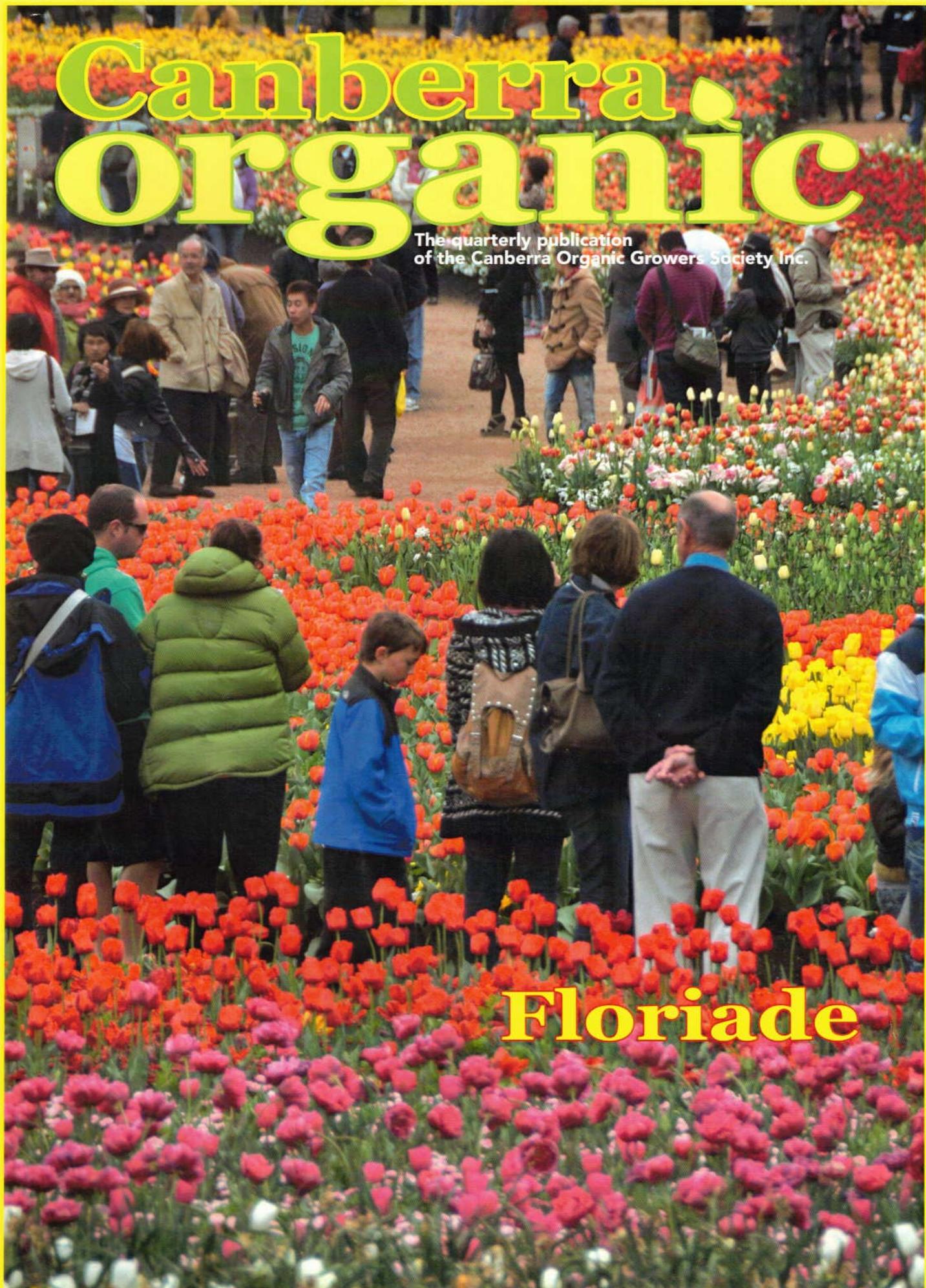


# Canberra Organic

The quarterly publication  
of the Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.

Floriade



# Crace gala opening

On 31 August the new Crace garden was officially opened. The guests included Simon Corbell, the ACT Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development, Michelle Darlington, 'Masterchef' contestant and Crace Resident, Matthew Frawley, the CIC Landscape Manager, Keith Colls, Garden Guru and temporary COGS convener, and Jason Hodges from Channel 7's 'Better Homes & Gardens'. The MC for the event was Con the Fruiterer (alias Mark Mitchell). It was a beautiful, sunny day or, as Con often put it, 'bewdiful!'

Con reminded us that the best way to get back in contact with reality is to stick our hands in the dirt, to get in touch with nature. 'Organic' does not simply mean that we don't clean it; he's learned from COGS what organic really means.

Crace's concept was partly prompted by English and European allotment design, according to Matt Frawley. His aim is for Crace to grow into a community facility rather than just being an isolated collection of gardeners. Keith agrees and added that growing connects us with nature and helps us feel alive.

Jason is very much in favour of community gardens. His home area is Pymble in Sydney, a comfortable, leafy suburb and the site of his first community garden. When he set it up two years ago he thought that it was simply unnecessary, but he was wrong—people regularly stop him in the street and say how much they use it, how



*Jason Hodges from Channel 7's 'Better Homes & Gardens' and Michelle Darlington. Photos: Walter Steensby.*

much it's changed what they're doing at home with their own kids. Con thinks every nature strip in Australia should be gardened. Jason points to verge gardens in places like Marrickville and especially in the troubled suburb of Redfern: young people there who previously felt inspired only to loiter and damage property now take pride in their suburb. Jason reports that the transformation in attitudes and behaviours has been little short of astonishing. This kind of venture can bring people together even from the toughest suburbs. It gives people building blocks for development in later life.

Simon Corbell thanked COGS for the important job we do in supporting community gardens right across the city. He esteems community gardens for two

reasons. First, he values them for the connections and community they build within a neighbourhood. Even in suburbs we can become very disconnected. Community gardens give people a great opportunity to reconnect with the neighbourhood and develop a sense of ownership. He looks forward to the future community-building role of the community garden in Crace. Second, community gardens provide an opportunity to grow some of our own food and to reconnect with food production. As residential densities increase and suburbs become more compact, as more of us move into flats or ever-larger houses losing our backyards, community gardens become an increasingly important component of the physical infrastructure of new suburbs. Crace is in a superb setting and will become better as people settle into using the garden.

Michelle and a CIC apprentice cooked Hanoi prawn cakes with fresh herbs in the Crace kitchen area for everybody; she is looking forward to regular fresh produce from the garden. Jason ran a well-attended planting workshop.

Crace is launched! May she have a long and prosperous voyage!

— Walter Steensby



*Con the Fruiterer (Mark Mitchell) and Simon Corbell, ACT Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development*

# President's report

As I write spring hasn't quite sprung but it's getting wound up. We've had some lovely days so far and I look forward to many more. So far the rainfall hasn't been too bad but I'm making more wicking beds at home anyway. My experience since the drought ended is that they never need watering or topping up; we can go on holidays and come back to a green bed. And no-one needs to 'enjoy' watering outside in the evening being bitten by mozzies.

## Floriade

I think a highlight of the year has to be the Urban Agriculture Australia (UAA) display at Floriade. It has proved very popular, and it's so gratifying that COGS was able to play a part in designing, building and operating it. Many volunteers from COGS and other organisations helped out with such things as sprouting summer vegetables in the dead of winter, building wicking beds and acting as Explainer on the display to expound things to the visitors. I hear that the Floriade management are well pleased with the whole thing and will invite UAA to put up another display next year.

