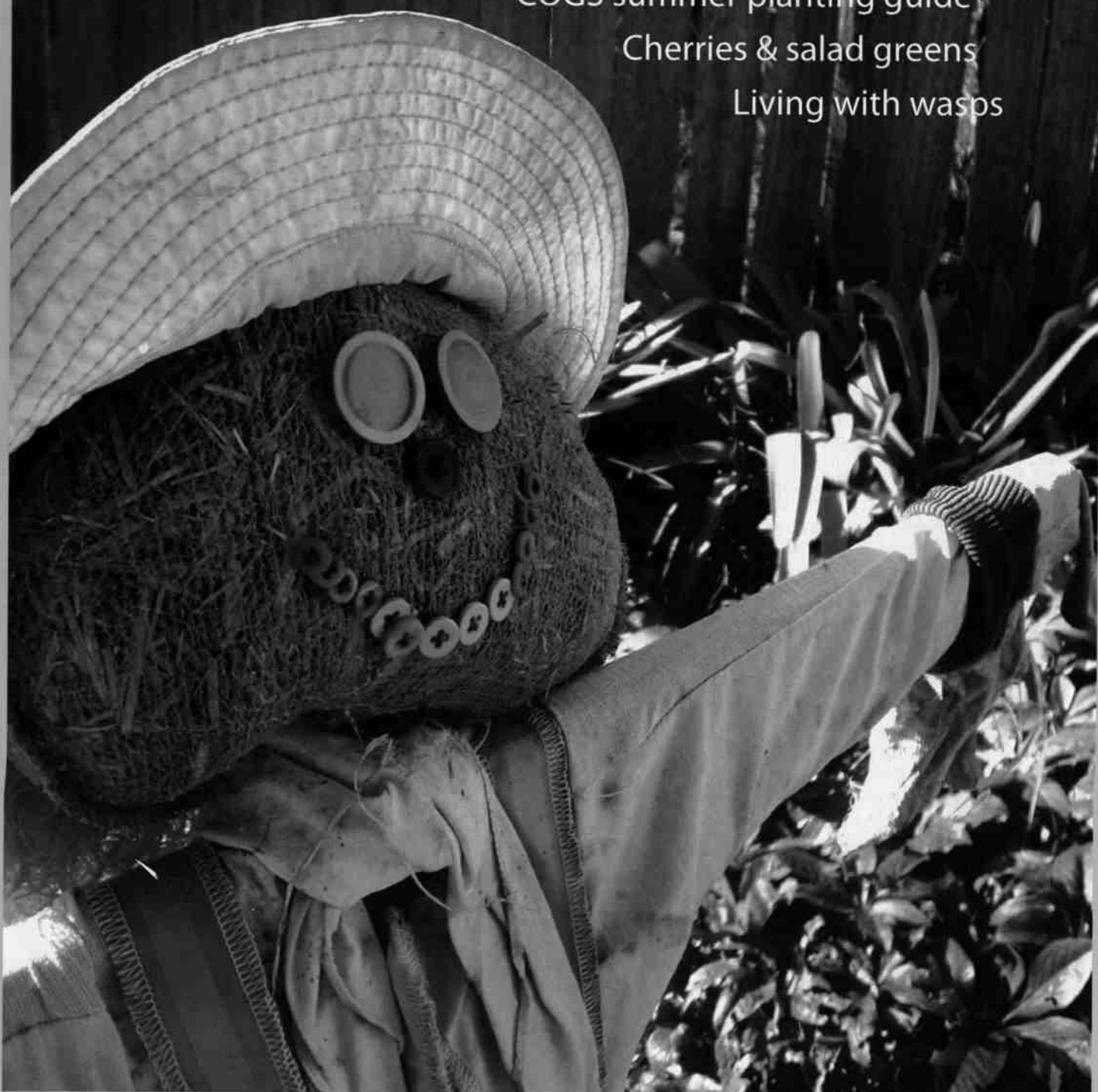


Canberra Organic

Summer 2008-09 : Vol 16 No 4

Composting for beginners
COGS summer planting guide
Cherries & salad greens
Living with wasps





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

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

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

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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.

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.

COGS COMMITTEE

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

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Currently vacant



President's report Summer 2008-09

For most of us our summer crops are well underway despite the best attempts of earwigs and other beasties in some of the gardens to chew up our seedlings. Most of

the gardens are looking very productive, so provided the weather is reasonably kind to us, we should have a good season.

Events in early 2009

Next year we have decided to bring the Harvest Night forward to the February meeting when the gardens will be in full production. We hope this will enable more people to participate and demonstrate the range of produce we grow across the Canberra region. Also the Cook garden will be participating in the Open Garden Scheme on 7 and 8 February. We hope this will provide good publicity for organic growing in general and COGS in particular.

Last year COGS (the Cook and Holder gardens) had a very successful entry in the Canberra Horticultural Society's Autumn Show. In 2009 the Autumn Show will be on 1 and 2 March. Now is the time to consider entering your produce in either the competitive section of the show or in the general community gardens display. A large number of people attend the show and our entry last year generated a lot of interest amongst show visitors.

Water and restrictions

Spring so far has been relatively dry. Although rainfall has been considerably below average, fortunately the ACT water storages have more water than the same time last year. We are still on Level 3 restriction but those restrictions are being relaxed from 13 December to 1 February to allow sprinklers to be used between 7pm and 10pm only on Saturdays for even street numbers and Sundays for odd street numbers.

Nevertheless, ploholders in COGS community gardens are urged to avoid using sprinklers if possible. In most cases the soil is unable to absorb water at the rate it is delivered by a sprinkler and, consequently, a considerable amount of water is wasted. Drippers are a much more efficient way of watering.

New gardens

Community gardening seems to have had a surge in popularity this year. Many of our gardens are now full or are very close to capacity. Some of the waiting lists are very long so the committee has decided to support the development of a new garden in Hackett. A grant application has been submitted but we do not know yet whether or not it will be successful. In any case I would like to thank those who have done a great deal of work researching possible locations and preparing the grant application.

A new community garden has been established in Kingston, adjacent to Telopea Park. This garden is not associated with COGS but operates along very similar lines to our gardens. It is operated by the Baptist church on their old tennis courts in a similar manner to the O'Connor garden.

Special interest & seed savers groups

Now that the danger of frost has passed (we hope) the first activity of our Special Interest Group, the climbing bean trial, is underway. We are comparing about twenty five varieties of climbing bean and we intend to have COGS members participate in a taste test in March at the end of AGM to assess which varieties produce the best taste. So far, earwigs and other beasties have found many of the seedlings to be very tasty.

We also will be introducing (re-introducing) another activity for COGS members next year. One of our new Committee members, Warren Clendenning, will be re-starting the COGS seed savers group. Saving open pollinated seed is an important issue for vegetable gardeners and all gardeners are urged to consider contributing to this activity. More information on the new group is provided elsewhere in this issue of the magazine.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who participated in COGS activities this year and I would particularly like to thank those volunteers who staffed our stalls at the Evatt Primary School Expo, Rodney's Nursery Expo and our Bunnings Display. Your contribution is greatly appreciated.

On behalf of the COGS committee I wish everyone a merry Christmas & happy New Year and I look forward to seeing you all at our first meeting of 2009 - Harvest night in February.

