


Canberra Organic

Autumn 2010: Vol 18 No 1



Olives & celery
Herbs, mulch, chickens
Autumn planting guide
Pollination for gardeners



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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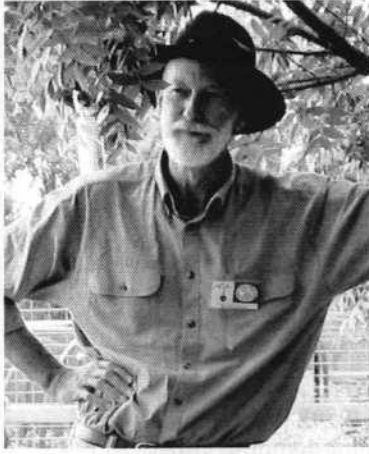
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President's report: Autumn 2010

I hope your gardens have managed to survive the heat. This summer has been particularly oppressive. November's average maximum temperature was over 6 degrees above normal. December and January maximums were both

over 3 degrees above normal. Minimum temperatures have also been significantly above normal. Consequently, my beans refused to set fruit until we had some respite from the heat for a few days in mid January.

Rainfall and water use

The effect of the heat in our gardens hasn't been helped by the lack of rain. Early spring gave a very promising start to the growing season but November and January rainfalls were well below normal, although we did have a couple of good falls in December which gave us a break from watering for a week or two. The Canberra water supply is holding up remarkably well with reservoirs at slightly under 49%, about the same as this time last year. Hopefully we will get through autumn without any more severe water restrictions.

The combination of high heat and a lack of rain has resulted in much higher water use in COGS gardens than in previous years. At the current rate of use most gardens will have used their water allocation for this gardening year (ending 31 August) by mid March and all the plot levies collected in September 2009 to pay for water will have been expended.

If the current rate of water usage continues this will require COGS to raise an additional levy on plot holders this year in order to pay our water bills between March and September 2010. As this is such a serious issue for COGS we have allocated the COGS meeting on 23 February to a discussion of the water situation in our gardens. We will be discussing water saving measures and the implications of our current rate of water use on the future of the gardens. The COGS gardens are your gardens, the plot levies are your money, so please come along to the meeting and make your views known on this issue.

On the look out for speakers

The Committee is currently preparing a list of interesting speakers for our other monthly meetings in 2010. If you know of anyone who may be willing to speak at a monthly meeting on an organic gardening/farming related issue please let a member of the Committee know. We

are always on the lookout for new speakers. Activities COGS is involved during the next few months include Corinbank 2010 in February. Two committee members will be presenting a workshop on starting an organic vegetable patch. We will also be participating in the Environment Centre's Harvest Festival on 27 March. Everyone is urged to enter the "Biggest and Best Vegetable" competition. There will also be beginners gardening courses in March/April and May/June. These courses will run at what we hope will be our new garden in Dickson.

AGM and committee membership

The March meeting, as always, is the Annual General meeting where we elect the COGS Committee for the following twelve months. Several committee members will be stepping down this year so there will be quite a few vacancies. To keep the organisation running it is essential that we at least replace those stepping down but it would be preferable if we could increase the numbers so that we have a full committee as provided for in the COGS Constitution.

During the last few years we have been operating with fewer committee members than the Constitution allows and this restricts the services we can provide to members. There are some very interesting initiatives we would like to introduce if we have enough committee members. If you are interested in joining the Committee please contact a current committee member and we will arrange your nomination. There is a notice of the AGM elsewhere in this issue. The AGM will be followed by harvest night. Members are urged to bring along some of their produce to show and to discuss their gardening experiences during the growing season.

HSOC's Autumn Show

Finally, I would urge all COGS Community Gardens' plot holders to consider contributing produce to the Community Gardens display at the Canberra Horticultural Society's Autumn Show on 6 and 7 March. Last year Cook and Holder gardens entered a display which was very popular with the public who visited to show. This is very good publicity for COGS and demonstrates to the public the quality of food which can be produced using organic gardening techniques. The prize money is an added bonus. Last year the Holder garden won \$50 and Cook won \$150. It would be good if all gardens would contribute. Details of how to enter the show are given in the notice elsewhere in this issue.

I look forward to seeing you all at our monthly meetings and other events.

Keith

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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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Angela Spencer & 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
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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 550.

ADVERTISING RATES

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Editor's note

Autumn's upon us! I was searching for a seasonal quote for this issue and came across this one from Samuel Butler which tickled me:

"Youth is like spring, an over praised season more remarkable for biting winds than genial breezes. Autumn is the mellower season, and what we lose in flowers we more than gain in fruits."

Perhaps I'm just at the right age to appreciate this wit...or perhaps I've just been swept away by Katie Mills and Gerry Jacobson who penned the winning entries in our COGS poetry competition. Be amazed by their wordsmithing on page 13.

Elsewhere in this issue of *Canberra Organic* are articles on pollination, a thought provoking discussion on whether to mulch or not to mulch, a sustainable living initiative in Queanbeyan, planning a herb garden and welcoming chickens into your garden system.

Our Q&A contributions are about green manure, growing beans and pruning scraggly citrus plants. Our seasonal vegetables are celery and olives and we take our usual romp around the COGS gardens.

Finally, this is my last issue as editor - I'm hoping to help develop the new COGS garden at Dickson and to contribute to COGS' external face through web and education activities.

A huge thank you to all who have contributed your thoughts, words and photos, particularly our garden convenors and committee members. Thanks to those who have helped with the mailing-and-organic-wine sessions, most notably Adrienne, Margaret and Andrew. I am extraordinarily grateful to Adrienne for her sage advice, critical eye and vast knowledge. Lastly - and definitely not leastly - thanks to all who have provided feedback on the magazine over the last 3 years - it's always a delight to hear from you.

Enjoy your autumn garden!

Monica



Monica and her broad beans have left the building

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Cover photos

Front cover

Tony's girls parading at the Mitchell garden

Back cover

Richard's sunflower evolution

This page

Domenic's almost-beans

Facing page

Broad beans ready to go (Rebecca Scott)

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In the news

Slip, slop and stop the drop

Can watering in the heat of the day cause leaf burn? ScienceBlog.com reports on a Hungarian study indicating that water droplets held by small wax hairs on plant leaves can act as a magnifying glass, causing localised burning from sunlight. Droplets on a smooth leaf surface are unlikely to cause damage. More good reason for late evening or early morning watering.

Un-bee-lievable landing

Bees undergo a sudden transition from speeding aircraft to hovering helicopter as they perform the delicate art of landing on a flower, according to new studies by University of Queensland's Vision Centre scientists. Unlike the 'controlled crash' of a fly landing, bees land with utmost delicacy after visually 'reading' its airspeed, hovering above its landing ground and sensing it with vision, feelers and legs. "It requires excellent coordination to get the speed, angle, distance and touchdown point exactly right - especially if the landing surface is sloping or even upside down" says key researcher Prof Mandyam Srinivasan. View the extraordinary footage on You Tube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRS_deQ4Ays.

Hot, with a forecast of hot

The Bureau of Meteorology has released its annual climate statement and it is no great surprise that we've just experienced the hottest decade since records began. 2009 was the second warmest year on record with mean temperature 0.9 degrees higher than average. And climatologist David Jones warns that 2010 is set to be even hotter, with temperatures between 0.5 and 1 degree above average. Phew!

Food safety experts' black list

The US Organic Consumers Association recently reported the results of a survey of food safety experts on 'what foods they would avoid'. On the list were non-organic potatoes (due to fungicide and herbicide treatments), non-organic apples (due to their frequent spraying) and canned tomatoes (a synthetic oestrogen is used to line the tins). The full list and the reasons for inclusion are on the OCA website www.organicconsumers.org. Sobering stuff.

Purple power

We all know our everyday orange carrots are a great source of vitamin A, folate and fibre. However, researchers at the University of Queensland are backing the purple carrot as 'the most powerful food on the planet', according to ninemsn.com.au. Recent studies indicate that this colourful cousin has double the level of beta-carotene and 28 times more anthocyanins - antioxidants, anti-inflammatory, anti-carcinogenic and anti-microbial agents.

