

Winter 2009 : Vol 17 No 2

Canberra Organic

Pumpkins & peas
Postcard from Sri Lanka
Crop rotation for beginners
COGS winter planting guide



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

Enquiries

Elizabeth Palmer
6248 8004
info@cogs.asn.au

Postal address

COGS
PO Box 347
Dickson ACT 2602

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.

President

Keith Colls
6161 4931
president@cogs.asn.au

Vice President

John Grubb
0419 290 546
the.grubbs@gmail.com

Secretary

Helen Mitchell
mitchysays@gmail.com

Treasurer

Adrienne Fazekas
6247 5882
afazekas@yahoo.com.au

Membership Secretary

Mary Colls
members@cogs.asn.au

Librarian

Margaret Richardson
6248 8306
ainsrich@actewagl.net.au

Public Officer

Margaret Richardson
6248 8306
ainsrich@actewagl.net.au

Editor

Monica van Wensveen
6255 4332
editor@cogs.asn.au

General committee members

Wayde Margetts
0402 344 367
wayde.marg@gmail.com

Sarah Todd
0407 037 060
todds@tpg.com.au

Carol Lilleyman
carol.lilleyman@gmail.com

Peter Kaylock
0423 846 995
kaylock@homemail.com.au

Web Manager

Mary Colls
webmanager@cogs.asn.au

Telephone enquiries

Elizabeth Palmer
6248 8004

COMMUNITY GARDENS

COGS operates 11 community gardens in the Canberra region, with the support of the ACT Government.

Charnwood

John Grubb
0419 290 546
the.grubbs@gmail.com

Cook

John Bennett
6251 1915
bennetts@grapevine.net.au

Cotter

Roz & Trevor Bruhn
6282 1214
bruhn2605@netspeed.com.au

Erindale

Christine Carter
6231 5862
ccarter@netspeed.com.au

Holder

Conrad van Hest
6286 3784 or 0438 811 712
zysyphot@netspeed.com.au

Kambah

Sonya Kershaw
bailsa64@hotmail.com

Northside

Will Borowski
0466 313 406
will_borowski@hotmail.com

Oaks Estate

Gail Bennell
0407 123 301
gbennell@gmail.com

O'Connor

Peter Crimmins
6247 5272
pcrimmins@csa.edu.au

Elly Cotsell

ellycotsell75@yahoo.co.uk

Queanbeyan

Di Weekes
6297 6402
the4ds@iinet.net

Peter Gicesku

0402 776 522

Theodore

Donna Evans
6291 6156
sekicats@actewagl.net.au



President's report: Winter 2009

The autumn weather is almost behind us now. Unfortunately for our gardens, dry, hot conditions continued through March, with maximum temperatures two degrees above average and minima one degree above average. Rainfall was

10.2mm compared with the average of 52mm.

Thankfully, April brought useful rainfall and cooler conditions. For those of us whose beans survived the fierce heat of February, the cooler autumn conditions brought on a bean revival and beans started producing again. The rest of the garden looked much happier too. April has been much kinder, with above average rainfall allowing preparations for our winter gardens to get into full swing. Hopefully the rain will continue and we can look forward to productive winter gardens.

The lack of rain in the first three months of the year has taken its toll on the ACT water supplies. Storage in the reservoirs fell from about 50% at the end of February to 44.3% at the end of April which is slightly less than at the same time last year but hopefully, water restrictions won't get any more severe. One certainty for plot holders is that the price of water will increase for the next gardening season. On top of this, all COGS gardens in the ACT will now be paying for the water used so inevitably, plot fees will increase in September. The size of the increase necessary to cover water costs will be determined at a joint meeting of the COGS committee and garden convenors in August.

Garden news

Now for some good news. New licences have been negotiated for COGS gardens on unleased Territory land and this has secured their future until 30 April 2020. However, the boundary of the Holder garden had to be slightly adjusted to accommodate some proposed new road works. The only garden whose future is still in doubt is Theodore - this is due to a lack of plot holders. Although numbers have increased during the last few months more plot holders are required before we can convince the custodian of the land that the garden is viable. So to save this garden, please contact the Theodore convenor urgently, or me, if you want a plot.

It is a different story on the north side of Canberra. All gardens are full with waiting lists and some of those waiting lists are quite long. We are considering starting a

new garden in Kaleen. A fenced site is available and the owner is keen to have it operate as a community garden, although there will be some costs involved in connecting the water supply. If you are keen to secure a plot, particularly if you are on one of the current waiting lists, please contact me urgently so we can gauge whether the level of interest is sufficient to justify the effort and cost of setting up the garden. See the notice about this garden elsewhere in this issue of the magazine.

Competitions and experiments

Our gardens have been very active during autumn. Two gardens - Holder and Cook - entered produce into the Horticultural Society of Canberra's Autumn show. Both displays were a credit to COGS and earned \$200 in prize money donated by Bunnings. I hope more gardens will enter next year.

Seventeen gardeners were active in the Special Interest Group we established last year. Twenty-six varieties of climbing bean were grown and those that were not destroyed by slaters, earwigs, birds and heat were taste tested at the AGM. A summary of the results are presented elsewhere in this issue and a more detailed report on the trial will be published on the website soon. Overall it was a successful first effort and I hope we will be able to trial other vegetables in the coming years.

COGS website

Those of you who have visited the COGS website recently may have noticed it has had a makeover. We are fortunate that one of the new Committee members is a computer whiz and did all the behind-the-scenes technical work to set it up. Much of the material on the site has been updated and we have added a couple of useful new features. We expect the site to evolve over time. There is now a blog which can be used by members (and the public) as a question-and-answer forum on gardening matters. It also gives the Committee the capacity to keep members up to date about events/opportunities that are brought to our attention after the magazine has been published. It has been set up so that members who register with the blog will automatically receive these notices. It uses an RSS feed. If you have difficulty registering or setting up the RSS feed please contact me for instructions.

Finally, I would like to thank all the committee members who retired at the AGM for the effort they put into running COGS. I would also like to welcome all the new committee members. There are six new faces at our meetings now and I'm sure they will all add to the vitality of COGS in the future.

Keith

CANBERRA ORGANIC

Volume 17 Number 2 (Issue 65)

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 |
|-----------|-------------|---------------|
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| 1/2 page | \$36 (\$30) | \$120 (\$100) |
| Full page | \$72 (\$60) | \$240 (\$200) |

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Editor's note

The pumpkins are safely stored, the green manure is up and the cabbage moth is on the wing - winter is bearing down.

A friend and I were lamenting recently about the transition periods on either side of winter 'proper' - in particular, that it can be difficult to find enough in the vegie patch to make a complete (and tasty) meal.

The predictable result of the conversation was a kitchen garden challenge, to see if we could forage enough for a good on-site brunch.

We salvaged some rocket and late season capsicums, lettuce and beetroot leaves for a salad. Early spinach, spring onions and an excavation of garlic gave a delicious base for an omelette, thanks to a donation fresh eggs.

And yes, I cheated. I added goat's cheese, a vinaigrette and a handful of walnuts - life's too short too skimp. So the challenge is out - what meals are you eating straight from your garden?

We have a fabulous issue of *Canberra Organic* this winter, with articles on crop rotation and organic mushrooms, a postcard from the markets and gardens of Sri Lanka and a peak into the cold weather activities of the COGS gardens. Thanks to all contributors!

It sounds like a boarding school menu, but our seasonal vegetables are pumpkin and peas, and our Q&A topics include the perils of transplanting carrots, using mushroom compost and tell-tale signs of a common nutrient deficiency.