Keith

CANBERRA ORGANIC Volume 16 Number 4 (Issue 63)

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

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

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EDITOR

Monica van Wensveen

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

editor@cogs.asn.au or
Canberra Organic
PO Box 347 Dickson ACT 2602

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)
1/4 page	\$18 (\$15)	\$60 (\$50)
1/2 page	\$36 (\$30)	\$120 (\$100)
Full page	\$72 (\$60)	\$240 (\$200)

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Editor's note

I was in St Kilda in October and spent a very pleasant hour wandering around the Veg Out Community Garden there. Formerly a lawn bowls green, the site now has 140 community plots - a wonderful mix of garden and artwork - communal composting areas, chooks and shady meeting areas, all with a backdrop of the Luna Park rollercoaster. The garden is under very strict water restrictions, so the plots weren't overly lush, but I sense that community spirit is more important than harvest weight to these gardeners.



This issue of *Canberra Organic* is full of summer information and tips. Featured are articles on living with European wasps, what's on display in Marin County markets. Our seasonal vegetables are cherries and salad greens. There are articles on composting and on recognising common nutrient deficiencies in your soil - in perfect time for the summer growing season.

There are new books in the library, a fantastic contribution from a Cotter poet and some great Q&A contributions from gardeners around the region - including making lemon cordial, the smell of rain and more on preserving plums.

As it is the end of the year, I send heartfelt thanks to the creative and informative *Canberra Organic* contributors for 2008. In particular, I'd like to thank the COGS convenors who take us into their gardens and provide humour and fabulous images to every issue. Also thanks to Rebecca, Kate, Andrew, Inge and Trevor who played quiet but essential roles in all this year's magazines.

Wishing you a peaceful break, some rain and many fruitful hours in your garden.

Monica

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Contributors to this issue

Articles

Warren Clendinning, COGS Garden Convenors, Keith Colls, Peter Cornhill, Gita Curnow, Adrienne Fazekas, Gerry Jacobson, Julia Trainor, Monica van Wensveen.

Photos

Craig Allen, John Bennett, Peter Cornhill, Adrienne Fazekas, Andrew Hodges, Rebecca Scott, Monica van Wensveen, Sonya Kershaw.



Cover photos

Front cover: Not-so-scary-crow (Rebecca)

Back cover:

Summer radish harvest
Beautiful flowering sage
The late great Trevor, guarding pumpkins

Opposite page: Veg Out garden gnome

This page: Morning dew on a strawberry leaf

Articles and photos by Monica van Wensveen unless otherwise stated

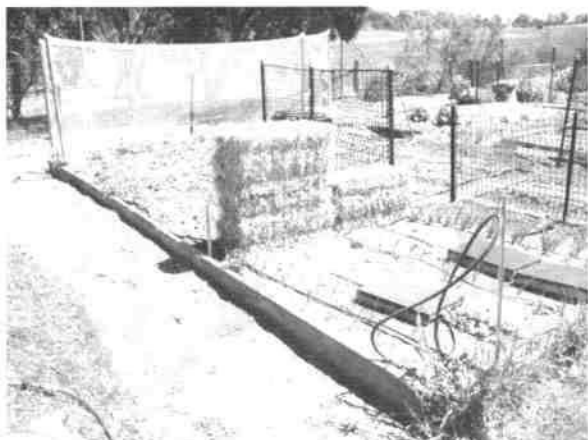
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Around the COGS Gardens

Cook

Spring has arrived in Cook. Plots are being re-discovered and plans made for what we hope to see on our tables before Christmas.

Should we plant after Grand Final Day or should we play safe on the frost front and wait till Melbourne Cup Day? Will we get enough spring rain? Will the cockatoos like my seedlings? Have I paid my plot fees? These are but some of the questions that were exercising the minds of gardeners at the Cook Garden as spring moved towards summer.



Top: Getting plots ready for spring planting

Below: Birds can present a challenge!

This year we have had other matters to consider as well. The Cook Garden was accepted into the 2008/2009 Open Garden Scheme and the Garden will be open for visitors on Saturday 7 and Sunday 8 of February 2009, between 10.00am and 4.30 pm each day. Now is the time to mark your calendar and come and see us in February. Look for us on Bindubi Street in Cook down towards the William Hovell Drive intersection. Meanwhile we are planning our plantings to look their best at that time.

The Garden plots are fully allocated at present and there is a lengthy waiting list. We held our Annual General Meeting down at the garden in September, choosing a

Sunday that turned out to be blessed with plenty of wind and rain. A hastily erected tarpaulin tied over our gazebo frame enabled most of the goodly number who attended to keep fairly dry. We also appreciated Keith's brick paving (very recently completed) which enabled us to have our barbeque on a paved rather than a muddy surface. While the barbeque was heating up some gardeners whipped into the toolshed for shovels and barrows and spread many square metres of woodchip. This has helped considerably in reducing rain run-off erosion around the entrance to the garden.

Good growing to all gardeners.

Photos & words from John Bennett

Cotter

Plots which became available at the start of the new garden year have been allocated to two of the people on our waiting list.

There was a good attendance of members at our annual meeting in early September. The working bee after the meeting enabled further work to be done on removing unnecessary regrowth from our site and tidying up the common areas. A big thank you to all who helped.

All gardeners are now active on their plots with the onset of the warmer conditions. Some have early and mid spring plantings already flourishing, even tomatoes (!), while others have been content to proceed with caution bearing in mind the possibility of a late frost. No doubt there will be a flurry of planting and sowing activity in coming weeks.

Many plots have healthy plantings of such crops as potatoes, onions, parsnips, broad beans and peas, but some early potato plants have struggled after being hit by a frost.

Roz & Trevor Bruhn

Oaks Estate

"Where is Oaks Estate?", I can hear the question now. Perhaps the less Canberrans know about us, the longer we'll enjoy our rural, and sometimes grumpily rustic, lifestyle but sadly Monica, our normally sweet-tempered editor, has offered personal violence if I don't write something. So here goes.

Oaks Estate is near Queanbeyan. The old Queanbeyan property, a squatting held by Tim Beard before some upstart called Campbell got a land-grant and kicked him off, is just up the road (in the ACT, actually, but don't tell anyone from Queanbeyan). It seems the old hands knew what they were doing when they started settlement here in the early-mid 1800's. With a nearby river junction we have magnificent soil - not like your Canberra clay muck, but we try not to brag too much.

Apparently I'm meant to tell you a bit about the garden

itself. This is difficult as I know very little about gardening and would much rather talk about motorbikes. No? Oh well. The Oaks Estate garden is one of the smaller COGS sites, 9 current gardeners and 4 or 5 newbies – welcome, folks, by the way. Largish plots, 15 square metres is a minimum, and soil that has been carefully worked up, off and on, over the last 15 or so years. Last summer it grew magnificent corn and a whole bunch of other stuff that (trust me) wasn't basil, tomatoes, squash or beans. Or weeds, of which I am an expert cultivator.

Darn it Monica, this isn't working. I'm a convenor, not a blessed gardening writer. I quit. The rest of you can go read about some other garden if you want, one with a convenor who knows more about plants than motorbikes. I've got to go anyway, I have a battery on the charger..

Terry Williams

O'Connor

Hello folks, the warm weather is here again and the snails appear to have broken their one child per family policy again along with the slaters. I spoke to one who said he has eight hundred great grandchildren and he's only six weeks old which is, however, truly ancient in the snail world.

We kicked off Organic Week with an open day in our garden. There was no great turn up from the general public but we didn't really try for them. It was attended by members of the O'Connor Uniting Church, where we are located and sundry friends of the gardeners. It was a beautiful day and the minister of the church gave us her blessing and everyone enjoyed music, tea, coffee and cakes. Once again the sense of community was there in a truly enjoyable way.

