

Summer 2007

Canberra Organic

ORGANIC GROWING IN THE CANBERRA REGION

The quarterly publication of the Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.

Guerilla gardening Raspberries and fennel Biodynamics

Rain tanks and sure-fire compost Early years of COGS

Cheese making COGS summer planting guide



Vol. 15 No. 4



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

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

For information about COGS and organic gardening, visit the COGS website www.cogs.asn.au

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MONTHLY MEETINGS

COGS meetings are held at 7:30pm on the fourth Tuesday of each month (except December and January) at the Majura Community Centre, Rosevear Place, Dickson (from September).

Guest speakers, a produce and seed exchange and sales and the COGS library feature at each meeting. Visitors welcome.

MEMBERSHIP

COGS offers single, family, associate and overseas memberships for \$25 for one year (\$15 for concessions) or \$40 for two years (\$24 for concessions) for new members.

There is a membership application form in this magazine. Please contact the Membership Secretary or a COGS garden convenor for an information kit.

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COGS is run by a voluntary committee elected at the COGS AGM each March.

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From the President Summer 2007

The planting of summer crops is well underway in the COGS gardens. The warm spring weather has

resulted in good early growth and the prospect of a successful season. After three very dry months, November finally produced some good rain. As I write over 90 mm have been recorded at Canberra Airport so far this month, with more forecast. Let's hope they're right.

Cogs at 30

As COGS celebrates its 30th birthday it's worth reflecting on some of its achievements. COGS has become well known and well respected in the Canberra community. The membership has grown to over three hundred and although some members eventually leave there is a constant stream of new members, keen to learn about organic growing and to access a plot in one of the gardens.

The community gardens continue to thrive and enable over one hundred and fifty families to enjoy the benefits of fresh, healthy, seasonal food. The importance of local food production is becoming more widely acknowledged as the costs, both financial and to the environment, of the production, transportation and packaging of produce are counted more carefully.

The gardens also provide a wonderful opportunity for members to learn from each other and develop a sense of community.

COGS is very fortunate to enjoy the on-going support of the ACT government and the Queanbeyan Council who provide the land for ten of the gardens. The eleventh and newest garden, O'Connor, is a partnership between COGS and the O'Connor Uniting Church which has utilised some previously neglected church land to create a very productive and popular garden.

The monthly meetings are well attended with members enjoying a wide variety of informative speakers and access to our ever expanding library. Suggestions for future speakers or topics, are of course always welcome.

Our quarterly magazine *Canberra Organic* has

gone from strength to strength in recent years and continues to be well received by the members and over a hundred non-members who regularly purchase copies.

COGS does not run itself, and over the years we have been very fortunate to have a succession of members who have volunteered their time to take on the responsibilities of a committee or garden convenor position. Without them the organisation would not have either survived or prospered.

Open garden

Charnwood garden will be open to the public on December 8 & 9 as part of the Open Garden Scheme. This is the first time one of gardens has participated in this scheme and gives us a wonderful opportunity to show off the benefits of community gardening and to promote COGS. I would like to thank all those at Charnwood who have worked hard to make this happen and wish them well for the weekend.

Water

Water restrictions are still a challenge for many gardeners but it is very important that they are adhered to and that the good reputation COGS enjoys is not jeopardised. The restrictions have been in place for long enough now that everyone should know the rules. Any members reported breaching the watering rules in a COGS garden will only receive one warning. A second breach will result in forfeiture of their plot.

Its encouraging to see more gardeners are using drippers to avoid the tedium of holding hoses. The combination of drippers and mulch minimises water use and provides more even soil moisture. The use of drippers also allows gardeners to get other things such as planting, weeding or harvesting, done during the watering slots.

Finally I would like to wish everyone a safe and happy festive season.

Adrienne Fazekas

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

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

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EDITORS

Monica van Wensveen and Sophia Williams

CONTRIBUTIONS

We welcome submissions, ideas and feedback.

Contributions preferred in Word, Publisher or text format, on disk, as attached files or as clean typed copy.

Images should be sent as attached (not embedded) files, on disk or as original photographs or slides.

There are four issues each year - Autumn (February), Winter (May), Spring (August) and Summer (November). Deadlines for copy and advertising are 15 January, 15 April, 15 July and 15 October, respectively.

Please send contributions to

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ADVERTISING

Please contact Monica van Wensveen on 6255 4332 or email editor@cogs.asn.au.

Canberra Organic is a unique way to reach people in the Canberra region who have an interest in organics, gardening and the environment. Our circulation is around 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)
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Editor's note

It is truly a sign of summer that I'm writing this on my back veranda in the late afternoon sun, rather than rugged up in the study with the heater on.

The approach of summer is a time of mixed feelings. The Queenslander in me is breathing a sigh of relief at the warmer weather; the Canberran me is looking at the prospect of another long dry with trepidation; the gardener in me is busy redesigning my plot to make the most of what moisture is coming; and my Dutch blood is still wondering where all the rain is.

This season's *Canberra Organic* features rainwater tanks, guerrilla gardening and the pursuit of the perfect euro-vegetable, plus articles on biodynamics, cheese-making and organic products from our recent diverse and talented presenters.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed stories, photos and ideas during the year. Thank you also to Adrienne and Sophia, who did the hard work finishing off this and the last editions of the magazine while I was swanning around on a bike and in rice paddies.

Wishing everyone a relaxing Christmas break and a soggy summer in their garden!

Monica



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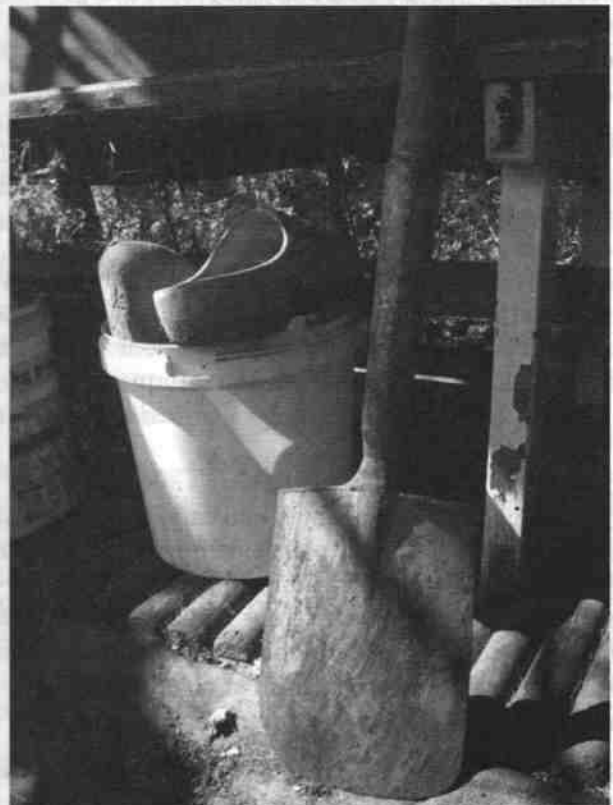
Karl Adamson, Kate Barrelle, Ben Bradey, Betty Cornhill, Peter Cornhill, Graeme Davis, Adrienne Fazekas, COGS Garden Convenors, Benny Glasman, Janet Popovic, Ann Smith, Monica van Wensveen and Alison Yamazaki.

Photos

Kate Barrelle, Ben Bradey, Adrienne Fazekas, Rebecca Scott, Ann Smith and Monica van Wensveen

Cover photos

Radishes from southern France; berries from Holland; one of the Cotter Orchard helpers, a Scarlet Robin; broad bean vista at Mitchell; Dutch gardening essentials (this page).



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Around the Gardens



Cook

Now that the decision to postpone Level 4 water restrictions has been made, spring activities at the Cook garden are well underway. People have been busy preparing the soil and planting spring vegetables. We are all hoping for more rain though!

We have 3 new members who joined in September and there are still 2 plots available - although knowing our history, these will go quickly.

Our monthly working bees and BBQs are still going successfully. We are well underway with a large project - the paving underneath the pergola for more comfortable BBQ events. I expect this will be done before spring is over.

If anyone from other gardens would like to pop in during one of our working bees and have a BBQ with us please do come along. Our working bees are on at noon every first Sunday of the month. In summer we will move the time to the afternoons as it gets too hot at noon. The working bees are a brilliant opportunity not only to get some community work done but also to meet members and share ideas and information.

Rasima Kecanovic

Cotter

The milder days in late winter and early spring saw all gardeners active on their plots either preparing for, or planting, their spring and summer crops. Gardeners who planted green manure crops in the winter have dug those in, and others have prepared their growing areas by incorporating a combination of compost and manure.

Several new gardeners have done wonders with plots that had been unworked for a while, and these plots now show good development of spring plantings of various crops.

Across the plots there have been plantings of many crops such as potatoes, onions, carrots, parsnips, lettuces, various peas and beans, and brassicas. No doubt these will be supplemented by plantings of tomato, zucchini, pumpkin and such like when any late frost risk has passed. The warmer spring conditions so far experienced coupled with the need to use water efficiently have seen the employment of mulching methods by the gardeners.

The recent annual meeting was very well attended and

approved our continuation as co-convenors. The working bee after the meeting attended to matters requiring action from the risk assessment report together with a general clean up of the common areas. We thank the gardeners for their efforts on the day, and also thank those who have addressed matters in the common areas since that day.