Enjoy-winter in your garden!

Monica

Top: Ingredients
Bottom: Result!



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Contributors to this issue

Articles

COGS Garden Convenors, Keith Colls, Gita Curnow, Adrienne Fazekas, Rachel Parry, Janet Popovic, Margaret Richardson, Garry Ridley, Angela Spencer, Monica van Wensveen.

Photos

John Bennett, Gita Curnow, Janet Popovic, Garry Ridley, Monica van Wensveen.



Cover photos

Front cover:

A bounty of winter greens

Back cover:

Pumpkins, pumpkins and more pumpkins

Opposite page:

The ingredients and spoils of a late autumn forage in the garden at Mitchell.

This page:

A glorious display of dahlias at the Cook garden for the Open Gardens Scheme.

Articles and photos by Monica van Wensveen unless otherwise stated

This issue of Canberra Organic is printed on recycled paper

In the news

Allotments aplenty in the UK

The UK's National Trust has launched an initiative to create 1000 new allotment plots across the country to give local communities the space to grow their own fruit and vegies. Growing spaces will vary in size, from smaller plots for new growers to larger areas for community growing schemes. To kick off the initiative, the Trust is turning over the back garden of its London office to become an allotment for staff.

Oz organics

A survey recently commissioned by the OFA revealed that 61% of grocery shoppers in Australia bought some organic products. This has increased from 43% in 2003. Another survey, conducted by Newspoll, reported that 72% of people who buy organic products would prefer one organic certification symbol, rather than the current system of eight symbols.

Benefits of bottled vitamins?

Reports from a Women's Health Initiative study indicate that multivitamins - at least in pill form - may not help prevent chronic disease or prolong life, as previously thought. The eight year study, which tracked use in over 160 000 women, flies in the face of public belief that doses of vitamins and nutrients make up for an unbalanced diet. Dr Peter Gann of the University of Illinois suggests that health benefits come from eating the whole vegetable, not just the nutrients. "There may not be a single component of broccoli...that is responsible for health benefits - why are we taking a reductionist approach and plucking out one or two chemicals in isolation?"

Le buzz in Paris

Paris is buzzing with the success of a three-year-old French program to encourage beekeeping in urban areas, according to the International Herald Tribune. In a country where at least 300 000 hives have disappeared each year since 1995, urban colonies are thriving, with hives on balconies, rooftops and in parks. Parisian apiarist Corinne Moncelli suggests that this is because "flowers and plants are changed constantly and there aren't pesticides".

White House turns green

And THE big organic story of late is the creation of a kitchen garden on the White House lawn, spearheaded by first lady Michelle Obama. The seedlings, fertilisers and insect repellents will all be organic and the garden will feature berries, herbs, two hives and 55 kinds of vegetables - selected by White House chefs for family consumption and State dinners. Said a former White House executive chef "This commitment by Mrs Obama to...freshly grown product is a progressive move forward that will raise the profile and awareness of local and sustainable food, both at the White House and nationally, to an unprecedented level."

Top tips for WINTER

① Guarding your garden

Fed up with the pitter-patter of tiny wings around your brassicas? You're not alone and every gardener seems to have their own remedy for the dreaded cabbage moth.

Some say that squashing the caterpillars keeps moths away. Others use chilli, pyrethrum or garlic as companion plants and use scattered planting (not in rows). Applying a salt water spray in the early evening is another suggestion, as is scattering eggshell halves amongst your brassicas, fooling the territorial moths into thinking the shells are other moths.



② Using lunar power

Gardening by the moon is a traditional technique that links lunar rhythms with soil moisture. As with ocean tides, other bodies of water also respond to the gravitational pull of the moon. Moisture peaks in full moon, so sow seeds and seedlings in a waxing moon (first quarter) or full moon to optimise germination and growth.

③ A berry merry winter

Winter is the time to apply TLC to berries and other soft fruit. Plant or propagate certified strawberry stock and remove old leaves and runners. Prune currants to remove dead wood and about a third of older branches to encourage new growth. Plant raspberries and boysenberries while dormant and remove old canes, leaving current season's growth for next year's fruit.

"Adopt the pace of nature - her secret is patience."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Weather and water watch

As the days become grey and frosty, here are the temperatures and rainfall to expect this winter, courtesy of the Bureau of Meteorology's long term statistics for the ACT region.

| TEMPERATURE | June | July | August |
|------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Canberra airport | max 12.2 | max 11.3 | max 13.0 |
| | min 0.9 | min -0.1 | min 1.0 |

| RAINFALL | June | July | August |
|------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Canberra airport | 41.1 mm | 41.3 mm | 46.6 mm |
| | 5.7 rain days | 5.9 rain days | 7.0 rain days |

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

Seasonal forecast: April to July

- The rainfall outlook for northern and eastern NSW is for wetter than normal conditions, contrasting with a drier than normal outlook for southern and western NSW. For the ACT region, there's no strong bias towards either drier or wetter than average conditions, with likelihood of change estimated to be 50%.
- There is a small shift away from normal temperatures expected for this period, with slightly higher maximums and slightly lower minimums a possibility.

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

Water use and restrictions

- At 1 May, Canberra's dams were 44.1% full.
- Stage 3 water restrictions are currently in place across the ACT. The daily water target is currently 112 ML - watch the road signs on Canberra's main roads for any changes, or visit ActewAGL's water networks website: www.actewagl.com.au/water/networks

'Food miles' study shows NZ's agricultural efficiency

A 'food miles efficiency' report on the production of New Zealand dairy products gives evidence that the generation of greenhouse gases - carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide, all implicated in global climate change - is less than in the British dairy system.

The key finding of the Lincoln University study is that the UK produces 35% more emissions per kilogram of milk solid than New Zealand, and 31% more emissions per hectare than New Zealand - even including transportation from New Zealand to Britain and the carbon dioxide generated in that process.

The report, which was authored by Professor Caroline Saunders and Andrew Barber, is titled *Comparative Energy and Greenhouse Gas Emissions of New Zealand's and the UK's Dairy Industry*.

It follows the first Food Miles report by Saunders, Barber and research assistant Greg Taylor, published in July 2006.

That report, which drew considerable critical response from UK trade and environmental interests, examined energy use and carbon dioxide emissions associated with the production of four products - milk solids, lamb, apples and onions.

In a landmark conclusion it found that there was greater energy efficiency in New Zealand for the production of dairy product, lamb and apples, and an advantage in relation to onions if storage costs for the UK product were included in the calculations.

This latest report focuses exclusively on the dairy sector and adds in greenhouse gas emissions.

"It is obvious that production systems and not transport are the major contributor to the differences in greenhouse gas emissions and energy use," says Professor Saunders.

Source: Lincoln University website
(www.lincoln.ac.nz) 27/07/07.

Around the COGS Gardens

Cotter

As we move towards late autumn regular activity in the garden has started to decline. By early April most gardeners had cleared plots of their summer plantings and dug in manure and compost to enrich the soil.

Those gardeners who didn't sow early green manure crops became active clearing plots and sowing green manure seeds when the forecasts indicated rain around the Anzac Day weekend, and no doubt were glad when nice falls of rain eventuated.

Some gardeners have plantings of winter vegetables growing nicely and are looking forward to a productive time from these.

As reported previously we have no vacant plots.

Roz & Trevor Bruhn

Holder

The garden has received a few light frosts and the gardeners are hastily picking late producing beans, capsicum, eggplant and tomatoes. This year has seen a bumper crop of pumpkins (golden nugget, Qld blue, butternut, Jap, etc), large variety of zucchinis and squashes.

