



Winter 2006

Canberra Organic

ORGANIC GROWING IN THE CANBERRA REGION

The quarterly publication of the Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.

The Many Varieties of Tomato Harvest Night Preserving Summer's Bounty
The Charnwood Garden Greenhouse Community Group Gardening in Oaks Estate
Garden Birds Vegie of the Issue - A tomato shaped like a 'thingy' Onions
NEW Question and Answer Section NEW E-mail Announcement List
COGS Winter Planting Guide



Vol. 14 No. 2

CANBERRA ORGANIC

Quarterly magazine published by the
Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.
PO Box 347, Dickson, ACT 2602
Vol 14 No. 2 (Issue 54)

Articles may be reproduced for non-profit,
educational purposes. For other purposes
please obtain permission from COGS.

CONTRIBUTIONS INVITED

Send on diskette (*any PC format, Microsoft
WORD or PUBLISHER files preferred*)
or email to: editor@cogs.asn.au
otherwise clean typed copy.

There are four issues each year:

Autumn (February), Winter (May), Spring
(August), Summer (November).

The deadline for copy and advertising is
15th January, 15th April, 15th July and
15th October respectively.

Articles in the magazine do not necessarily
reflect the views of the Society.

CO-EDITORS:

Janet Popovic and Sophia Williams

ADVERTISING:

Contact Janet Popovic 62582811
Email: editor@cogs.asn.au

The *Canberra Organic* magazine is a unique
medium for reaching people in the Canberra
region who have an interest in organic food,
gardening and general environmental issues.
Our circulation is currently 400.

ADVERTISING RATES

Payment is to be made in advance. COGS
members are eligible for the price in brackets.

Size	1 Issue	4 Issues
1/8 page	\$9 (\$7)	\$30 (\$25)
1/4 page	\$18 (\$15)	\$60 (\$50)
1/2 page	\$36 (\$30)	\$120 (\$100)
Full page	\$72 (\$60)	\$240 (\$200)

Products and services offered by advertisers are
not specifically endorsed by the Society and
COGS reserves the right to refuse advertising
not consistent with its aims and objectives.

Thanks to Arthur's Vegetable Clipart

From the Editor



*Since our COGS AGM in March 2006 Sophia
Williams and I have become co-editors of Canberra
Organic—I needed to allocate some time to other
activities and Sophia preferred not to take on full
editing duties at once. However this issue is to all
intents and purposes a Sophia production—thanks
Sophia, what a great start!*

*Once again we have lots of local content provided
by COGS members based on their experiences over
the Summer and Autumn growing seasons.*

*We also have three new segments that we hope you
will enjoy and help us to make regular features in
future issues.*

*The first of these is Gardener Profiles (page 18)
where we start off by featuring two gardeners from
Charnwood Community Garden—thanks Gita and
Melissa! If you would like to contribute to this
segment in future please contact Sophia directly or
let any Committee member know of your interest.*

*Secondly we introduce Vegie of the Issue (page 21)
in which our mischievous regular contributor
Graham Walker will be encouraging you to submit
notes and photos about produce to be admired,
amused by or amazed at.*

*The third new segment is a Question and Answer
page (see page 22) where you are asked to send us
your organic gardening queries for advice from
other COGS members or Canberra Organic
readers, and to also share your knowledge with us
by commenting on advice published in response to
the queries. We think this will tie in nicely with
trying to meet some of the needs identified at the
April general meeting for supporting new plot
holders (see page 16), including developing a
Frequently Asked Questions document that could
become part of our COGS kit.*

*Please also take note of the option to receive more
frequent COGS communications through our new
announcements list (details are on page 23).*

Enjoy your magazine,

*Janet Popovic
Sophia Williams*



From the President Winter 2006

The frosts in April suddenly killed off the summer crops but apparently not the grasshoppers - perhaps the birds will now be able to spot them more easily and do a bit of pest control for us over Winter. There is still time to plant peas, broad beans and spinach before the soil cools too much. These crops are frost resistant and will grow slowly through the Winter before producing early spring harvests as the weather warms up. If you don't get around to planting your peas and broad beans they can also go in in late Winter/early Spring for an early Summer crop. It's also time to prepare beds for Winter plantings of onions, asparagus and rhubarb crowns, raspberries and strawberries. Winter is also the time to plan your garden for the coming seasons - what will you grow next Summer, where will you plant the various crops, are you rotating your plantings sufficiently, should you try some new and different vegetables next season or get a load of manure to compost before Spring?

AGM

The Annual General Meeting was held on March 28th. COGS enjoyed another successful year in 2005 with our membership numbers and bank balance both increasing. The community gardens continue to be very well supported and the monthly meetings well attended.

A committee of eight was elected to run COGS for the next year. Keith Colls has rejoined the committee, refreshed by a couple of years sabbatical and Beby Bros has retired from the committee but will continue to oversee the library at the monthly meetings. The remaining seven of us have signed up for another year. There is always room for another committee member, or two, so if you have a few spare hours a month to assist with the running of COGS we would welcome your help.

Workshops for new gardeners

This year Keith Colls, the in-coming vice-president, is planning to facilitate a series of seminars/workshops designed to support new COGS community gardeners. These will provide information on organic gardening principles and practices and on the etiquette and responsibilities

of community gardening. If you have any suggestions for topics to be included - things you wish someone had told you, or information you wish you had been given when you first joined a COGS garden please let Keith or another committee member know.

Email list

For the benefit of our many members with internet access COGS secretary, Ben Bradey, has recently re-established the COGS email contact list which has been dormant for some time. We are unsure of the currency of many of the email addresses in the membership records and so are asking members to opt in to the new list if they wish to receive emails from COGS. Details of this process can be found on page 23 of this issue.

Water restrictions reminder

ACTEW has recently announced the introduction of permanent water restrictions in the ACT and Queanbeyan. These restrictions are currently in force and will apply each year from September 1st to May 31st. The **water restrictions do apply in the COGS community gardens** and I would ask you all to please observe them and to ensure that other gardeners also comply. Inconvenience is no excuse and leaving a hose, or hoses, running in your plot while you are gardening is not what is meant by "hand held" and contravenes both the letter and the spirit of the restrictions

After four years of doing a great job as the COGS editor, Janet Popovic has decided it's time for a break from the demands of the position. She has agreed to continue as co-editor while Sophia Williams learns the ropes. On behalf of COGS I would like to thank Janet for all the time and effort she has put into many wonderful issues of *Canberra Organic*. Sophia has done much of the work for this edition and I think you'll all agree it's an impressive effort and we can look forward to a continuation of the high standard Janet set.

Adrienne Fazekas

ACT COLLEGE OF NATURAL THERAPIES



COURSES

★ **PHILOSOPHIES & BEHAVIOURAL PATTERNS IN HEALTH & WELL-BEING**

WE ARE THE ONLY COLLEGE DELIVERING THIS UNIQUE MATERIAL.

Presenter - C. Joan Roche

- ★ *'Wholistic' refers to incorporating the Mental, Emotional and therefore Physical Health of people.*
- ★ *Through an approach that integrates these, personal health-care and well-being is achievable.*
- ★ *This Course is easy for people to understand and to change their lives.*

STARTS 6.30p.m. Wed. 31 May 2006

11 Wednesday evenings (6.30 to 9.30 pm.) 31 May - 23 Aug

FEES - PAYG - Deposit \$ 115 by 17 May

3 Instalments of \$130 on 31 May, 28 June and 2 August = \$505

★ **BACH FLOWER REMEDIES**

THIS COURSE TEACHES PRESCRIBING SKILLS IMPORTANT FOR EVERY THERAPIST.

STARTS 6.30p.m. Tuesday 13 June

12 Wednesday evenings (6.30 to 9.30 pm.) 13 June - 29 Aug

FEES - PAYG - Deposit \$145 by 23 May

3 Instalments of \$150 on 13 June, 11 July & 8 Aug.= \$595

act.college@bigpond.com

www.actcollegeofnaturaltherapies.com.au

ACT College of Natural Therapies

63 Oatley Court,

BELCONNEN ACT 2617

Ph. 6251 6241

Contents



President's Report Winter 2006 <i>Adrienne Fazekas</i>	3	Plant Profile— Growing Onions <i>Adrienne Fazekas</i>	24
Around the Gardens, <i>Garden Conveners</i>	6	Letter to the Editor - Excess Zucchini's <i>Robin McKeown, Rasima Kecanovic</i>	26
Harvest Night, <i>Ben Bradey</i>	9	COGS Winter Vegetable Planting Guide	27
The Many Varieties of Tomato, <i>Jen Johnston</i>	10	COGS Committee Members & Helpers	28
Preserving Summer's Bounty, <i>Lesley Pattison</i>	11	COGS Inc. Information	29
The Charnwood Garden Greenhouse, <i>Ray and Tricia Overvliet</i>	12	Membership Application/Renewal Form	30
All Ability Levels Gardening in Oaks Estate, <i>Julia Williams</i>	14	COGS Notice Board	31
Support for New Plot Holders, <i>Keith Colls</i>	16	Alphabetical Index of Advertisers: <i>When you use the services of our advertisers, please let them know you saw their ad in Canberra Organic.</i>	
Garden Birds, <i>Graham Walker</i>	17	ACT College of Natural Therapies	4
Gardener Profiles - Charnwood, <i>Gita Curnow</i>	18	Mooble	9
<i>Melissa Mc Closkey</i>	19	Holiday house, Malua Bay NSW	13
Vegie of the Issue - A tomato shaped like a 'thingy', <i>Graham Walker</i>	21	Cedar Lodge Motel Braidwood	14
Questions and Answers, <i>Sophia Williams (Ed)</i>	22	ABC <i>Organic Gardener</i> Magazine	20
COGS E-mail Announcement List, <i>Ben Bradey</i>	23	Eco Meats	23
		ANU Co-op Food Shop	31
		<i>Front cover photo: Garry Thomas's Pumpkins. Photo by Sophia Williams</i>	
		<i>Back cover photos: Chillies, Chooks and Dahlias from the Charnwood Community Garden. Photos by Sophia Williams</i>	

Water Restrictions

The ACT government has introduced permanent water restrictions in the ACT and Queanbeyan.

