

Canberra, organic

**Exploring the diversity
of our gardens**

Bitter melon

Cornelian cherry



President's report

Your new Committee

Here we are again, following our 2018 AGM, and with those lovely autumn leaves falling all around us, as we welcome our Executive team to another year of supporting your interests as members. I am delighted to be able to report that we continue with an experienced team going forward. All of our office bearers and committee remain in their roles, save for us farewelling Walter, Keith and Glynis, and welcoming Neville who moves from committee member to the Vice Presidency. I feel privileged to lead the team for another year, and to know such an energetic and committed team supports and guides us all.

Your monthly meetings

In an open members discussion at the conclusion of the recent AGM, it was apparent that there is strong support for continuing regular members meetings, though not necessarily every month. We are trialling a mix of outdoor and indoor meetings this year. We are aiming to have fun, and educate at the same time. Whether it's making compost, wicking beds or pickles, we hope we offer you something you might not experience otherwise. I encourage you to check the program towards the back of the magazine, and put the details in your calendar. I hope to see you at our events during the year, and share my saved seeds with some of you.

Your library

Our librarian Margaret has been undertaking an audit of our library holdings and will make recommendations to the Committee in coming weeks on what we should and should not be holding. If you would like us to buy a particular book for the library, please send your request to Margaret at librarian@cogs.asn.au. Member feedback is that despite the increasing availability of organic gardening information on the net,

there is still an important role for a well curated hard copy library, and your Committee agrees! We plan to put the catalogue on the website so you can see exactly what is available to borrow. The library will be "open" for borrowing and returns at all meetings held at the Majura Meeting Room.

Our community gardens

I particularly want to acknowledge and thank our garden convenors for their important work in looking after the smooth running of our community gardens. Without convenors, it would not be possible for COGS to operate as many gardens as it does, because all that detailed work would fall to your Committee!

Over the course of last year, our Convenors Kit was refined and provides great guidance particularly to new convenors, thanks to Glynis

and Jo. Additionally, Jo as gardens coordinator has commenced a regular schedule of garden convenor get togethers, in our gardens, for informal discussions on day to day matters and guidelines. If you as plot holders have a concern or query relating to garden operations you can raise it via your garden convenor, or to Jo at gardens@cogs.asn.au.

Report to the AGM

For those of you who were not at the AGM, we are publishing in this issue the Committee's report on the year just gone. I hope you find it of interest, and if it stimulates some ideas of where you would like to see your organisation heading, or what you believe it should be doing, please share them with the committee at president@cogs.asn.au.

Until next time, good gardening!

—Sue

Gorgeous dahlias from the Holder garden (photo: Margaret Stapper)



Executive Committee report to Annual General Meeting—27 March 2018

Another successful year

Over the past year, COGS continued its role as the pre-eminent organic gardening group for Canberra and environs, and the trusted and respected manager of community gardens in Canberra, as it reached its 40 year anniversary.

Membership and community gardens

COGS continues to manage 12 community gardens in Canberra. Nine of these are on land licensed from the ACT Government (Betty Cornhill, Charnwood, Cook, Crace, Erindale, Holder, Kambah, Mitchell and Oaks Estate), while two are on ACT public schools land (Dickson and Kaleen) and one is on church land (O'Connor).

COGS currently has 431 members. Not all members are plot holders in our community gardens (129 are not, though some of these are on waiting lists for plots), but the percentage of plot holder members is gradually trending up. Plot holder numbers within gardens range from 6 (Erindale) to 39 (Cook).

No new gardens were opened this year, although Coombs and Ginninderry, having had input from COGS, remain in planning by their respective developers. During the year COGS also provided input into a proposal for a community garden in a new ACT Government public housing development at Mawson (which due to site constraints we think is unlikely to proceed).

Our new Community Gardens Coordinator role (very ably filled by Jo McMillan) has successfully established an effective line of communication between garden convenors and the Executive Committee. In our devolved mode of governance, day to day management of garden matters is left to individual gardens to manage themselves, but with liaison via the

Community Gardens Coordinator on matters of principle, and practical matters such as regular water meter readings. During the year Glynis Kennedy completed revision of the Garden Convenors Kit which provides very useful written guidance to convenors, particularly for those new to that role.

Several of our gardens, including Charnwood, Cook, Crace, Kaleen, Kambah and Mitchell, actively participate in community outreach, either by delivery of fresh organic produce to organisations which ensure it reaches less fortunate members of the Canberra community, or by provision of plots to gardeners with disabilities or social disadvantage.

The Backyard Gardeners Group continued in operation over the year, with a number of site visits, led by Jeannette Heycox. The group is now at something of a cross roads, needing a new leader and the development of closer communication channels with the Executive Committee.

Finances and auditor

COGS is in a strong financial position. Our Treasurer Andy Hrast reports that at 31 December 2017 we had **total current assets of \$114,995 and overall net assets of \$138,822**. To put this in perspective, COGS has sufficient financial reserves to meet its ongoing expenditures for two years without any further income.

Total revenue in 2017 was **\$57,314**, up from **\$49,727** in 2016, largely as a result of fund raising by the Mitchell garden. Total expenditure was **\$70,794** compared to **\$77,672** in 2016. There was an overall operating loss of **\$13,480**.

The single largest item of expenditure was water, being almost 29% of the total expenditure by COGS in 2017. The total expenditure directly on gardens in our accounts was **\$47,700**, more than two thirds of all expenditure. The cost of the magazine production was **\$8,398**, nearly 12% of expenditures.

Postage costs were down, reflecting the move to emailing invoices. Administration costs were slightly up, but included **\$2,193** for expenses associated with the 40th anniversary event.

The expenditure for each garden is set out below.

The Treasurer recommends the appointment of Kim Hanna of Houston and Hanna, Chartered Accountants, as Auditors for 2018.

40th anniversary event

The highlight of our year was a very well attended 40th anniversary celebration which we held in late November 2017, in the Crace garden. We were honoured to have Meegan Fitzharris MLA, the Minister for City Services and also for Health and

(continued on page 4)

Expenditure by garden – 2017

Garden	Assets	General Outlays	Water	Total
Betty Cornhill	\$0	\$1,258.37	NA	\$1,258.37
Charnwood	\$0	\$1,172.30	NA	\$1,172.30
Cook	\$0	\$362.22	\$4,775.20	\$5,137.42
Crace	\$0	\$911.09	NA	\$911.09
Dickson	\$0	\$297.10	\$461.35	\$758.45
Erindale	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Holder	\$0	\$1,309.44	\$5,639.74	\$6,949.18
Kaleen	\$0	\$1,620.87	\$890.01	\$2,510.88
Kambah	\$0	\$234.53	\$3,656.13	\$3,890.66
Mitchell	\$12,900	\$5,521.72	\$3,032.74	\$21,454.46
Oaks Estate	\$0	\$366.67	\$1,044.72	\$1,411.39
O'Connor	\$0	\$197.40	\$901.40	\$1,098.80
Total	\$12,900	\$13,251.71	\$20,401.29	\$46,553.00

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Jenny Clark



The Canberra Organic Growers Society is a non-profit organisation providing a forum for organic growers to exchange information and supporting the adoption of organic growing methods in the community.

COGS encourages the use of natural methods to improve our soils, promote sustainability and produce fresh, nutritious food.