We had our AGM which was short and sweet, again cakes and tea, and the various roles of organisation were given to new people or carried on by the same olds. Myself and my partner attended a "Lets go Green" meeting at the church hall where the members of the church with talks given by some very motivated young people showed that they are serious about doing what they can to make the church property run in a more environmentally friendly way and to influence and involve the broader community in this.

One of the members of our garden, Greg O'Rourke, brought people from the Environment Centre to our garden where I gather they were suitably impressed by what had been done. Maybe this could inspire more gardens being started within the city environment. We have plenty of people on our waiting list so there is a growing demand for this and there are plenty of potential sites around town. With four green seats being occupied in the new government, maybe this is the perfect chance to pursue this.

The garden itself is looking great and everyone is planting summer vegies. I guess this is one of the least abundant times of the year in terms of yield but we still aren't buying any vegies. The tomatoes had a terrible year in our garden last season so there are great hopes for this summer - I guess it depends on how much rain we get as to how disease prone they are, but there is probably lots to say about this. It will be interesting to see how a very small garden like ours fares in this way. We'll let you know. So have a great summer everyone and happy gardening.

Philip Woodhill

Mitchell

G'day gardeners. Well there has been an influx of new gardeners at Mitchell, so welcome to Maree and Andy, Alison, Laura and Dennis, Sam, Terry and Emil, Rod and Tricia, Sarah, Celia, Phillip. That's all the new names I can remember - sorry if I forgot yours! Farewell to Jan, who is having a break from gardening for now - we can make room for you if you want to return.

It's great to see the weeds being replaced - plenty of spuds around, the tomato race is on, cucurbits are flowering, beans and corn are popping up everywhere.

Thanks to the old timers who have been helping the new gardeners with plants and advice.

There are 2 people on a waiting list now, as the garden is practically full. Happy gardening, and remember, you're always welcome to help maintain the communal areas.

Will Borowski

Queanbeyan

Hi there gardeners. Spring has sprung and the extra daylight, warmer temperatures and odd spot of rain have really got the vegetables in the plots looking productive and tasty.

We held a meeting on 18 October where President Keith gave a run-down of COGS policies and expectations to assist our healthy swag of new gardeners - thanks Keith.

Many gardening issues were discussed and a new coordinating team was elected comprising of myself and Peter Gicesky. We acknowledge the fine contributions that Maurice and Fran made to the garden whilst they coordinated and we wish them many extra hours of gardening enjoyment now that they are free of the coordinating responsibilities.

As for the new team, I will be handling the communication, paperwork and other office-related duties, whilst Peter will assist with the manual tasks that keep the garden looking spic and span.

There are currently no plots available.

Di Weekes

Around the Gardens continued

Kambah

Firstly I would like to welcome our new garden members, Anne Marie and Andrew Coules and their children, Matthew and William. Also to Stephen and Christine Kirk and to Donna Dufty, may you enjoy your plots as much as the rest of us do.

Thank you to all who attended our AGM and for the work that was completed during that event.

In reference to our couch suppression efforts, we have found that the weed mat proved to be ineffective mainly due to the water that it lets through.



Crops and children flourishing in the Kambah garden

Both the recent rain and the onset of summer have brought on a flurry of activity in our now lovely, green garden. Recent plantings include tomatoes, potatoes, carrots, onions, pumpkins, spinach, kale and beans and with the end of the frost season in sight we hope to reap a wonderful bounty of luscious fruit and vegetables during summer.

Due to the numbers of young families who are now members we are planning to erect a swing set and possibly a sand pit to help keep them entertained. We are also in the preliminary stages of constructing a frog pond which we hope will attract airborne wildlife as well as house frogs and lizards.

The recent rain has exposed the rather large population of slugs and snails around our plots and although some gardeners are trying pellets and beer traps the most effective methods seems to be collecting them by hand after the rain. I managed to harvest 6 kilograms in 3 morning sessions which was both rewarding and great fun!

Photo & words from Sonya Kershaw

COGS SEED SAVERS GROUP

The **COGS Seed Savers Group** is being re-formed to generate interest among members in seed saving. It is hoped that the group will be able to share skills, ideas and information about seed saving and propagation of associated plant material.

Some ideas for the group to achieve the aims of organic gardening and seed saving are:

- ☞ Members of the group will be encouraged to save enough seed to initially bank into the seed bank to bolster stocks
- ☞ Each member may have a favourite vegetable and may wish to become skilled at saving seeds from that particular plant
- ☞ The group could organise seed swaps
- ☞ In particular, the group could focus on heirloom seeds and rare seeds
- ☞ The group could hold seed harvesting workshops when the gardens are in full bloom
- ☞ The group could hold workshops on nursery and propagation skills at other times
- ☞ The group could arrange to have guest speakers at workshops or other meetings.

These are just some ideas, and of course, the list is endless. I would particularly like to hear from likeminded people who are interested in forming an informal seed saving group under the umbrella of the Society.

I can be contacted by phone on 0408 293 063, or by email at wclendenning@mac.com.

Warren Clendenning

Around the Gardens continued

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Warren Clendenning

Confronting the enemy

In the aftermath of heart surgery in June '03 I took up a plot at The Cotter Garden. Why did I choose this way of affirming my return to life after a near-death experience?

I could see that the soil was depleted. At home the 'no dig' techniques had worked well for me in the past. So I used the old work folders and notebooks as mulch, topped up with straw and then planted potatoes. They wouldn't need too much looking after, I thought!

Then that summer I had a consultancy in PNG. I did fieldwork there in December, came home for Christmas and spent a hot January writing the report. No time for gardening or for anything else!

I got back to the garden in February and found it overgrown and undergrown and intergrown with rampant couch grass! So I did penance. I spent the whole winter laboriously sifting through the soil and mulch removing all the tiniest pieces of couch and their fine hair roots. My physical energy was low. I was still recovering from surgery and adjusting to medication, so I did an hour at a time.

*confronting
the enemy couch grass
I lightly
fork and pull it out
my neighbour swings a mattock*

It was a slow process and I was much encouraged by Marie, one of our senior gardeners, with her cheery greeting of "Happy Gardening!"

I also started composting. The Cotter Garden is in the middle of an equestrian area with pony clubs and riding schools, and there is generally horse manure around to be collected, and sometimes there is spoiled lucerne or straw. It is great to garden symbiotically with this equestrian activity!

*at the horse
paddock a gift
for me –
four bags of straw
smelling of urine*

I have an Obsessive Composting Disorder. I generally have three compost heaps at various stages at the Cotter Garden, as well as two at home. I just build an open heap, sometimes with a wire cage, interlayering the manure with lucerne, autumn leaves, weeds and spent vegetables. We can do minimal watering with the current restrictions, and I don't have the energy to turn over a heap, so it is a slow process, perhaps taking a year or so for the compost to develop.

*no rain in
September and the
weather
forecast is fine –
what does fine mean?*

I topdress the vegie beds with compost after harvesting, and in five years have gradually built up the fertility of the soil. I still have to be vigilant about couch which intrudes at every opportunity. For a while I took up a second plot but realised recently that I was feeding tree roots and have now relinquished it.

*eucalypts
thrive at the
Cotter Garden
fed with my
precious hardearned compost*

I love winter gardening with its more leisurely and contemplative pace...

