

From Bare Earth To Bounty

The story of the Canberra Organic Growers Society



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*From Bare Earth To Bounty: The story of the
Canberra Organic Growers Society*

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
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by *Lydia Waldron*

Line eggshell with a little moist blotting paper. Can sow cress or radish seeds. Happy

paper. Can sow
cress or radish
seeds. Happy
Cresshair will
need a haircut
soon!

This disease was the scourge of Western sailors, but unknown to natives etc. Wash about 2 tablespoons in cold water and place in a day wash seeds with elastic band. Two or three times a day wash seeds so that strain through muslin so that



Keep up washing routine. After 8 - 10 days the sprouts will have grown sufficient

Daffodil & hyacinth bulbs, onions, potatoes and sweet jar of water and wedged in with the water and that the

Indoor gardening can be a great hoot! You need very little space, equipment or materials - and gardening is an activity from which most children derive immense pleasure. There's the thrill of growing, tending, and perhaps eating one's own produce.

And a little may also be learnt of growth, death and reproduction in the process:

Invective and best-known Chinese foods. Grown in China for many centuries, alfalfa is a fresh vegetable sufficient in vitamin C to prevent scurvy. Known to the Chinese. You can sprout beans, mung beans, alfalfa, even in a clear glass jar. Cover with a bit of old stocking and seeds with cold water and

The tops of carrots, parsnips, beetroot and even pineapple can form rootlets if placed in a saucer of water with a little of the base attached. The well-rooted pineapple top is a formidable beastie that will continue to flourish indoors if later transplanted into a small pot with soil potting mix added.

UNPOLISHED RICE will even shoot if placed on moist cotton wool in a location with adequate light and air. Moistened cotton wool every 2 days. Rice will germinate (shoots appear) within 4 - 5 days.

Foreword

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.

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 have 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 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.

Jackie French

Jackie French lives on an iconic organic farm in southern NSW. She is a prolific author and in the course of thirty years of experience has become one of Australia's foremost organic gardening experts.

Preface

Funded by an ACT Heritage grant, this book explores the organic growing movement in the ACT and surrounding region through the voices of thirteen members of the Canberra Organic Growers Society (COGS). We thank these members for their willingness to share their stories with us: Betty Cornhill, David Odell, John Brummell, Arno and Nel Struzina, Traudy and Bob Kalivoda, Peter and Shirley Carden, Joyce Wilkie and Michael Plane, Mary Flowers, and Rasima Kekanovic. We would also like to extend our thanks to the photographer, Michelle McAulay, for capturing such evocative images of our volunteers. The authors are all employed at the University of Canberra. Bethaney Turner's research focuses on urban agriculture, food-based social movements and food ecologies. Walter Steensby is conducting research into urban agriculture in the ACT region and is currently President of COGS. David Pearson's research is based around environmentally sustainable and healthy food choices, which includes local food systems, organic food and food waste.

In the oral histories, we encounter people from diverse backgrounds with a shared passion for organic gardening and the desire to share their knowledge with the community. Their recollections tell of lives shaped by gardens and gardening. Sometimes their food production begins as a response to illness and hardships; for others it is part of an ingrained familial legacy; and for some it is motivated by a desire to work with soil and nature in order to be part of a sustainable food system. For all of our interviewees, organic gardening is a way of life.

Before their stories begin, the following pages provide an overview of some of the key issues, challenges and successes experienced by COGS over the course of its thirty-five-year history. This is based on the information contained in the newsletters and magazines published by COGS from 1977 to 2012.

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 - Joanne Hodge
Librarian - Gail Dadds
Committee members - Shirley 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 by 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 Bate 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 N.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 upon 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 sliver 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, capsicums, pumkins, sweet corn and lastly the ever popular tomato.

Good growing!

Introduction

The harsh limestone plains, intense summer heat and frosty winter nights experienced in the Australian Capital Territory provide challenging conditions for food producers in the Nation's capital and surrounding regions. While in 2013, the year of Canberra's centenary, sheep grazing remains the dominant land use in the area, there is also a wide variety of food grown locally for commercial sale, as well as in backyards and community gardens. The last decade has seen a growing interest in local food from the community, both locally and around Australia. In Canberra this has resulted in the establishment of two regular farmers' markets and two farmers' retail outlets, as well as an upsurge of interest in backyard, community and school kitchen gardens.