Currently all plots are taken and a waiting list is in place.

Roz & Trevor Bruhn

Holder

The garden has seen the departure of nine gardeners and the garden welcomes Peter Kaylock, Kevin and Mary Murphy.

Some gardeners have finished picking the last of their late winter crops and the garden is starting to see a hive of activity in readiness for the upcoming growing season with some early spring crop plantings starting to emerge.

The only dampener to the growing season so far is the unseasonably warm weather, unexpected frosts and lack of rain. But plants that have survived the dry weather last year and have received minimal watering are surviving and showing new season growth. Currently there are few 45sqm plots available.

Conrad van Hest

Mitchell

The fruit trees we pruned last year have recently been showing their heartfelt thanks. To my untrained eyes, the hair cut looked fairly severe, but the trees have come back looking superb this season, with masses of blossoms and a neat, convenient shape.

The rest of the garden is also looking pretty spruce, thanks to a recent working bee - thanks to all who helped. Particular thanks to Jan for his hard work and for stepping in as convenor while I've been away.

In anticipation of a hot, dry summer, most of the Mitchell gardeners have cut back on either plot size or amount of vegies they're planting. I've sown half of my plot with green manure (so as not to have bare soil) and have thrown in all my out-of-date or nearly use-by seeds for good measure.

We have two new gardeners - welcome James and Tony!

Monica van Wensveen

O'Connor

Some good news came recently for our garden in the form of a \$20,000 grant to the Uniting Church to install water tanks. Thanks go to the members of the garden that put so much time and energy into making the application a success and thanks to the members of the O'Connor Uniting Church for their positive support of the project.

This spring has been amazing in the garden despite the dryness. The effects of everyone's efforts and time and nature (our second summer), are really showing now as the response of the ground increases. There are more fruits, berries and herbs appearing around the edges of the garden as the common ground becomes easier to use and the ivy and ornamental grape on the southern fence have wasted no time in trying to take what we feel is more than their share of the available space. The extra nutrition and water has enabled them to explode which has pleased the currawongs no end as they have been feasting on the berries that appeared on the ivy. We have resident magpies of course who are looking extremely healthy despite the dry as they have found a 'worm farm' where, previously, there was only clay.

One member of our garden has produced a small ripe tomato (late October as I write) with the use of large protective, solar cones. That has to be a record of some kind! The culture of the garden grows as each person adds something of their own in how and what they do, and welcome to another new member, Karen Rutherford.

And in the now immortal words of Peter Cundall, "that's your blooming lot for this week". I only worked out the pun in that the other day! Ah well, who's in a hurry anyway - the garden isn't. Bye folks!

Philip Woodhill

Cotter Orchard

The Fruit Variety Foundation planted the pome orchard in the Cotter Plots, next to the COGS Cotter Garden, in the early to late 1970s. The Foundation was a program within the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service with a remit to introduce virus-free pome fruit varieties into Australia for use in horticulture.

With an increasing reliance on private industry to do this kind of thing the Foundation was disbanded, the trees were duplicated as part of the heritage apple collection at Grove Research Station, in Tasmania's Huon Valley, and our local orchard was abandoned.

This history has been researched by new COGS member Karl, who has joined principally to gain access to the orchard. He's got a depth of interest and

experience in fruit tree cultivation which should benefit COGS as well as the orchard.

He's managed to acquire the Foundation's accession list to help identify trees in the orchard which still have tags, but tags with numbers only. The list confirms that, overall, there is a good mix of eating, cider and rootstock apples to work with, plus some pear varieties.

The continued absence of rain is having a serious impact on the orchard with further tree deaths, a number of other trees in need of salvage and almost all affected by various degrees of dieback. On a positive note the drought has culled the weaker rootstocks and those remaining will form a good framework for the future. The orchard volunteers see replacement of the irrigation system burnt out in the 2002 fires as necessary to ensure that no further deaths occur.

Rejuvenation, rescue and reestablishment are the aspects we will focus on over the next few years. A spring survey at early flowering identified the work that needs doing on individual trees and we have our work cut out for us! Contact Ann (6285 2995), if you would like to help—and enjoy the fruits of our labour in due course.

Rejuvenation is a continuing priority. With the drought, we have an ideal time to take the trees back hard without too much regrowth occurring. This will be most of the work over the next few years.

Rescue of ailing trees is another immediate priority. Some trees are in very poor health and eventually will need removal. We will look at grafting these in the coming season to ensure their survival for future years. The one thing we are short on is suitable rootstocks for these. If anyone is willing to donate a few spare young trees or rootstock suckers that they've potted on, please contact Ann.

Reestablishment of dead trees will also be commenced with the propagation of existing rootstocks this season. The orchard has a number of rootstocks that have for many reasons fallen out of favour with modern growers. The group will start propagation of these for replacement of the dead trees.

In both the fruit orchard and nearby nut groves, we have an excellent framework for the future. Once these are properly maintained the group see a place for them as productive orchards, educational tools and as scion resources for people interested in growing older unpatented varieties of pome and nut fruit.

Karl Adamson and Ann Smith

Organics in the news

Fantastic plastic

The plastic packaging required to track sales is taking the shine off finding organic produce in mainstream supermarkets. The New Zealand Herald reports that Purefresh Organic, who supply 80% of organic fruit and vegetables to New Zealand's supermarkets, is introducing biodegradable plastic packaging to reduce environmental impact. The plastic takes 18 months to break down, rather than 150 years.

Sustainability behind bars

Norway's Bastøy Prison is like many other offshore prisons, except that it claims to be the world's first 'green gaol', according to the UK's Independent. It boasts solar panels, wood-waste heating, a strict recycling policy and, with a 100% organic prison garden and livestock, is almost self-sufficient in terms of food. The prison receives grants from environmental groups and sells surplus produce to other gaols.

Anxious wait for additive results

The Guardian reports on an anxious wait on the results of a new study that potentially links a series of food additives to behavioural problems in children. Researchers at Southampton University tested a number of controversial food colourings and a widely used preservative that may be connected to tantrums, hyperactivity and poor concentration. Food safety experts are advising parents to eliminate these additives until the study's results are published.

Organic vs no-till farming

Science Daily reports that a long-term study by the US Agricultural Research Service suggests that organic farming can build up soil organic matter better than no-till techniques. Results surprised scientists who found that the additional of manure and cover crops more than offset any disadvantages from tilling.

Gastronomic gastropods

A couple from Brittany have become France's first certified organic snail farmers, reports the UK's Telegraph. The organic label for these culinary icons is only achieved if the snails are from certified organic parents and are fed only organic produce - organic clover and radish in this case - and live on pesticide-free soil, with 35 cm square for each animal. The Bonises, who raise around 250 000 snails, are restoring faith in the French market which have been flooded with snails from countries with few or no pollution controls.

Good news for garlic lovers

UK researchers have discovered that allicin - which is responsible for the sulphur compounds that cause garlic breath - also relaxes blood vessels, reducing blood pressure. Eat up!

Top Tips for SUMMER

1 Prioritise

Be a water pragmatist. Focus your watering efforts on those plants you most want to keep in your garden. And instead of growing everything from artichokes to zucchinis this dry season, plant only those vegies that are most important to you.

2 Escar-GO!

Everyone has tips to rid your garden of these slimy beasts. Some suggest organic sprays made from unpalatable plants or physical barriers like eggshells or sawdust. Tried and tested approaches include hand picking them after dark when they're most active, removing potential breeding sites from around the garden and encouraging predators such as birds and lizards.



3 Beneficial bugs

If a bug appears in your garden, be sure to identify it before you destroy it. Beneficial insects - like lady beetles, lacewings and parasitic wasps - can actually rid your garden of destructive insects.

4 Swap your surplus

When the glut of summer vegetables becomes too much, swap produce with fellow gardeners or give away excess to your neighbours, friends, and work-mates. And once *everyone* has their fill of zucchinis, start a recipe exchange.

5 Much ado about mulch

Mulch is a summer gardener's best friend. A layer of good mulch suppresses weeds, protects soil from erosion, conserves moisture, keeps soil surface and plant roots cool in summer and encourages worm activity.

"It's difficult to think anything but pleasant thoughts while eating a homegrown tomato."

Humorist and author Lewis Grizzard

Weather Watch

Batten down the hatches - here comes summer. Here's a snapshot of what to expect weatherwise, from the Bureau of Meteorology's long term statistics for summer temperature and rainfall.

Temperature

	December	January	February
Canberra	max 26.1	max 27.9	max 27.2
Airport	min 11.3	min 13.1	min 13.1

Rainfall

	December	January	February
Canberra	51.8 mm	59.5 mm	56.0 mm
Airport	5.7 rain days	5.7 rain days	5.1 rain days

(Rain days are days with more than 1 mm rain; temperatures are degrees Celsius)

Seasonal forecast: November - January

- Across most of southeastern Australia, the Bureau of Meteorology indicates the chances of accumulating at least average rainfall are between 45% and 60%.
- Across this region, the chances for above average maximum temperatures are between 60% and 70%. There is also a 60-70% chance of warmer than average minimum temperatures for this period.
- This rainfall and temperature outlook is mainly the result of continuing higher than average temperatures over parts of the Indian Ocean.
- There has been further cooling of the Pacific Ocean in equatorial regions. A late-developing La Niña event is in progress and models suggest that it should persist at least until early 2008.

