

Spring 2009 : Vol 17 No 3

Canberra Organic



Bee keeping
Asparagus & garlic
Spring planting guide
Build your own cloche



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.

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

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President's report: Spring 2009

Temperatures are gradually climbing which must mean it is time to get out into the gardens to make sure they are ready for the spring burst of activity.

Winter seems to have been relatively mild. Both maximum and

minimum temperatures have been a degree or so warmer than the long term average. There have been considerably fewer frosty mornings this year and not many of the very heavy frosts we usually rely on to reduce pest populations.

Gardeners will need to be vigilant early on in the season to spot any developing pest problems before they get out of control. Our next COGS meeting will be a discussion of approaches to managing pests and diseases in the garden. It will be the perfect opportunity to ensure your pest and beneficial insect identification skills are up to scratch.

Water issues and plot levies

Winter rainfall has been significantly below average. Dam levels at present are a little below last year's levels at the same time. Level three restrictions are still in force but hopefully we will get through spring and summer without any increase in watering restrictions. Nevertheless, we still need to be as frugal as possible with our water use.

I hope by now all plot holders are aware of the advantage of using dripper systems for their fruit and vegetables to ensure their plots are watered as efficiently as possible. Efficient watering is essential if we are to minimise the plot levy necessary to cover water costs.

The cost of water increased again on 1 July and the new garden licences now require that we pay the full cost of all water used. This has made it necessary to increase the plot levy to \$2 per square metre per year to ensure that COGS has sufficient funds to cover the cost of water.

Community gardens

The COGS Committee has just completed its annual risk assessments of all the COGS gardens. The gardens are functioning well with strong demand for plots in most areas. There are very few vacancies in the gardens in the

northern half of Canberra. Some of them have had long waiting lists for some time.

To help ease these waiting lists the Committee has recently signed a MOU with the Kaleen High School to establish a new COGS garden in the high school grounds. It is expected to start operating around the beginning of September. If you would like a plot and you are not already on the Kaleen list, please contact me urgently.

Theodore garden is still struggling to attract a sufficient number of plot holders to remain viable. It is essential that more gardeners join the Theodore garden if it is to continue to operate. Please contact me if you would like a Theodore plot.

Standards, events and the COGS website

The new Australian Standard for Organic and Biodynamic Produce is expected to be announced in September. This will allow domestic legislation to be created to ensure that all produce for sale labelled organic in Australia will meet the Australian Standard for Organic and Biodynamic produce. Currently no legislation exists to ensure produce sold domestically and labelled organic meets the national standard.

To bring this new standard to the attention of the public the Organic Federation of Australia is holding an Organic awareness fortnight *Trust Organic* from 2 October to 18 October. COGS will be participating in this fortnight. COGS contribution to this activity will be notified on the COGS web site as soon as it is finalised.

This year COGS will be contributing to Floriade. Three COGS members will be providing a total of eight talks on organic gardening at the sustainable garden display at Floriade. These talks will be listed on the web site soon. If you happen to be at Floriade at these times, I'm sure it would be appreciated if you attended the talks to provide the speakers with moral support.

The new web site continues to be well visited and the number of RSS subscribers to the blog continues to increase. If you wish to keep up to date with what is happening in COGS between magazines, please visit the web site often.

Keith

Plot levies for 2009-2010 are due by 30 September

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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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Monica van Wensveen & Angela Spencer

CONTRIBUTIONS

We welcome submissions, ideas and feedback.

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

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

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

Please send contributions to

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ADVERTISING

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

Canberra Organic is a unique way to reach people in the Canberra region who have an interest in organics, gardening and the environment. Our circulation is around 400.

ADVERTISING RATES

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

Size	1 Issue	4 Issues
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1/2 page	\$36 (\$30)	\$120 (\$100)
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Editor's note

Welcome to the spring issue of *Canberra Organic*. First of all, I'm delighted to introduce Angela Spencer, who has joined the writing/ editorial/ photography team and who has penned, checked and clicked much of this issue.

There has been quite a bit of media lately about the nutrient content of organic produce (see page 19). These articles make me stop and think about why I grow and buy organics. Far from being negative, they reaffirm the holistic approach to gardening that I enjoy - I love to think that my patch of dirt will be better when I leave than when I arrived. And I prefer the taste of organic produce and its clean production.

While we are in a position to choose what we buy and how we garden, there are areas around the world that are in a far more tenuous position. For example, most African farmers farm for survival rather than for profit and experts forecast that world food production will need to double by 2050 to feed our growing population. Can this be done, with mounting pressures of climate change, dwindling resources and changing land use?

Africa is in the midst of a new green revolution. The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (backed by Bill and Melinda Gates and the Rockefeller Foundations) and other groups like them are turning to new agricultural technology to address Africa's production challenge, underpinned by new seed strains, efficient use of fertilisers, improved soil health and better extension and education activities.

Detractors of these groups say that only replacing industrial farming by organic practices will lead to a sustainable solution. Both arguments are strong and both show promise for improved farm productivity. Given the need, can these models co-exist?

But onto things closer to home. This issue of *Canberra Organic* is packed with tips and ideas for spring. There are articles on building your own cloche and setting off on a bee keeping adventure. Our Q&A contributions are about freezing vegies, feeding dogs and tackling red-legged earth mites.

Our seasonal vegetables are asparagus and garlic and we have some delicious recipes to help you make the most of your broad bean bounty. As always, we take a tour around the COGS

community garden and in this issue, we tour the new COGS website as well.

Enjoy spring!

Monica



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Photos

CSIRO Entomology, John Grubb, Steve Henry, Ann Smith, Angela Spencer, Monica van Wensveen.



Cover photos

Front cover

Flynn and a wiggly friend at the Charnwood community garden (Angela Spencer)

Back cover

Brussel sprouts (Angela), spring poppies and chervil

Opposite page

Stuart, the guard-duck of Watson

This page

A beautiful crop of green manure (Angela)

Articles and photos by Monica van Wensveen unless otherwise stated

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In the news

Research reveals high food inflation

ABC News reported that recent Reserve Bank research confirmed that groceries prices are rising faster than the current inflation rate of 2.5%. Christopher Zinn from *Choice* says Australia's food inflation is higher than that of similar countries and that it is the cost of fresh produce "that has really gone up through the roof", with fruit and vegetable prices up to 4.1% per annum.

NQ rice trial

A trial of organic rice production is about to begin in North Queensland, according to ABC News. The three year study will test whether 'upland varieties' of rice can be grown across northern Australia without flood irrigation or manufactured fertilisers. Soil Systems Australia Director Adam Wilson says the focus on upland varieties is because they are better suited to organic nitrogen sources - such as compost and green manure - that are not highly soluble in water and hence will have little impact on waterways.

Royal roots

Queen Elizabeth is taking a turn at inspiring and supporting the UK's growing trend for organic gardening, reports the US's ABC news service. The 'Yard Bed', located at the back of the Buckingham Palace gardens, will be used as an organic vegetable plot. No chemicals will be used and bore water will be used, and is already being used for the rest of the Palace garden. Vegetables such as onions, leeks, corn, beans and carrots will not only grace the royal table, but are likely to be a conversation starter for the Queen's annual summer garden parties.

Bundanoon de-bottles

In July the Southern Highlands town of Bundanoon - community and businesses - voted overwhelmingly to ban bottled water. This first Australian ban on commercially bottled water was triggered by local concern about the carbon footprint associated with bottling and transporting water. These concerns are not just about plastic waste but also the cost of production on the environment, including fuels used to produce bottles and CO2 emissions associated with transport. Free water fountains will be installed in the town to replace bottled water.

Chop chop - or not

Research undertaken the UK's Newcastle University and published in *The Week* indicates that the anti-cancer properties in carrots are stronger if the vegetables are not chopped before cooking. Twenty-five percent more of the cancer-fighting compound falcarinol was found in carrots that were not chopped, leading researchers to conclude that more nutrients leach out of the greater surface area provided by chopping.

Top tips for SPRING

① Get garden-fit

Does your back groan at the very thought of all that spring bending and lifting? Gardening is great exercise but few gardeners take the time to stretch or warm up as they would before other activities.

Do some easy back and leg stretches before you start. Keep your back straight when weeding - don't hunch or reach too far. If you're lifting, bend from your knees rather than your waist and don't lift and twist together. Gradually build up time in the garden, remembering to stop and stretch every 20 minutes. Use tools with comfortable handles and remember to change hands periodically.



② Sweet-talk your citrus

Spring is the time to look after your new and old citrus friends. Plant new trees after the last frost in a warm protected position. Frost-affected leaves on older trees may be pruned in early spring. Add plenty of mulch and make sure you keep their shallow roots well watered, especially as the weather warms up.