## Credit where credit is due

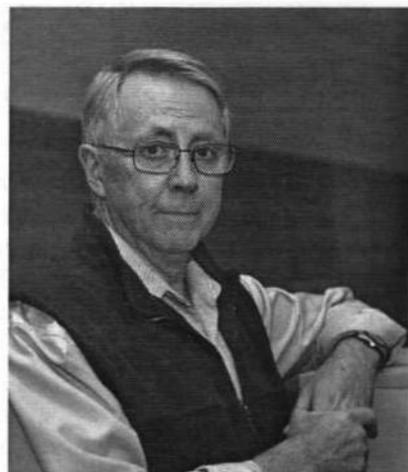
All our conveners continue to keep COGS operating smoothly. Simone Dilkara is dealing well with Cord Civil's temporary construction camp next to the Holder garden. Greg Parish has volunteered to be Crace Convener. On the committee, Sue Pavasaris is doing a great job with the magazine; Donna Vaughan and Greg Blood are revamping the library; Richard Horobin has taken up the Gardens Co-ordinator role. My sincere thanks go to all conveners and committee members: without you I could

achieve nothing, together we do good for Canberra.

## Plots and plans

COGS continues to get inquiries for plots, mostly north of the lake but some to the south. It's a pity we can't satisfy all requests. We've had some people asking what happened to the Theodore garden. The committee talked over reopening this garden. It has good soil, some of which may have been dumped there from the building of Parliament House, and at one stage it had 20 gardeners. Sadly we had to close it for a variety of reasons including just too much vandalism and expensive-to-fix problems with the water supply. The big question of course is, if we build it—or in this case rebuild it—will they come? Not an easy experiment to conduct. Unless we can find a way to keep watch over the garden and deter villains, and funds to repair the plumbing, it will remain closed.

The ACT government continues to hand on various inquiries to us, such as a group interested in



creating a new garden south of the lake. We've had requests for advice on how to set up gardens in three southside suburbs, and we've been asked if any of our members would like to use the existing facilities at a care facility in Hackett (please see page 19).

On 25 September in the new Crace garden Keith Colls, Richard Horobin, Andy Hrast and I met Joanne Mitchell and Katrina Lauc of the ACT Land Development Agency (LDA) together with Steve Rossiter of Elton Consulting. Joanne and Katrina are planning the new division of Molonglo; Steve is working on the Community Development Program called Mingle. We discussed how to go about a community garden in the new suburb (district) of Coombs;

our recent experience of setting up Crace is useful in this respect. Our mutual involvement should continue: the LDA will invite us for a site visit and design meeting later in the year.

## Ministerial advice

On 24 September Andy and I met Shane Rattenbury (Minister for TAMS among other portfolios) to discuss issues associated with community gardens in the ACT and the role COGS can play in their administration. We received a positive response and are following it up. There's a longer article on page 12 in this edition.

— Water Steensby



# Canberra Organic

## Volume 21 Number 3

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

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

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**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

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## Advertising in Canberra Organic

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

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

Size	Issue	4 Issues
1/8 page	\$9 (\$7)	\$30 (\$25)
1/4 page	\$18 (\$15)	\$60 (\$50)
1/2 page	\$36 (\$30)	\$120 (\$100)
Full page	\$72 (\$60)	\$240 (\$200)

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# Editor's note

## Welcome to the COGS spring magazine!

Happy spring!

The editor@cogs.asn.au email address is now active—apologies to those who emailed this address before I could access it—and COGS members have once again contributed some fascinating material for this magazine.

As lover of chooks, I was particularly thrilled to find the poem, 'Burble and cluck', in the COGS editor's mailbox. Matt, the magazine's designer, is also a chook enthusiast so he enjoyed doing a special page for it.

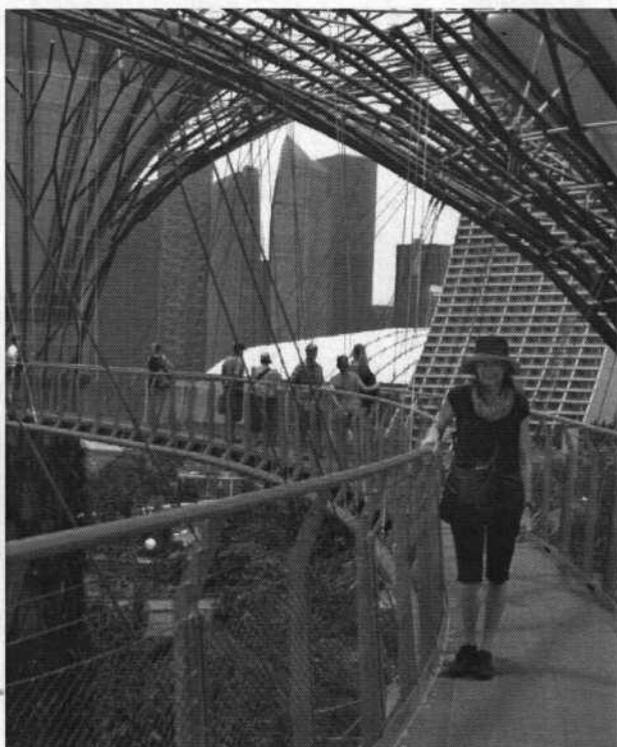
The main story for this issue is Floriade, Canberra's wonderful celebration of spring. There's also a bit of a tree and twig theme happening: Jane Vincent's been looking at sticks and stakes in the UK and I've been exploring Singapore's supertrees (see photo and article on page 17).

Andy Hrast has written great reports on the meeting with Shane Rattenbury and the proposed new community garden at Coombs, and David Jockel has written a thoughtful article on why governments need to invest in community gardens. Walter has written a comprehensive report on the Crace garden opening.

And it looks like there is a lot of activity going on in our own COGS community gardens as we prepare for the warmer months. Even the 'weeds' can be useful as we see from Jessie Coronakes' wonderful recipe for nettle soup.

Keep those contributions rolling in! Happy reading.

—Sue



## Cook community garden

### Spring is finally here!!

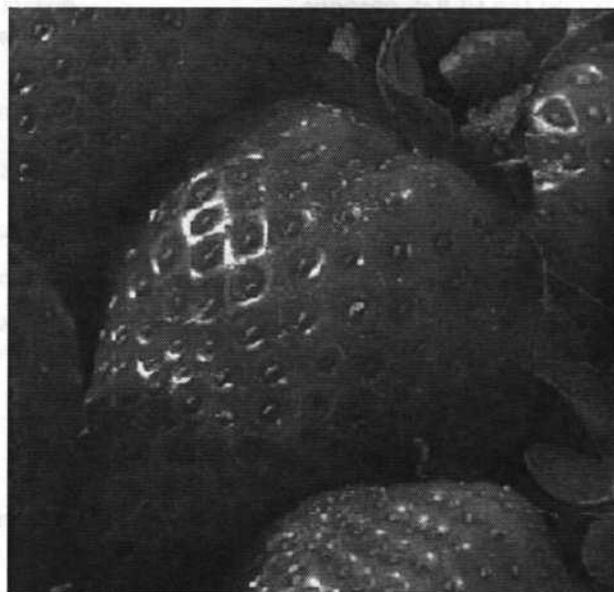
Spring is finally here and plot holders have been busy preparing the soil for their summer crops and harvesting their spring crops. The broad bean, asparagus, artichokes, strawberries, leeks, silverbeet and peas are all growing quickly and are ready for harvesting. Spring is a lovely time of year and also the busiest for our gardeners.

### Cook AGM and working bee 15 September

The garden's annual general meeting and another working bee were held on 15 September. There were no new nominations for committee members or the convener position so the present holders were elected unopposed: that is, me as convener and the committee members are Joanne Zions, John Tuckwell, Kym Louis, Julia Zachara and Mario Serenellini.

### Cook garden rules

The Cook garden rules have been rewritten so that the items are under a subject heading instead of date of AGM meetings. This has made the document easier to read.



At the AGM the following changes were made to the garden rules:

#### 1. Fruit trees in garden plots

It was agreed that fruit trees should not be permitted to be grown in garden plots.

#### 2. Neglected plots

Currently the garden rules state that if gardens have been neglected for three months, a warning will be given to the plot holder and they have three months to rectify the situation. It was agreed that this period was too long, and that after the initial warning the plot holder be given one month to rectify the situation otherwise they will be evicted from the garden.

