

Canberra organic

Celebrating
40 years of
community

plus

Spectacular spuds

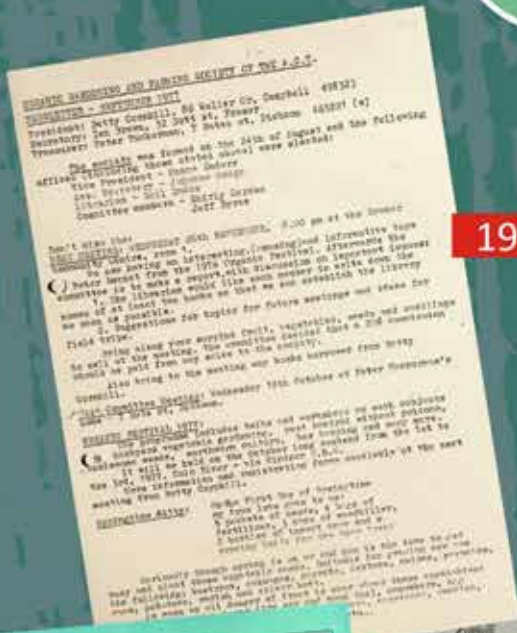
Fun with fungi

The best of our
40th anniversary
photo competition

40 years of



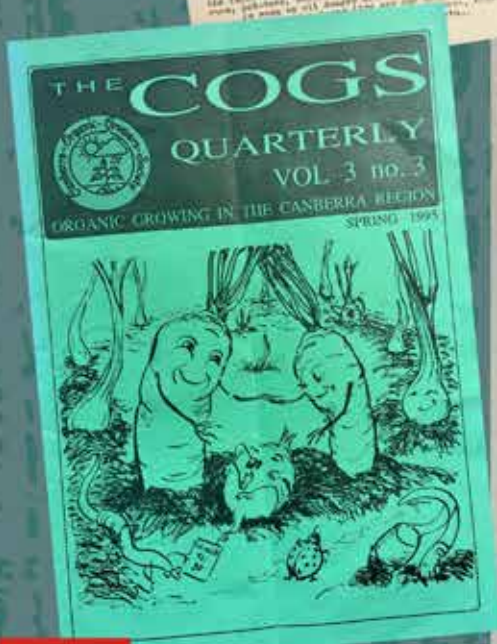
Canberra organic



1977



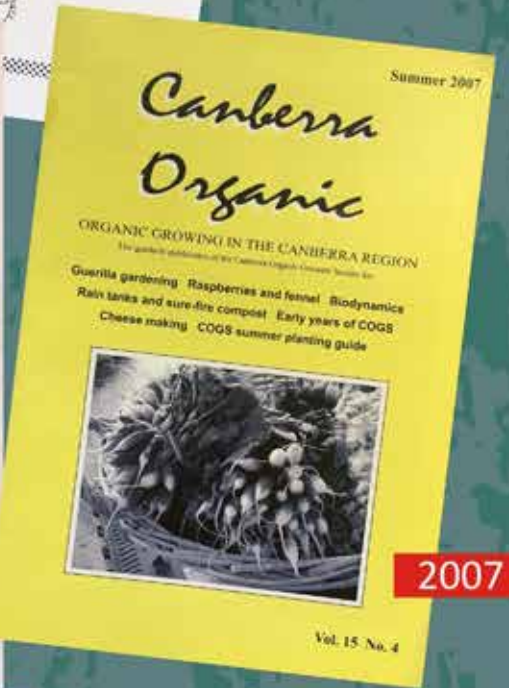
1989



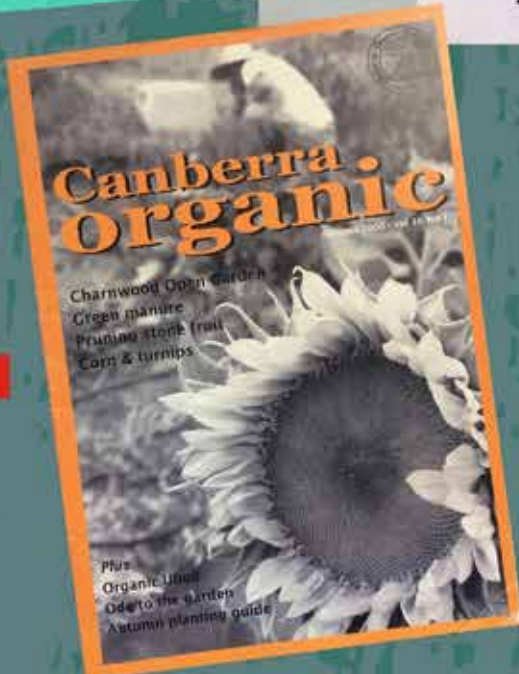
1995



1999



2007



2008



2016



President's report

Happy 40th birthday, everyone!

Forty years of organic gardening in the ACT might not sound too remarkable in the long historical sweep of backyard gardening, particular edibles, over many centuries. Certainly, animal manures and mulching have been used widely for generations. But pesticides and herbicides were too, and a range of inorganic fertilisers. Regrettably, particularly in broad-acre agriculture, they still are. 'Organic gardening' until recently was considered somewhat 'mumbo jumbo', or 'muck and magic'.

So in our 40th anniversary year we celebrate the great vision of Betty Cornhill and her small group of like-minded gardeners, who founded and created the nucleus of the Organic Farming and Gardening Society of the ACT, which is now known as Canberra Organic Growers Society Inc.

In looking back at the mere handful of members in the 70's and early 80's, we can take pride in the organisation's growth to a committed membership of over 400 gardeners currently, the majority of whom are a plot holder in one of the 12 COGS-managed gardens, or members of our backyard gardeners group. COGS is now an incorporated association with its own legal identity; has a beautifully designed and informative web site and a vibrant Facebook page with well over 2,300 followers; is widely linked to other bodies in the ACT and district urban horticulture scene; and has a regular monthly members seminar program.

All members and friends are warmly invited to share our common organic gardening heritage and commitment at a get together over lunch at the Crace Community Garden, relatively recently established, and one of our loveliest gardens (but just like babies, all our gardens are truly lovely in their own way!). Please come and join in our celebrations. Full details are elsewhere in this issue.

COGS Library

I am pleased to let you know that COGS has a new librarian—Margaret Stapper of the Holder garden. Thank you, Margaret! The library is now undergoing a review, reorganisation and audit. For those of you who may have one or more of our books on loan, now is the time to return them, to Margaret or at one of our members meetings.