The garden along with Cook had entered the Horticultural Society autumn show and Holder won the most outstanding vegetable exhibit, thank you to all Holder members for your contribution. Next year instead of two gardens entering the show, can all other gardens please consider entering it does not take much effort and it's a showcase for COGS and the community gardens.

Over the next year the garden is going through major change due to Molonglo / North Weston development. The first part will be a construction of cycle path in front of the garden and a section of the north west corner of the garden has to be surrendered for this project. The second stage is the closure of Cotter Road for the extension of John Gorton Drive, during which the garden will gain extra land at the southern end, plus a new access road and entry point.

The garden has a handful of vacant plots. If you are interested in a plot and do not mind putting in a bit of effort to rejuvenate one, then we are keen to have you join our garden.

Conrad van Hest

O'Connor

Hello to all. The garden at O'Connor is looking really great despite such a dry summer and not terribly wet autumn. The cold weather has set in and you must all be seeing this change to the 'short earthy look' in your gardens. The garden at O'Connor continues to grow and

improve. We have had some people leave and we welcome the new gardeners.

Our tank project has come to a halt as we have had to apply for more money to finish it. The additions to the initial plan in the form of a stormwater pump system increased the cost and left us with a shortfall in our funds. Hopefully we will be able to do this and finish the project as we now have two 'beautiful' 50,000 litre tanks sitting in the ground just waiting for all the winter rain to fill them up. Thanks go to those involved in the organising and to all concerned for their patience with the delays and unfinished site.

The garden has been covered in straw just recently particularly the paths and side beds around the perimeter of our 'tennis courts'. It has given the garden a softer look and feel and will help to retain moisture. Thanks again to all those involved in spreading it out. It took many wheelbarrow loads and was very dusty but the recent fall of rain settled it beautifully.

Our last general meeting went well, thank you Elly! We decided to have regular working bees to improve the garden and keep the appearance up to scratch. This is going well with everyone doing what they can when they can.

I can only say that to me it appears that everyone's enjoyment level has risen as the gardens fertility level has increased and just looking around it feels as though people have refined their knowledge of winter gardening as there is so much coming up that will grow on through the cold weather and keep feeding everyone. So all the best to everyone and here's hoping for a wet winter.

Philip Woodhill

Cook

In our last report we said we were looking forward to two days of visitors to the COGS Cook Community Garden as part of the Australian Open Garden Scheme. Well, we were not disappointed.

Even though we managed to score the two hottest days in February, with forty plus temperatures, we had more than a hundred paying visitors, many expressions of interest in organic gardening and several visitors who just wanted to see what goes on behind that fence at the bottom of Bindubi Street that they drive past every day. The talks by Keith Colls - two each day - on the COGS gardens and organics generally were particularly popular with visitors.

Many of the Cook Gardeners were involved in getting their plots into top condition and the results were well

appreciated. There was also a large group of helpers over the two days - setting up, manning the gate, preparing our photo display and talking to visitors. All in all it was a very successful community effort.

Cook also participated in the annual Horticultural Society Show in February with a display of produce from the garden. We even took away a couple of prizes !

On a less happy note the garden has been subjected to several break-ins over the last few months with damage to the perimeter fence on each occasion and apparently random and senseless destruction of some garden produce and some of our fixed assets. The police were notified of the incidents.

With winter approaching and our main growing season coming to a successful conclusion thoughts are turning to manure and hay and green mulch ahead of the first frosts and cold winds off the Brindabellas. Our neighbours at the Cook Horse Paddocks have offered horse manure to all our gardeners and this offer has been much appreciated.

There has been very little movement in our membership numbers. We are fully booked with forty-six plots and a waiting list of ten hopeful gardeners. Once people come they have been reluctant to leave. Our only departure this year has been as a result of a work transfer to Melbourne which they thought was a bit of a carbon footprint problem if they were to come up on a regular basis to pick their tomatoes!

May the autumn rains continue.

John Bennett



The Great COGS Climbing Bean Experiment

The results of the first COGS climbing bean trial are in. And the winner is...

In preparation for the 2008/2009 growing season a special interest group was established to test a variety of climbing beans for taste and suitability for growing in Canberra backyards and community gardens. Seventeen gardeners joined the group for the initial trial of twenty six varieties of bean.

The seed used in the trial was in some cases saved from previous seasons by individual gardeners, but was mostly purchased from Greenpatch, Diggers and Eden Seeds.

Varieties from five species tested were:

- *Vigna umbellata* (Rice)
- *Vigna unguiculata* var *sesquipedalis* (Black Seeded Snake Bean)
- *Phaseolus lunatus* (Madagascar)
- *Phaseolus coccineus* (Scarlet Runner and Sunset Runner)
- *Phaseolus vulgaris* (Blue Lake, Kentucky Wonder, Purple King, Wellington Wonder, Climbing Princess, Epicure, Fredrico, Delgado, Giant of Stuttgart, Greek, Lazy Housewife, Mosteller Wild Goose, Natural Salt, Rattle snake, Golden Wax Pole Bean, Frost Navy, Mrs O'Brian's Pole Bean, Zebra and Molly's Zebra).

Weather conditions during the growing season presented quite a challenge. Some of those who planted early (before the Melbourne Cup) lost their beans to frost. After the frosts the season progressed well at the beginning, but as most varieties were just starting to produce, the extremely hot weather of February struck. This prevented pods from being set and most varieties stopped growing.

When the weather cooled in March it took several weeks for the beans to recover and start producing again. This unusual hot weather no doubt had some effect on the results of the trial.

Those gardeners who kept their plots mulched during winter and planted their beans into the mulch or very close to it, either as seeds or as seedlings, had most or all eaten by slaters or earwigs. This considerably reduced the number of bean varieties tested. Perhaps this problem can be avoided by ensuring the ground is bare to about 20 to 30cm from the seedlings as slaters

and earwigs living in the mulch do not like to venture too far from cover.

Very few other pest and disease problems were reported. There was slight damage from green vegetable bugs (*Nezara viridula*), larvae of the grass blue butterfly (*Zizina labradus*) and possibly *Heliothis* (*Helicoverpa* spp), but not enough to be of concern.

Thirteen varieties were taste tested by COGS members after the AGM. The clear winner on taste was Rattle Snake, closely followed by Navy bean and Golden Wax Pole bean.

Other varieties in order of decreasing preference were Kentucky Wonder, Lazy Housewife, Purple King, Blue Lake, Sunset, Zebra, Mrs O'Brian's pole bean, Wellington Wonder, Mosteller Wild Goose and Giant of Stuttgart.

Since the AGM, beans that had shown little promise surged ahead in leaps and bounds at the end of the Season - in particular Madagascar.

I would like to thank all gardeners and taste testers who participated in the trial. A much more detailed report will be posted on the COGS web site soon.

Keith Colls



What Mario found in the garden



Everyone at Cook Community Garden knows and loves Mario. You can't miss his garden because it's always productive - outstandingly so. For example at the moment the broccoli is bursting with vigour and the artichokes, raddiccio and fennel are coming on a treat just when many other plots are looking a bit tired after a busy summer.

Mario is always willing to have a chat and is generous with growing hints to fellow gardeners who marvel at his success. But does Mario have a secret weapon?

He's now confessing to having dug up some pretty unusual materials which he assumes were part of the compost he inherited from former plot holders but possibly also are remainders from land usage predating the COGS lease ... I mean you've heard of the value of blood and bone, but bones as long as your arm or an animal's leg? Oyster shells, sea shells and cuttlefish? Wine and champagne corks? Plastic lego? A tiny teddy?