③ Catch a show

There are some fantastic garden shows in the region in spring. The Horticultural Society has its Spring Bulb and Camellia Show, Iris, Rhododendron and Azalea Show and the Spring Exhibition and Rose Show, and don't forget Floriade and the open gardens of the Southern Highlands. Rub shoulders with the pros, submit an entry yourself, or just enjoy the show!

**“In the spring, at the end of the day,
you should smell like dirt.”**

Margaret Atwood

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	September	October	November
Canberra airport	max 16.1	max 19.3	max 22.6
	min 3.2	min 6.0	min 8.7

RAINFALL	September	October	November
Canberra airport	52.9 mm	63.3 mm	63.3 mm
	7.1 rain days	7.8 rain days	7.4 rain days

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

Seasonal forecast: August-October

- The rainfall outlook for the ACT region is for neither wetter nor drier conditions than the long term figures. An El Nino event looks to be developing across the Pacific.
- The temperature outlook favours both higher daily maximums (around 65% likelihood for the ACT region) and higher nightly minimums (around 60%).

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

Water use and restrictions

- At 1 August, Canberra's dams were 44.3% full.
- Stage 3 water restrictions are currently in place across the ACT. The daily water target is currently 105 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

Breakthrough ideas to make Britain more sustainable

The UK's Sustainable Development Commission has unveiled a list of 'breakthrough ideas' that could transform Britain into a sustainable society.

The SDC's Breakthroughs for the 21st Century Project set out to identify the ideas that could make the biggest impact on Britain's efforts to tackle climate change, resource depletion and inequality.

A shortlist of ideas was selected by the SDC Commissioners from over 300 submitted by the public, academics, businesses and sustainability professionals.

The final 19 ideas include using fast-growing algae to capture carbon from fossil fuel burning, providing free bikes to encourage cycling for trips under five miles, providing outdoor 'well-being lessons' to all children, and turning the Royal Bank of Scotland into the Royal Bank of Sustainability.

Of particular interest to community gardeners are two breakthrough ideas in land-use for food and social benefit.

From the report: "Going local is only one aspect of the whole complex issue of sustainable food. It's significant, however, that a number of ideas submitted to the SDC for an overall 'food revolution' centred firmly on the re-localisation of food and support for local producers.

"This localisation provides the key to improved access to fresh seasonal produce, reconnecting producers and consumers, reducing transport-related emissions and increasing resource-efficient production. It also supports social interaction by bringing people together to make more of public and private space.

"We have chosen to showcase two practical initiatives. The first is based on what's happening in 'Incredible Edible Todmorden' in West Yorkshire, and encouraging other communities to take their lead. The second idea is for a new project to make use of under-used land for community gardening."

Read about these and other initiatives or download the report at www.sd-commission.org.uk

Source: SDC media release 1 July 09.

Around the COGS Gardens

Charnwood

In a galaxy far, far away... (or at least hidden in a nice spot on the outskirts of Charnwood), much has been happening in the Charnwood COGS garden.

Many of the plots are bursting with cool season vegies, such as broccoli, cabbage and broad beans or quietly creating the good stuff for Spring with plenty of green manure growing.

Over the past year, the garden has lost 6 valued gardeners, however we have recently gained 5 enthusiastic new gardeners – welcome to you! We currently have 3 vacant plots.

Since November, we have introduced five bee hives to the garden and three gardeners have transformed into enthusiastic beekeepers (see photo at right – this is our convenor, John, either wearing his beekeeping attire or his Star Trek costume!).

A few chookhouses have been dismantled after several attacks by foxes have unfortunately resulted in dead chickens and dismayed gardeners.

We have also formed an orchard working group to restore 200 square metres of community fruit trees – lots of pruning, watering and mulching needs to be done to ensure a bountiful fruit harvest next season. There are more than 35 fruit trees, including plum, apricots, apples and nectarines.

All of us are anticipating the preparation for the warmer seasons. At our recent July garden meeting, a visiting sheep poo merchant was almost crash tackled in the haste to inquire about his 20-year-old aged sheep manure! A few more weeks and the garden will be alive with gardeners digging in green manure and piling on manure and mulch in readiness for spring crops.

With beehives, ponds, fruit trees, chooks and worms and plenty of new gardeners, the Charnwood garden is certainly alive with activity.

Angela Spencer

Cotter

As is usually the case, the winter months have seen reduced activity by gardeners in the garden. However in that period a few gardeners have been harvesting various brassica vegetables. Others have left nature assist the growth of their green manure crops - some gardeners have now cut these off and dug the green in to enrich their soil prior to the spring planting period.

A working bee in the gardens in early May was well attended. We were able to do a general clean up of the grounds and remove some regrowth from areas on the



perimeter of the plots. A further clean up will be done after our annual meeting in September.

We still have no vacant plots and don't expect that position to change going into the new growing year.

Roz & Trevor Bruhn

Cook

As far as number of gardeners are concerned we continue to have a full house with no turnover during the last quarter. There is also a lengthy waiting list for plots.



On a somewhat sour note, we are continuing to be the target for what can only be described as malicious damage. Despite our cyclone wire fencing, topped with barbed wire, locked gate and locked shed, intruders are regularly cutting through the fence and embarking on apparently random acts of vandalism.

Apart from the demoralising damage to individual plots, our glasshouse has been smashed, probably beyond repair and our watering system put out of action. The police are involved in our attempts to identify the intruders.

On a happier note, with a full complement of gardeners to start the 2009 / 2010 garden year we are all looking forward to good gardening.

John Bennett

Mitchell

Mitchell garden and gardeners are gradually emerging from winter hibernation, with some flurries of activity on these beautiful weekend days.

Many plots have bounteous brassicas and broad beans. Others are biding their time with forests of green manure. Some gardeners (like me) have extended our green manure plots to include what uncharitable people might call grass.

Although we're a bit late, we're hoping to prune and shower our fruit trees with TLC at our September working bee.

All existing plots in the garden are taken, but there is room for gardeners keen to make a plot their own.

Monica van Wensveen



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Lennox Crossing, ACTON

Cost: \$40

More information & contacts:
Email garden@ecoaction.com.au
Phone 6248 0885

Spring harvest: ASPARAGUS

There is absolutely no comparison between the mushy tinned asparagus dubbed 'sparrow's guts' by generations of Aussie children (myself included) and wonderfully tasty organic asparagus picked and eaten straight from the garden.

This member of the lily family is a deep-rooted perennial that can live (and be harvested) for up to 30 years in the garden, once established. It just keeps growing and producing tender and sweet spears. Given the title of 'king of vegetables' by the discerning ancient Egyptians, asparagus is still prized and respected today as a gourmet delight.

Asparagus is an herbaceous perennial, developing crowns of fleshy roots that produce young shoots which are tender and sweet to eat. The plants produce dark green fern-like foliage in summer and are dormant in the cooler months.

There are basically three types of asparagus – white, green and purple. White asparagus (the same variety as green asparagus) is grown below the ground and is cut below the surface when harvesting. Commercially it is more expensive to harvest than the green variety. Green asparagus spears are grown in sunlight and picked when the tips come out of the ground (about 20cm above soil). Purple asparagus is grown and harvested in the same way as green asparagus – it is just a trendier variety as it is newer to the market.

Asparagus is incredibly healthy - high in potassium and dietary fibre (for digestive health), packed with beta carotene (for good vision), has heaps of vitamin E (good for red blood cells), folate (good during pregnancy) and vitamin C.

Site and soil

Asparagus likes deep, friable, rich soil. In heavy clay soils, the plants benefit from being mounded up or you can dig in lots of organic matter to ensure the soil is well-drained. Asparagus prefers soil with a pH of 6.0-7.0. Lime should be added to acidic soil.

It's a good idea to plant asparagus in a cool, shady spot with easy access for harvesting when in season. A trench is a good idea in hot areas.

Good companions for asparagus are tomatoes, parsley, basil, capsicum, nasturtiums and lettuce. Asparagus ferns can help deter pests from the cabbage family, so it can be a good idea to scatter them among annual crops.

Planting

Asparagus can be grown from seed or you can plant crowns – the latter is more popular and you can divide up a mature asparagus plant into crowns once it reaches its third year. Crowns are usually available to purchase during late autumn and winter. An average family will need 6 or more crowns for a good asparagus supply.

Asparagus needs to be planted in well-dug beds which have been thoroughly prepared and enriched with compost and well-rotted manure. Proper preparation is essential as it is such a long-lived plant. Crowns are planted 15-20cm deep and in trenches that are 40-60cm - in winter or early spring while still dormant - then back-filled with compost and manure. Place the crowns on a small mound in the centre of the trench so the roots

point down at an angle and carefully spread them out.

Asparagus has a deep root system and requires wide spacing so it gets adequate water and minerals from the soil. Water well.