Top tips for AUTUMN

① Be a bandicoot

Just can't wait for your first taste of this season's potatoes? Why not try a little bandicooting? This is the term for sneaking a few early potatoes while leaving the rest of the crop to develop fully. When the bottom leaves start yellowing, gently loosen the soil at the base of the plant and remove the larger tubers, leaving the others to continue growing.

If you're after late potatoes, wait for a fortnight after the foliage dies back, dig the spuds up carefully (try not to bruise or cut them with your spade) and leave them to dry for 2 or 3 days if weather permits. This allows the skin to mature which will be beneficial for storage.



② 'Tis the season

If you have a watering system for your garden, or even a strict watering regime, now is the time for a few autumnal adjustments. Adjust irrigation systems to use less water as the weather cools. Water in the morning to prevent damage caused overnight freezing of any water left on plants. Check soil moisture regularly, keep track of rainfall and water only as required.

③ Eat your way to better eyesight

Autumn is a great time to stock up on antioxidant-rich fruit and vegies like tomatoes, capsicum, carrots, dark leafy greens, broccoli and berries. Antioxidants are said to attack free radicals that can increase the risk of common eye diseases such as glaucoma and cataracts.

“Delicious autumn! My very soul is wedded to it, and if I were a bird I would fly about the earth seeking successive autumns.”

Novelist George Eliot (1819-1880)

Weather and water watch

Crisp mornings, fireworks colours, plenty to harvest - it must be autumn. Here's what to expect this season, courtesy of the Bureau of Meteorology's long term statistics for the ACT region.

TEMPERATURE	March	April	May
Canberra airport	max 24.5	max 20.0	max 15.5
	min 10.7	min 6.6	min 3.2

RAINFALL	March	April	May
Canberra airport	50.8 mm	46.0 mm	44.7 mm
	4.9 rain days	4.8 rain days	5.2 rain days

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

Seasonal forecast: February to April

- The rainfall outlook for the ACT region is neutral, with neither wetter nor drier conditions predicted for this period.
- Maximum temperatures for this period are bang on track - there's as much chance of exceeding the long-term average as not exceeding it. Nightly minimums are likely to be cooler than the long-term average (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 February, Canberra's dams were 48.7% full.
- Stage 3 water restrictions are currently in place across the ACT. The daily water target is currently 150 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

2010 tipped as growth year for organics

Business information analysts IBISWorld have released their predictions for the top ten growth industries for 2010. Second on the list (after sugar manufacturing) is organic farming, which has lifted in demand in recent years.

Consumers are increasingly drawn to organic produce, despite the fact that organic goods are on average more expensive than non-organic ones - in retail outlets at least.

According to IBISWorld, higher disposable incomes, increasing awareness of environmental sustainability issues and an increase in the range of organic produce available are fuelling the demand.

According to the company's Australian general manager Robert Bryant, the industry is expected to grow by 14.8% from 2009, with revenue projected at around \$430 million.

IBISWorld have predicted that the next five years

should see an average annual growth rate of 13.4% and a projected revenue of \$760 million.

Growing demand is also expected to result in significant job creation. As an employer, IBISWorld predicted that the organic farming industry is likely to strengthen from 6.2% in 2012-13 to 11.2% in 2013-14.

Also in the list of growth industries were building construction, insulation and weight loss services, online shopping and health insurance. Predictions for bottom five growth industries included video hire outlets, image processing and printing services, wired communication carriers and travel agencies.

According to Mr Bryant, while many of the country's global counterparts continue to feel the grip of the global financial crisis, on the whole a positive outlook was expected for Australian business in 2010.

Sources: IBISWorld media release (18 Jan 2010),
The Australian, Sydney Morning Herald.

Around the COGS Gardens

Cook

The summer has behaved strangely at Cook, with the Christmas rains a welcome present, followed by a distinct lack of precipitation.

Tomatoes seem reluctant to ripen, so we may be faced with a late bumper crop or just a late crop.

Despite the conditions conspiring against us the garden is full and a range of plants are growing. We welcomed one new gardener since the last issue, and several more future gardeners have gone onto the waiting list.

We have had at least one small brown snake in the garden. Rasima, normally afraid of snakes, described it as being beautiful, curious, lovely and pretty. I am normally terrified of snakes, and the one I saw looked reasonably harmless and inquisitive. Clearly this organic gardening caper puts one in a more contemplative mood than usual.

We will have once again had our garden open over the weekend of the 13th and 14th of February as part of the Australian Open Garden Scheme. Hopefully next issue I will be able to describe how it took place with temperatures in the 20s rather than the 40 degree days of 2009.

Happy autumn harvesting to all.

Wayde Margetts

Holder

The garden is humming along despite the heat and lack of precipitation. The decision facing gardeners in November was whether to plant early or later. Those who planted early before the onset of the heat were rewarded with healthy crops. Those who planted later struggled to get seedlings established in the heat. The late December rains have given crops a much needed boost.

This season has seen half a dozen sightings or close encounters with brown snakes and it has also been a bad season for earwigs. On the positive side, borage, Russian sage, fennel and cucurbits are flowering, the garden is teeming with honey bees, wasps, beetles and native bees, which will see bumper crops of tomatoes, zucchinis and pumpkins.

Thanks to the garden committee who have organized working bees and have kept the garden neat and tidy. We were fortunate to have access to a mobile mulcher which has seen all plant material in the former compost areas turned into finely shredded mulch. Thanks also to Geoff for servicing the lawnmowers.

The garden has five 45 sqm grassed plots and one 90 sqm slightly scruffy plot available.

Conrad van Hest

Mitchell

I'm obviously biased, but Mitchell garden looks fabulous at this time of year! The garden is a hive of late summer activity and is full to overflowing with healthy, productive plants.

Some of this abundance is due to Bob, John, Tony, Phil, Simon, Sam, Will and Richard who have made many early morning trips to Yass to transport trailer loads of mushroom compost - thanks guys, from us and the plants.

We have new co-convenors - Helen and Bob - relieving Will who is happily back to the business of gardening. Many thanks for your hard work Will.

And there's more new stuff! Celia painted us a beautiful new sign, Bob built a new communal shade house from pre loved materials for seed raising and put in a community herb garden, we've a new rain gauge (just in case it rains again) and new shorthand names for each plot (my favourite is the 'pool noodle



Left: Mitchell garden's new sign and shade house.

Right: A healthy Holder tomato plant with a bumper crop of fruit.

garden’).

We held our first end-of-year get together under a eucalypt canopy on a mellow evening in late December. Great food, a chance to chat with other gardeners (sometimes even about gardening) and general agreement to get together more often.

Our existing 22 garden plots are all taken. Please contact our convenors to be placed on the waiting list .

Monica van Wensveen

Oak’s Estate

The not-convenor’s non-report. And some non-mathematics.

Things got a bit hectic towards the end of ‘09. First our convenors Gail and Mark went feral and headed for Tasmania. (Seriously, we’ll miss you, guys. Thanks for riding herd on us). Then the assistant convenor Robert opted for a road trip with his wife Margaret, by motorcycle, to Scone. As one does. It seems I’m not the only motorcycling tragic in our garden – yipeee. And then some bright spark suggested I might want to do a garden report. Yeah, right. As if....

Meanwhile, back in the garden, and despite the rain at Christmas, things were looking bleak. Some silver beet, the obligatory corn, basil and tomatoes, the last of the snow peas, a few beans and some nasty big green things that look like Triffids are the main things to have survived the holiday exodus in good shape. OK, the Green Thingies probably aren’t Triffids, and I forgot to mention the rhubarb and potatoes, but I’ve told you all before that I’m not a gardener. It just isn’t something I do well.