#### 3. Mowing hazards

- a. Plot holders who have netting around their garden must ensure the netting is kept inside the boundary of their plot and on be on the paths as it is a hazard to the mower.
- b. Stakes and other material must be stored within the boundaries of the plot holder's garden plot and not be stored on pathway edges or pathways. This is not only a hazard to the mower but it is a tripping risk to gardeners.
- c. Boxed garden borders must be straight and squared off. Bits of edging must not protrude onto pathways.
- d. Holes in pathways must be filled in.

### Community fruit trees

Adrienne Fazekas, who has cared for the community trees for years, no longer wants this responsibility.

It was agreed at the AGM that a working group be formed to undertake this task.

### Tap maintenance

Mike Avent and David Maish have completed the work of overhauling all the garden taps. A big thanks to both of them.

### Risk assessment

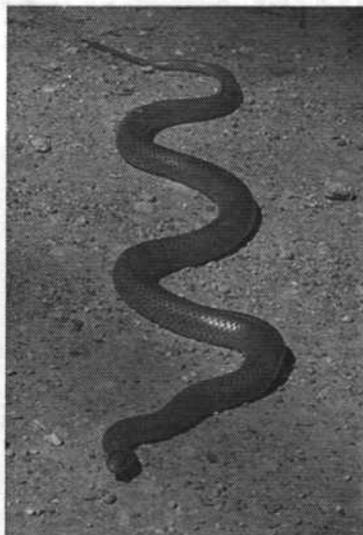
COGS was scheduled to do a risk assessment of the garden in September but as the COGS garden coordinator position is vacant there is no-one to organise it. The Cook committee will undertake an assessment of the garden in October.

### Snake notice

The snake notice, which was attached to the front gate, disintegrated and a new sign has been put in place. I think this new sign (see photo) will get the attention of everyone who visits the garden!

### Collection of plot fees

Plots fees and membership subscriptions were collected on behalf of COGS and to date there is only one outstanding. The process was very time consuming—particularly following up the outstanding



## BEWARE!!

Snakes have been sighted in this garden.

A snake bite kit and information on snake bite is in the shed.

Please take the time to read it.

debts—but it does relieve some of the pressure from the COGS treasurer and membership secretary.

### Waiting list and new plot holder

We currently have 12 people on our waiting list. We have one new member who will take up her plot in the next few weeks as one gardener has left. Margaret Stocks is our new gardener and she was very happy to get the plot as she recently left her country garden to move to Canberra.

—Glynis Kennedy (photos and story)

## Dickson community garden

In recent months, Dickson garden has been transforming ahead of the spring planting season.

This growing season, we will welcome two new gardeners to our group. In addition, we have established communal pumpkin and raspberry patches.

Our garden is on the site of Dickson College and we recently hosted a group of students undertaking training for a bricklaying certificate. Thanks to them, students from the college can now enjoy a walk-in raised garden bed!

We also hosted a number of volunteers growing seedlings for the Floriade display—our greenhouse has never been so well used! From all reports this was a great success.

—Nerida Hunter (photo and story)



*Robert and Mohammed working hard on our communal mint patch in the Dickson Garden*

# Around the COGS gardens

## Kaleen community garden

It has been a quiet winter, but things are now ramping up with an early spring. We have been away for eight weeks and the weeding and mulching we did before leaving provided a wonderful environment for the horse manure and straw to grow two-foot high weeds in our absence. We aren't on our own, as many others appear to be battling the weeds as well.

However the spring rain has brought flowers to many of our fruit trees and to our delight the first lot of fruit has set on some of the trees. Many of our plot holders have been planting asparagus and we are now reaping the benefits as big, glossy spears are shooting up for picking. The magpies have their new babies out of the nest so no doubt all the scarab grubs will be greatly appreciated. We have seen them stack about five into their beaks before flying back to the nest.

Recently we have had two members decide to leave the garden because of commitments (maybe the weeds!) and so we look forward to new members.

We have heard that approval is coming for the building of our pergola so that will be a welcome addition to the garden.

The photo shows an afternoon picking from the garden—the first time we have managed to get a proper bulb of Florence fennel! Obviously total lack of attention works.

—Robyn Power (photo and story)



## Cotter community garden

The Cotter Garden AGM held on 14 September was well attended with Ann Smith (convener) and Kay Collins (assistant convener) re-elected. The Cotter gardeners happily embraced the trial of new EFT arrangements for the payment of plot fees and membership. All gardeners chose to use EFT rather than pay cash.

The meeting resolved to purchase a BBQ and regular evening BBQs during the summer months are planned. Thank you to Richard and Patricia for organising this initiative.

The meeting also resolved to seek funding to re-gravel the driveway and a submission to the COGS Committee is being prepared.

The garden plots are awakening from their winter hibernation with widespread activity getting



*Cotter garden's new BBQ—recycled from the Green Shed for \$20.*

them ready for spring planting. Gardeners, however, remain wary of frosts and are holding off on frost-sensitive plantings.

The spring/summer chore of regular mowing is now underway.

There are a number of vacant plots at the Cotter Garden and existing gardeners have kindly taken on those plots to prevent them from becoming overgrown.

New gardeners welcome!

—Andy Hrast

# Charnwood community garden

As I write, the weather is straining to warm up sufficiently to nurture young warm-season seedlings. Several end-of-season cold snaps are thwarting some of us at the Charnwood garden in our attempt to run the gauntlet of the cold temperature/warm temperature 'divide'.

Like every spring, gardeners are eagerly preparing beds, fussing over seedlings and harvesting and maintaining crops from autumn while enjoying the energising warmth.

**The Charnwood garden is buzzing with the anticipation of summer crops and good community spirit.**

We are a full house at the moment as recent vacant plots have been snapped up.

Our AGM went smoothly with most gardeners paying their plot and membership fees promptly to our efficient treasurer, Jenny. The convener reins have been deftly taken up by Jo McMillan and all



other garden roles are also filled for the coming gardening year.

Our gardens were certainly not dormant over the chilly winter months, with gardeners enjoying good crops of winter veg and each other's company at several campfire dinners. Troy and Rebecca's garden seems to benefit from the addition of pigeon poo—Troy certainly seems happy with his 5 kg cauliflower

(see inside back cover)! Many of us have spent the cooler months preparing and reconfiguring beds, procuring straw and manure, planting green manure and growing crops such as broccoli, cabbage, beetroot, silverbeet and broad beans.

Lately we have been serenaded by the happy sounds of a resident kookaburra and children playing on a donated swing set and in the sandpit while the adults do some gardening.

Some kindly neighbours donated a compost bin and a tumbler, and some bags of lazy housewife bean seeds, all of which are much appreciated. Gardener donations of hand tools and mowers are also proving useful. We are benefiting from regular mulch deliveries—the mulch is being applied to the paths surrounding our plots to reduce mowing.

We have resumed our summer schedule of later meetings/barbecues and more frequent working bees to complete garden maintenance tasks.

Happy spring gardening to all!

—Angela Spencer

*Troy's monster vegetables.*

*Photos: Rebecca and Troy Lloyd.*



# COGS backyard visits 2013

This year we have not had as many backyard visits, but instead, a variety of different activities. We started off the year coming out to our property 'Gollion' in February. Last summer the fruit harvest had not been good, as the cold snap in October last year wiped out most of the peaches and nectarines. However, we still had plums, several varieties of apples, quinces and figs for everyone to see. We also did a short 'weed walk' after reading the new Weed Forager's Handbook and I was able to point out lots of plants for supplementing our salads!

In March, we saw Greg Blood's cottage garden with his raised vegie garden used for leafy vegetables and cucumber, tomatoes and capsicum. The vegies that take up more space like potatoes and eggplants are grown in his plot at the COGS Cook garden. Greg has an outstanding warm corner of the garden for citrus and lots of cute quirky features throughout his pretty garden.