Did these have anything to do with the huge odd shaped potatoes Mario harvested this year, or for that matter the enviable supersized tomatoes? Well anyway Mario has now started a 'display board' on one of his garden trellises for strange items he digs up. He just wishes he had saved for the record some of the items he found earlier.

As you can see from the photo of Mario and Garry, Mario has certainly also found a gardening mate or two who enjoy sharing a joke about what he digs up!

Janet Popovic



Winter harvest: PUMPKIN

Roast them, mash them, steam them, turn them into soup or scones (depending on geography). You can puree them, stuff them or put a candle in them and call them Jack - pumpkins are a very versatile veggie.

Yes, yes - before you bombard me with instructive emails, I know that pumpkins grow on a vine and therefore are technically a fruit (so purists, please replace versatile veggie with fabulous fruit).

They are a member of the gourd family (with squash, marrow and zucchini), originating in South America. In some parts of the world, they are dismissed as cattle fodder or a pretty ground cover, but luckily, not so in Australia.

Most commonly grown varieties in this region are Butternut (pear-shaped, prolific and not quite as rampant as other varieties), Jap (dark green skin with yellow flecks), Queensland Blue (slate-blue skin and distinctly ribbed) and Golden Nugget (a bush variety with small, tasty fruit).

Site and soil

Choose a sunny, sheltered spot in the garden for your pumpkins. Before planting, improve the soil with compost, well-rotted manure or other organic matter. They tolerate a range of soil conditions but need good drainage.

You will need a fair bit of room as the vines tend to wander. If you don't have a lot of room, try a bush variety, or set up a trellis and encourage your vines to grow up instead of out.

Planting

Pumpkins need a long, warm growing season to reach maturity. However, seeds won't germinate in cold soil. So either sow seeds in pots or in a protected place and then transplant into your garden, or direct sow after the last frost - October or November.

Sow seeds at a depth of about 1-2 cm on hills; germination should occur in 8-10 days. Hills should be spaced about 2m apart and can be home to 2-3 seeds or seedlings. Protect seedlings with mulch.

Cultivating

Pumpkins need regular watering and will be very happy with an application of compost tea or other liquid fertiliser during the growing season.

Removing growing tips if you want to encourage branching and fruit-set. For extra-large fruit, experts suggest allowing only one fruit to develop per vine. As fruits get bigger, you can raise them up on wood or straw to prevent rotting.

Harvesting

Leave pumpkin fruits on the vine for as long as possible, but try to get them off before the first heavy frost, which may damage the fruit. Ideally, wait until their skin has

hardened and the stem is dry. When harvesting, use secateurs and leave a length of stalk attached to the fruit.

If the fruit is intended for storage, 'cure' them first by exposing the skin to the sun for a few days and allowing it to dry out completely.



Problems

Pumpkins don't have many pests, but will end up with powdery mildew if they don't have enough sunlight or good air circulation. Excessive heat or rain may result in poor pollination, which may necessitate hand pollination.

Choosing and using

Although you can buy pumpkins all year round, bumper season is autumn to early winter. At the markets, choose fruit that seems heavy for its size, with undamaged skin and a bit of stalk still attached.

Store whole pumpkins for two or three months in a cool, dark place with good ventilation. Store cut pumpkin (wrapped) in the crisper, once the seeds and stringy bits have been removed.

For those intrigued with Halloween, my Canadian friend Rachel has entrusted me with her Jack O'Lantern-making secrets. Firstly, cut a 'lid' in the top with a paring knife. Get the kids to scoop out the innards and then neaten the insides with a spoon or knife. Draw a face on the broadest side of the pumpkin and get to work with the paring knife. Make a hollow inside for the candle (or use a tealight), replace the lid, and presto! But don't light the candle until after dark.

The pumpkins she uses in Canada are not eating varieties. She chooses bigger fruit because the walls are thinner and they are pretty hollow. She also swears by roasting the cleaned seeds in olive oil and sea salt.

References and further reading

- The Farmers Market Companion (Viking Books)
- Organic vegetable gardening (Annette McFarlane)
- The Canberra Gardener (HSOC)

Winter planting: PEAS

The vegetable herald of spring. The legume so delicious, only half a harvest will ever make it back to the kitchen. The crop that gives back to the soil as much as it takes out. They can be a bit finicky to grow, but isn't it worth giving peas a chance?

Peas have been a staple in our diet since prehistoric times. It is likely that they were first cultivated in Turkey, where seeds found in archaeological digs have been dated at around 7 500 years old.

Peas are rich in fibre and vitamins A and C, a significant source of folic acid, potassium and vitamins K and B1 and help reduce some harmful forms of cholesterol.

In gardening terms, peas can be broadly divided into field peas, traditional garden peas, sugar snaps and snow peas. Field peas are grown mostly for their dried seeds which are used for animal fodder and in soups and other dishes. The pod of the garden pea is discarded in favour of tender immature seeds. Snow peas and sugar snaps have edible pods - the former with a broad, flat pod and the latter with a pod that looks like garden peas, but with a thinner wall. Sugar snaps and snow peas are the most commonly grown in the Canberra region.

Site and soil

Peas will do best in a well-drained, moderately rich soil. Because they come with their own supply of nitrogen, the soil doesn't need to be nitrogen-rich. For this reason, peas can be planted after a 'greedy' crop. Try not to plant peas after beans (in the same bed), to avoid transfer of similar pests.

A sunny position is preferable and a fair bit of garden is required to grow enough plants for a decent yield.

Planting

Sow seeds to a depth of 5cm (or a little deeper in warmer weather) at intervals of around 10cm. Rows should be spaced between 50-90cm apart, depending on variety - dwarf varieties need more space as they have a broader form than climbing and tall varieties.

To avoid seed rot, plant seeds in moist soil (preferably in temperatures above 5 degrees) and don't water until germination occurs. Only mulch around strong seedlings, and keep mulch away from stems. A cloche may be used to protect tender seedlings.

Bush or dwarf varieties generally support themselves, but for most other varieties, some type of trellis or stake will help productivity, air circulation and harvest.

Peas prefer cool weather. Mature plants are not greatly affected by frost, but heavy frosts may prevent flowers from setting into pods. If you are planning to plant peas in warmer months, they'll be happier in a spot in the garden with a bit of shade.

Harvesting

Once pods begin to form, they need to be harvested regularly, before the pods go wrinkly. Harvest starts 8-10 weeks after planting and lasts for between 3-6 weeks.

After the final harvest, cut the stems off at ground level, rather than pulling the plant out of the ground. This way, the nitrogen in the roots will be released back into the soil, ready for the next crop.



Problems

Powdery mildew - a grey powder on the leaves - is the peas' most common complaint. Avoid overhead watering and try a foliar application of liquid fertiliser on a warm day.

Choosing and using

Choose pods that are crisp and bright green with no evidence of splitting. The smaller the pea, the more tender it will be.

Peas are best eaten on the day they are picked or bought. If you have to store them for a day or two, put them in a plastic bag in the crisper - they will turn starchy if left at room temperature.

Boiled or steamed peas team up well with mint, butter and shallots, or cream and herbs, but are equally magnificent *au naturel*. Snap and snow peas are perfect in salads and stir-fries.

References and further reading

- The Canberra Gardener (HSOC)
- Organic Vegetable Growing (Annette McFarlane)
- From A la Carte to Zucchini (Anthony Barker)
- Botanica's Organic Gardening (Judyth McLeod)

Postcard from Sri Lanka

As the first rays of sun glance off the Indian Ocean the market traders set up rickety stalls or just a sheet on the ground at Mount Lavinia, south of Colombo. Even in the cooler month of February the coastal humidity of Sri Lanka can sap the energy of negotiations in bananas, jackfruit and mullet so the dealers begin their commerce in the early hours of a Sunday.

