

Canberra Organic



Well done (again) Holder!

Holder community garden's winning display at this year's ACT Horticultural Society's Autumn Show in March 2015.

Holder also had the winning display at the show last year and the year before.

Are we going to let them win every year, other COGS gardeners? Let's give Holder some competition next year!

Photos: Sue McCarthy



The new COGS committee

Why is there no president's report in this issue? Because sadly COGS does not currently have a president or a vice-president.

Fortunately, there is an energetic new committee and in the absence of a president we will use this space to publish a committee report.

At the Annual General Meeting on 24 March 2015, the following committee members were elected:

Secretary: Andy Hrast

Treasurer: Maarten Stapper

Membership Secretary: Jo McMillan

Magazine Editor: Sue Pavasaris

Librarian: Donna Vaughan

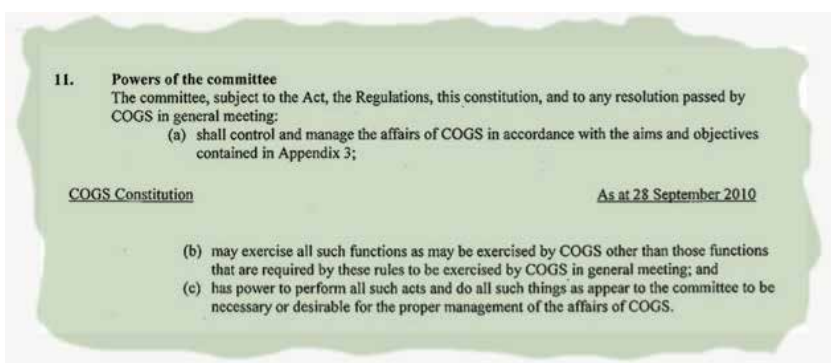
General Committee members:

Bill Chaffey, Jeannette Heycox, Richard Horobin, Glynis Kennedy,

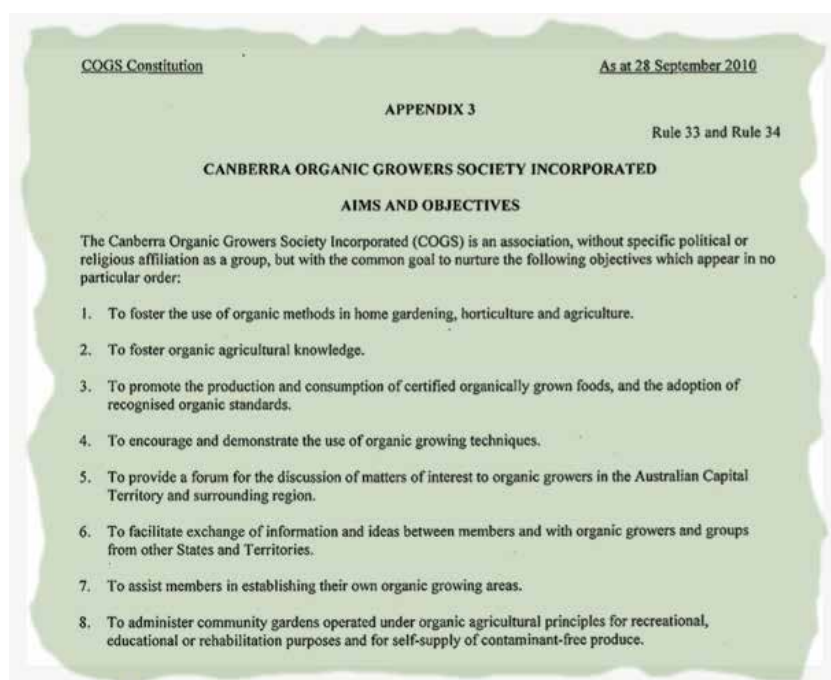
Sue McCarthy, Walter Steensby

What does the committee do?

Here are a couple of extracts from the COGS Constitution (available on our website <http://www.cogs.asn.au/about/>)



Here's a reminder of our aims and objectives as outlined in Appendix 3 mentioned above:



COGS is 'flavour of the month'!

We may have no president or vice-president at the moment, but COGS has recently been attracting a lot of publicity! *The Canberra Times'* writer Susan Parsons has written many of the articles that have been published about COGS and we are grateful to her for helping to raise awareness of organic gardening. Obviously readers are interested!

In February, COGS member Michele Barson was featured in relation to 2015 being the International Year of Soils:

<http://tinyurl.com/m6xs9jq>

Also in February, then COGS president Walter Steensby and his wife Cindy were featured:

<https://tinyurl.com/mu49chg>

In April, my French Maran and I were featured, promoting COGS and organic gardening in general:

<http://tinyurl.com/lwda8qw>

Also in April, Jo McMillan, Roger Curnow, Isabel Griggs and Theresa Rose were featured in an article about Canberrans growing their own fruit and vegetables:

<http://tinyurl.com/mk6at3k>

—Sue Pavasaris

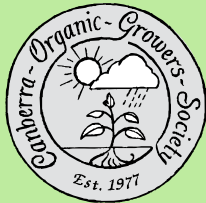


Canberra Organic is the quarterly publication of the Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.

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

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Sue McCarthy,
Jenny Clark



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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Community gardens

COGS operates 12 community gardens in the Canberra region, with the support of the ACT Government. The convenors and contact email addresses are listed below.

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Climbing beans. Photo: Heather Campbell





Isn't autumn beautiful!!!

As I was driving to work the other day I was struck by the beauty of the poplar trees. Already golden, they were shimmering. Soon they will be without leaves but for the moment they have incredible beauty.

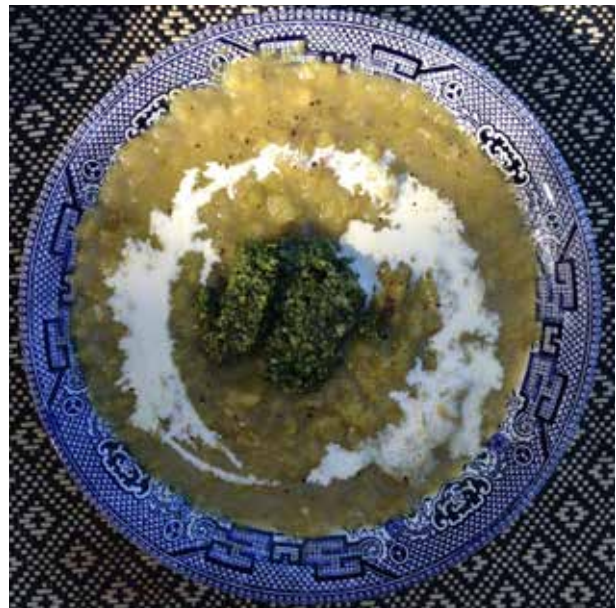
Contributions for this issue reveal COGS gardens in preparation for winter. It may be colder but there are still lots of things to grow.