Nor is mathematics, for that matter. But I did notice one thing in the last newsletter that I found quite startling. From the info on water allocations, it seems that, for our typical 30 sq metre plots (and we have 3 or 4 vacant, by the way) the water allocation would be about 23 minutes per week with a watering wand, or a

bit more with a conventional nozzle. (Hmmm. Note to self: organise plantings for next year to shade the plot from that harsh afternoon sun. Corn, maybe. Or Sunflowers. Or maybe those Big Green Thingies).

Terry Williams

Queanbeyan

No struggle at the ‘Struggletown’ gardens! Only a gourmet eatery.

The only gardens on the other side of the railway tracks, the Queanbeyan plots must take the prize for cultural diversity. With a mix of Croatian, Serbian, Indian, Korean, Norwegian, Greek, Koori and Dutch Aussies, the garden plots are as diverse as the languages spoken.

No more was the brilliance of the diversity more pronounced than at the Christmas party where members brought a dish with at least one ingredient from the gardens. The whole menu was GOURMET - the best feed in town!! Dishes included a range of sumptuous hors d’oeuvres, spinach pie, zucchini flower frittata, Asian noodle salad, fennel crab dip in a hollowed our bread bowl, new potato (nothing like potatoes picked that day!) salad with dill mayonnaise, fruit tarts and other delectable dishes too creative or too exotic to name.

We’ll be making dinner at the gardens in daylight saving hours a regular catch up for our mob. Incredible eating and green finger company makes for a lovely evening finished off with everyone watering their plots.

Dieuwer Reynders

Left: Rowan, Jae-hee, and Dr Young – going for seconds at the Queanbeyan Christmas Party!

Right: Dieuwer and baby Edo, Ljubica, Erica and baby Emily, and Diana – women’s business at the Queanbeyan Christmas Party.



Autumn harvest: OLIVES

Olives are one of the tastiest, hardiest and pedigreed fruit around. They can grow for hundreds of years but can start populating your antipasto platter in around two.

Olive trees are old! Moses granted olive growers exemption from military service. They are found in the Quran, in Homer and in a 2000 year old Roman cook book.



The olive branch has long been recognised as a symbol of peace. Because of their longevity, it's not possible to grow olives in a war environment - several years are required before fruit is produced and extended periods of calm are essential for productive farming.

Site and soil

Olive trees can adapt to a wide variety of soils, but prefer a soil with a balanced pH (neither acid or alkaline) that is rich in organic matter. They don't like to have wet feet, so good drainage is important.

Olives prefer full sun and require cold winters for good flower production and long, dry summers to mature good fruit. In particular, late frosts can vary production from year to year in this region.

Choose your position in the garden well - these evergreens can grow up to 50 feet tall and can live up to 500 years old!

Planting

Add composted manure to the soil prior to planting. Start with 1kg per tree in a metre diameter. If planting more than one tree, make sure they are at least 2m apart. You may need to stake young trees.

Olives can grow quite well in pots, as long as they are watered and fertilised appropriately. Choose a pot of at least 60-75cm diameter with a similar depth.

Cultivating

Olives are a shallow-rooted plant and so require frequent watering in hot conditions, particularly around flowering and fruit set. They like a dose of fertiliser in autumn and after harvest and good mulch to keep weeds at bay.

The best time to prune is after harvest. To maintain the health of the tree and to encourage fruit in the following year, prune branches in the centre of the tree to open the canopy and allow air and light to the foliage. Remove dead branches and any branches that are too close to the ground.

Harvesting

Fruit can be picked by hand or raked from trees using a closely pronged rake. Harvesting generally takes place from mid autumn to early winter.

Green olives (eg Manzanillas) are picked when they are hard, immature and very bitter. They need to be fermented, cured or brined before they're edible.

Black olives (eg Kalamatas) are mature fruit picked at different stages of ripeness. They have a milder flavour and don't need to be fermented before eating.

Problems

Thankfully, many of the more serious traditional pests haven't arrived in Australia, or if they have, their range is limited. Black scale adults suck carbohydrates from the plant, impeding fruit bud formation and causing leaf dieback. Olive lace bug is native to Australia, extracting fluid from the leaf of the plant, reducing plant growth and causing premature leaf drop.

Peacock spot is a fungal disease, most often observed on leaf surfaces, that also causes premature leaf drop and reduces productivity. Areas prone to heavy rain or late frosts during spring are most likely to be affected by the bacterial disease Olive knot, which produces round galls on young branches.

Choosing and using

At the market, choose green olives that are pale green or yellow, with no bruising. Find a good pickling recipe and then try marinating with garlic, chilli or your favourite herbs. Once pickled, they can be stored for six months without refrigeration.

Choose black olives with dark purple fresh fruit or black pickled fruit. Serve them at room temperature for maximum flavour. Use them in antipasto, as a tapenade, in salads, on a pizza or in bread.

They are low in calories and packed with monosaturated fats, vitamin E and disease-fighting phytochemicals that help clear cholesterol from your arteries - the ultimate tasty, guilt-free snack.

References and further reading

- Modern Olives: www.modernolives.com.au
- Olive Australia: www.oliveaustralia.com.au
- The Farmers Market Companion (Viking Books)
- Gardening Australia: www.abc.net.au/gardening
- Kitchen Garden Companion (Stephanie Alexander)

Autumn planting: CELERY

I'm not sure if they're myths or not, but two of the best known facts about celery are 1) it takes more calories to eat a piece than the celery actually contains, and 2) it has a reputation as a finicky plant to grow.

Here are some other cool facts about celery. It was once called smallage. It is mentioned in Homer's *Odyssey*. It is part of the *Apiaceae* family, along with celeriac, parsley, parsnip, carrots and fennel. It wasn't until relatively modern times (16th century) that celery began to be grown as a vegetable rather than a medicine.

In fact, amongst the most interesting things about celery are its reported medicinal properties. The seeds, stalks and juice are rich in compounds that help relax blood vessels, which helps in reducing blood pressure. It is also a good source of potassium, vitamin C, folate and mineral salts and has been prescribed to treat anxiety, insomnia, arthritis and gout. .

Site and soil

Celery originally grew in marsh land and has never lost its love for moisture-retaining, fertile soil that is slightly alkaline. It also favours a position in an open, sunny bed and needs regular watering to prevent the stems from becoming tough and stringy.

Planting

Celery prefers moderate conditions, so it's best to avoid planting in temperature extremes. In our region, the best time to plant is thought to be either in late summer-early autumn or late winter-early spring. I grow mine in autumn because I mostly use celery in soup and stock and I think the flavour is more intense once the frosts arrive.

It's far easier to use seedlings, but if you have a lot of time, patience and water, try growing from seed. Soak seeds before sowing and press them into seed-raising mixture rather than covering them. They will take 14-21 days to germinate and will need to be kept moist. Once they produce a pair of leaves, they can be pricked out into small pots and grown for a further 6 weeks until they're ready to be planted in the garden.

Adequate spacing between plants will allow good air circulation to keep the crop healthy. Suggested spacing is 20-30cm between plants and 60-80 between rows. Many books suggest planting in grids rather than in a long row to provide protection against the wind.

Growing

To blanch or not to blanch? Blanching produces sweeter, pale stalks. If, like me, you tend to use the leaves and stalks for cooking, blanching probably isn't necessary.

To blanch, wait until the plants are a decent height (at least two months after planting), then gather the stalks in a bunch and tie loosely. Wrap each plant in thick paper,

cardboard or a milk carton with the bottom cut out. Hill surrounding soil around the plant to exclude light. Continue to water regularly. After 3-4 weeks, the stalks should be pale and ready to harvest.



Harvesting

You can either carefully lift the whole plant using a fork, or harvest single stalks and leaves from the outside as you need them. The plant should be ready to harvest about 4 months after planting.

Problems

Snails and slugs need to be kept under control, especially if blanching. Don't grow carrots and celery near each other as carrot flies will attack celery roots.

A good growing environment and regular application of liquid fertiliser is the best way to control many pests. If you notice problems, such as leaf-spotting fungi or leaf miners, remove affected leaves (or whole plants if necessary) and burn or dispose of them - don't compost them.