For more information and regular updates, visit the Bureau of Meteorology's ACT weather website: www.bom.gov.au/weather/act

New climate projections

CSIRO Media Release 07/194 - 2 October 07

Climate Change in Australia is a new report released jointly by the Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO in October.

It provides the latest information on observed climate change across Australia and its likely causes, as well as updated projections of changes in temperature, rainfall and other aspects of climate that can be expected over coming decades as a result of continued global emissions of greenhouse gases.

The projections focus on the years 2030, 2050 and 2070 for various greenhouse gas emission scenarios.

"By 2030, we expect temperatures will rise by about 1°C over Australia, compared with the climate of recent decades," says CSIRO's Dr Penny Whetton, one of the report's authors. "The probability of warming exceeding 1°C is 10-20% for coastal areas and more than 50% for inland regions."

The amount of warming later this century will depend on the rate of greenhouse gas emissions. "If emissions are low, we anticipate warming of between 1°C and 2.5°C around 2070, with a best estimate of 1.8°C," Dr Whetton says. "Under a high emission scenario, the best estimate is 3.4°C, with a range of 2.2°C to 5°C."

Increasing levels of greenhouse gases are likely to cause decreases in rainfall in the decades to come in southern areas during winter, in southern and eastern areas during spring, and in south-west Western Australia during autumn, compared with conditions over the past century.

"We need to plan ahead, to reduce risks and make the most of any opportunities that may arise as a result of global warming," says another of the report's authors, Dr Scott Power from the Bureau of Meteorology. "The information in *Climate Change in Australia* is critical for that planning."

The report can be accessed at www.climatechangeinaustralia.gov.au

Enthusiasm: the early days of COGS

COGS celebrates its 30th anniversary this year - that's a generation of organic gardening in the Canberra region! Our first President Betty Cornhill reflects on the establishment and growth of the society.



Kiah, my organic farm out on the Yass River Road, was probably the real starting point of COGS.

Anyone enthusiastic about growing their own vegetables and fruit would visit Kiah, and come away full of enthusiasm for organic gardening.

It was a light-hearted place, where most people worked hard, and when we all met at lunchtime to eat our sandwiches or salads flavoured with herbs from the garden, the talk was happy and rather carefree.

Kiah was a place where 'organic' people from other parts of Australia or even overseas came to visit and hold seminars - people like Bill Mollinson, Michael Rhodes and even Lawrence Hills, who had started the Henry Doubleday Research Association in England.

COGS takes root

So it was not surprising that a society should start with beginning with a talk by Mike Lubke at the Canberra branch of the Natural Health Society of Australia in 1976 and again in 1977, when I was determined this time to really get it started, even if it meant that I would have to be President - a thing I was terrified of, partly because of my deafness.

Shirley Carden was at that first meeting at the Downer Community Centre and she will remember that it was my enthusiasm that won me the votes to be the first

President, that and the fact that I had been running an organic farm for 4 years and had a lot of knowledge to pass on.

I had a list of 70 people who were interested in forming a group. Most were vegetarians and members of the Natural Health Society, and were longing to grow their own vegies.

They just needed encouragement and some knowledge to help them, so I was on the phone a lot, getting speakers for our meetings and giving advice on all sorts of problems - such as what to do about pear and cherry slug, which I had discovered on the farm could be controlled by dusting the leaves with talcum powder or clay dust.

Many Canberra people find life in a city lacking something. This is so in all cities, but if they can just get their hands into some soil, it makes life become better somehow.

The growth of the COGS library

Hanna Enders and I went to the first two Organic Festivals at Luddenham and Colac and came back with a few books to start a library, bought with money given by Mike Lubke's group, Organic Growers of NSW, and that was the start of our wonderful library. Quite a few of our books were donated and Jackie French was one of our early speakers who donated copies of many of her books to the library.

Enthusiasm for the library waxes and wanes, but I am glad to see that the present committee is well aware of the value of the library, both as draw card and help in teaching new members how to grow organically.

I stayed on the committee for many years (about 20 I think) and when things got desperate, I would agree to be President again, because my enthusiasm has pulled COGS back from extinction a number of times. I have had my arguments with members of the committee and on several occasions, with the whole committee, but I have always done what I thought best for organics as a whole and for COGS as a group, even when I felt that the committee was unfair to me as a person.

When Shirley said to me "COGS is going to fold. There are only 20 paid up members", I retorted "Rubbish", and Shirley, knowing my unquenchable enthusiasm for organics, then said "Well, not if you will take over as President again."

The newsletter was a godsend, for I photocopied more than enough and sent them out to anyone who rang to ask me how to do *anything* organically.

I don't know how I managed to do so many things. I wrote publicity for our meetings and put it up in every health food shop in Canberra, as I was also doing for the Natural Health Society.

As these notices invariably ended with "Visitors welcome", our numbers reached 90 by the end of the year. I am not sure which year this was, but it was sometime in the 80s.

I only took on the job of President when no-one else could be found for it, but there was one thing I learnt from doing it - I got over being frightened of standing up in front of an audience and speaking.

My hands shook, so I made sure I had a table in front of me, and wrote my speeches out very large, so I could read them from the table, and I thought of all those people out there as my *friends*, which made it easier to talk to them. Also, I made visitors stand up and be welcomed, thus making the audience participate, and usually ensuring that the visitors would join and come again.

The library became a very important part of the attraction of the meetings, as I spent quite a bit of time reading books and magazines about organics and joined other groups to benefit from their knowledge. This exchange of newsletters was started by our first librarian, Gail Dadds, and has continued ever since. Up until recently I had read nearly every book in the library, but not any more. We have added so many good books in recent years.

The last time I was President, I asked Ron Champagne to be the Editor, and as he was able to have printing done by students, we had enough copies that we were able to sell them at health food shops and on stalls at field days, and even at the Canberra Show, where we had some wonderful stalls - thus spreading the word about organics among farmers and town people alike.

At the end of that year we had 90 paid up members and I was able to say "I told you so" to Shirley, who took it with a quiet smile, knowing it was just what she had planned.

COGS in context

I believed, and I still do, that making COGS lively and interesting will bring in new members, and this is

important because I believe that we have to stop poisoning our atmosphere and stop poisoning people.

At the time I was doing the newsletter fully, America was selling lethal chemicals to third world countries, whose people did not understand that these chemicals could be absorbed through the skin. Most of the chemicals had been banned in the States, so they were being sold overseas - this was America's prosperity.

I also had many articles about woodchipping our native forests. This was our government's prosperity and shame. Most of these articles were written by people who worked at the environment centre where I photocopied our newsletter and they were happy to reach a wider audience.

In 1983, there was an Organic Festival at a farm in the Kiewa Valley. That farm was a biodynamic farm and also had dams built according to Yeomans' book 'Water for every farm'. The fertility of that farm was such that I was convinced that this was the answer to the world's food shortage and possibly this country's water shortage.

That was where NASAA (National Association for Sustainable Agriculture Australia) started after many years of discussion and argument. I am proud to have helped to start it and to have been COGS representative at that first meeting, even though I was only an observer. COGS can be proud too that we helped to pave the way for NASAA to begin, and helped it to continue. This is the wider view.

My part in the start of the community gardens is another story - written in my little book 'Grow your own vegies: A handbook of organic community gardens.'

Betty Cornhill

ACT water restrictions

Stage 3 water restrictions apply in all COGS gardens.

Hand-held hoses with trigger nozzles, watering cans and drippers may be used 7-10am or 7-10pm on alternate days.

No watering is allowed at other times

Summer harvest: RASPBERRIES

Fresh raspberries are one of the delights of summer. They are easy to grow and a well maintained stand will remain productive for many years.

The plant

The raspberry (*Rubus idaeus*) is a deciduous, perennial shrub. Long canes are produced each season from a permanent crown. The canes are thorn-free but covered with prickly hairs. There are two varieties of raspberry: those that fruit in summer and those that fruit in autumn. It is important to know which sort you have as they are managed quite differently.

The summer fruiting varieties flower and fruit on the previous seasons growth. Each year after harvest all the fruited canes are completely removed to encourage the current season's growth. Commonly available varieties include: Willamette, Skeena, Chilliwack and Nookta.

Autumn fruiting varieties are smaller, less woody plants and bear their fruit at the tips of the current season's growth. All the canes are pruned off each Winter. Commonly available varieties are Heritage and Everbearer.



Site and soil

Raspberries prefer an open, sunny site. They do not enjoy extreme heat and need protection from hot afternoon sun and the hot north-westerly winds common in summer.

The soil should be slightly acidic, friable, free draining and high in organic matter.

Planting

Bare rooted canes are available in winter. Plant the canes 30 - 80 cm apart in rows running north - south to allow the sun to reach both sides of the plants. Each cane will produce a clump of six or more canes. The growing canes will need some support. The simplest method is to run three or four wires along the row to a height of 1.2 - 1.5 metres. The canes are tied to these wires in bunches as they grow.

Cultural requirements

Mulch: Raspberries are shallow rooted and will benefit from a deep mulch which conserves soil moisture and reduces soil temperature fluctuations. A mulch of compost and lucerne is ideal as it will also feed the plants.