For information about COGS and organic gardening, visit the COGS website

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Community gardens

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

Betty Cornhill	Richard Horobin — cotter_convenor@cogs.asn.au
Charnwood	Jurgen Sadlo — charnwood_convenor@cogs.asn.au
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Holder	Margaret Stapper — holder_convenor@cogs.asn.au
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Oaks Estate	Brian Connell — oaks_estate_convenor@cogs.asn.au
O'Connor	Jenny Clark & James Atkins — oconnor_convenor@cogs.asn.au

Wormwood flowers—see article on page 16 (photo by Sue Pavasaris)





Editor's note

There are many things that contribute to a great local community, including a welcoming and inclusive spirit, a nurturing environment, and a diversity of ages, skills and experiences, cultures and backgrounds that make that community strong.

It's an analogy that transfers neatly to a healthy and productive organic garden. In this case, diversity means a resilient garden that is more resistant to pests and disease, that attracts a variety of predators and pollinators, that nurtures our bodies and souls, and links us to our own food heritage or helps us to embrace somebody else's.

As I looked around my own garden during what felt like an endless summer, I could see fruit trees and vegies that have originated around the globe, many of which—like the new guinea bean in this photo—I had never encountered until I grew them myself. My community garden neighbours' plots have also been a wonderful education on a whole different range of vegies that are not only an important staple for millions of people around the world but that I now know will happily grow in Canberra's tough climate.

This edition of *Canberra Organic* is dedicated to trying something new and unusual, and to celebrating the diversity of both our community gardens and our community of gardeners.

I hope you enjoy it.

—Diana



(above) With a fully mature new guinea bean, also known as snake gourd and long melon. They are best eaten when 30–60cm long
(below) An amaranth plant in the Crace community garden

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This month's cover:

Pumpkins and lavender at Holder garden. Photo by Matt Mawson.



(continued from page 1)

Wellbeing, attend as our special guest, along with her husband and children. Pleasingly, Meegan expressed the support of the ACT government for our management of community gardens, and noted the role they play in building “community” spirit. Peter Cornhill, son of our founder Betty Cornhill, gave a terrific and comprehensive exposition of Betty’s vision for COGS and outlined some of the highlights and challenges between then and now. Keith Colls, a life member and previous President of COGS, took us through the history of the development of our community gardens, which almost without exception was undertaken by volunteer members, and Liz Myszk, a plot holder at the Crace garden, then shared her experience as a community gardener. Particular recognition and thanks go to Glynis Kennedy and Peter Weddell for their very hard work in staging this fully catered function, and not forgetting the Crace gardeners who ensured the garden looked lovely on the day.

Liaison with ACT Government and Government Grants

During the year a subcommittee of the Executive held meetings with our licence manager within the ACT Government, and also with senior officials in Place Management, to discuss expectations relating to gardens presentation and licence renewal. Discussions were cordial, and we are quietly confident that our gardens tenure will continue after the main licence expires on 30 April 2020.

Pleasingly, Mitchell garden was successful in the gardens infrastructure round of ACT government grants, with a proposal to extend plumbing to new plots established following their tree rationalisation project.

Education including monthly members meetings

As the majority of the aims and objectives in the COGS Constitution relate to education concerning organic growing, the Executive Committee ensured a high level of

member education during the year. COGS continued its tradition of issuing four beautifully presented magazines filled with useful gardening information. Particular thanks go to Diana Cozadinos, our editor, and Matt Mawson who assists with layout, for the fantastic quality look, plus Terry Williams for liaising with the printers, but also to our members for contributing such great articles and photographs.

In addition, we have continued to hold monthly members get togethers, either with specialist speakers presenting on a range of gardening-related topics, or as site visits to local farms and gardens. However, while farm and garden visits are typically well-attended, attendances at “talking head” meetings vary, depending on the presentation topic, suggesting that these do not necessarily meet most members’ needs. We have sought input from members as to what they want, but other than by attendance data we do not know. The Constitution (rule 23) requires that *“General meetings of COGS will be convened on the fourth Tuesday in every month except January and December or at such other times as may be determined at each Annual General Meeting”*. The Executive Committee invites

members’ comment and feedback on what subjects, venues and timing best match members’ needs. It recommends that members consider determining that in the upcoming year there be no less than four general meetings convened, at such times as the Executive Committee considers best meet members’ needs.

We continue to maintain our hard copy library, and following a review and audit by our librarian Margaret Stapper, we plan to publicise our catalogue on the members section of the COGS website so that members can conveniently see what is available for borrowing.

The website content, migrated across upon launch of our new website, is currently under review by a subcommittee led by Neville Jackson. Much of it, though not all, remains highly useful, but it is intended that some be rewritten to ensure currency, relevance to Canberra, and standardised style and presentation. Assuming support from the incoming Executive Committee, the subcommittee will soon be inviting expressions of interest from our member group, and also approaching known experts for assistance with the redrafting.

Springtime in the Betty Cornhill garden (photo: Matt Mawson)



Our Facebook page, which delivers timely educative information at no cost to a public audience, goes from strength to strength, now having approximately 2,500 followers, not much short of six times our formal membership numbers.

Records management

An important “back of house” project during 2017 has been the development of a new IT approach for COGS emails and records management. The current email system is not user-friendly and thus many emails are not captured by it. Moreover there has been no central digital repository for important corporate documents. A subcommittee led by Sue Pavasaris and comprising Sue and co-opted members Phil Combridge, Ben Winkler and Richard Horobin has recommended that COGS adopts a Google-based system that will allow transparency and easy retrieval of emails and documents, as well as sharing of documents during drafting. There will be an ongoing administrative cost, which, depending on how many email addresses we ask it to maintain, will be in the order of \$1,800 per annum. Given our significant responsibilities for ACT Government garden management, and regular changes within the Executive team, the Executive Committee considers the recommended system is appropriate and that the cost is proportionate to the benefit. Assuming support from the incoming Executive Committee, the new system should be launched within a couple of months and all office bearers and Executive Committee will be given guidance on its use.

Urban food economy connections

COGS does not sit in splendid isolation: it continues to actively connect with like-minded urban food economy groups in our region. We continue to cooperate with Urban Agriculture Australia and Canberra City Farm, and Southern Harvest, through site visits and cross-promotion, and shared education.



In the pink—Holder garden (photo: Matt Mawson)

Thanks to outgoing office bearers and Executive Committee, and to garden convenors and garden committees

As an organisation managed entirely without paid staff, COGS could not exist without dedicated volunteers prepared to spend significant personal time and effort on the many “back of house” aspects of our affairs. A very sincere thank you to all those who filled a governance role, big or small, in the past year. They have all contributed to COGS’ ongoing success. Some are stepping back for the coming year, and new energy, ideas and enthusiasm are sought from our member group.

A call to arms

To those members who have not undertaken such a role to date – please consider how you might personally contribute, going forward. COGS belongs to and benefits all of us. There are big jobs and small jobs, formal and informal, creative and routine. As members, we all have different “skill sets” and absolutely there will be something we can each individually do that we are good at, enjoy, and that helps keep COGS efficient and effective.

We look forward to welcoming you to the team that supports us all, as we move forward into the next 40 years.

—Sue McCarthy, President,
COGS, on behalf of the Executive Committee.

Holder community garden — a diverse harvest

Holder Garden is located in a gully—the cold air settles low across our plots making it two or three degrees colder than higher up, which restricts our growing season. In the first week of April we had already experienced one frost.

It is always a pleasure to see how our Holder gardeners use their plots. Some of our gardeners are renowned for their garlic, their broad beans, or their brassicas. Some have the best autumn raspberries imaginable! One of our gardeners grows beautiful dahlias. All tell me there is always something more to learn and more to enjoy about gardening!

This year we have some gardeners experimenting with sweet potato. These have been somewhat frost-damaged but still may continue growing given our un-seasonally warm temperatures. There is a mixture of white and yellow sweet potato growing in our garden and at the time of writing, the crops have not been harvested to know about the yield, but the plants have looked very healthy through summer.

