

Canberra Organic



Canberra Organic Growers Society

Think-tank meeting

Sunday 19 July 2015

Facilitator: Mike Avent

The organic movement endeavours to provide an alternative to modern industrial agriculture's dependence on synthetic fertilisers, fungicides, herbicides and genetic modification. Organic growers use natural means for improving and preserving our soils to produce nutritious, less contaminated food. The soil, enriched with compost, manure, green manure and mulches, and using companion planting, produces healthy plants which resist pest attacks and disease.

COGS has a devolved management structure with each garden managing its own affairs through an elected garden committee chaired by a garden convenor.

The gardens manage their affairs within a framework (Constitution, policies, rules and conventions) guided by the central executive of COGS (i.e. the COGS Executive) which has responsibility for corporate management, membership, finances and setting the strategic direction.

Despite the devolution of management to individual gardens, financial management is tightly controlled by the COGS Executive. The COGS Constitution requires ALL expenditure to be approved by the COGS Executive although there is provision for routine expenditures to be made in advance of approval. The COGS Executive has recently agreed to increase to \$200 the level of expenditure by garden convenors prior to approval.

As a new committee member and lifelong passionate gardener I see a number of opportunities for COGS to develop ...

What is COGS?

- Garden club?
- Garden manager?
- Organic advocate?
- Teacher?
- Community garden advocate?
- Environment advocate?
- Food industry advocate?
- All of the above?

Foreseeable and possible future trends— how do we anticipate and respond to:

- Canberra's growing population
- Canberra's aging population
- Increased number of apartment dwellers—increasing demand for community gardens
- Increased competition for existing garden space and for suitable sites for expansion
- Climate change
- Increased water costs

Organisations change—they start, end, evolve, change; they rarely stay the same.

COGS has four broad administrative streams:

- Membership
- Plot management
- Corporate administration
- Communication and education

Are you good with financial management, web management or administration?
Community organisations rely on volunteers to help out and it can be very rewarding being a part of the management and decision-making processes knowing that you are helping the COGS committee undertake its important work in providing services to its members.

Moving forward—COGS committee has a ‘think-tank’

Every now and then it’s useful for organisations, big or small, to take time out and discuss where they see themselves now and in the future.

This is exactly what happened on Sunday 19 July, when COGS committee members and some convenors—Mike Avent, Bill Chaffey, Jenny Clark, Michele England, Jeannette Heycox, Andy Hrast, Glynis Kennedy, Jo McMillan, Sue Pavasaris, Maarten Stapper, Walter Steensby and Terry Williams—met from 10 am until 3 pm.

Mike facilitated the meeting and, in a break from the hard work, the group enjoyed a delicious lunch provided by Glynis with crockery and cutlery provided by Jenny.

COGS is in a good place in terms of its financial position, level of expertise in organic gardening, and the knowledge and management of the individual gardens. Of concern are the transition of gardeners/members into having a greater involvement in the management of COGS, the current lack of a president and vice president, and the development of our main interface with the public—our website. Also of concern is the lack of induction kits for garden convenors and

garden plot holders and Glynis has undertaken to put the kits together.

It was generally agreed that the workload associated with the president and vice president can be excessive and that COGS would benefit from a specific role for a garden coordinator. The position would provide advice and assistance to garden convenors and garden management committees on the management of the various gardens, and take some of the workload off other executive positions. This, of course, will be put to the membership for approval.

A group has been established to review the COGS website with the aim of increasing its educational, managerial and accessibility capability. In the absence of more volunteers the committee is considering the viability of outsourcing some of the more basic and time-consuming administrative tasks associated with the running of COGS. One of the first steps in moving forward is to canvass the COGS membership to see if there are members who may be interested in playing a role on the COGS committee.

—COGS think-tank group



Payment of 2015–16 fees for membership and plots

Please wait for an invoice to arrive before paying the fees that cover our next financial year from 1 September 2015 to 31 August 2016. Some of you have already paid and thus won’t receive an invoice.

All finance data and membership information have been merged into the online MYOB AccountRight database. This allows generating one invoice for each member with their membership fee and, if appropriate, plot fees for all plot number holdings in the named garden.

The invoice will show your Member Number, total amount due and bank details. It must be paid via Direct Deposit to our bank account with Member Number as the reference, or by cheque to our postal address. The last day for payment is 30 September 2015.

* * *

Please contact me if you have any questions about the invoice.

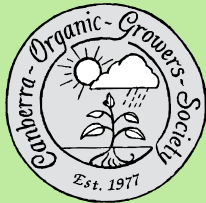
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Canberra Organic is the quarterly publication of the Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.

It celebrates organic gardening, local produce, sustainability and information 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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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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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



Editor's note

Hello everyone! It's always nice to produce the spring issue of the magazine as it is a reminder that spring is just around the corner.

Not that winter is unproductive in the garden: as the contents show, COGS gardeners have been busy growing all sorts of things, often making them into delicious recipes. Who could resist Heather Campbell's delicious cabbage pancakes, or Elizabeth Dangerfield's winning ways with peas? Kambah garden shows that with a bit of effort and innovation it's even possible to grow subtropical vegetables in Canberra.

Spring is also an opportunity for new beginnings and the COGS committee spent some time on Sunday 19 July talking about what we do and what we

could do better. Many gardeners say they 'just want to garden' but there still needs to be a committee prepared to do the administrative things that make it possible for COGS members to garden. Please consider taking a turn to help out.

The committee would also like hear your thoughts: Are there things COGS does well or not so well? What sort of things would you like to see in the magazine or on the website? Do you attend the monthly talks by different speakers or would you like other activities? Please let your garden convenor know your thoughts or email them to editor@cogs.asn.au and I can table them at the COGS committee meetings.