In April, only a few ventured out to Mary Brammall's garden in Wamboin, but they were rewarded when they saw her magnificent, bountiful garden. Mary also demonstrated all the different ways she preserves her big vegie crop. Then in May, Robyn Power organised an excellent visit to the COGS community garden at Charnwood. Stephen and Angela Spencer kindly hosted this visit and even provided some morning tea to add to our usual enormous spread. This garden provided some very different aspects of community gardening with a large variety of fruit trees in communal

areas and in some gardens. For instance, one plot was completely full of feijoas, trimmed so they were easily managed. Couch management, different soil and watering styles, and climbing vegetable supports made it a very interesting morning and it was great to see so many members turn up.

Mid-June we had a great roll-up to a tool sharpening workshop led by Randy and held at Margaret's place. The weather was freezing but the talk so fascinating and worthwhile that we all felt it was worth the cold! The rest of COGS can look forward to a similar talk in the near future. In August, we again had a different meeting when Jeannette Heycox invited us over to see her steep block in Giralang and we divided into three groups to come up with permaculture designs for her garden. We came up with three different plans and if Jeannette takes even half of these ideas she's going to have a wonderful garden! We look forward to seeing its progress.

In September, Greg Blood kindly offered to show us some less well-known aspects of the Arboretum. As a member for the Friends of the Arboretum, Greg is part of the

measuring team so he was able to show us some of the forests 'off the beaten path' where his team regularly work. We walked behind Dairy Farmer's hill and particularly liked the forests of the *Eucalyptus lacrimans* (weeping snow gum) and *Eucalyptus michaeliana* (Hillgrove spotted gum) as well as the Japanese snowbells, Cedros Island Pines and Chilean cedars. Greg also explained how they went about measuring the trees—both their width and height—it's not always easy to pinpoint the correct marker trees to measure.

After a busy October, where several members were helping with Floriade and many plan on visiting Murrumbateman Field Days for their seedling purchases, we plan on finishing off the year with a visit to Jan Jennings' garden. By all accounts this should be a great backyard visit.

Next year Jeannette will take over the organising of this group as I have done it for two years and Margaret for the two years prior to that. It's amazing that we've been visiting each other's gardens for over four years! We always have fun.

—Jane Vincent (photo and story)



*Greg's raised vegie beds with herbs, tomatoes and chillies. Note labels stapled to the bed edges*

# Why the community needs government investment in community gardens

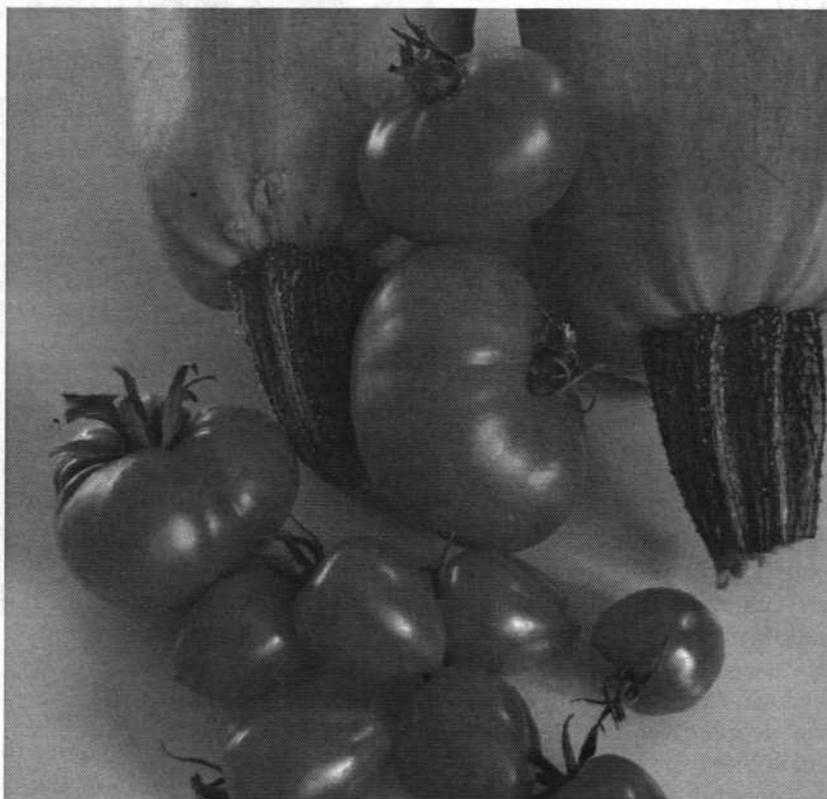
A recent article by Julian Cribb in the *Canberra Times* ('Time to end our deadly diet', 5 September 2013) claims that Australians' eating habits are killing 95,000 people and costing \$120 billion every year. Cribb draws on recent European research that shows preventable diet-related chronic diseases (such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and certain cancers) consume a huge proportion of health budgets.

This comes as no surprise—we all know that we need to eat more vegies and less junk food. But it is quite striking to think just how much of the community's money and resources could be saved if we did so. Every government struggles to find the money needed to provide healthcare for its citizens, and our healthcare system always seems like it is barely coping. More and more money is needed each year as more and more people get sick and rates of chronic disease continue to rise.

Our newly-elected government has promised to ensure that its health budget delivers more doctors, more nurses, and more hospital equipment.

**It seems pretty obvious that we can't continue this way. It also seems pretty obvious that there actually is a solution to the problem.**

It might sound miraculous to imagine that our health costs could be cut in half, or more, but the evidence is clear that this could happen if the population changed their eating and exercise habits. Hospitals would no longer be in a state of crisis. There would be no shortage of GPs. Huge amounts of money could be freed up and used to benefit the community in other ways. This is not a fantasy.



*Photo: Sue Pavasaris*

But CAN we change our habits? The whole momentum of our culture and economy seems to be driving us rapaciously in the other direction. Our emotional and mental health is collapsing, and if Cribb's article is to be believed, our physical environment and our food is becoming more and more contaminated with potentially toxic chemicals.

A big effort will be needed to turn this around, and if our elected leaders are serious about doing so they will need to commit energy and resources in the most effective ways possible.

There is of course endless debate about what the best ways might be. Cribb points out that the National Partnership Agreement on Preventative Health's budget of \$932 million over nine years seems like a pittance—a mere '0.08 per cent of the annual cost of our dietary havoc'. This seems obviously true, but I must admit to also feeling some sympathy with the current

government's view that too much money is being spent on the health bureaucracy in areas such as the endless gathering of meticulous health data, rather than on more hands-on projects.

**In this context, one area that stands out as a practical, value-for-money investment in health for any Australian government is community gardening.**

If more Australians were involved in growing and eating their own vegetables, free of toxins, surely this would have a clear impact on national health. And not just on the diet-related chronic diseases mentioned above. Not only would more of us be eating healthier food, we would also be engaging in physical exercise in a natural setting as part of a community. Common sense tells us this is

*(continued on page 13)*

# Mitchell garden working bee

While the weather has been slow to get warm throughout September, Mitchell plot holders got in early to get the garden ready for summer. About 10 plot holders turned up through the morning of the 5 October to participate in a working bee with the aim of cleaning up common areas in the plots.

Between raking leaves, picking up rubbish, collecting old pieces of wire, removing rocks that have been deterring people from mowing, it was definitely not a leisurely morning. The communal herb garden now looks less like a giant patch of well-manured couch grass, the walkways between gardens are more accessible, there are less fire hazards for when the local rangers drop by and I actually got to meet new people from the garden. Moving a lot of bark and debris from around the resident chook pens will also hopefully provide less coverage for the snakes.

I can say confidently that raking is a fantastic form of exercise and I certainly didn't feel any guilt skipping the gym that day.

The morning wrapped up with a customary sausage sizzle and I can attest to the success of the community garden working bee and encourage other gardens to do something similar—not only to clean up the gardens, but as an informal way to meet other people



and see what your garden neighbours are growing this spring.