Jeya Jeyasingham has been gardening with us for two years and his garden is filled with interesting fruits and vegetables. He agreed to an interview.

Jeya, who inspired you to be a great gardener?

I come from a farming family in Sri Lanka so my interests come from my parents and grandparents. In Sri Lanka my family have a coconut plantation, rice paddies and we also grow the crops I am growing here on my plot. I completed my PhD in environmental biology and I have worked as an academic in New Zealand and Australia. I currently work for the Department of Agriculture in Canberra. I cannot go without gardening—it is my passion! I really enjoy sharing my produce with others here at Holder but also friends who miss being able to eat these fruits and vegetables that are so common in Sri Lanka.

Our family traditionally farmed organically but in Sri Lanka we did have to adopt some use of non-organic

Indian melon



Jeya Jeyasingham with his chilli plants

practices. There was no recognition of organic practices and we could not get premium prices as you can here. I feel comfortable gardening organically as I remember those traditional methods.

To preserve our produce, we sun dry our chilli and eggplant. We also freeze some of our produce and pickle some.

Jeya, you have a wonderful chilli crop and grow eggplant and many other crops that other gardeners grow in our community garden at Holder. It is the first week of April and I see a plant I don't recognise growing as tall as the chillies with seeds developing. What is that?

This is Indian Spinach and I am letting it go to seed so that I can re-plant again in mid to late spring and throughout summer. A late frost will kill it and Holder is very susceptible to frost. The soft new leaves are used and it is very mild and very soft like English spinach. We make a type of stir-fry with it.

Jeya, tell me about your other more unusual crops.

The Indian Melon is really finished now but it tastes wonderful! It is very starchy and when it ripens it will split open and this is when it is eaten. To eat, you remove the seeds and add a little brown sugar. My 2017-18 crop was



Indian spinach

not very good but the previous year I had about 10-15 fruits, which is very good for here. It will not tolerate temperatures less than 10 degrees so the season is restricted. I bought a fruit from Flemington Markets in Sydney in 2017 and now I keep my own seed.

Bitter Melon is very good medicinally and has three important compounds that are especially good for diabetes. Bitter melon will grow to more than 30cm with a diameter 10cm, and it is very popular in India and Sri Lanka. The addition of coconut water during cooking reduces the bitterness and is used in some recipes. My bitter melon crop has finished now.

Snake gourd can grow up to 150cm. Sometimes a weight is put at the tip of it to stop it curling. It is a tropical or subtropical vine and is found growing wild in much of Asia. It is also regarded as native to northern Australia. We use this in a stir-fry or curry. It feels soft and there is not much inside. The seeds are scraped out and the thin layer of flesh is eaten. There are so many recipes using Snake Gourd but we make curry or stir-fry.

Jeya, would you share some recipes with us?

We are not master chefs but these (box) are some of the recipes that we use that can be modified easily. All three dishes are good to eat with steamed rice.

—Margaret Stapper
(article and photos)

Jeya's recipes

Bitter melon (gourd) and tomato salad

Ingredients

2 bitter gourds
1 small tomato
½ red onion
2 green chillies
½ cup cooking oil
salt to taste

Method

Wash and pat dry the bitter gourd. Cut lengthwise into half and remove all the seeds. Then slice each half into thin slices. Toss some salt and set aside.

In a small frying pan, heat the oil. Once it is hot, squeeze the bitter gourd to remove the moisture and fry it. When it turns to light brown, remove and leave on a kitchen towel to remove the excess oil.

Slice tomato, onion and chillies into thin slices, mix in a bowl with the fried bitter guard, add salt to taste and enjoy.

Snake gourd stir-fry

Ingredients

1 snake gourd
1 brown onion
3 dried red chillies
1 teaspoon fennel seeds
1 teaspoon mustard seeds
1 teaspoon turmeric powder
½ cup grated coconut
3 tablespoons oil

Method

Scrape the skin lightly off of the snake gourd, cut lengthwise into two, remove

the seeds and wash. Then slice it into small pieces. Cut onion and dried red chillies into small piece. Heat a cooking pan, add oil and once it is heated add the mustard seeds. When they start to pop add onion, chillies and fennel seeds and stir. Then add snake gourd pieces, salt and turmeric powder, mix well, cover and cook over a slow flame. Mix a few times. Once the snake gourd is cooked add the coconut, stir and remove from the flame. Leave it covered for 5 minutes, then transfer into the serving dish.

Indian Spinach curry

Ingredients

1 bunch spinach
1 onion
4 cloves garlic
3 chillies
1 cup water
¼ cup milk
½ lime
Salt to taste

Method

Wash and chop spinach into pieces. Cut onion, garlic and chillies into small pieces

Combine everything into a small cooking vessel, add water and salt, cover and cook on a slow flame, turning few times to make sure everything is mixed well and cooked evenly. Once the water is evaporated, add milk and cook for another 2 mins, don't cover. Let it cool and add lime juice to taste and mix well.



Charnwood hosts fruit tree maintenance and pruning workshop

At a general meeting of Charnwood plot holders it was decided we needed to seek some professional advice and guidance on our fruit trees—were some of the older trees still viable and how should we best maintain those trees that were still cropping? The Charnwood garden convenor, Jurgen Sadlo, met with horticulturist Kathryn Scobie who kindly assessed our trees and found that most of the fruit trees were still healthy but needed quite extensive and correct pruning to encourage good yields whilst maintaining good quality fruit.

A fruit tree maintenance and pruning workshop, under Kathryn's guidance, was subsequently organised on March 24th and opened to all interested COGS members. Kathryn is a trained horticulturist with over fifteen years' experience in Perth and Canberra and is now working part time at the Canberra Botanic Gardens as well as running her own consultancy business (www.goodfoodgardens.com.au).

The morning began at 8.30 with Kathryn presenting the fundamentals of pruning and fruit tree care



and maintenance. This was then followed by a 'hands on' demonstration assessing the thinning and heading needs of a pear tree and then pruning it to shape. Charnwood members who manage a fruit tree within the Garden were then able to

be individually guided and instructed by Kathryn as they began to enthusiastically prune their trees! Visiting COGS members were able to watch on and gain invaluable insight while the pruning saws—and on occasion the chain saw—were employed!

The workshop was highly successful. Kathryn's clear instructions and professional teaching technique provided the twenty six members who attended with invaluable information and clear demonstrations of just what was needed by individual trees. Members commented that they could now approach fruit tree pruning with confidence—a far cry from previous attempts.

Once again the COGS event was supported by a delicious morning tea that was enjoyed and appreciated by all, and a warm 'thank you' is extended to members who contributed a plate to our morning tea.

Charnwood gardeners would also like to thank Kathryn for her expertise





and energy on the day (she covered quite a few kilometres between trees that morning!), and COGS, which made it possible to engage Kathryn's services. Kathryn has also made available her pruning notes and information which can be accessed on her website at www.goodfoodgardens.com.au/pruning

—Philippa Hankinson
(articles and photos)

(above) Kathryn demonstrating thinning of the pear tree branches with Charnwood gardeners (L-R) Alissah, Tim and Cathy observing.

(right) All our activity heightened our appreciation of the morning tea!

(opposite page, top) Horticulturist Kathryn Scobie addressing the group prior to the pruning demonstration

(opposite page, bottom) The Charnwood garden banner (made by Jo McMillan) added a welcoming atmosphere to other COGS members



Crace community garden

On the last weekend in March, Crace Community garden participated in the Open Garden program.