There's lots of information to get your spring garden going in this issue. Bill Chaffey shows you how to give your precious seedlings the best start, and once they are growing you can keep the weeds under control using tips from June speaker, Alison Elvin's integrated weed management strategies. Holder garden proves that it is possible to successfully move a mature fruit tree—all you need is a bit of know-how and some special extras, like a couple of 'Lesleys'. Sadly there are no obvious solutions to stop O'Connor garden's moshpitting possums ...



The promise of spring has also prompted my Araucanas to start laying their perfect blue and green eggs. Happy gardening!

—Sue

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This month's cover:

What do you do with summer's excess tomato crop? Make passata of course! Crace community gardeners enjoyed their second successful passata-making day on 15 March. Read full story on page 6.

We need your input!

Please send any comments, articles, photos, news items, event information or recipes to

Canberra organic

Email: editor@cogs.asn.au
Post: PO Box 347 Dickson ACT 2602.



Dickson community garden

Dickson has been quiet over winter, though harvests are still taking place and plants continue to grow, albeit slowly.

Thank you to the COGS committee for providing funds to purchase a new whipper snipper. This will be very useful at our spring working bee.

The no-dig beds are looking great. They have reduced considerably and will be ready for planting in early spring. This is how they were made.

Step 1:

Collection of materials—brown, green and special. Brown materials or high carbon materials include newspapers (available from the recycling depots or newsagencies), lucerne, hay or dry leaves. Green materials or high nitrogen materials include animal manures like sheep, cow, chicken, fresh lawn clippings and non-invasive weeds.

‘Specials’ include soil improvers like lime, blood and bone, worm castings and compost.

Step 2:

No need to dig, just start layering like a giant deli sandwich—green followed by brown followed by special. Each layer should be about 3–5 cm thick but the special should just be a scattering (a handful to each square metre), though compost can be laid on thicker than this. After each layer sprinkle the pile well with water or some weak worm juice solution. It is very important that there are no dry spots in the pile. Keep building layers until the pile is at least 80 cm high (see photos).

Step 3:

Sit back and read a book on what to plant. Give the pile at least six weeks to start breaking down; longer is preferable. The pile will reduce significantly in this time.



Step 4:

Continue to top up the pile from time to time using the same method as for building—green, brown, special. The plants love it and the living soil does too.

There is also an excellent book on the no-dig method, available from

the library at each monthly meeting, hosted at the Majura Centre. Come along to the next one and look through the library, enjoy an informative talk and a cuppa with like-minded people afterwards.

—Michele England (story and photos)

Charnwood community garden

There are lots of signs of green (and human) life at the Charnwood garden, as we creak and groan through the crispy coldness of the winter months. As all Canberra gardeners know, there is still the opportunity to grow an array of produce successfully, despite the freezing temperatures and blankets of frost each morning. The slower pace of growth allows us to rejuvenate from the busier, warmer months and concentrate on carefully selecting vegetables that will grow over winter.

Plot holders at the Charnwood garden are therefore growing silverbeet, kale, onions, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, beetroot, garlic and more. Certainly silverbeet and kale seem to relish the freezing temperatures to produce a thicker, more resilient and crunchy leaf!

While social gatherings and working bees have slowed down slightly over the colder months, the garden is looking neat and tidy. A new back fence was erected by the netball club prior to winter, and is proving to be a more attractive and stronger alternative to the old fence. Thanks also to COGS for funding a new section of our side fence, which badly needed replacement.

We also have a rejuvenated frog pond, after two attempts to empty it and dig up the surrounding rocks and replacing the pond liner (pictures below). The area looks beautiful as it awaits the arrival of frogs and beneficial insects.

The Charnwood gardeners are also making decisions about plot sizes and what to grow for spring, as we head towards the end of the gardening year (from COGS' perspective!) at the end of August.

—Angela Spencer (story);
Jo McMillan (photos)

With a new pond liner at the ready, the second attempt at refurbishing the pond is successful





Crace community garden's second passata day

Following the success of Crace's first passata-making day on 22 March 2014, they did it all again on Sunday 15 March 2015 with great success.

Over 25 garden members and their families made their way to the garden to try their hand at the art of passata-making on what turned out to be a spectacular autumn day.

Passata is a fantastic way of using all of those late-blooming and leftover tomatoes to create a tasty and useful ingredient for sauces, pastas, casseroles and more.

This year's passata was lovingly cut, strained, boiled down and bottled from a combination of around 20 kilograms of leftover tomatoes from plot holders' gardens, and supplemented with approximately 7 kilograms of externally sourced Roma tomatoes. Not a drop of the produce was wasted as both the passata and the leftover tomato juices (which can be used for stock and flavouring) were bottled with help coming even from some of the youngest garden members.

Crace community garden plot holder and local chef, Josh Marks, led the troupe of eager gardeners in preparation and cooking of the passata, providing tips on how to best use the produce in recipes at home. Members also enjoyed a spectacular sausage sizzle and samples of fellow gardeners' home-made baked goods.

**As the garden continues to grow,
so does friendship among the
gardeners at Crace.**

This year's passata-making day contributes to this positive, inclusive and cooperative community, providing yet another fantastic opportunity for conversation and collaboration between plot holders.

The success of this year's passata-making day will ensure it returns again towards the end of next year's tomato season with the hope of breaking the production record once more.

—Alex Carder (story); John Atwood, Alex Carder, Nicole Atwood (photos)

*Garden members of all ages contributed
to the passata bottling process*



Kambah community garden

While this is the first article to appear in the magazine this year I am happy to report that the Kambah community garden is in great shape; not just in the garden environment but in the connections and goodwill between us and the success of our community activities.