Your monthly meetings

Your Executive continues to monitor the popularity of the monthly members meetings. Attendances vary, and we need your input into what you would like. So please tell us what you want, and when you would like them held—monthly, quarterly, day time, evenings, etc, or not at all. We have had good numbers at our off-site events, such as visits to gardens and a mushroom farm, and would appreciate your suggestions for future events as well as seminar topics.

A fresh gardening year

With our new gardening year having commenced on 1 September, garden AGMs have now been held, new or returned garden convenors and garden committees are in place, and membership fees and plot fees have been invoiced and the great majority paid. Garden convenors have been following up with any unpaid invoices for plots in their gardens. Plot fees fund our water—our biggest expense—and garden improvements, so we are naturally keen to get these banked.

It's been fantastic in visiting gardens to see many plots having been actively utilised over the winter months, with winter crops like broccoli and other greens now making way for spring plantings, and patches of robust healthy garlic maturing in nearly every plot. The tomato growers amongst us (and isn't that everyone?) are holding our breaths that a potential late snap frost doesn't happen this year, and others debating whether their potatoes should have gone in earlier. But that's what ensures gardeners never get bored or complacent.

Until next time, fulfilling gardening, everyone!

—Sue

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This month's cover:

Peas in flower, Sue Pavasaris's winning photo in our 40th anniversary photo competition. See more on page 12 & 13.

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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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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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We welcome your input!

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

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



Editor's note

It's hard to imagine what it was like to be an organic gardener in 1977. It was a revolutionary act that ran counter to the gardening 'wisdom' of the day. No wonder the founders of what was then called the Organic Gardening and Farming Society of the ACT sought to build a community of like-minded gardeners.

It would probably have been even harder for COGS' founders to imagine what their small band of 'radicals' would evolve into four decades later, as Sue McCarthy (President's report) and Jackie French (page 7) have so eloquently detailed.

More broadly, organic produce and gardening are increasingly becoming the desired norm, as evidenced by Canberra's spectacularly popular farmers markets and the prevalence of organic products in the major supermarkets. In backyards across Canberra and Australia, gardeners are replacing turf with tomatoes, herbs and chooks. Even on TV, the host of Gardening Australia, the effervescent Costa Georgiadis, has reached cult-level celebrity status.

Internationally, as awareness of the ramifications of pesticides and herbicides grows, whole continents such as Europe are taking action to limit their use. At a time when corporations are patenting plant genetics and global bee populations are dwindling, organic gardening has never been so relevant, nor its resurgence so critical.

I inherited my green-thumbed genes from generations of gardeners in the family before me, my personal interest awakened by self-sown pumpkins that took over the backyard of my first little rental home. For the next decade or so, living far from family, gardening was a passionate but mostly isolated hobby.

Crace garden sunrise



Crace garden in 2013 (above) and 2017 (below)



The opening of a community garden in my shiny-new suburb of Crace changed all that. Suddenly, I knew the names of dozens of people in my neighbourhood, people who I could chat to at the local shops, with whom I could exchange zucchini for parsnips, and swap ideas and advice. One of my favourite people is a fellow original Crace community gardener.

So in this, COGS' 40th year, my challenge to you all is this: make the most of the community that is COGS. Attend a working bee or the always informative COGS monthly member meetings, sign up to volunteer or become convenor at your garden's or COGS' next AGM, contribute a photo or article to the magazine, or just have a really good yarn with one of your garden neighbours. And please come celebrate COGS and all it represents at the 40th anniversary celebrations, at Crace community garden on Sunday 26 November.

I hope you enjoy this special 40th anniversary magazine.

Happy gardening,

Diana

P.S. I hope you like the new front cover design—as always, let me know what you think.

John Flowers, one of COGS' earliest gardeners



Memories of a revolutionary past

Congratulations to COGS (and all concerned) on its 40th anniversary!

During the early days of its conception it was a matter of belief and practice in what were fundamentally alternative ideas—the ‘muck and mystery’ brigade—clinging to concepts that were radically different to the application of artificial fertilisers to make ‘two blades of grass grow where one grew before’. Organic growing was so difficult. The ideas of composting, crop rotation, companion planting and the concept of beneficial insects were lost in the rush to adopt the ‘new’ agriculture—except amongst some.

My interest in organics was fashioned by, and grew out of, the Second World War where we were

encouraged to ‘dig for victory’. We didn’t have any artificial fertilisers then, just manure and the time honoured practices of caring for the land and a belief in the quality of home produced products. As well as using the home garden we had community allotments and the opportunity of helping farmers with seasonal produce—we had dirt under our fingernails in the bid to survive.

On coming to Australia I brought these concepts with me and found contentment in my own backyard as I put them into practice. Then I discovered COGS. The Betty Cornhill inspired group was small and dedicated but I felt I had come ‘home’—and I was not alone in my beliefs.

The early days of COGS were difficult as we had to rely on our own expertise for guidance—there were no references we could rely on as we had to make our own. We had field days, reciprocal visits to gardens and farms, visiting speakers and in-house sessions as well as writing about these in the early editions of the COGS journal. The Cotter garden was started by some members who went ‘feral’ but inspired the idea of community gardens and this idea expanded with the support of the ACT government—but with the proviso that all such came under COGS umbrella and were based on organic principles. Due to this enhanced profile membership expanded rapidly from less than sixty to over three hundred which meant activities had to be found to keep everyone interested—these were stimulating times and the time for COGS to be incorporated.

It was now time to set up certifying bodies to regulate the expanding industry which involved much travel and many meetings—but these germinated and took root.

From humble beginnings COGS can look back on 40 years of growth and the acceptance of organic principles in everyday shopping—it wasn’t easy being green but we can take pride in what we have achieved. Congratulations COGS.

—David Odell (former COGS President), Bungendore.



The poster features a green header with a central circular logo for COGS's 40th anniversary, flanked by stylized sun and plant icons. Below the header, the text is centered on a light brown background with a wood-grain texture. The main title is 'COGS 40th Anniversary CELEBRATION', followed by the date and time: 'Sunday 26 November 2017 1-3pm'. The location is 'CRACE COMMUNITY GARDEN Drooka Crescent, Crace'. Additional details include 'Free lunch and refreshments', 'Open to all COGS members, their friends and family', and 'BYO chair'. RSVP information is provided at the bottom: 'Please RSVP to Glynis for catering purposes by Thursday 24 November glynken@inet.net.au or phone 0402 087 269'.

Canberra Organic over the years

THE 1990's - ARE YOU PREPARED?

JOSHUA SHIRVIN EXPRESSES HIS CONCERN ABOUT WHAT LIES AHEAD.