Back in October, when Liz Myszka, a retiring Committee member, asked if we wanted to be involved, the new Committee just said yes without really knowing what was involved. Liz was going to be opening her own home garden, just across the road, on the same weekend. I didn't know who'd be interested in an end-of-summer community garden but Liz and John's Open Garden reassured me that people visiting them would probably pop into our garden.

The weekend arrived. The garden was looking lovely and tidy due to the work all we gardeners put in the weekend before. Garden beds stripped of tired end-of-season plants, weeds in the paths banished.

Saturday dawned bright and beautiful and people started arriving as soon as the gates opened. We could see streams of people heading over to John and Liz's place too. I really enjoyed greeting people, pointing them to interesting plots and chatting about gardening matters. We'd organised a roster of Gardeners to be on duty throughout the weekend and the participation was terrific.

Sunday wasn't such a spectacular day. The grey, windy, squally weather might have slowed the traffic but didn't dampen the enthusiasm of those who braved the conditions and we still got good numbers of people through the gate. By 4pm, when we were gently shooing visitors out the gate, over 200 people had enjoyed our garden. And we'd earned \$272 in gold coin donations for UNICEF.

Across the road, Liz and John Myszka had even more people enjoy their five-year-old garden. They have several



distinct 'rooms' that they've developed from scratch. They've created a blend of beauty and function. They have an emphasis on conservation and self-sufficiency, installing rainwater tanks and using recycled materials to establish beds and framing. Personal history and memories are alive with plants taken as cuttings from previous home gardens. They had a lovely busy weekend, too, showing admiring people through their garden. They raised over \$1000 through the entry fees for a school in Vanuatu.

All in all, the Open Garden was a great success. It wasn't onerous to organise, showed the community spirit of our members, and I, for one, surprised myself by really enjoying the weekend. It was great to see so many people interested in community gardening and to be able to contribute donations to UNICEF for people living in far less fortunate circumstances.

—Marguerite Perkins

(left) Leonie Walmsley welcomes visitors to the Crace community garden (photo by Marguerite Perkins)

(top) Liz and John Myszka's beautiful garden (photo by the Myszkas)



A little bit of heritage

This is the original submission to the government for establishing community gardens in the ACT under COGS governance. Due to its length, only the beginning and end are reproduced here. Please note that COG changed its name to COGS the year after this submission was made.

The Secretary NCDC
17 Fitzgerald St, Yarralumla
PO Box 373, Canberra City
Sept 21 1984

SUBMISSION FOR COMMUNITY GARDENS by the CANBERRA ORGANIC GROWERS SOCIETY

The Canberra Organic Growers Society, COG is a thriving organization with steadily increasing membership. Its fundamental objective is the growing of produce free from artificial chemicals and in a manner conducive to the conservation and regeneration of soil fertility by natural means. By achieving these objectives COG expects the community to benefit in two ways: by helping to preserve our soil and by making available fruit and vegetables that are free from



Peter Carden (photo: Diana Cozadinos)



Shirley Carden (photo: Peter Carden)

toxic contaminants. Growing plants is an underlying common interest of members most of whom have either chosen this as a vocation or method of recreation. Members come from all walks of life and are of all ages, flat dwellers, people with young families, retired people and young singles. Membership presently stands at 60 individuals and families. COG already successfully operates a small community garden located in the City Parks Administration's experimental area at Curtin. In 1982 COG was offered a plot here on a temporary basis for experimenting with organic growing. The garden has been run continuously since then and has been invaluable for developing organic methods and demonstrating their successes and failures. Generally both the quantity and quality of produce has been outstanding and this has led to a strong

demand from members to participate. However only ten member families can be accommodated comfortably. This submission arises from the success of this experimental venture and the fact that many more members wish to participate than can presently be accommodated. The waiting list currently stands at 51. We now seek a more extensive area on a permanent basis.

Community gardens exist elsewhere in the world and their number is steadily increasing. There are many examples in Europe especially UK. Even New York now boasts at least one. In Australia the community garden movement began in Melbourne and interest has now spread to many other parts of the country. Community gardens

(continued on following page)

started in the UK out of necessity during the war. The number declined after the war but after a period began to increase again until they boomed in the seventies. The reasons given are shorter working hours, earlier retirement, greater mobility, changing preference in recreation and economic necessity. In the Melbourne district the Nunawadding community garden co-operative was founded in 1977. By 1980 this organisation had doubled in size and others had opened at Springvale and Essendon. Still others are planned within the city area.

Research has shown that successful community gardens have a high proportion of growers who are motivated by the enjoyment of gardening and the sharing of experiences. The entire garden should be fenced for security reasons but it has been found that fences between plots are not favoured. Nevertheless private ownership of plots is essential for a reasonable time. With regard to administration it is preferable for the responsibility to be delegated to an existing organization such as COG having a special association with gardening. In such an organization members will have predefined common interests and the inherent screening that arises from this will ensure that all participants are well motivated and that disagreements among them will be absolutely minimal. In this regard it is pertinent to relate our experiences with the present small garden.

Persons interested in organic growing join COG and if they find themselves at home with the members and the ideals they gradually migrate to the garden where they are allocated a plot. There they learn from others and enjoy the company of like-minded individuals and especially enjoy eating quality freshly picked fruit and vegetables. Even if they stay no longer than a season it will have been a valuable educational experience for them.

There are very good reasons why the community at large should bear the relatively small cost of setting up and maintaining community gardens. The strong argument comes from drawing an analogy with the provision of sports facilities. Community money goes without question to the upkeep of sports fields for the benefit of people whose recreation is sport. Community gardening is also recreation and is at least as healthy. Moreover it is productive and has benefits for the community at large.

An important tenet of organic growers is that organic refuse such as autumn leaves and grass clippings should be converted to compost and returned to the soil. We are therefore in favour of a policy that avoids the air pollution caused by burning organic material in back yards and street gutters and are in favour of recycling enterprises such as is presently being experimented with at the Mugga Tip where organic material is processed by Corkhill Brothers into a variety of useful products such as tan bark and compost. COG actively supports these policies and sees the community gardens as a means of making people aware of the merit of pollution-free disposal of organic

refuse. Ultimately community gardens might be usefully associated with community compost dumps where refuse such as autumn leaves and lawn clippings might be brought. A well run productive garden is a good advertisement for both the administrative body and the government.

Based on our current experience the resources necessary for establishing a successful community garden for fifty people are as follows:

Items

Area of land. Two locations one on the north side and one on the south side of Canberra each of one hectare plus 0.5 hectare for future extension.

Type of land: well drained.

Location: sheltered from strong winds, sunny, away from main roads to avoid pollution, but with vehicular access, near habitation to discourage pilfering.

Fence. A security fence is required with a vehicle gate and perhaps a smaller gate.

Shed: not essential, this could be supplied by members in the long run.

Recurrent expenditure. Water, upkeep of fence. Upkeep within the

The members list from 1985 (photo: Peter Carden)





Betty Cornhill garden, which replaced the original Cotter garden (photo: Matt Mawson)

fence will be the responsibility of members. All gardening equipment and materials will be provided by members.

We hope you will be able to respond favorably to this submission in the near future and look forward to your reply,

Yours sincerely
S Carden

This submission is in a way the founding document of all COGS community gardens which, with the incorporation of COGS, was initiated by Shirley. The submission was successful and grants subsequently flowed, the first to the Cotter Community Garden. Plainly the success of the submission depended largely on the experience of running this very first COGS garden, the Cotter Community Garden. The name is important. This historic garden, this patch of now almost forgotten land situated beside the Cotter Road was always known as the Cotter Community Garden for that reason, and that name should be reserved in honour of its precedence and its founder. It should never be confused with that other garden situated a kilometre's walk away, first called the Woolshed

garden. The Woolshed garden now glorifies in the additional name of Betty Cornhill the doyen of COGS, title enough without misguidedly coveting the name of its predecessor. Well do I remember that first garden by the Cotter Road, the deal with the horse trainer to pay for the hire of a truck if he would load it with manure and dump it near our plots, the war on rats determined to eat our crop and the enthusiasm and good heart of those eleven founding members.

