



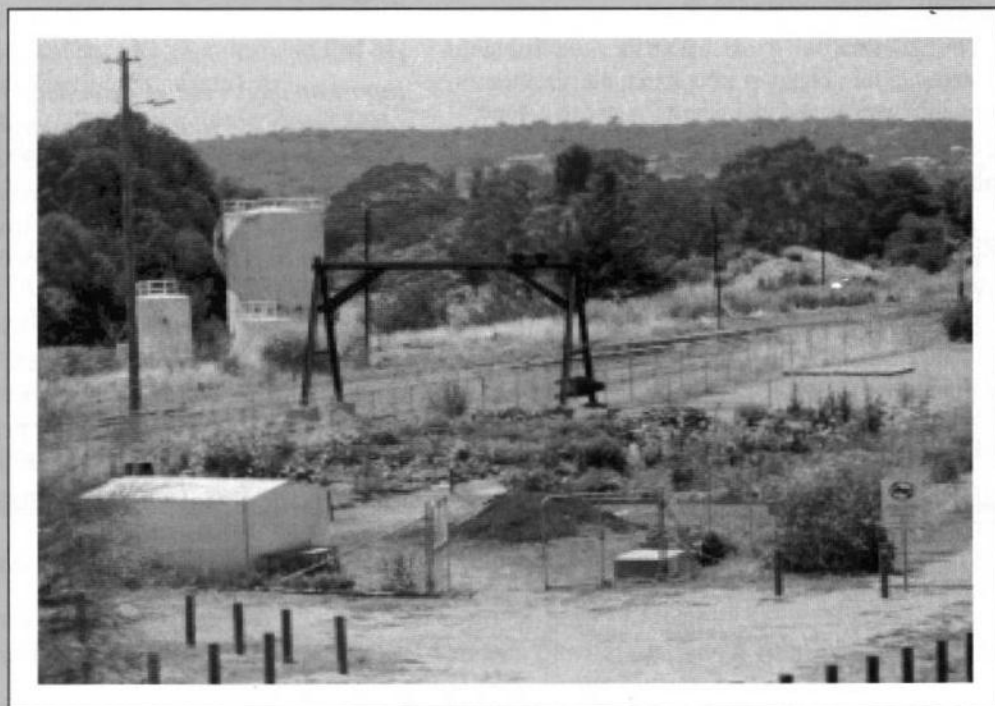
Summer 2005

# Canberra Organic

ORGANIC GROWING IN THE CANBERRA REGION

The quarterly publication of the Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.

**Charnwood Garden Renaissance, page 8** **Soil and Organic Gardening, page 12**  
**Where to Stow Your H<sub>2</sub>O, page 20** **Timing—When do you want to gather your produce? p23**  
**Gundaroo Open Gardens, page 24** **Plant Profile—Beans, page 28**  
**Summer Vegetable Planting Guide, page 31**



Vol. 13 No. 4

## CANBERRA ORGANIC

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Our circulation is currently 500.

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*Thanks to Arthur's Vegetable Clipart*

## From the Editor



*In this Summer issue of Canberra Organic there is  
plenty to motivate you to get busy in the garden. If  
you are just starting your Summer plantings, don't  
despair—Graeme Davis' tip is to delay planting until  
the soil warms up and to then seize the window of  
opportunity for fast summer growth (page 23). I  
hope he is right because my seed potatoes are  
growing long sprouts and my tomato seedlings are  
outgrowing their peat pots while I attend to the  
magazine ahead of them.*

*We have picture reports on the wonderful Gundaroo  
Village Festival held 5-6 November which included  
open days at Allsun Farm (pages 24 and 25) and a  
feature on the 'renaissance' at Charnwood  
community garden (page 8); a plant profile on Beans  
(page 28); and the COGS Summer planting guide  
(page 31). We are publishing Part 2 of Keith Colls'  
informative article on Soil and Organic Gardening  
(page 12) and Graham Walker has prepared another  
set of DIY projects (page 20), this time in the water  
storage line—practical, cheap and all with a smile.*

*Betty Cornhill got to the IFOAM conference in  
Adelaide—did anyone else in COGS go? - and it's  
no surprise that she enjoyed the experience  
immensely. Her report with pictures starts on page  
14, and she's sent along an IFOAM abstract about a  
one-cow organic farmer in India that you will enjoy  
(page 17).*

*On the local scene we have our Around the Gardens  
report on pages 6 and 7, an item on our seed saving  
night (page 26) that was a fun night presented by  
Graham Walker and Ray Harber, and another about  
a visit from the Sale Organic Group who took the  
initiative in coming to our seed saving night then  
joined us in visiting some of our community gardens  
(page 27).*

*Try and get to the COGS community gardens open  
day on Sunday 27 November. This time Charnwood,  
Mitchell and Queanbeyan will open at successive  
times on the same day so you can see three very  
different gardens. Details are on page 11.*

*Thank you for your continuing contributions and  
suggestions for future articles.*

*Enjoy your magazine,*

*Janet Popovic*



## From the President Summer 2005

With the weather, and the soil, warming up it's now the busiest time of the planting year in Canberra.

All the Summer vegetables can be planted over the next month. Of course, as always in Canberra, there is the chance of a late frost and some protection may be necessary for tender plants such as tomatoes, capsicums and eggplants. If you plan to grow cauliflowers, cabbages or Brussels sprouts for next Winter, don't forget to leave some space for planting these out in January.

### *Water restrictions*

On 1 November 2005 Stage 2 water restrictions were replaced by Stage 1 Conservation Measures which apply in both the ACT and Queanbeyan. Under these measures sprinklers and other irrigation systems can only be used between 6pm and 9am daily. Hand held hoses, watering cans and buckets can be used at any time. I have checked with ACTEW and "other irrigation systems" includes drippers and weeping hoses, *so unlike last Summer drippers must only be used during the allowed sprinkler hours.*

Once again, I remind members with plots in the COGS gardens that these ACTEW water conservation measures do apply in COGS gardens. Please make sure that you adhere to the allowed watering hours and the rules for the use of sprinklers and drippers. COGS rules also forbid any unattended watering in the gardens *i.e., if sprinklers, drippers or weeping hoses are used you must be present for the entire time that they are on.*

### *COGS Backyard*

Once again 'COGS Backyard', our demonstration garden, is struggling through a lack of volunteers to do the not very arduous work required. Recent working bees have been very poorly attended with the same two or three people the only ones to turn up. It's very disappointing that in an

organisation of more than 300 members so few find themselves able to help for an hour or two once a month. The dates of the working bees are published in each edition of *Canberra Organic* and regularly announced at the monthly meetings. The Xeriscape garden, where 'COGS Backyard' is located, is open to the public each weekend during Spring and Autumn and it reflects very badly on COGS if our garden is too often a 'demonstration' of weed growing. COGS Backyard has 64 sq metres of beautiful organic soil just waiting to be planted, nurtured and harvested if any member feels they could help out - of course you get to eat the produce too!

### *Open gardens*

Many members with a plot in one of the community gardens have expressed a desire to see some of the other gardens so on Sunday 27 November three of the gardens—Charnwood, Mitchell and Queanbeyan—will be open for members to visit. Members who visited the gardens COGS opened last Autumn found it very interesting to see how other gardeners grew and protected their vegetables as well as the variety of plants that were being grown and the ways problems were overcome. Each of the community gardens has its own unique character and I would encourage members to take advantage of this opportunity to see some of the gardens and talk to the gardeners. For directions and details of opening times please see page 11.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the committee and the garden conveners for the time and effort they have put in during the year to ensure the continued smooth running of COGS, and to wish everyone a safe and happy festive season.

**Adrienne Fazekas**

## STOP PRESS

COGS has been offered a wonderful, flat, sunny site in O'Connor for a new garden. Anyone interested in becoming involved in this garden please contact Adrienne.  
Ph: 6247 5882 Email: [president@cogs.asn.au](mailto:president@cogs.asn.au)

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		<i>Photos by Janet Popovic &amp; Ben Bradey</i>	

## Organic Gardening for Beginners Course

The next beginners gardening course will be held on Sunday afternoons commencing on 19 February and running until 12 March 2006. The course will be conducted by Keith Colls, former President of COGS and will take place at COGS Backyard, Xeriscape Gardens, Weston.

All enquiries should be directed to CIT Solutions on 6207 4441.



## Around the Gardens



### Cook

Cook garden is completely full for the first time in its four year history. The last two 'desert' like plots by the gate have disappeared under mountains of composted straw generously collected by Alan after this year's Canberra show and left to slowly decompose over the Winter. Six of the garden's members are growing their potatoes in this area over the summer months. The worms have already moved in and next Autumn a lucky gardener or two on the waiting list will be able to take over the plots. The new trees planted in our orchard during Winter are all thriving and the bees swarming out of the old, dead tree by the gate are still deciding whether or not to use the hive provided for them by Neil.

### Cotter

Anyone who attended the Cotter Gardens' AGM on Saturday, 10 September could not say that it was uneventful! After spreading a load of gravel on the dirt track from the gate to the shed, the hardy souls who had braved the elements to attend, perched on wet seats waiting for the next deluge while Andy Hrast briefed us on the finances etc. His voice was almost drowned out by the neighing of horses participating in a major event happening that weekend at the ACT Equestrian Park adjacent to our gardens. The working bee that followed the AGM had to be abandoned after a short while when the heavens opened.

Although the spring rains have been wonderful, they have resulted in a massive growth of weeds and we have had to tidy up some neglected or abandoned plots. At present there are two plots vacant - one 32 sq.m plot and the other 60 sq. m.

After several years in the job, Andy has retired as convener and we have taken it over. Thank you Andy for all that you contributed to the running of the Cotter Gardens.