The Christian holy day is a hangover from British Colonial dictates for the week, because Sri Lanka is largely Buddhist, Hindu, with a smattering of Islam. It may be the confluence of religions which keeps meat and its accompanying friends of flies away from the street traders

Vegetables and fruit are in abundance, including the exotic varieties such as jackfruit, durian, papaya. Nutrition is good in the resplendent isle, the rainfall welcome, the soil verdant. Crops abound, and in the markets there were no pickpockets. Nor does anybody hassle the tough fishermen f tuna with their machetes at the ready.

And lo and behold there is a nascent organic movement in Sri Lanka, which I unearthed further south, inland from the devil-dance and mask centre of Ambalangoda. After correctly prostrating myself at the holy temple of Sailatalarama Vihara I travelled with Siri by tuk tuk through the cinnamon plantations to his bio-gas driven organic farm.



He virtually casts a seed into the ground and if grows – breadfruit, jacks, bananas, melons - the list goes on. Organic farming is his hobby, the local government his paymaster, and in his absence from the farm he protects it with pit bull dogs, even though he is the most holy of farmers.

Cinnamon and other spices were why Sri Lanka was colonised. The Portuguese, Dutch and British wanted the trade and saw no reason why they should not invade a country to get it, blithely dismissing the fact that the country had been settled by Lankans for two thousand years.

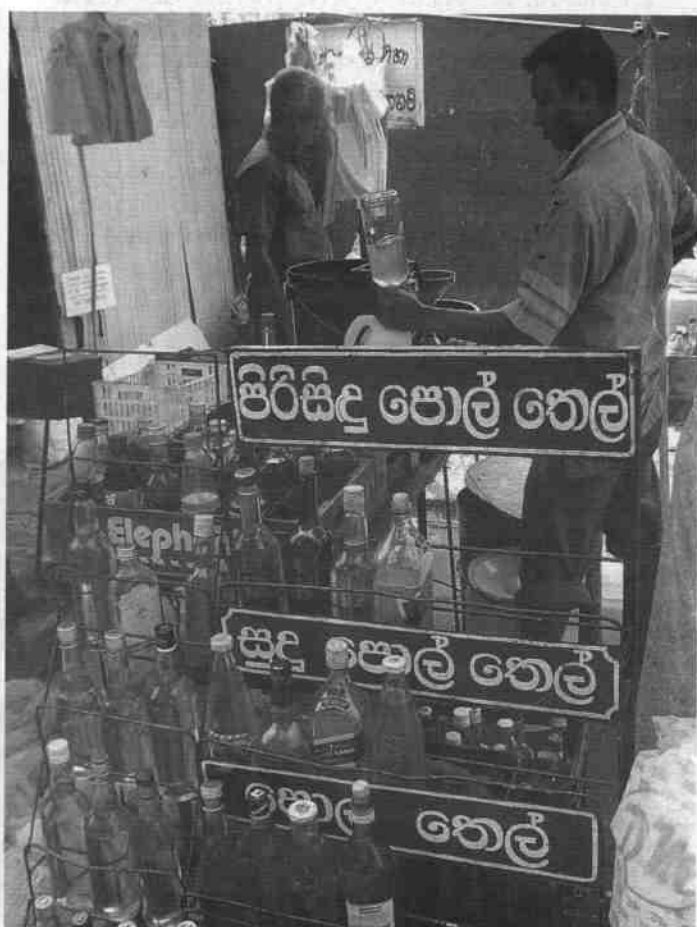
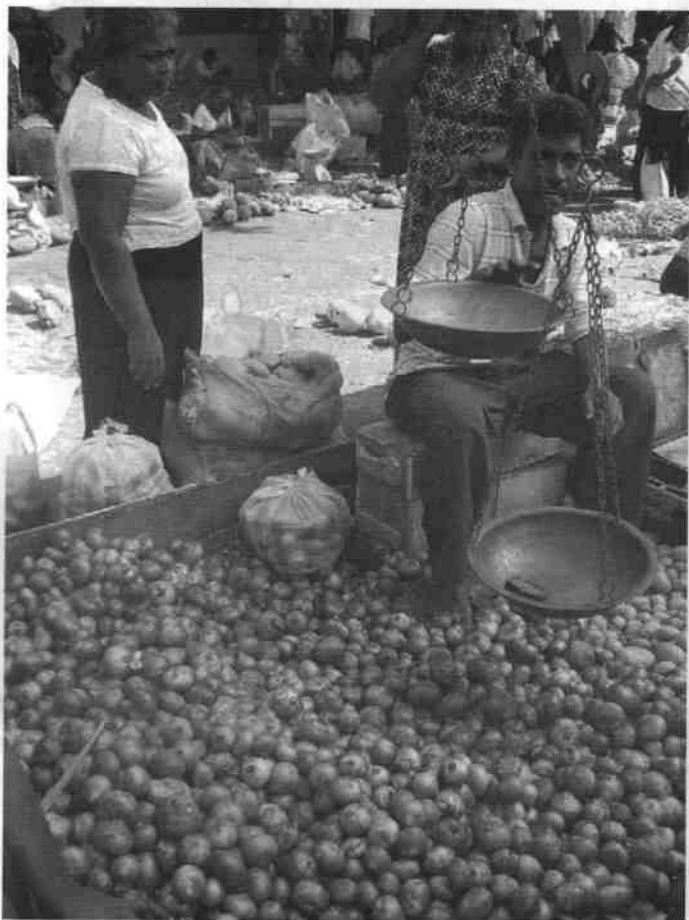
It was the British who introduced tea to the country in the 1870s, after the coffee crops were blighted. Tea is grown in steep valleys of the hill country, rice on the lowlands, and fruit and vegetables seemingly everywhere. Of course now it is socially expected and a pleasant thing in Sri Lanka, to take a high tea in Sri Lanka with hoppers (pancakes).

Words and photos: Garry Ridgway

Photos this page: Siri and Garry on the farm; spoilt for choice with bananas

Photos opposite page - Sunday morning markets: Snake beans grow easily here; selling a catch of tuna; the good oil; the odd onion for sale.





A beginner's guide to crop rotation

Crop rotation is one of the most useful tools in the organic gardener's toolkit. If you've never tried it, these tips and plans will help you get started.

Winter is a great time to sit back and plan your spring garden. Including a system of crop rotation in your plans will help maintain the health of your garden and make your gardening life easier.

Crop rotation is the practice of grouping vegetables according to their botanical families and making sure those groups aren't grown in the same position in the garden every year.

There is debate on optimal rotation length - some say the longer the rotation, the better; many say that a four year rotation is the best place to start. Beware of articles describing single season rotation systems using standard European vegetables - these aren't suited to Canberran conditions, where year-round growing is possible.

Why? Why? Why?

- *To control pests and diseases*
Plants in the same family tend to be prone to the same pests. Moving crops around a rotation prevents the build up and carry over of problems.
- *To take advantage of the previous crop*
Plant heavy nutrient feeders such as brassicas and tomatoes after legumes for a boost of nitrogen. Plant light feeders such as carrots and beetroot after heavy ones to reduce over-vigorous leafy growth at the expense of vegetable production
- *To improve soil structure*
Alternating root vegetables with shallow-rooted ones will help structure and reduce compaction. Varying plants in a particular area will also make the best use of nutrients that exist at different levels in the soil.
- *To make life easier*
Grouping together plants with similar growing requirements and habits will streamline garden management, especially watering.