After a very successful summer growing season across the garden many of the plot holders have put their gardens to rest with green-manuring and mulching. However, there remains a lot of winter planting of a diverse range of vegetables including our favourites—kale, broccoli, cauliflower, cime di rapa, Japanese turnips, daikon, Tokyo Bekana cabbage, beets, leeks, onions, garlic, peas and broad beans. For some of us, a slightly later planting in April and May has meant that growth through the cold months has been slow but we should start picking mid- to late-August, if not before. We can hardly wait to start enjoying the flavour of our freshly picked broccoli, cime di rapa, kale, spinach and all the other winter greens.

In May and June we welcomed three new gardeners who live locally, and their enthusiasm for organic gardening—even in winter—is very encouraging. All new gardeners get a full briefing on the operations of the garden at the outset and assigned plots that are clean and dug over. They know how much this helps.

Namadgi preschoolers visiting the Kambah community garden



Tamil vegetarian lunch in the Kambah community garden for our Red Cross colleagues in May (photo taken by Red Cross worker)

Since 2013, in cooperation with the Australian Red Cross and Companion House we have been sponsoring asylum-seekers under our 'Goodwill Garden' program. At the end of May, our Tamil gardeners prepared a delicious vegetarian lunch at the garden for our Red Cross colleagues from the Migrant Support Program (see photo). They prepared lunch again for a big appreciative crowd at a Red Cross Refugee Week event held in the Griffin Centre on 18 June. This was a great opportunity for them to celebrate their food and culture and their achievements in growing food in the Kambah community garden. Japanese pumpkins from the garden were used to make a great Tamil curry. Financial support for the program

from the Kambah garden for plants, seeds and soil amendments (e.g. manure and mulch) is met from the proceeds of our plant sales and a few small donations from the garden community.

We will be holding an Open Day and plant sale at the garden on Saturday, 26th September. We'll have a food stall and everyone is welcome to come and help support the continuation of our Goodwill Garden program. The propagation of hundreds of seedlings for sale by the garden community is a huge exercise but very rewarding and it is such a good cause.

One of the collateral benefits of the Goodwill Garden program so far has been the donation of fresh surplus produce to members of the asylum-seeker and refugee community. As the winter crops reach maturity and through into spring and summer we hope to continue to help the vulnerable in our community in a small way by sharing fresh surplus organic produce with the Red Cross Road House. A lot of plot holders are participating in this project and our plantings in the communal vegetable garden will be contributing as well.

—Neville Jackson (story and photos, except where noted)

A venture in diversity

The challenge and experience of growing traditional Tamil vegetables in the Kambah community garden.

One of the great joys of growing food is experimenting with new varieties (and species) of vegetables. While we shouldn't lose sight of the need to supply a good range of the basic and the familiar vegetables throughout the year, we can widen our horizons and promote ecological diversity in our garden environment by looking to new kinds of vegetable plants that offer great nutrition and real culinary interest.

Last summer in the Kambah community garden our Tamil gardeners grew a good range of staple crops including different types of eggplant, chillies, tomatoes and cucumbers, but they also inspired us to try some of their other traditional vegetables, food plants that are less common in Australia but have wide popularity in many parts of Asia, from India to Japan. Of course, unlike Sri Lanka, Canberra does not have a subtropical climate so at the outset we were very cautious. I'll share what we have learned in our first spring/summer growing season—with results that vary from success (gourd) to unmitigated failure (okra). Even in the latter case we may just try again!

Amaranth (*Mulai Keerai* in Tamil)—The red leaf variety was sown direct in spring in soil with a lot of organic matter. It proved quite hardy to the summer heat so long as the moisture was kept up. Mulching helped. It was picked through December and January. There is a green and red variety readily available as seed. It is sometimes called Chinese spinach or En Choy. Amaranth leaves are highly nutritious with a



Red amaranth



Serpent gourd



Bitter gourd

subtle flavour that is great in dal or masiyal.

Bitter gourd (*Paavakkai*) or bitter melon—This is a vigorous climber that proved quite productive. We picked about 5 kilos from four plants. Seeds were sourced from a melon bought from a local Asian supermarket and were soaked in warm water overnight and incubated at 25° C for over a week. Seedlings were planted out into warm rich soil in

late September. The fruit should be picked when green and about 15 cm long. Remove the seeds before cooking. Bitter melon is very popular in Indian, Sri Lankan and Chinese cooking.

Serpent gourd (*Pudalangai*)—*Trichosanthes cucumerina* is a tropical or subtropical vine that produces the most delicately beautiful flowers and elongated fruit up to 100 cm. With encouragement from our Tamil friends

Around the COGS gardens



we attempted its cultivation to see how it stood up to our soil and climate. While the seeds are notoriously difficult to germinate, we had reasonable success using a seed incubator at 25°C. Strong seedlings were slow to establish, however. They need rich well-drained soil with coarse sand added. The healthy vigorous plants ultimately produced fruit of an edible size late in the season (February), so we were happy with our first attempt. The fruit is high in fibre and used in Tamil cooking in a dry stir-fry curry called Poriyal and in many other recipes. The young shoots and tendrils of this plant are also eaten as edible greens and stir-fried.

Okra (*Vendakkai*)—We tried a commonly available variety, Clemsons Spineless. We got good germination in a seed incubator at 25°C after first soaking the seed in warm water for 24 hours. While direct sowing is often recommended, in Canberra we don't get the optimum soil temperature until well into spring, which can

be too late for optimum growth and productivity from these plants. Our plants survived transplanting into slightly acid soil rich in compost. However, they failed to thrive in most cases and did not produce many pods—a real mystery.

Snake beans (*Payathangai*)—We have had good results with Red Dragon, a common variety of these beans that is a vigorous climber. Unlike French beans, snake beans are quite tolerant of hot weather so they are a good option if you want to be picking your beans well into January. They have a different texture to French beans and respond well to stir-frying.