*Roz and Trevor Bruhn*

### Holder

After the recent rains over the past few months it looks as though this season will be a wonderful time for gardening as the soil has moistened up and warmed nicely. Of course weeds, being first class opportunists, are powering along too. The growing conditions are so good that some of us have seen prepared areas just "disappear" within the last 2-3 weeks. Some gardeners already have crops of lettuce, silverbeet, leeks, onions and broad beans ready to eat. Our earlybirds have

started planting their tomatoes and other vegetables for the coming Summer. Some will have wonderful fresh salads ready for harvest from their plots shortly. There are also patches of colour from sweet peas, calendulas, poppies, and other flowers and herbs. The sweet peas smell wonderful. Raspberries and other soft fruits are also relishing the conditions and quickly leafing up and shooting upwards.

Just a reminder that in early Autumn 2006 Holder will be amongst the gardens "open" for other COGS members to come and see just what we are growing and how we are doing it. Lets get sowing, planting and growing so that we have some inspiring and productive gardens for our visitors to admire and be impressed by when they come to Holder.

Thanks are due to those members who have helped us by mowing around the pathways within the garden.

We have recently had a break in at our garden shed and a member's lawn mower plus the petrol can were stolen. Over the last year a few good quality hoses belonging to individual gardeners also "got up and walked". If you take your own tools, etc. to the plot please take them with you afterwards. Otherwise there is no guarantee that they will still be there the next time you want to use them, even if stored in the shed.

We currently have six plots available, one of which is a double plot. These are in various states of readiness for use—please get in touch if you are interested in joining us. The standard plot size at Holder is 9 x 5 square metres.

Happy gardening.

*Jane Andrews and Jen Johnston, co-conveners.*

### Kambah

Spring brought the sound of birds into the Kambah Gardens but it also brought the sound of children laughing as they discover the wonderful world of worms, grubs and bugs. This warm and wet weather has brought 5 new members to our garden, including 3 families so we now have lots of new children to join our existing 2 family groups. Two senior ladies have also joined our garden and have immediately demonstrated their years of experience and a youthful vigour that belies their years. Faizah minimises watering by planting in the bottom of trenches (approx 10-15 cms deep) with great success. Raija (from

Finland) already has ripe strawberries and is looking forward to new potatoes for Christmas. Both these ladies catch 2 buses to get to our garden so their dedication is applauded.

Our new members are most welcome and helped fill the void when Shirley (our convener) and Mary O moved on to greater things in their home gardens. We are very grateful for all the work that Shirley and Mary O contributed to the Kambah garden and we wish them happy gardening for the future.

We have 4 good plots awaiting new members and 3 plots that will require some recovery work before they are ready to be allocated. Tree roots have invaded a number of plots but hopefully the current rains will slow their invasion plans. We are advertising the Kambah Garden in a local newsletter and by letterbox drops to recruit new members. If you have people on your waiting list, perhaps they may also like to travel by bus to the Kambah Garden.

Broad beans, broccoli, snow peas, silverbeet, swiss chard and spring onions are currently showing good returns in the garden and green garden peas are eagerly awaited. Some gardeners planted asian greens after listening to Joyce Wilkie's great talk in February and had good results from Senposai, Kalian, Pak choi and two different mustards. We also found that successive crops of an Italian brassica germinated well right through winter but its 'turnip' flavour was not popular with everyone. Self-sown lettuce is appearing everywhere in the garden and provides a welcome contribution to the salad bowl.

Mowing the grass is a constant task, especially at this time of the year. We use the grass cuttings to control couch around the apple tree and for the compost bins. However a longer term solution will be to reduce the area to be mown, by allocating more plots, and sharing the workload. Mowing is necessary because snakes are now on the move and will continue to be around until the cold weather returns. Who is going to have the first ripe tomato?  
*Mary Coulson*

#### **Mitchell**

The Mitchell garden's influx of new members continues, with the garden pretty much full this year. One large patch of couch has been dug up and topped with a no-dig style garden. The birds got to the layers of straw, so a rather elaborate net structure was erected to keep everything in order. The other patch of couch has been taken over by another keen new gardener. So we are well on our way to eradicating the problem from Mitchell garden for the first time in several years.

While the rain has been welcome, it's starting to border on too much at this time of the year. Massive downpours don't do much to help the soil warm up for planting of summer crops. Our driveway has started to wash away and is making access difficult in some areas of the garden.  
*Don't forget to come to Mitchell on open day on 27 November between 1 and 2.30pm.*

*Ben Bradey*

#### **Queanbeyan**

That's our garden on the front cover of this issue. *Come and see us on the open day on 27 November between 3 and 4.30pm—see page 11 for more information.*

**For Sale—Two row-seeders for planting vegetable seeds. \$45 each. Phone: 6249 8323.**

### **A reminder about lawn mower safety**

With spring well advanced and grass growing whilst you watch, I thought it advisable to visit the Kambah Mower Centre for repairs to our second-hand (Scott Bonner) mower. It appears that our mower had been fitted with incorrect blades, that the throttle cable had been installed too high—near the engine where it could overheat, and that oil had entered the carburettor—probably because the mower had been tipped backwards (for cleaning underneath). Apparently mowers are designed to be kept level and should only be tipped in the appropriate direction. A quick squirt of 'Carb Clean' was the remedy.

With (4) correct blades and the cable refitted it is now a safe machine, thanks to the experience of a skilled technician. So when buying a second-hand mower, check the safety requirements in the handbook or take it to a skilled technician. Just because the engine starts doesn't mean it is OK!  
Mow, mow, mow the grass.....  
**Mary, Kambah Garden**

## Charnwood Renaissance brings order to the wilderness



*Garry in El Paradiso, Charnwood community garden. Photo by Sophia Williams.*

**The members of the Charnwood Community Garden invite COGS members to come and check us out on the Members visiting day, Sunday 27 November. Our timeslot is from 11.00 to 12.30pm, so bring a steak and a cold drink. The BBQ will be on.**

Our garden highlights include:

**The Community Orchard:** While space permits, members can be allocated two fruit tree spots in the garden—free of charge. Existing trees undergo ‘adoption’ to interested parties.

**Chooks:** A wonderful addition to the garden. They produce eggs, recycle all the kitchen and garden waste, and fertilise the soil. They are our unpaid workers. There is a variety of feathered

occupants: chickens, ducks and turkeys... Sometimes we joke “Where’s the pig?”

**Bees:** Mark has a number of bee hives in the garden and we are sure it helps our productivity. Possibly available to other gardens if you ask.

**Paradise:** Garry calls his plot El Paradiso or “Paradise”. You have to see it to believe it. White picket fence, fountain, the works...

**Ray’s Hot House:** A previously unused garden structure was converted into a hothouse this year and has enabled the garden to get a good start with most plants. Ray is also very inventive and adventurous in the crops he grows.

**Fence line plots:** The garden has turned fences into a productive asset by promoting fence line



*L to R: Up the garden path; gate to El Paradiso; space saving plot; resident turkey. Photos by Sophia Williams.*



plots to gardeners who want to grow vines and climbers. In return they keep the outside of the fence in order. Standard fees apply.

*The Recreation area:* Complete with Kitchen Sink and netball pole. Excellent shade in the hot summers.

*Kids Corner:*

Tucked away, nice and shady and the kids have fun while mum and dad garden.



renaissance—or rebirth.

Before then, through circumstances, it had become pretty run down. Declining membership, thefts, and patchy administration had seen it bump to a low of about four plot holders, all committed gardeners but struggling to maintain such a large area, especially in the hot summers.



When I joined the garden in about April 2002, the only

The origins of Charnwood garden are lost in suburban folklore, although I have it on good authority that it was one of the first gardens in Canberra, and was paced-out by none other than Shirley Carden who was one of the founders of COGS.

*Left to right: The hot house; one of the bee hives*

About 4,000 square metres in total, the garden is fortunate in that it has ACT Government installations on two sides—an Urban Services Depot to the South and the Charnwood Netball courts on the West.

This has a number of advantages for us. Firstly, there is ample sealed car parking outside the garden gate. Secondly, there is a regular deposit of woodchips outside the Urban Services Depot which have over the years helped to build up what was a very depleted soil—basically rock and clay.

When it was originally established the garden would have overlooked grazing lands. Now it overlooks Dunlop suburb—which is great because walking-past traffic has helped us build our membership. Many members live within walking distance.

Since about 18-months ago, the Charnwood Garden has underdone something of a

tenants in the garden were: John (also the Convener and treasurer); Carmen and Robert , Borek and another Carmen.

At that time the place was a bit of a jungle. There were overgrown plots, a large amount of weed cover on non-developed areas and rubbish in the corners. A sad and rickety swing set that sat among the long grass was dismantled during a working bee because it was deemed unsafe.

In the middle of this, the enthusiasm of John to keep the garden alive has to be noted. John claims to have carried in thousands of cubic metres of woodchips and dirt, and in so doing has built the topsoil in many of the areas in the garden. Having seen him at work with a shovel, I cannot doubt this.

John’s enthusiasm for growing spuds and-pumpkins seemed only to be matched by his dedication to digging long runs guided by his orange rope, in which he would promptly plant more potatoes. We secretly refer to him as “Spudman” capable of leaping the fence in a single bound!

While John was spud-farming Carmen and Robert were busy in the western end of the



*L to R: Melissa and Tim with Tess and Nicholas; Behind these neatly planted rows is a relaxation area; John dug over and built up the soil in much of the garden. Photos by Sophia Williams and Janet Popovic.*

## Charnwood renaissance continued . . .

garden, at one stage working five plots, before the installation of their fruit trees in the summer of 2003.

As the work load became too much, Carmen let some of the vegetable plots go, and as of September 2005, has actually ceased in the veggie plot area, but is still working on a fruit orchard.

Back in April 2002, I was a real beginner. The biggest mistake I made was to assume that everything that had wooden borders around it was good.

This may be so in some areas but if there is rampant couch in the garden, like we have, I think the borders just get in the road of couch control. Bare earth borders are easily the best.

I have discouraged new members from using edges because of this.

The other thing I did was to assist John as the Convener by recruiting new members into the garden. A notice in my workplace yielded Melissa and Tim in the autumn of 2004.