Water: Adequate soil moisture needs to be available from flowering to harvest. Drip irrigation under mulch is the most efficient method to use. Overhead watering should be avoided as it can increase the risk of fungal diseases. Wind protection may be necessary if the site is exposed.

Harvesting

Raspberries ripen progressively over about four weeks so need to be harvested regularly. Once the fruit is ripe it will come away without its stalk. The berries will not keep well after picking so should be eaten within a day or two. A single mature clump can produce up to a kilogram of fruit.

Pruning

Summer fruiting varieties: After harvest cut all the fruited canes to the ground. Thin the new canes to five or six of the strongest in each clump. Tie the new canes to the wires. If some are too tall they can either be cut back or tied horizontally along the top wire.

Autumn fruiting varieties: Cut all the canes to the ground after the last fruit is harvested.

Pests and diseases

The major pest problem is birds and plants may need to be netted from the start of ripening until harvest. Fungal diseases such as anthracnose, leaf spot and botrytis can attack raspberries. Cultural controls such as ensuring good air circulation, avoiding overhead watering and removing any diseased canes will usually be sufficient.

References

- Glowinski, L 1991 *The Complete Book of Fruit Growing in Australia*, Lothian, Melbourne
- Baxter, P 1991 *Fruit for Australian Gardens*
- Pan Macmillan Publishers Australia

Words and photo: Adrienne Fazekas

Summer planting: SWEET FENNEL

Although Sweet Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare* var. *azoricum*) is classified as a herb, it is also a handy and hardy addition to a vegetable garden. It is a Mediterranean native and is also known as Florence fennel or finocchio.

Plants grow up to 1 metre, with dill-like plume leaves, aromatic yellow flowers and a bulbous stem. Fennel has an aniseed flavour and all parts of the plant can be used.

While sweet fennel is prized for its bulb, other varieties - some quite weedy - have been developed for their stalks or decorative foliage and it is easy to confuse young plants prior to bulb formation.

Site and soil

Fennel prefers rich well-drained soil and full sun. It is not keen on heavy or compacted soils

Planting

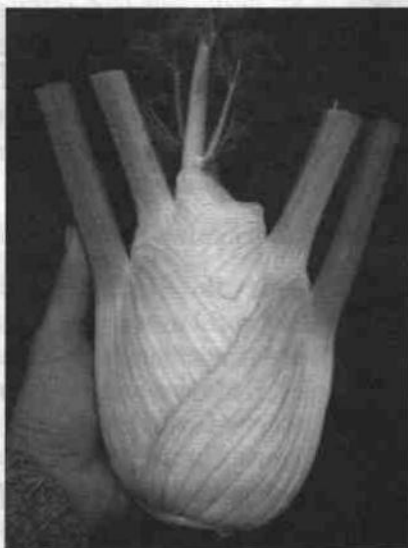
To plant, sow seeds directly once the ground is consistently warm. Planting in mid-summer should give a harvest in autumn

Seeds should be spaced (or seedlings thinned to) at least 25cm apart and covered lightly with about 1cm of soil. Seeds can be sown in trenches to assist blanching later on. Germination takes 7-10 days - keep soil moist during this period.

Cultivating

Once the stem has swelled to the size of a golf ball, it can be blanched to reduce bitterness and encourage a clean white bulb at harvest.

Put a paper or cardboard collar around the base and mound soil around the collar. Once the stems have swelled to double the size (around 1 month after blanching), they are ready for harvest.



Harvesting

To harvest bulbs, remove collars and soil from the base and cut just above the root with a sharp knife.

Harvest the leaves at any time, remembering to leave enough to feed the plant.



Fennel is many things, but not a dog-deterrent.

Harvest seeds once they have formed and the flower head has died. Store seeds in a cool dry place. Note that different varieties cross-pollinate readily with each other, with the weedy fennel and also with dill.

Problems

Snails and slugs are fond of the bulbs, so check before eating. Although fennel is very hardy, excessive heat, cold, disturbance or water stress can affect cause plants to bolt. If left too long, fennel becomes stringy and tough.

Choosing and using

At the market, choose unbruised bulbs that still have their green tops on whenever possible. Unwashed fennel can be stored, wrapped, in the crisper for about a week.

Leaves can be used as a garnish or as flavour to soups and sauces. The raw bulbs and stalks are a refreshing addition to a salad. Fennel can also be braised, steamed, fried or baked.

Tea made from fennel seeds is said to aid digestion while externally, the oil eases muscular and rheumatic pains.

References and further reading

- Organic Vegetable Gardening (Annette McFarlane)
- The Gardener's Network website www.gardenersnet.com/herbs/fennel
- Holistic herbal (David Hoffmann)

Words and photos: Monica van Wensveen

Guerilla Gardening: a futile or fertile revolution?



In addition to undertaking random acts of beautification of public spaces, Guerilla Gardeners are often driven by political motivations – for example, anti capitalism, anti land ownership, anti corporate control of food, anti genetic modification of food. For them Guerilla Gardening (GG) is highly symbolic, non-violent direct activism. They find it unconscionable to have land left idle in a time of global food insecurity – and when 23% of all land in USA cities is vacant, they have a point.

Others are environmentally motivated to repair derelict and damaged land, as well as increasing local production (and hence reducing ‘food miles’). Some are concerned with the right to have local production of food. And then there are those who just like the idea of doing something a bit edgy with positive social consequences and no objective harm.

Irrespective of motivation, the code of honour comprises three principles – only use unwanted or neglected land, leave it in better condition than when you found it, and don’t get caught.

But what comes of GG other than the satisfaction of the midnight warriors themselves? In fact there is excellent anecdotal and solid social science evidence that irrespective of the motivations of those carrying out GG, the community benefit is significant and positive.

Blessed are those who see beautiful things in humble places. (Camille Pissaro)

Clandestine carrots

The other morning we woke early, alarmed by unusual scuffling noises outside. Peering apprehensively through the window, we saw our seven year old neighbour, Josh, illicitly planting carrot seeds in an empty pot on our front deck. He’s possibly the youngest Guerilla Gardener in recorded history, that breed of gardener who illegally enters unused land and without permission grows something on it.

In a city, a Guerilla Gardener’s canvas is vast – vacant lots, median strips, abandoned cars, potholes, cracks in concrete paths. And their paint is anything that grows – sunflowers, creeping pumpkin vines, veggies or even marijuana – dropped as seed, or as ‘seed bombs’ or ‘green bombs’ containing a mixture of compost, clay and seeds.

Productive social outcomes include increased community self-respect, as well as social cohesion and collaboration that spans racial and generational lines. Other worthwhile outcomes include increased food availability, decreased criminal activity in or near the vacant lots, decrease in rubbish accumulation, greening and beautification of an otherwise ugly and derelict space. Not bad for a symbolic act.

Guerrilla Gardening through history

From Bougainville to Belgium, and Singapore to Somalia, the world over and since time immemorial GG has been happening. It’s mentioned in the Bible, and gypsies, Bedouins and early travellers in the Middle East and Central Asia have been practicing GG forever – sowing crops such as potatoes along the roadside and on the land of others, to return later to harvest it.

Johnny Appleseed is the most obvious early American ambassador of GG. Popular legend has him spreading apple seeds wherever he travelled (whereas in fact he planted nurseries and built fences around them).

And many gardeners know of the English amateur horticulturist Ellen Willmott who in the late 1800s and early 1900s had over 60 plants named after her ("Miss Willmott's Ghosts") on account of her prolific GG seed spreading activities. In addition to her seed spreading against the wishes of land owners, it appears that Miss Willmott became increasingly cantankerous – or perhaps paranoid – with age, even booby-trapping daffodil fields to deter bulb thieves. A true activist to the end!

On St Patrick's Day in 1948 Dick Fagan from Oregon USA secretly planted flowers in a tiny patch of soil surrounded by concrete, originally destined to house a lamp post. It grew into the smallest park in the world (even rating a mention in the Guinness Book of Records) and has become folk legend with a leprechaun granting Dick a wish of his own little park!

Despite its long history, the term 'Guerilla Gardening' was not actually coined until 1973 when Liz Christy and her Green Guerillas group in the Bowery Houston (NY) area began 'planting as protest'. They tossed Christmas tree ornaments filled with soil and flower seeds into derelict abandoned lots, and over a decade these spaces grew into flower and vegetable community gardens, eventually wholeheartedly embraced by the local people and now also by the authorities. The classic slogan surviving from this time is – 'Resistance is Fertile'. Some 35 years later these particular gardens and the spirit of GG are still growing strong.

In the Australian context there are GG groups forming in Brisbane, Maleny on the Sunshine Coast, Melbourne and Paddington in Sydney. And apart from seven year old Josh and other inspired individuals like him, there appears to be very little organised GG in Canberra – yet...

Thorny issues

A range of potentially problematic issues are raised when considering the wider social and legal implications of GG. Serious Guerilla Gardeners would never consider seeking permission to plant before hand, placing GG squarely in the realm of the illegal. So no matter how good your vegies or flowers are there is the risk of prosecution for vandalism or trespassing.

Some sustained GG projects have grown so successfully that the local community has sought involvement and ownership of them, so they are not GG any more – by definition.