Sprinklers, drippers, oozing and weeping hoses can only be used between 6 pm and 9 am daily.

Buckets, watering cans and hand-held hoses with trigger nozzles may be used any time.

These restrictions are currently in force and apply between Sept 1 and May 31.



Around the Gardens



Cook

Thanks to Ras Kecanovic for taking on the role of convener. All the plots at Cook are currently taken. We welcome all of our new gardeners.

Cotter

In spite of the hot summer, crops have generally been good as long as gardens have been watered regularly. There were some problems with tomatoes grown from commercial seed, while those that were self-sown produced really well - another reason to save seeds!

The zucchinis have been very successful and there are plenty of pumpkins on the wandering plants. Gardeners have harvested peppers, beans, eggplants, carrots, onions etc, and large quantities of potatoes. Sweet corn plants have been attacked again this year and we are not sure whether mice or birds are the cause of that. We have had a report of a large rat being seen at the garden.

The frosty night of 1 April certainly hit frost-tender produce, but there is now good reason to clear the ground and plan for winter vegetables. There are several plots available of varying sizes.

Roz and Trevor Bruhn

Cotter Orchard

A head count of the apple and pear trees advises 48 or 46 trees. Perhaps it is 47? Perhaps it depends on whether more have stopped trying to battle our drought at each count?

There are a lot of possibilities there. And some substance too. In January I collected off the ground a cooking apple at which the cockies had had a little chew. When I next visited, an equestrian had left open the gate to our apple and pear area, so any more evidence of production had disappeared. We'll have to keep a closer eye on that gate when the orchard improves.

It's always pruning time at the orchard, as there is a lot of dead wood still to go, and shoots from the rootstock which now tower over the trees. If you report with your pruning equipment, you can be shown the location of the fruitful persimmons and pistachios which will be ready to pick now.

The Cotter Orchard is open to all COGS members who are willing to help. Their reward will be a

share of the fruit, starting with those persimmons and pistachios. There's at least one member who contacted Andy Hrast about it but whose name did not get passed on. Try again at <a.smith@netspeed.com.au> or 6285 2995.

Ann Smith

Holder

After a very trying summer season summer crops have finished, with our first frost being at the beginning of April. Frosts are more damaging since the 2003 bushfire as we have lost the protection that we used to enjoy from the trees along Streeton Drive and also the pine forest. Suddenly flourishing tomatoes, pumpkins, capsicums, eggplants, cucumbers and sweet corn came to an abrupt halt. It was a sad sight. Most plot holders have now cleaned up after summer. Most gardeners who aren't cropping over the winter are either mulching or sowing areas of green manure to feed the soil in preparation for next spring. If any plot holder would like green manure seed, contact Jen after hours as she will be able to get it for you within a fortnight. There are 2 sorts of mixes available this year: the usual grasses plus legumes mix, and a legumes only mix.

Some of our plot holders now have seedlings of broad beans, winter lettuces, silver beet, rocket and spring onions in their gardens. Those who were organized also have good crops of leeks and winter brassicas, particularly broccoli and cabbages, growing well. Garlic planting is also in full swing.

Just a reminder that as the COGS "open gardens" were not held this autumn as first suggested, they will be held later this year. Holder will be among the gardens "open" for other COGS members to come and see just what we are growing and how we are doing it. It is likely that this will be the last weekend in November.

We have already had a small 'open garden' in March, when some year 9 students, in the permaculture class at Stromlo High School, visited the garden for an afternoon. They were interested to see just what plants were being grown, the different techniques used by various gardeners and to talk to two of our plot-holders who just happened to be there at the time. Thanks very much to those who so patiently answered all of the students' questions. The three hens, who have now returned to the Holder garden in a new home, were very popular too.

Also a big thank you to those members who have helped us by mowing around the pathways within the garden and are starting to clean up our few vacant plots and sow them with green manure.

We currently have three single plots (45 sq m) available and one double plot (90 sq m) available. These are in various states of readiness for use. So if you are interested in joining us please get in touch. Happy gardening.

Jane Andrews and Jen Johnston, co-conveners.

Kambah

Congratulations to the Kambah children who won the pumpkin growing competition with 13 good sized pumpkins. Their result was clearly better than the adult's plot where only a motley mix of pumpkins and butternuts were produced. We all look forward to a vigorous defence of the title next summer.

The summer grasshopper invasion ceased with the onset of cold nights but the green vegetable bug, the harlequin beetles and the black bean flies continued to steadily work their way through the tomatoes and beans. A garlic and chilli spray showed limited results, better results were achieved from molasses spray* but it required very frequent spraying. The garden was also visited by a large flock of cockatoos that tested their beaks on the remaining corn cobs, the new broccoli seedlings and various other plants. However the most infuriating pests in our garden have been the two legged kind. Two youngsters, who entered the garden under the fence, succeeded in destroying a number of potato plants, various zucchini and squash and some watermelons. We are grateful for the assistance of four members of the public attending a function at the nearby Woolshed, who stopped the youngsters willfully damaging the vegetables and called the convener. Support like this from the general public feels just as good as producing a good crop of vegetables.

Membership at the garden has been swollen by the arrival of Fiona & Clyde, Lyn & George and Fran & Len who bring years of gardening experience from the UK, from country NSW, and from a rural block. We look forward to learning from them and sharing our garden. On 26 March an enjoyable afternoon tea was held in the garden to introduce all our gardeners and present the pumpkin prizes. Due to our increased membership we only have 2 plots currently available but will start a new 'no-dig' plot to be ready by spring.

Apart from the pumpkins, gardeners had steady rewards from zucchini, squash, potatoes, green onion varieties, tomatoes and both climbing and dwarf bean varieties, but frosty nights have now ended the cucurbitaceous crops. Silverbeet, chard and non-hearting lettuce varieties have provided slow but continuous picking. Autumn fruiting raspberries are now being picked together with a small second crop of strawberries (the molasses spray* was more effective on the raspberry crop). Snow peas, broad beans, cabbage and green manure crops have all been planted and we are anxiously awaiting some rain to give them a boost.

* 1 tblspoon molasses dissolved in 1 litre warm water and 1 tspn organic liquid soap. Combine and spray regularly over the leaves.

Mary Coulson

Mitchell

Another summer season has come and gone - all too quickly as is often the case in Canberra. What started out as a wet summer quickly turned to hot and dry. But before everything had a chance to ripen, temperatures dropped and the first light frosts appeared in early April. But everybody seemed to grow and harvest something for their troubles at Mitchell.

I had good success with miniature watermelons and rockmelons which ripened quite nicely in late Feb and early March. Very sweet and a good size for one or two servings. Unfortunately my baby corn was not so successful - it grew very strongly but I was never around to pick the cobs at the right size. The birds had a good time with the baby corn cobs which seemed to grow from finger size to the size of normal corn almost overnight.

There has been some movement recently with two gardeners leaving Mitchell for the greener (and closer to their homes) pastures of O'Connor. We enjoyed their company and wish them well at the new location. I will be eager to see what they've made of the old tennis court when COGS hosts the first open day at O'Connor. The two vacated plots have been eagerly snapped up by two existing gardeners seeking out the best in soil and sun - essential for growing good vegetables. As the convener it was starting to become like a game of Monopoly as the gardeners jostled with each other to snap up the best plots in the garden. The dust has now settled and everybody is happy with their allocations. The garden is now full.

continued next page . . .

Around the Gardens continued . . .

We were recently approached by the ACT Government who would like to place a gate across the access road which leads to the garden. They are concerned about the number of people who use the road to dump rubbish at the end or trade in illegal substances. We will be pleased to see that activity forced to move somewhere else. The additional gate will also help to improve security for our garden. Having to pass through an extra gate is a small price to pay for the extra security it offers. COGS will supply a lock for the gate which will allow our gardeners to get past (combination will be same as existing garden gate).

Ben Bradey

O'Connor

Remarkable progress has been made in the garden in the less than five months that we have been operating. All fifteen plots have been allocated and we have a waiting list of keen prospective gardeners. Most plots have been at least partially developed with some gardeners obtaining good crops directly from the tennis court surface and others importing soil and fixing edgings around beds. Crops of lettuce, silver beet, celery and snow peas are rewarding the early starters.

A shed has recently been installed and work continues on developing the communal, perimeter beds in time for Spring plantings. By the end of the year we hope to have the eastern frontage planted to potatoes, the southern to pumpkins and zucchinis and the western and northern at least partially planted with citrus and kiwi fruit.