It was around spring of 2004 that Garry arrived and took on the meanest part of the garden—Snake Gully—that no one else wanted to touch.

His care and attention literally transformed this area into his own little paradise. His crops are terrific and his 54 square metre space produces a huge amount of food. It shows that you don't need a big space to be productive. He also pays for otherwise unusable space and has literally turned it into an Australian gardening showpiece, with goldfish, worm farm, chooks, and ducks and complete with espresso machine and alfresco setting.

As a retired chef from the Café Latte side of Canberra, Garry is also very helpful at suggestions of how to improve gardens and even how to cook the produce!

He carries a love of gardening from his childhood and has an extended family that takes a lot of interest in his progress, supplies seedlings and helps him eat the produce.

Garry's influence on the garden was, from the outset, very positive. He could see the potential for a well-run garden that would enable many gardeners from the surrounding suburbs to enjoy the experience of sharing a garden with others.

It was Garry who also introduced chickens to the

garden, and was shortly followed by myself and Tim and Melissa. Ray and Patricia came along later with their beautiful ducks, sadly lost to dogs or foxes one dark night.

In January of 2005 John stepped down from the Convener's position and Garry was elected Convener, with me as Treasurer. Over a couple of months, all plots were remeasured to bring the garden allocations up to date.

This period coincided with a boost in membership. We had walk-ins and referrals and found membership increasing rapidly. A letter writing campaign to local businesses yielded some sponsorship, but the real improvement in the garden came from the increased membership base.

Through the doors came Mark with his bee hives, Warren and Sharon, Ray and Patricia, John and Carmen, Ron and Bernadette, and then later Renae and Michael.

I took over from Garry as Convener in April this year, and Ray took on the task of Treasurer and Plot Master.

Ray has done a great job and this is illustrated by the fact that all of our plot fees are in for the year, and that we are now one of the most productive gardens in the COGS network in terms of our plot fees contributions.

In my view all gardeners must realise how fortunate they are that COGS exists and we must do our best to ensure its financial health.

We now have more than 20 members and meet on a monthly basis to ensure orderly running of the garden. Our current let area is about 2,300 square metres, which includes areas of the garden that have never before been cultivated.

Each weekend, children are frequently sighted in the garden. Tim and Melissa have been especially interested in introducing the youngsters, including their children Nicholas and Tess, to the pleasures of the garden.

In good weather, family picnics in the shade of the recreation area make for good memories.

Without doubt Charnwood Garden is on the 'up and up'. The weed jungle has been tamed and replaced with a vibrant, productive community garden which the members enjoy.

**Stephen Dangaard,  
Convener, Charnwood garden**

# COGS Community Gardens Open Day

27 November 2005



## —Program—

11am—12.30pm • Charnwood community garden  
*(located off Lhotsky Street, Charnwood,  
near Charnwood netball courts)*  
Bring something to BBQ if you wish

1pm—2.30pm Mitchell community garden  
*(located at the city end of Hoskins Street,  
Mitchell, past ACTEW)*



3pm—4.30pm Queanbeyan community garden  
*(located on Henderson Road,  
Queanbeyan, immediately west of the  
railway station)*



This is your opportunity to be inspired to grow organically this Summer.  
Come and see three of the eleven COGS community gardens —  
all different, all wonderful.

Speak to your fellow COGS members, discover some new plants and  
get some tips and tricks to make your own garden grow!

Don't miss it!

For further information you can contact the garden conveners  
whose details are listed on page 32 of this magazine.

# Soil and Organic Gardening Part 2

Part 1 of this article by Keith Colls on *Soil and Organic Gardening* was published in *Canberra Organic*, Spring 2005, pages 10-15. It dealt with Soil Characteristics, Physical Properties, Chemical Properties, including plant nutrient needs and controlling soil acidity. *Editor*

## Chemical Properties continued—

### Identification of Nutrient Deficiencies and Toxicities

Each nutrient has a range of specific roles in the biochemistry of a plant. Lack of particular elements disrupts these biochemical processes and produces visible symptoms in the plant. Some symptoms are specific to particular plants such as blossom end rot in tomatoes caused by calcium deficiency (usually due to irregular watering) but often general symptoms in the leaves can identify nutrient problems which can be dealt with by the gardener through soil management.

While the identification of nutrient deficiency can be quite complex, especially where there are interacting deficiencies and resulting stress on the plant has also led to disease or pest attack. However, the first step is to identify whether the older or newer leaves are the most affected. The nutrient elements nitrogen, phosphorus, magnesium, potassium, molybdenum are very mobile within a plant and consequently deficiencies appear on the oldest leaves first. Calcium, sulphur, iron, copper, zinc and boron are relatively immobile in a plant and deficiencies first show up on the youngest leaves and shoots. Manganese deficiencies can affect both old and new leaves. The COGS handout, *Nutrient Deficiencies in your Plants. How to*

*Identify and Correct them – Organically*, summarises these symptoms. More detailed descriptions can be found in the CSIRO publication *Food for Plants*, in Weir and Cresswell and in Handreck and Black.

### Capacity of soil to store nutrients

Some soils have a greater capacity to store plant nutrients than others but good soil management can increase that capacity. The very small soil particles *viz*, clay and humus, play an important role in the capacity of soil to store nutrients and facilitate access by plant roots to those nutrients.

Plant nutrients are present in the soil as ions. These are nutrient elements with a positive electrical charge (called cations) or a negative charge (called anions). The particles of clay and humus are also charged, usually negatively, consequently these soil particles are surrounded by a cloud of nutrient ions held in place by the electrical attraction of oppositely charged ions. This is a dynamic process and there is a constant exchange of ions with those dissolved in the soil water. The tiny root hairs through which plants absorb nutrients are also charged and give off hydrogen ions so there is also a continual exchange of ions between the roots and the soil water, or where they are in direct contact with clay and humus particles, with the cloud of ions surrounding those particles.

The capacity of soil particles to attract a cloud of nutrient ions varies greatly. A commonly used measure of this capacity is called the cation exchange capacity, known as the CEC and is measured in units of milliequivalents per 100g. The following table compares the CEC of various common soil particles and humus.

Clay	CEC	Meq/100g
Smectite (common in the black soils of northern NSW)	High	150
Vermiculite	High	150
Chlorite	Medium	50
Illite	Medium	50
Kaolinite (common clay particle in Canberra)	Very low	10
Humus	High to very high	150-500

Humus is the relatively stable part of soil organic matter remaining after the major portions of plant and animal remains have been decomposed. It consists of large organic molecules containing mainly

carbon, hydrogen and oxygen but also considerable amounts of nitrogen and sulphur as well as lesser amounts of other elements. Clearly, because of the high CEC of humus, the organic gardening method of adding organic matter which is eventually broken down into humus will greatly increase the soil's ability to hold nutrients. This is illustrated by the following table taken from a

study of clay and organic matter contents and cation exchange capacities of topsoils from the main soil groups of the Canberra area (J R Sleeman and P H Walker, CSIRO Division of Soils, Soils and Land Use Series, No. 58, 1979 – quoted in Handreck and Black). Note the increase in CEC with addition of organic matter in the italicised section of the table.

<b>% Clay</b>	8	9	10	10	<i>11</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>11</i>	14	16	18	20	23	25
<b>% Organic Matter</b>	1.9	1.6	1.8	2.9	<i>1.3</i>	<i>3.3</i>	<i>7.9</i>	3.1	4.2	4.2	3.6	7.3	5.8
<b>CEC (Meq/100g)</b>	9.6	8.7	8.8	10.7	<i>8.1</i>	<i>9.1</i>	<i>16.3</i>	11.8	15.8	15.3	15.3	22.5	26.5

### Biological Properties

A healthy soil is teeming with living organisms besides plants, the vast majority of which are beneficial to plants. They are an essential component of healthy soil. One cubic metre of top soil contains about 2.5 kg of living organisms such as earthworms, millipedes, ants, nematodes, protozoa etc and other micro-organisms. This soil life is essential for releasing nutrients back into the soil in a form available to plants. A healthy soil life also helps to ensure that disease causing agents are kept within acceptable limits.

Organic gardening encourages the maintenance of this soil life by avoiding the addition of chemicals to the soil which will destroy parts of this life and avoiding the use of gardening methods which will interfere with the natural interactions which occur within this soil life. Even acceptable organic pesticides can have a devastating affect on soil life, for example, rotenone (derris dust) (see *National Standard for Organic and Biodynamic Produce*) which is sometimes used by organic growers for controlling aphids and caterpillars is highly toxic to earthworms.

It is beyond the scope of this article to describe the great variety of this soil life and the role of each in maintaining a healthy soil and healthy plants.\*

The soil environment such as its wetness, temperature, types and amount of organic matter it contains, types of minerals, oxygen supply, pH etc affects the types of organisms in the soil. For example, fungi prefer drier and more acid soil than bacteria consequently as soil becomes drier or more acid the microbial life of the soil has an increasing proportion of fungi. Many of these factors such as wetness, type and amount of organic matter, oxygen supply to the root zone, and pH are within the control of the gardener. The two most common methods by which

gardeners exploit the soil life is in the making of compost and in the encouragement of earthworms. A great deal of information on the nature, function and importance of the various aspects of soil life can be found in standard textbooks such as Handreck and Black.

### Conclusion

The foundation of successful organic gardening is the condition of the soil in which our plants grow. It is the soil which provides the majority of nutrients needed by plants and, consequently, much of the effort of the organic gardener is devoted to ensuring that the soil is in a condition which allows plants to access those nutrients efficiently and sustainably. The gardener will then be rewarded with a plentiful supply of nutritious and delicious food.

\*See Sandra Norman's article *The Soil Food Web*, *Canberra Organic*, Spring 2005, page 22.

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Keith Colls

## IFOAM—The Chance of a Lifetime Experienced

After my car accident I thought I was going to have to miss the Conference because my knee had a lump on it the size of an emu's egg and I was supposed to rest it and put ice packs on it.