Some years ago when Walter was president, COGS decided to produce a booklet on the history of COGS. There was a general call for snippets of history to be sent to Walter for possible inclusion. It was then that I embarked on the tedious work of extracting Shirley's records from an ancient Microbee computer. No mouse did it have nor a printer that still worked. There was only one thing for it—bring up the documents on the screen and take photographs. I set up my camera on a tripod and got to work. I have many scores of these photos covering the times Shirley was President and convenor of the Cotter Garden. They include letters and reports and newsletters for the Cotter Garden plot-holders. The photo shown here in this article is an example. It is in fact the earliest

list of plotholders dated February 1985, some three years after the Cotter Community Garden started.

Some people might be surprised to see that Betty Cornhill is not listed. Though Betty was not among the eleven founders, her name does turn up in May 1987 and thereafter. She would no doubt have been among the leaders who led the gardeners to their new home in late 1988. This is the date when Shirley moved to her Berry farm after having secured firm title to the Woolshed land.

Walter and I have discussed the idea of putting these photos on a DVD to be kept in the library. That would make these early records available to any budding historian who might like to do some research.

Without doubt the doyen of COGS will always be Betty Cornhill and as such COGS has thought it fitting to name the Woolshed Garden in her honour. It is my fervent wish that Shirley Carden will also be honoured, not by a plaque or seat or some such, but in a way that her name is also spoken often. Shirley and Betty were good friends and I feel sure that the first to agree would be Betty herself.

—Peter Carden, Past Treasurer and life member, one of the first eleven plotholders of 1982.



Long melon dishes

Qiwen Lin has been a member of the Mitchell Garden for years and grows a large variety of Chinese veggies and herbs. The following recipes use long melon, which is also known as new guinea bean or snake gourd. The seeds should be planted direct in early summer in a sunny spot, with a trellis for the vine. The melon can also be eaten like zucchini.

The melon should be prepared by peeling off the skin and removing the core with seeds. Cooking time is only a rough estimate.

—Qiwen Lin (recipes),
Narelle McLean (photos)

Long melon stir fry

1. Chop pre-prepared melon into half inch pieces
2. Heat pan with vegetable oil
3. Add the melon pieces and stir-fry for about 2-3 minutes
4. Add some salt and cook for further 2-3 minutes.

Note: Alternatively, you may fry one or two eggs first, and then add the melon pieces and stir fry (repeat the above procedures).

Long melon and pork rib soup

1. Chop pre-prepared melon into inch-long pieces
2. Put 250g pork ribs in water, and cook ribs until water is boiling, pour the boiled water away, and then rinse ribs with cold tap water
3. Put cold water and ribs into a pot, add ginger, a teaspoon of cooking wine, 5-6 Sichuanese peppercorns, one or two green onions, and boil
4. Simmer and cook for about 1-1.5 hrs until ribs are completely cooked
5. Add melon pieces (optional—add sliced tomatoes as well) and cook for about 20 minutes
6. Season with salt to taste and serve.

A taste of the tropics

Bitter melon is a popular vegetable in South and South East Asia. It belongs to the Cucurbitaceae family. Also known as bitter gourd, or bitter squash, or balsam-pear, it mainly grows in tropical and sub-tropical areas. It is known for its health benefits and particularly believed to help manage type 2 diabetes. Bitter melon is rich in vitamins A and C, high in fibre and low in calories. It is eaten unripe when it is still green.

Usually you can find two types of bitter melons—the South Asian variety you find in India and Sri Lanka, which is smaller and darker green in colour and the South East Asian variety which is larger in size and lighter in colour.

In Canberra, bitter melon can be grown during the warmer months. Seeds can be bought online or you can get seeds from ripe fruits you can buy from Asian grocery shops. Seeds have a red coat and it needs to be removed before planting. You can either plant them directly in the ground or grow them in a container in a green house and transplant when the ground is warmer and all risk of frost has passed.

Bitter melon prefers a sunny position and needs to be supported on a trellis. You can also grow it in pots. Prepare the soil rich in compost and organic fertilizer before planting. Water regularly to keep the soil moist.

In about two months' time, bitter melon produces male and female flowers that are yellow. Normally they get pollinated by bees and other insects. If there are no bees around, you may have to hand pollinate. In about two weeks' time, the fruits will be ready for harvest.

If you would like to reduce the bitter taste, you can salt the bitter melon before cooking or making salads.

Cut the melon lengthways in half and remove the seeds using a spoon. Slice the bitter melon and add a teaspoon of cooking salt and let it sit for about ten minutes. Squeeze the excess water off and rinse in cold water and use as required.

You can find many bitter melon recipes on the internet. They can be scrambled with eggs, stir fried, stuffed, curried or made into salads. Here is one of our favourite bitter melon recipes, in which lime juice, onions and tomato successfully reduce the bitterness while retaining all the goodness of the fruit.

—Amara Perera (article and recipe photos)
and Diana Cozadinos (garden photo)



Bitter melon and tomato salad

- 1 medium sized bitter melon
- 100 grams French shallots (you can use a small sized Spanish onion instead)
- 1 medium sized tomato
- 1 deseeded green chilli (optional)
- 1 small lime
- Salt and pepper

Cut the bitter melon in two lengthwise and remove the seeds and white spongy middle using a metal spoon. Grate the bitter melon using a mandolin grater. Alternatively you can finely slice the bitter melon.

Finely slice the French shallots. Cut the tomato in to four pieces and slice finely. Cut the deseeded green chilli finely. Mix the sliced onions, tomato and green chilli in a medium sized salad bowl. Add salt, pepper and juice of the lime. Add the sliced bitter melon and mix well.

Serve with boiled rice, chicken or meat curry.



Wormwood

Wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*) may not be a popular plant in modern Australian gardens but there are so many good reasons to grow it.

With its silver-grey leaves and tiny yellow flowers, wormwood is an attractive plant for your garden and can be used for hedges as well as for a feature background. However, it also has other useful properties.

I grow it next to the chook pen as it discourages pests including mice—not that I’ve seen any compelling evidence that it’s working! Wormwood tea can also apparently be used to get rid of fleas on dogs.

While you can’t grow wormwood right next to other plants as its roots excrete a substance that other plants can’t tolerate, it’s useful to grow it in the vicinity of fruit trees and vegetables. Wormwood has a particular scent that aphids, moths and caterpillars don’t like. I have seen evidence of this.



If the scent reminds you of something you might be thinking of the fortified wine, vermouth. Wormwood is a key component of vermouth—not that I’m using it for that purpose.

Wormwood is also used in herbal medicine to boost the immune system and treat colds and digestive disorders. You may have seen wormwood tablets and teas in health food shops but you’d really have to know what you were doing to make

your own. The active substances in wormwood are very strong and can apparently cause problems if taken incorrectly or for prolonged periods. Fortunately wormwood is so bitter that it has a sort of built-in warning system.

—Sue Pavasaris
(article and top photo)

(above) *The wormwood plant*
(below) *Wormwood flowers*



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Winter is the time for exotic plants like okra

Jambalaya, crawfish pie and fillet gumbo

The lyrics of this popular song conjure up visions of sunny, palm-fringed Caribbean beaches, wooden huts and the smell of Creole cooking. Imagine pots of gumbo (also known as okra or ladies fingers) simmering over wood fires a thousand of miles away from Canberra's winter chills.