Thanks so much to those who have sent in contributions. Being a member of COGS is all about sharing good ideas, from Michele's solution to snails and slugs to Sue's wonderful book review and the Slow Food lunch at O'Connor. I'm sure there are lots more good ideas from COGS gardeners so please send them in to share so we can all benefit.

In between sleety showers of rain and bursts of sunshine I've been planting garlic. We eat loads of garlic so I love to watch it grow and then harvest it in early summer.

My MASSIVE zucchini crop has finished and I am proud to say we used every last zucchini. I hate to waste good home-grown food. I found a wonderful recipe for zucchini soup that I would like to share with you. I should warn you that when I cook I neither measure nor time so you will have to use your discretion!

Zucchini soup



Method

1. Chop zucchinis, cover with water and steam until tender.
2. In a separate saucepan fry garlic and onion in olive oil until tender.
3. Mash the cooked zucchini and add to the garlic and onion with a couple of litres of stock. I'm vegetarian so I use vegetable stock. Simmer over a low heat.
4. While this is cooking make some pesto with basil leaves, olive oil, parmesan cheese and pine nuts.
5. You can purée the zucchini mixture if you like, but I like it quite chunky. Add salt and pepper to taste.
6. To assemble, ladle the zucchini soup into a bowl and stir a swirl of pesto into the middle. Add a swirl of cream and eat with crusty bread. Seriously delicious!!!!

Happy gardening!

—Sue

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This month's cover:

Borage, also known as 'starflower', is a wonderful plant to grow in your garden. Apart from looking beautiful, it attracts bees and has medicinal qualities (photo: Diana Cozadinos)



Dickson community garden

Dickson welcomed three new gardeners to our patch since the last report—Maggie, James and Veronica. All their plots are looking very lush and well tended. Thank you to the COGS committee for providing funds to purchase a new mower and wheelbarrows.

At the last working bee a no-dig berry bed was made. It has reduced considerably since its starting height of 80 cm, and planting of Waldorf blackberry and gooseberry will take place shortly. These were propagated last year from backyard stock. The Dickson gardeners will be organising another no-dig garden for perennial plants, such as rhubarb and asparagus. These beds complement the raspberry bed built a few years ago.

—Michele England
(photos and story)



Dickson's no-dig berry bed

Dickson garden solar food dryer



Ray Prowse's solar dryer

A few years ago I built a solar food dryer with the specific purpose of preserving some of the copious numbers of tomatoes I was growing. I subsequently found that many other vegetables and fruit were ideally suited to the dryer.

I searched the internet for books on solar food dryers and found a very good book titled *The Solar Food Dryer* by Eben Fodor. The book included design and assembly instructions for several different styles of dryer. I ended up selecting the one shown in the accompanying schematic.

I fabricated the dryer from relatively cheap materials; the only items I didn't compromise on were the two food trays.

Around the COGS gardens

For these I used kitchen-grade stainless steel mesh obtained from a supplier in Fyshwick. The absorber plate was cut from a sheet of black Colorbond® fencing material and, together with the glass, was sourced from Fyshwick. The box was made from marine-grade ply. I also included a digital thermometer so I could see what pattern of air flow and temperature resulted in the best drying. Eben Fodor's design includes an optional 200W light globe to provide heating when there's insufficient sun. I thought that if I was going to use electricity to dry produce I might as well do it in the oven. I didn't include the light globe.

Operation

I have used the dryer to dry my own crops of tomatoes, onion and chillies, while I purchased apples, peaches, apricots and nectarines from the Farmer's Market. All were dried successfully. The one fruit which didn't work was bananas.

There are differing schools of thought on pre-treatment of different fruits. The fruit will dry just as well if you don't pre-treat it but will be discoloured. If

you're using the fruit yourself this doesn't matter but I guess if you were trying to sell the dried produce you'd need to use a pre-treatment to ensure the good looks of the resulting product. I found that lemon juice in water was effective. This suited me well because I have a bountiful lemon tree in the backyard. After soaking for around a minute in the lemon solution, I then rinsed the fruit in cold water and it was ready to place on the drying racks. I also found that slicing the fruit into approximately 5 mm slices enabled good air flow through the fruit which resulted in good drying. If the slices were thicker the produce still dried, but it took longer.

The tomatoes needed to be peeled by dipping them into boiling water for a minute and then into cold water. The skins just about fell off. After removing the seeds I sliced the tomatoes to enable airflow through and placed them on the racks.

For all produce (fruit and vegetables) the drying time depended on both airflow and temperature. Airflow is driven by the tempera-

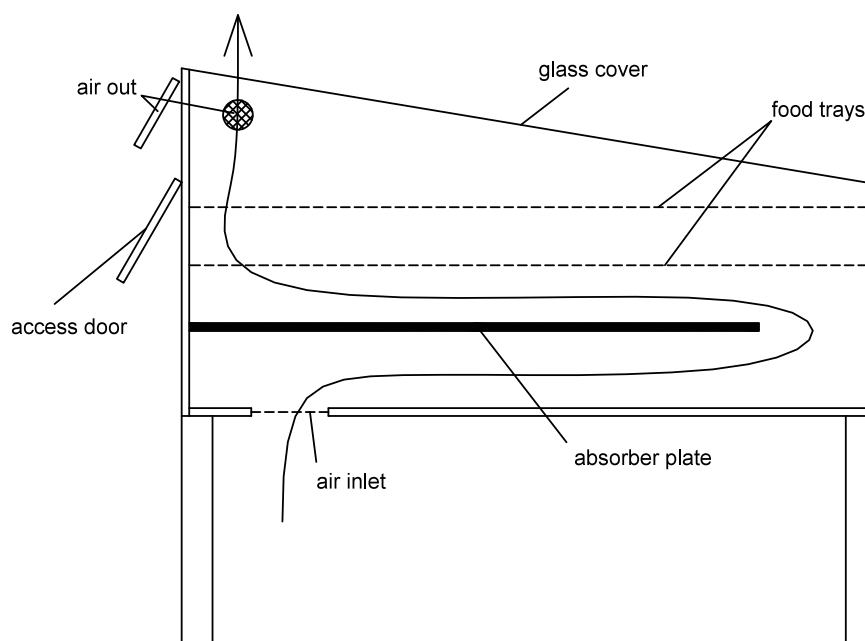
ture (hot air rises) but is aided by controlling the vent at the top rear of the enclosure. There are round fixed vents as well. It was a bit of trial and error to work out the best settings, but, on a hot day, I found that leaving the air vent fully open was best. The inlet and outlet vents are covered with fly mesh.