I had a week or so to get it better, so using all the power of my mind, I kept sending messages to my knee to get better quickly. I felt that because NASAA had organised this Conference and I had booked to go, I didn't want to let NASAA down after they had so kindly made me a Life Member.

Besides I had paid for my attendance and for my hotel booking and the two exciting-looking tours, so I decided to be bold and go and I rang Virgin and asked for a wheelchair at Adelaide Airport. The wheelchair at Adelaide Airport consisted of a huge 6-footer who came aboard the plane and asked me if I could walk down the steps off the plane. Picturing myself being carried off the plane by the stranger I quickly said yes, and then had to walk quite a long way on the wet tarmac and through the airport before reaching a taxi. At least the giant carried all my luggage except my handbag. I couldn't help thinking Canberra was better than that. I must add that on my return trip, a nice young lady and a wheelchair were provided, and while waiting I enjoyed the company of Don Allan who writes an amusing column in the *Canberra Chronicle*.

I really wish that you could all have experienced this Conference in Adelaide. The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) has a Scientific Conference every three years, in countries like Denmark, Switzerland, Canada, Argentina. The one I did not fancy going to was in Burkina Faso, where they had just experienced a military coup. That did not appeal to me, but I believe it was very successful in helping the local population to avoid a famine after the wars.

In Adelaide they had put me in the same hotel as Jan Denham who was Convener of the whole conference, and she looked after me as though I

was her grandmother, getting taxis for me or driving me in her car when there was any distance to go. She was really wonderful to me.

My first tour was a pre-conference tour to the Cooyong, a Nature Reserve and Bird Sanctuary where local Aborigines live and work. There is an Aboriginal Museum there where a young Aboriginal talked to us about his tribe and the meaning of the weaving they do, and showed us artefacts which were thousands of years old.

After the two hour trip my leg had become very swollen and painful, so when the others went off on a Bush Tucker walk, I stayed with the bus driver and a large telescope which was left for us by David—the guide who joined us from his home in the reserve, who knew just about everything about birds, flowers and native animals and was happy to share his knowledge with us.

Later we had a delicious lunch in a restaurant restored and rebuilt by an Aboriginal family. We had a choice of fish caught that day in the huge lagoon outside the windows, or kangaroo meat, but most of us had a taste of each. The fish was really good, as only fresh fish can be. The kangaroo meat was very similar to beef.

David entertained us with many stories and information on the return journey until we reached the place where his wife was waiting to take him down the long side road to his home.

On the outward trip we had had a lady guide who told us all about the city of Adelaide from its foundation to the present day, and pointed out all the buildings of interest as we passed. I had never been to Adelaide, so enjoyed this very much. I was especially interested to hear that no convicts came to Adelaide, and many of the early settlers were aristocrats, certainly a cut above the average convict! This meant that the city was planned and built by these proud immigrants from the start.

The highlight of the Opening Ceremony of the

*L to R: Children performing at the Opening Ceremony; the Italians brought cheese!; the new World Board.*



conference was the dance by children dressed as Ladybirds, Lacewings, Dragonflies and other good bugs. This was so popular that they had to do encores while we in the audience stood up to take photos, and there was much shouting and clapping.

Later at the Banquet, they gave a repeat performance amid enthusiastic applause. Also at the Banquet several people were honoured including Alex Podolinsky, the founder of Biodynamic Agriculture in Australia. The BD group in NSW had put on very extensive pre-Conference tours in NSW and QLD, and there was also one in Victoria and two in WA. On these tours one is shown many organic and BD farms which are not as badly affected by drought as conventional ones.

The scientific part of the Conference consisted of papers given by researchers from all over the world on diverse subjects related to organic growing. I attended four or five a day, but there were many more I would have liked to have heard, because this is how you learn about new things such as Sonic Bloom and Effective Microorganisms (EM), which are useful in helping plants to grow well. One amazing story I have just read in the abstracts is about “A Successful Organic Farmer with One Cow Dairy” in India. I will photocopy the extract, as it seems to me to show what the small farmer can do, not only in India, but in many poorer countries, even in Australia.

Every lecture I attended a seat was found for me and I was treated with the utmost courtesy. When I got up courage to join in the discussions, the room became silent and they listened to my ‘words of wisdom’ so that made me feel good. Someone came up to me at lunchtime and said “I’m glad you said that about Sir Albert Howard’s cattle in India rubbing noses with the

Indian cattle and not getting Foot and Mouth from them because Sir Albert’s cattle were fed on compost grown fodder”. This was the beginning of Organics.

There is much more I could tell you about the Conference—the World Organic Festival held on the Adelaide Racecourse, where there were all sorts of stalls and it was fun to taste the different foods, and where I managed to buy some very interesting books. Among these was a little book called “Advanced Biodynamic Agriculture, How to make Biodynamics work better” by Hugh Lovel. I found several chapters on how to make rain. I have known for some time that Biodynamic farmers can do this, but have never found out how! This bears out my theory that biodynamic agriculture is the farming method of the future in Australia.

There was also my visit to the Food Forest, a permaculture property about two hours’ bus trip from Adelaide. This was a very good tour, and the property is well worth a visit if you are ever in South Australia.

Last of all was the General Assembly where all the business of IFOAM is conducted.

Three years ago in Canada I had made the suggestion that IFOAM set up a course for primary schools, so that children could be taught about organic growing, and take the knowledge home to their parents. This was voted one of the best ideas and was passed to the World Board after the brainstorming session, but in the three years since nothing had been done. Linda, an ex-president of the World Board, helped me to put it to the General Assembly, and just before I had to leave to catch my plane for home, it was voted on and passed. I left with a delighted grin on my face amid loud applause. **Betty Cornhill**

*Left to right: Jan Denham with conference giant, Betty Cornhill and Aini from Zambia, Betty with giant. Photos supplied by Betty Cornhill.*



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## A SUCCESSFUL ORGANIC FARMER WITH ONE COW DAIRY

Ashwini, K.M. and Krishna Moorthy, V.  
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Adyanadka - 574 260  
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### INTRODUCTION

Agriculture with dairy makes organic farming more successful and sustainable. The present story is about Mr. Sanjeeva Bunta (49) a small farmer with about 1.5 h land who is successfully managing his farm becoming 100% organic in 2001.

### METHODOLOGY

Mr. Sanjeeva Bunta, a farmer in Moodambailu, Karnataka State, owns 0.34 h of irrigated and 0.24 h of rain-fed land. In addition, he has 1.00 h land with user - right, wherein he has planted cashewnut and forest plants, which provide the dry litter and green leaves for manure.

Multiple cropping system: He has adopted the multiple perennial cropping system with arecanut, coconut, black pepper, banana, cashewnut breadfruit, pineapple, cocoa, vanilla and vegetables. A few honeybee colonies are also maintained. The farm has adopted rainwater-harvesting techniques.

One cow dairy: Interestingly he has a one-cow dairy. Systematic maintenance of the cow is the most important feature of his farming, which provides milk, gas for cooking / light and manure for his plants and cash to his family. The cow dung is fed to gobar gas unit for gas production. Toilet waste is also connected to this gas unit. The spent slurry is used either to make compost by the VRF method (Moorthy et.al. 1998) or directly fed to plant basins. He gets a gross income of Rs.42, 395/- from his dairy and net income in Rs.12, 500/- (One US \$= Rs.45/-). His indirect income from dairy in the form of energy, milk and manure is estimated at Rs.7115/-.

Income from mixed agriculture: Mr. Sanjeeva Bunta cannot boast of very high income from agriculture. But due to mixed farming and low input costs, his income is sustainable and attractive. He earns a net profit of Rs.44, 565/- from his farming activities.

Good income, happy family: Mr. Sanjeeva Bunta and his wife Mrs. Devika for their joint efforts earn a net profit of Rs. 64,180/- (2003 data), resulting in a monthly average income of Rs.5,348/-. This is quite attractive in a village. The couple has a small house with electricity, television, phone, tap water etc. Further, they also own a two-wheeler. Their three children are being provided with good education.

### CONCLUSION

Organic farming is not only a farming method but also a life style. Mr. Sanjeeva Bunta's model fits into this and is worthy of emulation, especially by small and marginal farmers.

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## Beautiful Holiday House

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## Australian Open Gardens Braidwood

26 and 27 November 2005

Four gardens will open in Braidwood—

Birchgrove  
St Omer  
Lisdaleen  
The Shoemakers.

*This event is being run in conjunction with the  
"Airing of the Quilts Weekend."*

## COGS Backyard - Xeriscape Gardens



*COGS Backyard, Xeriscape, Weston in November 2005—Top left to right: garden view from western corner; herbs framing bed just planted with potatoes, carrots and beetroot; Bottom left to right: last season's green manure bed awaiting planting of tomatoes, capsicum and eggplant; broad beans and peas straining the bird netting. Photos by JP.*

Please try and join the next COGS Backyard working bee to be held on Saturday 26 November, 2-4pm, so that it is neat and tidy before the Christmas vacation period. Enter through the gate on Unwin Place, Weston (just past the Police complex and opposite Orana School). Offers of assistance with maintenance over the Christmas/ New Year period would be much appreciated by your COGS Committee. Perhaps our community gardens could take turns on a roster basis—Charnwood, Cook and Mitchell have been the main contributing gardens in the last eighteen months.

**Thank you** to the following COGS members who have helped at COGS Backyard in recent months:

*Peter Cornhill, Adrienne Fazekas, Robin McKeown, and Janet Popovic.*

and at the Down to Earth Expo: *Ben Bradey, Mary Coulson, Adrienne Fazekas, Janet Popovic, Richard and Mary Ann Reed, Sophia Williams.*

A further Actew Corp *irrigation workshop* will be held at Xeriscape on 1 December. This will cover installing and using drip irrigation and its benefits; mulching; and drought tolerant plants. Entry is by gold coin donation but you need to phone 6248 3131 to book a place.