Another risk is that councils or commercial owners can destroy the gardens – a high emotional cost, but one that

no doubt spurs some onto greater GG feats. More dangerous are the unintended but possible health consequences of growing edibles in areas of weed spraying or in toxic wasteland.

So is resistance futile or fertile?

Are Guerilla Gardeners just ratbags and romantics, or are they justified rebels with a worthwhile cause? Personally, I'm leaning towards the latter. Despite some of the extraordinary community gardens and projects that have grown out of GG I am a bit pessimistic about the capacity of GG to actually challenge capitalism or mass produce local food.

But in the words of songwriter Paul Kelly, 'from little things big things grow', and the politics that GG agitates for – making decent food available to all, without environmental cost, and beauty for the sake of it – are worth seed bombing for.

Postscript

After careful consideration and extensive legal advice, we've decided not to press charges in relation to Josh's carrots. In fact we're talking about joint custody of some corn, and he can plant it wherever he likes.

Kate Barrelle

Photo: Rebecca Scott

Further reading & tips for those interested in Guerrilla Gardening

- Tracey, David. 2007. *Guerrilla Gardening – A Manual*. New Society Publishers.
- www.guerillagardening.org
- www.myspace.com/guerilla-gardening
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guerrilla_gardening
- <http://www.utubevideoclip.com/> (search guerrilla gardening for multiple clips)

www.cogs.asn.au

The COGS committee is reviewing and reinvigorating the COGS website in the new year.

If you have suggestions or ideas for content, now's the time to contact us!

Send your thoughts to editor@cogs.asn.au

Organic kitchen composting - Bokashi style

I have a confession to make – I'm not very good at composting. I know, there is no excuse, especially when I have access to all the information COGS has to offer.

It's a bit like living in the mountains and not enjoying the view or having a place at the coast and never going to the beach. But somehow composting just doesn't work for me. Maybe I'm too impatient, or maybe I never seem to have the right mix of materials on hand. So normally I just chop up the organic material into pieces and scatter around the garden as a mulch, letting nature take its course. Maybe with the odd kitchen scrap thrown in for good measure. This isn't particularly effective, and the reason why the Bokashi Bucket caught my interest.

These little (about 8 litre) buckets take all kitchen scraps, including items that are a bit dodgy to compost normally such as citrus and meat. You can also throw in used tea bags and tissues if you are keen. A special mix of bran and sawdust infused with micro-organisms is scattered over each layer of scraps as you work your way to the top. The supplier markets this as EM – 'effective micro-organisms'. You do have to wonder whatever happened to the 'ineffective' micro-organisms. Those poor little critters aren't given the time of day in this system.



fermentation process can reach its maximum potential before it's buried in the garden, while you start to fill the other bucket.

Material left for a week or two in the bucket will develop a white fungal growth – a sure sign that good fermentation has been achieved. The material will be quite acidic for the first few days after contact with soil, so it's best not to plant any new seedlings in the immediate area until this settles down and the material neutralises.

I'm amazed at how much material is finding its way into the bucket – material that I would previously had thrown in the bin. Our two-person household fills a bucket each fortnight and a \$9 bag of the micro-organisms lasts about 6 weeks. Sometimes, depending on what material has been used, a concentrated liquid is produced that can be diluted and watered into your soil for a bio-active soil conditioner.

These little buckets aren't cheap to buy and you need to re-purchase the micro-organisms every few months. But for those living in a townhouse or apartment, they are the perfect answer to creating high-quality compost for the courtyard or pots. And for a non-composter like me, they are just ideal – simple, quick and high-quality compost every time.

Words and photos: Ben Bradey



Anyway, the whole lot 'ferments' in the bucket until it is ready to be buried in the garden – this is when the real action starts as the break-down of material only occurs once it's in contact with soil.

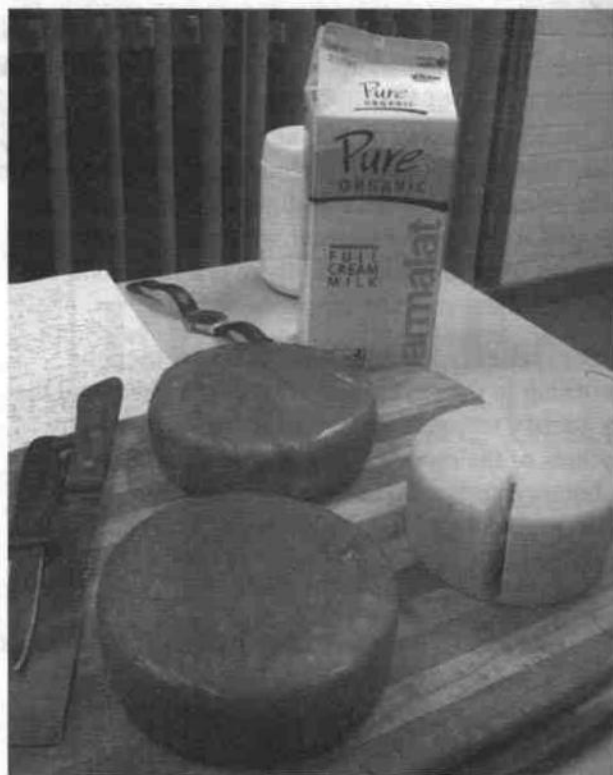
Because the system is anaerobic (no air), a full bucket has a smell not all that unlike pickled cucumbers and, while not the sweetest smell on the planet, it's much better than what you'd expect from kitchen scraps after a few days. It's a good idea to have two buckets so the

Hands on cheese making

Benny Glasman, our COGS speaker for September, introduced the art of cheese making and gave a hands on (and very tasty!) demonstration.

I was privileged to be the first speaker at COGS' new monthly venue at the Majura Community Centre in Dickson. It is a wonderful space, for the room itself, spacious outdoor courtyard and ample free parking. I think it feels better to be on ground level also.

My own interest in cheese making came about two years ago (living in Rosebank in northern NSW) when a friend asked me if I'd like to milk her Jersey cow Nanushka once or twice a week. Naturally I jumped at the chance, having never done this before, and soon began taking home 5-6 litres of the finest organic, still warm, raw milk. Cream, butter and cheeses soon followed.



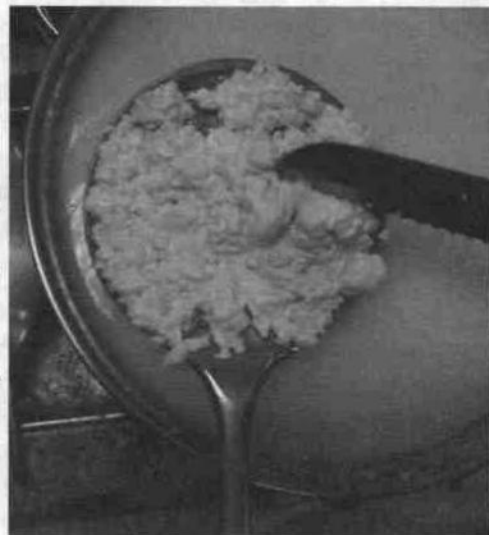
At the same time two women from a communal property a few valleys over were giving a cheese making demonstration as a fund raiser for their local village. I signed up and learned how to make fetta, ricotta and 'Dharmananda Farm Cheddar' - a cheese that they had perfected over the last thirty years.

This same recipe (using shop bought unhomogenised biodynamic milk) I demonstrated at the COGS meeting at Dickson.

As everyone saw, it is a remarkable thing indeed to preserve in such a way - by water removal (removes the whey, leaving the curd) then pressing in the cheese press and salting or waxing for maturation.

It is very patient hands on work with one hour devoted to continually stirring and cutting this coagulated mass of milk.

Almost everyone in the audience helped with this cutting and stirring (see right for their handiwork), leaving me free to talk and ramble on.



I hope to have demonstrated to everyone that it is relatively easy to make cheese with the simple equipment of cheesecloth, rennet and starter culture (from a cheese making supplier) and a home made cheese press - a stainless steel billy can with holes drilled in it, a round piece of plywood and a filled 20 litre water container acting as a weight on top.

The beauty is not just in making your own cheese, but to make a cheese like no other in the world. Using milk - be it cow, buffalo, yak, goat or sheep - and the addition of different cultures, rennets and mould spores, through to employing the many ways of making the cheese, the possibilities are endless.

At the end of the night, we cut up and tasted three cheddar cheeses that I had matured for one month, three months and four months. The difference that maturation alone made was plain to see and taste.

I enjoyed giving the demonstration and passing on the Dharmananda recipe, and wish you good luck in your attempts.

"Blessed are the cheese makers" (Life of Brian)

Benny Glasman

Photos: Monica van Wensveen

A biodynamic evening with Lynette West

Lynette West is well known in our local region but is now achieving world wide recognition for her work in biodynamic practice (biodynamic agriculture originated in 1924 and is based on the eight lectures of Rudolf Steiner).

Lynette is the founder and principal of the Biodynamic Education Centre offering courses developed from her twenty years of practical experience in biodynamic agriculture. By invitation in 2006 and 2007 Lynette taught biodynamic practice at the Duchy Home Farm in the United Kingdom (owned by HRH Prince Charles) and in 2007 she also conducted courses at Garden Organic (formerly Henry Doubleday Research Association) and Newton Dee Camphill Community, Scotland.