Generally the fruit and tomatoes took more than one day to dry and I had to keep turning the dryer so that it was facing the sun.

My best success was drying onions and chillies. These I simply cut finely, placed on sheets of kitchen towel and placed the sheets on the drying racks. Both dried in less than a day. Word of warning: after slicing chillies, wash your hands very well *before* going to the toilet!!

I live in a town house in Hackett and space is limited. After tripping over the solar dryer too many times I have relocated it to the COGS Dickson garden and have encouraged other plot holders to try it out. If COGS members from both Dickson and other gardens want to get together to discuss or inspect or use the solar dryer I'd be happy to set up a date and time to demonstrate it to others.

—Ray Prowse (story and schematic)



Solar Food Dryer Schematic

Cook community garden

At the time of writing we are having good rain which will reward all the hard working gardeners who have toiled to get their gardens ready for the autumn/winter plantings.

Garry Ridgeway, who was an instigator and founding member of the Cook Garden in 2002 (having previously gardened at Mitchell), has relinquished his plot. Along with other stalwarts of the garden, he built the pergola and was involved in erecting the

shed. I understand that while the fencing was erected by a contractor, all the works (particularly the irrigation system) within the fence were undertaken by volunteer labour and Garry was an active participant. In more recent times Garry has undertaken ground maintenance of the perimeter and is a master with the brushcutter. Garry will be sorely missed and I thank him and wish him all the best. I will particularly miss our discussions on fishing!

At a recent working bee about a dozen or so willing participants put in a couple of hours to trim trees and weed around the shed and fence line. The end result saw two ute, two trailer, and a large trailer load of prunings being taken to the green waste. Thanks to Annie, Mario and Andrew for doing the green waste run(s) and to the others who participated. As a result the garden is looking pretty ship shape.

–Mike Avent (story and photos)



The hard workers pose for a group photo

Around the COGS gardens



Greg Blood, former COGS librarian, weeding



Mario Serenelline with three 'tiny tatties'



Now that's a trailer load! (L to R) John Tuckwell, Andrew Combe, David Maish



Carl Were trimming the trees



Charnwood community garden

Charnwood gardener Thu Thu Khoe grew these amazing amaranths in the Charnwood garden. Although amaranths are usually grown in warm areas, the Canberra summer appeared to have agreed with them. The leaves are a nutritious staple vegetable in many parts of Asia but need to be eaten cooked as the raw leaves are high in nitrates and oxalic acid. A fast grower, Leaf Amaranth is also known as Chinese spinach.



(above) Thu Thu Khoe's beautiful amaranths (photos: Jo McMillan)

(left) Hot air balloon over Charnwood garden (photo: Teresa Rose)

Charwood community garden

The plot holders at the Charnwood Garden have been busy bees (including busy with bees!) at the tail end of summer and start of autumn. Many gardeners enjoyed a bountiful warm season harvest and some decent rainfall in the middle of April has assisted with garden bed preparations for the cool season. Green manure can be seen poking its way out of the soil in many of the plots. Our bee-keeping gardeners have reported fantastic honey yields this season.

Our regular garden meetings and working bees will soon slow down, due to the chill of the upcoming winter months. As a garden, we have been kept busy with our communal activities of mowing, pruning and general maintenance.

The western side of the garden has had an uplift, due to major refurbishments being made to the adjacent netball courts. We now have a brand new black panelled fence along one side of the garden. Some of our gardeners took the opportunity to remove some dead shrubs along the fence and add some mulch—it is looking good!

A group of gardeners tidied and reconfigured the frog pond, replacing the surrounding rocks, plants and mulch in the hope of attracting more frogs and beneficial insects.

In the spirit of caring and sharing, we have been collecting excess produce to be delivered each week to the charity Canberra City Care in Charnwood. Thanks to Teresa for coordinating the collection.

We are lucky enough to be regular recipients of free woodchip mulch (sometimes even delivered inside the garden ... aren't we spoilt?!), which is put to good use on the native garden beds, along the boundary fences and on garden pathways. We have been fortunate



Teresa Rose was very excited to find these sweet potatoes growing in the Charwood community garden. She had planted them as an experiment, unsure whether they'd grow in the Canberra climate. Photos by Jo McMillan

to receive donations of retractable hose kits from Hoselink. These hoses prove their value at the end of a long gardening session, when they can be packed away with the flick of a wrist! Many thanks to Hoselink for this generous donation.

Several of us attended a talk on the topic of sustainable food futures at the National Arboretum on 23 March. Speakers included media personality Indira Naidoo, Diggers founder Clive Blazey, permaculturist John Champagne, and local radio personality Graham 'Willow' Williams. Topics included community gardening, food forests and permaculture.

Charnwood Garden featured in an article on urban agriculture in *The Canberra Times* on Sunday 19 April. Thanks to Gita for allowing her plot to be photographed and to Jo, Isabel, Teresa, Gita and Roger for participating in a photo shoot and interview with the newspaper reporter. The garden and COGS was mentioned alongside the Canberra City Farm and other local groups.

The Charnwood garden currently has a full and active membership, with some stalwarts set to leave, new gardeners on board and a reasonable waiting list.