Last Oct '87 was the greatest stock market crash of all time. Now we are moving away from the charts as the present stock market has reached new all time highs. The present monetary system as we now it is about to make the greatest change ever. We see this best in nature - summer, autumn, winter, spring. The world has seen several depressions, but we tend to remember only the last one '28 & '29. It was thought then that such a thing couldn't happen again. The two before that were in 1840 & 1870. Sixty years passed before the last one, & now another 60 years. Officials refuse to believe that it could happen again. In Dec 1929 the market crashed the fifth & final time & it was all over. There was no one left to play the game. So the Great Depression began, and lasted 8-10 years. This time we'll see the world's greatest depression all. There were many work camps in the last depression. People were slaves to just get food & shelter or stand in line all day for a bowl of soup or a piece of bread. Some fought to death over food & shelter.

Most western societies levied new heavy tax burdens before & during the depression, aimed at the poor & middle class, so most lost even what little they had. It seemed that only the small farmer, with no great debts, survived without much difficulty for they grew food & everyone needed it, & would trade or do anything to get it. Food first, then shelter & the rest follows. It was the rich that caused the depression in the first place. In '28 the top 10% owned more wealth than the lower 40%. They owned 32% of all wealth. Today the top 1% owns more than the lower 40% & they own more than 35% of total wealth. Many rich lost everything then as

well as the poor. History is repeating, itself. It goes in cycles, the same as man & nature does. We have been in a recession for some time now. Multinationals are becoming larger. The stock market has crashed 3 times now. We probably have only 2 or at most 3 left before we begin to pass into the last stage of the greatest depression of all. It will be an inflationary depression, much worse & the opposite of the last one.

Many have written about such things, including Dr Ravi Bakti in his book, The Great Depression of 1990. He is an economist whose predictions of the crash were off only by a couple of years.

When society has finished nearly destroying itself completely Mother Nature will step in to clean up the mess. There will be great weather changes & upheavals. She will change directions of energy, North to South poles & v.v. This happens every 7000 years & again cycles. See the signs of the times now. Drastic changes in weather patterns, hot, cold, wet, dry, earthquakes, volcanoes, eruptions. Now what is the meaning of all this info. The whole world has been warned about what is about to happen. We must start to prepare ourselves for the coming events.

First we need to finish our houses & shelters or to build new ones, making sure the debts or loans are not too great to be paid off shortly. Help your neighbours finish their if possible. The start growing gardens. To produce your own food is very important. Store up grains & seeds & dried & canned food for the future. Grow greens & large amounts of veges together in your communities. We need to find different kinds of energy sources.

February 1989

Betty Cornhill, COGS' first president



Early COGS members Bob and Traudi Kalivoda and Shirley Carden

**** NEXT MEETING **** Tuesday May 28th (4th Tuesday of the month) in Room 2 at the Griffin Centre, Bunda Street, Civic, from 7.30pm for library loans, book and produce sales - you are encouraged to bring in any produce to barter or sell. This month we are trying something a little different - a "know and Sell" night. The following people have volunteered to talk for 10 minutes each:

- David Odell on "Why and how I first became interested in organic growing"
- Shirley Carden on "Herbs for winter health"
- Linda and Rosemary on "Solar dryers"
- Traudi Kalivoda on "Spaghetti Squash"
- Peter Cornhill on "Making Outtings"

Any members are welcome to bring anything of interest, share an organic experience or good book on organics. Shirley asks for any suggestions for crediting mice, as setting traps seems to enhance their food supply. (Ed. - try wedging a husked sunflower seed under the points on the trap. They can't get it without getting themselves caught.)

May 1985

IS ORGANIC GARDENING A CULT ?
Or an authentic conservation movement ?

Until a few years ago, many people were reticent about constructing a compost enclosure for their garden.

For one thing, they didn't want to be identified with a cult which practices various unorthodox "rites": raw food eating, herbal teas, ("how queer!"), vegetarianism, health-foods, ("have you tried my wholemeal bread?") and compost gardening, which gave the uninitiated visions of heavy manual work involvement.

Compost gardening clubs in the past have been guilty of creating an exclusive, pious composting elite. If a prospective member didn't or wouldn't make garden/domestic compost he was ostracised for his single narrow mindedness.

The merits or demerits of such and such a composting technique would be discussed, and debated for years with thought rarely given to other aspects of the environment.

All of that has now changed. thank goodness, and it took the near destruction of our farming soils to make people wake up. A general awakening to the degrading of our environment, now that we can see the bottom of the resource barrel, has contributed to getting organic gardeners involved in real conservation issues.

Today, in order to go forward, to improve our environment (particularly in relation to soil management) we must go backward, to the days of yore, before the advent of the agro-chemical industry and the Von Liebig theory.

There are many people who believe that the orthodox conservation movement doesn't concern itself enough with legitimate conservation ideals. They may well be justified in demanding that Conservation be more closely allied to survival than for example, preservation orders for a particular house or mountain.

What is there about organic gardening that imbues its adherents with such enthusiasm ? Because it feels good doing good, in harmony instead of conflict; it is recreational and saves the environment; it is building instead of destroying.

April 1978

From bare earth to bounty

by Jackie French

The following article is the foreword of *From Bare Earth to Bounty* — The story of the Canberra Organic Growers Society, written by Bethany Turner, Walter Steensby, David Pearson, 2013

In 1970 Canberra wasn't supposed to be a place to grow anything much: just hardy native species, or the ornamental plums and hawthorn and other cold-climate exotics planted by Parks and Gardens. Canberra was supposed to be too cold, too hot, too dry and too barren for market gardens or orchards, apart from the river flats where apples and a few crops grew at Pialligo. And 'everyone knew' that the only way to grow fruit and veg was with regular applications of pesticides and fungicides. Except the Canberra Organic Gardeners.

Organic growing was a radical concept back then.

COGS asked me to speak after the publication of my first book, *Organic Gardening for Australians*, in 1986. Organic growing was a radical concept back then. The gardening gurus in mainstream magazines and newspapers were strictly of the 'follow the spraying timetable' genre.

Fast forward thirty years and those radical ideas—along with similar techniques that were new then, of drip irrigation, integrated pest control, and growing a planned framework of plants instead of neat rows, as in permaculture—are now commonplace. The research into organic strategies done by backyarders like those of the Henry Doubleday Research Association has been replaced by sustained research by both academics and a multitude of industries.

So who were the Canberra Organic Gardeners of thirty years ago? They were the most diverse group I have ever met, ranging from 'muck and magic' grey-haired adherents who'd been making compost for decades, to earnest undergraduates. Ideas, books, cuttings, seeds and wholemeal date slices and chamomile tea were exchanged with enthusiasm and generosity, as were suggestions for Canberra community gardens and a public dinner that might—just possibly—be made with all-organic products.