Local food production was also important in the early days of the Capital, with the Federal government keen for Canberra to become self-sufficient in food. To assist with this endeavour, the fertile soils of Pialligo were identified for use in commercial-scale vegetable production.¹ By Federation, dairy farming was already thriving, with the Duntroon Dairy having been built in 1832. However, the focus on food extended beyond the public domain of commercial production to the role of individual, private backyards. In accordance with Ebenezer Howard's 'Garden City' ideals, Canberra's houses were designed so blocks would be big enough for homeowners to have backyard vegetable gardens, chickens and fruit trees,² as well as utility areas (sheds and clothes lines) and some lawn for recreation. To maximise food production in both commercial and backyard enterprises, from around the middle of the twentieth century, agriculture and gardening guidelines encouraged cultivation techniques using best practice from the Green Revolution. This meant a reliance on chemical pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers to control disease and

pests while also maximising production. Following the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 and the increasing strength of organic movements nationally and internationally, by the 1970s more and more people were beginning to raise health and environmental concerns associated with mainstream growing techniques.

Motivated by mounting evidence of the dangers of these chemicals and a desire to improve human health, the Canberra Organic Farming and Gardening Society was formed in 1977. In 1981 the society changed its name to the Canberra Organic Growers (COG) and adopted its first formal constitution. In April 1985, following the drafting of a new constitution, the name changed once again to the present Canberra Organic Growers' Society (COGS). In its early days, the nascent movement focused its efforts on challenging conventional agriculture and food production methods by promoting the benefits of, and education in, organic practices. The society has remained committed to achieving this aim throughout its thirty-five-year history and has played a significant role in encouraging organic food production in the backyards, small farms and community gardens of Canberra and its surrounding regions.

Throughout its history, COGS has educated, inspired and lobbied the Canberra community and politicians to recognise the human and ecological benefits of organic growing. Through its support, development and management of community gardens throughout Canberra, COGS has also played a key role in negotiating with the ACT government (and the former Territory administration) to gain access to productive, organic food-producing spaces in the city for hundreds of local residents. In 2013, the ongoing success and relevance of the Canberra Organic Growers Society is demonstrated by the existence of eleven community gardens, a membership of over 430 people and the promotion of organic growing through participation in numerous public events including organic gardening and composting workshops.

The History of COGS

FROM THE GARDEN TO THE POT

By Conrad van Hest



The best way to savor your produce is to preserve them now and enjoy at later stage.

Peach chutney

- 3 cup peaches
- 1 cup white vinegar
- 3 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon cardamom pods
- 1 teaspoon fenugreek
- ¼ teaspoon chilli flakes (optional)

Blanch peaches in saucepan of hot water, cool in cold water and peel skin off. Remove seed and chop roughly. In a saucepan add peaches, vinegar and sugar cook for 10 minutes on medium heat stirring often. Add the ginger, cardamom, fenugreek and chilli flakes mix in well, cook for 30 minutes on low heat stirring occasionally. Divide mixture into 4 x 250ml preserving jars, seal and preserve as per manufactures instructions. Cool, label and store in cool place.

Crunchy pickled onion rings

- 1kg red onions
- 24 whole cloves
- 24 peppercorns
- 4 teaspoon mustard seeds
- 2 tablespoons dill tops
- 6 cups organic apple cider vinegar
- 2 cups spring or filtered water
- 2 cups castor or brown sugar
- 2 teaspoons salt (optional)
- 2 teaspoons turmeric
- ¼ teaspoon cinnamon