—Angela Spencer



Holder community garden

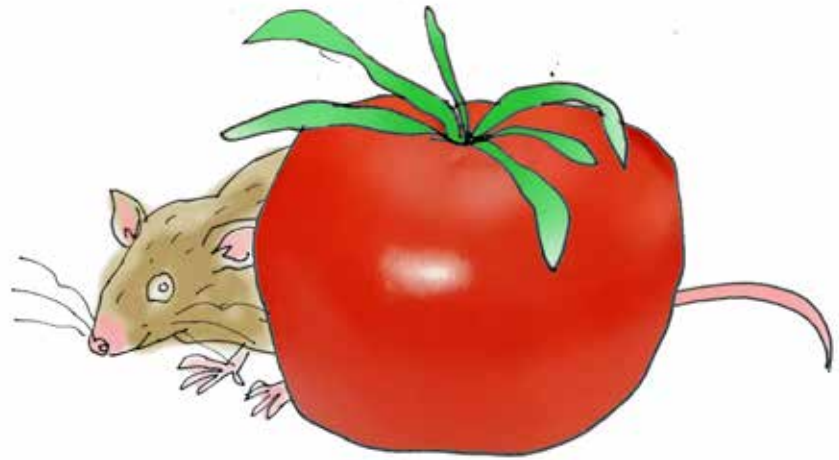
**Position vacant: Pied Piper
(experience essential)
Apply: Holder community
garden**

*'Rats! They fought the dogs and
killed the cats, and bit the babies
in the cradles ...' **

The summer and autumn growing season at Holder garden has been bountiful. Our open, sunny and well-ventilated situation has been terrific as usual for corn, pumpkins, squash, and eggplants in particular, and our beans have loved this summer's cooler and damper weather.

However ...

Our resident bush rat community has burgeoned with the available bounty. It has been a couple for the gardeners, lots and lots for the bush rats. Almost-ripe corn in



particular has been stripped bare, and our organic gardening commitment has been tested. Tomatoes are a favourite also, followed by pumpkins, and eggplants.

Traps have been useless. The rats, however, have enjoyed their nightly entrée of peanut butter

and pumpkin seeds on the traps, before moving on freely to enjoy their corn main course.

A musical solution could be the answer.

–Sue McCarthy (story and photos)

*Robert Browning – *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*

Below: Some of the Holder crops that survived the bush rats



O'Connor community garden

O'Connor garden welcomed Sam and Moira to two 22.5 square metre half-plots and the last one will be allocated shortly. This fills our garden for now as the Very Difficult Plot still needs more rehabilitation and the current consensus is that it should become a shade-tolerant communal berry patch.

Thank you Alan for resolving our waitlist! Our waitlist is now much shorter, but we do not expect new vacancies soon.

Hopefully O'Connor garden will get a beehive next spring as this suburb has lost most of its hives due to the ageing of the beekeepers over the last few years and pollination has become an issue.

A number of our gardeners have hit a sweet spot between balancing water and other management inputs and produced superb crops this summer and autumn.

O'Connor hosted a Slow Food Canberra lunch [see story on pages 12 and 13]. This was a magic early autumn day: good food in excess, not quite enough space for all who turned up and a buzz of communication. Slow Food Canberra generously contributed a Tahitian lime to add to our new citrus grove—thank you!

A new initiative has been to invite friends and waitlisters in to sharecrop.

One gardener has a baby taking up a lot of his time and my household has reduced in size. Now that the COGS insurance is less prescriptive, we have taken this opportunity to share with others. All have been required to become COGS members. Invitees have been either or both friends and on our waitlist. I now have a good neighbour and a delightful young family sharing my backyard and



Some of the food on offer at the Canberra Slow Food lunch at O'Connor community garden. See the story on pages 12 and 13. (Photo: Sue Pavasaris)

my COGS plot. Good production for three households, but we will better coordinate next year.

Perhaps this concept could be used elsewhere when plot holders are away for an extended period or need a bit of time out? We

have had wasted space in the past because of such absences.

We continue to battle the creepers, feral woody weeds, rats and possums, but thankfully little couch.

—Jenny Clark

Slow Food Canberra lunch at O'Connor community garden

A lovely late summer afternoon and a sloooow lunch were the perfect ingredients for Slow Food Canberra's visit to the O'Connor garden on Sunday 15 February.

Approximately 22 people attended the lunch, with some belonging to both COGS and Slow Food Canberra.

The event started with a talk and tour of the garden by COGS member and Slow Food member, Alan Robertson, who has a plot in the O'Connor garden. Alan talked about the history and ethos of the garden and ensured the group worked up an appetite as they inspected the prolific summer produce.

O'Connor convenor Jenny Clark together with Barbara Payne, Trish McEwan, Glen Shelley and Alan Robertson organised a lovely table setting, complete with tablecloths, crockery and glasses, as well as contributing a large frittata. Other gardeners contributed salads, pickles and platters.

Slow Food Canberra is part of an international group founded to counteract the 'fast food and fast life' concept. There is an obvious alignment between the COGS philosophy and the Slow Food principles of: good—a fresh and flavoursome seasonal diet that satisfies the senses and is part of the local culture; clean—food production and consumption that does not harm the environment, animal welfare or human health; and fair—accessible prices for consumers and fair conditions and pay for producers.

—Sue Pavasaris (story and photos)



(clockwise from above) –
 Barbara Payne and Slow Food Canberra's co-leader Ian Ryall inspect the table
 Ian Ryall with Alan Robertson
 Ian Ryall and former COGS president Walter Steensby raise their glasses to good food and great company
 Some of the delicious food at the lunch
 Where better to have lunch than in the garden?





Snails and slugs—how I stopped them chomping through my seedlings

I have tried many organic approaches to keeping snails and slugs off my seedlings in the garden. Salt is good but you have to use copious amounts and it washes away in the first decent rain. Also, salt is probably not good for overall soil health in the long run. Coffee grinds seem to work but success is not guaranteed. Perhaps the snails like their morning cuppa as much as I do.

**I have also tried beer traps
but the snails seem to enjoy a beer
and a green salad on the side.**

Wandering around the garden at night with a torch I have managed to remove a number of snails and slugs off my seedlings just as they are about to bite through that soft plump stem, but quite a few come back when I am not around. My garden has plenty of places for my slimy friends to hide, so I have a shiny new plan and I hope it works: copper bandings on barriers is my new hope. Apparently slugs and snails will get a jolt as they try to cross the copper band, and so move onto other plants not protected. That is the theory anyway.

These are the supplies needed: lots of disposable plastic bottles—1.2 litre are perfect, copper tape backed with adhesive (available from most garden centres), strong scissors and a few spare hours.

Instructions

1. Cut down the bottle into three sections so you have a middle with straight (not tapered) edges.
2. Place the copper tape around the perimeter of the bottle, near the top.
3. Place the bottle over the plant, copper at the top, and push slightly into the ground so the snails and slugs can't slither underneath. Voila, you are finished and can enjoy watching your veggies grow to maturity!