Alan Robertson

Queanbeyan

The Queanbeyan Rail Yard garden has had a good spring and summer season so far with a full complement of gardeners throughout the year and a great variety of fruit and vegetables being grown. The first bite of autumn frosts has now prompted most gardeners to clear their beds in preparation for winter crops, which also tend to do very well in the garden.

While yields across the board have been quite good, this year has been a strange one for most of us with an abundance of capsicum (even for novice growers like myself) coupled with a remarkably poor year for tomatoes. For some reason that nobody has adequately explained, we had a late and quite poor fruit set, low production and fruit

that simply did not keep well. Maybe next season will be better for us.

The only significant pest that we have had this year has been Grasshoppers, with an occasional appearance of Harlequin beetles on the Tomatoes. Most gardeners simply let nature take its course with these infestations, and the open conditions of the garden mean that there are few places for pests to hide from the birds and other predators.

Unfortunately (for the rest of us!) one of our regular garden stalwarts, Peter, has decided to pull stumps and head for the sunnier, warmer climes of Narooma. Peter has been the backbone of the garden, regularly pitching in to keep the weeds down, repairing broken equipment and basically doing the 'core' jobs that are essential for the smooth running of the place. Peter, you will be sorely missed, but we have no doubt that there is about to be some spectacular gardening going on in Narooma!

As with any community garden, nothing would work without the goodwill and enthusiasm of our members, many of whom have been very generous with their time and skills to keep the garden running efficiently. We would also like to thank the Queanbeyan City Council, for its continuing support for the garden through the delivery of compost-enriched soil. Thanks also go to Maree and Julie for their help and support.

As usual, a special thanks goes out to the staff at the Minerals Council of Australia, who have taken the time to separate out their compost-able rubbish into the bins provided in their office, and are now supplying around 5-7 kilograms of kitchen scraps to the garden per week. Along with the kind donation of composted soil from the Queanbeyan Council, these inputs ensure that beds can continue to be built up to improve production.

Cormac Farrell



Harvest Night 2006



This year I decided to give melons a go for the first time. So I scoured the seed catalogues and bought a variety of watermelon and rockmelon seeds from Diggers. Those that did best tended to be the smaller varieties as they were able to ripen quickly in the short Canberra growing season. Particular favourites were the 'Minnesota Midget' Rockmelon - about 10cm in diameter with sweet orange

flesh. A great size for a single serve! Each plant produced between 3 and 5 melons. Rockmelons are ripe when they start to disengage from the vine which makes picking easy.

My favourite amongst the watermelons was 'Golden Midget' - perfectly round and about the size of a conventional rockmelon - 15 to 20 cms in diameter. The skin of this watermelon turned yellow when ripe with a salmon pink flesh inside. It had only a few seeds which were easy to remove.

Not so successful was an unidentified watermelon that I brought to Harvest Night. This was a more traditional oval shape - about the size of a football. It contained hundreds of small seeds which were difficult to remove when eating. It didn't taste all that great either.



Baby Sweet Corn plants grew strongly in the plot but I was never quick enough to harvest the cobs at the correct time (cobs about the size of your finger). I decided to follow the suggestion of letting unharvested cobs mature for popcorn making, but the birds got to them before they made it to the popcorn machine. I always wondered why Baby Corn is so expensive to buy in the shops. Now I know. You have to watch it like a hawk and pick it at just the right moment.

Ben Bradey

mooble - all natural stuff

the best range of organic wine in Canberra

organic wine is made from organically grown grapes - better for the soil and better for you - taste and feel the difference!

- prices start at \$10 per bottle for the budget-conscious.
- for the connoisseur, we have many top-rated wines, including Temple Bruer (Langhorne Creek, SA), Battle of Bosworth (McLaren Vale, SA), Botobolar (Mudgee, NSW), Frogmore Creek (Tas), and many more...
- we often hold free wine tastings - check our website for details.

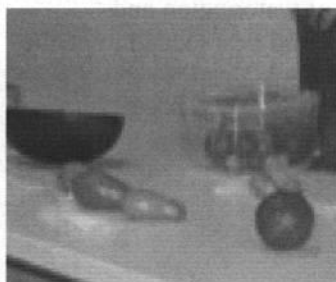


10% discount offered on dozens, and free delivery in ACT

Bailey's Corner, 143 London Circuit, Canberra City 6162 4985

mooble.com.au

The Many Varieties of Tomato



Late last winter, beguiled by the appealing colour photographs in the seed catalogue and thinking longingly of fresh, home grown tomatoes, my daughters and I

bought seed of many varieties to try out at the Holder plot. Also a friend gave me about a dozen plants that she had grown from seed which she had saved. Here are some of the varieties that we grew.

Maltese: this is a pinkish, juicy, pear-shaped, and sized, relatively thin-skinned tomato that originally came to Australia with immigrants from Malta. It has been grown in the Canberra area for about a decade. It is a large, leafy, productive plant that produces many fruit which are very good for cooking. The main problem with it was that it is very obvious to birds (or some other pest – there were plenty to choose from last summer). Fruit were often bitten/damaged near the top and the tomato then was quickly attacked by insects and diseases. Once the fruit had been damaged it needed to be harvested soon after or it rotted.

Beam's Yellow Pear: a small-fruited tomato that produced prolifically. These deep yellow tomatoes, each about 2 cm long, and with a mild taste, were very popular in salads.

Mexico Midget: a small (often only about 1 cm diameter) round red tomato produced in clusters with the usual number of tomatoes per truss, rather than the very long trusses of other small-fruited cultivars such as Sweet 100 or Reistraube. However the tomatoes were very numerous and so very time consuming to pick. But they had a wonderful intense flavour, for those who like a strong 'tomatoey' taste. This cultivar did not seem to be attacked by any pests and produced prolifically over the season.

Broad Ripple Yellow Currant: another small, round-fruited, pale to mid-yellow tomato with fruits that were slightly larger than those produced by Mexico Midget. Again these were very prolific and had a sweet, mild taste that was popular in salads.

Brasero: a low sprawling, almost leafless plant, that produced numerous, round, red medium-sized fruit that were good either fresh or cooked. These very strange-looking plants flowered early – the plants were almost like flower-tipped skeletons – and produced many tomatoes.

Tigerella: a productive variety that produced mid-sized red round tomatoes that have yellow streaks on the skin. These were very tasty but slow to ripen in my plot, but that may have been the poor spot in which they grew.

Green Zebra: another round mid-sized tomato that has green flesh inside a yellow skin that is streaked with green when fully ripe. Immature fruit are green all over. This is another tasty fresh-eating variety.

Yellow Roma: these plants were extremely hardy, vigorous and grew into large leafy bushes with many, many fruit. There seemed to be 2 forms of fruit: the classic elongated Roma shape and also a shorter broader version that was more like an Oxheart or Amish Paste tomato in shape. Both produced lots of deep golden tomatoes that were tough-skinned and suffered very little damage from fruit fly or other insects, just dry spots from the stings. Only at the very end of the season were a few found with fruit fly maggots. These tomatoes were equally good either fresh or cooked.

Red Roma: these were essentially the same as the Yellow Roma, even to the 2 shapes of the tomatoes, except that the fruit were red. Again these were large leafy productive plants that produced copiously over a long season, and did not seem to be damaged much by insects.

Yellow Peach: an old variety with a furry skin like a peach. In our plot it was a smallish bush lacking in vigour that only produced a few small, round pale yellow fruit, but they were free of insect damage. This might be a characteristic of "peach" tomatoes, as a Red Peach grown some years earlier also was a poor grower that produced relatively few tomatoes. These seem to have novelty value only.

Jen Johnston

Preserving Summer's Bounty

Why bother keeping food when we can eat it fresh?

Most COGS folk produce great tasting fruit and vegetables year round but we have a tendency to grow too much when we have the space available. The decision to grow a few tomatoes often results in planting punnet loads or one or more of every heirloom variety available. We savour the promise of produce and wait anxiously over the growing season, watching weather patterns, lamenting lack of rain. Whether we favour homegrown fruit and vegetables for reasons of good health or economy we either harvest lightly and regret not planting more or have to deal with oversupply. So after you've fed the family, neighbours, friends and enemies, have a go at preserving. It can be done in small batches within a manageable timeframe for busy people. Saving your produce as preserves for the coming year allows you to really enjoy your harvests.

The preservation of food has a long and interesting history. Here in Australia many of us recall the Royal Agricultural Shows of our childhood, and enjoy those shows still in our region today, with displays of beautifully presented bottles of preserves. One treasured 1940s manual gives detailed instruction for a tasty bottle of 'Calves Foot' Jelly - yum! Fowlers Vacola of Melbourne has been producing home food preservation products and kits since 1915. The well known vacuum sealed method promoted by Fowlers Vacola has provided the means for many Australians to live off the land in difficult times and to follow the ideals of self-sufficiency and sustainable gardening. Preserving supports personal control over our health and food quality by not using artificial preservatives, chemical additives or pesticides.

As we move into the winter months there is still an abundance of autumn produce to preserve. Quinces, apples, crab apples, pomegranates, figs, medlars, citrus, kiwi fruit, feijoas etc. A trip to Revolve or the local fete could yield products such as preserving jars, lids and clips to help you begin your preserving journey.

For the Royal Canberra Show this year I celebrated Fowlers' 90th year with a Pantry Collection of unusual preserves using old, discontinued bottles and lids from the 1940s. Whole preserved apricots and plums, pomegranate cordial, vegetable pickles, apple and passionfruit sauce, sweet orange marmalade, fruit mince for little tarts were arranged with old swing tags of the era. Today there are many new preserving kits and food dehydrators available to help us all enjoy and savour the highly nutritional foods we produce. Happy harvest!