Why grow okra?

Well surprisingly, this subtropical plant grows very well in Canberra and flourished in the Crace Community Garden last summer. It is remarkably hardy as it can put up with very hot, dry weather when other vegetables flag. It is also a beautiful plant with hibiscus-like flowers and is related to the mallows. It is the green or red pointed finger-length seed pods that are usually eaten although the leaves are apparently tasty too.

Okra is a good source of vitamins and minerals, contains lots of fibre (100g can supply more than 20 per cent of your daily requirement) and is low in calories. Research suggests that okra may help in the management of blood sugar levels, may lower cholesterol and may inhibit helicobacter pylori (the bacteria associated with stomach ulcers). Okra is traditionally used to treat a host of ailments and it will be interesting to see what further research reveals about this exotic plant.

Okra is a mucilaginous plant which means it can produce lots of slime when cut up and cooked. This is a mixed blessing. The slime is actually soluble fibre which is very good for your digestion. Soluble fibre can act as a prebiotic and can also give you a feeling of fullness after eating a meal. It is also viscous and can help thicken stews such as the eponymous gumbo. On the other hand, for mucilaginosophobes like me, all that slime can be off putting, but there are ways around this problem.

Growing okra

It is a good idea to soak seeds overnight in water before planting them. Plant in warm soil (over 20°C ideally) spaced about 50cm apart as the plants get quite large. The soil should

(below) An okra flower, which will soon develop into an okra pod.



Okra pods

canstockphoto.com.au

be improved with compost and dug over to ensure it is well-draining but water retentive. A hot summer should give the best results but wait until all danger of frosts has passed before planting.

Harvesting

The seed pods should be ready to pick anywhere between 11 and 14 weeks from planting. Pick the pods when they are young and small (around 5-8cm long) as larger ones will be stringy and unappetising. If it has been raining it is a good idea to wear gloves when picking the pods as some people are allergic to them when wet.

Cooking

Okra has a mild taste, somewhat similar to eggplant. Here is a basic recipe from a Crace community gardener who grows it and loves to eat it. Don't wash the pods, wipe them if they need it. Fry some onion, garlic, green chilli and curry leaves in some oil in a hot pan. Slice the okra pods diagonally into big chunks, or leave whole if the buds are small, add to the pan with some turmeric powder and crushed red chilli. Cook on very high heat without crowding the pan. You do not want the okra to start sweating. It should be ready in a minute or two. You can then add this cooked okra to other dishes if you wish. Don't wash cut okra if you don't want it to be slimy. Another trick to reduce sliminess is to soak the sliced okra in vinegar before cooking, rinse and pat dry before using. Likewise, cooking okra with tomatoes helps reduce the slime due to their acidity. Lime or lemon juice also helps for the same reason.

The pods can also be grilled on a barbeque, pickled or eaten raw.

Happy dreaming of the Caribbean

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

Rare fruits that shouldn't be

Two rare fruits that ought not to be rare in Canberra are firstly, the delicious *Asimina triloba* which is the largest edible fruit native to North America, and second, the historic Cornel, a.k.a. 'Cornelian Cherry', *Cornus mas*.

I grow both, and recommend them for this climate. Today I will concentrate on the second.

Cornelian cherry, though its bright red fruit looks and tastes like a cherry, is not a cherry. It is not even related to the stone-fruits (*Prunus* species). Instead it is an edible dogwood.

Yes, there are edible dogwoods! The Korean or Japanese *Cornus kousa* sometimes has edible fruit; though the white-flowered purely ornamental cultivars of it that are sold in nurseries mostly do not. The showy pink fruits of the related *Cornus capitata* (Himalayan Strawberry Tree) are that plant's chief beauty. When I find a nursery offering a batch of them, I taste a fruit from any plant I am tempted to buy, hoping to find a truly edible cultivar.

But *Cornus mas*, the Cornel, is a serious fruit. It has been in European orchards for thousands of years.

Odysseus a.k.a. Ulysses, a keen orchardist, famously returned from the Trojan War to his beloved wife Penelope—and, according to Homer, to his beloved fig-trees, pears, and Cornelian cherries.

Like the walnut, the Cornel was both food tree and timber tree. The wood is so dense it sinks in water, and so strong it made spokes, staves, and wedges to split other woods. It was also the preferred wood for spears and pikes, and for Odysseus's famous bow. (I suspect the orchard Cornels were often raided in time of war: a version of 'plowshares into swords'!)

And though this tree is often little taller than a shrub, Homer claimed the Trojan horse was made from its wood! Well, the tree does live for centuries. Perhaps the old-world forests were taller, and older, then. For more on this tree in history, check the online article 'Cornelian Cherry from the shores of Ancient Greece'.

Cornus mas is also an outstanding ornamental—three times a year. In late winter the fluffy yellow flowers on leafless branches are spectacular for about a month against Canberra's

blue skies; then there are bright red fruits against deep green leaves in late summer; and finally comes the red-purple autumn foliage. The bark is also very attractive; and there are cultivars with variegated leaves.

I found *Cornus mas* on sale last spring at Gold Creek Nursery, as an ornamental among the other dogwoods; so you should be able to order it from them. Or from Diggers, whose brochure remarks, 'After tasting Cornel Jelly one could not go without a Cornelian Cherry in the garden'.

In the 19th century, orchardists improved most *Prunus* fruits, making them bigger, sweeter, less sour, and thornless. *Cornus mas*, though never thorny, was on the sour side; and it did not improve as fast as *Prunus*. Hence it vanished from Western European orchards, and its unique taste was lost. But in Eastern Europe and in Iran, closer to its wild origins, there was perhaps more genetic diversity; and a breeding program in the Ukraine finally produced large-fruited cultivars.

Recently three of these were imported into Australia: Red Star, Elegant, and Jolico (the first two largely self-fertile). These may be available from Yamina Rare Plants Nursery—ask Peter Teese at info@yaminarare-plants.com.au. Or cuttings can be borrowed from fruit enthusiasts and either struck (50 per cent success rate) or grafted onto ordinary (ornamental) *Cornus mas* plants.

In July last year Jan and I stayed at a B&B in northern Italy, whose owner Nadja Pittino served us Cornelian cherries each morning with yoghurt, and also on cereal. Her neighbour had a superb tree that was double netted: one net above for the birds, and a net below like a hammock, into which the red fruits dropped, self-harvested, when perfectly ripe. The owner would tilt the hammock each morning and pour ripe fruits into a basket.

Two bottles of Cornel liqueur





Cornel harvest, Osoppo, Italy 2017 (photo by kind permission of Graziella Gentilini)

At breakfast the fruits tasted almost exactly like stewed or bottled cherries. I found it hard to believe they had not been stewed in sugar; but it seems they were just perfectly ripe. They sweeten rapidly if stored for a day. And last for weeks in the fridge.

She also had bottles of Cornel liqueur. The recipe was simple: Fill a bottle with 200 gm sugar, 1 litre of grappa (or brandy or vodka), and as many Cornels as will fit.

If travelling in Europe between July and September keep an eye out for these fruits in markets. At other times you could try asking for the jam: *marmellata di cornioli* (Italian), or *Kornelkirschen-Konfitüre* (German) or *confiture de cornouilles* (pronounced kornu-yah or simply kornuy, in French).

The Cornelian Cherry is far hardier and more adaptable than the true cherries. A downside is that its fruit stays very sour till perfectly ripe—which it never will be, unless you net it against the birds!