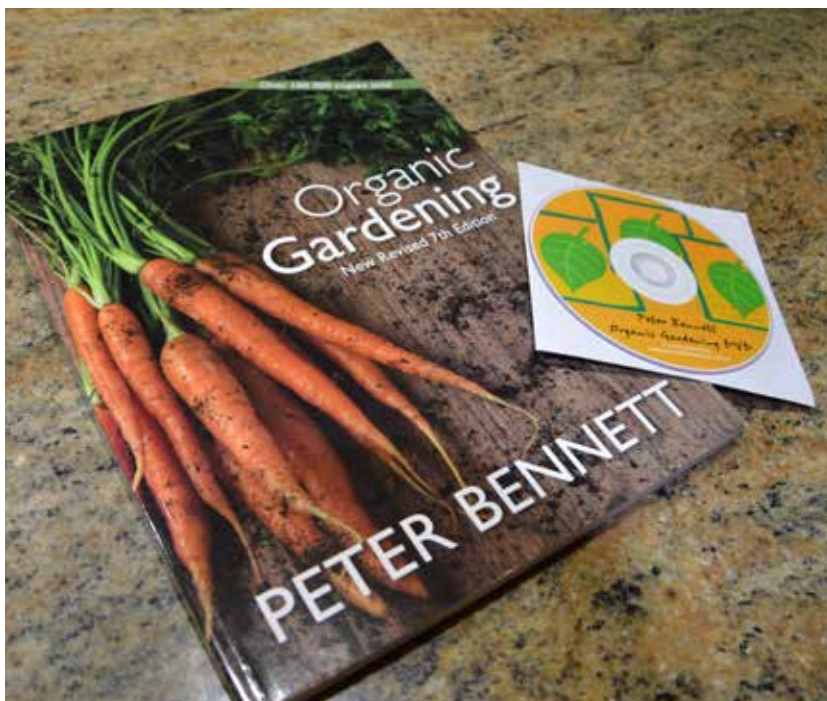
Some tips

- Follow the instructions that come with the packet of copper tape.
- Make sure that the tape doesn't get dirty as if so it will not conduct a current that deters the snail or slugs as they try to cross.

—Michele England (story and photos)

[Editor's note: Michele, I have another weapon for the fight against snails and slugs—my chooks!]





Organic Gardening

**(new revised 7th edition)
by Peter Bennett**

A hundred and sixty thousand gardeners cannot all be so misguided as to have purchased a book with such a standard sounding title, you would think, unless the author delivered on those often-used words 'organic' and 'gardening'. The good news is, it is a fabulously informative book and you don't even have to buy it, as it is already in the COGS library. The even better news is that I found it so good that I proceeded to buy my own, hence the library copy is back in circulation. And if you do buy your own you can get a DVD as well, in which the author demonstrates some hands-on tips.

Peter Bennett is an Adelaide gardener and educator, nearly as old now as my aged mum, but much younger when he wrote the first edition of this book. He is much more opinionated than

her about most gardening-related topics though, often going against accepted wisdom but providing his own reasons or justification.

The book is organised into seven main chapters: The Life of the Garden, The Living Soil, Preparation and Maintenance of An Organic Garden, Fertilisers, Poisonous Chemicals and the Alternatives, Composting, and Cultivating Your Plants.

The stand-out chapters for me are The Life of the Garden (nearly 50 pages devoted mainly to invertebrates but with a small section on vertebrates, even including our beloved reptiles) and The Living Soil (soil structure and analysis). The author is practical, but does not flinch from presenting the science. Now I know the meanings of endosmosis, exosmosis, plasmolysis and synergism, and not just for the Scrabble board!

In particular, the photos and other visual aids in The Life of the Garden chapter should help COGS gardeners to recognise the many organisms with which they share their garden plots—spiders, ants, bees, wasps, dragon flies,

lacewings, flies, sucking bugs, beetles, praying mantises, earwigs, wood lice, the very long list goes on and on.

In The Living Soil, the author looks at the interaction of essential elements in the soil, and the way they exert 'stimulating' and 'antagonistic' effects on each other. He also outlines the role of specific mineral elements such as cobalt, copper and magnesium.

The Composting and Cultivating Your Plants chapters are great reading too, but to a degree offer a less unique perspective. Most of us have gardening books already that provide cultural notes and outline essential conditions, methods and management of compost.

What I love about this book is it is imbued with the author's personality and perspective, and to the extent he has prejudices I suspect I share them.

He is certainly on the COGS wavelength when addressing fertilisers and chemical pesticides, and outlining how to prepare and maintain an organic garden.

Five stars, David.

Yes, I agree, Margaret—five stars.

Organic Gardening (new revised 7th edition) by Peter Bennett, published in Australia by New Holland Publishers Australia Pty Ltd 2006, 2010

ISBN 9781877069109

The book and DVD can be purchased direct from the author at:

www.peterbennettorganics.com.au/store/product_category_1.htm

Product name: Organic Gardening Manual \$45.00 (inc postage/delivery)

Product name: Organic Gardening DVD \$22.95 (inc postage/delivery)

—Sue McCarthy (review and photo)

COGS climate change submission

The ACT Government runs a *Time to Talk* website where they seek the opinions of the public on a wide variety of matters. A recent topic was climate change adaptation, ‘... how we build the resilience of our city and lifestyles to climate change’.

The website is still available, although the submission period has closed:

<http://www.timetotalk.act.gov.au/consultations/?engagement=have-your-say-on-climate-change-adaptation>

You might like to read COGS Committee’s submission below.

Climate change adaptation

Strategy: promote community gardens, city farms and urban agriculture in the ACT

The Canberra Organic Growers Society is of the opinion that in relation to climate change, a significant adaptive strategy is to localise the food economy to the greatest extent possible. Please consider:

- a. Something like 90% of Canberra’s food supply comes from outside the ACT and almost all of this arrives by road transport.
- b. Every litre of fuel not used on transport reduces greenhouse gas emissions and our reliance on fuel imports.
- c. While crude oil prices are dropping at the moment (March 2015), it is unknowable how long this trend will continue. It can be only a matter of time before fuel prices return to their former levels and go beyond them. Fuel substitutes, if and when they become available, will not necessarily be any cheaper. We should plan for the worst case.
- d. The sooner fresh foodstuffs reach their markets, the better the quality of the food.
- e. It is preferable to keep supply lines as short as possible to reduce both transportation fuel usage and transportation costs/time.
- f. Community gardens and urban agriculture in the

ACT should concentrate on growing fruits, vegetables and crops most suited to the soils and climate of our region. Certain produce cannot be grown economically in the region or at all, e.g. tropical fruits, and it is obvious that complete local self-sufficiency is not possible.