Peel onions and slice into thin slices (¼ inch thick), separate the slices into rings. Divide the onion rings among four clean 500ml preserving jars. To the onions add 6 cloves, 6 peppercorns, 1 teaspoons mustard seeds and ½ teaspoon dill tops. In a saucepan combine vinegar, water, sugar, salt, turmeric and cinnamon, heat to boiling then simmer for 2 minutes. Fill the jars with hot liquid leaving a ¼ inch headspace, run a blade around inside walls to remove air bubbles. Seal and preserve as per manufactures instructions. Cool, label and store in cool place, let pickles mellow for a month before using. (Modified recipe from *The Good Stuff Cookbook* by Helen Witty)

Zucchini relish

- 600g zucchini
- ½ cup olive oil
- 1 cup organic apple cider vinegar
- 1 tablespoon castor sugar
- 1 teaspoon ginger minced
- 2 cloves garlic minced
- ¼ teaspoon turmeric
- 1 teaspoon allspice
- 1 teaspoon fenugreek
- pepper and salt to taste

Zucchini cut into 100mm segments, then cut into half then depending on size cut into thirds or fourths, then finally cut into 20mm batons. Heat oil in saucepan add zucchini toss lightly for 5 minutes, drain liquid off return to heat add vinegar and sugar, simmer for 15 minutes or until liquid has evaporated by half stirring occasionally. Add the spices toss in lightly, cover and heat on low for 30 minutes. Taste and adjust seasoning, put into clean preserving jars and seal and preserve as per manufacture instructions.

Beetroot relish

- 1kg beetroot cooked, peeled and diced
- 2 cups red onion chopped
- ½ cup olive oil
- 1 ½ cups Avaron organic apple cider vinegar
- ½ cups castor sugar
- 3-4 medium cloves of garlic crushed
- 2 teaspoons ginger minced
- 2 cups Roma tomatoes peeled, deseeded and pureed
- ¼ teaspoons salt (optional)
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon allspice

In a heavy pan heat oil add onions, cook on low heat stirring often, until golden in colour about 10 minutes. Add beetroot cook covered for 10 minutes stir often. Add vinegar simmer until liquid reduces by half. Add tomatoes, sugar, garlic, ginger, salt, pepper and allspice mix in well, bring to boil then reduced to low heat and cover. Cook until mixture thickens about 1 to 1 ½ hours, stirring occasionally the last 5 minutes cook uncovered. Ladle hot mixture into hot clean jars seal and preserve as per manufactures instructions. Cool, label and store for six months.

The rise of the organic movement

The landscape of food production has changed considerably since COGS began. Suburban sprawl, urban infill and water restrictions have directly impacted on food gardening practices in the ACT. Within the broader context, the most significant change has been the growth in mainstream acceptance of organic production coupled with the development of regulatory systems to certify organic produce. This is evident through the promotion of organic growing in television shows such as *Gardening Australia*, magazines such as *Organic Gardening*, the prevalence of backyard compost heaps, and the increasing availability of organic foods in mainstream supermarkets. However, when COGS began in the late 1970s, organic farming and gardening was an alternative, fringe practice disregarded by many as all ‘muck and magic’. In a direct challenge to accepted scientific knowledge related to farming and gardening guidelines, the organic growing movement rejected the use of chemicals and focused on the development of humus-rich, fertile soil through a variety of techniques revolving around the ‘rule of return’ (Jones, 2010). This included the then revolutionary ideas of composting organic material (such as weeds, scraps and animal manure).

In the 1940s and 1950s composters also advocated the wonders of ‘night soil’ (urine and faeces), which many believed to be critical to the production of successful, nutrient-rich compost (Jones, 2010). Betty Cornhill, the founder of COGS and first president, endorsed the use of urine in an article on trace elements in the April 1990 newsletter, stating,

I contend that if you put urine in your compost you will make excellent compost and a handful around each plant will prevent any lack of trace elements, and usually of the major elements as well. If used fresh urine is quite safe. (p. 20)

TRACE ELEMENTS

The use of trace elements is, I believe allowed under the NASAA organic standards and also the British Organic Standards, but only when advised by the inspector, and certainly it is not advisable to use them more than once in the same place.