Gotu kola (*Centella asiatica*) or *Vallarai Keerai* in Tamil.—This plant belongs to the Pennywort family and is a useful plant for a damp, shady spot in your garden. It shows a degree of frost tolerance with mulch that provides protection for growing shoots. The plant has a creeping habit and needs to be contained. It is used as a leafy



Gotu kola

green in Tamil cooking for dal and spicy salad dishes. It has been known in India and Sri Lanka for centuries as a medicinal plant particularly in Ayurvedic medicine.

[Readers of *Canberra Organic* who have experience in successful cultivation of these plants may like to share your know-how. You can email me at neville.jackson@bigpond.com]

—Neville Jackson
(story and photos)

Cook community garden

Things have been very quiet at the Cook garden over the past few months, with some gardeners taking the opportunity to get rid of a few weeds and plant the spring/summer produce.

The formal risk assessment of the Cook garden has been done and the full report should be available shortly. Of note, however, are a number of items that propose a potential risk to gardeners. These include sharp edges protruding on reinforced steel trellises, uncovered star pickets, unsound and unsightly structures, and protruding supports along garden edges. Please take the time to self-assess your plot in regard to potential risks and please remove the piles of weeds and old garden produce from plots before the snakes and vermin come to visit.

—Mike Avent (story and photo)



How I give my seedlings a strong start

Following on from Michele's popular article on how to stop snails and slugs destroying her seedlings (published in the winter issue), Bill Chaffey shares his method for ensuring his seeds grow with the best chance of success. If you have a good, organic idea please share it!

As most good gardeners refine their techniques over time, my gardening practice has evolved too. I have pretty much tried many of the organic methods one will find searching the web on this subject, with some success. And

organic pest control methods can be time consuming.

Following some experimentation growing broad beans—soaking the seeds in water, and the sprouting of seeds prior to direct sowing in the garden bed—I then trialled growing broad bean seedlings to 4 leaf stage in toilet rolls (as per process detailed below) and was impressed by the strength of the seedling, seedling root growth, and minimal transplant stress.

During the next spring-summer growing season I had an extreme problem with pests eating my climbing bean seedlings soon

after they sprouted from the soil, with the third planting being successful but much later than I would have liked.

So I grew the next climbing beans as seedlings using the toilet roll method and had the same success as I had with my broad bean trial. Now I grow all my broad beans, peas, climbing beans, bush beans and corn by this method.

As part of the overall process, before transplanting these strong seedlings I first scrape back the mulch (which harbours pests) from the planting location. After two weeks when the plants have established, I return the mulch.



The additional benefit to a home garden of transplanting seedlings using this direct method, is a shorter growing season and more efficient use of land.

Materials needed

Lots of recycled toilet rolls, polystyrene vegetable box, seedling tray, organic compost, organic seed raising mixture, bean seeds, and time.

Instructions

1. Cut sides of polystyrene box down to 12 cm high, place drainage holes in bottom, and save a piece cut from sides for use as dividers (if required).
2. Place approximately 3 cm of compost on the bottom of the polystyrene box.
3. Place toilet rolls upright in the polystyrene box on the compost bed to encourage strong and deep roots.
4. Half-fill toilet rolls (5 cm) with seed raising mixture, lightly compact, place a seed in centre of each, then cover

with 5 cm of the seed raising mixture and lightly water.

5. Place toilet rolls on the seedling tray in a warm location.
6. Keep the seed raising mixture and toilet rolls moist but not too wet. Maintain until seedlings reach 4 leaf stage (4 to 6 weeks).
7. Transplant seedlings in toilet rolls as they will readily decompose, and water with a seaweed solution.

Some tips

- Follow instructions for the particular seed chosen.
- Water seedlings prior to transplanting into moist garden soil, and plant at a cool time of day to minimise transplanting stress.

—Bill Chaffey



O'Connor community garden

Our last available 22.5 square metre plot will be taken up by Jutta in August when she returns from visiting family. Jutta sent a photo of her grinning young daughter, dwarfed by berry and cherry fruit in her grandparents' allotment in northern Germany. The daughter looked as if she would explode if she ate much more! Oh for the productivity of these crops in their natural environment.

This leaves us with three or four on our waitlist. One awaits the completion of her new house; Jim, who has recently relocated from Sydney, will sharecrop until a plot becomes available.

The apple trees have been eradicated. We had four young trees but codling moth, lack of productivity, and damage from possums meant that we decided that these should—sadly—go.

Possums moshpit onto the apple trees from the fence and then eat everything in adjacent gardens

We are in the progress of putting in an asparagus bed along this 6 to 8 metre communal garden bed. With luck, the wind and currently poor soil across this corner will not be too much of an impediment. Thank you Phil for contributing an impressive pile of horse poo and straw from the last race meeting.

Freecycle (freecyclecanberra@yahoo.com) is a great place for keeping still-useful stuff out of landfill. So often what you no longer need can be used by



someone else. However, I got over-enthused by the offer of a large volume of kitchen compost. One of our generous gardeners went to collect it and found it a suppurating pile of anaerobic yetch. Too kind not to accept, he transported the said yetch in the boot of his new car and it is now fermenting on our new berry patch. His trip to Sydney on the following day was stinky, with all the windows open. He also gave a tutorial on composting methods to the donor.

This convenor does not do much, but the O'Connor garden has become a truly collaborative endeavour, and we are managing well.

—Jenny Clark

Can a mature pear tree be successfully moved? Holder Community Garden shows how

You will need:

1. Access to Facebook. That's how Holder found out that a home gardener was offering a mature tri-grafted pear tree, gratis, on the COGS Facebook page. Just shows, time spent on Facebook can be time well-spent!