- g. Liaison with the surrounding region of NSW should be an integral part of food planning and production, e.g. the Regional Development Association, Southern Inland (RDASI).

Many related and significant issues were brought out and discussed at the Food Security Ministerial Roundtable hosted by Shane Rattenbury on 22/5/2014. COGS supports the goals and aspirations of his subsequent Ministerial Statement of 17/2/2015, and in particular its recognition of the critical role that a broad urban network of well-run community gardens can play.

–Walter Steensby



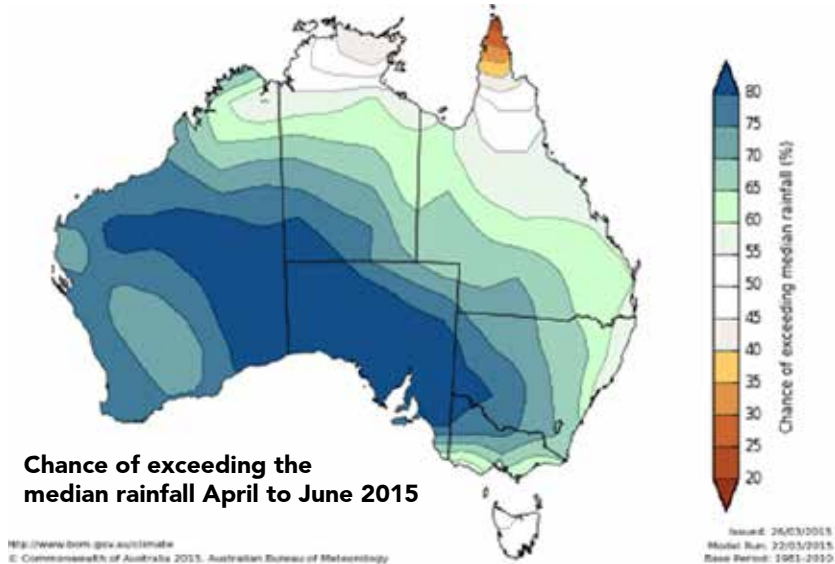
Photo collage: Matt Mawson

Recent warming of Pacific Ocean could be early indication of El Niño

The Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) in its 31 March 2015 update on El Niño has warned that the recent warming of the tropical Pacific Ocean has primed it for the development of El Niño. However, BOM also says that an El Niño does not always develop from the ocean trends currently observed.

International climate models monitored by BOM predict that the central tropical Pacific Ocean is likely to continue to warm with El Niño thresholds being reached or exceeded by mid-year. Fortunately, the accuracy of model outlooks at this time of year is lower than for at other times of the year.

The Bureau's Tracker remains at El Niño WATCH status. This means that when current observations and model outlooks are con-



sidered together, there is about a 50 per cent chance of El Niño developing in the coming months, which is twice the normal likelihood.

In the shorter-term, much of Australia is likely to have a wetter-than-average April to June. The major influence for the rainfall outlook over this period is the warmer than normal sea surface temperatures in the Indian Ocean and surrounding much of the Australian coastline.

–Andy Hrast

Dam levels in the Canberra Region and capital cities

	ACT storages	Murray-Darling Basin	Burrinjuck Dam	Blowering Dam	Syd	Melb	Bris	Adel	Perth
% full	80	40	32	29	83	71	96	53	24

Summer Will Come Again

July
is the coldest month
grey mornings
from the bus ... ah ...
the first flowering tree

far too cold
to garden today
I reach
for the seed catalogue
and garden tomorrow

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

foggy morning
numb hands in the soil
planting out
red onions
dreaming of summer salads

just before
this frosty dawn
Orion
rises in the east
summer will surely come again

– Gerry Jacobson






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Recipe: Tomato jam and tomato sauce

I had a bumper crop of several varieties of tomato this summer, and felt very daunted by what to do with all of them. After making the usual chutneys, strained sauces and serums, and using the dehydrator for days there were still many tomatoes remaining. My 87-year-old mother suggested I try my hand at making an old favourite from her days as a child in Queensland—tomato jam.

I found an old recipe book I've had since the 1970s—the *Cordon Bleu Book of Jams, Preserves and Pickles* by Rosemary Hume and Muriel Downes—and from its now brown and aged pages I found a recipe that helped me reduce 30 large tomatoes to two medium sized jars of the most delicious tomato jam. Here's the recipe, plus an adaptation I came up with for a really yummy tomato sauce.

—Deborah Hamilton (text, photos and recipes)

Tomato Jam

Ingredients

6 lbs tomatoes [about 2.7 kilos]

6 lbs sugar [about 2.7 kilos]

10 tablespoons lemon juice, the rind of 2 lemons or 2 level teaspoons of powdered tartaric or citric acid



What I used as ingredients instead

I used the 30 tomatoes I had, weighed them and then adjusted the sugar quantity down as I used a caster sugar/stevia [sugar substitute] mix so less sugar was needed. I didn't have enough lemons so I used the rind and juice from the three lemons I had and added a teaspoon of citric acid.

Method

1. Scald tomatoes to loosen skin, allow to cool, remove skin, slice the flesh and put into a pan (not copper).
2. Add lemon juice, rind, acid and simmer until pulpy.
3. Warm the sugar and add it to the tomato/lemon pulp, stir until dissolved.
4. Then boil rapidly until the jam will set on testing.
5. Turn into warm, clean jars and seal.

The jam took quite a while to set and I stayed close to the pot so it didn't burn or discolour. The result is a beautiful translucent jam with a real tang.

Tomato sauce adaption

I used the same ingredients and method as for the jam, but I reduced the sugar further and I added torn basil leaves from a good bunch of basil, white wine vinegar (not too much—test by taste), and a little rock salt and white finely ground pepper. This sauce is really good!