COGS has done much more than promote organic growing methods. I suspect that the camaraderie and sheer enthusiasm also helped create a social



Before and after: Charnwood community garden in 1991 and 2017

climate that dared to cope with the vagaries of Canberra's physical climate.

Because now, as Canberra's farmers markets attest, you can grow, buy or swap almost any locally grown organic foodstuff apart from chocolate and coffee, and I wouldn't be surprised if some enthusiastic retiree or researcher wasn't building a passively heated solar greenhouse to grow those on the hills above Lake George.

We can all eat local organic apples or drink organic wine now, spoon on local organic yoghurt, luxuriate in local organic cheese, or head to an organic butcher. The community gardens are flourishing.

But the COGS camaraderie and enthusiasm still matters, as does its exchange of ideas, experience and wisdom. Canberra continues to challenge all growers, organic and otherwise, as does the propaganda of agribusiness and world views that promote retail therapy instead of hands-in-the-dirt with your kids beside you and the birds above. COGS is still here to nurture and support us.

—*From Bare Earth to Bounty* is available to borrow from the COGS Library

Mitchell community garden

This year the sun found its way onto many more plots at Mitchell after the garden had several trees felled. Many were old and diseased and many provided the garden with a bounty of mulch.

We welcomed new gardeners from the greater Gungahlin area as many people live in townhouses in this area and it doesn't provide the space to grow enough vegetables.

Mitchell Garden also welcomed some young families with eager young people to enjoy gardening with their parents. You can never be too young to grow your own food and we hope the young gardeners enjoy the fruits of their labour.

We held our AGM in early September and welcomed some new faces onto the Mitchell Garden Committee. New ideas and sharing of expertise will bring more energy to the garden and help new gardeners and some older ones, to try new methods, to



Narelle's early tomato spring planting

enjoy sharing of ideas and to add much to the Mitchell Garden.

Gwen has started to reinvigorate the orchard and has planted some new varieties of fruit trees and berries. Now we need to think of ways to keep the fruit-eating birds from enjoying all the fruit.

Our recent efforts to make compost in our new compost bays has been a success—thanks to our Compost Gurus, Kevin and Phil. Already some gardeners have had a barrow or two to add to the plot for spring planting and more compost will be available soon.

The Mitchell AGM



Around the COGS gardens

A local takeaway shop provides us with a large box of lettuce leaves, coffee grains and egg shells each week, to add to our compost making. Another local business gives us kitchen scraps and coffee grains each day so we are very grateful for their waste as it provides good additives to the compost bays.

Our monthly Working Bees now have new guidance from Gladys and Ken and with the weather warming up, those early morning starts will be much more pleasant and Bev will keep us all safe with her OH&S guidance.

With 41 plots and 36 gardeners, we have a good mixture of styles, nationalities, and expertise. Mitchell Garden looks forward to a good variety of produce over summer. Many gardeners have already planted for early summer pickings so fingers crossed for no more heavy frosts this spring.

Our one year of planning and fundraising has paid off and our new shed and BBQ/seating area is underway. Hopefully we have dry weather until the shed is built as we look forward to the dry, clean space for all to share.

—Narelle McLean
(article and photos)

Keith's Irises



(above) Adele's spring planting

(below) Before and after the trees were felled



Crace community garden

The afternoon of Saturday, 26 August, was bright and sunny for our Crace garden working bee. Lots of plot holders apologised for being overseas—they just couldn't change their tickets, otherwise they'd have returned for sure to help splash the garden paths blue with our weed killing vinegar mix.

Those of us able to make it sprayed the weeds, cleaned up some garden beds, enjoyed a sausage or two, and we welcomed enthusiastic new members.

The afternoon had a lovely community feel to it, and heralds the beginning of the spring gardening season.

—Margie Perkins (article and photos)

(right) A younger gardener waters a fruit tree

(below) Helping our new members prepare their plot for spring crops



O'Connor community garden

In late 2005, the O'Connor Uniting Church began its community and environmental programme and our Garden was established. About twenty-five of us (plus assorted kids and a couple of dogs) now garden there. If you drive by on Brigalow Street you will also see the photo-voltaic cross on the A-Frame Church. Our Garden is just to the east on two old tennis courts. Drop in and say 'hello' if the small gate is open.

A busy time in our Garden just now as some gardeners are moving, rebuilding or travelling. We recently welcomed Alister, Chris, Mehdi and Mousa, and Adele has returned with a new family after her sojourn in the US.

Our last working bee was a great day with most gardeners attending. The plot Alan has nominated for outreach production was well dug over and poo'd.

We have also begun our second soil mining of the paths. Over recent years I have shanghaied passing tree chipper trucks, so our paths have received mixed mulch, a lot of which has decomposed into superb organic soil. The working bee moved a lot of this onto hungry still-clay communal beds.

Last summer's heat and desiccating wind reduced production. There are almost as many solutions as we have plots planned to counter this future climatic problem!

I attend some COGS Executive meetings and continue to be humbled by the professional expertise and hard work freely contributed to manage a community group of some 400, assist with the development of new gardens and to maintain a popular website and Facebook. Please appreciate that others are working hard to assure your access to your own piece of dirt.

—Jenny Clark (article)
and Deb Hamilton (photos)



(above) preparing the sweet potato bed

(below) the resident magpie chicks had a feast during the working bee; calendulas happily everywhere; the kennel bug house

(bottom) new co-convenors James and Jenny at the head of the table





40th anniversary photo competition

Thank you to all those who entered our first photo competition, celebrating the history and beauty of organic gardening. The entries were diverse, including photos of some stunning produce, the best and worst of gardening (including those pesky cockies), before and after photos of Holder garden and some intergenerational gardening.

The competition was co-judged by an external artist, with all identifying information and captions removed from the photos to ensure an impartial result. The winner and second place will be able to choose their prize from a range of Fowlers Vacola preserving jars and accessories, kindly donated by COGS member Julia Trainor.

And the winner is...

Sue Pavasaris with her beautiful photo of peas in flower.

Second place has been awarded to **Joanne Widdup** for her photo titled 'Worms are Interesting!'



FIRST PRIZE: **Sue Pavasaris**

Photos from Sue's backyard garden in Griffith, Canberra, including the winning photograph (above)



John and Liz Myszka A huge tomato (1); cockatoo damage (2, 3);





SECOND PRIZE: Joanne Widdup

*Worms are interesting (Joanne and her grandson, Ashton);
Vegies in the front garden; Creating some Easter magic.*



Mario Serenellini

Mario's grandchildren, Olivia and Jordan, helping at Cook garden.