Harvesting

Growing asparagus is an exercised in deferred gratification. In the first year after planting, avoid the temptation to harvest for at least 2 years to give the roots and crowns time to develop a strong root system. The leaf buds below the soil surface form spears above the ground as the temperature warms in spring and after harvest, the spear extends into a tall frond – the plant photosynthesises and replenishes its nutrient reserves in the crown for the following year's harvest.

During the second year, cut every shoot for 8 weeks and then let the fern grow out naturally. The year after that and then every spring thereafter, harvest the plant for up to 12 weeks.

Asparagus spears grow slowly until the tender tips poke through the soil, then they can grow at a rate of 20-25cm per day! To cut the spears, use a knife and try not to injure the crown. If the spears are thicker than a pencil, cut them before the spears branch at around 20cm tall. Leave them to feed the crown if they are thinner than this.

Cultivating

Regularly feed asparagus well with decomposed animal manure and compost. Mulch and water well.

When the plant is about 4 years old the fronds form really thick roots which turn yellow in autumn – this is when you should cut them back to ground level or around 7.5cm from the soil surface. The garden bed will look bare until spring, when the spears will pop up again. Generously apply compost and well-rotted manure to prepare for spring growth and top with a thick mulch.

Beasties and other problems

There are few pests and diseases that affect asparagus, apart from the slugs and snails. Yet another reason to grow asparagus in abundance around your other annual crops! If you aren't getting many spears, it indicates poor nutrition, too much or too little water, harvesting for too long or that the crowns need to be divided.

Choosing and using

If you are buying asparagus from the market, select straight, firm, crisp spears with compact tips, tight scales and good colour. Both thick and thin spears are both tender but thick spears are tastier and have a better shelf life.

To store asparagus, place it in the fridge standing up in a glass of cool water and cover with plastic wrap. Trim the bases off to help it stay fresh longer. If handled properly, asparagus can be kept for more than 2 weeks.

Angela Spencer

References and further reading

- The Permaculture Home Garden (Linda Woodrow)
- Australian Organic Gardening Handbook (Brenda Little)
- Australian Asparagus Council <http://asparagus.com.au>
- Green Harvest website www.greenharvest.com.au/plants/asparagus-info.html

Spring planting: GARLIC

Love it or hate it, garlic holds a proud place in history, kitchens and gardens around the world. It's easy to grow, good for you and wards off everything from colds and aphids to vampires and bad dates.

Few plants have divided societies - and rooms - as much as this member of the onion family. *Allium sativum* has been around for a long time. It was mentioned in the Bible, in Sanskrit writings from 3000 BC and was in the tomb of Tutankhamen. Nero loved it, Roman priestesses shunned it, Pliny the Elder prescribed it for infections, insomnia, epilepsy and haemorrhoids.

It's rich in vitamins A, B1 and C and contains sulphur, calcium, magnesium, iron, potassium and zinc. It is said to guard against cholesterol, high blood pressure, heart disease, infections and colds.

There are two main varieties. Softneck varieties are the most common. They don't have a flowerhead and tend to have a longer shelf life. Hardneck varieties have flowerheads like onions, produce fewer, bigger cloves and prefer cooler climates such as ours.

Garlic is also said to repel aphids and can be used as a companion plant for roses, fruit trees and members of the tomato family.

Site and soil

Garlic likes full sun, good drainage and some well incorporated compost or aged manure.

Planting

In cooler areas, garlic can be planted anytime between late autumn and early spring for best results. Source garlic from an organic provider and steer clear of imported bulbs as they (by necessity) have been fumigated with methyl bromide as they reach Australia.

Separate a bulb into individual cloves. - it's best to source the bulb from an organic provider. Plant each clove pointy end upwards a few centimetres below the soil surface, spaced 10-20 cm apart.

Mulch well as garlic doesn't like competition from weeds. Regular watering is important and the ground should not be allowed to dry out completely during bulb formation.

Harvesting

Garlic is slow to mature, generally taking around 8 months to produce a bulb. Harvest when the leaves begin to turn brown or yellow - don't wait until the foliage has completely died back.

Stop watering the plants for at least a week before you intend to harvest. Lift the bulbs carefully from the soil with a fork. If it's good weather, leave them to dry in the sun for a few days.

Problems

Garlic has few problems with pests or diseases. Thrips can be a problem as can downy mildew and the fungal disease white rot in cool wet weather.

Poor growth may be the result of planting time, watering schedule, soil acidity or variety.



Choosing and using

Choose bulbs that are plump and hard with no spots or bruises. Fresh garlic has a mild flavour and should be moist and crunchy. Flavour becomes stronger as the garlic dries.

Don't store garlic in the fridge. It will keep for up to 9 months in a cool, airy place - try hanging in bunches or spreading on racks. Bulbs are best stored whole rather than separated into cloves.

It is an essential ingredient in Asian, Mediterranean, Eastern European and Arabian cuisines and can be savoured in many ways, including roasting, braising, frying, and raw.

To easily remove skins, try dropping a clove into boiling water for a couple of seconds, then running cold water over them - the skins should slip off. Garlic presses can be useful, but remember that the flavour will be stronger than if a clove is chopped or crushed.

References and further reading

- Organic Vegetable Growing (Annette McFarlane)
- From A la Carte to Zucchini (Anthony Barker)
- Garlic growing in Australia www.garlic.com.au

A touch of frost

How to build and use garden cloches in your spring garden

“Last night, there came a frost, which has done great damage to my garden...It is sad that Nature will play such tricks on us poor mortals, inviting us with sunny smiles to confide in her, and then, when we are entirely within her power, striking us to the heart.”

Nathaniel Hawthorne, The American Notebooks

Spring may have sprung, but many Canberra gardeners, with a slightly over-eager glint in their eyes, tired of the seemingly endless icy cold winter days and nights that befall our region, pounce on the soil as soon as winter clicks over into spring.

They morph into garden machines, piling on the manure, digging, weeding, smelling the promise of warm weather, and the excitement and anticipation of a bounteous spring garden builds. Seedlings are madly thrust into the still-cold soil, exposing them to the chilly early spring air – the same tiny plants we have lovingly tended from seed within the warm confines of a hothouse during the latter stages of winter like mother hens.

Experienced local gardeners will tell you that you can never trust the Canberra climate – there can often be a last, sneaky touch of frost well into October and even November. Just when you think it is safe to plant those tomato plants....

The extended period of cold nights in Canberra means that the planting of seedlings that love warmth must be delayed, as cold soil affects root growth and frost can cause permanent damage to sensitive foliage.

One very useful solution - which will appeal to those gardeners who enjoy building structures in the garden just as much as playing with seeds, plants and animal manure - is to build a cloche for the vegie garden to protect tender young plants from the cold air and frost until the weather properly warms up.

Build your own

A cloche is basically a hoop house type structure placed around plants to cover and protect them. The word “cloche” is French for “bell”. Traditionally, cloches were made of glass and were smallish bell-shaped covers to protect individual plants – Victorian inspired, they were both pretty and useful. The term “cloche” is now used to describe tunnel-like structures used in the garden.

A tour around several COGS gardens shows there are quite a few easy and ingenious ways to build your own cheap and cheerful cloche or cold frame without spending a lot of money and using materials we already have around the garden.

There are quite a few options for constructing your own cloche, using either a combination of new and/or recycled materials or commercial cloche systems available from retailers.

Following are a few suggestions which may inspire you to get your notebook and pencil out to design and build your own creative garden structure to protect your spring seedlings.

A popular and simple option is to build a covered hoop frame over your garden beds to form a tunnel-like cloche. The series of hoop frames can be made using black agricultural poly pipe (recycled or new) or even 4mm fencing wire – place them in intervals of around one metre and secure them over stakes or lengths of wooden dowelling driven about 40cm into the ground. Or if you are using fencing wire, push it into the ground. A low tech (and easy to manoeuvre) alternative is to secure pipe straight into orange aqua spikes.