Choosing and using

When purchasing fresh celery, choose firm, crisp bunches with unwilted leaves. Steer clear of stalks with blemishes or cracks. Store celery in the fridge - unwashed and in a plastic bag or container - for up to a week. If your stalks are looking a bit limp, revive them by soaking them in cold water.

Celery is great as extra crunch or a main feature (a la Waldorf) in salads, in stir-fries, as a garnish, and as an integral ingredient in stock or a star attraction of soup. I harvest the seeds and use them instead of salt in stews, soups and casseroles in particular, as I've read that they're a natural flavour enhancer.

References and further reading

- Organic Vegetable Growing (Annette McFarlane)
- From A la Carte to Zucchini (Anthony Barker)
- The LoveCelery website: www.lovecelery.co.uk
- Kitchen Garden Companion (Stephanie Alexander)

Canberra Organic Growers Society ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 7:30pm 23 March 2010

The COGS Annual General Meeting will be held on Tuesday 23 March at 7:30pm at the Majura Community Centre in Rosevear Place, Dickson.

In accordance with Section 22 of the COGS Constitution the business of this meeting will be:

1. To confirm the minutes of the last AGM and of any general meeting since that meeting
2. To receive from the Committee reports on the activities of COGS during the preceding financial year
3. To elect members of the Committee, including office-bearers
4. To receive and consider the audited statement of accounts and the auditor's and Committee reports that are required to be submitted to members according to Subsection 73(1) of the Act.

Committee members will be elected according to Section 13 of the COGS Constitution, which states:

1. Nominations of candidates for election as office-bearers of COGS, or newsletter editor, librarian or ordinary Committee members shall be made in writing, signed by two members of COGS and accompanied by the written consent of the candidate (which may be endorsed on the nomination form).

2. If insufficient nominations are received to fill all vacancies in the Committee, the nominated candidates shall be deemed elected and further nominations shall be received at the AGM.
3. If insufficient further nominations are received, any vacant positions remaining on the Committee shall be deemed to be vacancies.
4. If the number of nominations received is equal to the number of vacancies to be filled, the nominated persons shall be taken to be elected.
5. If the number of nominations received exceeds the number of vacancies to be filled, a ballot shall be held.
6. The ballot for the election of office-bearers, newsletter editor, librarian and ordinary Committee members shall be conducted at the AGM in a manner as the Committee directs.
7. A person is not eligible to hold more than one position on the Committee simultaneously except:
 - (a) the position of Public Officer
 - (b) the position of Membership Secretary, which can be held by the Honorary Treasurer.

For more information on the meeting and for nomination forms, please contact the COGS Secretary Helen Mitchell at mitchysays@gmail.com or info@cogs.asn.au, or talk to another member of the current Committee (see page2 for contact details).

COGS green manure mixes now available

Each year COGS buys bulk seed that is mixed, packaged and made available to members.

This year there will be two mixes available:

- **Legume and cereal mix** containing field peas, vetch, rye-corn, wheat and oats
- **Legumes only mix** containing field peas, lupins and vetch

Seed is packaged in quantities suitable to cover about 30 square metres and will be available from COGS garden convenors from late February or at the COGS general meetings.



COGS poetry competition winners

Who knew that such poetic hearts beat in our COGS garden community?

Thanks to all who contributed their poems. We're delighted to share the winning poems from Katie Mills and Gerry Jacobson.

Community garden

Katie Mills

The sun shines strong as my heartbeat,
as I pull out couch grass,
gnarled as old memories,
until the soil flows loose and free.

Our children laugh and chase,
each other in a tumbling
but graceful herd,
my two with hair dandelion-bright,
under the Autumn sky.

We chat to our plot neighbours,
and dig,
cooled by a Brindies wind,
sharp with a
clear joy.

Digging to the rhythm of the garden,
which comes deep from the earth,
where the earth worms are tunnelling
and the seeds are sprouting,
bursting up to greet the sun.



Hands in the soil

Gerry Jacobson

midwinter chore ...
I dig up old plants
divide the crowns ...
I will spread rhubarb
all over this world

too cold
for hands in the soil -
reaching
for the seed catalogue -
cultivating the future

white
frosty morning ...
scented afternoon
of daphne and jonquils ...
evening glowing by the fireside

out in the garden
this sunny windy morning
planting the leeks
for autumn soups ...
praying for rain

this drizzle
is far too gentle -
the Earth
cries out for rain -
"Send 'er down Hughie!"

pumpkin vines
on the rampage
in the chookyard
the old black hen
reluctant to descend

blessed
are those who plant peas
this season -
they shall harvest
and eat in the spring

May
is the merry month
mulching ...
gathering autumn leaves
enjoying touch ... smell ... crunching

Using mulch - an open letter to COGS

17 December 2009

Dear Editor

I am writing concerning the article "How much water do you use in your COGS garden plot?" in the Canberra Organic Summer 2009-10 edition by Adrienne Fazekas.

I found it a most informative article with very useful suggestions for saving water. I was particularly pleased to see that mulching was not seen as the panacea with a number of issues associated with mulching explored.

It is a pity however that mulching was not more fully analysed. I have concerns with mulching, in the COGS garden situation as a means of maintaining moisture levels, on environmental and economic grounds. I have set out below my concerns.

Environment

Rain Adrienne in her article notes that "Watering can be problematic in a well mulched garden" as most of the water just runs off or is trapped in the mulch. "Most of the water trapped in the mulch will evaporate" according to Adrienne. The same problem presumably applies to any rain that may fall on the mulch.

It seems to me to be both wasteful and unproductive to exclude rain as a source of water from the garden and to rely on irrigation.

Carbon foot print Using imported mulch seems to me to create a large carbon footprint. The mulch has to be harvested, baled, packaged in plastic, transported to a warehouse and then to a retailer. The energy required for all these activities is carbon based.

Additionally, as suggested by Adrienne as the most effective form of watering with mulch, a dripper system is required. These are made of plastic and aluminium both of which require large inputs of carbon based energy to produce and, in the case of plastic, as the raw material for production.

Sugar cane mulch seems to me, to be particularly energy intensive because of the distances it is transported.

Water supplied in Canberra is largely gravity fed. The energy required for what pumping is required could, at least in principle, be provided from renewable sources. Intuitively I feel that the use of water is less damaging

environmentally than importing mulch. I have no data but would be happy if one of your readers could provide some figures on the CO2 emissions created by the provision of mulch versus water.

Economics

For the purpose of this analysis I have assumed a 100 square metre plot (10mx10m) to keep the arithmetic simple.

Adrienne's article says the water allowance for a 100 square metre plot is 54 kilo litres. From a plot holder's perspective this can be viewed as having purchased 54 kilo litres of water and so there is no financial incentive to invest more money in mulching to reduce the usage below 54 kilo litres. It makes financial sense to a plot holder to use every litre of water they have purchased.

However if the plot holder were to decide that 54 kilolitres is not sufficient for their 100 square metre plot they conceptually have two options:

- Mulching to reduce the amount of evaporation; or
- Purchase additional water (I have assumed an additional 50 per cent or 27 kilo litres).

Mulching Option

To cover the 100 square metres plot at the rate recommended by Adrienne would require 5 cubic metres of mulch (ie 10mx10mx0.05m). In practice the full 100 square metres would not be covered with mulch and I have assumed that only 40 per cent (ie 40 square metres) would be covered reducing the required amount of mulch to 2 cubic metres.

Bunnings in Tuggeranong is selling bales (0.5mx0.4mx0.3m) of pea straw for mulching at \$18 per bale. Lucerne mulch costs \$23 per bale. It would require 33 bales of pea straw at a cost of \$594 to cover the 40 square metres to the required depth.

Additionally a dripper system, as suggested in Adrienne's article, would be required. I estimate that to cost about \$13 if it is amortised over 5 years.

Watering option

According to my latest ACTEW water bill the cost of water is \$1.95 per kilo litre. Purchasing the additional 27 kilo litres would cost \$53 and is clearly the more cost effective option.

As a matter of interest the cost of mulching would purchase nearly six times the original allocation.