Conrad van Hest

Holder garden, 2004 (above) and now (below).



a healthy harvest at John's Crace plot (4, 5, 6)



Summertime spuds

The humble spud is a much maligned vegetable. It has been spurned for years by those worried about their figures because of its undeserved reputation for being fattening. It wouldn't be so, of course, if it wasn't lathered in butter or sour cream or dunked in hot oil and laced with salt to produce irresistible treats. In fact, one medium-sized boiled potato contains no fat at all and only 425kJ, but deep fry it as chips and you end up consuming 1143kJ including 16.8g of fat (*Australian Healthy Food Guide*, September 2017)

Potatoes are good for you (yes really!)

It is true that potatoes contain starch and starch is a type of carbohydrate, but the body needs

carbohydrates; for example, the brain needs a constant supply of blood glucose usually obtained from the breakdown of carbohydrates. If you get irritable on a low carbohydrate diet it could be because you aren't producing enough serotonin—which helps you feel calmer and happier. Carbohydrates trigger the release of tryptophan which enters the brain and stimulates serotonin production. Potatoes do have a high glycaemic index, meaning the starch in them is fairly quickly converted to blood glucose, but if you combine them with a meal of meat and lots of other vegetables this effect is moderated.

Potatoes contain a lot of potassium, which is good for blood pressure and nerves. They

also contain folate and vitamin B6, and one potato surprisingly will provide half your daily ration of Vitamin C. You need to eat your potatoes with their skins on to maximise these benefits. Eating the skin means you get lots of fibre too.

And potatoes can help your gut feel a lot happier. Cooked and cooled potatoes contain resistant starch, a type of fibre that the good bacteria in your gut love. These bacteria help boost your immune system and can help protect you against bowel cancer. They are to be encouraged, so tuck into those potato salads this summer. Just remember, when potatoes go green a toxin is produced that is quite harmful so don't eat green potatoes.

Freshly dug potatoes in a Grace community garden plot



Why grow your own potatoes?

That is all very well, but aren't there lots of potatoes in the supermarket—cream ones, red ones, pink ones, ones covered in dirt—why bother growing them? Because most potatoes found in supermarkets are all-rounders—okay for most things but not brilliant. The biggest difference is that some potatoes are more starchy and others more waxy. You need a potato variety suitable for how you are going to cook it, otherwise the results may be quite mediocre. Here are my favourites:

Kipfler—A cigar-shaped waxy potato with yellow flesh and a buttery flavour. Great for salads but also nice steamed and boiled. Holds its shape.

Desiree—has pink skin and creamy flesh. Because it is both waxy and floury it is good for mashing, dry baking, roasting and salads. I found it excellent for gnocchi.

Russet Burbank—the ultimate chip potato. As a bonus it contains high levels of antioxidants.

King Edward—if you want a potato you can bake whole straight on your oven racks, this is the one for you. Just wash, dry, prick it in a few places, rub with some olive oil and salt and bake—don't use foil as it will make it soggy. It should have wonderfully fluffy, creamy white flesh. It is also good for roasting and mashing.

Kennebec—one of my favourites because it produces roast potatoes which are fluffy on the inside and crunchy on the outside. It is also good for chips and boiled.

Growing potatoes

Potatoes need 60-90 days frost-free to be successfully harvested. Many Canberrans plant potatoes at the beginning of spring and if you are really lucky you can harvest them before Christmas as new potatoes. If you plant some in summer they will be fully mature just as the weather is cooling down and are more likely to store well over winter, but you need to give them plenty of water over the hotter months.



© Can Stock Photo / Szakaly

Potatoes like a fertile, deeply dug, moist, acidic soil with a pH of less than 6 so dig a trench about 20cm deep and add lots of compost, decomposed manure, blood and bone and some rehydrated peatmoss if your soil is alkaline. Mix everything together then plant seed potatoes (certified virus free), cover with soil and then a thick layer of mulch. It is a good idea to sprout your potatoes first by leaving them in the light for a couple of weeks until short sprouts appear then plant. Space the tubers 30-35 cm apart.

Harvesting potatoes

Store your potatoes in a cold, dark, slightly moist place — you can put them in the fridge. Kennebecs and Russet Burbanks store well. I have tried many ways of preserving potatoes, but because they are so full of water they do not freeze well. The most successful approach was to pre-blanch chips, dry them out in the fridge, fry them in hot oil until just coloured and then drain them very well. Freeze individually on trays then pack into vacuum sealed bags. To cook, take them straight from the freezer and crisp up in very hot oil.

Cooking healthy meals with potatoes

Firstly, as potatoes are 80 per cent water they build up quite a head of steam when you roast or fry them.

This will make the outside of the potato go soggy once it is away from the heat source. So, give your roast potatoes (and chips if you have the patience) a bit of a jab with a skewer to let the steam out or smash them up a bit and put them back in a slightly hotter oven to crisp up.

Spray unpeeled potato wedges with a little olive oil, sprinkle with chopped hard herbs and a little salt and roast. Serve with a yoghurt and herb dressing. Bake them whole in their skins, scoop out some flesh and stuff with all manner of healthy things. For example, you could crack an egg into the potato and put back in the oven until the egg is cooked to your liking. Microwave slices of unpeeled potatoes for a minute or two then cook on the barbecue. Mash steamed or boiled potatoes with olive oil, crushed garlic and herbs. Mix in purees of other vegetables such as peas, pumpkin, sweet potato and carrots to add more flavour and more goodness. Make potato salads using a low kilojoule dressing. Add potatoes to vegetable soups and puree—the potatoes make the soup creamy and luscious. Air fry chips for a special treat.

I have to confess that potatoes are my all-time favourite food so that this article may be biased.

—Elizabeth Dangerfield (article) and Diana Cozadinos (photo)

COGS visit to Majestic Mushrooms farm

24 September 2017

On a very windy Sunday afternoon, about 40 COGS members and their friends met with Majestic Mushrooms owners Helen and Ian Chu. It was an afternoon to be cherished particularly, because of the kindness and hospitality given to everyone by Helen and Ian. I also got an appreciation of how hard this couple work to operate their business and make it successful. Helen is a Cambodian refugee who came to Australia with her family with nothing but the clothes they wore. Helen and Ian met at Canberra University. Helen has a Bachelor of Education degree and Ian has a Bachelor of Engineering in Electronics and Communications. They agree that their qualifications have been useful to them and enable them adapt and make innovations in operating their farm.