### Organic garden needs new members

Mugga Mugga Community Garden is located near the historic Mugga Mugga homestead in Symonston, not far from Red Hill, Narrabundah, Griffith, O'Malley etc. The garden is not run by COGS but is organic. It is a small garden about 20m x 8m, fully fenced, with an automatic drip watering system and a fertile clay soil.

We are looking for one or two more interested individuals or families to join us in working this garden to its full potential. If you are interested please contact—

**Peter Cornhill on 6295 9851 after 7pm weekdays or at weekends.**

## Where to Stow your H<sub>2</sub>O— water storage options for all sizes and budgets

Regular readers (OK, recent readers) of *Canberra Organic* will know what a stingy so-and-so I am, hobbling together for a few bucks what Bunnings would skin you a hundred for—like compost bins for example. Well, I covered both routes in my water storage regime, going for the DIY professional approach, a moderate small-scale cop-out approach and a downright shonky large-scale ultra-cheap final option, which is the one I am most proud of. I mentioned some of this briefly in previous ramblings, but I'd like to share all three with you here in detail, my organic comrades, as water is one of our most precious resources. It also happens to fall from the sky for free—you just need to collect it.

### 1. DIY professional tanks

Option one was a professional 6000 (maybe 8000?) litre plastic tank, which after paying \$1000 odd dollars for the tank, I was less than keen to have professionally installed. You can save about \$1000 again with a few concessions if you're prepared to install it yourself. Here's what to do:

- Select a solid piece of ground close to your house (but not too close—check where your plumbing *etc.*, is because if you need to get to it a full water tank is problematic to move), and level off the ground.
- We decided to make our base out of hardwood pallets and cinder blocks, as these are cheap or free to obtain. It won't give you a high tank, which is bad if you need the height to drive the water around an uneven block, but will keep it under 2m tall, which is superb for avoiding the costly and arse-paining engineering certificates.
- A trip to Aussie Junk or Revolve, a paradise for bodge-it-up gardening projects, is your best bet for inlet pipe and maybe even connectors, but the latter, tape and sealant may have to be purchased at (God forbid!)

full price. Insert the tank inlet and overflow into your downpipe.

- Block some of the other downpipes with blocks of wood with nails or hooks stuck into them (for removal—I learnt the hard way) to get maximum catchment. Next time you have good rain, check you don't have water pooling anywhere; if so, unblock the downpipe in that area.

### 2. A moderate small-scale cop-out approach

The big tank is a winner for house roof water, but I soon saw drips and at times torrents being wasted off my sheds. I also wanted somewhere to store overflow from my main tank, and a source I could easily dip the watering can into closer to my garden beds. This is the cheapskate gardener's alternative to those fat drum-sized tanks you'll pay *circa* \$100-150 at the corporate bully-boys; here's what I did:

- Source some clean 44-gallon drums that have been used for storage of grain or other animal feeds. If you get molasses drums, clean them thoroughly. NEVER use chemical or fuel drums.
- Make a stand close to your garden beds out of a hardwood pallet, once again sourced from the lost-pallets home, and four cinder blocks. Stack the four drums onto it—they'll fit quite neatly.
- The next step depends on how you want to empty them—I've gone for the don't-need-a-gym-membership bucket watering technique, syphoning, or most recently an electric pump. You could also drill holes in the bottom of the drums and attach a tap fitting.
- I fill these drums from my main tank whenever it looks like rain or from runoff from my small garden shed, and use the water when I'm just watering a small portion of my beds, my herb garden or seedling pots.



Left: Protank—my professional but DIY installed tank (Option 1). Far Right: Drums on crate—overflow tanks for dipping the watering can into (Option 2). Centre: Drum under a shed gutter.

Projects and photos by  
Graham Walker



### 3. A downright shonky large-scale ultra-cheap final option

A few words came to mind when this plan hatched one sunny morning at Aussie Junk as I sifted through other people's trash—'harebrained', 'ludicrous', 'economical', and of course 'got to be done'. Put simply, you convert an old above ground swimming pool into a water tank, ending up with a product that stores almost as much water as a professional tank (option 1) but costs about 1/10<sup>th</sup> of the price! Here's what I did (try it if you dare):

- Buy an old above ground pool; basically finely corrugated flexible sheet metal in a long strip. I paid \$12 for my first one, and around that for the rest of them depending on size.
- Select a spot close to some serious runoff you don't already collect; I chose our two-car garage. Unroll your pool and see how big it is, and more importantly, how much bigger space you have.
- Level off the area and lay it with some plastic (nice, but not essential) and then several layers of cardboard (see picture). Bike shops are the primo source for free cardboard for mulch underlay or whatever. Get all the staples out first.
- Place your pool on the cardboard and unroll it. If you don't use its full length, you'll need to drill holes in it to connect it as a loop. You should have a hole every 10cm—don't, as I did initially, underestimate the weight of a few thousand litres (hence

kilograms!) of water! Use zinc plated flat head screws, about \$3 a pack from the hardware shop.

- Fold newspaper, cardboard or similar into the right angle around inside of the pool where it touches the ground to block up any gaps.
- Line the pool with heavy plastic (4m wide is about \$3-4 per metre), preferably two layers.
- In theory, if your pool is perfectly round you shouldn't need additional support. Theories being what they are, I'd suggest a whole lot of *evenly spaced* star pickets round the circumference.
- If you don't want a round pool (my option as the space wasn't round), you'll need to do some serious bracing. Remember, the water is pushing out in all directions and it's essential to have the forces balanced, ie. a sausage-shaped pool will work so long as the long edges are braced. Any pool will tend toward wanting to be round, and put up a sizeable battle to obtain it!
- Bracing is done by attaching the tops of *evenly spaced* star pickets with threaded rod. Hammer your pickets in so the holes face each other, pop the threaded rod (about \$10 for 3m at big hardware joints) through them, then secure with nuts and washers. It's terribly important that the pickets are adjacent so that the pool doesn't bulge out at the wider gaps.
- Importantly, cover the tank with a solid cover, either pallets, ply or similar, to stop it being a pit trap for local animals and a breeding site for mozzies. I'm yet to nut out the best option, but pallets covered with a



*Above Left: Lay the plastic—preparing the site for a pool-tank. This corner was ideal as it was a hard to use space close to two downpipes. Above Right: The downpipe from the shed that feeds my larger pool-tank.*

*Projects and photos by Graham Walker*

tarp or an old tent fly (also easily found second hand) with an elastic collar are a goer. Alternatively, bung some fish it.

- Being a slight loony, I think similar constructions could be made from old rolling garage doors or similar, but it would be well worth doing the sums and proceeding with caution with any tall structures as the water is very heavy.

### Emptying your water storage

Having saved so much on a tank, I invested in pump (lovely how that logic works aint it!). This is a great option if you have a big plot and no time to hand water, need to get the water a distance from your pool-tank to your plot or don't fancy hand watering. An entry-level household pump with auto cut off goes for \$200-300... a bit less than many people shell out for excess water bills annually.

For a professional tank with the outlet at the bottom, the sheer weight of water will push water 15-20 metres along flat ground at more than adequate pressure for hand watering, so long as you use a large bore pipe. Black flexible irrigation pipe (available at Bunnings Fyshwick) is an excellent cheap option to get from tank to beds, with flexible stuff like a greywater hose at the end to water plants or fill drums.

### In a nutshell...

***Building your own tanks can be fun and economical. It saves a free resource that many pay for. It also helps you get closer to self-sufficiency and sustainable gardening—a quest we should all strive for.***

Graham Walker



*Above Left: The finished big pool-tank.*

*Above Right: A smaller version of the pool-tank near my beds at home. Note the star picket bracing. "My enthusiasm to finish before a big storm overtook my memory to take pictures of all the building stages", adds Graham.*

*Projects and photos by Graham Walker.*

## The Alternative Technology Association Contented Chook Awards

As Australians are renowned for their innovation, adaptability and creativity, we have some of the best chook houses in the world! If you think you—and your chook shed—have these qualities, consider entering the Contented Chook Awards—closing December 31, 2005.

There are three categories—Urban (this structure must be within an area with designated street lighting); Rural/Regional; and Design Category.

It is expected that structures will protect chooks from the elements and that they will comply with local government regulations on poultry housing.

***Further information from the website [ata.org.au](http://ata.org.au) or contact Frith Kennedy on 03-9419 2440.***

## Timing—When do you want to gather your produce?

At the COGS general meeting on 25 October **Graeme Davis**, a member of both COGS and The Horticultural Society of Canberra, set out his thoughts on timing—how to get flowers and vegetables ready when you want them. Graeme is well qualified to advise in this area as he is renowned for his prize-winning daffodils, dahlias and vegetables. However, he modestly explained his focus on timing is in terms of planning harvests to coincide with his availability and a convenient time for the family to process and preserve the edible produce. As an organic grower Graeme's main aim is to grow produce really well and to harvest on the right day.

To grow well plants need to be growing at the time when conditions are best for them—thriving plants are less subject to disease, require less attention, and will produce bigger returns. The planting guidelines found in manuals generally refer to when you *can* plant rather than when you *should* plant. Many gardeners get the urge to plant as soon as Spring arrives but, for example, in Canberra tomatoes can be hit by frost and be set back by cool periods and potatoes planted too early can suffer from blight when conditions are still cool and wet. Similarly, onions set out in July grow very slowly and can quickly go to seed or split when Spring warmth arrives. Graeme noted that a gentleman who moved to Canberra in the 1940s and had kept records since then observed that it was a waste of time planting onions in July for these reasons.

*If you want good results with minimum bother—*

- wait long enough for the soil to warm up
- utilise the mid summer window that aids fast growth.

### **Suggested timing for Canberra planting:**

**Onions**—plant in September.

**Tomatoes**—plant one or 2 plants after Melbourne Cup Day if you want some salad tomatoes around Christmas/ New Year; plant mostly late November or early December to produce big crops of healthy tomatoes for cooking and preserving in March/ April.