Lynette has developed the first Australian distance education course in biodynamic practice. At Garden Organic Lynette's training course was filmed for a documentary about biodynamics.

For further information see Lynette's website:
www.biodynamiceducation.com



At the August COGS general meeting we were treated to an evening with Lynette West. She described the biodynamic approach as developing a consciousness of physical and spiritual life forces hand in hand with scientific observation and discipline.

Biodynamics is about having a spongy soil full of biological life that smells right and produces healthy, vibrant plants with natural resistance to pests and diseases and strong seed vitality - a living soil (as opposed to a chemical cocktail) flowing with energy when there is harmony with life forces in nature.

'Biodynamics uses the same methods as organic farming to restore the soil, but importantly,' says Lynette, 'it also uses the unique biodynamic preparations to stimulate the microbial activity of the soil and to balance life forces in the soil and atmosphere.'

At the COGS meeting Lynette listed key principles in biodynamics as:

✓ **A self-sustaining organism**

'Under biodynamic principles a farm is treated as a single entity. The farmer works to create balance and harmony between the different elements, while restoring the soil's micro-activity.'

A Tasmanian beef and grain property that adopted biodynamic principles was studied over 5 years and showed increasing soil fertility with no external inputs. In Europe there are examples of successful farming operations managed for 80 years without external inputs.

✓ **Organic matter converted into humus**

The all important humus is the end result of good composting. Humus releases humic acid which helps the soil take minerals from the atmosphere and unlock elements otherwise locked up in the soil by chemicals.

Lynette said that farming experiments have shown that 3 to 5 years after adding humus to soil tested as deficient in certain elements, those elements have appeared without those elements being added by the farmer.

✓ **Work in harmony with natural rhythms**

This includes moon and planetary cycles. Lynette gave some examples of how the rhythms of nature affect our gardens: Pruning a plant at full moon releases lots of sap that hinders healing; ploughing in green manure in the evening helps the soil digest it whereas in the morning it 'sits'; cider vinegar with garlic releases parasites from animals when there is a full moon but not when there is a new moon.

With experience you can learn to divide the jobs according to the rhythms of nature. Lynette noted that our society recognises that humans are affected by rhythms of the moon (for example, additional ambulance and police are rostered for eclipse and full moon periods) and so should we recognise that plants are affected by such rhythms.

✓ **Increasing life force in soils, plants & animals**

A key biodynamic practice is to use special biodynamic preparations. These are applied on a descending moon so that energy drives down into the earth. Lynette described this as the use of a homeopathic solution but with the need to observe scientifically what the impact is. Preparations can be obtained cheaply by joining the Bellingen Biodynamic Agriculture Association.

✓ **Diversity at all levels -biological, plant, animals**

The closer a system is to monoculture, the harder it is to hold it. We are losing species diversity at an alarming rate. For example, in Mexico there are now half a

dozen varieties of corn where there were once 2000 (see the DVD "Future of Food" by googling on the net).

Local seed saving is vital to maintain the genetic diversity of plants. Lynette noted that it takes four generations for a species of plant to become adapted completely to your locality.

Some experiments Lynette suggested we undertake include:

- Planting 1/2 punnet of seedlings in the morning and 1/2 punnet in the evening; the evening planting will do the best.
- Monitoring for 3 weeks the germination and growth rate of 4 punnets of seedlings using four different types of water - rainwater, water boiled with electricity, water boiled with gas and water boiled in a microwave.

Janet Popovic

Source: Notes taken by Janet Popovic at Lynette West's presentation to the COGS general meeting on 28 August 2007 and Lynette's Biodynamic Education Centre website.

Talking organics with Diana O'Brien

Our speaker at the October COGS meeting was Diana O'Brien.

Diana been writing about gardening in Canberra for 24 years, first for the Canberra Times and currently for the Canberra Chronicle.

Diana covered many topics in her presentation and even more in her responses to questions from the audience.

She touched on the importance of soil, new organic products, drought proofing your garden, beating insect pests and sustainable farming practices.

Diana's column *In the Garden* appears each week in the Canberra Chronicle.



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What's new in the COGS library

We have four terrific new books in the library. Remember, if there are books you think the library should have, please let me know, at the meetings or by email (details in the front of the magazine).

Easy Organic Gardening and Moon Planting Lyn Bagnall, 2006.

Written for Australian gardeners by a certified organic farmer and gardener, this is an extensive reference to organic cultivation methods, combined with a moon-planting guide. An easy-to-follow moon-planting routine for all aspects of gardening, with a listing of the best planting, harvesting, and pruning days from 2006 to 2010, is provided.



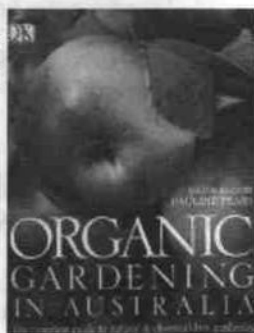
Included are chapters on:

- how you can revitalise garden soil and keep it healthy
- composting and worm-farming techniques that will transform garden and kitchen waste into top-quality, organic fertiliser
- how to protect your garden from climate change and save water
- a month-by-month diary of what to plant when for all climate zones of Australia
- raising healthier, pest- and disease-resistant seedlings, shrubs and trees
- growing your own fruit and vegetables in garden beds or pots
- a comprehensive listing of Australian native plants
- safe alternatives to using poisons in your garden.

Bagnall is obviously an experienced gardener who has really grown the plants, as the cultivation notes are thorough and personal. You can find out more on her website: www.aussieslivingsimply.com.au/news.php

Organic Gardening in Australia, The complete guide to natural & chemical-free gardening Edited by Pauline Pears. Australianised by Allen Gilbert and Laurie Cosgrove, 2006

This is one of those lush Dorling Kindersley books with page after page of full-colour photos illustrating all types of organic garden elements and practices, with good accompanying text.



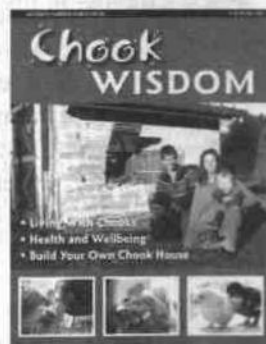
Despite being based on an original UK publication, it has been carefully rewritten for the

Australian market, and all photos have been incorporated to some extent.

This weighty tome includes information on vegetable crops and plant problems, soil management and recycling to water conservation, natural pest control and propagation, how to encourage biodiversity in your garden, and even organic garden design.

Earth Garden's Chook Wisdom

In the classic style of Earth Garden magazine, this *mook* (a great Japanese word for a magazine crossed with a book) gathers together the collective wisdom of a great range of chook enthusiasts.



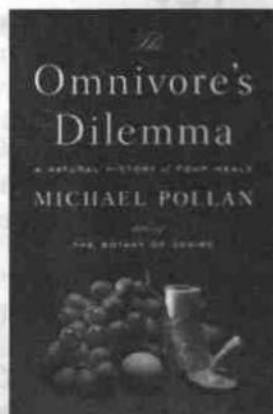
There are some beautiful tips, and lots of entertaining reading, in such startling chapters as 'When is an alpaca a chook?' And for those with urges towards avian architecture, there's a whole chapter of inspiration.

Chapter one is Build Before You Buy or Breed
Chapter two is Growing the Good Egg
Chapter three is Living the Chook Life
Chapter four is Health and Wellbeing

The Omnivore's Dilemma Michael Pollan, 2006.

This book, by the journalist Michael Pollan looks at four possible answers to the question – if as omnivores, we can eat anything, what should we eat?

Pollan explores industrial food, industrial/large-scale organic, small-scale organic and hunter-gathering as possible ways of sourcing our food.



While the setting is US, the questions and information in this book are thought-provoking in any context. Pollan is a very thorough researcher and terrific writer – you may know his *Second Nature*: a gardener's education, or *Botany of Desire*: a plant's eye view of the world.

Alison Yamazaki

Setting up your own rainwater tank

Thinking about setting up a rainwater tank at home but not sure where to start? Peter Cornhill shares his experiences and advice.

If you haven't yet set up rainwater tanks in your backyard, now could be a good time to do so. Admittedly, most days there is no sign of rain on the horizon as the drought bites more heavily. However, water restrictions are only likely to get tougher and 70 square metres of roof catchment area will yield 42 000 litres of water from 600mm of rain per annum (slightly less than Canberra's average).

In my opinion, it is also better quality water, being free from tap water additives such as chlorine and fluorine. This water can be used for drinking, garden irrigation, washing water or even showers/ flushing for the toilet.

Getting started

First you need to check with your local authority (ACTPLA in the ACT). In the ACT, Development Approval is often not required. If you want to receive the ACT government rebate on tanks, you will need to connect the tank into the house (as well as the garden), which requires a licensed plumber.