Lesley Pattinson

Some of Lesley's prize winning preserves

Note: If you are interested in preserving, have old copies of Fowlers Vacola books or a supply of lids, clips and jars you no longer require, I would be interested in hearing from you because I would like to organise small start up kits for COGS members to share. I can be contacted on phone 6288 0293 or 040 3555 629. LP.

The Charnwood Garden Greenhouse - Where's The Serenity?

Winter rapidly approaches with a snarling vicious bite in the wind and early leaf curling frosts. The time is ripe to look back at the successes and failures of the Charnwood Garden Greenhouse (*aka* – The Fertile Sacred Haven)

In July 2005 the old disused shade house at Charnwood garden was moved out into sunlight and covered in clear builders plastic. With thoughts of improving warmth (although not the smell), internal heat-banks were created using aerated horse manure and chook poo. After adding a potting bench and seed raising areas, suddenly a greenhouse was born!

Within a week of construction a fine aroma wafted from the greenhouse, a harbinger of the delicious heat created by half a ton of fine Canberra horse caca. Our portable weather station indicated daytime temperatures of approximately 35°C and an overnight average of about 5°C. Yes, we were gardening in the middle of winter in our singlets (no, gardening in the nude hasn't taken off at Charnwood!). The internal humidity was indicated at a constant 99%, and although welcome in a gym, this sauna like environment posed a problem with regard to moulds etc.



It is a testimony to one of Charnwood's great gardeners (not mentioning any names, Garry) that by week 3 seeds were germinating. We were opening the door by 9am, and closing it in the evening; this was sufficient to decrease the humidity and reduced the daytime temp down to about 30°C. August saw the germination of hundreds of tomato seeds (yes we planted enough for many acres of land!) and lettuce seedlings by the truckload. Other plants such as Asian greens, kale, onions, carrots, and broccoli flourished with vigorous abandon. The back patting got quite out of hand at this stage and of course nature saw fit to humble us with the proverbial fly in the ointment. We had leaf discoloration by September.



With great humility we realised the discoloration on the plants was due to UV deficiency (although called "clear builders plastic" it is quite opaque). Nature was once again restored to her celestial status as we allowed sun into our sacred dwelling via a clear vinyl skylight in the northern side of the greenhouse. There was a miraculous metamorphosis in the colour of the plants within a week or so (although there were some truly disturbing looking plants that never recovered their natural form that remain a mystery to this day).

Disaster eventually struck, as in October we had a tempestuous hail storm that turned our sacred dwelling into an imitation of Swiss cheese. The plastic was pierced and the holes allowed a subsequent wind storm to shred our greenhouse. This of course now meant that leaving the door open constantly to allow for cooling was a redundant exercise!

The total cost for the greenhouse was \$30. It was a grand learning experience that with modifications means (with a bit of luck) this year will be even more productive. So the question begs, what changes would have to be made to make our fertile sacred haven a success?

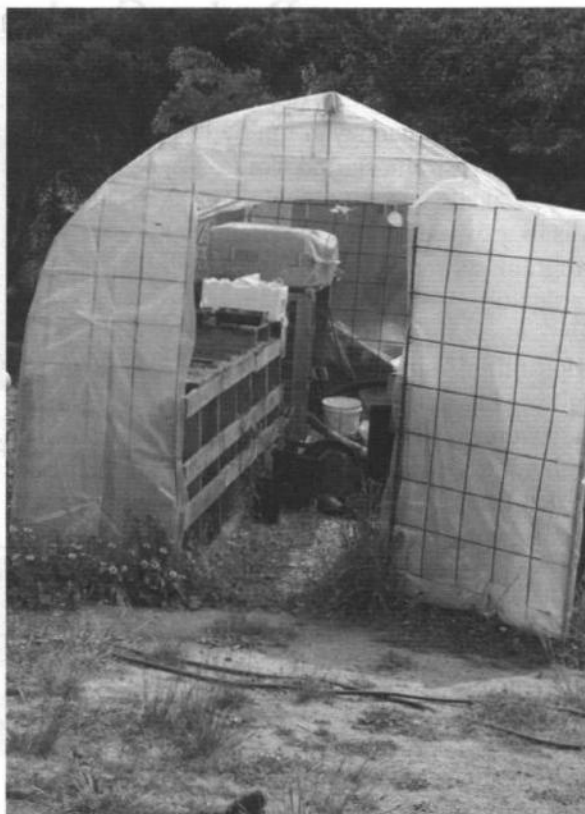
The All New Charnwood Greenhouse – the dream lives on...

This cold winter coming, we are changing the position of the greenhouse, to run in a north south direction. We discovered that one long side became so hot that the plants dried out within hours of watering during the day. Our new cover will be a woven polymer used by commercial greenhouses (hail proof, what genius I ask you?). The northern end of the greenhouse will be covered with clear vinyl for maximum UV penetration, and the southern end will be covered with a tri layer of hessian for insulation and air movement.

Some seeds will be germinated directly above the manure heat-bank to improve germination success. There will be a plant potting frenzy, with many more plants potted than last year with our new fangled shelving system which has more than doubled the space for plants. A small area will be set aside for tropical plants in large pots, to improve the ambience and try the long shot of producing mangos and avocados (one can dream can't one?)

Most of all we will be encouraging (poking and prodding) more people to be involved, have some fun, put their two cents in and offer some variety, which after all is the spice of life.

Ray and Tricia Overvliet



Beautiful Holiday House

Just across the road from the beach at Garden Bay over the hill from Malua Bay surf beach.

Two minutes walk to sandy beach good for swimming, snorkelling, or teaching children to swim. - Easy drive to many other lovely beaches. House sleeps eight, large fenced garden where children can play within sight.

Pets welcome.

Cool sea breeze in summer, warmer than Canberra in winter.

Reasonable rates.

Only 166 kms from Canberra. Take visiting friends and relatives to see the South Coast.

Telephone Brian or Jackie on 6254 4977 for bookings and prices.



Community Group Begins Garden in Oaks Estate

Earlier this year a group of people attending day programs in Queanbeyan run by Disability Services Australia started work on one of the plots at the Oaks Estate Community Garden. The aim was to grow vegetables for their cooking programs as well as to learn about gardens and gardening.

I don't think anyone expected the weeds to be quite as big as they were, or as hard to pull out as they were.... The group quickly found a friend with a lawn mower and mowed some of the weeds so that they could actually see what they were dealing with.

Our group divided the plot into beds and laboriously pulled and dug out all the weeds, mounded the earth up into sections and made pathways. Several people had not gardened before whereas others had, but most people were very willing to learn about gardens and being a gardener. As with all groups of people, some preferred to supervise from the shade....

After the beds were dug, the group bought some organic vegie mix and spread it over the beds, then some pea straw. Now they have planted lettuce, carrots, strawberries, peas, spinach, chives, broccoli and red onions. They found some sprouted seeds that looked like garlic, and peas and leeks that were just growing, so they planted them in a better place and are nurturing them as well.

The group has been learning about different soils, mulches, what to grow in the different seasons, how much plants need watering – as well as how much hard work it is to prepare soil and how much fun it can be pushing a wheel barrow.

One gentleman who likes to walk a lot has been going up to the garden regularly to water as well as picking lettuces for the group for lunch. Another who has been inspired by Don Burke, has great plans for the garden (shade, patios, BBQs) and has been helping to dig pathways, rake mulch and plant seedlings. One lady who has not worked in a garden before thought it was all too hot and too much hard work, but has agreed to give it a go over time to see if picking the grown vegies improves her opinion of gardening. Another

gentleman is inspired by all the vegetables we have been planting and is waiting to plant broad beans, Brussels sprouts and turnips. Part of the beauty of community gardens is that there is room to plant to everyone's taste. Members of the group are looking forward to their first meal that they cook from their own vegetables!

There has been a lot of merriment and team work in the project so far; people have taken it in turns to dig and to rake, to wheel barrow, to plant and to water. The group has supplied some photos of their work so far (see the page opposite) and will give an update on progress in a few months. It is precious to see the natural tendency that we all have to lean on the rake or the spade when it is time for a break!

Julia Williams

*Opposite page:
New Oaks Estate gardeners enjoying the garden.*

Cedar Lodge Motel Braidwood

Centre of town
in historic Braidwood

Discount to COGS Members

64 Duncan Street
Braidwood

Phone: 02 4842 2244

Fax: 02 4842 2658

Run by a COGS member.



the support for new plant jobs is strong



Support for New Plot Holders in COGS Community Gardens

COGS has about 300 members of whom about 185 are plot holders in COGS Community gardens. Feedback from some gardeners suggests that there is a need to provide new plot holders, particularly those with little experience of organic gardening, better support while they are new to gardening in a COGS Community garden.

To address this need, the COGS Committee is considering starting a seminar/workshop series for new plot holders, particularly those who have not gardened organically before. It is expected the first of these seminars/workshops would occur in Spring and be repeated every three or four months or as demand requires. While the seminars/workshops will be designed specifically for new gardeners with little experience of organic gardening, all COGS members (plot holders or not) would be welcome to attend.