As an aside, the Mitchell gardens are plush with nettles at the moment (I am sure the lawnmowers ended up eating a lot of them) so thought it appropriate to include some tips on how to use nettles instead of disregarding them as another weed (see recipe page 11). I saw an episode of British show 'The edible garden' in which an attempt was made to make nettle beer. In short, it was not a success, but I would be pleased to hear if anybody succeeded in creating it.

— Jessie Coronakes (photos and story)



## Notes from Mitchell garden AGM

Mitchell garden held their annual general meeting on 7 September 2013. The following Committee members were elected:

- convener—Richard Larson
- risk, health and safety officer—Keith Murphy
- treasurer—Ian Mitchell
- working bee coordinator—David Thornhill
- magazine contributor—Jessie Coronakes

Additional garden members are needed to assist with the management and upkeep of the garden. All volunteers welcome! Working bees are scheduled for the first weekend of each month.

One of the new Mitchell gardeners, Christina, will be growing flax to make paper. Christina said she had previously grown it in the Queanbeyan COGS garden and everyone at the meeting was most interested in hearing how it is grown and harvested.

Other topics discussed at the meeting included management of weeds, communal compost heaps and burning off.

Mitchell garden has a number of spare plots so please contact the convener if you would like to apply for a plot.

## Stinging nettles ... in a nutshell

- They lose their sting in the first 30 seconds of cooking.
- They have high levels of protein.
- Harvest them for eating before they are knee high.
- The seeds and roots have medicinal value.
- In autumn they can be used to make cordage—they are good for water cordage uses, like nets (hence the name).
- They are possibly the easiest plant food to dry and save for later.
- You should not eat them once they begin to form flowers.

## Nettle soup recipe

### Ingredients

half a bag of nettles (if you cannot get enough nettles mix it up with spinach)

- 1 brown onion, diced
- 4 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 carrot, diced
- 2 sticks celery, diced
- 2 potatoes, peeled and diced
- 5 cups stock, approx. (chicken or veggie)
- olive oil for frying
- 1 tsp coriander powder
- 1 tsp cumin powder

### Method

Fry onions, garlic, celery, potatoes and carrots until golden. Add spices to fry briefly. Then add stock to cover all ingredients. After you have prepared the nettles (use only the smaller leaves and always wear gloves) add to the stock along with other greens you may be using. Boil slowly for around an hour at most (top-with water if needed). Mix through a blender to get a smooth consistency (or you can mush it up manually for a more rustic soup). Serve with a dollop of plain yogurt and season well.

—Jessie Coronakes



## COGS meets with Shane Rattenbury, MLA

On 24 September 2013, COGS President, Walter Steensby and COGS Secretary, Andy Hrast met with Mr Shane Rattenbury, Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Housing, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, and Minister for Ageing. The meeting was to discuss a range of issues associated with community gardens in the ACT and the role COGS can play in their administration.

The meeting was initiated by COGS. The ideas and proposals put forward by COGS were well received by the Minister.

**It was clear from the discussions that the Minister and the ACT Government consider community gardens an important community and urban agriculture initiative.**

The Minister said that the government is requiring developers building new suburbs to provide community gardens and is looking at the scope for retrofitting gardens to older suburbs.

COGS' successful administration of the existing gardens is recognised by both the political and administrative levels of the ACT Government. The Minister said that he envisages COGS playing a key role in their management as the number of community gardens expands.

The Minister said that he has held talks with Attorney-General, Simon Corbell to streamline and clarify the administration of community gardens within the government. Mr Corbell is also Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations.

COGS President, Walter Steensby welcomed the government's commitment to community gardens and pledged COGS' support to help the government expand the number of gardens. He also agreed to provide commentary on criteria for selecting future community garden sites and the suitability of sites.

Walter pointed out that there is a demand for garden plots that COGS is unable to meet, which justifies increasing the number of community gardens. He also pointed out a recent trend of rising numbers of requests from community and disability groups seeking gardening expertise to help with the establishment of gardens which COGS is unable to fully meet.

Walter specifically sought support for a review and updating of COGS to recognise the expanded numbers of gardens and the emerging role of providing gardening expertise to the wider community. The Minister recognised these needs and agreed to examine how the government might be able to assist.

—Andy Hrast

*(L to R) Andy Hrast, Shane Rattenbury, Walter Steensby*



# Community garden proposed for Coombs

On 25 September 2013, COGS met with representatives from the ACT Land Development Agency and consultants planning the community garden in the new suburb of Coombs in the Molonglo Development.

The meeting was held at the new COGS garden at Crace. The Crace garden has been built by the developers and is seen as a model for future community gardens in new suburbs. Keith Colls is the acting convener and mentor while the Crace garden is being established.

Discussions centred on both the physical layout of the garden and the development of the Crace garden community.

Keith identified a number of improvements that could be made to the garden design including the



(L to R) Richard Horobin, Katrina Lauc, Steve Rossiter, Keith Colls, Joanne Mitchell, Walter Steensby

**The investment in the garden infrastructure is already proving to be the focus of community involvement in the new suburb and would be an ideal model for other new communities.**

width of garden beds for wheel chair accessible plots, the use of crushed granite on paths, the number and location of taps and composting arrangements.

There was also discussion of the value, given the large cost, of raised beds and how the soil in them could be maintained over the longer term.

There was general recognition that an experienced and dedicated person is needed to help the garden in its initial phase while

the community develops around it. The model of parachuting in an experienced community garden person, such as Keith, to work with the developer and the local community was considered to have worked well and is a model that could be transferred to other gardens.

The Coombs garden is estimated to be some 18 months to 2 years away from being ready for its first gardeners.

—Andy Hrast

*(continued from page 9)*

beneficial for our mental and emotional health, and scientific research is beginning to convincingly confirm this.

If community gardening programs also incorporated organic waste recycling, very significant contributions could also be made to the struggle against environmental destruction, soil degradation, and climate change.

It is amazing what community gardening groups have already achieved through the hard work of the volunteers who adminis-

ter, manage and promote them. But these unpaid volunteers can only do so much and, given the pressures they are under, there is no guarantee that community gardens will even remain viable, let alone flourish and grow.

The amount of money needed to make a huge difference to organisations like COGS truly is a pittance, and the potential benefits to the whole Australian community (and to the Australian physical environment) are huge. I am new to COGS and must admit I don't really know what we are doing to attract government

support, but it would be great if this could become a focus of our energies. And perhaps funding from philanthropic sources might also be worth exploring?

PS: Apologies for the rushed nature of this article. I, too, am subject to the rapacious driving forces of our society and struggle to find the time and energy to do anything that actually seems useful and worthwhile. In fact, I quite often struggle to get out of bed, put on clean clothes, and brush my teeth ...

—David Jockel

# Success at Floriade!

Our cover story

## Beautiful innovation at Floriade 2013—COGS helps Canberra celebrate the annual festival of flowers

COGS is one of the 14 organisations forming the collaborative venture known as Urban Agriculture Australia (UAA). Volunteers from many of the organisations turned up in force for Floriade with 95 volunteers contributing their time and talents to build, equip, furnish and explain the UAA urban agriculture display. This is the first time that such a display has been mounted at Floriade, and it was a testing time for all concerned: Floriade management had accepted UAA's proposal to provide a display and UAA, with limited or no experience in this kind of thing, had to deliver the goods!

It succeeded, and succeeded splendidly. Feedback suggested the public really liked the fact that a lot of the display items were hand-made—wicking beds, milk-

bottle flowerpots, a rocket stove, fountain, scarecrow. The DIY aspect had great appeal and illustrated that one need not resort to ready-made big-store items for a garden to look and function well.

One of COGS' main roles was to help sprout the dozens of vegetable and herb plants needed to make the display attractive, and do so in the dead of winter. COGS members also helped build and dismantle the display, and to act as Explainers during the month of Floriade.