Oddly enough, the seeds too are sometimes eaten—ground up as a substitute for coffee—or mixed with coffee to give it a vanilla-like flavour, said to be the secret of “Vienna Coffee”.

The Cornel may produce 25-100 kg per tree depending on its age; and it fruits for some 150 years.

Recipes for its use in tarts, sherberts/sharbat, fools, jams, fruit-leathers, wines, vinegars, etc are legion. It is reputed to have endless health benefits or specific medical effects, particularly if you pickle the young sour fruits like olives. Chinese medicine even claims that *Cornus* fruit cures ‘spermatorrhea’, which means what you might think it does!

So google this tree. And don’t miss the modestly titled online article Cornelian Cherry (Dogwood) in South of Ukraine—an erudite paean to its wonders.

This adaptable tree will grow here, provided you give it regular watering in summer’s heat till well established. But don’t over-water, or dig the sort of hole into Canberra’s slow-draining clays that turns into a well. As with most plants on clay, dig a hole that is wider but not much deeper than the

pot you are planting. Mulch well, but not touching the trunk.

Lime is beneficial but not essential. Ditto fertilizer. Expect it to grow fairly slowly to four metres. Prune to a single trunk, or let it grow as a typical dogwood thicket. Or make a hedge. And do propagate some cuttings or layers to give away to fellow gardeners!

Cornus mas likes sun, but may appreciate some shade for its first two years. Like most trees, it prefers an east or north-east facing to a west or north-west one. Morning sun is far more valuable to plants in a cold climate, and less stressful, than afternoon sun. But this is a hardy dogwood, and will do well almost anywhere. Try it.

—Mark O’Connor (article and photos, unless specified)

<http://markoconnor-australian-poet.blogspot.com/>

A hammock net, with close-up of the dogwood-like leaves



Neutral conditions—neither El Niño nor La Niña

The Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) report released on 10 April 2018 advises that the current weather conditions are neutral ie neither El Niño nor La Niña. Most climate models predict that these conditions will persist through the southern autumn and winter.

Sea surface temperatures in the central Pacific are close to average for

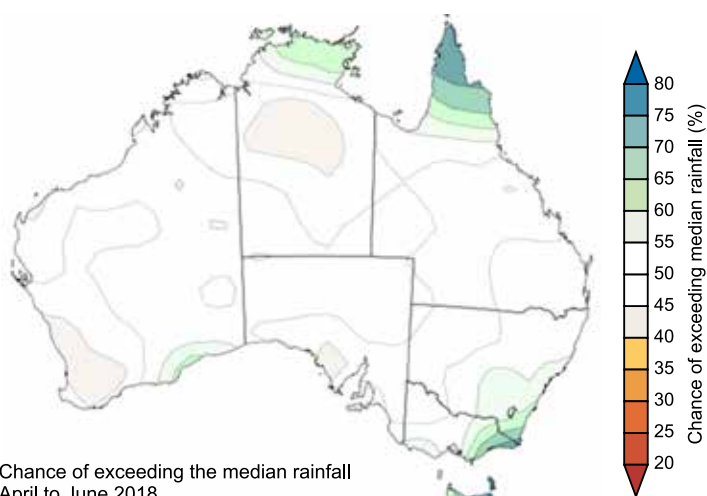
this time of year. Beneath the surface, the tropical Pacific Ocean is slightly warmer than average, but well within the neutral range. In the atmosphere, cloud and pressure patterns remain weakly La Niña-like, but trade winds are close to average.

The Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) is also currently neutral. Most models indicate a neutral IOD is

likely for autumn and early winter. However, two of six models indicate a negative IOD is possible during winter. During negative IOD events, southern Australia typically experiences a wetter than average winter-spring.

The BOM warns that climate models have lower accuracy during autumn than at other times of the year and hence outlooks should be viewed with some caution.

— Andy Hraat



Dam levels in the Canberra region and capital cities

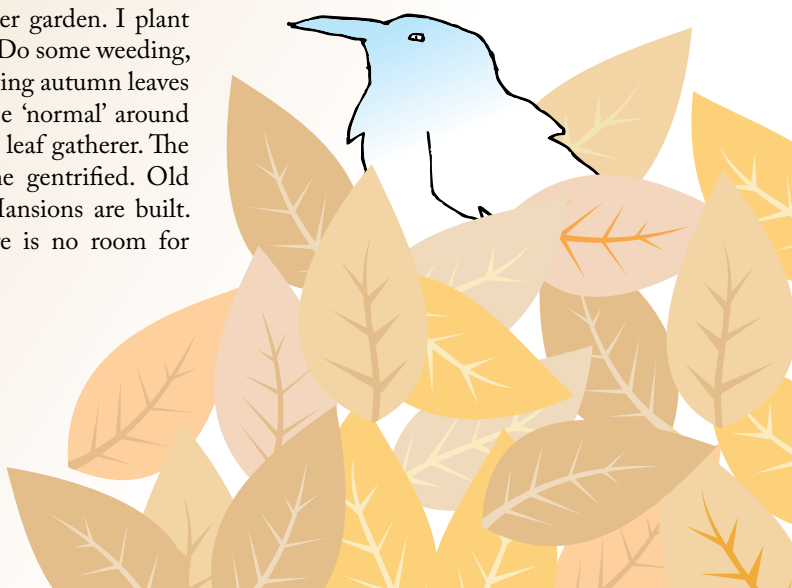
	% FULL April '18	% FULL April '17
ACT storages	74	88
Murray–Darling Basin	52	67
Burrinjuck Dam	40	50
Blowering Dam	44	53
Sydney	75	96
Melbourne	61	65
Brisbane	83	78
Adelaide	52	75
Perth	35	25

The last of the leaf gatherers

Growth slows right down in the winter garden. I plant onions and transplant rhubarb crowns. Do some weeding, some pruning. I'm also out there collecting autumn leaves in our neighbourhood. This used to be 'normal' around here, but I think I'm the last surviving leaf gatherer. The suburb has changed so much, become gentrified. Old cottages are bulldozed and new McMansions are built. These take up entire blocks and there is no room for gardens.

—Gerry Jacobson

mulching leaves
composting memories
half hidden
in morning mist
and smoke haze



Drawing by Matt Marston

Prickly pears

Have you tasted the fruit of the prickly pear bush? I'm over 70 and never tried one until last week.

Along with a fellow gardener, we carefully picked about six fruit off the prickly pear bush in the corner of our Mitchell Garden. Double gloved hands with knife and bucket in hand. Yes, a few prickles got through the gloves but then the taste test.

With plate, tongs and knife in hand, we cut the pear open and scooped out the flesh with a spoon. What an exotic taste! What an exotic colour!

I am hooked. Back to the bush again this week for more as I can't resist another taste of this rather different fruit. I would not have guessed you could eat from this very prickly cactus bush but I am very grateful to my gardening friend for telling me about the pears and helping me to taste one.

If you have not tried one yet—give it a go but remember—double leather gloves, a knife and a bucket. That's a novice's tip—you may have a better one!

Narelle McLean (article and photos)





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***Australian Bush Superfoods* by Lily Alice and Thomas O'Quinn**

Being up in the Daintree and finding so many 'bush' foods that the Indigenous peoples have eaten for centuries, gave me a real taste for finding out more. So imagine my joy at winning a competition run by a well-known newspaper and receiving *Australian Bush Superfoods* as the prize!