It is expected that the seminars would cover such topics as:

- Principles of sustainable organic gardening
- Soils (including plant nutrition)
- Dealing with pests and diseases
- Products and ACT suppliers of products suitable for organic gardening
- Garden rules and garden etiquette

This matter was discussed at the COGS General Meeting of 25 April 2006 and members provided very helpful suggestions as to what information new gardeners might find useful. Suggestions included:

- Provide a checklist to give guidance on what is organic and what is not;
- Each new gardener to be assigned a mentor for at least 1 month;
- Provide an ACT suppliers list for organic products;
- Provide FAQs on dealing with common practical problems encountered by gardeners;
- Develop a questionnaire for all new gardeners to gauge their experience in gardening and in particular organic gardening;
- Provide a list of garden rules and garden etiquette (including an explanation of who owns what in the garden (community vs private));
- Provide web references to the up-to-date versions of the National Standards for Organic and Biodynamic Produce and the certifying agency Standards where available;
- Keep a copy of the up-to-date Standards in the library.

This proposal will be discussed further with the garden convenors at their May meeting. The COGS Committee is keen to receive suggestions and feedback about this proposal from as many members as possible. We are particularly keen to hear from those who are new to gardening or are new plot holders but we are also keen to receive comments from experienced gardeners (whether plot holders or not).

Please email your comments to keithcolls@optusnet.com.au or send them via snail mail to COGS PO Box347, Dickson ACT 2602.

Keith Colls

Garden Birds: Mother Nature's Airstrikes

Many gardeners protect their valuable booty with nets, and while this is sensible for fruit trees and some other exceptionally tasty treats (*ala* sunflowers) that cop raucous attack from sharp-beaked birds, you may want to reconsider imprisoning the bulk of your plot.

I stress I'm no expert on the matter, but the following tale was witnessed next to a netted-in plot, which the owner said seemed more susceptible than most to insect attack. It is testament to the beautiful systems nature implements to keep different species under control and how we can use them as organic gardeners.



I originally spotted this wee winged critter (see photo at left) while taking photos of the site where the Mitchell Garden will build its greenhouse, but then my feathered friend got seriously protective. It hopped and flew through the plants on my plot, picking off the odd insect, and after some 'fly-bys' eventually decided she or he'd have a go at me (see photo below).

In a blur of feathers my ankle lived to tell the tale. But over the course of my fortuitous ten minutes or so with this ravenous bird, it went my ankle again and chewed at least 15 bugs

including some far too big for its beak – while not swallowed, unlike my ankle, they didn't live to tell the tale.

Birds are one vital part of Mother Nature's game plan for dealing with nasty insects. While they probably consume some good ones too – I imagine the bright markings of a lady bird may be a tasty advertisement – the vast bulk of insects in our gardens need a good chomping.

As I witnessed, the featured famished feathered philanthropist free of charge (*Canberra Organic* tongue twister 101) devoured grasshoppers – in plague at the time, beetles, cicadas, the odd slow-witted fly, caterpillars and a few other bugs I couldn't identify. It dodged tomatoes, sumptuous leafed vegies and capsicums – my only complaint is its tastes don't extend to weed seeds – while eating hard to find insects; generally doing all the things I can't.



While tasty, with human reflexes insects are hard to catch and too numerous to bother, and besides the wings get stuck in your teeth – most irritating.

So you've got to wonder what happens when you net in a plot with mesh that allows insects in, but not their bird predators. Mother Nature isn't on the guest list and her birds go with her. So check carefully next time you interfere with Ms Nature's evolved and intricate systems; by virtue of evolution, there is always method to her madness and as organic gardeners we are akin.

If you have a tale of Mother Nature's astonishing persuasive powers, especially if you photographed it, why not share it with other readers'. Send it to editor@cogs.asn.au.

Graham Walker

Gardener Profiles from Charnwood

Gita Curnow



How long have you been a member of COGS?

I joined COGS in September 2005, preparatory to taking up a plot at Charnwood Community Garden.

What was your gardening life before COGS?

I've been gardening my entire married life (43 years) - my husband was never interested in gardening (he thought the weekends were for playing rugby and going on long walks with our kids and me, and generally relaxing before the onslaught of the next working week!).

What first spurred your interest in gardening?

I like a garden with lots growing in it. Have always been interested in growing as much as possible of my own produce - although it was limited to summer harvests until this winter. In the early days it was mostly because we didn't have much money and it was cheaper to grow one's own (and I had time to tend a garden as I stayed home looking after children and home for the first 12 years of marriage, and then for the next 14 years worked less than half-time). Perhaps my interest in gardening is a throw-back to my European peasant ancestors!

What brought you to organic gardening?

I have always been about a 90% organic gardener - it struck me as cheaper and less poisonous, even back in the 60s. The downside, of course, is that it is more time intensive (eg. peering closely at foliage and squashing/eliminating unwanted pests one by one).

Any great gardening achievements?

Nothing stands out as a memorable gardening achievement - I just slog on as best I can. I'm very pleased with the progress I've made on my virgin plot at Charnwood in my first 6 months. Then again, I'm too old (in my sixties) to start from scratch and do everything myself (I've set up 2 gardens from scratch previously and it's too long a struggle without help) - hence giving in to the expense of having the area rotary-hoed, the surface couch hauled away and lots of garden manure/loam trucked in.

Do you have gardens at home?

I am the gardener at home. In the 37 years we have lived in our current house, we've never had a front lawn. Originally I planted only natives, but when they became too straggly after 12-15 years (I hadn't known I was supposed to prune natives to make them denser) I gradually replaced the natives with mostly exotics. More than half the back garden was originally

lawn which tended to be encroached on over the years as carport, bedroom ensuite, shed, and courtyard were added. Another extension out the back in 1999 left only a small area of lawn which I abolished and had replaced with pavers. As part of the same extension project I had 2 rainwater tanks installed (3000 gallons & 500 gallons) so that I could still water my garden when I was old and poor and unable to afford excess water bills - little did I know water restrictions would begin applying a mere 3 years later! My vegetable garden over the past 15 years has gradually become overshadowed by neighbours' trees and as a consequence is no longer very productive. The back garden is a mix of fruit trees, berries, and a sort of cottage garden. And, apart from a sample of summer vegetables, the vegie plot is being turned over to herbs.

Why did you choose to become part of a community garden?

I wanted an allotment to grow enough vegetables to become almost self-sufficient by the time I retire. Community gardening was what was on offer.

What is your favourite vegetable to grow and why?

I don't have a favourite vegetable I like to grow - I prefer to have a range of different vegetables growing, and to watch over what each does. With the greater growing area I now have by having a community garden plot I'm having great fun growing produce I've never had the space to grow before. It's a great challenge, and I'm learning with the help of fellow gardeners and my mistakes.

What is your secret to a great garden?

I'm an enthusiastic gardener and the idea of a well-tended, well-laid-out, productive garden plot appeals enormously to me. I like to freeze, bottle and otherwise preserve excess produce from the garden to eat at a later stage. It may sound a little crazy, but I believe my 3-4 visits per week to the gym for weight training and stretching helps me enormously for the stamina required to set up and maintain a garden plot.

Do you have any other living things in your COGS garden - chicken, ducks, children! etc?

By next spring I hope to have planted raspberries, blueberries, red currants, gooseberries and strawberries in my plot area. I'm also experimenting to see if passionfruit vines can survive in the gardens. My children have long flown the coop, and I don't have space for a chook house (even if I knew how to tend them). Is my homemade fertiliser a 'living thing'? Today I diluted and fertilised my winter vegetable crop with a brew of comfrey leaves and water that has been 'brewing' in a large plastic bin for the past 4 weeks. It stank to high heaven, but I don't think plants can smell - only I had to hold my breath every now and again.

Melissa Mc Closkey - with Tim, Nicholas & Theresa



What brought you to organic gardening?

I originally started gardening organically because I was worried that pesticides and other chemicals are bad for the planet. Nature is not meant to

be a monoculture and I

was keen to garden with nature rather than against it.

As I've become a more active organic gardener, through my reading and through my experiences, I've come to realize that not only is it better for the planet, but it's also better for me.

Gardening History

I've gardened all my life. As a young girl, in a large family, I used to grow tomatoes in our backyard where my three brothers would play cricket. Their desire to be Lillee or Chappell always trumped my desire to grow. Later, living in group houses in the inner suburbs of Sydney was not much more conducive to gardening. I'd just finish planting a garden and then we'd all move on to other houses, other adventures.

It was not until I came to Canberra that my gardening really blossomed. The original owners of my first house had been Italian, and while the garden had gotten away under subsequent owners, that family that I never met taught me a lot about where to plant what, and how to make a Canberra garden thrive. The key seemed to be soil and aspect.

I was tempted to join COGS at that stage, but only decided to take the plunge when we moved from our first home into a new home without space for a vegetable garden (it lacked those key ingredients – soil and aspect).

Why community gardening?

When I garden at home, I garden alone. Nick will go inside and play computer games, Tess will do her things, and domesticity will always call me away from the garden. And while I now have the power to stop boys from knocking cricket balls on to my tomato plants, I don't want to exercise it. I want Nick and Tim to enjoy the pleasures of cricket in our back yard.

At the community garden I can dedicate myself to my garden. I can lose myself in a way that is not possible at home. There is also the benefit of having other gardeners around, learning from each other, and it provides an outlet for Tim to experiment with various designs for chicken houses. We are now on our fourth version I think.

Favourite vegetable to grow and why?

