry summer days.

Heat protection

On days of extreme temperature your plants may need to be physically protected from the heat. This can be achieved by covering plants with shade cloth secured on a frame e.g. weldmesh or irrigation pipe bent over to form a tunnel, with shade cloth secured by pegs.

Watering

Try not to water the leaves of plants that are susceptible to fungal diseases (e.g. tomatoes, cucumbers, pumpkins and zucchinis) and try to water individual plants thoroughly, rather than watering a whole area.

Always follow water restrictions and check soil moisture before watering – a rostered watering day doesn't mean you must water.

Weeds

Keep weeds down. They compete with your plants for food, water and sunlight. It is best to tackle them when they are small – before removing them becomes an exhausting exercise.

Pests

Pests can multiply over summer. Don't reach for the pesticides. Observe if there are natural predators present, remembering that there will be a delay between the appearance of the pest and the subsequent buildup of its predators.

If you must spray, use an environmentally benign spray. Read books such as Jackie French's *Natural Pest Control*.

Harvesting

Make sure you harvest your crop regularly – in most cases this will encourage your plants to continue cropping and you can enjoy your produce at its peak.

Remember to leave space in your vegie patch for those winter vegetables that prefer to be planted in late summer to early autumn. Brassicas and other winter crops need time to mature before the extreme cold of winter sets in.

| | DEC | JAN | FEB |
|------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Bush beans | S | S | |
| Beetroot | S | S | S |
| Broccoli | ST | ST | T |
| Brussels sprouts | ST | ST | T |
| Cabbage | ST | ST | T |
| Carrots | S | S | S |
| Cauliflower | ST | ST | T |
| Celery | T | T | S |
| Chicory | S | S | S |
| Chinese cabbage | S | S | |
| Cucumber | ST | T | |
| Endive | S | S | S |
| Kohlrabi | ST | ST | T |
| Leeks | S | S | |
| Lettuce | ST | ST | ST |
| Marrows | T | | |
| Parsnips | S | S | S |
| Potatoes | S | S | |
| Radish | S | S | S |
| Silverbeet | ST | ST | T |
| Squash | ST | | |
| Swedes | | S | S |
| Sweet corn | ST | T | |
| Tomatoes | T | T | |
| Turnips | | S | S |

S = seed sowing; T = transplanting

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

Planting times will vary for different varieties of the one vegetable e.g. December plantings of heading lettuce varieties should be successful; while February plantings should be the butterhead varieties.

Want to contribute?
We'd love to hear from you!
Please send contributions to:
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 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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