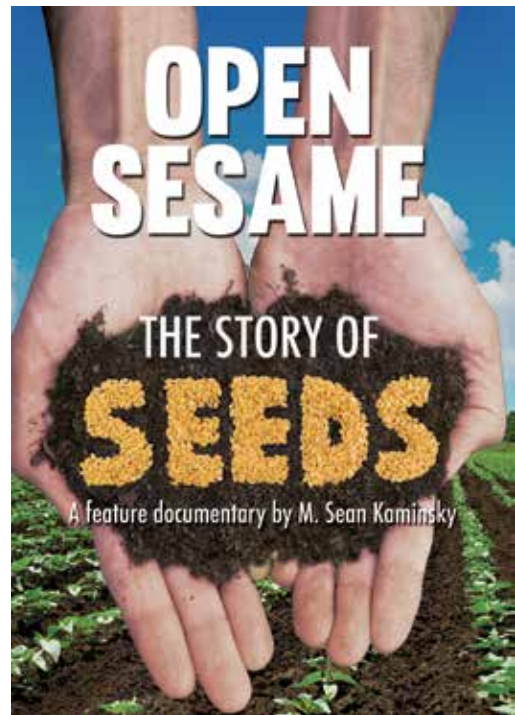
COGS monthly meeting speakers

Please come to these meetings if you are new to organic gardening and have questions about the principles and practice in our gardens. You are welcome to bring a friend.
Speaker information provided by Donna Vaughan and Jane Vincent.

24 May—Film: *Open Sesame: The Story of Seeds*

This timely and emotionally moving documentary by filmmaker and writer Sean Kaminsky, illuminates what is at stake and what can be done to protect the source of nearly all our food: SEEDS. According to the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), approximately 90 per cent of the fruit and vegetable varieties that existed 100 years ago no longer exist today. Maintaining seed biodiversity allows us to breed new varieties that are resistant to pests or thrive in temperature extremes. This is essential in a changing climate.

Meanwhile, corporations are co-opting seed genetics using patent law. In the past, seeds were a shared resource not unlike the water we drink or the air we breathe. Today, corporate-owned seed accounts for 82 per cent of the worldwide market. In this film you will meet a diverse range of individuals whose lives centre around seeds: farmers, renegade gardeners, passionate seed savers, artists, seed activists. This film tells the story of seeds by following their challenges and triumphs as they work to save this precious resource.



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28 June—Alison Elvin
Wildly Wilful Weeds and their Management

Sunday 28 June at 2 pm, Alison Elvin will be discussing the characteristics of common garden weeds, and explaining why they grow where they grow. She will then examine their intrinsic value to the gardener and producer, and suggest a variety of chemical-free control methods.

With tertiary qualifications in ecology, environmental science and herbal medicine, and decades of work in the environmental and agricultural sector, Alison has a passion for understanding the holistic relationships between soil, water, air and living organisms.

She is a director with Natural Capital Pty Ltd and for many years has delivered highly successful workshops throughout southern NSW, ACT, and northern Victoria. The workshops focus on such topics as natural resource management and sustainable production, integrated weed management, whole farm planning, and riparian and wetland rehabilitation.

All participants are encouraged to bring along plants on the day for identification and discussion.

[Ed: Jane says Alison is a wonderfully entertaining speaker so it should be a great afternoon.]

26 July—Dr Maarten Stapper
Healthy Soil—Healthy Food—Healthy People

COGS: why are we organic? What is organic? What are the roles of compost and soil carbon? How do we generate and maintain healthy soils for healthy food?

Soils are the foundation of life on earth and continuous use of synthetic fertilisers and chemicals affects life in the soil, reduces plant health and lowers food quality. A healthy, living soil is self-organising and endeavours to optimise plant growth by making plants more resistant to diseases and insects, and less susceptible to environmental conditions, while achieving higher nutrient density produce. Maarten will mention some products he is using to support this process.

Maarten will also talk about the reasons behind the continued lack of acceptance that organic food is healthier. Organic food is produced in complex biological systems characterised by symbiosis, interdependence, and resulting in synergies which are difficult to quantify with

PLEASE NOTE
All Sunday afternoon events start at 2 pm, including the film for the May meeting (which had been advertised as having a 2.30 pm start in the autumn issue of *Canberra Organic*).

current scientific methodologies. However, more and more scientific evidence is being published.

An important skill gardeners, farmers, consumers and scientists need to (re)develop and use is the capacity to be bio-sensitive: that is, to trust nature and to be in tune with and respectful of the processes of life; developing that 'green thumb' or having a 'gut feeling'.

Maarten featured in the ABC Australian Story 'Back to Earth' in 2009. Read more about the story and his work at :

www.drmaartenstapper.com.au.

23 August—Ross Bennett
Snakes and snakebite first aid

The Director of the Australian Reptile Centre, Canberra, Ross Bennett is well known to many Canberrans through his previous role as a Ranger and Wildlife Officer with the ACT Parks and Conservation Service, his 'Snake Tales' presentations to schools and community groups over many years, and the recent publication of his book *Reptiles and Frogs of the Australian Capital Territory*. His commitment and knowledge stem from a lifetime of hands-on experience with reptiles across Australia and overseas.

Find out more at this fascinating and timely pre-snake season talk.

An eastern brown snake in the chookhouse. The eastern brown is regarded as the second most venomous land-based snake and is known for its speed and aggression. Photo: Matt Mawson



Permaculture courses in the Canberra region

Preserving with vinegar and sugar with Ruth Gaha-Morris

Weekend course 25 and 26 July

Educator Training Workshop with Helen Lynch

One Day September 27 at Caroola Farm

Bee Keeping Course with Bees R Us at Caroola Farm

One Day course 20 October

More information and online bookings at:
www.permacultureexchange.org.au
E: admin@permacultureexchange.org.au
T: Penny on 0400 165 403

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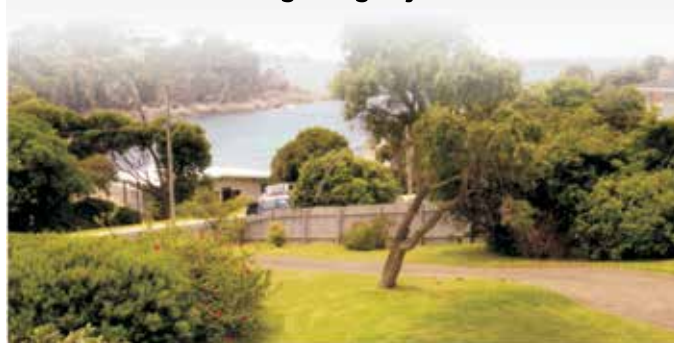
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1/8 page	\$9 (\$7)	\$30 (\$25)
1/4 page	\$18 (\$15)	\$60 (\$50)
1/2 page	\$36 (\$30)	\$120 (\$100)
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Please contact editor@cogs.asn.au

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Canberra Organic Growers Society MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Please contact members@cogs.asn.au with any enquiries

Member details—Please print clearly, especially your email address

A membership year runs from September 1st of the current year to August 31st of the following year.