Everyone knows that a supermarket tomato tastes like cardboard compared with one fresh off the vine, but I was surprised to find the depth of taste and lusciousness that is an organic rockmelon.

Favourite use of self grown vegies?

Currently we're eating a lot of pumpkin so here's one of our favourite pumpkin recipes.

*Penne with browned garlic and pumpkin (courtesy of Matthew Evans from SMH)
(serves 2-3)*

Kind of garlic-inspired. The warm crunch of the browned garlic goes nicely with the soft sweetness of the pumpkin.

400g of pumpkin, peeled and cut into 2cm dice
olive oil for roasting
5 cloves of garlic, cut into fine slivers
250g penne pasta
1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
25g Italian parmesan, grated

Lightly oil the pumpkin and roast in a hot oven (220c) until very soft and starting to colour (about 20 mins). Keep warm, or reheat before assembling. Fry the garlic in a little extra-virgin olive oil until light brown, then remove from the heat immediately. Cook the penne in at least 2.5 litres of salted boiling water. Drain (do not rinse), keeping about half a cup of the cooking water in the pan. Return the hot pasta to the saucepan, add the remaining extra-virgin olive oil, garlic, pumpkin and half the parmesan. Toss to combine, then serve hot, with the rest of the cheese on the table.

Other living things in your COGS garden?

There is no end to living things in our COGS garden. The soil is jumping with energy from worms, bacteria and fungi. We have three chickens who are an integral part of our crop rotation scheme, and help add more life to the soil, and we have a gold fish who lives in the 'Kinder Garden', her role in the natural balance is to keep the mosquitoes under control.

I'm able to garden here because my kids are also growing to love it here. Often I pick Nick (8) up from school, and Tess (4) from pre-school, and we all come down to the garden to unwind. They are both learning the joys of watching and helping plants grow, although they don't yet have the necessary patience to wait for the harvest to be ready. Nick has put his energies into a secret children's garden in a secluded corner, and is forever dreaming up changes for how his little version of paradise should grow. Tess loves to socialize and will follow other gardeners around their plots chatting about their gardens.



Organic GARDENER magazine

Organic Gardener magazine presents clearly written features and stunning photography on all aspects of eco-living.

Inspiration

Information

Practical advice

The Winter issue is an inspiring mix of organic gardening advice and eco-living stories. We take you from the basics of growing citrus trees successfully to sustainably retrofitting the suburbs. Discover organic travel in Tasmania and how to grow your own firewood. Jerry Coleby-Williams shows you how to have healthy soil for healthy gardens. We also uncover the health benefits of wheatgrass and why it is so great for mind and body, plus lots more.

Winter issue on sale 7 June - only \$7.95!

Available from all ABC Shops, ABC Centres, newsagents,
and ABC Online www.abcshop.com.au

To subscribe:

Call 03 8317 8110 or go to www.isubscribe.com.au

Special subscription offer for the Winter issue:

Subscribe to *Organic Gardener* for \$34.95 and receive* a FREE CD "In the Garden"
valued at \$19.95 (*while stocks last).

CALL FOR ENTRIES: Veggie of the Issue

Welcome to a new regular Canberra Organic segment “Veggie of the Issue” where we take your amazing photos, drawings or even your kid’s drawings (yes, we’ll take anything!) of your produce, and give it the showcase it deserves. Your produce could be funny looking, big, small, diseased, in a noteworthy situation or you could just be a proud parent – so send ‘em all through.

If you have an amazing fruit or veggie, send details, a quote/description and image (photo or drawing, kid’s drawings especially good) to graham.walker@csiro.au or Graham Walker, c/ CSIRO Education, PO Box 225, Dickson, ACT, 2602.

Veggie of the Issue: A tomato shaped like a thingy?

Our first Veggie of the Issue is this comically shaped tomato grown by Ray at the Mitchell Gardens. Now I have a penchant for gutter humour, but even the purest of readers will have to admit that this tomato, as Ray and Baldrick from *Blackadder* put it, “is shaped like a thingy.”

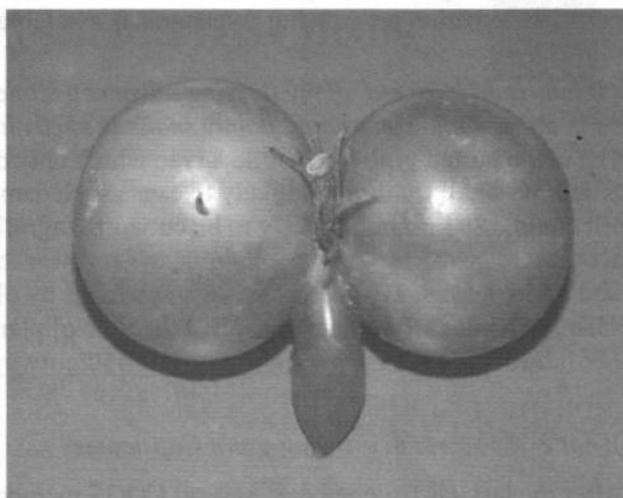
But it doesn’t stop there. Subsequent research by the team of journalists at Veggie of the Issue yielded some shocking results for an internet search on “tomato shaped like a thingy” and some revised searches led to the following starting explanation for Ray’s odd shaped tomato.

One explanation is “Catfacing”, where blossoms stick and form weird shaped tomatoes upon development, although the pictures suggested Ray’s tomato was an astonishing case. Other options are a virus, although the tomato is in perfect health, or abnormal pollination due to hot or cold conditions.

Another possibility is that two tomatoes have grown in tandem and the small ‘appendage’ is a shared segment. I have noticed overgrown segments on single tomatoes, but never on conjoined twins before – well done Ray! If you have the answer, please contact Veggie of the Issue on the above details.

Either way, the thingy shaped tomato has won Veggie of the Issue.

More tomato stuff:



<http://www.hort.purdue.edu/ext/HO-26.pdf> - a great paper on tomato growing, including Catfacing

<http://www.yardener.com/ProblemsofTomatoes.html> - tomato problem summary

<http://www.abc.net.au/adelaide/stories/s1605811.htm> - ABC’s 2006 Tomato Review

<http://www.ninemsn.com.au/article.aspx?id=63554&subsectionname=gardening> – What can go wrong with home-grown tomatoes. A fabulous tomato overview by the legendary Jackie French.

Graham Walker

Questions and Answers

Many of us have questions related to Organic Gardening and one of the benefits to being a part of a community is being able to access our communal wealth of knowledge. A number of magazines run a question and answer page such as our friends at BOGI (Brisbane Organic Growers). We are proposing to have a new regular page within our magazine, where we are able to learn from the experiences of others, but it can only happen with your input! This is how we envisage the page working:

1. You send your questions either to us or to the e-mail announcement list (see page23).
2. We put your questions to the Members at the next COGS General Meeting or collect responses through the e-mail announcement list.
3. We publish your question and the answer in the next issue of *Canberra Organic*.

If we cannot get an answer from the members who attend the next general meeting we will then publish the question in the magazine and ask for answers from our readers. Also if you disagree with the answer given by the members please write to us so that we can give different view points and perspectives!

So here comes your part! Please send us your questions or answers to:

E-mail: editor@cogs.asn.au
Phone: 62551349
Snail Mail: COGS
PO Box 347
Dickson ACT 2602

Q: "During winter are you meant to slash back your asparagus or just leave it? How do you care for your asparagus crowns during winter?"

A: "The asparagus fern dies down between April and May as the plant undergoes a natural dormancy period over winter. The debris from the fern is usually slashed and mulched back into the soil, with care taken not to damage the crown. Other methods of removing the fern debris include using a flame burner." (Information on growing Asparagus is available from the *Australian Asparagus Council*)

Q: "What could have cut off my thriving advanced lettuce seedlings at the base? I found curled white grubs in the soil and some small pointy snails in shells like seashells on the leaves."

A: The white curled grubs are beetle larvae which only damage plant roots and the small snails are unlikely to cause such damage. The culprit could be a bird but is likely to be cutworm (*agrotis* spp). Cutworms are brown with pointy ends. They stay near the surface of the soil under leaves. Try protecting your seedlings by placing them in collars of cardboard set into the soil at the time of planting. For further information see : www.gaipm.org/top50/cutworms.html



Cutworm Photo by UGA Archives

Q: *What is the secret to growing great Capsicums?*

A: After the last garden open day, several COGS members noticed that the Capsicums were a standout performer in the garden, and several people asked for advice on the tricks that our gardeners use to achieve such healthy, productive plants.

The Capsicum plants that I have been growing were supplied to me by one of our more experienced gardeners as advanced seedlings. They were planted into raised beds in pairs about 10cm apart, and 25 cm between the pairs. Once Capsicum plants are well established, you should hill up the soil around the stems of the plants with good, rich soil to give extra support and nutrients. Some gardeners also put frames of horizontal stakes to give additional support to the plants. Mulching is highly recommended, as you need to keep the water up to them, especially during fruit formation.

(with thanks to Bosa! - Member of the Queanbeyan Community Garden)

COGS E-mail Announcement List

COGS has re-established an email announcement list for its members. The list will be used to notify members of the following :

- ★ reminders about upcoming COGS events
- ★ changes to the schedule/speaker line up for COGS events
- ★ information received by other organisations or people that may be of interest to COGS members (eg gardening courses, open days, exhibitions, requests for assistance)

You may expect to receive one or two emails a week from this list. To subscribe, simply send a blank email to the following address :

canberra_organic_growers-subscribe@yahoo.com.au

You will receive a welcome message containing details about the announcement list and how to unsubscribe if you want to.