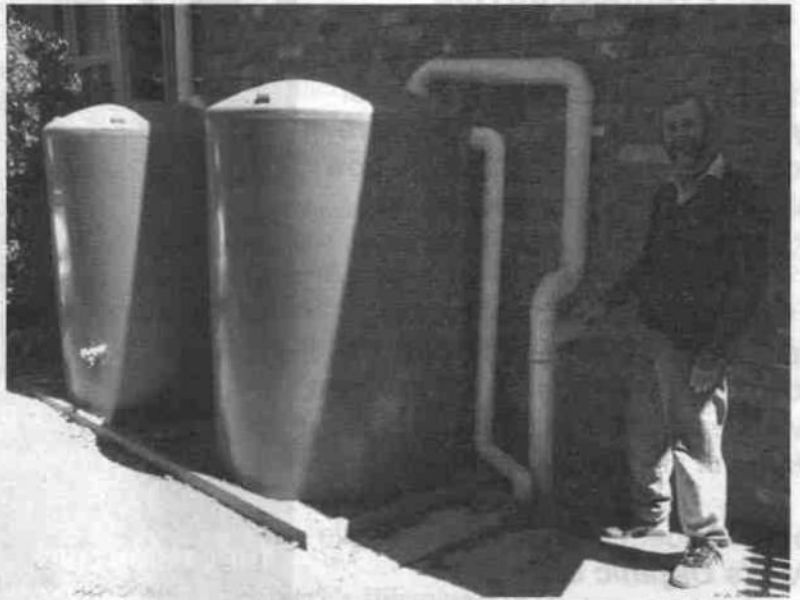
This entails putting in a backflow valve (to prevent backflow into the mains), a pressure reduction valve and a permit from ACTEW. This can be paid for from the rebate (currently \$550 for a 2000-3999 litre tank, \$700 for 4000-8999 litres and \$800 for 9000 litres).

Most roof types are okay for rainwater collection. Exceptions are rooves painted with lead-based paints or bitumen, pesticide treated woods and rooves with lead flashing. Discharge pipes from roof-mounted appliances should not be allowed onto the roof catchment area.

Before siting your tank, work out whether you want to gravity-feed to the garden or install a pump. If you live on a steep hillside, you could get enough flow to run short distances of poly pipe with a small number of drippers. Otherwise, you will need a pump.

Types of tanks

We put in our two 1700 litre tanks as a bit of an afterthought when we built a large one room extension 2 years ago, but have saved thousands of litres of otherwise wasted rainwater since then. If we had had one more room, we would have put in larger tanks, as a number of times they have overflowed into the sump and from there into the stormwater system. The larger the tank you can fit in, the better!



The traditional rural tank was made of reinforced concrete or galvanised iron. These can still be bought if you have the money and space for them.

These days, with plastic ones being guaranteed for 20-25 years, available in a wide range of shapes (including the 400mm wide Slimline), colours and sizes and for a much cheaper price, most people go for this option.

At the time our tanks cost \$485 each, plus \$15 deliver. They are mist green coloured, which contrasts well with the red/orange bricks behind. They are 1200mm round, 1760mm high and sit neatly against the wall of the new room at the bottom of the drive. They are about 400mm apart, joined at the base by a 19mm poly pipe. There is just enough room between them to squeeze through a door under the house, where the pump is located.

Connecting to the house

At first we connected just the back of the house via 100mm downpipes, one of which had to be directed under the new room, out again on the driveway side and up into the tank. Later on I connected the front of the house by the same method, replacing the old 70mm downpipe with a brand new 100mm one.

Our bedroom is right next to this downpipe, separated from it only by a window of old thin glass. When the next rain fell, the water splashed loudly around in the enlarged pipe - it was a bit like trying to sleep under Niagara Falls!

Luckily the solution was simple. A friend advised getting a nylon rope, tying one end to the gutter and dropping it all the way down the downpipe. It needed to be nylon so it didn't rot, and it works well, dispersing the waterfall.

The downpipes are positively charged - that is, they hold some water all the time. This can cause problems with mosquito breeding, but you can buy fine meshes to fit across the top of your downpipe to prevent this. The tanks themselves have fine mesh on their inlets.



Because of the prevalence of possums, we decided that if we wanted to drink the water, we would need a 'first flush' system. This involves putting an elbow in the downpipe just before it runs into the tank. The first 50 litres or so of rain is diverted into a separate pipe with a bung at the bottom of it. As it fills, and oversized ping pong ball in it rises and eventually blocks the narrowed top of this diverter pipe, forcing the water to flow from then on into the tank. After rain you release

the bung from the bottom of the diverter, which allows any debris to be flushed out. These 'first flush' kits are available from local tank suppliers.

Pumps and taps

Having set up your tank, run a pipe from your outlet to a pump. If you can put the pump under the house or deck, great. Otherwise buy a cover for it to protect it from the weather. We chose a small Davey pump with an automatic cut-out so it would never dry out (and therefore never blow up!).

Its minimum output (without taxing the pump) with a 15 metre 19mm diameter garden hose is about 10 litres per minute, but it can go up to 35 litres per minute. This can be controlled by a gate valve near the pump. I have not tried connecting to my 12mm dripper line yet as the pipe is very old and will probably split. Also, the pump manufacturers recommend a minimum outlet size of 19mm pipe to handle the flow without putting back pressure in the pump.

The other outlets are a tap in the kitchen for drinking, one in the laundry for the washing machine and one to the toilet cistern. Unfortunately the water still has a slight cementy taste due to the work on the roof of the new room, so has not yet replaced our water filter. However, using it for the washing machine and toilet has saved us several thousand litres of mains water and kept our bills down in times of steady increases in the price of water.

The washing machine water is recycled onto the back lawn via some 32mm pool hose attached to 20 metres of rural grade (thicker) polypipe.

When the tanks run low, it takes me only a couple of minutes to switch the washing machine hose from the tank line to mains water. In the toilet, it's just a case of turning off one tap and turning on the other, as the mains is still connected on the other side of the cistern. You will need a plumber to sign off for ACTEW approval and to get the rebate.

Next step, pray for some rain. It's amazing how much water your tank will collect with a good shower or two!

Peter Cornhill

Photos: Adrienne Fazekas

References

- 'Rainwater tanks: Guidelines for residential properties in Canberra'; on ACTPLA website www.actpla.act.gov.au

Here and there: Gardens & granny gears

Our cycling trip to Europe quickly turned into a tour of markets and vegie patches with some pedaling in between.

Let me first explain what a granny gear is for those who don't know (or don't need to use them). This is the smallest and easiest gear on a bike, used mostly for steep climbs. As southern France is fairly hilly, my granny gear and I became pretty well acquainted.

However, one of the great things about cycling at this slow pace is that you can't miss anything about your surroundings - from the lazy buzz of an afternoon petanque session to the chimes of village church bells to the aroma of wild thyme on the hillsides. Cooking on a camp stove also gives the perfect opportunity to rummage through local markets every day.

A snapshot of euro-gardening

Much of my garden watching was done in the south of France and then around Holland, up the Rhine valley in Germany and in Spain's Andalusia region - which made for some interesting comparisons.

The lifestyle novels about summer in the south of France are true. The pace is slower, people thrive on sunlight and fresh produce and time is taken to appreciate 'the good things in life.'

Potagers abound and anyone with a small square of garden or a sunsoaked stone wall will have planted at least some tomatoes, a couple of varieties of lettuce and some beans and onions. Wherever there was room, there was also a swathe of flowers (lots of dahlias), a walnut tree and a comfortable chair or hammock to savour the garden experience.

In the villages that were either too hilly or all stone, often there was an area set aside for community gardening and early mornings and late evenings were a great time to catch people working the soil, trussing tomatoes or just chatting to the neighbours.

The Dutch love their gardening but being Europe's most densely populated country, there is little spare space in backyards. However, most villages we cycled through had areas allocated for communal gardens and when we passed through in late summer, these were neatly planted up with predominantly alliums, cabbages, lettuces and beans. The other place to find garden space is alongside railway tracks where growing and relaxing are enjoyed in equal measure.

Along the Rhine, we came across many vegies thriving in the rich river soils and many Germans thriving in their little garden paradises complete with flower beds,

weekend cabins and outdoor furniture. I saw fewer vegetable gardens in Spain, but noticed that many homes with enough space have backyard mini-orchards of citrus and olive trees, which probably serve as much for shade as for produce.

To organic or not to organic

Because my language skills are a little limited I didn't get a good understanding of whether organic gardening was the norm or an anomaly. The French gardeners I spoke to (when there was a break in conversation about cycling and the upcoming rugby world cup), tended to be organic as much as they could, but would use some pest products if necessary.

I think there is a similar attitude in Holland although I met two fascinating gardeners from the south of the country who ran a completely organic farm and used horses rather than tractors. They sell their produce not just in the region, but throughout Europe and we noticed a proliferation of 'organic' and 'bio' shops in the bigger cities we passed through.

Vive les vegies!