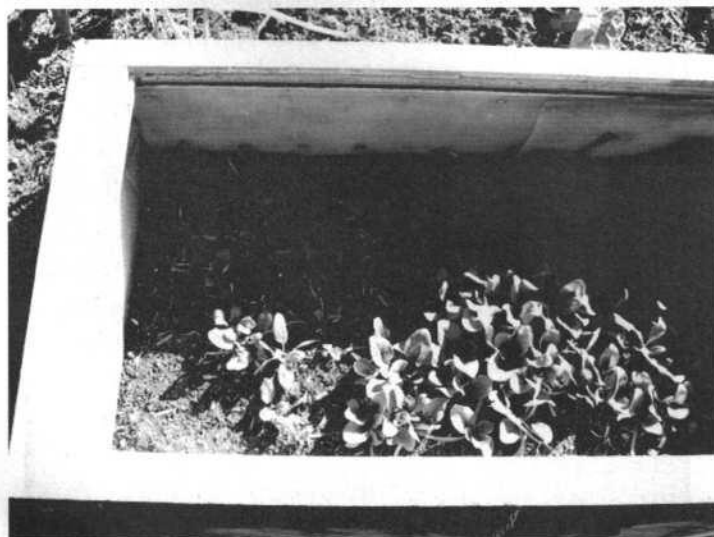
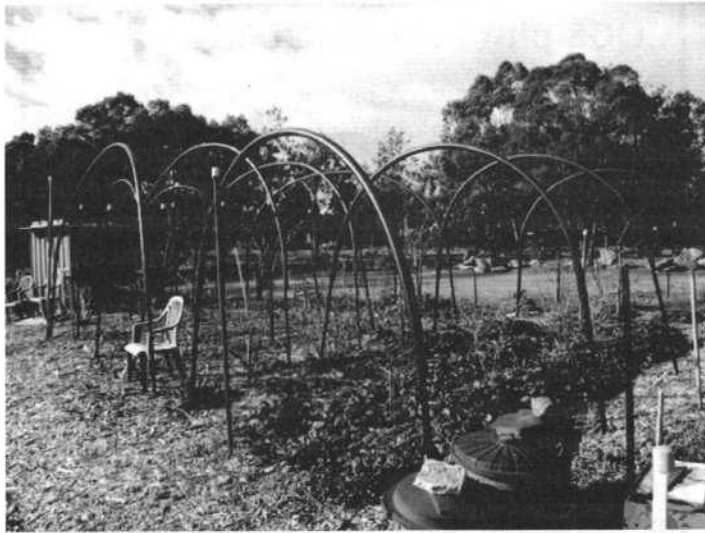
The hoop frames should fit the width of your garden beds and be positioned with a generous curve. The hoops need to be covered with either commercial fabrics such as “microclima” or plastic painting drop sheets, shade cloth, fruit tree netting, old mattress wrappers or anything else that effectively prevents plants being exposed to the elements while also letting sunlight penetrate. The cover can be attached to the hoops with special clips, old hair clips, bulldog clips, string or you can just drape the cover over the hoops and anchor it to the ground with planks of wood, tent pegs or old bricks.

Clever protection

If you don't have the time or inclination to build a hoop house structure, a quick option is to throw the fabric/plastic over the garden rows as a “floating cover”. Place stakes at the corners of the garden beds and then drape the fabric over the beds, securing the ends to the ground with tent pegs or bricks.

Whichever option, you will need to lift the cover during the day to weed or harvest and allow for adequate ventilation and sunlight.

If you only want to protect a small number of seedlings



Top: Ready to go! Pipe hoops secured by stakes driven into the ground at Charnwood

Middle: Shadecloth over by pipe hoops secured by aqua spikes, string and tent pegs, at Mitchell

Bottom: A cold frame in action at Queanbeyan

at a time, why not make your own mini-greenhouse to place over them? Recycled clear plastic drink bottles can be cut in half, with each half being used as a mini cloche over the plant – if you use the top half, you can then water the plant through the bottle opening. Also, don't throw out your old wire hanging baskets – remove the chains, attach clear plastic over the basket and upend them over plants.

And that old or unused dome tent lurking in the garage? The ones without a base would be perfectly qualified to be redesigned as a garden cloche and you can even secure them to the ground with tent pegs! Or you can just use the tent's dome frame structure without the fly sheets and cover it in clear plastic or shade cloth instead. The options are endless...

Why bother constructing your own garden cloche? In many parts of Australia, you probably don't need to, but in Canberra a cloche provides a good temporary protective measure to assist gardeners in protecting plants from late frosts and bugs, achieving an early start with spring seedlings, protecting plant cuttings, extending the harvest and warming the soil prior to planting. The use of a cloche is also an excellent organic way to protect fruit and vegies from pests and bugs as the physical barrier eliminates the need for pesticides.

Try cold frames

It is worth mentioning cold frames at this point, as they are useful and easy to construct. They are also quick to dismantle when no longer needed and stored for the next cold season.

A cold frame is a low wooden or concrete frame structure topped with glass, clear plastic or other transparent material which is used to acclimatize seedlings and plants. They are used to create a microclimate (like a mini greenhouse) to give seedlings an early start in Spring and to harden and protect plants removed from greenhouses before they are planted into garden beds. The transparent top allows sunlight to penetrate, while the cold frame structure ensures heat does not escape.

Cold frames can effectively increase the air and soil temperature, while also providing plants with shelter from the wind. A great time to make use of a cold frame for seedlings is 4-6 weeks before the last frost-free date.

To build your own simple cold frame, find an old window, white house paint and old bricks from the local tip or recycling centre (REVOLVE at Mitchell is often a great source of materials for most gardening projects).

Choose a warm spot, ideally close to a north-facing wall and lay out three layers of bricks – the window will determine the dimensions of the cold frame. Use

some diluted white paint to cover the window glass and then place the window on top of the bricks. The bricks absorb and store heat during the day, releasing it slowly at night to keep the plants warm, however you may need to cover the glass with hessian bags or shade cloth to ensure heat is not lost through the glass at night – put these on in the afternoon and remove them mid-morning.

To make an upmarket version, use timber instead of bricks and hinge and slope the window to allow for water runoff and easy access. You can also use clear plastic instead of glass.

If you are using a cold frame for seeds, don't forget to prop the lid when the seeds germinate to allow for ventilation during the day. Remember to keep checking the soil for moisture as it is warmer inside the cold frame – you may need to water more often.

So for all the versatile and ingenious COGS gardeners out there, a garden cloche or cold frame might now be on your gardening "to do" list as a late Winter project to ease your veggie plants into the warm wonders of Spring. And the use of recycled materials makes it a very attractive cheap DIY project!

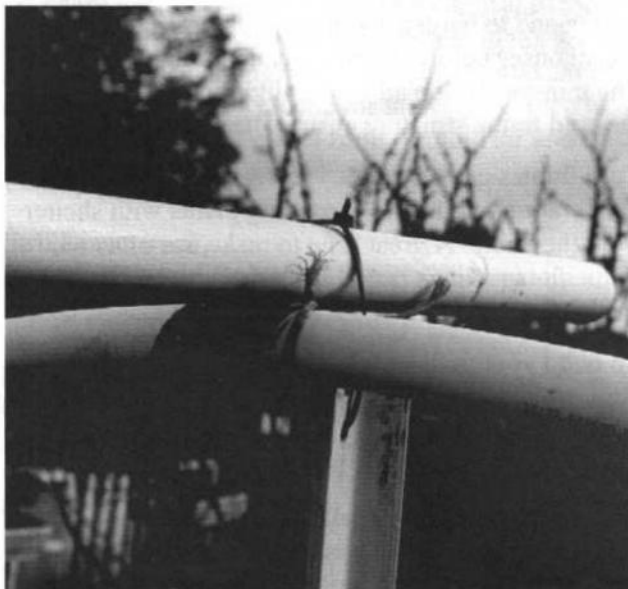
If you do attempt to build your own garden cloche, why not email or send us some pictures and designs to share with your fellow COGS gardeners?

Angela Spencer

(Photos: Angela Spencer and Monica van Wensveen)

Information sources

- The Canberra Gardener
Horticultural Society of Canberra, 2004
- www.veggiepatch.com.au
- Aussie Organic Gardening
<http://aussieorganicgardening.com/blog>
- www.answers.com



COGS plot fees for 2009-2010

The annual Committee/Convenors' meeting of 11 August decided to raise the plot levy for all COGS community gardens to \$2 per square metre for the next gardening year (1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010). This increase is necessary to cover an expected increase in the running costs of the gardens.

The increase in running costs are due to the rising cost of water. It is a condition of the new licence agreement with the ACT government that all gardens on unleased Territory land must have a water meter connected. This will increase the number of water bills we have to pay. It is estimated that this will increase the cost of providing water for our gardens by about 75%.

In addition, ACTEWAGL increased water charges again on 1 July 2009. It is expected that about 95% of the plot levy will be needed to pay for water. The remaining amount will go into the individual garden funds for the garden committees to use on improvements in their garden.

Efficient watering is essential

Because water is such a large component of the cost of running COGS' gardens it is important that all plot holders use water as efficiently as possible so that future increases in the plot levy can be delayed as long as possible.

ActewAGL have indicated that water prices will increase annually in the future.

Inefficient watering significantly increases our costs. If plot holders need advice on efficient watering techniques please contact your garden convenor or a Committee member to discuss methods of water conservation in your garden.

Plot levies due on or before 30 September

Plot holders who wish to continue use of their current plot are reminded that plot levies are due on or before 30 September 2009. Currently there are waiting lists for most of the gardens. Plots which have not been paid for by 30 September will be immediately re-allocated to those at the top of the waiting list.