They said they are both hard workers and very determined, but all they had was the theory of mushroom growing and little practical experience. Since pur-



chasing the farm they have immersed themselves in the science of growing and marketing mushrooms and have been very successful in both.

Helen and Ian may be familiar to COGS members as they have a stall at the Capital Region Farmers Market. In addition to selling their mushrooms and distributing them to stores locally and interstate, they recently exported their product to Hong Kong. They hope to export their mushrooms to other international markets in the future.

The couple told us that they went through a lot of difficulties when setting up the farm, a lot of trial and error, a lot of tearful nights and a lot of doubts. They said they have a very strong relationship and talk and work things out together, and they feel they can overcome any hurdle because they are strong together.

The mushrooms are grown in large sheds on the Chu's 31 acre property, which is located between Murrumbateman and Hall. They grow white *agaricus bisporus* mushrooms at three



different stages of development –button, cup and flat. They also produce Swiss Brown and Portobello mushroom in various sizes. Their mushrooms are Freshcare certified, which means they meet the stringent requirements of the Freshcare Food Safety Code of Practice, as required by many retail outlets including Coles and Woolworths. Their motto is to put ‘quality first’ that is, to provide the best product with the best service to guarantee customer satisfaction.

Their mushrooms are grown in temperature controlled facilities that simulate the ‘ideal season’ all year round. The mushrooms are all handpicked and, as a family run business, the Chus are able to vary the growing conditions and harvesting periods to cater to their customers’ requirements and deliver pre-cooled mushrooms to their customers on the same days as they are picked –a true definition of ‘fresh’ produce. The mushroom growing conditions are supervised by computers and Ian can check up on his mushrooms from anywhere in Australia or the world by using his iPhone.

Our intrepid group toured the mushroom growing facilities and on entering we all had to wipe the soles of our shoes in a liquid



Helen and Ian Chu

that kills any foreign spores. We entered a number of growing rooms where the various types of mushroom are grown on tiers of shelves. After the cold of the outdoors, the sheds are slightly steamy and a little bit clammy. The mushrooms are a wonder to see as there are thousands of them popping up their pristine white heads in the black soil. There is a slight mushroom smell given off which reminded me of damp enriched soil.

The wind was howling outside and it felt at times that we would all be blown away as the sheds rattled and squeaked. The Chus outlined the process of growing mushrooms and explained that

the mushrooms can double in size in 24 hours so picking is done continuously. The Chus employ about 20 or so people to do this as they produce about 20 tonnes of mushrooms per week.

Nothing is wasted on the farm as the stalks are sold as cattle feed and the ‘soil’ they grow in is sold as soil-enriching mushroom compost.

The mushrooms are grown all year, which requires a lot of energy, so the farm’s power bills are enormous. Because it is a 24/7 business it needs a lot of people to hand pick the mushrooms and keep the farm operating. The Chus are proud of the product they produce and hope customers appreciate the costs involved in producing their high quality product and understand the prices they have to ask to recoup their costs.

It was an enjoyable and educational afternoon and, as we had to turn some people away because the number of people who wanted to attend was ever increasing, we will arrange another visit next year.

I should add that we had a fantastic afternoon tea at the end of the tour and I thank all the people who kindly contributed to the great food that was heartily enjoyed by all.

—Glynis Kennedy (article),
Jo McMillan and Richard
Horobin (photos)



Traditional food growing and life in rural China

With modern agriculture prevails and many awoken, this article takes you to rural China, back to its traditional ways of food growing, foraging, harvesting, storing and a more organic way of living. Please let me take you to Jiaodong Peninsula, Shandong Province, China, where I grew up. Located 37.5 degrees north latitude, it is one of the planet's prime locations for temperate climate fruits such as apples and pears. Persimmons, grapes, chestnuts, peaches, cherries and hawthorns also favour these mountains of terrace fields. Located by the Yellow Sea, facing Korean Peninsula across the sea, it is also monsoonal climate, which means heat and rainfall in summer, which enables the region to grow some tropical crops like peanuts, ginger and sweet potatoes. And surprise, this area's main food staple is wheat, no rice grown here.



My cousin ferrying pears in wicker baskets on traditional wheelbarrow down the mountain

The region shares lots of similarity in climate and crops with Canberra. Being colder, hotter and wetter than Canberra region, knowledge in food growing, foraging and storage from this part of rural China would benefit Canberra growers too. This article provides a glimpse of some traditional farming knowledge, foraging, cooking and housing and folk arts from Jiaodong Peninsula, China.

24 Seasons

Listed as World Heritage, there are 24 seasons in ancient Chinese farming calendar. The 24 seasons give farmers good reference as to when to sow and harvest what crop. To name a few, there are "Waking of the Insects" and "Rain for the Grain" in spring, "Frost Fall" in autumn.

Terrace Fields

While many know the rice terrace fields in southern China, not many know that there are plenty of terrace fields in northern China. In spring time, they are covered with blossoms of fruit trees, a beautiful season to visit. Not many know the ages of terrace fields in rural China. I found that some are quite young. The ones in the below photo were built in the 1970s, converting a poor mountain area to farmable terrace fields, visited by the UN many times until the 1990s as a poverty alleviation project. As I watched how terrace fields were built in the 1970s, my heart trembled in awe to people power.



Intercropping

Traditional farmers are conscious of space and food diversity. This picture shows peanuts planted among apple trees, for space, ventilation, nitrogen fixing and food production.



Guerrilla food growing

I was surprised seeing food growing outside apartment building: beans, gourds, sweet potatoes, peanuts, tomatoes, okra, anything possible. Wherever the older generation live, you see food

growing. I wondered how people got to use public space to grow food. It turned out that they just occupied the parkland where the local government planted expensive Indian Mrytle, which isn't suitable for the cold climate. Local government worked out that residents growing food there saves them expense in park maintenance. So agreement reached without discussion.



Traditional Farming Tools

Take sickles as an example, there are all kinds of sickles for various purposes. The traditional farming tool knowledge is endangered as people think machines are better. This collection below is in a museum.



Foraging

Being indigenous to the land, rural Chinese people inherit knowledge about wild food and medicines. Often a plant is food as well as medicine. Common wild vegetables favoured in rural China include amaranth, shepherd's purse, little thistle, purslane, honey locust, elm seed pods, widely and wildly available herbs include motherwort, mugwort, honeysuckle, balloon flower and many more.

The photo below shows a man buying cicada shells, a valued Chinese medicine, from villagers.



Food cooking

All parts of an animal are used. Lots of what we call 'weeds and pests' in Australia are commonly used food resources, including the well-loved delicacy: carp. It is not a matter of lack, but a matter of knowledge: there are plenty flathead in the ocean.