Conclusion

I am not suggesting wanton and indiscriminate use of water. Adrienne's article has many sensible and cost effective suggestions for saving water which I would encourage all gardeners to use because they are good gardening practice. Mulching is good gardening practice but only if the mulch can be sourced locally and at low cost.

I agree with Adrienne that the current water allocation is adequate in all except unusually hot and dry years. At those times we need to look carefully at what is the most cost effective and environmentally responsible option for the COGS garden situation.

Yours sincerely, Andy Hrast



A response to Andy's letter from Adrienne Fazekas

Thank you Andy, for your interesting letter in response to my article. It's good to get some feedback and I hope your letter inspires other gardeners to consider the issues of mulch and water more deeply.

The article was intended to alert gardeners to the amount of water being used in the community gardens this summer and to help enable them to measure their personal consumption.

I hoped that 'over waterers' would be encouraged to use less water and had not considered the possibility that gardeners would think it was in their interest to make sure they used every litre of their water allowance.

The water allowance is in place to help COGS to budget for the cost of running the gardens each year. If every gardener took the view that it was in their financial interest to use their entire allowance, the result would be an automatic increase in plot levies every September. Currently, any money budgeted for water that remains unspent is available for the following years water bills and reduces the need to raise the plot levy.

Those gardeners who overuse water, or just make sure they use every litre of their allowance, are disadvantaging the more frugal community gardeners who are subsidising them. The money raised from plot levies is also used to pay for insurance, tools, repairs and improvements in the gardens. The more spent on water, the less there is for these other purposes. In addition to this financial incentive to use less water, every litre not used is available elsewhere in the environment.

Organic gardening involves, among other things, growing within the limits of the environment, the climate and the available resources. This has been a very dry summer, but water is a scarce resource and gardeners should be doing whatever they can to conserve water. COGS is not in the business of 'irrigated agriculture' and, if we continue to have such dry summers, gardeners may need to consider planting different crops, or fewer crops, rather than simply expecting to use more water.

In response to Andy's analysis of the cost of mulch versus water I'd like to offer the following comments:

Carbon footprints

I don't think its as simple as comparing the carbon footprints of mulch and water. I would suggest you also need to include the costs and benefits, both financial and environmental, of each option. Mulch provides many benefits to a garden besides reducing evaporation including: providing organic matter to improve soil structure and water holding capacity, reducing erosion and encouraging earthworm activity.

Cost of water

ACTEW has two prices for water depending on the volume used per quarter. Over the warmer months almost 90% of the water used in the gardens costs COGS \$3.90 per kl rather than the \$1.95 Andy pays for his home consumption.

The option of individual gardeners purchasing additional water is not possible in the community gardens without the installation of water meters on individual plots.

Cost and availability of mulch

I agree with Andy that the 'Bunnings' mulch option is very expensive. There are however many sources of 'free' or cheap local mulch, including:

- Grow your own - lucerne, green manure, weeds and spent crops can all be cut or pulled for use as mulch;
- Straw from the Canberra show is available for the cost of transporting it;
- Spoiled hay from Pialligo, Murrumbateman or Sutton is advertised in the Saturday Canberra Times pets & livestock section when available;
- Autumn leaves can be raked up from parks.

Thanks again for your letter. I would be interested in hearing from other gardeners on this issue.

Adrienne Fazekas

Pollination - A gardener's guide to the birds & bees

Perplexed about pollination? Flummoxed by fruiting? Red-faced over reproduction? Pollination isn't so important for vegies grown for their roots or leaves. But if you're growing plants for their seeds and fruit, read on.

First, let's get the science stuff out of the way.

Below is a diagram of a stylized flower. In the boy's corner are the stamens, which comprise the stalk-like filaments, topped with a large lobe called an anther, where pollen is produced.

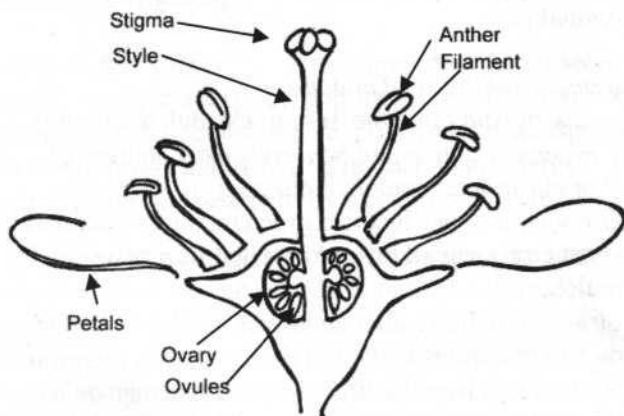
In the girl's corner is a pistil, comprising a central style with an ovary at one end and a sticky tip called a stigma at the other end.

Pollination is the transfer of pollen from the male part of the flower to the female part.

Pollen grains have an intricate and unique design, so every flowering plant can be identified by its pollen.

When the right pollen grains land on the right stigma (and a stigma can definitely tell), the grains germinate, producing a pollen tube that grows from the grain down through the style into the ovary. Bingo - fertilisation.

Petals and stamens drop off, the ovary enlarges and becomes fruit and the individual ovules develop into seeds. The seeds have three main parts - a tough, protective seed coat, a partly developed plant embryo and a reserve of nutrients.



Making connections

Because plants aren't able to move in search of a mate, they need other ways to bring the male and female parts together - to transfer pollen.

Some flowers self-pollinate, but most use other means -

key ones are wind, insects, birds and mammals. The structure of flowers is often a good indicator of the type of pollination the plant uses.

Wind pollination

As Gardening Australia suggests, if you are one of the many people in Canberra who suffer from hay fever, you probably have an inner radar for when local grasses are flowering. Grasses use wind to pollinate but it's a bit hit-and-miss so large quantities of small, light pollen grains need to be produced and dispersed in the hope that some of the pollen hits the target. Stamens tend to have long, slender filaments that sway in the wind and stigmas tend to be feathery to catch floating pollen.



Corn plants use wind to carry pollen from the male tassel (top) to the female silks (below). When this happens, corn kernels begin to develop. To increase your chances of success, it's best to plant corn in a few shorter rows than one a single long row.



Insect pollination

Vine plants, such as melons, pumpkins and cucumbers have separate male (stamen but no pistil) and female (vice versa) flowers on the same plant. To produce fruit, pollen is transferred from the male to the female flower by insects.

Characteristics of insect-pollinated plants include large, scented flowers, the presence of nectar as an attractant, large, sticky pollen grains to cling to insect bodies and gummy stigmas.

The odour and appearance of these flowers varies with the insect it's trying to attract. Butterflies are apparently one of the few insects that can see colours, so their



flowers tend to have a mild fragrance, but are generally brightly coloured (red or orange). Flowers to attract bees have a sweet fragrance, while flowers to attract flies smell more like mildew or rotting flesh. Plants that attract moths are nocturnal flowerers.

A recent study in Germany showed that "insect-pollinated plants benefited disproportionately from organic farming" which the researchers suggest was due to the higher density of insect pollinators in organic fields compared to conventionally farmed fields.

If your garden doesn't get much insect traffic, you may need to hand pollinate. Using a soft brush (like an artist's paint brush) or a cotton bud, gently collect pollen from the male flower and transfer it to the stigma of the female flower.

Self pollination

Peas, beans and tomato plants self-pollinate. Transfer of pollen takes place within the individual flowers without the need for wind or animal vehicles.

If these plants need a helping hand, gently brush the inside of the flowers with a brush and make sure the pollen hits the stigma.

Bird and mammal pollination

Birds and animals aren't very important pollinators in our vegetable gardens, but they earn their keep in systems like rainforests where around 75% of canopy trees depend on them for pollination and seed dispersal.

Special characteristics of plants pollinated by birds include brightly colored, cup-shaped flowers, while bats are often attracted to white flowers that bloom at night. Both bat and bird pollinated plants produce a lot of nectar and provide a perch or landing site on the flower - when the animals go after the nectar, they get a smattering of pollen on their fur or feathers that they can deposit on the next flower.