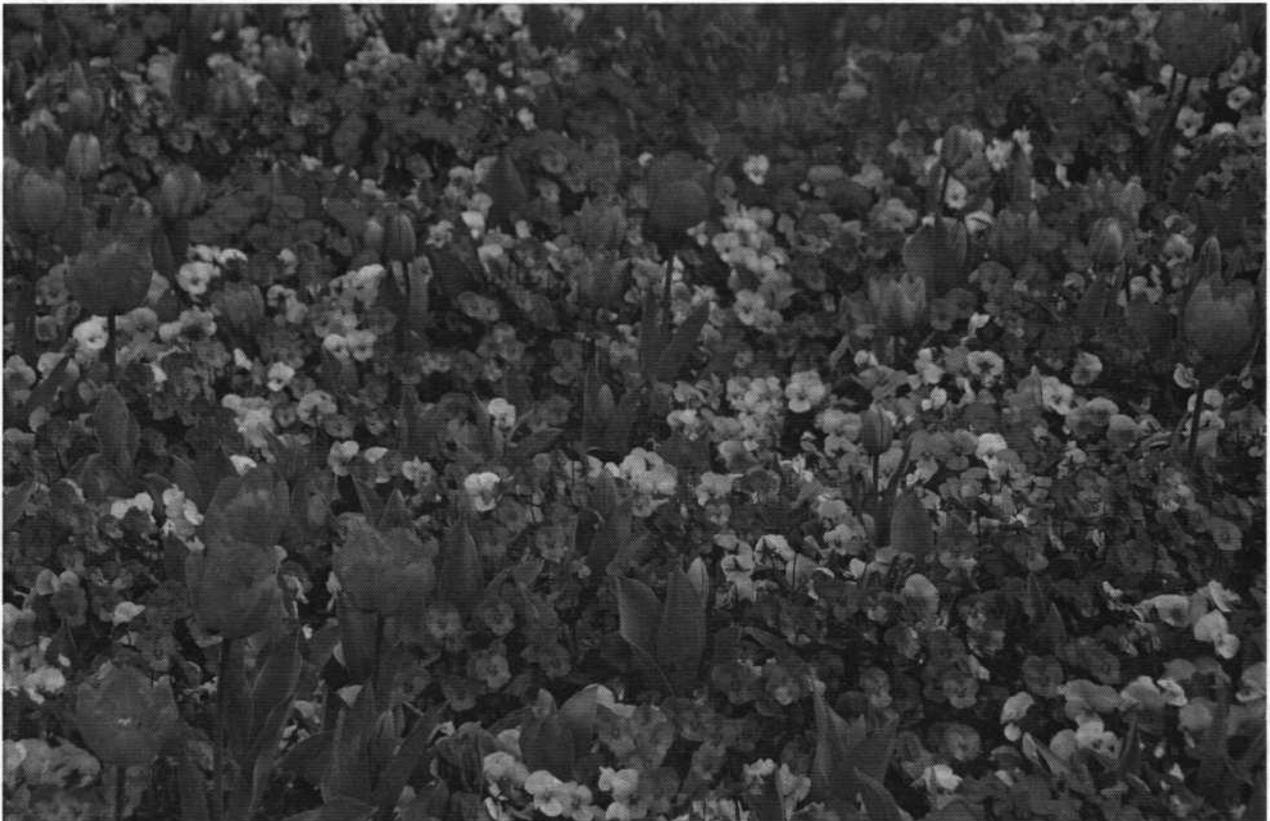
Although Floriade is all about flowers, at the official launch, even celebrities like Costa from 'Gardening Australia' and masterchef Julie Goodwin talked about food, not flowers. Costa said that the farmer should be at the top of the health system. Food

is basic and fundamental—get the food right and so much follows.

Themes that resonated strongly with the public were local and domestic food production.

The scheduled, semi-formal talks both on-site and off-site were well attended. In fact, some visitors knew as much or more than the UAA explainers! Other visitors said that they'd come to Floriade exactly for the kind of help and advice that the UAA team provided. Tulips are just not enough.

If unattended, the display would not have proved to be anywhere near as much of a drawcard as it proved to be. Some volunteers commented that 'the best way to learn is to teach' as having to explain things to an audience promotes one's own learning.



Among the things to remember for next year's Floriade display is that some kind of script or 'flash cards' may be useful and all volunteers need the chance to attend the lectures and presentations.

The UAA web site turned out to be a great asset as visitors could be directed there for help and fact sheets. Many of them took photos of the URL on the sign, but there was a suggestion that it would have helped if there had been something like a business card or A5 leaflet to hand out.

Community engagement at Floriade was excellent and the educational side was very successful. The actual project management and day-to-day running of the UAA effort was described by many members as 'exemplary'.

The UAA volunteers worked together like a well-oiled machine! One volunteer commented that the whole process was fascinating to experience—so many people came together with diverse backgrounds and a wide range of competencies and abilities. Everyone pulled together even though no control was evident and no-one was overbearing or pushy. Volunteers appreciated the shared meals and social interactions and everyone enjoyed participating—it was safe and fun for all people to be at the edge of their learning abilities.

Next year? Already UAA is talking about a bigger display area that would not get so crowded. Apparently the Floriade management are very pleased with the UAA effort and that there was always a volunteer available to 'catch the ball' when needed. As one volunteer said: 'We have learnt!'—the many visitors to the UAA display at Floriade 2013 undoubtedly feel the same way.

UAA is an exciting new venture in Canberra.

Please visit [www.uaa.org.au](http://www.uaa.org.au) to learn more.

*Growing seedlings for the  
Floriade display  
Photos: Ray Prowse*





## Sticks or stakes?

On a recent walking trip in the UK I noticed it was common practice to use sticks or prunings rather than stakes to hold up plants. Not only was this very good recycling but no trees were cut down in the making. The materials looked attractive and the combination of branches with small twigs worked well, for example, as a support for the tendrils of climbing legumes.

I realised many of the sticks were from hazelnuts as, being naturally multi-stemmed, they can easily be cut back to their bases every few years (coppiced). In the UK the thicker branches are used for woven wattle (not acacia) fences, as shown in the photo. However I saw many other prunings being used including willows (although they do sprout!), ash and birch.

Sometimes the sticks were in rows for vegies like snow peas, but I also saw many fashioned into squares with strings holding them all together. I have found this method very effective this year for my broad beans. I also intend using it for dahlias and other soft-stemmed tall flowering plants this summer. I have so far used hazelnut, plum, mulberry and lemon verbena but I'm sure I'll find plenty more prunings to put to such good use. I hope the accompanying photos explain this excellent idea.

—Jane Vincent  
(photos and story)



*A woven 'wattle fence' at Kew Gardens*



*Various plants in Chelsea Physic Garden all held up by sticks and stakes in a square arrangement*

# Singapore simulates nature with supertrees

Most people associate the city-state of Singapore more with skyscrapers than trees.

With a population of around 5.4 million people living in an area of just 710 km<sup>2</sup> Singapore is highly urbanised and has very little natural environment remaining.

However, in an area of reclaimed land in the Marina Bay area a grove of 'supertrees' has materialised, dominating the skyline and having a cooling effect on the adjacent city area's micro-climate, generated by all the glass and concrete.