Please don't miss out on retaining your plot by forgetting to pay your plot levy. Plot levies can be paid at the garden AGMs or alternative arrangements can be made by contacting your garden convenor. Each convenor will notify garden members of the date of their garden's AGM.

Keith Colls

What's in a name?

We've had discussions before in the *Canberra Organic* about whether "organic" really is the best word to use to describe our style of growing.

'Organic' also describes all chemical compounds containing carbon, including the petrochemical fertilizers which are the diametrical opposite of our soil additives.

So how do other European languages handle this issue? My curiosity was piqued by packets of an 'organic' coffee which I bought while staying in Estonia. The contents are described in 20 languages, ten to each side of the packet.

Löfbergs Lila Ekologiskt Odlat is "100% Organic KRAV certified" and a pleasant brew. I even brought back one empty packet so that I could study it further. Recently I found that a delicatessen in Belconnen stocks the same blend.

Unfortunately for this study, the English version of the 20-language description does not use the term 'organic' - but a panel on the back says 'Organic coffee' in 15 languages. Leaving out the Greek and Russian scripts, we have:

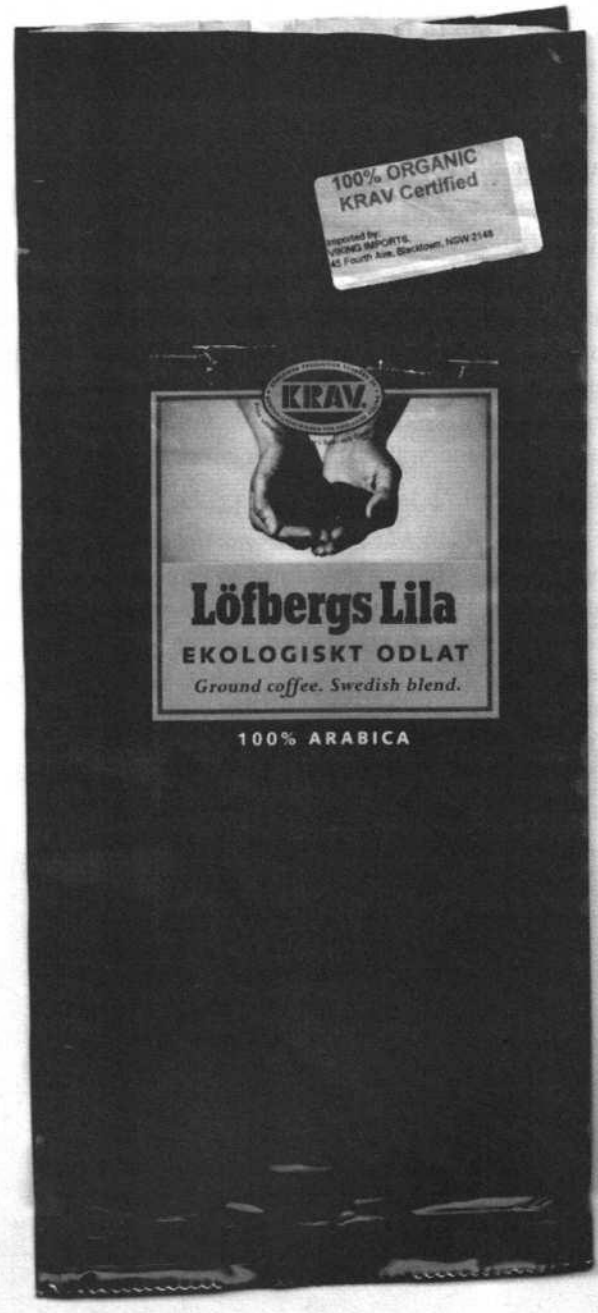
- Økologisk kaffe
- Ekologiski kaffe
- Ekologisesti viljeltyä kahvia
- Café écologique
- Caffé ecologico
- Ekologina kava
- Kawa ekologiczna
- Café ecológico
- Ökologische Kaffee

and

- Organaniline kohv
- Organická kava
- Dabiski audžéta kafija
- Blokávė

Oh, and another vote for Ekologiskt from the Swedes counterbalances Organic from the English speakers.

Ann Smith



2009 COGS garden meetings

Charnwood Saturday 22 August

Cook Sunday 13 September

Cotter Saturday 19 September

Holder Sunday 20 September (TBC)

Kambah Tuesday 22 September

O'Connor Mid-September (TBC)

Mitchell Saturday 26 September

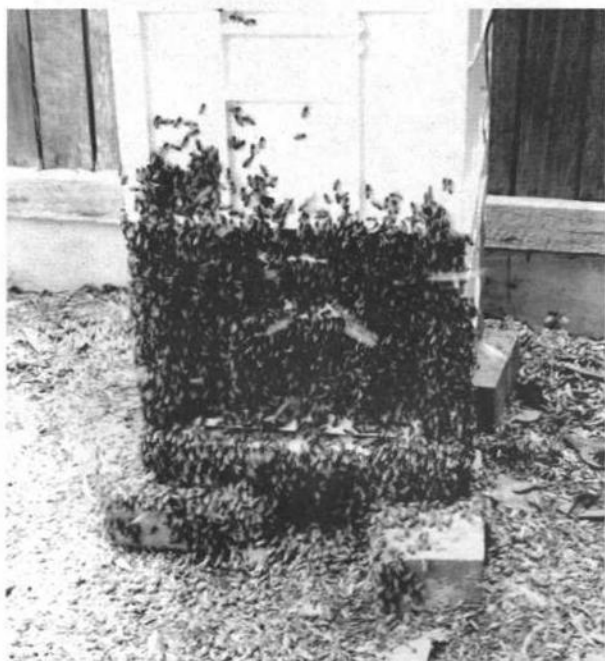
Please confirm these dates with your convenor!

An unexpected encounter with bees

My introduction to bee keeping came quite by accident and occurred last September, when as the newly elected convenor of Charnwood community garden, my attention was drawn to a part of the garden that contained a 200 metre area of unloved fruit trees.

On closer inspection I discovered at least a dozen bee hives; alas the hives were in a similar state as the orchard. After following up with the owner (who was no longer a member of the garden), the hives were removed with the exception of four hives. I immediately thought here was an opportunity to gain a quick entry into becoming an apiarist and canvassed for wider involvement amongst my fellow gardeners, two of whom expressed a similar interest.

What I did not realize at the time was the effort involved in rehabilitating what I would term as feral hives. The amount of effort involved soon became apparent when I gained the help of an experienced apiarist through the Beekeepers Association of the ACT, Mr. Dick Johnston, to whom I am deeply indebted for his guidance and support in transforming the hives to ones that comply with NSW regulations; interestingly, the ACT does not require hives to be registered.



Within a couple of months, I purchased all the necessary bee keeping paraphernalia and soon the hard work was behind me and I was the proud owner of two new hives. However, this achievement was not without its moments! I soon learned that hives cannot simply be moved - after all, we just wished to relocate the hives to another part of the garden so a newly formed orchard group could tend to the fruit trees without disturbing the bees.

Foraging bees find their hive by navigation using the position of the sun and landmarks close to the hive, such as shrubs[1]. Unless you move the hives no more than a metre a day or greater than 5 kilometres, the bees will return back to their old location and not survive. So having learned of these constraints we relocated three of the hives to my back garden.

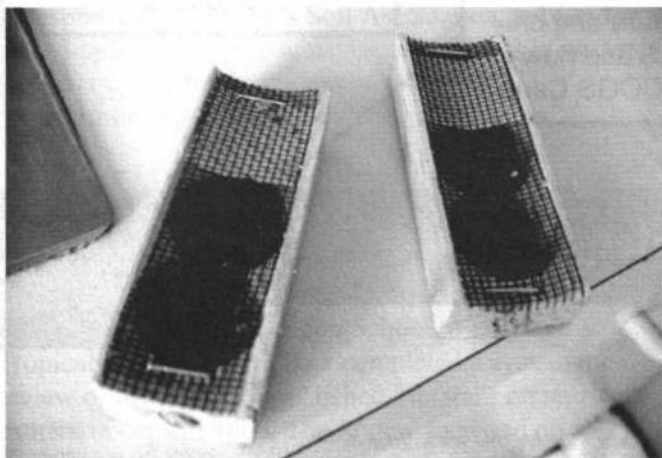
What I did not realize at the time, was that one of the colonies was somewhat aggressive and as a consequence, posed an unexpected challenge for me as in process of restoring the hive I found that the bees were just a little unfriendly and I encountered far too many stings.