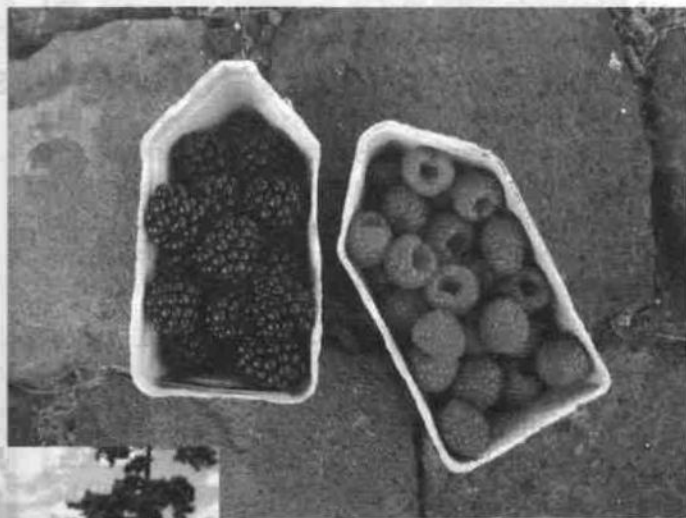
Some of the most enjoyable moments of our travels were spent in local markets. We were lucky enough to hit the traveling markets in the Dordogne-Lot region which guaranteed a sensory overload of fresh produce and local delicacies almost every day. Amongst the ubiquitous duck products were artistically presented bounties of stone fruit and just-picked summer favourites. Apples, mushrooms, a myriad of berries and olives were the pick of the German, Dutch and Spanish markets we trawled.

Amongst our many delicious meals, three stand out. The first was in a hilltop village in southern France. It was a simple salad of goat's cheese, sardines, herbs and a perfectly ripe tomato. The second was a soup made of pfifferlinge (an odd-looking seasonal mushroom), enjoyed in a guesthouse along the Rhine. The third was the juiciest tastiest white peach I've ever had, eaten under a roman aqueduct in Languedoc.

On my "just missed" list was Dutch asparagus season (especially the divine white asparagus), Valencia oranges (I have no excuse for this - I may have been distracted by olives and Spanish wine) and truffles (we missed the season by a few months but did get to camp in a truffle ground).

With this predisposition for food, I guess it's not surprising that the only souvenir I brought back for myself is a wicker market basket from France.

Words and photos: Monica van Wensveen



Clockwise from left: Madame at travelling market in Languedoc; vegie patch along the Dordogne; beans growing with a windmill vista; Parisien artichokes; forest fruit feast; gardening for food, beauty and pleasure; shopping for apples along the Rhine.

How does your garden grow?

Which community garden gives the best produce?

Many of us are participants in a COGs community garden – looking after our own plots and working together to maintain the general and shared areas. We also help each other out with watering and solving problems as they arise.

So which of the gardens is producing the best produce? How good is what we produce organically?

The Horticultural Society of Canberra will be including a new competition section for community gardens in their March show (on 1 March 08). Entries will be collective garden entries (not individual gardener entries) in the form of:

A display of flowers, fruit and/or vegetables (any one, two or all three) grown in a community allotment or garden to be displayed in an area 75cm deep and 120cm wide.

Prizes will be awarded for:

1. Overall appearance and quality
2. Most outstanding flower exhibit
3. Most outstanding vegetable exhibit
4. Most outstanding fruit exhibit

This competition could provide very good publicity for COGS and its gardens. Other community gardens in Canberra may also provide entries and it would be interesting to see how their efforts compare with ours.

If nothing else this is a chance to show off what can be done and to promote COGS. I hope all gardens will be able to provide entries.

How to participate

Obviously each garden that wants to enter will need a co-ordinator to collect what is available from plot holders and to set up the display. If the organiser for each garden can let me know about their entry by Wednesday 27 February (by calling 6161 2304) I can make sure that enough table space is available for everyone. Equally, if anyone has any questions I am happy to try to answer them.

The challenge is to get your produce looking good on the day. For that it needs to be fresh and attractive – the question is: would you buy it if you saw it at a shop? A wilted lettuce and over mature beans are not that attractive! So you will need to get your timing and presentation right.

Timing

Timing is relatively easy but trial and error is needed to get it right.

For many crops the biggest challenge is getting them to

mature in time. Examples include rockmelon and pumpkins. All you can really do is grow early maturing varieties and hope for the best.

Other types of vegetables crop over extended periods - examples are cucumbers and tomatoes. In a normal season you might expect these to be available in early March.

Others store well such as potatoes or onions – simply harvest at maturity. Personally I dig my potatoes in the week before the show, but then I plant later than most.

However, there are some crops where maturity is very time specific and for those you need to carefully plan.

Corn takes a specific amount of time to mature which varies with varieties – old corn is not very attractive and immature corn does not help a lot. Perhaps the best way to have corn on time is to plant 3 blocks of corn – one at maturity days plus 14 days, a second plus 7 days and a third on the requisite number of days.

Beans – dwarf beans produce a large crop but over a short time. They take around 8 weeks to reach maturity. I plant rows at 10 weeks, 9 weeks and 8 weeks before the desired date.

If planted in spring squash will mature in mid summer – a planting around mid -late December will normally mature in early March (although some varieties can take longer).

Lettuce are not easy to produce for 1 March but they can certainly look good. Different varieties take different times to mature so choose the variety you want to grow and then plant according to the time indicated on the packet.

Presentation

You want the produce to look good. Some things you can pick early and keep. Others you need to pick in the couple of days before they are required while others need to be as fresh as possible. The judge will test how fresh they are. The trick with presentation is to think how the produce will look the most attractive.

With thought you can avoid the worst of the problems. For example, a wilted lettuce looks bad but it can be maintained by staging in a small container of water, perhaps with roots still attached.

What the judge will be looking for is quality and variety and I know that in the various community gardens we have a lot of that.

Graeme Davis

COGS summer planting guide

Mulch and compost

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

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

Heat protection

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

Watering

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



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

Weeds

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

Pests

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

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

Harvesting

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

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

	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 seedlings

This table is a guide only - 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 varieties should be successful; while February plantings should be the butterhead varieties.

Conservation Volunteers

Conservation Volunteers Australia needs you help!

What is Conservation Volunteers Australia?

Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) is a not-for-profit organisation that manages volunteers on conservation projects around Australia and the world.

What does CVA do around Canberra?

Local projects include tree planting, seed collection and propagation, conservation fencing, flora and fauna surveys, heritage conservation, track construction/repair and weed removal.

Projects run most weekdays and some weekends.

No previous experience is necessary and transport is available from Civic. Call the office or book into one of our free Volunteer Information Sessions to find out more.

Why get involved?

- A great way to get outdoors and do something positive for the environment
- A fun thing to do with friends, or a great way to make new friends
- Learn new skills and see places you have never seen before

How to get involved

Before joining a project, all volunteers need to be registered and undertake a short safety briefing. To arrange this induction, or to book onto a project, call us on 02 6247 7770 or email us on canberra@conservationvolunteers.com.au. Volunteers under 15 years must be accompanied by a parent, guardian or teacher.

Upcoming projects in and around Canberra

- **4 December**
Volunteer Information Session
- **8 December**
Nature Saturdays - Bushwalk in Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve
- **9 December**
Landcare Memorial Forest, McKellar
- **18-22 February**
Coastal Reserves of southern NSW
Nadgee NR, Ben Boyd NP and Bournda NP



Spanish home exchange

Ever dreamt of living on a farm in Catalonia?
Here's an opportunity of a lifetime.

Francesc Ferrer and his family live in a small farm about an hour's drive from Barcelona. They have a small garden, about 1ha of forest and are in the network of organic producers and consumers in Catalonia (NE Spain).

Francesc, Astrid and their 3 children (12, 9 and 6 years) are planning to come to Canberra in July and August 2008. It will be half work (at CSIRO Land and Water working with Richard Stirzaker) and half vacation.

They are looking for a member of COGS who is interested in a **home exchange**: they offer their farm for a couple of months in exchange for a place to stay in Canberra for the two months they plan to stay.

Contact Francesc by phone +34 973 532 110 or email francesc@lab-ferrer.com

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 at our new venue
MAJURA COMMUNITY CENTRE
ROSEVEAR PLACE DICKSON**

A Plant Clinic will be held at all monthly meetings. Please bring any pest or disease problems for identification and share your experience with other gardeners.

27 November 2007
Celebration of 30 years of COGS

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

26 February 2008
Speaker and topic to be advised

Visit www.cogs.asn.au for updates and confirmations.

Events

Open Garden at COGS Charnwood
12 December 2007
Contact Tim Carlton for details

Sustainable Living Festival
16-18 February 2008
Federation Square, Melbourne
www.slf.org.au/festival

And for those traveling further afield:

Biofach - The World Organic Trade Fair
15-18 February 2008
Nuremberg, Germany

International scientific and professional conference on organic agriculture and climate change
17-18 April 2008
Clermont-Ferrand, France

The 16th IFOAM Organic World Congress: Cultivate the Future
16-20 June 2008
Modena, Italy

Roster for COGS meeting suppers

Volunteers are still needed!

Please put your name on the roster (available at meetings) or ring a committee member to volunteer.

Thank you!

Farmers Market

Every Saturday 8am - 11am

EPIC (enter near Shell service station)

ACT water restrictions

Stage 3 water restrictions apply in all COGS gardens. Hand-held hoses with trigger nozzles, watering cans and drippers may be used 7-10am or 7-10pm on alternate days.

No watering allowed at other times

Organic Gardening course

CIT Solutions course for beginners

11 Nov-2 Dec 2007
Weston Campus, Sundays 1-4pm

For information, call 6207 4441 or visit www.citsolutions.cit.act.edu.au

Environment calendar

- Coastcare Week - 3-9 December
- World Wetlands Day - 2 February
- Clean Up Australia Day - 4 March