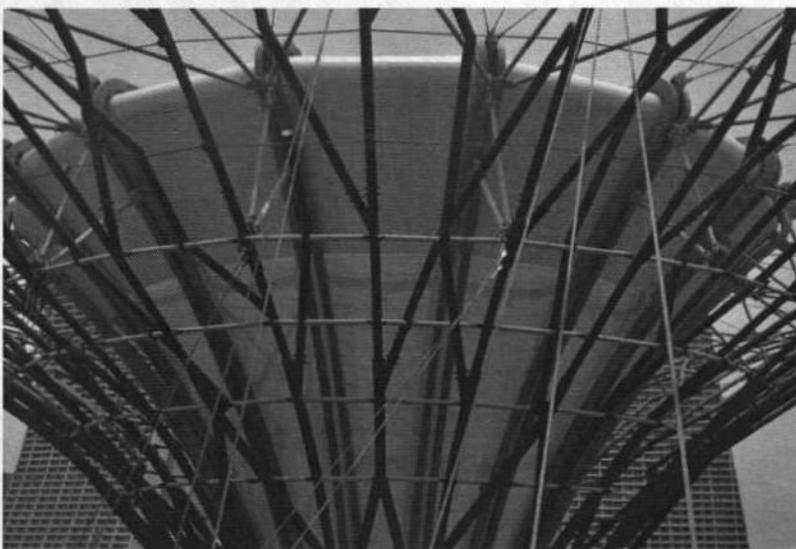
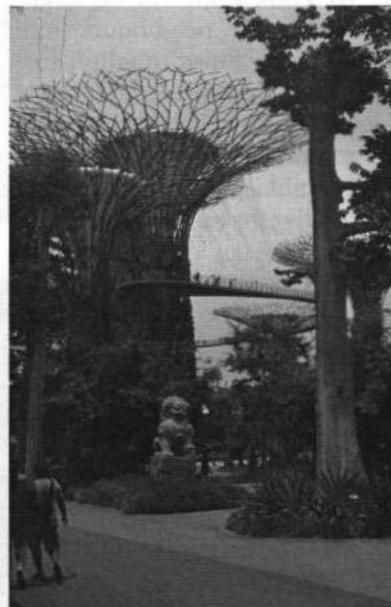
The supertrees are giant water reservoirs with technologies that perform some of the same functions as real trees: the photovoltaic cells gather solar energy—'photosynthesis'—and air is conditioned and cooled through an exhaust system. An elaborate system of metal rods and trellises support climbing plants and vertical gardens—and, in the case of one of the supertrees, a restaurant!

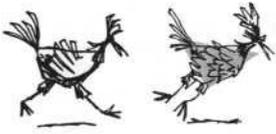
The supertrees range between 25 and 50 metres in height and two of the larger trees are linked by an elevated walkway. They support a green space called Gardens by the Bay that is part of Singapore's plan to provide a green belt around the city.

During my recent visit a Singaporean told me there were '5 million stressed people' in Singapore because they live in small apartments in a highly urban environment. Fortunately, the Singapore government appears to recognise the importance of nature as they have imposed severe penalties for chopping down trees and there is an active movement to encourage urban gardening and create green spaces in the city.

There may not be much that's organic about the supertrees but to my mind they are a novel approach to an urban problem.

—Sue Pavasaris  
(photos and story)





## Burble and cluck



**B**urble and cluck in the early morning. Neighbours over the back fence have chooks. Listening ... a slight nostalgia.

We had chooks for 30 years, a succession of Rhode Island Reds, Black Orpingtons, White Leghorns. They foraged in our backyard, roosted in the loquat tree, woke us up in the morning with squawks and squabbles. They scratched and fed and laid eggs. Happy burbles.

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

For 30 years a glut of eggs. We gave them to neighbours and friends. The finest quality free range eggs. I made countless pots of lemon butter, because we also had a glut of lemons. A spot of heart trouble put an end to that. Low fat diet for me nowadays.

Foxes got the last batch of chooks, a Black Orpington cross. One by one they were picked off on moonlit nights. I would hear squawks at 2 am, run naked into the night screaming at the fox. In the morning a trail of feathers, going nowhere.

**sunset fades  
and venus shines ...  
the moon is full ...  
a fox lopes  
down Empire Circuit**

I think the fox attacks followed the death of 'AB', our border collie. Before that the roosting chooks had been protected by the dog, or by her scent around the yard.

**seventeen years  
the gift of love  
required  
her collar and lead  
still hang in the laundry**

No more chooks for us. We would have to build a fox-secure run. And our focus is now on grandchildren. Frequent trips to see them in Sydney. So much easier without chooks, not having to get someone to feed and water them. But I do miss them and sometimes just hang out in the garden to listen to the neighbours' chooks burbling.

And what I've realised is that for 30 years we had minimal weeding. Free range scratching effectively kept the garden weeded. Without the chooks it's endless weeding and mulching ... for me!

**pulling weeds  
this bright spring day ...  
up they come ...  
waves of sadness  
overwhelm me**

—Gerry Jacobson



*Petal, Black Beauty, Pocahontus and Charlette Photo: Matt Mauson*

# The weather report

Average rainfall expected during spring in Canberra

The Bureau of Metrology reported on 24 September 2013 that atmospheric and oceanic indicators continue neutral—that is, neither El Niño nor La Niña.

Most weather indicators are at near average levels. Modelling by both the Bureau of Meteorology and other international agencies expect the neutral conditions to continue for the remainder of spring and summer.

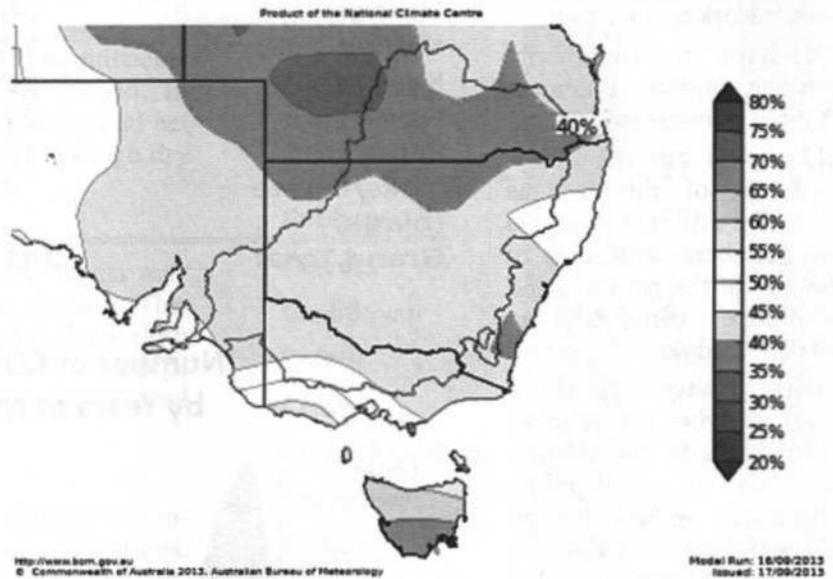
The conditions in the Indian Ocean which contributed to above-average rainfall across large parts of southern Australia during late autumn and winter have now decayed and are expected to remain neutral for the remainder of 2013.

The Bureau of Meteorology says that there is a 40 per cent chance of exceeding median rainfall in Canberra during the next three months.

## Dam levels in the Canberra Region and capital cities

	ACT storages	Murray-Darling Basin	Burren-juck Dam	Blower-ing Dam	Syd	Melb	Bris	Adel	Perth
% full	76	79	67	91	93	79	97	86	31

## Chance of exceeding the median rainfall: October to December 2013



## Permaculture courses in the Canberra region

Introduction to Permaculture 23–24 November 2013  
Australian National Botanic Gardens

Permaculture Design Certificate 2–15 March 2014  
On-Farm at 'Caroola', Mulloon

Permaculture Internship Program March–May 2014  
On-Farm at 'Caroola', 'Mulloon' and 'Jacmarall'  
Includes: animal systems, holistic management, rural skills, forest gardens, market gardens and soil biology

**These specialty short courses throughout 2014** include animal systems, holistic management, soil health, rural skills, forest gardens and market gardens.

**Book online at:** [www.permacultureexchange.org.au](http://www.permacultureexchange.org.au)  
E: [admin@permacultureexchange.org.au](mailto:admin@permacultureexchange.org.au) or  
T: Penny on 0400 165 403

COGS members get the 'early-bird' price!

Permaculture  
eXchange

## Gardeners wanted for new gardening community in Hackett

**Ross Walker Lodge** is an independent home for five adult residents with mild disabilities, supported by the St Margaret's Uniting Church in Hackett.