Planning and doing

- ① Make a list of what vegetables you want to grow and then group them by family, according to the table on this page.
- ② Make a map of your garden and divide it into beds - choose as many beds as number of years you want the rotation to last (eg for a four year rotation, choose four beds). Remember to think through warm and cold season cropping options.
- ③ Distribute your crops in these beds. Try to keep families together. If there will be more than one family in a bed, make additional groupings based on similar seasonal, growing, water or nutrient requirements.
- ④ Fill in spaces with short term crops such as leafy greens, shallow-rooted vegetables or annual herbs.
- ⑤ At the beginning of the next growing year, move the crops combinations around to the next bed - clock-wise, anti-clockwise or however you like. In particular, think through nutrient transfers between past and future crops.
- ⑥ Keep records and maps of what you do to help with planning in subsequent seasons.

Three important points!

- Any amount of crop rotation is better than none. Even if you have only a tiny garden, stick to the simple rule - don't plant the same crop in the same place two seasons in a row.
- What vegetables you include in your rotation scheme should be entirely determined by what you want to eat - it makes no sense to grow food you don't like just because it fits into a system.
- Gardening is supposed to be enjoyable and relaxing - create a rotation scheme that suits you and is easy to follow.

| Family | Common name | Family members |
|----------------|--------------|---|
| Alliaceae | Alliums | Onion, leek, garlic, shallots |
| Apiaceae | | Carrot, parsnip, celery, fennel, dill, coriander, parsley |
| Asteraceae | Daisy family | Lettuce, endive, chicory, Jerusalem artichoke |
| Brassicaceae | Brassicas | Broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, radish, turnip, swedes, mizuna, mustard, kohlrabi, bok choy, kale, rocket |
| Chenopodiaceae | | Beetroot, silverbeet, chard, spinach |
| Cucurbitaceae | Cucurbits | Pumpkin, squash, zucchini, cucumber, melon |
| Fabaceae | Legumes | Peas, beans, broad beans (and leguminous green manures) |
| Poaceae | | Corn |
| Solanaceae | Solanums | Tomato, capsicum, chilli, eggplant, potato, tomatillo |

Adrienne's six year rotation

Below I've detailed the six bed, six year rotation I'm using in my plot at the Cook garden. I've included some timing information to illustrate how it all fits together in practice, as the beds are rarely completely empty. Planting and harvesting times are intentionally vague as they depend on the particular season.

This plan was devised to allow year round harvesting and the vegetables included are those I grow regularly. The peas, beans, broad beans, sweet corn, carrots, beetroot and turnips are sown from seed and everything

else (except potatoes, shallots and garlic) is planted as seedlings.

The annual garden is divided into six areas of 10 square metres each and plantings are made as illustrated.

The plan can be easily changed to a five year plan by omitting the winter salad in bed C and the spring brassicas in bed D. If this is done, bed C becomes bed D from summer until spring (with the beans remaining until autumn) and the legumes, brassicas, roots and potatoes have all rotated through in two years rather than three.

BED A Solanums

- Plant tomato, capsicum, chilli, eggplant and basil in Nov/Dec; harvest until the first frost in autumn when it becomes bed B

BED F Cucurbits & sweetcorn

- Plant zucchini, cucumber, rockmelon, pumpkins & sweetcorn in late spring/early summer
- Plant green manure as crops finish in autumn; dig it in in early spring and it becomes bed A

BED B Alliums

- Plant spring onions, shallots & garlic in late autumn
- Plant the main onions (early & late varieties) in winter
- Plant more spring onions in early spring & plant leeks in late spring
- The garlic & onions are all harvested by Feb/Mar and in autumn, snow peas & broad beans are planted and it becomes bed C (although the leeks are still there until winter)

BED E Root crops, silverbeet, spinach, spuds

Half the bed

- Plant carrots & beetroot in spring and again in late summer; harvest from summer until winter
- Plant silverbeet in spring; harvest until following spring
- Plant bulb fennel in summer
- Plant spinach & more silverbeet (for chooks in winter) as space is available in autumn
- Celery would be included here if you wished

Half the bed

- Plant potatoes in Sep/Oct; harvest Feb/Mar
- Follow potatoes with green manure

BED C Legumes

- Plant snow peas & broad beans in autumn; plant more snow peas in spring
- Plant peas in autumn or early spring
- Plant climbing beans in late spring & bush beans successively throughout summer
- The peas & broad beans are finished by Christmas and are replaced from mid-summer with autumn & winter salad leaves which are harvested until spring when it becomes bed D
- Any empty space is filled with green manure in autumn

BED D Brassicas

- Plant broccoli, mizuna & lettuce varieties in early spring
- Plant cauliflower, more broccoli, swedes & turnips in summer
- Plant rocket, mizuna, pak choy & Chinese cabbage in early autumn
- Cabbages & Brussel sprouts would be included in this bed but I rarely grow them
- Crops in this bed are harvested during autumn & winter & in spring it becomes bed E (some late cauliflowers may still be there in spring)

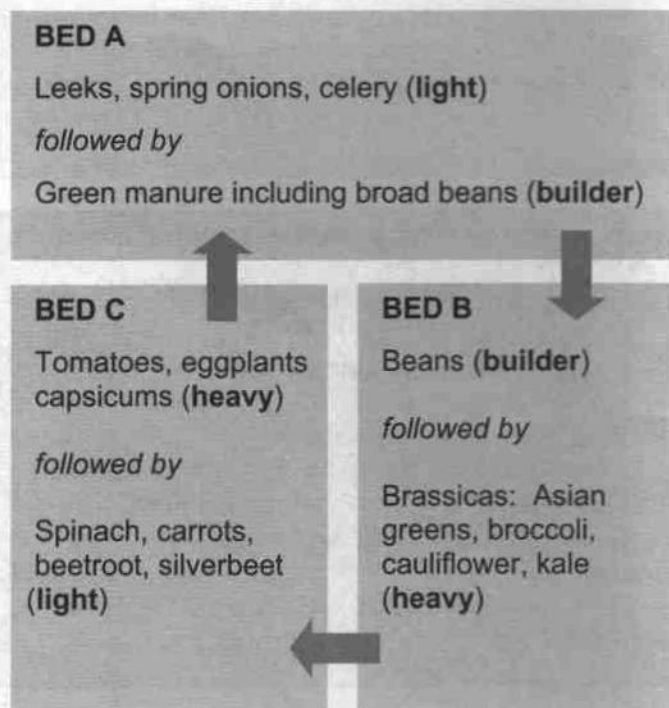
Monica's three year rotation

At my plot at the Mitchell garden, I use a three year rotation - partly because I haven't been gardening for very long, and partly because I'm not nearly as organised as Adrienne.

I mainly grow solanums, legumes and alliums in summer and a smattering of brassicas, spinach, a few root vegies and more alliums through winter. I have some herbs and artichokes that stay put and I try to make space at the edge of my plot for rambly pumpkins and a zucchini or two in summer.

I can divide my main crops into heavy feeders (brassicas, solanums), light feeders (alliums, celery, spinach, root vegies) and what www.vegetableexpert.co.uk call soil builders (legumes including green manure).

These are planted in three roughly equally sized plots. The crops are rotated by season so that heavy feeders follow soil builders and light feeders follow heavy.



So in the first year I plant alliums and celery in bed A in the warm months and green manure in the cold months. In the second year, I plant tomatoes and their family in bed A (from bed C in the first season) to take advantage of the work of the green manure. In the cold months, I plant spinach, silverbeet, carrots etc. And so on in a three year cycle.