I could not wait (neither could my wife!) for the compulsory three week period to pass in order for me to relocate the hives back to Charnwood gardens. Perhaps I should not have been so eager for this event; firstly I had to seal the hives the night before. With some excitement, I approached the hives the following morning and alas, those cunning bees found an opening. Fortunately, additional tape and even more tape solved the problem and we were on our way to the community garden.

As we arrived at our destination, my colleague Frank O'Rourke braked a little too enthusiastically and I was advised that the troublesome hive had moved and was emptying its contents of not so happy bees. At that moment I wondered what I was getting my self into, so did Frank! Fortunately, we were suited up and copious amounts of smoke restored order and all without a sting, I was so relieved; we now had the hives back in the confines of the garden and my interest in these special creatures so important to us gardeners has grown and become a passion. Indeed, I am now planning to establish a third hive by early spring.



Having attended a Canberra Institute of Technology course on bee keeping, I learned that I needed to requeen the troublesome hive. After ordering a queen from a breeder in Queensland (no pun intended) within a couple of days a package arrived in the mail and I was the proud owner of a new queen bee safely contained and supported by several escorts.



Of course before you introduce the new queen into the hive you need to locate the old queen and dispatch her. I soon had a content colony and the products of its labours-honey.

Seasonal management of your hive is not onerous; on the contrary, management of your hive provides the opportunity to better understand these creatures under your care. It is important to ensure that your colony is free of disease and from spring through to early August, I endeavour to inspect my hives every two weeks.

Last season was an exceptional year for honey production and we in Canberra are fortunate to live in the 'garden' city which provides a reliable supply of nectar and honey. Your first extraction of honey is a special occasion and one that reinforces the amazing role bees fulfil in our community.

Although somewhat of a novice apiarist, I can strongly recommend this rewarding hobby. Bees are fascinating creatures and more importantly we gardeners have a symbiotic relationship with them; they fertilize our crops and provide the added bonus of honey. As organic gardeners, we recognise the need to avoid the use of pesticides, and insecticides on our crops and since becoming a beekeeper I now better appreciate how beneficial this philosophy is in reducing the threat to the survival of our precious bees.

For any one of you who may be tempted to become an amateur beekeeper, I strongly recommend that you join the Beekeepers Association of the ACT.

The Association's web site is: www.actbeekeepers.asn.au . The Association meets monthly and you could not meet a more helpful and enthusiastic group of people.

I also recommend undertaking a beekeeping course. The Beekeeper's Association web site provides details of such courses that are conducted by the Association in concert with the Canberra Institute of Technology. The course provides a sound working knowledge of beekeeping and honey production. Dick Johnson is the course coordinator and can be contacted on 02 6282 8112.

For details on set up costs, I recommend the Bindaree bee supplies web site: <http://www.bindaree.com.au> . Mike the owner of Bindaree can assist in providing all the necessary beekeeping equipment. For example, a 'starter' kit would cost around \$450.00.

I hope this article has generated an interest in these special creatures and some of you may well consider taking the first step in to taking up beekeeping as a hobby, you will never regret such a decision.

John Grubb

Photos: John Grubb and Angela Spencer

[1] Courtesy, Bee AGSKILLS, a practical guide to farm skills. NSW Department of Primary Industries Page 38



The new look www.cogs.asn.au!

The COGS web site has been upgraded, updated and uploaded! Visit www.cogs.asn.au to check Out the latest news, features and gardening tips.

The aims, structure and philosophy of COGS and how to get in touch with COGS Central

Membership information, including application form and fees



Home

- Blog
- Community gardens
- Planting Calendar
- Organic Principles
- Growing Guides
- Tips and Techniques
- Links
- Sitemap

Welcome

Welcome to the Canberra Organic Growers Society web site. We are a group of gardeners (mainly urban) dedicated to growing our own organic fruit and vegetables, either in backyards or community gardens. This web site contains information on various practical aspects of organic gardening and is particularly relevant to the Canberra region. It also contains information about our community gardens, notices of coming events of interest to gardeners and a blog which includes gardening questions and answers. The web site will be regularly updated so please subscribe to our RSS feed so that you are notified of any significant additions to the site, new events and breaking news.

News and Events

Upcoming events

25 August 2009 07:30 PM

Managing Pests and Diseases in Your Garden. Bring along your pest and disease control methods to share with other gardeners. There will be a discussion of the organic gardening principles underpinning pest and disease control and their practical application through the use of Integrated Pest Management. There will also be an opportunity to test your skill at identifying common pests and diseases and distinguishing between pests and beneficial insects.

Majura Community Centre, Rosevear Place, Dickson

COGS

The *Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.* is a non-profit organisation which was started in 1977 with the aim of providing a forum for organic growers to exchange information and encourage the general public to adopt organic growing methods.

COGS blog

Jump to the blog

List all posts

Latest blog posts

- Availability of Local Fruit and Vegetables
- Organic Chooks

A growing repository of organic growing! This information is being updated regularly and includes the COGS seasonal planting guides for the ACT region, tips, techniques and growing guides for fruit and vegetables, guiding principles for organic gardening and information about our COGS community gardens.

Find out the latest COGS news, events and speakers, with a map to our meetings

Share information with other gardeners with the COGS blog

Sign up to automatically receive COGS blog updates via email or your RSS reader!

If what you're looking for isn't on the site yet, let us know!

Organic food not nutritionally better than conventionally produced food: report

In July, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine released the results of a literature review, citing that there was no evidence for superior nutritional content of organic produce over conventional produce. Not surprisingly, the review has prompted a fair amount of response (see the UK's Soil Association website for an example www.soilassociation.org). Let us know your thoughts on the following media release (www.lshtm.ac.uk/news/2009/organicfood.html).

“There is no evidence that organically produced foods are nutritionally superior to conventionally produced foodstuffs, according to a study published today in *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.

Researchers from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine have now completed a systematic review of the available published literature on nutrient content of organic food. The review focussed on nutritional content and did not include a review of the content of contaminants or chemical residues in foods from different agricultural production regimens.

Over 50,000 papers were searched, and a total of 162 relevant articles were identified that were published over a fifty-year period up to 29 February 2008 and compared the nutrient content of organically and conventionally produced foodstuffs. 55 of the identified papers were of satisfactory quality, and analysis was conducted comparing the content in organically and conventionally produced foods of the 13 most commonly reported nutrient categories.

The researchers found organically and conventionally produced foods to be comparable in their nutrient content. For 10 out of the 13 nutrient categories analysed, there were no significant differences between production methods in nutrient content. Differences that were detected were most likely to be due to differences in fertilizer use (nitrogen, phosphorus), and ripeness at harvest (acidity), and it is unlikely that consuming these nutrients at the levels reported in organic foods would provide any health benefit.

Alan Dangour, one of the report's authors, comments: 'A small number of differences in nutrient content were found to exist between organically and conventionally produced foodstuffs, but these are unlikely to be of any public health relevance. Our review indicates that there is currently no evidence to support the selection of organically over conventionally produced foods on the basis of nutritional superiority. Research in this area would benefit from greater scientific rigour and a better understanding of the various factors that determine the nutrient content of foodstuffs.'

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Eokomit is available in three pack sizes for small, medium and large scale gardeners, farmers and growers

75g	\$18	treats 5 cubic m compost or 250 square m of land
300g	\$43	treats 20 cubic m compost or 1000 square m of land
3kg	\$175	treats 200 cubic m compost or 1 hectare of land

All prices include 10% GST plus postage and handling costs anywhere in Australia.

Eokomit can be ordered securely via our website using *Paypal*.

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

Recipes to the rescue!

Broad beans are a delicious spring harvest treat and there are lots of ways to eat them. Unlike other vegies, they have a distinct season, but that makes them extra special. Preparing broad beans to eat is a labour of love, but well worth it. You can eat the pods whole if they are small enough, or you can peel the pods when they get bigger to use in a variety of tasty dishes.

If you can be bothered, it is also a good idea to peel the broad beans a second time before cooking. To peel the tough outer bean, blanch the beans in boiling water for 30 seconds to loosen the skin and then peel. You end up with small, glossy broad beans that will only take a few minutes to cook. Here are a few recipes to tickle your taste buds!



Broad beans with eggs (Habas guisadas con huevos)

1 cup freshly podded broad beans
1 chopped leek
garlic
2 chopped tomatoes
bit of sliced ham
6 mint leaves, chopped
4 eggs
sea salt
grated tasty cheese

- Blanch, skin and halve broad beans.
- Fry 1 chopped leek and garlic for a minute or so.
- Add 2 chopped tomatoes and cook for 6 or 7 minutes (add sliced ham here if you're ham-inclined).
- Stir in the beans and mint leaves.
- Light beat eggs with sea salt.
- When the beans have heated through, stir through the eggs and a handful of grated cheese (if you're cheese-inclined).
- Stir until the eggs are set and the mixture is moist but not juicy.