The lodge is only a few years old and has a considerable garden space across several large courtyards and a common area.

The residents and supporters of Ross Walker Lodge would like to invite gardening enthusiasts to come and create a thriving garden that better utilises the land and resources we have available.

Sound garden infrastructure is in place with a combination of raised and ground level garden beds, a mix of ornamental and edible plants, good fencing and rainwater tanks. Gardeners are invited to come and make the garden their own.

If you are needing a new garden plot and are interested to also create a new gardening community, please contact:

Briony Griffiths, Community Development  
UnitingCare NSW/ACT  
Ph: 0427 038 180  
Email: [bgriffiths@unitingcarenswact.org.au](mailto:bgriffiths@unitingcarenswact.org.au)

# COGS—vital statistics

Using the membership database, I've found we have about 460 members.

Excluding the 'home' members, they cultivate 241 plots, covering 9,048 square metres. That suggests the average plot is about 38 square metres, and about 1.9 people work on each plot.

We have 12 community gardens, and an unknown number of home gardeners.

Although I am much less confident of the gardens data, I've attached it to give the members some idea of the size of the gardens, and encourage conveners to correct my data.

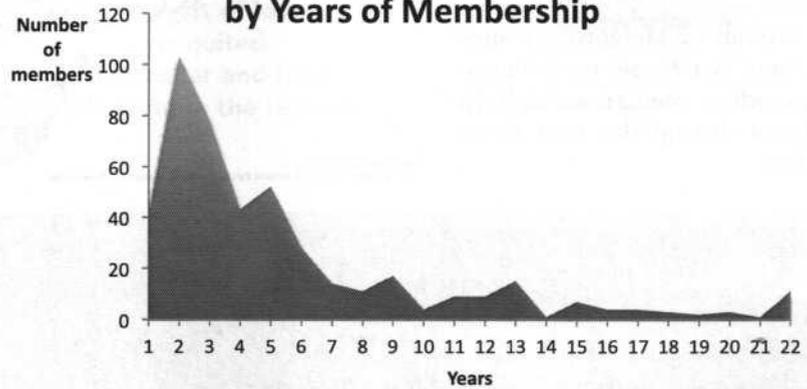
Lastly, I have attached a chart showing the number of members by the number of years of membership. This shows we have over 20 life members, and that the median number of years that a member stays is six.

That's good, because we spend about three years getting the soil working!

—Richard Horobin

Row/Labels	Values	
	Count of garden	Sum of Area (m <sup>2</sup> )
Charnwood	32	1,706
Cook	40	1,890
Cotter	19	845
Crace	12	136
Dickson	11	187
Erindale	7	120
Holder	36	2,022
Kaleen	18	601
Kambah	18	604
Northside	27	553
O'Connor	17	206
Oaks/Estate	4	31
(blank)		147
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>9,048</b>

**Number of COGS Members by Years of Membership**



Spring has sprung!  
Cherry tree pic by Sue Pavasaris



# summer planting guide

## Mulch and compost

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

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

## Heat protection

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

## Watering

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

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

## Weeds

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

## Pests

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

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

## Harvesting

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

Remember to leave space in your vegie patch for those winter vegetables that prefer to be planted in

late summer—early autumn. Brassicas and other winter crops need time to mature before the extreme cold of winter sets in.

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

S = seed sowing; T = transplanting

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

Planting times will vary for different varieties of the one vegetable eg December plantings of heading lettuce varieties should be successful; while February plantings should be the butterhead varieties.



## ACT Vegan & Vegetarian Society

### Want to help the planet, your health and millions of animals?

The ACT Vegan & Vegetarian Society welcomes new members. We provide support and information about vegan and vegetarian lifestyles, and opportunities to meet others with similar interests. We organise regular social events and workshops, including family-friendly events.

**Members also receive discounts from a variety of local restaurants and businesses.**

To find out more, or to join our free e-mail list, see our website at [www.vegact.org.au](http://www.vegact.org.au) or call 0417 464 675.

You can also find us on Facebook.



### DID YOU KNOW?

The United Nations estimates that the meat industry causes more greenhouse gas emissions than all the cars, trucks, planes and ships in the world combined.\* Producing 1 kg of beef takes between 50,000 and 100,000 litres of water, compared to 2500 for 1 kg of white rice, and much less for most fruit and vegetables.\*\*

People on a plant based diet have far less incidence of heart disease, cancer, diabetes, MS and many other diseases.\*\*

\*Livestock's Long Shadow, [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)  
\*\*Eating Up The World, [www.vegetarianvictoria.org.au](http://www.vegetarianvictoria.org.au)

## Beautiful Holiday House

Just across the road from the beach at Garden Bay, over the hill from Malua Bay surf beach.

Two minutes walk to a sandy beach good for swimming, snorkelling or teaching children to swim.

Easy drive to many other lovely beaches.

House sleeps eight, with a large fenced garden where children can play within sight.

Pets welcome.

Cool sea breeze in summer, warmer than Canberra in winter.

Reasonable rates.

Only 166 km from Canberra. Take visiting friends and relatives to see the South Coast.

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



# COGS Noticeboard

## COGS green manure mixes are available

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



This year there are two mixes available:

- Cereal and legume mix containing wheat, oats, ryecorn, field peas and vetch
- Legumes only mix containing field peas, vetch, lupins.

Seed is packaged in quantities suitable to cover about 25-30 square metres and is available at the COGS general meetings or on request.

Bulk deliveries to community gardens can also be arranged through your garden convener.

**Available for \$2 per bag as a COGS fundraiser**

## Let's talk about gardening

Did you know that you can now find COGS on Facebook? Just search for the Canberra Organic Growers Society and "like" the page to receive interesting links and tips in your newsfeed or to debate a topic.



Find us on:  
**facebook®**



## Canberra City Farm

has a new website

[canberracityfarm.wikispaces.com](http://canberracityfarm.wikispaces.com)

And while you're there, click the side menu to

check out the Urban

Agriculture Australia page.



urban  
agriculture  
AUSTRALIA

# Eco Meats

## YOUR ORGANIC BUTCHER

ORGANIC beef, veal and lamb cuts including rump, porterhouse and T-bone steaks, sausages, mince, kebabs and fillet, cutlets and chops.

ORGANIC pork and free range organic chickens

FREE RANGE GAME MEAT including emu, goat, crocodile, kangaroo, wallaby, rabbit, duck and venison

CONTINENTAL DELI including pepperoni, cabanossi, trout, salmon, cheeses, organic stock, bread, bagels, dips, salami and smoked meats

FAIR TRADE Jasper coffee

LINDSAY and EDMUNDS homemade organic chocolate



### Specialists in organic pesticide-free meats

Shop 41  
Belconnen Fresh Food Markets  
Lathlain Street, Belconnen

Open Wednesday to Sunday  
8am to 6pm

Phone 6251 9018  
Fax 6251 9017



The University of Canberra and Ricoh Australia have partnered in the **UC Green Print Centre**.

UC Green Print Centre is designed as a sustainable bulk print centre using certified carbon-neutral papers, soy-based non-toxic toners and zero-waste-to-landfill practices.

We would like to invite COGS members to use our services, which are lower-priced than elsewhere.

A4 colour print	\$0.28 each
A4 B&W print	\$0.028 each
A4 100% FSC recycled paper	\$0.02 sheet
A0 colour posters	\$26 each
Retractable banners	\$175
Trade quality paperback binding	\$5 with colour cover

We specialise in short-run printing, and can help with graphic design work too.

For your convenience, online submission is available.

# UC GREENPRINT

CENTRE

Powered  
by Ricoh

For more information,  
please see our website at  
[ucgreenprint.com](http://ucgreenprint.com)



Photo: Troy and Rebecca Lloyd

**Troy Lloyd, of Charnwood community garden,  
with his 5 kg cauliflower, fed by pigeon manure.**

Front cover photo: Matt Mawson