Adult 1 First name _____
Surname _____
Occupation _____

Adult 2 First name _____
Surname _____
Occupation _____

Child 1 Name _____
Age _____

Child 2 Name _____
Age _____

Child 3 Name _____
Age _____

Child 4 Name _____
Age _____

Address Street _____
Suburb/Town _____
State _____ P/code _____

Phone Home _____
Mobile _____

Email address _____

Receive COGS magazine by email or post?
(tick relevant box)

Volunteer details

COGS is a volunteer organisation and thus relies entirely on volunteers for its continued operation.

As a member, in which areas would you be prepared to volunteer some time or skills?

Garden plot request

For which garden(s) do you want to be on the waiting list? _____

Membership agreement and signature

I agree to follow the rules of COGS during my membership.

(signature) _____ Date / /

Payment details

Memberships are for a family unit of one or two adults and their children under 18 years of age.

Full membership costs \$30, Concession membership costs \$18.

Concessions are available to Healthcare card holders, pensioners and full-time students.

Both adults must be eligible for the concession rate to apply AND evidence must be provided.

An additional joining fee of \$5 (\$3 for concessions) applies to all new memberships. This only need be paid ONCE.

Applications will be sent back if there is no reference for direct deposits.

Member	Full	Concession
New	<input type="checkbox"/> \$35.00	<input type="checkbox"/> \$21.00
Renewal	<input type="checkbox"/> \$30.00	<input type="checkbox"/> \$18.00

Please send your completed application and payment (no cash) to:

The Membership Secretary,
Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.
PO Box 347
DICKSON ACT 2602

Payment by direct deposit to

Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.
Westpac Bank, Petrie Plaza, Canberra

BSB 032-719

Account 291247

Date / /

Reference _____ (please use your surname)

Payment by cheque/money order to

'Canberra Organic Growers Society' or 'COGS'

Payment attached to completed application

Direct deposit is the preferred payment method.

COGS Administration only

Membership No. _____ Bank ID _____ Receipt No. _____



winter planting guide

VEGETABLES

Asparagus

Prepare the bed before you buy the crowns to plant in late winter/early spring. Since this is a perennial crop which can last for up to 20 years it is well worth the effort of establishing properly. Asparagus needs good drainage and plentiful food and can be planted very successfully in a raised bed enriched with compost and well rotted manure. Seaweed is an excellent mulch.

The crowns are planted in a trench, but with the roots straddling a ridge. Cover so dormant shoots are about 4 cm below the surface. Do not harvest spears the first year, and only harvest for a few weeks the second year.

Remember this is a long-term investment.

Broad beans

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

Kohlrabi

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

Lettuce

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

Onions

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

Peas

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

Rhubarb

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

Other possibilities

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

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

Frost-sensitive vegetables such as capsicum, eggplant and tomatoes can be started early in August indoors

but may need a heated glasshouse or warm spot to germinate and will certainly need protection before being planted out in spring.

FRUIT

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

Strawberries

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

Berries

Raspberries, youngberries, boysenberries etc can be planted during winter while they are dormant.

Remember, these bear fruit on canes grown in the previous year so to prune remove all the old canes in autumn or winter making sure to leave the current season's growth for next year's fruit. Autumn fruiting raspberries bear on the current year's growth so are cut to the ground in winter after they have fruited.

Currants

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

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

S = seed sowing; T = transplanting

What's On



COGS monthly meetings 2015

Location: Majura Community Centre,
Rosevear Place, Dickson

Sunday 24 May

Film screening: Open Sesame:
The Story of Seeds

Sunday 28 June

Speaker: Alison Elvin

Sunday 26 July

Speaker: Dr Maarten Stapper

Sunday 23 August

Speaker: Ross Bennett

Please note:
the starting
time for these
events is 2 pm

Want to share your stories with the Australian gardening community?

COGS received this message in February 2015 ...

My message is about: Community gardens

Name: Frith Kennedy

Email: kennedy.frith@abc.net.au

With Gardening Australia once again starting up this March (Saturday, March the 7th at 6.30pm) we're keen to get gardening groups from around the country more involved than ever before.

We'd like to encourage you and your members to share your photos, stories, tips and queries with our gardening community on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. Please see the links below.

PLEASE NOTE—Whilst some of our staff members have returned for 2015, our social media won't be 'live' until we return to air.

If you're interested in joining the conversation, we'd love to hear from you.

However, please also be aware that the ABC cannot recommend or endorse commercial products or businesses—however, we are able to support government and not-for-profit groups.

*Good luck and happy gardening,
Frith Kennedy @ The GA Team*



Want to contribute?

We'd love to hear from you!
Please send contributions to:
editor@cogs.asn.au

	Deadline	Published
Autumn	mid-January	mid-February
Winter	mid-April	mid-May
Spring	mid-July	mid-August
Summer	mid-October	mid-November

Gourmet Mushroom Propagation



Canberra City Farm will be holding a full-day gourmet mushroom propagation course on Sunday 7 June.

The course will be run by Tasmanian mushroom expert Will Borowski.

Numbers are limited.
Email canberracityfarm@gmail.com for more details.

Dawn of farming sparked speed-evolution in weeds

19 November 2014 by Colin Barras
(New Scientist, issue 2996)

IT DIDN'T take long. Just a few thousand years after humans began to domesticate crops, a wide variety of weeds had adapted to exploit the new farmlands – with some species seeming to have evolved, like crops, to be completely dependent on cultivated land.

Given the chance, weeds will take root in most agricultural settings. Today their presence lowers crop yields by 10 per cent globally, causing losses of tens of billions of dollars in profits each year.

Want to read more? Andy Hraat thought COGS readers might be interested in this fascinating article. Canberra Organic has written to request permission for the whole article to appear, but we have not received a reply from New Scientist. However, you can access the article for your personal use at:

<https://tinyurl.com/nemo4my>

NewScientist

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