**Potatoes**—plant in December/ January when it is unlikely to be humid or wet (store seeding potatoes where it is dark and cool and break off sprouts if necessary).

**Cabbages, caulis, broccoli**—plant seeds in Christmas/ New Year period so they are growing strongly by mid March or they will go to seed in early Spring and you will waste a season's worth of food. To make space dig over the picked onion bed and add compost. Plant closely and spread out seedlings as necessary later.

**Lettuce**—best planted in Spring or Autumn but a short window for harvesting so work it out.

**Chillies and eggplant**—plant seedlings mid November but they do need a long hot season.

**Butternut pumpkins**—plant seeds direct mid November; seedlings in December for March harvest.

**Basil**—plant about Christmas time, earlier for pesto; trim it like a hedge.

Thanks Graeme for a thought provoking presentation, and for ably stepping up when Jackie French was unable to be with us because of illness.

*Item based on Editor's notes.*

## Caption Competition



*What caption would you put to this picture?*

Tucked away with the sheep waiting for the attention of the shearers is a curly-headed 2 year old. *Photo by JP.*

Email your entry to [editor@cogs.asn.au](mailto:editor@cogs.asn.au) or post it to COGS PO Box 347 DICKSON ACT 2602. **We need your name and contact number along with the suggested caption—**before 15 January which is the deadline for the next issue of *Canberra Organic*.

The winner gets the glory of winning plus a packet of COGS seeds. See page 35 for the winner of the Spring caption competition.

## Gundaroo Open Gardens ...

Gundaroo Village turned on the hospitality and opened the gates to nine gorgeous gardens during the weekend of 5-6 November and thousands of people took advantage of the opportunity and the wonderful warm weather to linger in the gardens, wander through the village, dine and shop, enjoying it all in the relaxed friendly atmosphere. Congratulations to the organisers—let's hope they were pleased with the event and offer a repeat performance in future years.

The gardens were all beautiful—I can only provide a small selection of photos—with regret only in black and white which cannot do justice to the gardens which were full of splendid colour and every shade of green. *Top row, left to right: Holmwood—the lovely cottage garden; part of the vegetable patch . Middle row, left to right: Old Boree Homestead, front garden; Mallegum Cottage, wood fired oven and BBQ. Bottom row: Royal Hotel, the vegetable gardens, which include heirloom varieties grown for the associated restaurant. Photos by JP.*



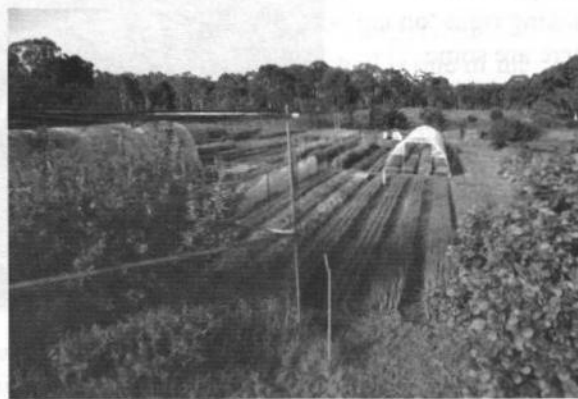


## ... Allsun Garden Farm

Joyce Wilkie and Michael Plane opened Allsun Garden Farm as part of the Gundaroo weekend festival on 5-6 November. As many COGS members will know they are very generous giving what 'spare' time they have to share with others their knowledge of growing organically and encouraging others to have a go. The weekend was no exception and about 1200 people, including quite a few from COGS, visited Allsun over the two days. Joyce described it as "a bit hectic at the farm but it was a truly wonderful weekend ... a huge success."

I hope the following pictures give an idea of what there was to see—you quickly realise that there's intensive activity involved in maintaining production of their wonderful organic vegetables, and management of their poultry.

*Top row, left to right: Poly-tunnel protecting long rows of lettuce, mizuna and rocket; wide view of the farm; Middle row, left to right: Joyce answering the questions of some visitors—beside rows of peas and kale; Alternate rows of kale and peas. Bottom row: Poultry tractor which facilitates movement of poultry to areas needing their 'bare earthing'; Archway in a lush green hedge—the sign says "remove old crop and weeds"; Solar power! Notes and Photos by JP and Allsun.*



## COGS Seed Saving Night

The COGS general meeting on 27 September was a night to remember—it was our first meeting in the new Griffin Centre AND we had a highly entertaining and informative presentation from Canberra seed savers extraordinaire Graham Walker and Ray Harber.

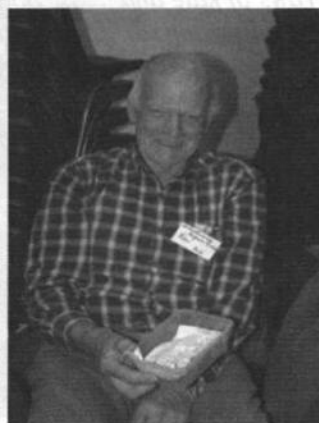
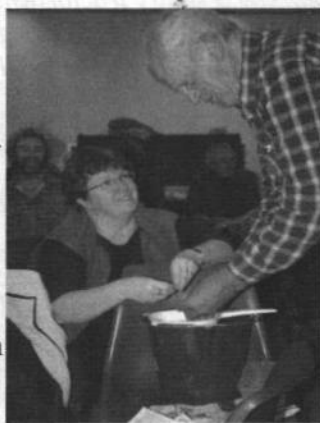
A great plus for the new building from my point of view is that it's now possible to take photos without the digital bringing up in great detail the peeling paint and scuffed decrepit columns of Room 4, Griffin Centre. Nevertheless our previous 'home' for general meetings, since sadly leveled to the ground, was a

very user friendly facility - library storage and tea-making right 'on tap' - there are some adjustments to be made with all 'conveniences' now one or more corridors distant! But as you can see we had a good crowd, our library and tea did become available and we had an AV presentation on pristine white walls!

Ray and Graham promised and delivered with gusto a Seed Saving for Dummies session full of practical tips and techniques and full audience participation. If you've read Graham's columns in this and the previous issue of *Canberra Organic* you will have guessed that the evening was light-hearted and resourceful (cheap). Our presenters demonstrated "winnowing", the artificial breeze generated by an electric hairdryer, and "sieving," onto a large collection surface, "we found ours in the corridor" (a flattened cardboard packing case that had not yet made it to the garbage collection). We were not made to feel like dummies at all. We all formed into small groups and scooped seeds from excellent specimens of marrows and

pumpkins; washed, cleaned and dried the seeds; then packaged them for sharing and taking home. I have my small pack of "Zucchini Black Jack, ex Mitchell community garden (Canberra), very prolific, excellent variety, packed 27/9/05" that I am planning to plant in the next week or so, confident that the seeds will produce healthy and healthful zucchinis like the amazing specimen I scooped the seeds from!

Those attending the meeting were also able to buy pre-packaged seeds and seedlings at dirt cheap prices.



Included in our number were a group of visitors from Sale in Victoria - they had seen our notice of meeting on the COGS internet site and had rung to see if they could attend. They were such good sports we took them along to see three of our community gardens the next day (see page 27).

*Summary*—We save seeds to maintain a diverse gene pool, keeping old varieties that would otherwise disappear, to encourage desirable traits and characteristics, and for our satisfaction and contribution to sustainability. We need to tag desirable plants, isolate certain plants from insect or wind pollination, await the full maturity of the selected specimens, clean and separate seeds, and label and store seeds appropriately.

*Photos*—Centre, left to right: Alison from Canberra washing pumpkin seeds with Peter from Sale; Peter is pretty pleased with the outcome. Below: Meeting Room 10, new Griffin Centre—left to right: The presenters prepare; the President confers; the library and supper tables are set out at the back of the room.

*Photos and notes by JP.*



## Visitors from Sale

At our seed saving meeting in September it was a pleasure to meet several members of the Sale Organic Group who had come to Canberra to see Floriade and had noted from our website that our meeting was on during their visit.

Janis Jones lives in Paynesville and she describes the Sale Organic Group as “a diverse bunch of ‘have-been farmers’, ‘wanna-be farmers’ and ‘backyarders’ all with the same common interest. Because of the distance we live from each other, it’s about a round trip of 160 kms for me. We meet every alternate month with some trips away ...and we have our own seed box operating”.

Janis, Shirley, Peter (who has a hand in running one of the produce shows in the Gippsland area), and Margaret (who I understand has been known to collect a few prizes for what she grows) got into the action at the seed saving night and felt they could manage visits to a couple of COGS community gardens the following day.

Adrienne and I took them to Mitchell (below, left), to Dickson for a peep through the fence,



and to Cook community garden.

At Mitchell Peter was keen to check out Graham’s claims to having grown enormous cauliflowers (below, centre) and I think was relatively satisfied. There was lots to see at Mitchell, including recently added chook pens,

flourishing broadbeans, an enormous artichoke, an impressive new netted plot and general evidence of good growth after consistent rain. Our visitors insisted on taking a “President and Editor inspecting artichoke” photo (below, right).

Don’t forget that Mitchell is one of the COGS gardens opening on 27 November—from 1 - 2.30pm (see page 11 for further information).

Janis, and Peter who lives in Sale, have left their contact numbers

with us in case “anyone wants to call in and see what we are doing down here.” So if you are off to Victoria and wish to make contact with members of the Sale Organic Group, ask Adrienne or Janet for contact details. JP



## A Glasshouse to Share at Cook Garden



During the last few weeks there has been a bit of activity in the communal area of Cook garden as a concrete slab and brick work were laid, then the frame assembled for a glasshouse. Thank you to Sue and Steve Adams who have given the glasshouse to the garden. The photo shows Adrienne, Keith and Ilya working on assembly of the frame. Cook gardeners are looking forward to putting it to good use!



## Plant Profile—Beans

### *Phaseolus vulgaris* and *Phaseolus coccineus*

Beans are one of the easiest vegetables to grow in Canberra over the Summer months. The plants are quick growing and can be dwarf bushes, annual twining climbers or perennial 'runners' which are also climbers. Bean pods can be eaten fresh or left to fully ripen and the dried seed stored for later use in soups and casseroles.