*alone in
the garden preparing
beds for
planting seeds – in
the silence sadness sprouts*

I usually grow rhubarb, garlic, broad beans, salad onions and green leafy vegetables including silverbeet, senposai and kale. Of course gardening and cooking and eating the vegetables fits in with my compulsory low-fat diet.

*wintry
morning planting
seedlings
of red onions
dreaming of summer salads*

I don't enjoy summer gardening so much. The heat and water restrictions curb my enthusiasm. I don't want to be out there in the sun, and some failures have put me off the summer crops. Like my first corn crop being eaten by cockatoos, and the tomatoes by something smaller...! However I grow potatoes and leeks successfully and one summer was a riot of pumpkins....!

I still feel that the garden is for me rather than me for the garden, so I sometimes lose seedlings through not being able to look after them in warmer weather. I go out there for a couple of hours about two mornings a week. It fits in with my bicycle lifestyle and I often carry bales of straw and sacks of leaves on the bike, although this is a hazardous process and I ride slowly on the grass verge rather than mix it with the traffic in the Cotter Road.

Gerry Jacobson

In the news

Breathe easy with broccoli

US scientists have found that sulforaphane - a substance found in broccoli - may limit the damage that can lead to serious lung disease, by activating genes that protect lung cells from toxins. Researchers suggest that finding ways to increase this gene activity could lead to treatments to prevent the progression of pulmonary disease towards conditions such as emphysema. Brassicas to the rescue!

Are our kids eating well?

A new survey on Australian children's diet and activity habits has just been released by the University of South Australia and CSIRO. Among the key nutritional findings is that the proportion of children meeting the guidelines for fruit and vegetable intake declined with age, with only 1% of 14-16 year olds eating adequate fruit (compared with 61% for 4-8 year olds) and 5% eating adequate vegies (compared with 22% for 4-8 year olds).

Ruling the roost

ABC Science News reports on a new study that shows that looks aren't everything - for roosters at least. Running counter to previous research which suggests morphology or looks are the best indicators of reproductive success, the Macquarie University researchers found that hens are more likely to choose partners that put themselves in the path of danger and alert the brood to a predator.

The power of algae

The latest word in biofuels is algae. According to Time, US scientists have been working on raising algae with virtually identical properties to petrol. But because algae consumes carbon dioxide, it would be carbon-neutral, and it is not a food crop like other biofuels such as corn or sugarcane. With heavy investment into research and development, one of the big questions for the industry is how to grow algae cheaply on the large scales required.

Greening the Sahara

Is it possible to turn the driest parts of the globe green? ABC News reports on the success of a multi-country project that has seen hundreds of millions of trees take root in the West African region over the last 17 years. The success of the project has surprised local communities and researchers alike, turning 5 million hectares of harsh desert country into productive land, increasing soil fertility and forage for livestock, and providing windbreaks and firewood.

Vegie orchestra celebrates 10 years

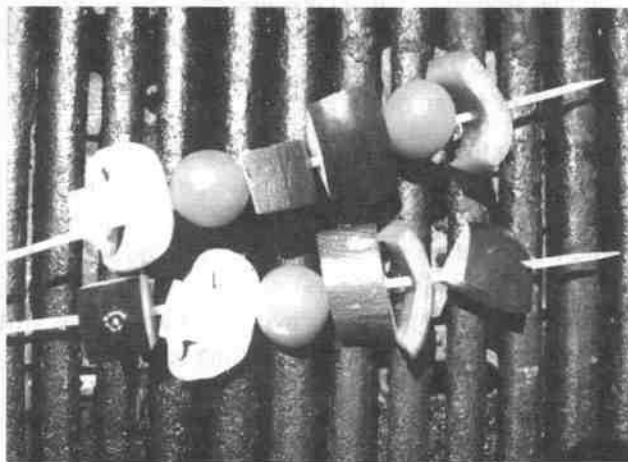
Vienna's Vegetable Orchestra has just celebrated the 10th anniversary of its unique "organic music", played on instruments such as cucumberphones, capsicum trumpets and leek violins. The musicians need around 70kg of fresh produce per concert and 3 hours or so to carve their instruments. Hear them on their website at www.vegetableorchestra.com.

Top tips for SUMMER

1 BBQ beauties

Next time the shrimps are poised over your barbie, give them some vegetable company. Sliced capsicum, eggplant and zucchini are BBQ hits; kebabs are quick and easy and corn on the cob and asparagus are crowd-pleasers. You can also try steaming vegetables like fennel, spuds or greens in alfoil with a little butter, water or wine.

And for a wood BBQ, raid your garden for woody herbs like rosemary, bay and thyme to add a delicious smoky smell and taste.



2 Be GardenSmart

The ACT Government offers a free GardenSmart service to advise ACT residents how to garden in a water-wise way. To register call 13 22 81. Tips include adding organic matter to your soil, using mulch, keeping weeds down, checking your watering system regularly and adjusting your watering patterns to take into account weather conditions and plant needs.

3 Grow top crops in pots

Try pots if you lack space, want to protect your best vegies from hungry beasties, or like to have fresh food in reach of the kitchen. Use good soil or potting mix and have adequate drainage holes. A large, deep pot is less likely to dry out and has space for root growth.

"My whole life has been spent waiting for an epiphany, a manifestation of God's presence, the kind of transcendent, magical experience that lets you see your place in the big picture.

And that is what I had with my first compost heap."

*Bette Midler
(Singer, actress & compost enthusiast)*

Weather Watch

Summer's here - time for some ho-ho-hot weather. Here's what to expect this season, courtesy of the Bureau of Meteorology's long term statistics for temperature and rainfall in the ACT region.

TEMPERATURE	December	January	February
Canberra airport	max 26.1	max 27.9	max 27.1
	min 11.3	min 13.1	min 13.1

RAINFALL	December	January	February
Canberra airport	52.5 mm	59.3 mm	56.1 mm
	5.8 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 to January

- There is a strong likelihood of warmer than average minimum (generally night) temperatures during this period across most of southeastern Australia. The chances are estimated to be 70-80%.
- There is a moderate shift in the likelihood of warmer than normal maximum (generally day) temperatures in the same period, with estimates given of 60-70% across the region.
- The outlook for rainfall in this period is neutral for southeastern Australia - the chances of being wetter than normal are about the same as the chances of being drier than normal.
- Models suggest that neutral conditions are expected across the Pacific Basin for the rest of 2008. Ocean temperatures are close to their long-term average and there is little potential for El Niño or La Niña conditions to develop.

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

Aussie organics are growing

New research commissioned by the Biological Farmers of Australia (BFA) has revealed over 80% growth in organic farm gate sales since 2004, despite widespread drought conditions across the country.

According to BFA Director Dr Andrew Monk, "While most agriculture has suffered in recent years from drought and floods, many sectors of the organic industry have recovered to be able to consolidate and expand."

The Australian Organic Market Report is the first Australian organic data collected in four years. Among the key findings are:

- 40% of consumers in Australia now buy organic food at least occasionally
- Major retailers now carry more than 500 different organic lines in fresh and grocery categories.
- The number of certified organic operators has increased by an average of 5.2% annually over the last 5 years, during a period of ongoing decline in overall farmer numbers in Australia.

- In 2007, there were 2750 certified organic operators. Almost three-quarters are producers, representing around 1.5% of all growers.
- Australia has 11 988 044 hectares of certified organic farmland - the largest amount in the world. The majority of this area is used for extensive grazing.
- The average size of organic farms has increased, suggesting a trend towards professional farming on a larger scale.
- Retail value reached over \$600 million, with reports of 10-30% yearly growth since 2004.