A very small amount of Sodium Molybdate scattered around each cauliflower plant will give you the best caulis you ever grew. At least that has been my experience, with one exception. We had an allotment when I first married in England. It was quite a bus ride from our basement flat and I spent long days there, but there was no toilet nearby, and my caulis were big enough to hide me squatting behind them. The one just downhill from where I usually squatted grew and grew until it was 18 inches across and still firm and beautiful.

I contend that if you put urine in your compost you will make excellent compost and a handful around each plant will prevent any lack of trace elements, and usually of the major elements as well. If used fresh urine is quite safe.

Betty Cornhill

As proof of the method, Mrs Cornhill recounted the success of a cauliflower located downstream from her regular squatting spot at her first allotment in England, which ‘grew and grew until it was 18 inches across and still firm and beautiful’ (p. 20). The lack of toilets in COGS community gardens may well be producing similar stories of magnificent growth today. However, from around the 1950s ‘night soil’ officially fell out of favour amidst growing concerns of pathogens and illness. Still, composting continues to be a mainstay of organic gardening with the practice broadening to include the use of worm farms and bokashi buckets. At its core, the principle remains the same: organic growers use organic matter to feed the soil to produce nutritious, healthy, chemical-free food to nourish humans.

Australian organic organisations began in the 1940s, with one of the first being the Victorian Compost Society. By the 1970s an organic organisation existed in all capital cities and many regional areas (Jones, 2010, p. 40). Canberra was no exception. With a name developed to echo

the national Organic Gardening and Farming Society (OGFS), the OGFS of the ACT commenced operations in the latter half of 1977. The society had its genesis in a group of like-minded locals who were involved in the Natural Health Society, a national organisation that began in 1960. Betty Cornhill was inspired to start the society after listening to talks delivered by Mike Lubke from the Organic Growers of NSW to Canberra's Natural Health Society branch. Following the talks, Mrs Cornhill notes,

I had a list of 70 people who were interested in forming a group. Most were vegetarians and members of the Natural Health Society, and were longing to grow their own vegies. They just needed encouragement and some knowledge to help them... (*Canberra Organic*, Summer 2007, p. 10)

COGS, or the OGFS as it was then known, was formed to facilitate this sharing of information and encouragement of organic production at a time when such practices were relegated to the fringes of society.

Organic production is based on a belief in a direct relationship between food, the environment and human health. The use of organic practices that care for the soil and all elements of the ecosystem are understood to produce better quality, nutritionally rich food, in contrast to the chemical-laden, unnatural foods produced through chemical-reliant conventional production methods. The marginalised position of such ideas in the late 1970s was expressed by one COGS member:

It's sometimes quite hard being an organic gardener. When people know you have such queer ideas it encourages them to try to catch you out. (Newsletter, August 1978)

The society took up the challenge to convince people of the dangers in their food supply and convert them to organic production. In line with these beliefs, the OGFS of the ACT was developed to assist and educate people in how to grow food organically.

From its inception, the society has attempted to fulfil this aim through a convivial atmosphere, encouraged by the convening of regular

monthly meetings with guest speakers where members and the general public could swap seeds and produce, share supper and exchange tips and information related to organic growing. The ongoing financial security of the society also has deep roots, as evident in the society's first newsletter in 1977 encouraging participants to '[b]ring along your surplus fruit and vegetables, seeds and seedlings to sell at the meeting', noting that '[t]he committee decided that a 20% commission should be paid from any sales to the society'. Such financial issues, however, have not distracted from the intention of the groups' monthly meetings, which from the outset were organised to be interesting and lively:

At the last committee meeting it was recommended that in future, general meetings not be taken up with formal business as was necessary in the initial setting up of the Society. This will make way for what members really want – stimulating, informative discussion and activities. (Newsletter, October 1977)

The stimulating discussion was often inspired by invited guest speakers, including key figures in the Australian organic growing movement such as Bill Mollison (the founder of permaculture), Jackie French (one of the early back-to-landers) and Esther Dean (the Australian proponent of no-dig gardening). These meetings also gave members access to the COGS library of organic growing books. The library's first books were bought with donations from Mike Lubke and the Organic Growers of NSW Society, with generous donations from Jackie French also assisting the early development of the library. In the early years the meetings often included the screening of gardening and agriculture related films (for example, in May 1981 the newsletter reports that the previous meeting had shown *The New Alchemists*, *Farming in South China*, and *Garden Friends or Foes* – a film on pests). The society also established a seed bank and set about raising money to support its growth by charging 20 cents for supper and in, November 1977, introducing an annual 'subscription' fee of \$5.