2. A generous community-minded donor. Holder as a community garden got preference for the pear tree over other interested gardeners. Very sensible decision—at least we thought so!

3. A couple of Lesleys. One (a Kambah backyard gardener) to give the tree away, the other (a Holder community gardener who happens to teach horticulture and knows a thing or two about fruit trees) to give educated tips on how to maximise success for the moving project. Good job, Lesleys!

4. A calendar. Pear trees apparently don't mind being moved while they are dormant, over winter.

5. A Conrad, a Paul, a Zeke and a Sue (or equivalent small team), with a variety of tools—picks, shovels, spades, axe, trailer and tarpaulins. Plus warm coats, for a frosty early morning dig.

6. A brush and a hose. Codling moth is a pear's nemesis, particularly in our organic environment, so as per our Lesley's instructions we removed all the soil from the roots, and brushed the bark a bit to dislodge any over-wintering moth larvae.

7. A temporary quarantine bay. We put the tree in a compost bay for a few days, making a giant bucket of water with two tarpaulins to drown any remaining codling moth larvae.

8. A suitable planting spot. In Holder's case, we chose a sunny well-composted bed down in our north-east corner, with orientation for all three main branches of the tree to each get the morning and afternoon sun. It is also well distanced from our main orchard so any remaining codling moth will be less likely to infest our other trees. Apparently these moths are stay-at-home types, and can't travel very far. We staked the tree to provide extra stability.

9. As many sets of gardener fingers as possible. All fingers to be crossed for a successful transition. Only next season will tell!

10. Recipe books (optional), featuring Packham, Williams and Beurre Bosc pears.

—Sue McCarthy (story and photos)

Top row:
initial digging;
out it comes

Middle row:
trimming back to
the root ball;
trimmed back and
ready to go

Bottom row:
on the road;
quarantining any
remaining codling
moth;
at the new home in
Holder garden







Tomatoes, lettuce and zucchini flower photos: Sue Pavasaris. Broccoli photo (top right) Heather Campbell

Weather

El Niño strengthening

The Bureau of Meteorology report issued on 21 July reports that the 2015 El Niño is strengthening. All key ocean monitoring areas have been more than 1 °C above average for 10 successive weeks—two weeks longer than the record in 1997. The eastern tropical Pacific is now at or exceeding +2 °C.

In the atmosphere, during the past week the Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) has dropped to around -20, the lowest values of the event so far.

All international climate models surveyed by the Bureau of

Meteorology indicate El Niño is likely to strengthen, and is expected to persist into early 2016. El Niño events typically peak during the late austral spring or early summer, and then weaken in the new year.

El Niño often brings below-average winter and spring rainfall over eastern Australia and above-average daytime temperatures over the southern half of the country during the second half of the year. However, other factors, such as temperatures to the north of Australia and in the Indian Ocean, also affect Australia's climate, meaning El Niño is not the only

Dam levels in the Canberra region and capital cities

ACT storages80% full
Murray-Darling Basin41% full
Burrinjuck Dam48% full
Blowering Dam32% full
Sydney92% full
Melbourne69% full
Brisbane96% full
Adelaide49% full
Perth21% full

influence on rainfall and temperature changes.

—roving correspondent,
Andy Hrast

Integrated weed management strategies

Alison Elvin presented a fascinating talk on Sunday 28 June as part of the COGS program of speakers. The following is Alison Elvin's summary of integrated weed management strategies.

* * *

Using a range of appropriate management methods in a co-ordinated fashion throughout the seasons and over the years, you will gain real control of your weed numbers.

These management strategies include:

- Observation, patience and vigilance. Keeping records can also be most useful.
- Identifying your weeds correctly, knowing that many garden weeds are also desirable edibles, while others are powerful medicinal herbs. Can you use these?
- Always trying to remove the weeds before they have set seed. Dispose of seed appropriately—you need a very hot compost to kill most weed seeds.
- Realising that when you leave bare ground a weed species will often grow there. As they say, nature abhors a vacuum.
- Recognising that each weed species is an indicator of specific soil conditions, including the availability of various soil minerals. Research what your particular weeds may be indicating about the current state of your garden soil, and take appropriate remedial action.
- Improving soil health—boost soil carbon, check the calcium/magnesium balance, increase beneficial



Photo: Matt Mawson

- soil microbes, ensure the suite of minerals necessary for excellent plant growth are biologically available.
- Biological controls—many weed species have accredited biological predators (rusts, weevils, borers, beetles etc) that weaken the plant, if not actually kill it. These are your friends and add significantly to your local food web.
- Increasing your crop rotations and following one type of crop with quite a different crop the next season. Integrate this with companion planting.
- Factoring-in 'fallow' periods, with the soil remaining crop-free for a period of time, then either thickly covering it with appropriate mulch or sowing to a smother or green manure crop.
- Mulching/smothering (e.g. weed mats)—this prevents sunlight reaching weeds, kills smothered weeds, improves soil quality and retains soil moisture. Know the source of the mulch and its own potential weed-seed burden.
- Hand-pulling or mechanically chipping-out weeds and composting, burning or adding to compost teas.
- Once the weeds are removed, either mulching the ground thickly and/or sowing a competitive smother species into the cultivated ground in a series of rotations.
- Slashing/mowing—this prevents seed set without creating bare ground, and opens up spaces for desirable competitive species to spread.
- Flame and steam weeding between the rows reduces weed overburden—this works best on annual and very young perennial weeds.
- Establishing windbreaks—this creates appropriate microclimates for plant growth. Adds biodiversity and shelter. Protects against invasion of weed seeds from neighbors.
- Garden hygiene—cleaning machinery, boots, socks; purchasing weed-free mulch. Identify any new germinant if the species is unknown to you.