The report was researched by the University of New England, is based on industry-wide survey data and builds on research of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in 2004.

Dr Monk hopes the report will be a key tool for decision-making for existing and potential producers, marketers and organisations.

Source: BFA Press Release - 22 July 2008.

Summer harvest: CHERRIES

For me, summer has really arrived when plump, juicy cherries hit the markets and roadsides around Canberra. And who hasn't dangled them over their ears, been excited by the discovery of a 'triple-burger' or played rapid-fire seed-spitting games with their siblings?

Cherries are closely related to apricots, plums, nectarines and peaches, which are collectively known as drupes, or more commonly known as stone fruit. They belong to the *Prunus* genus of the rose family. Only a few members of the genus have edible fruit, the best known being the sweet cherry (*Prunus avium*) and the sour cherry (*Prunus cerasus*). Of these two, there are hundreds of varieties

The first commercial orchard in Australia was planted in Young in 1878. The Young and Orange districts produce around 70% of NSW's cherries and account for around half the national harvest. NSW cherries are also grown in the Batlow-Tumut region, around Cowra, Canowindra and Forbes and in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area.

Production is greatly influenced by rainfall - drought affects yield, size and timing and rain at harvest causes splitting.

Growing cherries

Cherries do best in sheltered areas with light rainfall. They grow on most soil types except heavy clay, as long as the soil is friable and well drained. They don't like having wet feet, so slightly sloping country with deep, well-structured topsoil is ideal. A winter chill is required for a good crop.

Cherry varieties cross easily, so buds from a healthy, productive tree are often grafted to a rootstock selected for a good growing habit. Care should be made to plant cross-fertile varieties, and those with similar flowering times together to assist pollination.

Management includes pruning (summer pruning is thought to be the most beneficial), weed control and timely fertilising and watering (www.agric.nsw.gov.au for details).

Trees can grow to 12 m and with good management, they'll be around for a while. They begin to produce significant crops from about 6 years and can continue to produce fruit for around 100 years.

Problems

Cherries are prone to a number of pests and diseases. In our region (Southern Tablelands), bacterial canker is the most serious problem, particularly in colder and wetter areas. They are also susceptible to viral diseases and insect pests, and have their own slug (cherry slug) and aphid (cherry aphid). Information on dealing with these pests is available from NSW Agriculture.



As they are one of the first fruits to appear in spring, cherries are regular targets for birds, particularly in early-maturing varieties. Netting is considered the best form of control.

Harvesting

Cherries trees produce white or pink flowers in spring. Depending on location, cherries are ready for harvest around 6-8 weeks later. Cherries are generally picked by hand, with the stems attached to prolong shelf life.

Peak season for cherries in our part of the world is early-mid summer. Cherries don't ripen after harvest, so they need to be picked very close to maturity, and are therefore don't travel well and are highly perishable.

Choosing and using

Cherries range in skin colour from glossy red to almost black, and in flesh colour from pinky cream to cerise to black. At the markets, look for bright, glossy, fat fruit with green stems. Avoid bruised or soft fruit and small, hard fruit - the former will spoil quickly and the latter will lack flavour and juice.

Eat as soon as possible after purchase (this is no great hardship). They can be stored for a few days in a paper or plastic bag in the fridge. Wash just before use. They can be eaten raw, baked in pies and tarts, stewed, poached, preserved, glazed and jammed. There are even commercially available cherry pitters.

Not only do they taste great, cherries are a good source of vitamin A, B-complex and C, iron, potassium, sodium and dietary fibre. Herbalists suggest that they are good for stimulating kidneys and colon and recommend the juice to relieve symptoms of gout and arthritis. And they make great earrings.

References and further reading

- NSW Agriculture AgFacts: Cherry growing in NSW (Jeremy Bright and Sue Marte)
- Botanica's Organic Gardening (Judyth McLeod)
- The Farmers Market Companion (Viking Books)

Summer planting: SALAD GREENS

Growing salad greens is easy and satisfying - there is no greater reward than creating a summer salad sensation from your own garden. And with a bit of planning, you can enjoy an almost continuous supply year-round.

Far from the 'rabbit food' days of yesteryear, gardeners now have access to a wide range of salad plants - with remarkably diverse textures, colours, shapes, flavours and seasonal preferences.

There is no decree saying that salads must be green or that salad greens can only be lettuces. Try adding cress, endives, mizuna, rocket, soft herbs like tarragon or chervil and edible flowers like nasturtiums or chive flowers.

However, the most popular salad green is still lettuce, and there are four main types. Hearting lettuces (like the traditional Iceberg) grow relatively slowly and are harvested as an entire plant. Non-hearting or leaf types (such as Oakleaf) mature faster, producing loose bunches of crinkly or frilly leaves that can be harvested progressively. Butterheads (such as mignonettes) have smooth leaves and a loose formation. Romaine or cos lettuces have tall leaves that are ribbed and grow upright.



Site and soil

Salad greens like to have the best position and conditions in the garden and tend to bolt to seed if they don't get them. They prefer rich soil. Use well-decomposed compost to prepare the soil as fresh compost may burn young plants. Salad greens would happily follow a green manure crop.

Daytime temperatures up to 20 degrees are ideal for growth. In warmer periods, choose shaded areas of the garden or erect a cloche.

Planting

If using seeds, sow them thinly (with river sand if necessary) and not too deeply in a mulch-free area and water in. They should germinate in around 7-10 days.

If you have a large enough area and a taste for salads, try monthly plantings to replace harvested plants and to ensure a continuous supply. A space of around 30cm is recommended for each plant.

Cultivating

For successful plants need to grow consistently and quickly. Because they have shallow roots, they need a ready supply of nutrients and water to prevent the plants becoming stressed and subsequently bitter or prone to bolt.

Use mulch to prevent moisture loss. Water in the morning when possible to reduce the likelihood of disease. Regular applications of liquid fertiliser or compost tea are also suggested.

Harvesting

Plants should be ready for harvest in around 7 weeks. For non-hearting types, pick individual leaves as you need them, from the outside of the plant (but make sure you leave enough for the plant to be able to photosynthesise). For hearting varieties, cut the whole plant once it's large enough to use.

Vitamin content and flavour are at their peak when freshly harvested.

Problems

The biggest challenge for salad growers is the constant attacks from snails and slugs. There are many tips on how to deter them, including: removing them by hand, creating physical barriers like eggshells or sawdust, using organic sprays made from unpalatable plants, encouraging natural predators such as lizards and birds, and removing potential breeding sites.

Mildew diseases can be a problem - these are often caused by unsuitable garden conditions.

Choosing and using

When buying salad greens, choose the freshest leaves you can find. If necessary, they can be kept for a few days in the fridge in a storage bag, crisper, plastic container with a lid or wrapped in a clean tea towel.

Snails are the intermediate hosts for a number of unpleasant parasites, so wash leaves thoroughly before using. Make sure the leaves are dry (with a spinner or tea towel) before adding any dressing, or the dressing won't be able to cling). Add dressing just before serving and toss well.

References and further reading

- Organic Vegetable Gardening (Annette McFarlane)
- From a la carte to zucchini (Anthony Barker)
- The salad garden (Joy Larkcom)
- Indolent kitchen gardening (Libby Smith)

Living and gardening with wasps

The arrival of European wasps in our garden has challenged our organic gardening methods. In this article I share our experiences in the hope that we will benefit from the experience of others.