The society facilitated access to the latest organic information on a national and international scale through presentations by notable figures, the library, the screening of films related to organics, gardening and agriculture on an international scale, and its newsletters and magazines. The COGS library, sale of produce, invited speakers, and magazines remain popular features of the society today. The seed bank, through the seed savers group, has recently been reinstated, though similar initiatives have been pursued from 1977, leading to regular requests in the newsletters and magazines for seeds with enthusiasm waxing and waning over the years. The issue of seed saving gained momentum in the 1980s in response to the plant variety rights debates (discussed in greater detail below) and again in the early twenty-first century, possibly as a response to growing concerns related to food security and the role of GM technology.

Reaching out: education and advocacy

From the beginning, the provision of regular newsletters or magazines has been integral to the society's efforts to promote organics amongst its members and the wider community. This is consistent with other Australian organic organisations, which have 'been copious publishers of newsletters, magazines and pamphlets' (Jones, 2010: p. x). From 1977 to the early 1980s, the newsletters of the OFGS and then COGS published numerous articles relating to the effects of the increasingly industrialised food system and the national and international progress of the organic movement. The newsletters often included items such as brief news snippets, book reviews and reports on scientific research and organic practices reprinted (with full acknowledgement) from other sources such as the *Agricultural Gazette of NSW*, *CSIRO Environmental Reporter* and the publications of other organic groups from around Australia. The reprinted articles provide a philosophical context for the detailed discussion and instructions related to the practicalities of local organic gardening in the ACT and surrounding regions.

Throughout the first decade or so of the society's existence, the newness of organic gardening for many members, coupled with the ongoing improvement of organic growing techniques relevant to the local area, is evident in the provision of regular instructions on how to compile and manage compost heaps. This focus reinforces the ongoing importance of the 'rule of return' to organic growers and an ecologically informed worldview whereby gardeners recognise the limits of their control of the environment and the need to work with non-human elements such as soil and microorganisms to provide mutual nourishment. Betty Cornhill was a great advocate of compost, noting in 1982,

No matter how many books you read on the subject of compost there is always more to learn, and as with everything else, you must practise it to do it well. When you build a compost heap you are making a little factory: the workers are the bacteria, fungi moulds and of course, earthworms... The materials your workers need to make the end product, humus, must include proteins, carbohydrates, and in fact, they need a mixed diet, as we do, for they are, in fact, eating the materials provided. (Newsletter, June 1982, p. 4)

Despite the passion motivating the society's distribution of monthly newsletters, there are regular calls for members to submit articles and for volunteers to be involved in the magazine production (through the provision of content or assistance with collating and distributing the newsletters/magazines). The call for members to provide stories relating to practical local growing advice remains a feature of the society's publications throughout its history.

In 1981 interest in the society had stalled with only thirty members, prompting the management committee to explore possibilities of a merger with the National Health Society or the ACT Permaculture Society. After one last attempt to rally supporters, a newly elected committee under the presidency of Rose Walters announced in the July 1981 newsletter,

Our Society is saved, for the time being at least. We are at a watershed. We have 6 months to review our vigour, extend our membership and to make organisers [sic; should be organics] vital in the A.C.T.

As can be read in Betty Cornhill's recollections below, the committee members worked hard to increase the society's profile and membership numbers. Over the course of the next year, membership rose to ninety-six. The society was 'saved' and, with some fluctuations, it gradually grew over the ensuing three decades, with the number of members rising to over 300 in the early 1990s and over 400 in 2012.