Traditional houses

Traditional houses are sensitive to the earth and people. They are sourced locally, solar passive, well insulated, energy efficient with the traditional rocket stove system (Kang and Guo), where cooking heats up the mudbrick bed.



A Ming Dynasty house, showing the mudbricks

(continued on following page)

The Weather Report

A late developing La Niña is possible

The Bureau of Meteorology report released on 10 October 2017 says that indicators of an El Niño/La Niña are neutral. The surface of the tropical Pacific has warmed recently as a result of weaker trade winds. This reverses the cooling trend that had been observed since mid-winter. While sea surface temperatures remain well within the neutral range,

anomalously cool water persists below the surface.

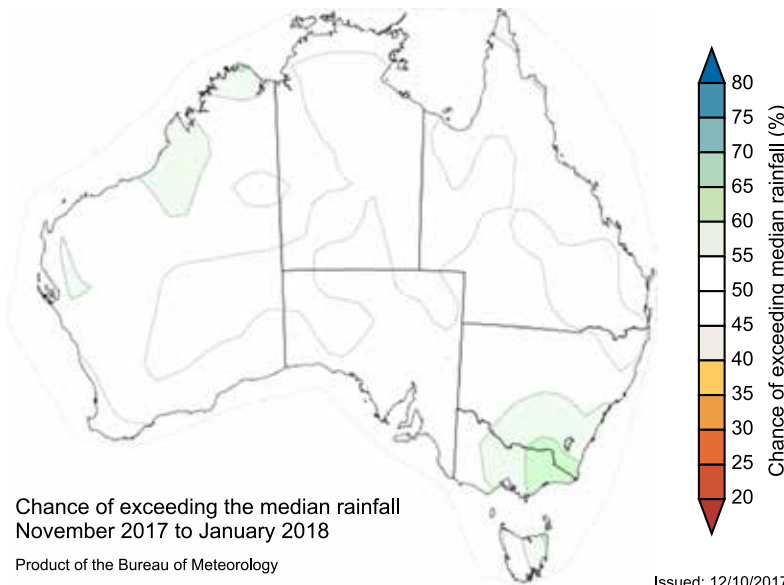
International climate models surveyed by the Bureau suggest this recent surface warming may only be temporary, with further cooling of the tropical Pacific Ocean likely. Five of the eight climate models suggest sea surface temperatures will reach La Niña thresholds by December 2017, but only three

maintain values for long enough to be classified as a La Niña event.

While unusual, it is not unheard of to see La Niña develop this late in the year. Of the late-developing La Niña events, their effect on summer rainfall has been mixed, with some leading to widespread above-average falls across eastern Australia, and others having minimal effect. The current three-month rainfall outlook suggests only a 50 per cent likelihood of wetter conditions in many parts of the country.

The Indian Ocean remains neutral.

—Andy Hrast



Chance of exceeding the median rainfall November 2017 to January 2018

Product of the Bureau of Meteorology

<http://www.bom.gov.au/climate>

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Issued: 12/10/2017
Model run: 8/10/2017
Base Period: 1951–2010

Dam levels in the Canberra region and capital cities

	% FULL Oct '17	% FULL Oct '16
ACT storages	79	100
Murray–Darling Basin	73	80
Burrinjuck Dam	59	73
Blowering Dam	76	97
Sydney	87	95
Melbourne	71	70
Brisbane	70	79
Adelaide	86	98
Perth	40	28

(from previous page)

Folk arts

Folk arts in rural China is an expression of love for nature and life, they are used in festivals and celebration. While with busy modern life space, such knowledge isn't well inherited, there are some persistent artists aiming to pass on the knowledge and skills.



Decorative flower bread, made with flour.

Tour to Rural China

If you like what you've read and would love to see them, feel them, try them and live in them for real, please contact Shaoying. You'll get to live in traditional houses, hands-on experiment with farmers and artists in traditional farming, cooking, foraging, eating and making traditional art, in a small immersive group. Your visit would bring pride and confidence back to rural communities.

The next 10-day tour is at the end of April 2018, spring blossom season, costing less than \$2000 for an authentic experience second to none.

You can reach Shaoying on: shaoyingtours@gmail.com, 0427 784 882, (02) 4844 4470. You can also find out more about Rural China Tours on Facebook, just type in Shaoyingtours or Rural China Tours.

—Shaoying Wang
(article and photos)

Building a solid foundation with basalt rock dust

Basalt rock dust is high in iron and magnesium. It is often applied as a top dressing by farmers at the rate of 1 kg per square metre every two to three months. A rate eight times higher can be used, but has to be incorporated into the soil. Uptake of available iron and magnesium by plants will be transferred into the vegetables we eat, and may be beneficial for persons with low iron binding capacity, like me!

Before winter, I incorporated approximately 700 kg of basalt rock dust into my garden plots 9 and 14. The total area of these plots is 52 square metres, so, the application rate was 13 kg per square metre. This is more than that suggested above, but I reasoned it would be okay because:

1. The rock dust had a sizeable proportion of larger granules (1 mm diameter) and therefore would take many years to break down, relative to the 'dust' that

would be taken up by the plants immediately, and

2. My vegetable plots are worked intensively, so the rock dust would continue to be well dug in.

To track how the addition of basalt rock dust affected the soil, and therefore, the uptake of nutrients, I took soil samples from four different locations on six sampling occasions and measured soil pH. Before adding the basalt rock dust my soil pH was 6.5 to 7.5. Immediately after adding the basalt rock dust the soil pH dropped to 6 and remained at this level on the remaining sampling occasions. A pH of 6 is classified as 'somewhat acidic'.

As expected during winter, very little growth occurred. Come the warmer weather, more watering, and the first flush of iron and magnesium from the 'dust', all of my flowers and vegetables (acid loving and not so acid loving) garlic, raspberries, asparagus, parsley,

broccoli, strawberries, sweet peas, poppies, queen anne's lace, onions, celery, leeks, silver beet, rhubarb, foxgloves, and potatoes seem to be growing very well.

If you are interested in trying basalt rock dust, there are a few things to note:

- One trailer load of rock dust is equivalent to 1 metric tonne (1000 kg) and is very, very, heavy
- I could lift half a wheel-barrow load at a time.

—Teresa Rose

Editor's note: When using rock dust, it is recommended you wear protective goggles and avoid inhaling the dust.

Schmidt Quarries at 12 Bass St Queanbeyan (entry off Barra Place) sell basalt rock dust (from their quarry in Nimmitabel).

They can deliver 6 tonnes by small truck or 13 tonnes by large truck.