Our rural vegetable garden is in a remote area south of Jindabyne. The nearest neighbour is about three kilometres away, and much of our property is surrounded by wilderness. The vegetable garden is close to the house, and is flanked by about a dozen fruit trees – apples, nectarines, peaches, plums, cherries, Asian pears, apricots and figs.

We are used to protecting our garden from large predators, especially birds and possums. Vegetables in winter must be grown under cages, and fruit trees must be netted, otherwise the harvest is zero. The few invertebrate pests have been controlled using organic methods – until the wasps arrived.

We first noticed European wasps visiting our garden after the 2003 alpine fires. We managed to find a nearby nest and control them for a while, but further invasions arrived in successive summers. The wasps are now a constant presence, with large numbers in the warmer months.

Dangers of the European wasp

Unlike the bee, which stings once and leaves behind its stinger, the European wasp can sting repeatedly, even through thick leather gloves. The European wasp will aggressively defend its nest if you pass close to it, so it is important to locate and destroy nests if you find wasps near your home or garden. The wasps are stimulated by movement, so it is best to stand still or move slowly to avoid being stung when wasps are about.

As well as being a danger to people and animals, wasps are a threat to other insects, including bees. Wasps are also a major threat to horticultural and viticultural enterprises, where they are a safety hazard for harvesters and devour a large proportion of the crops.

Garden maintenance

At first we found it disturbing to work in the vegetable garden surrounded by the loud hum of wasps in the air. But as we worked we realised that the wasps were only interested in the fruit trees. Although they were buzzing all around, they did not take much interest in us while we tended the vegetable plots.

We usually net the fruit trees in summer, before the fruit becomes attractive to birds. With European wasps

around, it is best to net the trees well before the fruit ripens. Once the fruit starts to ripen there are too many wasps flying about the trees, and the action of netting a tree becomes more hazardous.

The birds will always peck the earliest ripening fruit, and this damaged fruit attracts the wasps before the sound fruit becomes attractive to them. We would normally remove this damaged fruit, but the wasps were a deterrent to this maintenance.

Last summer we had some nice rain, with the effect that a small percentage of our fruit crop started to rot on the trees. At first we were reluctant to remove this rotting fruit, because it meant plunging one's head deep into the canopy with dozens of European wasps buzzing around our heads.

We covered ourselves well, including fly veils, but the wasps are capable of stinging through clothing. The main trick is to move very slowly. We found that the wasps are so single-minded in their attraction to the fruit, that they took very little interest in us.

Harvesting fruit

By the time the fruit was ready for harvest, the dozens of wasps had increased to many hundreds of wasps in every tree. We like to harvest our stone fruit when it is almost fully ripe, but last summer we were forced to pick it a little earlier than usual. If we had not harvested the fruit before it was fully ripe, the wasps would have left nothing for us to harvest.

The wasps were attracted to most of the fruit trees, but they were most strongly attracted to the more fragrant fruits such as nectarines and Asian pears. Apples and plums were less affected – the plums ripened before the wasps started feeding heavily on fruit, and the apples ripen very late in our garden, when the weather is already cooler and the wasps are much less active.

European wasps have a habit of burrowing into the fruit and eating it from the inside. A pear might have a small hole in it, invisible as you plucked it off the tree, but out of that hole would emerge dozens of plump wasps. From the outside, the fruit appeared almost perfect. If left to their meal, the wasps completely gut the inside of the fruit, leaving an almost perfect but empty skin.

As well as harvesting earlier in the season, we also learned to harvest early in the day, while the sun was rising and the fruit was still wet with dew. At this hour there were only a dozen wasps flying around in each tree.

It appeared that by late summer and early autumn a large number of wasps were spending the night inside the fruit. The mornings are cool here (we are just 35 km south east of Thredbo) and at this time of day the wasps were sluggish with the cold. We still moved slowly and smoothly as we harvested, and we were vigilant as we selected only completely sound fruit from the trees, but harvest proceeded effectively at this early hour.



European wasps converge around a small hole in an Asian Pear.

Controlling the European wasp

It is important to be aware of the life cycle of a wasp nest, and the preference of different wasps for different foods at different times.

Workers (infertile females) are more active early in the summer, when they are extending the nest and feeding protein to the larvae. Queens are more active in late summer and early autumn, as they prepare themselves for fertilisation, dispersal and hibernation.

Wasps are attracted to garden features such as fruit trees, berry bushes, grapevines, and compost heaps. They are attracted to outdoor food sources such as barbecues, picnics, pet food, dogs chewing on bones in the garden, and carrion.

We found that the best approach is to observe which wasps are present and what they are eating, and to meet their demands for both meat and sugar to maximise the kill.

Generally speaking, the aim of control measures during early and mid summer is not to kill individual wasps, but to kill the nest. In late summer, when the queens don't seem to return to the nest at night, the aim included killing the queens so they could not establish nests the following spring.

We had already developed some knowledge of European wasps, because we had noticed that they would rapidly cover any dead animal in the paddock or the bush.

When the wasps invaded our garden, we adopted three strategies: directly destroying the nests when we found them in the paddocks or bush, luring wasps to poison baits so that they would take the poison back to the nest, and directly poisoning wasps.

Directly destroying the nests

Destroying the nests directly is the ideal way to control European wasps. The wasps mainly feed within 200 metres from the nest, and fly in a straight line from the food source back to the nest. If you can determine the direction of travel, you know where to search for the nest. It is easier to detect the direction of travel when the sun is low in the sky.

However, in the bush it is extremely difficult to locate the nests. Most nests that we found were found by accident, as we walked around the property. The nests usually appear as just a hole in the ground about 3 cm wide.

Once found a nest is quickly and easily destroyed by puffing a small amount of poison around the mouth of the nest, so the wasps walk over the powder as they enter the nest. This should be done at night when the wasps are inside the nest. Wasps are attracted to torch light, but they cannot see red light.

Trapping wasps in the garden

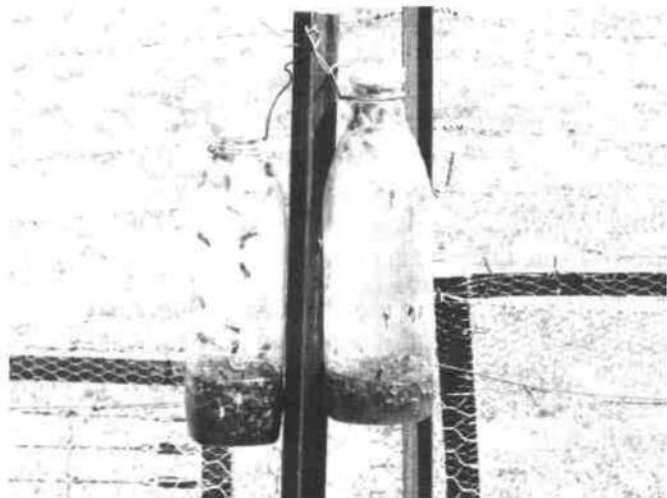
As our garden is on our sheep property, we use blowfly traps around the house, and routinely trap hundreds of blowflies a week. When we set up the wasp traps, we found that flies and wasps were attracted to their own traps, almost without exception.

While the purpose of the blowfly traps is to trap and kill individual blowflies, the purpose of the wasp traps is to lure them to a poison bait and allow them to take the poison back to the nest.