There are hundreds or perhaps thousands of varieties of beans commonly grown worldwide. The pods may be green, red, purple or yellow, patterned or plain, round or flat, stringy or stringless.

The seeds of different cultivars are extremely varied in size, colour, taste and texture. In Australia at least a dozen varieties of beans are available from the major seed companies and many more varieties are available from mail order seed suppliers. The Seed Savers Network has over 200 varieties of *Phaseolus vulgaris* available to its members.

Beans were domesticated in South America as early as 5000 BC and over the following millennia bean seeds became a staple crop throughout the Americas. Christopher Columbus is credited with introducing beans to Europe and later the French introduced the idea of eating young bean pods as a vegetable.

#### Names

The common names of beans can be confusing. Some like kidney beans are named for the shape of the seed while others like zebra beans are named for the seed colour or pattern. It is thought that French beans got their name from the English habit of calling anything foreign 'French'. In Australia the names French and Dwarf and Bush are often used synonymously. Butter beans in Australia are those with yellow pods—either bushes or climbers—while in New Zealand and the USA, Lima beans are called butter beans because of the texture of the seeds when cooked. Dwarf, bush and climbing beans are all varieties of the common bean *Phaseolus vulgaris* while perennial runner beans are varieties of *Phaseolus coccineus*.

#### Growing beans

Beans are a warm weather crop and seeds should not be planted until the soil starts to warm up in Spring. In Canberra this is generally late October or early November. Successive plantings of dwarf beans can be made over the following two or three months to ensure a continuous supply of pods. Climbing beans take longer to flower but crop over a longer period and one planting is usually sufficient. Runner beans are initially planted from seed and will form crowns just below the soil surface which will re-sprout in Spring. Runner beans may last for several years before they need re-planting.

#### Site and soil

A site in full sun is best but beans will tolerate shade for part of the day. Too much shade leads to frail plants with thin stalks. Some protection from hot Summer winds should be provided if possible.

Beans are best direct sown where they are to grow, in a neutral soil (pH 6—7) that is well drained, and well structured. The addition of organic matter will improve both the structure and drainage of your soil, particularly if it is naturally clayey. Planting rows can be slightly hilled to assist drainage.

#### Planting

Before planting beans it is important to know whether you have a dwarf or climbing variety. Climbing beans are planted more closely and require a sturdy support to grow on. Supports should be in place before planting, at least 1.5—2 metres tall and can be made from a variety of materials including wire mesh and bamboo.

Sow the seed at a depth three times the length of the seed. Space climbing beans about 6—8 cm apart and bush beans about 10—12 cm apart. Keep the soil just moist until the beans have germinated. If the soil is too wet bean seeds will rot in the ground before sprouting. Once the bean seedlings appear the soil surface should be kept dry to minimise the possibility of fungal diseases

such as damping off.

### *Cultivation*

Beans need regular water which should be applied to the root zone rather than the foliage. Good soil drainage is essential as beans will not tolerate water-logging. Mulching will help protect the roots from excessive heat in Summer and also help to retain soil moisture. Additional fertilising should not be necessary if your soil contains plenty of organic matter. Being legumes, beans have the ability to fix atmospheric nitrogen in nodules on their roots and so are less dependent on soil nitrate levels than many other plants. The nitrogen fixed in the root nodules is available both to the beans and to following crops. A side dressing of wood ash applied prior to flowering may be beneficial if potassium levels are low. Weeds should be removed, as they appear, to minimise competition for water and nutrients.

### *Harvesting*

For climbing, runner and some varieties of dwarf beans, regular picking will encourage the production of more pods. Other varieties, such as Brown Beauty, have only one flush of flowers and all the beans mature at the same time. This trait is very useful if you are interested in freezing or otherwise preserving the crop. All bean varieties can be eaten at any stage of development, from young green pods to fully mature seeds, depending on your taste. Some varieties such as Kentucky Wonder are excellent both as a green pod and as a dried bean seed. If you are growing beans for their seeds, let the pods dry completely on the vine before picking. The seeds can then be easily shelled from their pods and stored for later use.

### *Pests and diseases*

Insect pests are not usually a major problem when growing beans. Slugs and snails can damage or destroy young seedlings and may need to be controlled. Aphids, mites or looper caterpillars may attack beans but in a well managed organic garden are usually kept under control by beneficial insects such as spiders, lacewings and ladybirds and by the hand-picking of caterpillars. Beans can be attacked by a variety of fungal and bacterial diseases such as rusts and wilts. Practising crop rotation, ensuring good air circulation, avoiding overhead watering or waterlogging and keeping the plants growing

vigorously will minimise the chances of fungal diseases becoming a problem. Many disease resistant varieties of beans are available.

### *Saving seed*

Beans are one of the easiest plants to save seed from as pollination generally occurs inside the flower before it is fully open. Therefore cross-pollination is rare. If you intend to save bean seed choose unblemished pods from healthy plants and leave them on the bush/vine to dry completely. Once the pods are dry the seeds should be removed and dried for a further one or two weeks before being stored in an airtight container in a cool place. Bean seeds will remain viable for at least three years if correctly stored.

**Adrienne Fazekas**

### *References*

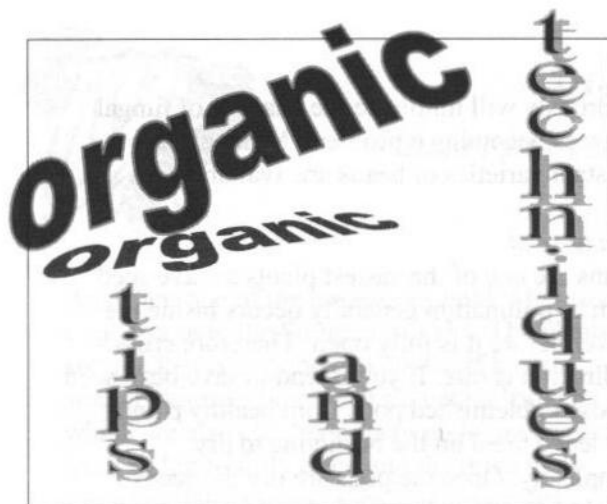
*Growing Peas & Beans* David R. Murray

*The Seed Savers Handbook* Michel & Jude Fanton

Clipart courtesy of *Arthur's Clipart*

*Below: Climbing beans growing in Adrienne's plot at Cook community garden, 2004. Photo by JP.*





### Planting green seed potatoes—

When I found that some seeding potatoes I had bought were green I asked a few experienced gardeners whether it was all right to go ahead and plant them. I was hesitant in the context of frequent advice that green potatoes should not be eaten. In all cases the advice was yes, it was fine, and even a bonus, to have green seeding potatoes because nothing was likely to attack the tubers once planted and healthy potatoes would be produced as long as the normal precautions of keeping the potatoes covered while growing were followed. *Source: Editor*

**Grey aphid infestation**—Even vigorously growing brassicas can suddenly be infested with grey aphids with the onset of warm weather. Interesting advice from Hugh Lovel in the Suncoast Organic Growers newsletter of May 2005 (*reprinted by BOGI see below*) is that the aphids are the messengers not the message (he notes this is not yet conventional wisdom)—the affected plants may “contain too many salts usually nitrates or urea and too little silica, sugars and complex proteins.” He suggests working up the soil and allowing time for bacterial activity in compost material to slow down, then to plant the companion plants for brassica—cereal grains (rye, wheat or barley with vetch, crimson clover if available, lupins or other winter legumes) with brassica at the rate of 10 to 1. The idea is to let the “legumes bring oxygen to the soil and ensure the winter cereal grain seedlings will have plenty of mycorrhizae”. Seedlings (not seed) of mustard, turnip, canola and Chinese radish seed can be included as transplants at the same time. Hugh Lovel says that it is only with plantings of this sort that he has seen mycorrhizal colonisation on brassica roots “and this mycorrhizal symbiosis silica proofs your broccoli and kale from aphids. You’ll have low nitrates and high silica”,

producing sweetness as the silica and sugar content rises. *Source: Brisbane Organic Growers Inc., Newsletter, October 2005, pages 11-12.*

### Items from Henry Doubleday Research Association of Australia (HDRAA) Australian Newsletters

**Encouraging Lacewing**—Apparently yeast, as found in vegemite, is favoured as a food by lacewing. In one season the offspring of one female lacewing eats over 13 million aphids. To breed and establish the female lacewing needs pollen and flowers scattered around the garden. *Source: No. 39, December 1979, page 3.*

**Source of potash**—Bracken fern, composted while green, is an excellent source of potash. *Source: No. 39, December 1979, page 4.*

**Onion treatment for roses**—Cut into small pieces 0.5kg of onions, add boiling water and let it stand 10 hours. Add cold water to make up to 10 litres. Water the rose plants, then apply the onion water. It is not the smell of the onion that repels aphids but “some property in the onions that gives the plant its own resistance to the pest.” *Source: No. 38, October 1979, page 3*

**Latin Square for experiments in growing**—The HDRAA recommended way of testing whether various plants grow better in particular conditions is for gardeners to set plants out in a ‘latin square’, then to observe and record what happens. It used to suggest experiments that home growers could try out by this method, encouraging them to report the results to HDRAA so that an overview of whether particular variables produced better results than others could be obtained.