Plants that are pollinated by tree-hugging mammals

such as possums and rodents have developed clever ways to transfer pollen. For example, some rainforest trees have flowers that grow along their trunks and branches (rather than at the ends of the branches) so that pollination occurs as the animal climbs.

Facts, figures and photos - Monica van Wensveen

2010 Canberra Harvest Festival

Come and celebrate Canberra's delicious local food on **Saturday 27 March** from midday to 5pm at the Canberra Environment Centre on Lennox Crossing in Acton

The Festival will feature

- Community information stalls
- Free & fun workshops for everyone
- Local fresh produce for sale
- Gourmet organic barbeque lunch
- Free raffle prizes
- Best & biggest local vegie competition
- Kids' activities
- Live music

For more info, visit www.ecoaction.com.au

Community garden research - your help needed!

Dear Community Gardeners,

My name is Bethaney Turner and I am a lecturer in the Faculty of Arts and Design at the University of Canberra and I am interested in hearing about your experiences of community gardening.

I would like to explore a range of issues, from how and why you have taken on a growing plot to what you grow and how you use it. More broadly, this research explores the relationships between participation in community gardens in Canberra and issues of urban health, social inclusion and active civic participation.

If you would like further information and/or you would like to participate, please phone, email or write to me and we can arrange a suitable date, time and venue for an interview.

Dr Bethaney Turner

Convenor of the BA in International Studies,
Faculty of Arts and Design, University of Canberra
Phone: (02) 6201 5732

Email: Bethaney.Turner@canberra.edu.au

QUEST for sustainable living in Queanbeyan City

I pass Railway Park Community Garden several times a week on my morning walk and it's always a delight to see it doing so well. Plots are full; gardeners are busy. This little patch of green is like an oasis in the city's highest density precinct.

I was deeply involved in setting up the garden, from the early concept to the official opening by then mayor Frank Pangallo. The city council's support was critical to the project coming to fruition.

Now council, and the NSW Government, plan for Queanbeyan City to grow to 70,000 by the year 2031 – almost double the current population of 38,000. Many of the new homes are planned for the 'greenfields' sites of Googong and Jerrabomberra Valley. The rest will come from infill development.

All across the city old houses are coming down to make way for townhouses and three and four-storey apartment blocks. Where I live there are a handful of heritage-listed cottages progressively being overshadowed and crowded out by these new buildings because council has a conflict of planning policies that it has been too slow to resolve.

This medium-density infill development is changing the face and feel of Queanbeyan. Older homes, on large or medium lots, had orchards, vegetable plots and chook runs. When these blocks are redeveloped everything goes – rarely is there a tree left standing.

Another 32,000 people can't all live in detached dwellings on 700 square metres or more without concreting every green space and building up and over

the escarpment. But people living in smaller homes, through choice or necessity, should still have an opportunity to garden, for exercise and to help reduce the amount of food that travels great distances to our kitchen tables.

The Queanbeyan City Sustainability Initiative (QUEST) has been formed under the auspices of Queanbeyan Landcare to focus on ways of reducing our carbon footprint.

Food, which accounts for more than 15 per cent of national greenhouse gas emissions when processing, transportation, refrigeration and disposal are included, is one area we are focusing on. Everyone has to eat and it is a good way of introducing people to the need to take action on climate change. Food can also help build community relationships. That's why we are looking at how to establish more community gardens across the city.

We need to identify land and to convince council to expand the scope of uses to which developer contributions can be put to include community gardens. With enough supporters and energy, we could establish one garden every year. In a decade, we could have a community garden in every suburb or town.

To find out more about this project and to get involved contact QUEST - see details below.

Katrina Willis
QUEST Convener
P: 02 6284 4113
E: katrinawillis@inet.net.au

HSOC Autumn Show 6-7 March

The Horticultural Society of Canberra's Autumn Show is an excellent opportunity to show off the fruit and vegies you grew this year. You don't need to be a member of HSOC or an expert!

There is also a category for community gardens with generous prizes - all COGS community gardens are encouraged to enter a display. A large number of Canberra residents visit the show and the publicity COGS receives through our garden displays is well worth the effort.

For details on how to enter and for information about categories, visit www.hsoc.org.au or phone the event secretaries on 6255 1371.

Corinbank Festival 2010

Corinbank 2010 will incorporate a Gourmet Slow Food Banquet, slow food stall and community information point; and seminars and workshops around sustainable food.

If you're visiting Corinbank 2010 drop in to listen to the COGS workshop on establishing your own vegie plot. It will be conducted by Sarah Todd and Helen Mitchell on Saturday 27 February at 3pm.

Corinbank 2010 will be held at Corin Forest Mountain Resort Friday 26 to Sunday 28 February.

For a map and to peruse the packed festival program, visit www.corinbank.com

There are chickens in my garden!

Sitting at the dinner table I watch our hens getting ready for “bed”. They have one last scratch around their favourite dust bath, eat a little more of their “lawn” then slowly dawdle along to their house. A bit more scratching amongst the mulch in their yard then they hop up onto the perches for the night.

Five years ago I got my first chooks. Although most backyard hens are kept in secure netted yards I wanted mine to be ‘free-range’. We have a large block with a fenced area where the dogs can’t go – perfect for chooks I thought!

Reading all I could on the subject and talking to friends with chooks we built a yard and a small house which was previously our grand-sons cubby. We bought our first girls from a Fyshwick Stock feed merchant at ‘point-of-lay’ and kept them in their yard for 2 weeks. Once they were allowed to venture out I discovered that young chooks like to fly! - into the next-door trees, about 4 metres up with a large Cattle-Dog beneath them. *Lesson 1 – clip the feathers on one wing.*

Chooks are descended from jungle birds, so they love bushes and trees to hide under, soil to dust-bath in and every manner of beetles, snails and grubs to eat. “Grain, greens, grits and grubs” I read somewhere, is standard fare for poultry.

We quickly found that they love to dig and scratch – established ground cover plants didn’t last long under their onslaught. *Lesson 2 – place rocks around precious plants.*



Our chooks accepted the laying boxes made for them and before long we were receiving beautiful brown speckled eggs – small at first but they get bigger as your chooks mature.

Readily available chickens are mostly ISA Browns or HyLines, red hybrid cross-breeds developed to lay lots of eggs but over a relatively short laying ‘career’ – maybe 3 years maximum. You can buy them from Feed Merchants on order.

Pure breeds such as Australorps, Light Sussex and Leghorns lay for a longer period but produce less eggs per year. And pure-breeds tend to go broody more often. The magazine “Australasian Poultry” advertises pure-breeds.

If you want to have free-range hens you need a fairly large area, preferably grassed and guaranteed secure from foxes and dogs. Yes, Canberra suburbs are home to many foxes! It helps if there are dogs in the adjoining yards.

Clean fresh water is essential plus a laying mixture from feed merchant or pet shop. They need a supply of shell-grit to make their egg shells, and small ‘grit’ to grind their food. They love vegie scraps but I don’t recommend letting them in your vegetable patch – I did once, for 10 minutes! They need a shelter with perches, to keep them dry and comfortable.

The minuses? Cleaning up after them (but it makes great compost), having a sick chook ‘put down’, worming, oiling their legs to prevent ‘scaly leg’.

The pluses? Their contented, calming presence, a garden almost free from pests and the eggs! Oh those eggs, many to use and some to give away!

Free range chooks are a joy to behold. The worst part is deciding what to do when they no longer produce eggs – do you keep your non-productive pets, harden your heart and ‘dispose’ of them or increase the population which then destroys their habitat! Chooks can live for over ten years. *Lesson 3 – when you give them names they become family!*

Some resources

- Australasian Poultry magazine - Newsagent
- Backyard Poultry Naturally by Alanna Moore – COGS Library
- Jackie French’s Chook Book – COGS Library
- <http://9am.ten.com.au/article-pets-keeping-backyard-chickens.htm> - Website
- <http://www.backyardpoultry.com/> Web site

Margaret Richardson

The Simon & Garfunkel guide to growing herbs

Are you going to Scarborough Fair?
Parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme
Remember me to one who lives there
She once was a true love of mine

Simon & Garfunkel, 1966.