Only the COGS Secretary can forward messages to participants and your email address won't be given to any other person or organisation by your participating in this list. Send an email to info@cogs.asn.au if you would like anything announced. If appropriate it will be released to the other participating members.

Ben Bradey

ECO MEATS

Specialists in Organic Pesticide-free Meats

Organic Beef Organic Poultry
Organic Lamb Organic Sausages
Organic Pork Game Meat
Crocodile, Emu, Goat,
Kangaroo, Rabbit, Venison



Now Open: Continental Deli

Shop 41
Belconnen Fresh Food Markets
Lathlain Street, Belconnen
Telephone 02 6251 9018
Fax 02 6251 9017
Wednesday to Sunday

Just the way Mother Nature intended!!

Attention Organic gardeners
We also sell Supercharge and certified Alroc products:



YOUR ORGANIC BUTCHERY

Growing Onions

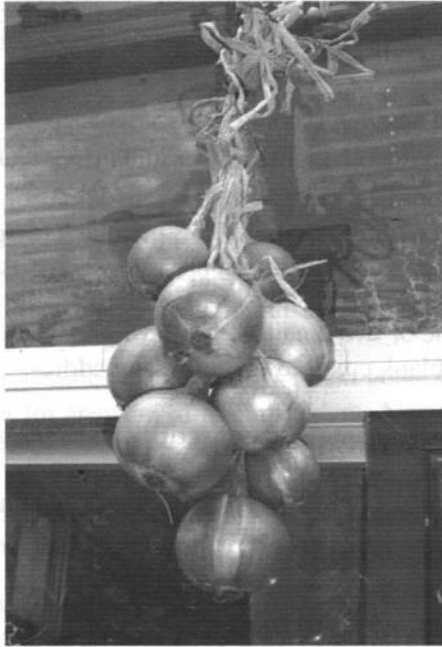
Onions are one of the most frequently used vegetables and also one of the easiest to grow if you get the timing right. Many varieties are available, both for eating fresh or storing for later use. With a bit of careful planning and the planting of several varieties, an area of around 6 or 7 sq m can produce enough onions for two people for twelve months. Onions may be soft or paper skinned, bulbing or bunching and coloured white, red, brown, yellow or green. The common onion *Allium cepa* can be eaten fresh or stored for later use. Soft skinned varieties such as 'Early Flat White' or 'Sweet Red' mature earlier (Nov - Dec) than most of the paperskin varieties but do not store well. Paperskin varieties such as 'Creamgold', 'Brown Spanish' and 'White Spanish' mature around February and if correctly dried and stored will keep for 8 or 9 months. The main problem I have found in having onions available all year is not storage but planting enough to last until late Spring when the new seasons crop is ready.

History

Onions are one of the oldest cultivated plants with a recorded history of over 5000 years. They are thought to have originated in the Middle East and Central Asia and are now grown throughout the temperate and sub-tropical regions of the world, and have become an essential ingredient in many national cuisines.

Site and soil

Onions need to be grown in full sun. A well worked friable soil incorporating well rotted organic matter is best. A very rich soil is not necessary and too much nitrogen in the soil will produce large onions with poor keeping qualities. Good drainage is essential and onions will not thrive in very heavy soils. Onions prefer an alkaline soil and a pre-planting dressing of lime or dolomite may be necessary to ensure a pH of at least 7. I grow onions in a separate bed as part of a six year rotation plan (they follow the tomatoes, capsicums and eggplants) and dress the bed with



'Brown Spanish' onions dried and ready for storage and use during Winter

Dolomite at the rate of about one handful per two square metres a couple of months before planting out the onion seedlings.

Planting

Onion seedlings should be planted out in their final position in late July, August or early September. Many books tell you to plant onions in early Winter but in Canberra both the weather and soil are too cold. Seedlings set out too early in Winter will just sit there for weeks looking sick and are more prone to go straight to seed in Spring without forming bulbs. Seedlings planted too late will not form bulbs and will go to

seed the following Spring. The fact that seedlings are available in the nurseries does not always mean it is the best time to plant them. Onions are relatively slow growers and will occupy your garden for about six months from the seedling stage. Seed can be directly sown but is often very slow to germinate in Winter and the seedlings will usually need transplanting anyway to their final spacings. I find it much easier to plant the seed in punnets at home where they are more easily cared for and to plant them out in the garden when they are big enough to handle easily - about 10 - 15 cm tall. Bundles of bare rooted seedlings are usually available which I have also used with great success. Make a shallow v-shaped trench about 5 - 10 cm deep and simply lay the seedlings out with their roots at the bottom and their shoots lying up one bank. Brush some soil over the roots and water in well. In a few days the seedlings will stand themselves up vertically. Space the seedlings about 10 cm apart to allow room for the bulbs to grow.

Cultivation

Onions grown for keeping are best planted in a separate area so watering can be better controlled near harvest time. The number of leaves produced determines the number of layers in the bulb and therefore its ultimate size. Seedlings will grow slowly until the weather warms up when the leaves start to grow

quite rapidly. Water sufficiently to keep the soil evenly damp, but not wet, during early growth. A mulch between rows can be helpful in retaining soil moisture but do not mulch too close to the plants as this can lead to fungal disease problems. The onion roots extend to a depth of 15 - 20 cm so there is no need for the soil surface to be kept moist. No supplementary feeding should be required if your soil contains good quantities of organic matter. The soil around the developing onions should be kept weed free. Bulb formation in onions is triggered by day length - the longer keeping varieties generally require longer days to begin forming bulbs. Bulbs begin to form from late Spring to late Summer, depending on the variety, and are clearly visible on the soil surface - about half the bulb is above the ground so it's easy to see how they are progressing. Once bulbs become evident, direct watering of long keeping varieties should be reduced to allow the outer layers of the bulbs to begin drying and to form their paper skins.

Harvesting

Paper skin onions mature in late Summer or early Autumn. When the bulbs are fully grown the leaves begin to yellow and wither. Watering at this stage is unnecessary and any overhead watering can induce neck rots and mildew problems. The soil surface should be kept dry to assist ripening. The leaves can be folded over at the neck to speed the ripening process. Once the leaves have yellowed completely, or have fallen over by themselves, the onions are ready to harvest. Pull them up and allow to dry further until all the roots wither and can be rubbed off. This can be done on the ground if the weather is warm and dry or otherwise on a rack in dry, sheltered spot. Commercially onions are dried on the ground but in Canberra the Autumn dews can be a problem and rack drying is more reliable.

Pests and disease problems

There are multitudes of pests and diseases which *can* attack onions but in practice I have found them to be one of the most bullet-proof crops to grow. The biggest problem is usually birds which can uproot all your newly planted seedlings in early Spring - seemingly just for the fun of it. A simple netting

arrangement of polypipe hoops and bird netting will prevent any damage. The birds seem to give up on onions later in the season. Clean cultivation - no close mulching and a weed-free surface - will reduce the likelihood of problems from fungal diseases and crop rotation will reduce the build up of any soil borne pests or diseases.

Saving seed

Onions are biennials and will go to seed in the second Spring. The flowers are insect pollinated and different varieties need to be isolated from each other to prevent cross pollination. Commercially, onions grown for seed are caged and pollinating insects introduced into the cages. If you wish to save onion seed its easiest to let only one variety go to seed each year. Onion seed does not keep very well and should be planted within two years of harvest.

If you are interested in finding out a lot more about onions and their history and cultivation Penny Woodward has written a very comprehensive book called *Garlic and Friends*, published by Hyland House in 1996, which is full of valuable information. It includes lists of all the onion (and other allium) cultivars available from suppliers in Australia and details of planting times, harvesting times, keeping qualities etc.

Adrienne Fazekas



Creamgold onions drying before storage

References

Garlic and Friends Penny Woodward

The Seed Savers Handbook Michel & Jude Fanton

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Excess zucchinis

I read Sophia's article about what to do with spare zucchinis in the autumn edition of *Canberra Organic* with great interest, having a huge oversupply of yellow ones myself. I thought I would tell you of my favourite zucchini recipes from my much thumbed copies of a few classic recipe books. These are probably available in the Canberra public library system, as well as in paperback and maybe in second hand book shops.

From Claudia Roden's "A Book of Middle Eastern Food" come a couple of Eggah dishes, a sort of middle eastern omelette. Eggah bi Eish wa Kousa (Bread and Courgette Eggah) uses half a pound of zucchinis to six eggs and three slices of bread; also parsley, onion and black pepper. Eggah bi Kousa (Courgette or Marrow Eggah) uses six small zucchinis or a medium size marrow to six eggs, butter or oil, black pepper and optional cinnamon.

Elizabeth David's "French Provincial Cooking" features quite a few delicious zucchini recipes, for example, Courgettes Fines Herbes for little zucchinis, which are cooked in butter with chopped parsley, chervil or chives and a squeeze of lemon juice. Also Petits Soufflés aux Courgettes - miniature soufflés, but can be made as one large one. The recipe uses one pound of zucchinis, two whole eggs with two extra whites, five tablespoons grated gruyere cheese and white sauce.