The timing isn't always perfect and there's always some new vegetable that I want to try out. I like to fill up the space between these main crops with salad greens, flowers and whatever looks interesting at the time.

More information

You can find information on crop rotation (including suggestions for a rotation plan) in any good organic gardening book including:

- A slice of organic life (Sheherazade Goldsmith)
- Organic vegetable gardening (Annette McFarlane)
- Easy organic gardening (Lyn Bagnall)
- Indolent kitchen gardening (Libby Smith)

Adrienne Fazekas & Monica van Wensveen

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The survey takes around 20 minutes to complete and is accessed at this link:

www.questionpro.com/akira/TakeSurvey?id=1169675.

2. Spreading the word

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For more information, please contact Sonia Graham at sonia.graham@csiro.au

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Recipes to the rescue!

Pumpkin overload? Once again, the COGS cavalry arrives with a wonderful assortment of recipes to try out on your glut of gourds.



No-fat pumpkin fruit cake

500g mixed dried fruit
125g brown sugar
1 tablespoon golden syrup
1 cup water
1 teaspoon mixed spice
½ teaspoon cinnamon
1 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda
1 cup cooked, mashed and cooled pumpkin
2 eggs (or equivalent Orgran® No Egg)
1 cup wholemeal plain flour
1 cup white self-raising flour

- Put fruit, sugar, syrup, water, spices and soda into a large saucepan and bring to the boil. Cool.
- Add beaten eggs and pumpkin and mix well.
- Stir in flour.
- Bake in a 20cm round or square tin or a loaf tin at 170°C for 1 ½ hours or until cooked.

Note: The fruit mixture and pumpkin don't need to be cold, just cooled enough not to cook the egg



Pumpkin ginger biscuits

¾ cup raw sugar
1 cup cooked, mashed pumpkin
½ cup oil
1 teaspoon vanilla
2 cups self-raising flour
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon cinnamon
¼ teaspoon nutmeg
¼ teaspoon ginger (or replace with raisins)
1 cup chopped crystallised ginger

- Combine sugar, pumpkin, oil and vanilla.
- Stir in ginger.
- Sift flour with salt and spices and add to mixture. Mix well.
- Drop teaspoons onto greased oven trays. Bake at 180°C for approximately 15-20 minutes.



Thanksgiving cookies

2 ½ cups plain flour
1 tsp cinnamon
½ tsp baking soda
2 ½ tsp baking powder
¼ tsp salt
1 cup sugar
125g butter or margarine or ½ cup oil
¼ cup pure maple syrup
1 tsp pure vanilla essence
1 cup cooked and mashed pumpkin
½ cup chopped pecans (optional)
¾ cup dried cranberries (optional)

- Combine flour, cinnamon, baking soda, baking powder and salt.
- Cream together sugar and butter then gradually beat in maple syrup, vanilla and pumpkin.
- Stir in pecans and cranberries if used, then the flour mixture.
- Drop teaspoonfuls on baking sheet and bake at 190°C for 10 minutes.

Note: This can be baked as a cake in a swiss roll tin (32 x 24cm) at 190°C for about 30 minutes.



Roast pumpkin salad

1.5kg butternut or other firm pumpkin
¼ cup pine nuts or pecans
¼ red onion
100g cow or goat feta
Baby spinach and/or rocket
2 tablespoon olive oil
1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar
Salt and pepper

- Chop pumpkin into 3cm cubes.
- Toss in a little olive oil, salt and pepper and roast on oven tray, 180°C until cooked (30-40 minutes).
- At the same time roast pine nuts or pecans until brown (5-10 minutes).
- Slice onion very finely, cube feta.
- Mix oil, vinegar, salt and pepper.
- Toss all ingredients together and serve immediately.

Note: If time is short microwave pumpkin with oil, salt and pepper (it will be less firm than oven-baked), and brown nuts in a dry saucepan, shaking frequently.

Pumpkin pie

1 1/4 cups pumpkin puree
3/4 cup sugar
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon ground ginger
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 teaspoon flour
2 eggs, lightly beaten
1 cup evaporated milk, undiluted
2 tablespoons water
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 unbaked pastry shell

- Combine pumpkin, sugar, salt, spices, and flour in a medium mixing bowl. Add eggs and mix well.
- Add evaporated milk, water and vanilla. Mix well.
- Pour into pastry-lined pie pan. Bake at 200 degrees for 15 minutes.
- Reduce heat to 180 degrees and bake for around 35 minutes longer, or until the centre is set.

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Pumpkin pancakes

1 cup flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice
1 egg, slightly beaten
2 cups pumpkin puree
1/2 cup molasses, or maple syrup
3-4 tablespoons buttermilk or milk
2 tablespoons unsalted butter, or margarine, melted
1/2 cup chopped pecans or hazelnuts, optional
Powdered sugar for dusting

- In a large bowl, sift together flour, baking powder, salt and pumpkin pie spice. Set aside.
- In another bowl, beat egg slightly. Add pumpkin puree, molasses/syrup, milk/buttermilk and melted butter or margarine. Mix until smooth.
- Blend in the dry ingredients all at once. Mix until batter is smooth. Allow batter to rest for 30 minutes or more.
- Stir nuts into batter, and add additional tablespoon of buttermilk or milk if batter is too thick.
- To make pancakes, spoon a heaped tablespoon of batter onto a lightly greased preheated frypan. With the back of the spoon, flatten batter as per pikelet thickness. Cook slowly until bubbles appear on top and bottom is golden brown. Lift edge to check. Turn and cook until other side is golden brown.
- Place on a platter and set platter in a warm oven.

- Continue making pancakes until all batter is used. Makes 24 pancakes.
- Garnish with powdered sugar or serve with corn syrup, maple syrup or your favourite pancake syrup.

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Pumpkin-Amaretto cheesecake

This is a spirited version of an old fashioned favourite. It is sinfully rich. Bake and refrigerate this cheesecake a day ahead for best results.

11 sweet plain biscuits, crushed to make 1.5 cups of crumbs
1/4 cup sugar
1/3 cup unsalted butter or margarine, melted
2 small packs reduced fat cream cheese, at room temperature
1 cup lightly-packed brown sugar
2 cups fresh pumpkin puree
2 egg yolks and 4 egg whites
1-1/2 teaspoons cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
2 tablespoons flour
2 tablespoons: whipping cream and Amaretto
Whipped cream (optional)

- Preheat oven to 180 degrees.
- In a springform pan, mix biscuit crumbs, sugar and melted butter.
- Using clean fingers, press the mixture evenly onto the bottom and sides of the pan.
- Bake for 8 minutes. Remove from oven and cool.
- In a large bowl, use an electric mixer or food processor to whip cream cheese until smooth. Stir in brown sugar and blend until thoroughly mixed.
- Add pumpkin and add egg yolks one at a time, blending after each addition until smooth.
- Add half the egg whites at a time, blending well after each addition.
- Add cinnamon, nutmeg, flour, Amaretto and whipping cream; stir to blend.
- Pour mixture into prepared crust. Set springform pan in a large roasting pan and fill with 1/2 inch tap water. Bake 1 hour, or until knife inserted in centre comes out clean.
- Remove from oven, chill for 6-8 hours (or overnight) in the refrigerator. To serve, top with whipped cream if desired.