My partner Craig, who does all the pest control on our property, has liaised closely with the NSW Department of Primary Industries about European wasps, and cooperatively experimented with different traps and lures.

The exchange of ideas was very productive, and soon we were trapping hundreds of wasps every week. Each fruit tree had its own wasp trap, consisting of an old 1 litre plastic milk bottle with a small hole of about two square centimetres cut into the side of the milk bottle. The trap was wired onto a post close the tree, about 150-180 cm from the ground.

The simplest and cheapest lure was in fact the most successful – Woolworths' Home Brand lemonade was a clear favourite with the wasps. Only a small amount of poison was added to the lemonade, in the hope that the wasps carry it back to the nest and return several times before they die themselves. If there is too much poison in the lemonade, the wasps will die in the trap without returning to the nest. There is a variety of readily available wasp poisons, but we used ant and roach powder with good effect. Emptying wasp traps has become just another maintenance chore on the farm!



The wasp trap on the right is filled with dead wasps. The wasp trap on the left has a fresh brew of lemonade and poison

Poisoning wasps outside the garden

Damaged and rotting fruit was removed from the garden and placed in a small mound where the wasps would find it. As soon as the wasps started feeding on the mound of fruit, it was lightly dusted with poison which they would carry back to the nest. Dead animals with exposed flesh wounds (made by wild dogs, foxes or crows) would typically be covered with wasps feeding on the meat. If found close to the house, we dust the carcass with poison so the wasps take it back to the nest. The wasps liked any protein, with a preference for venison!

Facing the future with European wasps

It now appears that European wasps are a naturalised part of Australia's urban and rural landscape. Following the failure to control them as an urban pest, it will be even more difficult to eradicate them as a rural pest.

When walking in the bush we are always vigilant for wasp activity and nests. It will be interesting to see what happens in our garden this summer. We will certainly be ready with early trapping, early netting, prompt removal of damaged fruit, and harvesting at dawn. Of course, it is possible that last summer's efforts decimated the wasp population for miles around our garden, but we will believe this when we see it!

*Julia Trainor
Photos: Craig Allen*

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Composting for beginners

Are you a confused composter? Not sure what's in, what's out, how hot, how wet? Peter Cornhill answers these questions and more.

There are many methods of composting - open heaps, home made bins, black commercial bins, digging in kitchen waste directly, and so on. You need to find what works for you.

Try to get a cubic metre of material for each heap (this can be added to or accumulated over a few weeks). A larger heap, or a regularly turned heap, will generally break down faster, especially in winter.

My own method is three bins consisting of upright hardwood pallets, sitting beside each other (left photo). The front is left open when first filling them, then a sheet of old plywood or similar is placed across them as I build up materials. One bin is ready to use (right photo), another is 'cooking', and the third is being added to.

Benefits of a good compost

The finished product should be dark brown or black and have an earthy smell. It will act as a soil conditioner, fertilizer and a suppressor of soil-borne diseases.

Composting also:

- Improves soil structure by aggregating soil particles
- Improves the water-holding capacity of the soil
- Makes digging easier
- Increases the ability of the soil to absorb rapid changes in acidity and alkalinity
- Neutralises toxic substances such as toxic metals
- Nutrients become available slowly throughout the growing season and are less likely to be lost through leaching (as soluble fertilizers tend to be)
- Reduces the level of pathogens by increasing the biological activity in the soil
- You can add compost to sandy/ clay soils at 10kg/m² at first, then 3kg/m² as a top-up.

What can go into a compost heap?

Pretty much anything organic (living or that was once living) - fresh manure, grass mowings, kitchen waste, leaves, weeds, vacuum cleaner dust, straw, sawdust, seaweed. Comfrey leaves are great for the compost as well as being great for healing broken bones.

Don't put anything in the heap that roots easily, like couch grass, kikuyu grass, Wandering Jew, periwinkle, honeysuckle or ivy. I wouldn't put dog poo in either, due to the prevalence in this area of worms, particularly hydatids.

Kevin Handreck (*CSIRO Discovering Soils series: composting - Making soil improver from rubbish*) suggests adding lime, dolomite and wood ashes directly via a light sprinkle on garden beds as needed to increase alkalinity, rather than in the compost heap. However, if you have woody or resinous material to be broken down, or plastic compost bins (which are partially anaerobic and therefore more acidic), then lime etc can be used in the compost heap.

Other things you need for a successful compost

AIR Make sure the bottom of the bin is in contact with the soil, but raised to allow air in. Use woody materials - such as corn stalks and prunings from perennials and shrubs - at the base of the heap if possible.

A piece of agricultural drainage pipe placed vertically down the centre will help air flow, as well as being a watering hole for the heap.

You can turn the heap after 8-10 days and again after 30-40 days to get more air in and speed up decomposition. I don't do this through lack of time and mine still works well - it just takes a bit longer!

MOISTURE The heap should be damp but not soggy, like the texture of a squeezed sponge (50-55% moisture content). If it's too moist, it lacks sufficient



air. If it's too dry (below 40%), it won't decompose rapidly - this is often the case in Canberra.

Set your compost up in the shade or semi-shade to begin with, and water layers as you add them, especially sawdust and dry large leaves (these can be broken down by running over them with the mower first).

I have drippers on my heaps that water every time the vegie garden system comes on, or if a heap is ready, can be turned off completely. Think about adding dish-rinsing water to your bucket of kitchen waste (Betty Cornhill's method) to get more moisture in the heap.

TEMPERATURE There will be an initial heating up to 50-60 degrees C. This is important to kill most pathogens. Try to put spent tomato and cucurbit vines into the centre of the heap during this phase. If the heap is not heating up properly, try a sprinkle of blood and bone.

Next comes the cooling period, when microbes and earthworms move in. The population of microbes changes constantly as the temperature of the heap changes.

The compost can be used when the temperature drops below 40 degrees. If the heap is a bit on the small side, heat can be retained by covering it with old jumpers, blankets, hessian bags and the like. If you are building the heap over time, a layer of old compost or soil on top helps keep the heat and moisture in.

CARBON:NITROGEN RATIO The ideal carbon:nitrogen ratio is 25 to 30:1. Try to put alternate layers of high nitrogen and high carbon materials. Examples of common compost materials are lawn clippings (20:1), cow manure (12:1), chook manure (7:1), straw (100:1), paper (170:1) and sawdust (450:1).

Keep the layers fairly thin - 50mm or so (less for dry leaves and try to mulch them first) and water as you go.

POULTRY Employ poultry as the first step in composting by feeding them all the kitchen scraps (except citrus peels and onions), weeds and excess greens from the garden. Then add layers of their manure/ mulch to the compost.

COMPOST ACCELERATORS There are several of these available commercially. I haven't used them, but others have and find that they work well. For more information, refer to May E Bruce's book *Compost making by the quick return method*.

Compost has low levels of nutrients - typically 1.4-3.5% nitrogen, 0.3-1% phosphorus and 0.4-2% potassium, so you may need to supplement intensive crops such as vegies with foliar sprays of fish emulsion or seaweed fertilizer during the growing season.

However, with fruit trees, my own experience of adding just compost to my neglected orchard near Bega last season saw trees that had never produced fruit suddenly do so. The almond tree put on nearly a metre of growth after doing nothing for several years!

As Peter Cundall says "Organic growers don't feed their plants - they feed the soil, naturally, and allow the balanced soil to feed the plants. Without doubt, the most important of all natural fertilizers is a good compost, made from a wide variety of ingredients".