Spring is the time for harvesting peas

You haven't lived until you have eaten a pea straight from the bush. And although you have to pod a lot of peas to have enough for a meal, they are worth it.

Did you know that the scientific name for pea is *Pisum sativum*?

Peas are good for you!

- Peas are legumes and are high in protein, fibre and micronutrients but low in fat so they are a great addition to your diet—especially if you are watching your weight.
- Peas contain coumestrol, a phytonutrient that may help prevent stomach cancer, as well as high levels of antioxidants.
- Pisumsaponins I and II and pisomosides A and B are anti-inflammatory phytonutrients found almost exclusively in peas.
- Peas also contain vitamin C and vitamin E, and a good amount of the mineral zinc and omega-3 fat.
- Peas are high in vitamin K and vitamin B which can help to prevent osteoporosis.
- The niacin in peas can help reduce 'bad' cholesterol and increase the 'good' cholesterol.

Cooking with peas

Peas are, of course, delicious on their own, but these garnishes bring out the flavour.

Garnishes for boiled peas

- Garlic butter with chopped mint
- Toasted sesame seeds and butter
- Crispy bacon pieces, garlic and olive oil
- Olive oil, lemon juice and lemon zest

Smashed peas

- Coarsely mash boiled peas with a fork or process to a



form a smooth purée, or serve any stage in between. They go well with mashed or smashed potatoes and pumpkin.

- Season well and dot with butter, a dollop of cream or a sprinkle of olive oil. Add sautéed onion, bacon, garlic, or anchovy, as you wish.

Mushy peas

- Fry a coarsely-chopped onion in olive oil until lightly golden.
- Add 3 cups of peas, 1/3 cup of vegetable stock and 1/3 cup thin cream.
- Cook until peas are tender. Mash with fork and season.

Sautéed peas

- Add lightly-cooked peas to sautéed onion, leeks or shallots; sautéed bacon pieces, pancetta or prosciutto; and sautéed garlic.
- Toss in the pan with a little butter or olive oil.
- Finish if you like with a little stock, white wine, or lemon juice; season and reduce to form a sauce.

- Garnish with a little finely-chopped mint or other herbs, or finely-grated lemon zest.

Pea pasta

Add cooked peas to pasta dishes. Peas go well with cream, garlic, shallots, onion, leeks, white wine, ricotta, feta, smoked salmon, chillies, pesto, rocket, parsley and mint.

Sugar snap peas

The pods of sugar snap peas are edible because they're less stringy than garden pea pods which have crisscross fibres and are too tough to eat, which is why you have to shell such peas before eating. Team with bacon, butter, sage, prawns, mint, chicken or ham.

Snow peas

Snow peas are easy to grow and can be eaten raw, steamed, lightly sautéed or stir-fried so they retain their crispness and wonderful green colour. Don't let them grow too big or they can become stringy. Try to eat them as fresh as possible as they go limp and tasteless if left too long.

Recipes

Check out the following recipes for peas at www.taste.com.au

Asparagus and peas with hazelnuts: a great fresh-tasting spring recipe using the first peas and snow peas planted in late autumn or winter, spring asparagus and the last of the hazelnuts picked in autumn.

Lamb and snow-pea stir-fry: uses lamb, young onions and early snow peas.

Penne with peas, feta and lemon: uses all three commonly available types of peas to make a lovely, light, spring pasta.

Brussels sprouts with peas and hazelnuts: uses young sprouts and spring peas as well as using up any hazelnuts in store.

Crushed peas and potatoes with sumac lamb cutlets: shows how delicious peas can be when they are smashed up a bit.

Sugar snap peas with orange, almond and dill: a delicious way to use snap peas.

Garlic choy sum and snow peas with peanuts: a very tasty vegetable stir-fry using snow peas and Asian greens. Asian greens need to be grown quickly in spring and harvested while young before they bolt.

Green pea and radish salad: uses the best of spring vegetables if you use fresh podded broad beans rather than frozen ones. Lightly cook them in boiling water, cool in cold water and remove their tough



outer skin. Radishes can be grown in early spring but don't let them grow too large and risk becoming woody.

Chilled pea soup with mint gelato: a sophisticated celebration of peas. The combination of peas and lettuce is classic. Use fresh peas and cook for a little longer than frozen peas. You can use the last of the stored potatoes to make this an early spring dish or wait until the first chats are ready in late spring.

Warm green pea and garlic dip: peas aren't just for sides; they can star on their own as this dip proves.

Preserving peas

Frozen peas

- Blanch excess peas for a minute, cool in iced water and drain well.
- Freeze on trays, then put into bags and vacuum seal and return to the freezer.

Dried peas

- You can also dry your peas.
- Allow them to fully mature on the vine, about a month after you would normally have picked them.
- Remove them from the pods and spread them out to dry for a couple of weeks or speed this up by using a dehydrator.
- Dried peas are good added to winter soups and stews. Soak them overnight to rehydrate them.

–Elizabeth Dangerfield

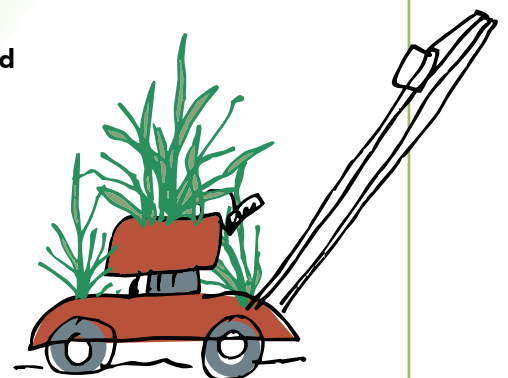
Please note: www.taste.com.au is one of many websites Canberra Organic may mention as of interest to our readers. We are in no way endorsing this website and only the recipe titles have been republished.