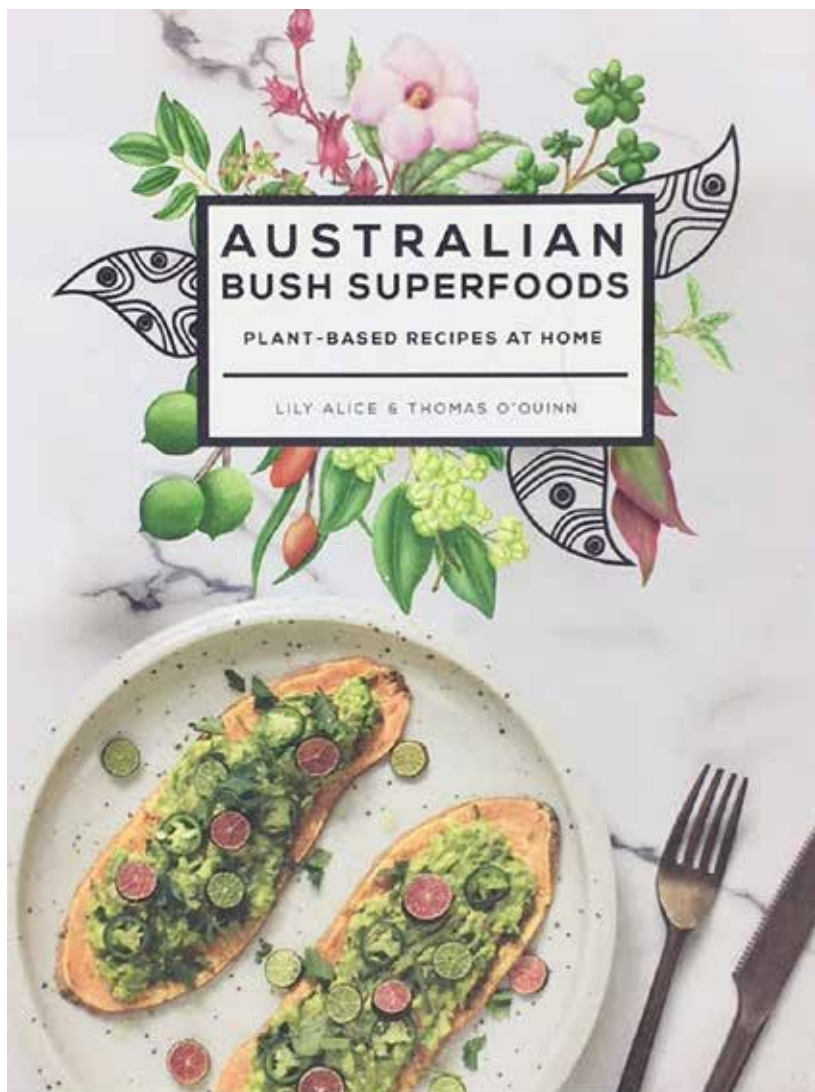
This is a lovely little book, beautifully illustrated and designed by the authors, and containing a winning mix of information about bush foods and recipes so that you have some ideas on how to use them. According to the authors, Australia has many native plants of such value to health and well-being, that they could be classed as 'superfoods'.

While the Indigenous peoples have known about the astonishing medicinal and nutritional value of many native plants, we are still finding out. For example, as the authors point out, the Kakadu plum has unmatched vitamin C content.

In addition, it makes sense to grow plants native to Australia that suit our conditions. As the world grapples with issues of climate change, food miles (the cost of transporting food over large distances), obesity, and the poor nutritional value of many of the over-processed foods in supermarkets, it's good to think about other options.

Australian Bush Superfoods features 40 Australian bush superfoods and has information about where they grow, how Indigenous peoples used them, their nutritional value and a recipe. There's also a glossary and a section on where you can source these superfoods—many, like lemon myrtle and Davidson's plum are now appearing in our supermarkets in various forms.

The recipes tend to be vegan but it would be easy to introduce animal products if you prefer. The recipes are valuable, not only for introducing bush foods into your diet, but also



in offering another way of thinking about food. For example, have you ever thought about using karkalla (*Carpobrotus rossii*) in Nori rolls? Karkalla is a creeping native ground-cover that's also known commonly as 'pigface'. It's common in coastal areas in southern and western Australia and Tasmania, and the authors say it adds fresh and salty crunchiness to Nori rolls. According to the authors the Indigenous peoples valued the mild salty flavour and juicy leaves of karkalla and ate it regularly in their diet.

Similarly, next time you're tempted to pop a pain killer for a headache opt instead for some native lemon-

grass. Easy to find in plant nurseries due to its popularity as an ornamental grass, native lemongrass apparently contains a bioactive compound called 'eugenol' that has antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, antifungal and antiseptic properties.

I found *Australian Bush Superfoods* fascinating and inspiring. So what am I going to try next? I thought 'Bunya Nut Borscht' sounded like a winner.

—Sue Pavasaris

Alice, L, & O'Quinn, T, 2017, *Australian Bush Superfoods*, Hardie Grant Travel, Melbourne.



winter planting guide

VEGETABLES

Asparagus

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

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

Remember this is a long-term investment.

Broad beans

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

Kohlrabi

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

Lettuce

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

Onions

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

Peas

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

Rhubarb

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

Other possibilities

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

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

Frost-sensitive vegetables such as capsicum, eggplant and tomatoes can be started early in August indoors but may need a heated glasshouse or warm spot to germinate and will certainly need protection before being planted out in spring.

FRUIT

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

Strawberries

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

Berries

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

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

Currants

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

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

S = seed sowing; T = transplanting

What's on



Your monthly members meetings

Sunday 29 April 2018 at 2pm—Guided tour of Betty Cornhill Garden, off Cotter Road, Curtin (Equestrian Centre exit) and demonstration of broadfork and wicking bed. Afternoon tea.

Sunday 27 May 2018 at 2pm, at Majura Meeting Room, Northside Community Centre, Rosevear Place, Dickson. Gardeners forum—our more experienced members are invited to share organic gardening knowledge with our newer plot holders. Seed/seedling swap. Our lending library will be open. Afternoon tea.

Sunday 24 June 2018 at 2pm—Guided tour of Canberra City Farm, Dairy Road Fyshwick, including viewing new community garden plots and other recent developments. Afternoon tea.

Sunday 22 July 2018 at 11am—Guided tour of Landtasia Organic Farms, 8884 Kings Highway, Mulloon 2621 (map will be provided). Come and see how the professionals make that lovely compost! Bring lunch for a day out in the country.

Sunday 26 August 2018 at 2pm, at Majura Meeting Room, Northside Community Centre, Rosevear Place, Dickson. Pickles, relish and chutney forum—bring along your preserves for a comparative tasting, and share recipes and hints on how to make that summer bounty last all year. Seed/seedling swap. Our lending library will be open. Afternoon tea.

Community Garden AGMs during September – no members meeting.

Tuesday 23 October 2018 at 7.30pm, at Majura Meeting Room, Northside Community Centre, Rosevear Place Dickson. Our popular Gardening and Pests Q&A will return. Seed/seedling swap. Our lending library will be open. Supper.

Tuesday 27 November 2018 at 7.30pm, at Majura Meeting Room, Northside Community Centre, Rosevear Place Dickson. Christmas party and seed/seedling swap. Our lending library will be open.

COGS green manure mixes Now available—

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



This year there are two mixes available:

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

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

Bulk deliveries to community gardens can also be arranged. **Available for \$5.00 per bag.**

Please contact Neville Jackson –
vicepresident@cogs.asn.au

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

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.

CURRENT FACEBOOK MEMBERSHIP

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Find us on:
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*Ridge gourds trellised between two plots
at the Crace community garden*

(photo by Diana Cozadinos)