Happy composting!

Words & photos: Peter Cornhill

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Recognising common nutrient deficiencies

This article gives guidelines on how to identify the most common nutrient deficiencies that can occur in some of our favourite summer vegetables.

Organic gardeners are continually building up a healthy soil - full of nutrients available in a balanced form, well aerated and a good crumbly texture. However, problems can arise along the way due to nutrient deficiencies in the soil and subsequently, in the plants grown in that soil.

A good long-term remedy is to regularly add compost to your soil - the importance of this natural fertiliser can't be overemphasised. Make plenty of this wonderful stuff from a variety of ingredients and problems will rarely arise. There are many articles in previous *Canberra Organics* on making compost, and compost-making features in almost all books on organic growing.

First, a word of warning: If you think there is a possibility of a significant nutrient deficiency in your soil, before you start adding amendments to correct the supposed imbalance, test your soil pH.

If the pH is outside a range of about 6.0 to 7.0 - the best range for growing most vegetables - certain nutrients may be present in the soil, but will not be present in a form that is accessible to your plants. Adding more is unnecessary. You will need to correct the pH, but usually this is only necessary every 3 or 4 years.

Nitrogen is an essential component of chlorophyll which gives leaves their green colour. It improves the quality of leaf crops and is very influential in determining the size of the fruit.

Deficiencies in this nutrient show up clearly in the overall slow growth of the plant and the colour of the leaves which are typically light green to yellowish. Be careful correcting any imbalance as excessive nitrogen can lead to lush foliage but little or no fruit on your plants.

Particular symptoms, in addition to leaf colour and slow growth, for common vegetables are:

- *Tomatoes* Flower buds turn yellow and drop off. Fruit will be small.
- *Corn* Leaves have yellowish centre streaks. Lower leaves affected first, become brown and drop off.
- *Potatoes* Young top leaves may curl upward. Tubers will be small.
- *Cucumbers* Fruit light in colour and pointy at blossom end (ie the part furthest from the vine).

Phosphorous is important for the hardy growth of the plant, playing an important role in root development and cell activity.

When a deficiency in phosphorous exists, particular symptoms can include:

- *Tomatoes* Leaves dark green, purple underneath. Very slow growth.
- *Corn* Stalks small. Leaves purple at the tips and along the margins.
- *Potatoes* Stunted plants; leaves may curl upwards. Tubers may have brown specks inside, often radiating from the core (note that extremes of temperature or viruses can cause similar effects).

Potassium is an essential element for plants, and is involved in a wide range of physiological and biochemical functions.

Specific symptoms of a deficiency in this nutrient are:

- *Tomatoes* Leaves dark green and bunched together. Older leaves become yellow, then brown at the edges. Fruits fall off soon after ripening, and often have hard white 'core'.
- *Corn* Lower leaf tips become scorched and brown. Poor root system. Stems can become so weak that they snap off
- *Potatoes* Leaves very dark green, may turn brown at edges and die.

Calcium is a component of cell walls, and stimulates root and leaf development and activates enzymes involved in plant metabolism. In tomatoes, calcium deficiency is exhibited as blossom end rot. This is also associated with uneven watering, which means that calcium does not reach the flower in time for fruit set. Tips of new growth are stunted.

Magnesium is needed for photosynthesis to occur. It also stimulates the uptake of phosphorous. In plants such as tomatoes and beans, deficiency causes older leaves to turn yellow while the veins stay a bright green. They eventually turn brown and die. Only a few flowers and fruit form.

Generally to know if you have a deficiency in any of the **trace elements** you will need to have, your soil tested, as deficiencies cause a wide range of problems which vary from plant to plant.

More information

For more information on these nutrients, including references and tips on how to address deficiencies, visit the articles section on the COGS website at <http://www.cogs.asn.au/articles>

Many thanks to the unknown author of this article!

Postcard from Marin County, California



Organic vegies on sale and display at the San Rafael Farmers Market (Photos from Adrienne Fazekas)

What's new in the COGS library

We have some great new books in the COGS library - two are featured here. Remember that if there are books you think the library should have, please let Alison Yamazaki know - either at the monthly meetings or by email (contact details are on page 2).

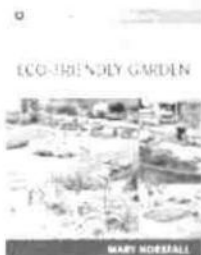
Creating your eco-friendly garden

Mary Horsfall 2008

From the CSIRO Publishing website:

"Creating your eco-friendly garden shows you how to develop an environmentally friendly garden for little cost. Practically written, it is based on the author's first-hand experience as well as the wealth of knowledge she has amassed working at Grass Roots, Australia's most popular self-sufficiency magazine.

The book offers advice on planning your garden, choosing plants, planting times, watering options and pest management following organic principles. It explains how to assess the soil and microclimatic effects of surrounding buildings and vegetation so that you can determine the style of garden that best suits your property."



Sustainable gardening

Robin Johnson 2008

From Robin's introduction:

"Welcome to my second book *Your Sustainable Garden*. In this book we focus on making the most of your garden area or space and ensuring it not only survives our fluctuating Australian conditions, but thrives!

This new book follows on from my acclaimed work *Garden Design for Everyone* which introduced and encouraged simple garden design strategies to help everyone develop their own garden

This book gives simple advice on how to develop your own sustainable garden, secrets of composting and also includes a comprehensive list of plants suitable to use for your garden in all temperate climates. So let's begin our journey together whereby treating our environment with care and respect you can gain greater abundance and pleasure from your garden."



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

S = seed sowing; T = transplanting

This table is a guide only - observe 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.

COGS NOTICE BOARD

Speakers

7:30 pm on the fourth Tuesday
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.

24 February 2009

Growing sprouts
Barbara Schreiner
plus COGS Harvest Night

24 March 2009

COGS Annual General Meeting
plus review & taste-testing Special
Interest Group climbing beans

Note that there are no COGS general meetings in December or January

Events

Horticultural Society of Canberra
Autumn Show

7-8 March 2009

Lancaster Hall, National Circuit Forrest

Don't forget the new competition
for community gardens!

www.hsoc.org.au

Environment Centre Harvest Festival

28 February 2009

info@ecoaction.com.au, 6248 0885 or

www.ecoaction.com.au

HSOC Garden Study Tour

13 April-5 May 2009

Visit Spain and Portugal!

www.hsoc.org.au

Open Garden at COGS Cook Garden

Cook garden is opening its gates to the public at part of the Australian Open Garden Scheme 6-7 February 2009.

For more information, contact John Bennett or visit www.opengarden.org.au

ACTEW Stage 3 water restrictions apply in all COGS gardens

Handheld hoses with trigger nozzles, drippers, watering cans or buckets can be used 7-10 am or 7-10 pm on the odds and evens system.

No watering is allowed outside these hours

Canberra farmers markets

Northside: Saturdays 8am - 11am
Capital Region Farmers Market
EPIC (entry near Shell service station)

Southside: Sundays 9am - noon
CIT Southside Campus
Entry via Ainsworth Street in Phillip

Join Greening Australia's Seed Squad

Nearly all tubestock used by Greening Australia for revegetation projects in the ACT region are propagated by seed.

GA is gearing up for a big seed collecting summer and is currently recruiting volunteers to join the Seed Squad, who will help GA staff to track down provenance seed at different locations around the Capital Region.

Contact Jemma Johnston on 6253 3035 or jjohnston@act.greeningaustralia.org.au.

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