They are open from 7am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday and can be contacted on 02 6298 1355.

Teresa's basalt-infused bed at Charnwood community garden





EDUCATION

Food and Farming related courses in the Canberra Region

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- Food preservation
- Farming courses

Help us create a vibrant local food community

Courses, farmers market, local food news and events

COGS members get 50% off membership

Bookings essential

www.southernharvest.org.au
hello@southernharvest.org.au

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Canberra - Capital & Country Convivium

GOOD: quality, flavoursome and healthy food
CLEAN: production that does not harm the environment
FAIR: accessible prices for consumers and fair conditions and pay for producers

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Facebook: Slow-Food-Canberra-and-Capital-Convivium

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Horsing around

The Betty Cornhill Garden is in an equestrian area. OMG is it fifteen years I've been scavenging? Manure and spoiled hay for compost, straw for mulch. It's great to garden symbiotically with horses. Recently there's been increased equine activity, more stuff lying around, and I'm not the only collector.

sweating ...

shovel and barrow

and the sweet smell

of horse manure ...

obsessive compost disorder

Early on I read in an 'organic code' somewhere (was it in these pages?) that animal manure should go through two cycles of composting before being used on the garden. Perhaps there's a risk of pathogens or vet chemicals, maybe antibiotics, entering the food chain.



Photo: Matt Mauson

What I do is build open heaps and interlayer the manure with hay, autumn leaves, weeds and spent vegetables. I try and make the heaps big enough and hot enough to get rid of weed seeds. It's slow. Usually takes a year or two for stuff to break down. Sometimes I need three compost heaps in different stages.

**hands in the soil
this sunny windy
spring morning
planting the leeks
for autumn soups**

—Gerry Jacobson



**NATIONAL
ARBORETUM
CANBERRA**

Succulent Day

National Arboretum

Discovery Garden & Terrace Room

9:30am – 2:30pm, Saturday 18 November 2017

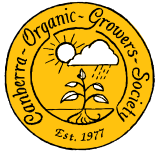
Featuring well-known expert Attila Kapitany

Free event



Learn more about succulents and their part in the National Arboretum.





summer planting guide

Mulch and compost

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

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

Heat protection

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

Watering

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

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

Weeds

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

Pests

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

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

Harvesting

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

Remember to leave space in your vegie patch for those winter vegetables that prefer to be planted in late summer to early autumn. Brassicas and other winter crops need time to mature before the extreme cold of winter sets in.

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

S = seed sowing; T = transplanting

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

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

What's On



COGS 40th Anniversary CELEBRATION

Sunday 26 November 2017
1-3pm

CRACE COMMUNITY GARDEN
Drooka Crescent, Crace

Free lunch and refreshments

Open to all COGS members,
their friends and family
BYO chair

Please RSVP to Glynis for catering purposes
by Thursday 24 November
glynken@iinet.net.au or phone 0402 087 269

Advertising in Canberra Organic

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

Our circulation is around 700.

Advertising rates

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

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

Please contact editor@cogs.asn.au

Articles in the magazine do not necessarily reflect the views of COGS. Advertised products and services are not specifically endorsed by COGS.



Canberra Seed Savers at the Canberra City Farm

Canberra Seed Savers start by planting and nurturing a seed, that becomes a strong plant that flowers and is pollinated, and sets an abundance of seed that is selected and saved and replanted by seed savers. Come and join us and be part of this magical cycle of life.

Seed Savers get together on the first Sunday of every month, from 2–5pm at Canberra City Farm. In peak season, we will also meet on some weekday afternoons at the Food Co-op in Acton. For more details go to www.ccfarm.org.au/get-involved/attend-a-workshop or follow us on Facebook or email Arian at arian.mcveigh@bigpond.com

Everyone is welcome to our get-togethers—you don't need to be an expert and you don't need to have a garden. Bring seeds, old gardening magazines, nibbles or drinks to share—or just bring yourself and help us to harvest and save the abundance of seeds.

Let's talk about gardening

Our Facebook community is
growing every week.

Our page includes the latest on the events, news and gardening advice that matter to Canberra gardeners.

Just search for the Canberra Organic Growers Society and 'like' the page.

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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

ORGANIC GARDENING AND FARMING SOCIETY OF THE A.C.T.

NEWSLETTER - SEPTEMBER 1977

President: Betty Cornhill, 86 Waller Cr, Campbell 498323
Secretary: Ian Brown, 32 Nott st, Fraser
Treasurer: Peter Tuckerman, 7 Bates st, Dickson 465221 (w)

The society was formed on the 24th of August and the following offices (including those stated above) were elected:

Vice President - Hanna Enders
Ass. Secretary - Johanne Hodge
Librarian - Gail Dadds
Committee members - Shirly Carden
Jeff Byrne

Don't miss the:

NEXT MEETING: WEDNESDAY 28th SEPTEMBER, 8.00 pm at the Downer Community Centre, room 1.

We are having an interesting, (amusing) and informative tape Peter Bennet from the 1976 Organic Festival. Afterwards the committee is to make a report, with discussion on important issues;

1. The librarian would like each member to write down the names of at least two books so that we can establish the library as soon as possible.

2. Suggestions for topics for future meetings and ideas for field trips.

Bring along your surplus fruit, vegetables, seeds and seedlings to sell at the meeting. The committee decided that a 20% commission should be paid from any sales to the society.

Also bring to the meeting any books borrowed from Betty Cornhill.

Next Committee Meeting: Wednesday 12th October at Peter Tuckerman's home - 7 Bates st, Dickson.

ORGANIC FESTIVAL 1977:

The programme includes talks and workshops on such subjects as; backyard vegetable gardening, pest control without poisons, wholesome weeds, earthworm culture, bee keeping and many more.

It will be held on the October long weekend from the 1st to the 3rd, 1977. Colo River - via Windsor H.S.W.

More information and registration forms available at the next meeting from Betty Cornhill.

Springtime ditty: On the First Day of Springtime
my true love gave to me:
5 packets of seeds, 4 bags of
fertilizer, 3 cans of weedkiller,
2 bottles of insect spray and a
pruning knife for the pear tree!

Seriously though spring is on us and now is the time to get busy and plant those vegetable seeds. Suitable for growing now are the following; beetroot, cabbages, carrots, lettuce, onions, parsnips, peas, potatoes, radish and silver beet.

As soon as all danger of frost is over plant these vegetables: french and climbing beans (try soy and mung too), cucumbers, egg plant, marrows, squash, zucchini, melons, okra, capsicum, pumpkins, sweet corn and lastly the ever popular tomato..

Good growing!