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*Thanks in particular to Angela Spencer,
Keith and Margaret Colls and Darcy Coen*

What's new in the COGS Library

Feature book

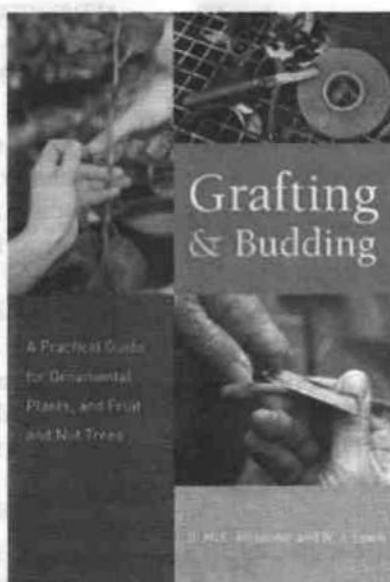
Grafting and Budding: a practical guide for ornamental plants, and fruit and nut trees.

Donald McEwan Alexander and William J Lewis
Landlinks Press, 2nd edition, 2008

This book explains how grafting works, methods for budding and splicing, and advice on preparation and selection of grafts.

As well as all the commonly grown fruit trees, tomatoes and passion-fruits, grapes and roses, and Australian natives are included.

The book is for Australian gardeners and I'm sure it will be very popular amongst our more adventurous COGS gardeners.



From our Librarian

Please hunt around your home for any COGS library books you may have forgotten to return.

We are undertaking a stocktake of the Library, and will start sending out overdue notices very soon.

The Library is being re-organised, hopefully to allow you to find what you want more easily.

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and relatives to see the South Coast.

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





COGS WINTER PLANTING GUIDE

VEGETABLES

Asparagus

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

Broad Beans

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

Kohlrabi

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

Lettuce

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

Onions

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

Peas

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

Rhubarb

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

Other possibilities

Growers may wish to start a number of crops in late winter rather than early spring if the winter is mild or if they have a sheltered garden bed.

These crops include artichokes (Globe and Jerusalem), beetroot, cabbage, carrots, potatoes and radish.

Frost-sensitive vegetables such as capsicum, eggplant and tomatoes can be started early in August indoors but may need a heated glasshouse or warm spot to germinate and will certainly need protection before being planted out in spring.

FRUIT

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

Strawberries

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

Berries

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

Currants

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

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

S = seed sowing; T = transplanting

Q&A @ COGS

Q "Is it best to **direct sow carrots** or to transplant seedlings?"

A Last spring I sowed a packet of carrot seeds. One row germinated far too thickly whilst another row was half empty.

When the seedlings were about 6cm tall I transplanted, individually, some of those I had thinned out. See the accompanying photo for a sample of what the transplanted seedlings grew into. Veritable monsters - huge circumference but no length, with lots of little willies attached.

I guess the message is to not transplant carrot seedlings in future.

A couple of years ago I transplanted some parsnip seedlings and they turned into corkscrews. So that's another root vegetable that doesn't take kindly to transplanting. *Gita Curnow*

Q "What is the status of **mushroom compost** in the COGS approach to organic gardening?"

A There is mushroom compost and mushroom compost. The short answer is probably that it depends on where the compost comes from.

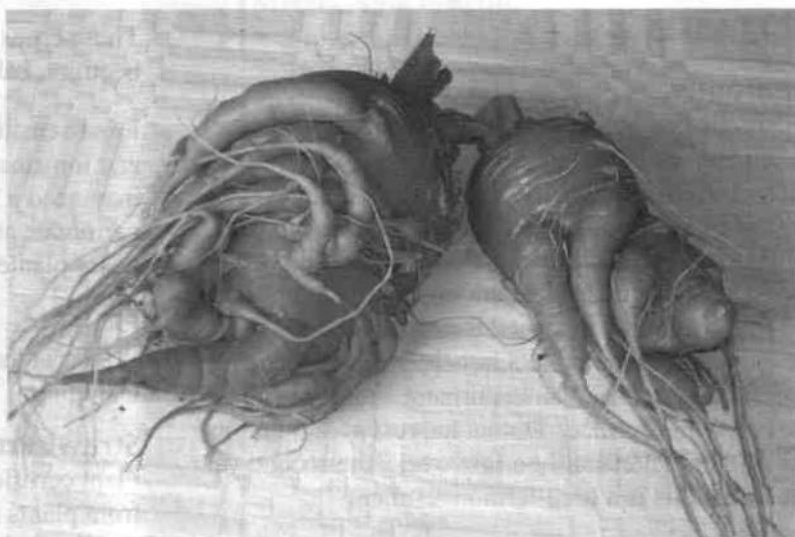
I have heard that some mushroom compost is sprayed with various things to make it sterile. Other companies sell unadulterated compost. It is definitely worth asking. *Keith Colls*

Q "Are **shallots and spring onions** the same plant?"

A What a can of worms this question is! Cooking books vary widely and add green onion, scallion and eschalot to the mix; gardening books contradict each other across all terms and websites have views aligned with their country of origin. Here are some examples:

"Shallots or eschalot or scallions divide evenly from one bulb to form a cluster of small even-sized bulbs, each with a separate stem."

"In Australia, shallots (or green onions) have white and green stalks without a bulb, spring onions (or scallions) have a small white bulb and a green stalk, white onions are fully developed bulbs, usually without a green stalk, and eschalots are bulbs with papery skins that grow in a cluster, like garlic."



"Shallots that are found in Australian grocers, with long green leaves and unformed bulbs, are known in other parts of the world as green onions, scallions or spring onions, although a spring onion would have a partly formed bulb."

"A proper shallot (*Allium ascalonicum*), sometimes referred to as an eschalot, is like a brown garlic bulb with a sweet delicate flavour."

If anyone out there has an answer, we'd love to hear from you!

Q "During the last growing season, some of my plants developed reddish-purple lines in leaves and stems - is this a **nutrient deficiency**?"

A It sounds like your soil might be lacking phosphorous, which is pretty common in Canberra. The colour is anthocyanin which is the result of an excessive sugar production triggered by the low levels of phosphorus.

If this is the case, try incorporating blood and bone into your soil, or even rock phosphate - both are organic solutions

A few readers have pointed out that **metal lids and microwaves** don't mix (see last issue's Q&A tips on easy ways to bottle fruit). You're absolutely right! The metal lids are used for storage only.

Please send any questions or responses to editor@cogs.asn.au or to the COGS post box.

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.

26 May 2009

Keeping bees in your garden
John Grubb, Vice-president of COGS

23 June 2009

City to soil: A composting project to return organic matter from urban communities to farmland
Simone Dilkara, Project Manager of Groundswell

28 July 2009

Standards for organic agriculture in Australia: Past, present and future
Els Wynen, Director of Eco Landuse Systems

Events

Enviro Expo 2009

Friday 12 & Saturday 13 June 2009
Queanbeyan Conference Centre, Crawford St

Enviro Expo 2009 is a two day event showcasing innovative ways in which the local community can reduce their impact on the environment. The Expo will be full of interactive workshops, information sessions and exhibitions - including the Queanbeyan and Oak's Estate gardens.

Environment calendar

International Day for Biological Diversity
22 May www.cbd.int/idb

World Environment Day
5 June www.unep.org/wed/2009/english

National Tree Day
2 August <http://treeday.planetark.com>

World Water Monitoring Day
18 Sept www.worldwatermonitoringday.org

Prospective new COGS community garden in northern suburbs

The COGS Committee is currently in discussions to develop a new COGS community garden in the grounds of the Kaleen High School.

Please register your interest in developing the garden and/or taking a plot with:

Keith Colls president@cogs.asn.au
John Grubb gardens@cogs.asn.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

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