This isn't really Simon & Garfunkel's advice on growing herbs in your garden. Simon & Garfunkel knew their stuff with regards to deep song lyrics, groovy hair and seriously earnest facial expressions on album covers, but I doubt they knew much about herb gardening.

But the herbs mentioned in *Scarborough Fair* deserve a place in your herb garden. Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme can form the basis of your stash of herbs and have a myriad of uses both in the kitchen and in the medicine cabinet. If you only have a small amount of space allocated to herbs in your backyard, you could just plant these four stalwarts and all will be well.

These herbs are easy to care for, simple to grow, are useful in the kitchen and will thrive with little effort.

A curly question: Parsley

(Petroselinum crispum)

Parsley is probably the best known and most frequently used herb and an essential inclusion in your herb garden. It is a culinary herb and a biennial but is usually grown as an annual. The common variety has crisp, curled leaves, and Italian parsley has flatter leaves.

Parsley will flourish anywhere and grows to around 30-45cm. It likes a rich, non-acidic and well-drained but moist soil. A semi-shaded position is ideal.

The seed is hard to germinate (taking 8 weeks or so) – try soaking them in warm water before sowing. Sow seed twice a year to ensure a constant supply (early spring and mid-summer). When sowing, thoroughly dig the soil, rake to a fine tilth and sow the seed thinly.

One-year-old plants produce more succulent leaves and if you cut the flowering stems in the second year, you can extend the life of the plant.

Parsley is native to the Mediterranean and therefore needs protection in winter, but will survive the Canberra frosts if sheltered.

If you don't have a dedicated herb garden, parsley is a good edging plant for garden beds and borders. In the kitchen, it can be used as an instant garnish or flavouring for most dishes and munching on some fresh parsley will remove bad breath. Try making an easy spread for bread by mixing some butter and parsley together. A yummy salad side dish is tabouleh – mix some burghul (or couscous), chopped curly parsley, tomatoes, red onions,

garlic, olive oil and lemon juice together. Parsley is also a rich source of iron, vitamin C and iodine.

Sage advice: Sage

(Salvia officinalis)

Sage is a fast spreading, aromatic and mainly evergreen perennial shrub with a reputation for being a cure-all for all sorts of medical problems.

There are numerous varieties (around 900) but the common variety has small mauve flowers and hairy, grey-green, deeply veined leaves. Sage likes dry, well-drained and slightly chalky soil, and full sun.

Sage grows quickly from both seed and cuttings and needs little attention. Sow seed in mid-late spring in shallow drills, then cover lightly with soil. Cuttings can be taken in early spring to early autumn.

Sage bushes grow to around 60-80cm in height. It is a good idea to give them a good prune and replant in a different position every four years as older bushes become straggly. You can also remove new branches from 2-3 year old bushes to use as cuttings.

Sage leaves are at their best just before flowering and are fantastic lightly sauteed in a splash of olive oil and then mixed through pasta along with some roast pumpkin, honey, butter and garlic.

A rose by any other name: Rosemary

(Rosmarinus officinalis)

Just thinking about rosemary tends to instantly get the nostrils sniffing due to its beautiful, pungent, aromatic scent. Rosemary is an attractive perennial evergreen shrub characterised by long, spiky, needle-like grey-green leaves and pale blue flowers.

It makes a useful small hedge and is a fantastic plant for the harsh, dry Canberra climate as it will pretty much grow anywhere with little water. Rosemary originates from the Mediterranean and its Latin name means "dew of the sea".

The bushes grow to around 90cm (or higher if protected against a wall) and are very attractive to bees. A sheltered and sunny position with sandy and well-drained soil (with a touch of lime) is perfect.

It is hard to cultivate from seed but plants can be grown from soft cuttings taken from a strong side shoot in early spring.

Rosemary is both hardy and decorative and therefore earns its place in any modern, water-wise garden. It is delicious with roast meats, in stuffings or as a bath infusion.

It's always time for thyme

(Thymus vulgaris or Thymus citridorus)

Thyme is a beautifully scented, hardy perennial shrubby evergreen that has many varieties – the most used are known as common thyme and lemon thyme.

Thyme grows in a small bush shape (25-45cm) and has woody stems with small, very dark green leaves and pale mauve flowers in early summer.

Thyme prefers a light and well-drained, gravelly soil and full sun. It's easy to raise from seed and can be planted in spring. You can also take cuttings or divide the plants. It's a good idea to cut the plants back in mid summer to get rid of old wood.

Lemon thyme creeps along the ground and makes a lovely ground cover in between stepping stones or pathways. Thyme bushes are attractive to bees and thyme leaves are fantastic in meatball and pasta sauces or in stuffing.

Honourable mentions

Of course there are many great herbs out there – these are just four of them. Herbs are generally easy to grow and are both aesthetically pleasing and functional. They can save you money at the supermarket, make your garden look old-worldly, help cure your ills and flavour your food and can be planted in pots to give as gifts to friends.

A note about herb garden design

Designing your herb garden can be fun – there are many examples of useful and pretty designs. Yvonne Cuthbertson's book, *Beginner's Guide to Herb Gardening*, is one of many useful books that detail herb garden designs. You can also get inspiration from potager, cottage, Shakespearean or formal knot gardens.

You can grow herbs along the edges of your general gardens, in a chessboard pattern, in between pavers, in between the rungs of an old ladder on the ground, in a round garden bed with a "clock" design or just sit them in attractive pots on the verandah or window sill.

It's a good idea to position your herbs relatively close to your kitchen, so they are close at hand.

Most herbs just need a bit of sunshine, well-draining soil, some watering and a spot of compost. They are happiest grown in the soil but containers and pots are an acceptable compromise (and a good solution if you don't have a big back garden).

References

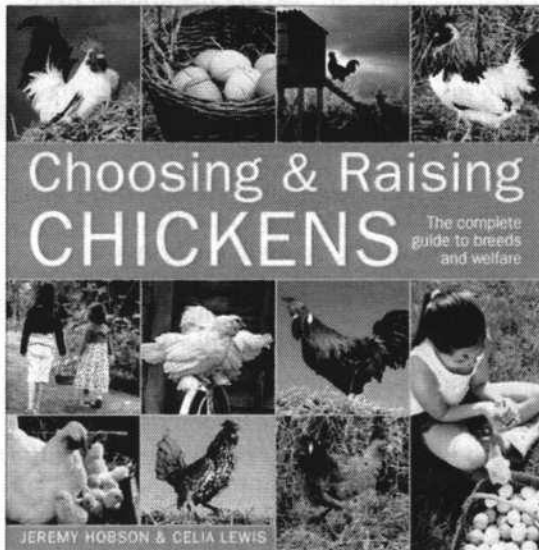
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Angela Spencer



Book worms: What's new in the COGS library

There's a new book about chooks in the COGS Library - and it's well worth a look!



Choosing and raising chickens - the complete guide to breeds and welfare

Jeremy Hobson and Celia Lewis

Published by David & Charles, UK (2009)

This is a practical and comprehensive everything-you-need-to-know guide to chicken breeds for anyone who keeps chickens, is considering keeping chickens or aspires to keep chickens. Comprehensive content features over 70 breeds which reveals how, as well as being useful, chickens are interesting and colourful characters. This guide includes essential practical information on feeding, housing and welfare as well as easy-to-use keys to selecting the most suitable breeds. Chickens make great pets -- they are low maintenance living on the scraps that you throw away, and are easy-going, plus they thrive in small urban areas and backyards.

Don't forget to bring your overdue books to the next monthly meeting!

Margaret Richardson

ORGANIC BACKYARD FOOD COURSES

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Email garden@ecoaction.com.au
Phone 6248 0885



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Where: Orana Steiner School, Weston, A.C.T

When: April 10th to April 22nd - 13 days.