One pound of zucchinis and half a pound of tomatoes go into Courgettes aux Tomates, along with olive oil, garlic and pepper. To turn this dish into Courgettes à la Nicoise one adds six stoned and halved black olives and some parsley. Gratin de Courgettes et de Tomates cooks two pounds of zucchini in butter with one pound of tomatoes, parsley, garlic, salt, pepper and breadcrumbs.

Ratatouille Nicoise is delicious, but somewhat time consuming to make, I find. For eight people, needed are: three medium sized onions, three aubergines, three sweet red peppers, three zucchini, four tomatoes, garlic, coriander seeds, basil or parsley and olive oil.

"Summer Cooking" again by Elizabeth David, features Courgettes au Jambon, with one pound

of zucchini, 3-4 ounces ham, garlic, olive oil and pepper. Also Courgettes with Parsley Butter - zucchini, olive oil and butter, parsley and lemon juice.

Soupe Menerboise, a substantial dish, is made of: half a pound of zucchini, one pound of tomatoes, two onions, garlic, two small potatoes, a handful of shelled and peeled broad beans, basil, one and a half ounces small pasta or broken spaghetti, olive oil, two egg yolks and parmesan cheese. The difficulty, if growing one's own in Canberra, is to get the broad beans and zucchinis ready at the same time! Peeling the broad beans is also a chore, but the result is worth it.

And lastly, another Elizabeth David recipe, this time from "Italian Food" - Zucchini Agrodolce (in sweet-sour sauce). This needs one pound zucchinis, olive oil, pepper, cinnamon, wine vinegar and sugar. Sformato di Vitello e Zucchini (a pie of veal and small marrows) features one pound of veal, butter, parmesan cheese, one and a quarter pounds of small zucchinis, salt, pepper and nutmeg.

Robin McKeown

Lebanese zucchinis for pizza base or spread

I also received an email from a fellow gardener at Cook Community garden, Rasima Kecanovic, who has kindly forwarded a recipe that we have discussed while harvesting zucchinis from our garden plots.

For a very simple and very tasty spread, especially for a pizza base, or as a sauce in other cooking—

Slice and roast, or grill, the zucchinis with garlic cloves. When cooked well, blend together with garlic. You can add chillies to it if you wish. Place the resulting creamy mixture in jars and seal well. Keep in the refrigerator or, if well sealed, unrefrigerated.

Note: If you use normal zucchinis for this recipe, Ras suggests peeling them. The strong green skin may be a little bitter. **JP**

Thanks to Robin and Ras for sending these additional ideas for cooking up zucchinis—there should be no problems handling large harvests from now on.

Sophia and Janet



WINTER VEGETABLE PLANTING GUIDE

Asparagus

Prepare the bed before you buy the crowns to plant in late Winter - early Spring. Since this is a perennial crop which can last for up to 20 years it is well worth the effort of establishing properly. Asparagus needs good drainage and plentiful food and can be planted very successfully in a raised bed enriched with compost and well rotted manure. Seaweed is an excellent mulch. The crowns are planted in a trench, but with the roots straddling a ridge. Cover so dormant shoots are about 4cm below the surface. Do not harvest spears the first year, and only harvest for a few weeks the second year. Remember this is a long-term investment.

Broad Beans

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

Kohlrabi

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

Lettuce

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

Onions

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

Peas

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



Rhubarb

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

Other possibilities

Growers may wish to start a number of crops in late winter rather than early Spring if the winter is mild or if they have a sheltered garden bed. Such crops include Artichokes (Globe and Jerusalem), Beetroot, Cabbage, Carrots, Potatoes and Radish.

Frost-sensitive vegetables such as Capsicum, Eggplant and Tomatoes can be started early in August indoors

but may need a heated glasshouse or warm spot to germinate and will certainly need protection before being planted out in spring.



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

Strawberries:

Plant certified stock or propagate from runners (not from plants more than 2 years old however) in a soil enriched with compost or well rotted manure. Remove old leaves and excess runners to tidy up the plants in winter.

Berries:

Raspberries, youngberries, boysenberries etc can be planted during winter while they are dormant. Remember these bear fruit on canes grown in the previous year so to prune remove all the old canes in autumn or winter making sure to leave the current seasons growth for next years fruit. Autumn fruiting raspberries bear on the current years growth so are cut to the ground in winter after they have fruited.

Currants:

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

Gooseberries:

Like similar conditions to currants.

Winter Vegetable Planting Guide

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

S = Seed Sowing T = Transplanting

This table is a guide only, so observe the seasonal weather patterns before deciding when to plant, as there will often be distinct differences from one year to the next. The microclimate of your garden will also influence the times when you plant.

COGS Committee Members & Helpers

President	Adrienne Fazekas	6247 5882	president@cogs.asn.au
Vice President	Keith Colls	6251 7729	keithcolls@optusnet.com.au
Secretary	Ben Bradey	6161 0329	info@cogs.asn.au
Public Officer	Ben Bradey	6161 0329	info@cogs.asn.au
Treasurer	Michelle West		
Membership Secretary	Jen Johnston	6288 3200	members@cogs.asn.au
Librarian	Sophia Williams	62551349	nathsoph@hotmail.com
Co-Editors	Janet Popovic & Sophia Williams	6258 2811 62551349	editor@cogs.asn.au editor@cogs.asn.au
General Committee Members	Stephen Dangaard		
<u>Garden Conveners</u>			
Charnwood	Stephen Dangaard	6258 9302	
Cook	Ras Kecanovic	6258 7174	rasima_kecanovic@hotmail.com
Cotter	Roz & Trevor Bruhn	6282 1214	bruhn2605@netspeed.com.au
Cotter Orchard	Ann Smith	6285 2995	a.smith@netspeed.com.au
Dickson	Bebby Bros	6248 0063	
Erindale	Christine Carter	6231 5862	ccarter@netspeed.com.au
Holder	Jen Johnston	6288 3200	
Kambah	Mary Coulson	6231 6405	rcou7287@bigpond.net.au
Northside	Ben Bradey	6161 0329	bbradeyau@yahoo.com.au
Oaks Estate	Terry Williams	6299 2409	fourofus@cyberone.com.au
O'Connor	Alan Robertson	6251 0906	araba@netspeed.com.au
Queanbeyan	Cormac Farrell	0422441358	cormac.farrell@minerals.org.au
Theodore	Richard Reed	6291 1897	rmjreed@ozemail.com.au
<u>Monthly Meetings</u>			
Seed exchange	vacant		
Supper conveners	Volunteers - Please add your name to the roster!		
Librarians	Bebby Bros and Sophia Williams		
Web manager	Ben Bradey		info@cogs.asn.au
Telephone contact	Elizabeth Palmer	6248 8004	
Inquiries about Organic Growing		6248 8004	info@cogs.asn.au

To contact COGS

Email info@cogs.asn.au or visit our website at www.cogs.asn.au

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

Venue: Meeting Room 6 The Griffin Centre

Genge Street, Civic

(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 12 community gardens in the Canberra region. Gardens are located at Charnwood, Cook, Curtin (Cotter Garden), Dickson, Erindale, Holder, Kambah, Mitchell (Northside Garden), Oaks Estate, O'Connor, 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. 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

COGS
PO Box 347
DICKSON ACT 2602
Phone: (02) 6248 8004
Email: info@cogs.asn.au
Web: www.cogs.asn.au

COGS NOTICE BOARD

Don't forget to check the COGS website at www.cogs.asn.au for updates and new notices.

Speakers

7:30 pm, Meeting Room 6,
Griffin Centre,
Genge Street, Civic,
(opposite the old Griffin Centre site)

23 May 2006

Grahman Williams:
Head gardener at Lanyon Homestead will speak
about ornamental vegetable growing.

27 June 2006

Ben Bradey and Graham Walker:
Weed identification and Management

25 July 2006

To be advised

22 August 2006

John Field:
Will speak about the importance of plant
nutrition, and how it can be achieved using
organic and biodynamic techniques.

COGS Working Bees

COGS Backyard

Saturday 27 May, 1-3pm
Sunday 2 July, 1-3pm
Saturday 29 July, 1-3pm

COGS Meeting Suppers

*Thanks to Janet, Alison and Eliza for providing
our recent general meetings with supper.
Members enjoyed your tasty treats!*

*We need MORE volunteers for upcoming
meetings so why not add YOUR name to the
roster! (ring Janet 62582811)*

Events

Small Area Farming Expo, 10am-4pm,
Sat 27th & Sun 28th May,
At the Queanbeyan Showgrounds

Biodynamic Faming and Gardening Course
With Lynette West

Level 1, 13th & 14th May 2006, Bungendore

Level 2, 27th & 28th May 2006, Bungendore

Level 3, 3rd & 4th June 2006, Bungendore

For further information,
www.biodynamiceducation.com.au
(02) 61617639 (Yvonne)

The Co-op Food Shop

Kingsley Street, Acton
off Barry Drive

*We provide an ecologically and
socially sustainable alternative to
supermarket shopping.*

**We have fresh organic and BD
fruit and vegetables.**

**A large range of beans, flours,
nuts, oils, tofu and tempeh
is also available.**

**Tuesday and Thursday
10 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Wednesday Friday Saturday
10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Sunday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.**

Phone 6257 1186

**Food Co-op Members receive
20% off listed prices**



COGS E-mail Announcement List!

(See Page 23)

To subscribe, simply send a blank email to the following address :
canberra_organic_growers-subscribe@yahoogle.com.au