Deeply Embedded

Away for a month. Neglect the plot. Feeling guilty I venture out there. Weeds four feet high. Couch grass invading on all sides. Luckily the potatoes are OK, well mulched. But the rest of it. OMG. I start to excavate the leeks. Sun gets higher. An hour is enough. Ride home for a shower. Then down to the cafe. Newspapers, write a tanka perhaps?

–Gerry Jacobson

**underground network
roots deeply embedded
terrorist gang
or couch grass
in my veggie patch?**






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Asian tofu with broccoli and greens

Ingredients

- 1 packet firm tofu, sliced in half and half again
- 2 tablespoons cornflour
- 4 tablespoons sesame seeds
- 2 tablespoons sweet chilli sauce
- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 1 teaspoon sesame oil
- 1 pak choi or other Chinese greens sliced
- 8 snow peas, halved
- Head of broccoli cut into florets and stem julienned
- 6 spring onions cut into lengths
- 1 large red chilli, sliced
- Soy dressing
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1/4 cup rice wine vinegar
- 2 teaspoons dark brown sugar
- 1 clove crushed garlic
- 1 tablespoons garlic chives, finely chopped

Method

1. Combine sesame seeds and cornflour.
2. Brush the tofu with chilli sauce and dip tofu slices in the combined cornflour and sesame seeds. Refrigerate to firm up for 15 minutes.
3. Heat half the olive oil and fry the tofu with a dash of sesame oil until golden on each side. Drain on paper towel.
4. Chop the spring onions, pak choi and snow peas into smaller pieces.
5. Heat the remaining olive oil and the sesame oil in a wok and stir-fry the broccoli florets, stems, snow peas, spring onions. Add the pak choi and stir to wilt.
6. Put the vegetables onto a plate, top with the fried tofu and pour over the dressing.



Pickled red cabbage

Ingredients

- 1/2 red cabbage
- 3 tablespoons salt
- 1 cup water
- 1 cup white vinegar
- 1/2 cup white sugar
- 1 stick cinnamon
- 4 whole cloves

Method

1. Slice the red cabbage finely and put into a bowl. Sprinkle with the salt and stir through. Cover and leave for several hours until the cabbage is wilted.
2. Meanwhile, heat the water, sugar, vinegar and the spices in a large pot until the sugar is dissolved. Leave to stand to absorb the flavours.
3. Sterilise enough jars in your oven (200°C for 20 minutes) for the amount of cabbage pickle you have made. Put lids of jars into a heatproof jug and cover with boiling water.
4. Reheat the pickling vinegar to boiling point and remove the cinnamon stick and cloves.
5. Rinse the red cabbage briefly under cold running water and drain in a colander.
6. Remove hot jars from the oven and put onto a wooden board. Fill the jars with the red cabbage and pack down tightly.
7. Pour over the hot pickling liquid and top jars with the hot lids. Tighten the lids securely. Leave pickle for 10 days before eating.

Cabbage pancakes

Ingredients

- 1/2 small cabbage (750 g), sliced finely or shredded
- 2 eggs
- 1 egg yolk
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1 cup plain flour
- 3 tablespoons melted butter
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/2 tablespoons chopped chives
- 2-3 tablespoons butter for cooking

Method

1. Bring some water to the boil and add cabbage. Cook the shredded cabbage in boiling water for 5 minutes.
 2. Drain and rinse under cold water until cool. Press out all the liquid and put into a bowl.
 3. Mix together the eggs, yolk, milk, flour, melted butter and salt in a blender or whisk by hand until smooth.
 4. Combine this mixture with the cabbage and the chives. Season to taste.
 5. Heat a heavy duty frypan and grease with some of the cooking butter. Add a tablespoonful of the batter for each pancake and cook until golden on each side. Keep warm in oven while cooking remaining mixture.
 6. Serve with crispy bacon or a dollop of sour cream or both!!
- Heather Campbell
(recipes and photo)

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.

**Sunday, 23 August, 2pm—
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. Abundant and diverse soil biology (i.e. presence of earthworms) ensures that under all circumstances there are beneficial species active to undertake any task to feed and protect plants. Symbiosis is this balanced, mutual interdependence of different species. It is a protective mechanism in nature that

develops in response to compatible needs. Such systems run on carbon, water and nitrogen, all free from the sky.

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 nutrient dense 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 and genetic modification (GM) technology is unhealthy for people, animals and landscapes. Science, academia and governments are influenced by multinational corporations and stick to the current paths of industrial agriculture and food processing. Current powers effectively sideline critics and maintain a delusion of control of the natural world.

Yields have not increased with GM and pesticide use has risen to combat problems of resistance. Herbicide use has increased and glyphosate hazards to humans, animals, crops and soils are being made apparent by the critics. New weeds, diseases and pests keep appearing that need chemical

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control. (*GMO Myths and Truths*: <http://earthopensource.org/earth-open-source-reports/gmo-myths-and-truths-2nd-edition/>)

Organic food is produced in complex biological systems characterised by symbiosis, interdependence, and resulting in synergies which are difficult to quantify with current scientific methodologies and mind-set. Some scientific evidence has been published; for example, about the state of science reviews on nutritional superiority and pesticide risk by The Organic Center USA (<https://www.organic-center.org/scientific-resources/publication-archive/>).

* * *

**Tuesday, 22 September,
7.30pm—
Dr Richard Stirzaker**

A story of water and food

Richard Stirzaker studied Agricultural Science at the University of Sydney and did his post-graduate studies in soil science. He joined CSIRO in 1990 to take up a post-doctoral fellowship and has since carried out research projects on agroforestry, salinity and irrigation. His passion is developing simple tools for monitoring water and solutes that can be used in the context of adaptive learning. His current work focuses on food security and small-scale irrigation projects in west and southern Africa. He is an honorary professor at the University of Pretoria in South Africa where he has supervised numerous PhD students. Dr Stirzaker is possibly best-known among home gardeners for his 2010 publication, *Out of the scientist's garden: a story of water and food*. Richard's talk will focus on a new instrument he has just developed that shows soil moisture by coloured lights. The system is being used in Africa now and is very well-suited to home gardens.