Tutors: John Champagne and Phil Gall

Cost: \$1250 incl. day meals and one dinner

Deposit: \$200

The Permaculture Design Certificate Course is FARMREADY approved. Registered Primary Producers and Indigenous land managers get up to \$1500 towards training costs.

Permaculture Design Certificate Courses

Residential Course or Commute

Where: The Crossing Land Education Trust, Bermagui

Dates: October 4th to 16th - 13 Days

Tutors: John Champagne, Hugh Gravestine, Phil Gall, Kathleen McCann, Aaron Sorenson and Julie Davies.

Cost: \$1250 incl. day meals and two dinners

Accommodation: Bunks (\$250) or camping (\$200)

Deposit: \$200

Introduction to Permaculture Courses

Where: Brogo Permaculture Gardens, Brogo (Bega Valley), Hawkshead Rd, Brogo

When: 22nd & 23rd May or 6th & 7th November

Tutor: John Champagne and friends.

Cost: \$175 includes all day meals

Deposit: \$50

Contact: John Champagne Phone: 02-6492 7306

Email: brogopg@bigpond.net.au

Web: www.permaculturedesign.com.au

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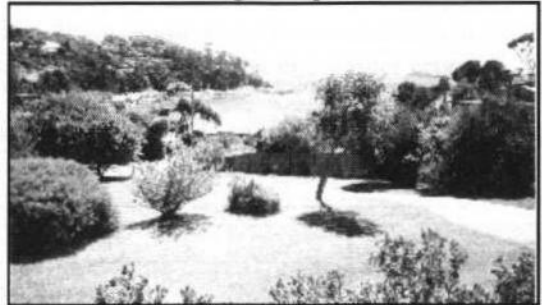
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COGS AUTUMN PLANTING GUIDE

Brassicas

Late plantings of Brassicas in March may be successful, but summer plantings are usually more reliable. In autumn, it is already too late to grow from seed. Take care too with the varieties chosen - it is too late to plant savoy cabbages, but the smaller ball-headed varieties should be successful.

Peas

Sugar snap peas may be sown in early March for a winter harvest, but the crop could be lost if there is an early severe frost affecting the blossom. Peas sown later in April-May will be ready for a spring harvest.

Lettuces

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

Leeks

Leek seedlings may be planted in early March for small leeks in winter, although summer plantings are more reliable.



Onions

Early varieties can be sown in April to early May to be harvested from spring to early summer.

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

Spring flowers

Remember that many spring flowering plants are best planted in autumn, so they can establish before the winter cold, and then start growing in the early warmth of spring. Stocks, pansies and poppies can be planted as seedlings in March and early April. Others such as Virginia stock, candytuft, larkspur and sweetpeas can be sown direct throughout autumn.

Green manures

Autumn is the time to plant green manure crops so they can establish well before the frosts.

Green manure crops suitable for planting in Canberra are:

Legumes: Broad beans, field peas, lupins, sub clover, tic peas and vetch.

Non-Legumes: Barley, oats and rye.



Legumes are very useful as they fix nitrogen in the soil whilst the non legumes provide bulk organic matter.

Cut or dig in the green manure in spring, at least 4-6 weeks prior to planting your summer crops.

Flowering crops need to be dug in before flowering, cereal crops before producing a head of grain.

	MAR	APR	MAY
Asian greens	ST	T	
Brussel sprouts	T		
Broccoli	T		
Broad beans		S	S
Cabbage	T		
Cauliflower	T		
Chicory	ST	T	
Chinese cabbage	T		
Corn salad	ST	ST	
Endive	ST	T	
Garlic		S	S
Kale	T		
Kohlrabi	ST	T	
Leeks	T		
Lettuce	ST	ST	ST
Peas	S	S	S
Onions		S	S
Turnips	T		

S = seed sowing
T = transplanting

This table is a guide only, please observe the seasonal weather patterns before deciding when to plant, as there will often be distinct differences in weather from one year to the next.

Q&A @ COGS

Q “Where are all the beans this year? My bean plants look healthy, with lots of leaves, but there are few flowers and no beans.”



A There are a number of reasons for poor fruit set. One is too much nitrogen, which encourages plants to put efforts into producing lots of foliage (great for leafy greens), but at the expense of fruit.

Another reason may be that your beans are in a position in the garden that is too shady - most summer-fruiting vegies need 6-8 hours of full sun every day.

High temperatures and low humidity at flowering may also be a cause of low fruit set. Depending on the type of bean (and how much time is left in the season), your plants may adjust, produce more flowers and give you an autumn harvest.



Q “When’s the best time to plant green manure, and what type is best in this region?”

A Green manures can be grown all year round - whenever there’s a spare patch of ground for 6 weeks or more. However, there are three main ways to grow them in our region:

- ❶ *As a crop during the main growing period* - a disadvantage is that the manure crop takes up valuable space at the most productive time of the year.
- ❷ *As an undercover crop* grown with the main crop. A green manure crop planted after the main crop has been established is a useful approach in cold areas where this is not enough time to plant manure after the summer harvest. It is also useful in warm seasons where an early

manure crop can protect new seedlings from weeds and drying winds.

❸ *As an overwinter crop.* This is the most common approach in the ACT region as manure crops are ideal to grow during the cold months, when vegetable plots might otherwise be left vacant. The time to plant overwinter crops is now, as soon as the summer crops have been harvested, to allow enough time to establish before winter.



Which green manures you grow will depend on your objectives for using them. For example, if your soil is compacted, try a green manure with deep roots. If you need to boost your nitrogen levels for the next crop, try a legume. If you need soil stability and weed control, try a clover. If you need more organic matter in your soil, choose a bulky manure crop.

There’s an article on the COGS website (www.cogs.asn.au) that gives details of the green manures commonly used in the ACT region, their best sowing time, soil type, root system and weed control abilities. Also remember that it’s often a good idea to grow a mix of green manures to optimise benefits.

The COGS green manure mixes will be available during autumn from the COGS monthly meetings or from your convenor. There are two mixes: a legume and cereal mix containing field peas, vetch, ryecorn, wheat and oats; and a legumes only mix containing field peas, lupins and vetch.



Send your questions, responses or comments to editor@cogs.asn.au or to the COGS post office. Don’t forget to visit the Blog on the COGS website www.cogs.asn.au.

COGS NOTICE BOARD

COGS monthly meetings

Come along at 7:30 pm on the fourth Tuesday of each month to the MAJURA COMMUNITY CENTRE, ROSEVEAR PLACE, DICKSON

Meetings feature an interesting speaker, good company and a huge range of COGS library books to borrow.

23 February

Using water efficiently in the garden - an open discussion on water use

23 March

COGS Annual General Meeting & Harvest Night

Organic Gardening course

CIT Solutions
Beginners Organic Gardening

21 March to 18 April
& 30 May to 20 June

Dickson College, Sundays 1-4pm

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

ACTEW's Stage 3 water restrictions currently apply in all COGS gardens

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

No watering is allowed outside these hours.

Also note that drippers are allowed in COGS gardens, but gardeners need to present at all times while they are on.

Digging around the web

Veg Out Community Gardens St Kilda

www.vegout.asn.au

This is the website of the Veg Out community gardens in St Kilda, which is an organic volunteer-run garden comprising more than 140 plots located on land that was formerly a lawn bowling green. Have a virtual "wander" around the website and get a sneak peak at how another community garden network is organised.

Kew Seed Bank

www.kew.org

Kew is a UK-based plant collection and environmental research organisation, with the motto "plants, people, possibilities". Its mission is to "inspire and deliver science-based plant conservation worldwide, enhancing the quality of life". The website is packed-full of info on Kew's worthwhile conservation research and the interactive map of worldwide research activities tells you what is being done in Australia.

True Food Guide

<http://truefood.org.au/>

The True Food Network is a community of chefs, food experts, community groups and interested individuals concerned about genetically-engineered ingredients in our food and beverages. The website details the True Food Guide 2010, which rates more than 1000 Australian food and beverage brands for the presence of GE ingredients. You can sign up to the Network to receive updates, search the database by brand or sign the petition to urge for more comprehensive food labelling laws for GE food.

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