Chorizo with broad beans

250g shelled broad beans
chopped garlic
125g chorizo, cut into thick slices
3-4 chopped mint leaves
salt and pepper
2 tbs lemon juice

- Blanch and dry shelled broad beans.
- Fry some roughly chopped garlic and chorizo (cut into thick slices) until golden.
- Stir in the beans. Add mint leaves, salt and pepper and lemon juice.
- Mix well and serve with crusty bread.

Spicy broad bean fritters with natural yoghurt

1kg fresh broad beans
6 sprigs fresh coriander, chopped
sea salt & freshly black ground pepper
½ tsp cayenne pepper
1 level tsp ground cumin
½ fresh red chilli (deseeded and finely sliced)
1 heaped tsp plain flour
1 litre vegetable oil
4 tbs natural yoghurt
few handfuls mixed crunchy salad leaves e.g cos, rocket, beetroot leaves
squeeze of lemon juice
extra virgin olive oil, to serve

- Boil broad beans for 30 seconds, then drain. Pinch the skins off when cool.
- Season with salt and pepper and add spices, chilli, coriander, broad beans in a food processor until finely chopped.
- Sprinkle in the flour and pulse for a few seconds.
- Pour vegetable oil into a large saucepan 5-7cm deep and heat the oil until it sizzles.
- Scoop small amounts of the broad bean mixture into small balls and carefully lower them into the hot oil and fry until crispy brown.
- Remove them with a slotted spoon and drain on a plate lined with paper towel.
- Season with salt and pepper.
- Dress the salad leaves with a bit of olive oil and lemon juice.
- Serve the fritters with natural yoghurt and mixed salad leaves – yummo!

Broad beans, potatoes & carrots

1 small onion, chopped,
1 rasher bacon, diced
1 tbs olive oil
1 carrot, sliced
1 medium potato, cut into chunks
¼ cup chicken stock
2 sprigs fresh thyme leaves
500g whole broad beans, shelled and peeled again

- Heat olive oil in a saucepan and add onion and bacon. Fry until onion softens, stirring occasionally.
- Add the carrot and potato and stir-fry for 2 mins. Combine with onion and bacon.
- Add chicken stock and thyme leaves, cover the saucepan with a lid and cook for 10 mins until potatoes are softened.
- Toss in prepared broad beans and cook with lid off for 5 mins.
- Serve immediately as a side dish.

Broad bean pancetta & feta salad

2.5 cups shelled fresh broad beans
100g thinly sliced mild pancetta, coarsely chopped
80g baby rocket leaves
1 red onion, halved & thinly sliced
16 fresh basil leaves, torn
2 tbs red wine vinegar
2 tsp olive oil
1 tsp wholegrain mustard
1 garlic clove, crushed
pinch of salt
feta, crumbled

- Cook broad beans in a medium saucepan of salted boiling water for 8 mins or until tender. Drain and refresh under cold running water. Remove skins and place in a large serving bowl.
- Heat a small non-stick frying pan over medium-high heat. Add pancetta and cook, stirring, for 3 mins or until crisp. Remove from heat.
- Add pancetta, rocket, onion and basil to the broad beans and gently toss until combined.
- Whisk together the vinegar, oil, mustard and garlic in a jug. Taste and season with salt. Drizzle over broad bean mixture and gently toss to coat.
- Sprinkle feta over broad bean salad and serve immediately.

Broad bean salad

500g cooked broad beans
2 medium tomatoes, chopped
1 small onion, diced
1 cucumber, diced
2 cloves garlic, crushed
Half bunch fresh parsley, chopped
1 lemon, juiced
3 tbs olive oil
1 tsp ground cumin
Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

- Combine broad beans, tomatoes, onion and cucumber in a salad bowl.
- Toss with garlic, parsley, lemon juice and olive oil.
- Season with cumin, salt and pepper.
- Can be served at room temperature or cold.

Gnocchi with saffron and broad bean sauce

Packet of gnocchi
1 knob butter
1 large onion, peeled and finely sliced
10 broad beans, peeled and blanched
3 ladles chicken stock
pinch saffron threads
¼ handful flat leaf parsley, finely chopped
salt and pepper to taste

- Melt butter in a fry pan and add onions. Cook for one minute and add the broad beans.
- Add a ladle of chicken stock to the pan and simmer for 2 minutes, then pour in a second ladle of stock.
- Add a pinch of saffron threads and then parsley. Stir and simmer for one minute, before adding a third ladle of stock.
- Simmer for a few minutes until the sauce reduces and thickens, adding a little more stock if needed. Season to taste.
- Bring water to the boil in a pasta pot and salt and the gnocchi. Boil the gnocchi until it rises to the top. Spoon the gnocchi into the sauce in the frypan and mix while still simmering.
- Grate fresh parmesan onto the gnocchi. Toss well and serve immediately.

Broad bean dip

350g podded broad beans
1 tsp cumin seeds
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
sea salt
pepper
3 tbs cooking water
1/3 cup olive oil
½ tsp smoked paprika

- Bring a saucepan of lightly salted water to the boil and drop in the broad beans. Cook for 5 mins, then drain, reserving 1/3 cup of the cooking water. Run the drained beans under cold water for 30 seconds and peel the broad beans a second time.
- Heat a small non-stick frying pan and toast the cumin seeds until fragrant, keeping them moving with a wooden spoon. Tip into a mortar and pestle and grind to a powder.
- Put all ingredients (except olive oil) into a food processor with 2 tbs of water and blend to a smooth puree. Then add olive oil and pulse.
- Season if required.
- Thin the puree if needed with water if it is too thick.
- Otherwise, spoon into a shallow dish and drizzle with olive oil and a sprinkle of paprika.
- Great with crackers, bruschetta or Turkish bread.

With thanks to

- *Jamie at Home: Cook Your Way to the Good Life*, Penguin Books, 2007
- *Organic Vegetable Gardening*, Annette McFarlane, ABC Books, 2002
- www.cuisine.com.au
- www.sbsfood.com.au
- <http://allrecipes.com.au>
- *Good Taste* - September 2004
- Monica van Wensveen

Angela Spencer

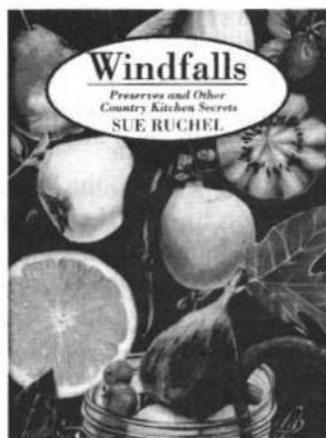
What's new in the COGS Library

New books - Spring 2009

Windfalls: Preserves & other Country Kitchen Secrets

By Sue Ruchel
Melbourne: Aird Books, 1993

A delightful old-fashioned book includes descriptions for making jams, jellies, crystallized fruit, dried flowers and fruits for stocking the pantry and providing thrifty gifts!

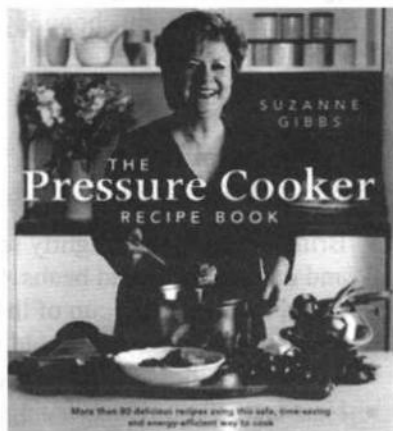


The Pressure Cooker Recipe Book

By Suzanne Gibbs,
Penguin, 2009

Here Suzanne selects more than 80 of her favourite pressure-cooker recipes, and describes the process from beginning to end.

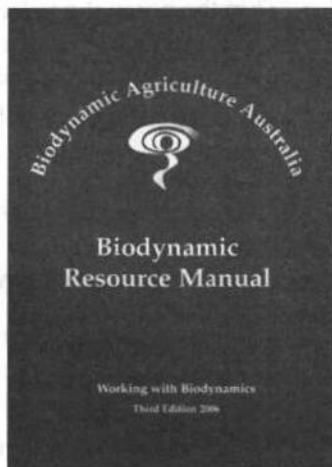
Learn how to cook an osso bucco in 25 minutes, a chicken tagine in 15 minutes and a delicious bread and butter pudding in 20 minutes.



Biodynamic Resource Manual

Biodynamic Agriculture Australia (3rd edition) 2006.

Biodynamics is a regenerative agriculture, holistic in approach and practice. Although designed for agricultural application, this small book contains principles applicable to the home garden, including information on soils and plant applications working towards healthy soils and plants.



Your COGS Library

Did you know that COGS has a borrowing library which is accessible at each general meeting?