**Tuesday, 27 October,
7.30pm—
with Keith Colls**

COGS Q&A night

Keith Colls will be with us once again to explore solutions to those thorny questions encountered in the orchard and veggie patch. Keith is a qualified horticulturalist, a founding member of the group which established the Canberra City Farm (a centre in Turner which demonstrates urban agriculture techniques and sustainable living), and a past president of the Canberra Organic Growers Society. He has been involved in establishing and managing community food gardens in Canberra and Queanbeyan since the late 1990s and has been conducting gardening courses for CIT Solutions since 2001. The October meeting is an opportunity to bring along any puzzling pests and weeds you have come across while preparing your garden for spring sowing. This is also a chance to share your own experiences and remedies, along with your views on the principles and philosophies underpinning our choice to garden organically. From microbes to mega seed companies, no subject is too big or too small!



**Tuesday, 24 November 2015,
7.30pm—
Christmas party**

The November COGS meeting is the last meeting for 2015 as well as our Christmas party and end-of-year social gathering. Come and catch up with other members over a cooling drink and nibbles. Drinks will be supplied but please bring a plate to share. COGS meetings will restart in February 2016.

Recipes

Spicy lentil soup

Preparation time: 15 minutes

Cook time: 1 hour

Serves: 6–8

Ingredients

2 tablespoons olive or sunflower oil
1 large onion, finely chopped
3 cloves garlic, chopped
1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
1 tablespoon ground cumin
2 teaspoons ground coriander
½ teaspoon cardamom powder
½ teaspoon paprika
½ teaspoon turmeric
1 teaspoon chilli flakes
2 carrots, peeled and grated
2 stalks celery, finely diced
300 g pumpkin or sweet potato, chopped
400 g tomatoes with juice
1 cup puy or French style lentils, washed
1 cup red lentils, washed
8 cups water or vegetable stock
ground black pepper (as little or much as you like)
bunch parsley leaves (optional)

Method

- Heat oil in a large saucepan and gently fry onion, garlic, ginger and spices until the onions have softened and you can smell the aromatic spices.
- Add lentils, vegetables, water or stock and simmer on lowest heat for 1 hour.
- Add seasoning to taste.
- When ready to serve add parsley.

—Glynis Kennedy
(recipe and photo)



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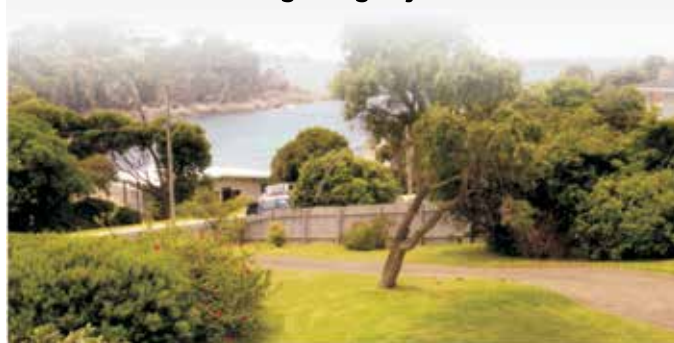
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A membership year runs from September 1st of the current year to August 31st of the following year.

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		Child 3	Name _____ Age _____
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		Email address	_____
			Receive COGS magazine by email <input type="checkbox"/> or post? <input type="checkbox"/>

(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.
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BSB 032-719

Account 291247

Date / /

Reference _____ (please use your surname)

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Direct deposit is the preferred payment method.

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spring planting guide

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

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

Using seeds

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

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

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

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

Crop rotation

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

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

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

Plant varieties

It is important with crops such as cabbage and lettuce to choose the appropriate variety for the time of year. Lettuce varieties best suited to early spring are cos, salad bowl, butterhead and mignonette.

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

S = seed sowing; T = transplanting

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

What's On



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

COGS monthly meetings 2015

Location: Majura Community Centre, Rosevear Place, Dickson

Please note: the winter times (Sunday afternoons at 2:00 pm) will end after the August meeting when we will revert to the summer times (Tuesday nights at 7:30 pm) for speakers.

Sunday 23 August 2:00 pm

Speaker: Dr Maarten Stapper

Tuesday 22 September 7:30 pm

Speaker: Dr Richard Stirzaker

Tuesday 27 October 7:30 pm

Q&A night with Keith Colls

Tuesday 24 November 7:30 pm

Christmas party!!!!



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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. **Available for \$5.00 per bag.**

Please contact Glynis on 6251 6641 or email glynken@iinet.net.au

Open Gardens Canberra Inc

Cultivating the tradition of open gardens

Shirley Pipitone has established **Open Gardens Canberra** to take the place of the now-closed national scheme. At least nine gardens will be opening this year in Canberra and the surrounding region, and more next year. Open Gardens Canberra will have its own website very soon and it's already on Facebook!

Shirley aims to create a community of garden lovers in the region. For an annual fee of only \$25, members have free entry to all gardens opening under Open Gardens Canberra!

Contact Shirley at opengardenscanberra@gmail.com for more information.



FARMERS MARKET

at BUNGENDORE

2nd and 4th Saturdays 9am-1pm

Bungendore Memorial Hall

Kambah
community garden
OPEN DAY

SATURDAY 26
SEPTEMBER

Plant sale



(Above) suprette cabbage; (below) wombok. Photos by Heather Campbell