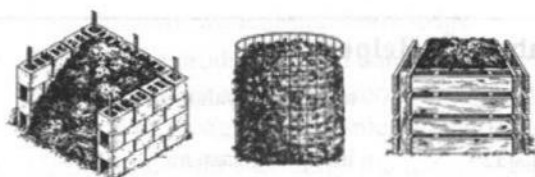
To plant in a ‘latin square’ divide a square bed, or garden area across beds, into quarters—a minimum of 1 metre x 1 metre per quarter. The size of the growing space depends on the number of plants, their growth habit and the need for reasonable separation between plants. Plant the same number of rows and the same number of plants in each quarter. In two quarters diagonally opposite each other plant the crop using the *experimental variable* to be tested and in the opposite two quarters diagonally plant the *control* plants. For example you might plant short shoot potatoes in one diagonal and long shoot potatoes in the other. Observe and record differences at the end of the season—factors such as height, weight of produce, insect damage and disease. *Source: No. 26, 1977, page 2 and No. 37, 1979, page 14.*



## SUMMER VEGETABLE PLANTING GUIDE

In Summer it is a good idea to mulch your garden beds to help keep the soil cool and moist. One experiment has shown that a 4cm layer of straw reduced evaporation by 73%. Be careful however 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 will contain all the nutrients your plants need for strong, healthy growth. In addition it will retain water and act like a sponge to keep your plants moist through the dry summer days.



On days of extreme temperatures your plants may need to be physically protected from the heat. This can be achieved by covering the plants with shade cloth secured on a frame eg weldmesh bent over to form a tunnel (secure the shade cloth with some pegs).

Try not to water the leaves of plants that are susceptible to fungal diseases eg tomatoes, cucumbers, pumpkins, zucchinis. Water with drippers, fill pots sunk into the soil near the plants, or if you must use overhead watering, water in the cool of the morning so the water can evaporate during the day.

Keep those 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 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 build-up of its predators. If you must spray, use an environmentally benign spray. Read books such as Jackie French's *Natural Pest Control*.

Make sure you harvest your crop regularly - in most cases this will encourage your plants to continue cropping and you get

to eat your produce at its peak.

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



### Summer Vegetable Planting Guide

	DEC	JAN	FEB
French Beans	S	S	
Beetroot	S	S	S
Broccoli	ST	ST	T
Brussels Sprouts	ST	ST	T
Cabbage	ST	ST	T
Cauliflower	ST	ST	T
Carrots	S	S	S
Celery	T	T	S
Chicory	S	S	S
Chinese Cabbage	S	S	
Cucumber	ST	T	
Endive	S	S	S
Kohl Rabi	ST	ST	T
Leeks	S	S	
Lettuce	ST	ST	ST
Marrows	T		
Parsnips	S	S	S
Potatoes	S	S	
Radish	S	S	S
Silver Beet	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; please observe the 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 eg. December plantings of heading lettuce should be successful; February plantings should be the butterhead varieties.

## Canberra Organic Quick Quiz

1. What nutrients are supplied by Blood and Bone?
2. Why is wood ash useful in an organic garden?
3. Why should ladybirds be encouraged?
4. Why don't beans need a soil rich in nitrogen?

Answers are on page 35. Too easy? Send your own quiz and answers for possible publication to [editor@cogs.asn.au](mailto:editor@cogs.asn.au)

### COGS Committee Members & Helpers

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<b>Garden Conveners</b>			
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<b>Cook</b>	Alan Robertson	6251 0906	<a href="mailto:araba@netspeed.com.au">araba@netspeed.com.au</a>

### Garden Conveners Cotter community garden:

*Roz and Trevor Bruhn* 6282 1214 [bruhn2605@netspeed.com.au](mailto:bruhn2605@netspeed.com.au)

Please note Roz and Trevor have taken over from Andy Hrast as convener/s. JP.

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<b>Theodore</b>	Richard Reed	6291 1897	<a href="mailto:rmjreed@ozemail.com.au">rmjreed@ozemail.com.au</a>

### Monthly Meetings

<b>Seed exchange</b>	vacant		
<b>Book sales</b>	Murray Dadds		
<b>Supper conveners</b>	Marie Bahr, Mary Flowers		
<b>Librarians</b>	Beby Bros, assisted by Victor Oates		
<b>Web manager</b>	Ben Bradey		<a href="mailto:info@cogs.asn.au">info@cogs.asn.au</a>
<b>Telephone contact</b>	Elizabeth Palmer	6248 8004	
<b>Inquiries about Organic Growing</b>		6248 8004	<a href="mailto:info@cogs.asn.au">info@cogs.asn.au</a>

### To contact COGS

Email [info@cogs.asn.au](mailto:info@cogs.asn.au) or visit our website at [www.cogs.asn.au](http://www.cogs.asn.au)

**COGS monthly meetings** are held at 7:30pm on the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of each month (except December and January)

Venue: Genge Street, Civic—the new Griffin Centre, opposite the old Griffin Centre site

—Visitors Welcome—





## Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.

# INFORMATION

### GENERAL INFORMATION

The Canberra Organic Growers Society is a non-profit organisation started in 1977 with the aim of providing a forum for organic growers to exchange information and encourage the adoption of organic growing methods. COGS is an association without specific political or religious affiliation as a group. COGS has the following objectives – to:

- Foster the use of organic methods in home gardening, horticulture and agriculture
- Foster organic agricultural knowledge
- Promote the production and consumption of certified organically grown foods and the adoption of recognised organic standards
- Demonstrate and encourage the use of organic growing techniques
- Provide a forum for the discussion of matters of interest to organic growers in the ACT and surrounding region
- Facilitate the exchange of information and ideas between members and with other organic growers
- Assist members in establishing their own organic growing areas
- Administer community gardens operated under organic agricultural principles for recreational, educational or rehabilitation purposes and for the self-supply of contaminant free produce.

### ADMINISTRATION

COGS is run by a voluntary committee which is elected annually at the AGM in March. The committee meets monthly and all members are encouraged to consider participating in the work of the committee.

### MONTHLY MEETINGS

Meetings of members are held in Room 4 at the Griffin Centre, Civic, at 7.30 pm on the fourth Tuesday of the month (except in December and January). Each month there is a guest speaker. Recent meeting topics have included Backyard poultry keeping, Worms, Herbs and Seed Saving. At the meetings there is a produce and seed exchange table and a bookstall. COGS seeds and seedlings are often available for purchase. Members may also borrow two items from the COGS library. A light supper is available after the meeting.

*Visitors are welcome.*

### QUARTERLY MAGAZINE

*Canberra Organic*, the quarterly publication of COGS, contains articles on organic growing, informs members of upcoming speakers and events, and includes planting and growing information specifically for the Canberra region. Members are encouraged to contribute articles.

### COMMUNITY GARDENS

COGS currently operates 11 community gardens in the Canberra region. Gardens are located at Charnwood, Cook, Curtin (Cotter Garden), Dickson, Erindale, Holder, Kambah, Mitchell (Northside Garden), Oaks Estate, Queanbeyan and Theodore. Members may obtain plots to grow organic produce for home consumption. These gardens provide a wonderful opportunity for people to garden with other organic growers, to share their expertise and learn something new at the same time. Plot holders are required to pay an annual levy to cover the cost of water, insurance, tools and maintenance. The ACT Government has supported the establishment of these gardens through the ACT Office of Sport and Recreation and the Department of Urban Services Community Renewal program.

### INTERNET

COGS maintains a web site devoted to organic growing at [www.cogs.asn.au](http://www.cogs.asn.au). The site contains the COGS information papers on organic growing, seasonal planting guides, certification information, a page for children and links to related organisations and information sources.

### OTHER ACTIVITIES

From time to time COGS organises other activities for its members. For example, we participate in the World Environment Day fair and arrange information days at "COGS Backyard". Seminars and workshops are also conducted.

### CONTACT

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

# COGS NOTICE BOARD

Don't forget to check the COGS website at [www.cogs.asn.au](http://www.cogs.asn.au) for updates and new notices.

## Speakers

**7:30 pm, Genge Street, Civic**

*(the new Griffin Centre, opposite the old Griffin Centre site)*

### 22 November 2005

Shirley Carden  
*Herbs*

**Note that no COGS general meetings are held in December or January.**

### 28 February 2006

Graham Williams  
Head Gardener at Lanyon Homestead  
*Organic Gardening and Vegetable Growing*

### 28 March 2006

COGS AGM and Harvest Night  
*(COGS members are invited to bring their produce to display and talk about)*

## COGS Working Bees

**COGS Backyard—see page 19.**

**Saturday 26 November, 2-4pm**

Help is also required for maintenance of COGS Backyard over the December/ January period—please contact a COGS Committee member (see page 32 for contact details).

**[www.cogs.asn.au](http://www.cogs.asn.au) for updates and confirmations.**

**Apology**—The presenter at our October general meeting was Graeme Davis rather than Jackie French as advertised. Our Spring issue had just gone to print when Jackie needed to pull out because of illness. *COGS members wish Jackie a speedy recovery and look forward to her being able to address a future COGS meeting.*

## Events

### 27 November 2005

Open day for COGS members at—

- 11am—12.30pm Charnwood garden
- 1pm—2.30pm Mitchell garden
- 3pm—4.30pm Queanbeyan garden

*For further information see page 11.*

### 26-27 November

Australian Open Gardens, and “Airing of the Quilts” weekend, Braidwood—see page 18.

### Saturday mornings, 8am-11am

Farmers Market, EPIC  
(enter near Shell service station)

**Caption Competition winner** from the Spring issue of *Canberra Organic*—



The winning caption for the photo above was: *“You would have to be quackers not to dine here!”* and the winner of the COGS seeds for this entry is Roz Bruhn—congratulations, we’ll be in touch!

The current caption competition is on page 23.

**Correction**—In the Spring 2005 issue of *Canberra Organic*, in the story *John and Margaret’s “Sea Change”*, I said that John Allen was treasurer and communications officer for the protest action against the proposed charcoal plant on the south coast of NSW. Sorry I got it wrong—Margaret Allen was the Treasurer, John was the Internet communications officer. *JP.*

### Canberra Organic Quick Quiz Answers

1. Blood and Bone supplies slow release nitrogen, phosphorus and calcium.
2. Wood ash can supply potassium and deter slugs and snails.
3. Ladybird larvae eat aphids.
4. Beans are legumes and therefore have the ability to use atmospheric nitrogen via bacteria which grow in nodules on their roots and so are less dependent on soil nitrogen than other plants.