We currently have almost 300 books available, with another 100 which have been lost or not returned.

Topics cover all aspects of gardening, focusing on Organics, Fruit & Vegetable growing, Soil health, Seed saving & growing, as well as care of Bees, Chooks & Goats, agriculture and produce as food.

Books are arranged in broad subject categories, and you can borrow 1 or 2 books at the meeting, returning them the following month.

We also have a small selection of gardening magazines which are now becoming available for loan. These include "Organic Gardener", "Gardening Australia" and "Grass Roots".

Margaret Richardson

The Co-op Food Shop

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Wednesday Friday Saturday
10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
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COGS SPRING PLANTING GUIDE

Spring is the main planting season in Canberra. The timing of some plantings may need to be varied depending on the particular year.

Be prepared to protect your frost tender seedlings, as harsh frosts can occur right through spring. Make your own cloches from plastic bottles with the bottoms cut out, or use row covers for larger plantings.

USING SEEDS

When direct planting with small seeds, eg carrots, bulk out first by mixing the seeds with sand. You can help the plants pre-germinate by keeping them in moist sand for about 4 days before planting out (do not let them actually germinate).

When planting out large seeds, eg pea or corn, soak overnight in a weak seaweed solution prior to planting; alternatively, keep seeds moist between 2 pieces of kitchen paper for 3 to 4 days until seeds germinate, then plant out carefully. This is particularly useful if you are not sure of the seed's viability.

Check your seed packets for their use-by date as poor germination may result from planting after that time, or plants may show a lack of vigour when the seedlings come up.

A seed should be planted at a depth 2 to 3 times its diameter, although it is better to plant too shallow than too deep.

CROP ROTATION

Remember to rotate the crops you grow in a particular garden bed. Crop rotation is a most important practice for organic gardeners. Successive crops should not come from the same plant families nor make the same demands on nutrients ie follow heavy feeders with light feeders.

Also, successive crops should not share the same diseases or attract the same pests - this prevents a build up of disease problems, and reduces losses from pests.

There are numerous crop rotation schemes used, but try to keep to at least a 4 year rotation period and **do not grow members of the same plant family** in the same bed in consecutive years eg tomatoes, capsicums, eggplants and potatoes are all from the solanum family.

PLANT VARIETIES

It is important with crops such as cabbage and lettuce to choose the appropriate variety for the time of year. Lettuce varieties best suited to early spring are Cos, Salad Bowl, Butterhead and Mignonette.

	SEP	OCT	NOV
Globe artichoke	T	T	
Jerus. artichoke	T		
Asparagus	S	S	S
French beans		S	S
Beetroot	S	S	S
Broccoli			S
Brussel sprouts		S	S
Cabbage	ST	ST	ST
Capsicum*		S	ST
Carrot	S	S	S
Cauliflower			S
Celery	S	ST	ST
Cucumber*	S	S	ST
Eggplant*	S	S	T
Endive			S
Leeks	ST	ST	T
Lettuce	ST	ST	S
Melons	S	S	ST
Onions	T	T	
Parsnips	S	S	S
Peas	S	S	
Potatoes	S	S	S
Pumpkins*	S	S	ST
Radish	S	S	S
Rhubarb	T	T	
Silverbeet	S	S	ST
Snow peas	S	S	S
Spinach	ST	ST	
Squash*	S	S	ST
Sweet corn		S	ST
Tomatoes*	S	S	ST
Turnips (white)	S		
Zucchini*	S	S	ST

S = seed sowing; T = transplanting

* When planting these seeds before November, the seed should be started in punnets indoors and the young seedlings kept in a warm sheltered place. Plant out the seedlings once the soil has warmed and the danger of frost has passed.

Q&A @ COGS

Q "My dog loves to eat raw carrots. Are they OK for him or **should dogs not eat vegetables?**"

A Most vegetables are safe for dogs to eat and are a good source of antioxidants, soluble fibre and roughage to help nutrition and promote intestinal health. Particular vegies that are good for dogs include leafy greens, beans, cabbage, broccoli and carrots (so your dog is doing himself a favour!).

Vegetables to avoid are onions, garlic and mushrooms. Onions and garlic contain the chemical thiosulphate which is toxic to dogs, causing a type of anaemia. Onions carry more of the chemical and all forms of onions can cause problems - raw, cooked, dehydrated and table scraps such as pizza and Asian food. As with humans, certain species of mushrooms can be fatal if eaten by dogs.

Most dogs like the taste of at least some vegies and experts suggest to aim for around 20% vegetables in their daily food. Try cooking vegetables to aid digestibility, or gradually increasing the amount of vegetables in your dog's diet. Try pureeing if that fails.

Q "I have been making lots of soup in winter but am never sure **which vegies freeze well** and which ones don't."

A Any vegetable with a high water content - lettuce and cucumbers for example - is unlikely to freeze well because the cell walls will burst as the water expands and crystallises. Celery, capsicum, onions and tomatoes and fruit such as apples, pears and melons are best not frozen, unless you are planning to cook with them.

Cooked potatoes lose their texture and colour when defrosted. Likewise, pastas and grains used cooked recipes are softer after freezing. It's best to add these and any specific seasonings (herbs and onions) when the dish is reheated.

The best way to freeze most vegetables is to blanch them first. Drop sliced or podded vegetables into boiling water for a few minutes until the colour starts to brighten (the time will depend on the size and type of vegetable). Stop the cooking process with cold water and dry with absorbent paper before packing into airtight bags or containers.

Finally, freezing retards the growth of bacteria, mould and yeast but doesn't stop deterioration or spoiling completely. Try to eat your frozen goodies within a few months for the best results and quality.

Pest of the season



Red-legged earth mites are a problem in pastures, crops and vegetables in areas of Australia with cool, wet winters.

They are about the size of a pin head, with orangey-red legs and a black, velvety body. Mites typically cut leaf tissue and suck discharged sap, causing 'silvering' of foliage which is often mistaken for frost damage.

Organic control methods include: garlic or chilli spray, increasing water to affected area and squashing and hosing. Make sure you spray under the leaves as well as on top.

More info www.dpi.vic.gov.au
Photo courtesy of CSIRO Entomology

A A last word on **metal lids and microwaves** from Heather Campbell who wrote the original notes on bottling fruit. "I thought I had better clear up a misconception about metal in the microwave. I can assure your readers that the metal lid is put onto the jar of fruit before it is microwaved and it does not cause any arcing or damage to the oven. This apparently is due to the small ratio of metal in comparison to the amount of other ingredients in the jar. I don't understand the physics of this either but it works!!

I know this is a bit of a scary thought especially as we have all been told for years that metal and microwaves don't mix. However I have never experienced any problems having followed the instructions in the recipe book.

To alleviate any worries readers might have, I am happy to demonstrate this technique of bottling fruit at one of the COGS meetings if there is interest in me doing so."

COGS NOTICE BOARD

Speakers

7:30 pm on the fourth Tuesday
MAJURA COMMUNITY CENTRE
ROSEVEAR PLACE DICKSON

25 August 2009

Bring along your pest and disease control methods to share with other gardeners. There will be a discussion of the organic gardening principles underpinning pest and disease control and their practical application through the use of Integrated Pest Management. And test your skill at identifying common pests and diseases

22 September 2009

Sustainable healthy food production and environment

Dr Maarten Stapper, Farming systems agronomist, BioLogic AgFood

27 October 2009

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

Don't forget! All COGS plot levies are due by 30 September - see your convenor for details

Trust Organic

A fortnight of awareness featuring Organic Standards and Climate Change - coordinated by the Organic Federation of Australia.

Friday October 02 to Sunday October 18, 2009.

For events and updates, visit the OFA site or www.trustorganic.org.au/

Digging around the web

Gardenate

www.gardenate.com

Gardenate began as a personal project of gardening enthusiast who always happens to be an IT guy. It provides a FREE (yes, free!) online gardening calendar/organiser which enables you to plan your planting schedule, tells you what to plant and when for your climate, provides planting reminder emails, information on what/how and when to harvest and you can read about vegies and herbs in an alphabetised list. Canberrans can get detailed information – we're in the cool mountain zone. Highly recommended website!

Vasili's Garden

www.vasilisgarden.com

If you've never watched this grass roots-style gardening show on SBS, take a look at the website to get your fix. Vasili visits everyday gardeners in suburban Melbourne, sharing their stories along with their gardening tips. The focus is on gardening and cooking the organic way, and particularly the Greek way!

Earth Garden

www.earthgarden.com.au

Fans of this fabulous magazine will love the webpage! It includes copies of past articles on topics such as organic gardening, permaculture, poultry, strawbale homebuilding etc. There's an online bookstore, classifieds, a guide to sustainable motoring, plus Jackie French's columns!
Angela Spencer

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