The renewed vigour of the society in the early 1980s coincided with two key developments: first, the establishment of the first COGS Community Garden near the Yarralumla woolshed (known as the Cotter or Curtin garden); and second, the growing national and international debate related to plant variety rights (PVR) legislation. These two issues characterise the dual concerns of the society from its inception, as expressed in the newsletters and magazines: a desire to promote organic production and, therefore, a broader ecological awareness and understanding of the connections between environmental and human health combined with a focus on providing practical ways of supporting local efforts to enact this philosophy through the production of healthy fruit and vegetables in the ACT. Community gardens are discussed in greater detail below, but we turn first to the PVR debate.

Engagement in the PVR debate signals the society's first major foray into political lobbying and advocacy work, which began in earnest after the introduction of the Plant Variety Rights Bill into the Senate in 1982. The belief that food crops should be publically available goods is evident in the COGS publications, with the society's major objection to the PVR scheme motivated by concerns that private corporations would gain control of the source of food production. Authored by COGS member Kathleen Maher, the society made a submission to the Committee on Natural Resources on the issue of plant variety rights, which was reprinted in the COGS newsletter in March 1983. It concludes,

It is doubtful whether the advantages attributed to the introduction of the P.V.R will be as anticipated by proponents of the bill. Furthermore, there are no grounds to assume that greater efficiency in plant breeding will arise from expanded private involvement than from expanded public involvement.

On the other hand overseas experience has shown serious disadvantages arising from such legislation.

Therefore, the Canberra Organic Growers propose that this

Committee recommends an extensive study into need for and likely consequences of P.V.R legislation in Australia. (p. 4)

In the March 1985 magazine, COGS members were asked to actively work to oppose the legislation by writing to ministers and signing a petition organised for the meeting in May 1985. The opposition was unsuccessful and in 1987 Federal Parliament introduced the *Plant Variety Rights Act 1987*. This was superseded by the *Plant Breeders Rights Act 1994*, which aligned Australian rights with new international protocols contained within the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants 1991.

In the second half of the 1980s, the issue of certification became important to COGS and the broader organic movement in Australia. As organic produce started to find its way into the marketplace, many producers and sellers were keen to assure customers of the organic credentials of foodstuffs, thus paving the way for the associated inclusion of a price premium for authentic organic goods. In 1988 the National Association of Sustainable Agriculture Australia (NASAA) began formulating its national standards. Over the period of this process, COGS' publications not only focus on local organic growing, but also promoting organic purchasing. In the February 1989 newsletter, the then editor, Ron Champagne, encouraged COGS members to spread the word about organic produce by making 'neighbours, friends, acquaintances aware of the dangers of chemical farming and of the existence of the alternatives', noting that COGS members need to 'create the market for certified organic goods' (p. 1).

In 1992, NASAA developed its national standard for the certification of organic and biodynamic farms and produce. At around the same time, the first advertisements for organic food outlets start to appear in the magazine. The importance attributed to certification as a means of validating organic production methods continues through to the mid-1990s with the then president, Michelle Johnson, seeking to reassure members of the trustworthiness of certification (*COGS Quarterly*, Autumn 1994,

vol. 2, no. 1, p. 7). She recounts a story of a member who, suspicious of a 'white powdery residue' on her recently purchased 'organic' bananas, sought advice from COGS. Ms Johnson promptly made contact with a certifying officer for NASAA³ who identified the likely source of the bananas – a grower who used an organic product, diatomaceous earth, which could explain the residue. However, Ms Johnson encourages consumers who have concerns related to the authenticity of organic foods to speak to retailers, obtain the grower's number and batch number and then, if they still have concerns, to contact COGS.

The 1990s marks a turning point for the organic movement at large, as well as for COGS. The growing public interest in organic food led to COGS membership doubling in the year preceding April 1990. By 1991 membership was close to 300, which the president, David Odell, noted 'makes COGS one of the largest organic-growing groups in Australia' (Newsletter, March 1991, p.2). The new interest seems to be motivated by a growing awareness of the potentially negative impacts of eating conventionally grown food and a rising concern about environmental issues centred on increasing greenhouse gas emissions, the hole in the ozone layer and fears related to ongoing species loss. The idea that human practices had caused significant damage to the planet start to gain traction in this decade, pushed along by the growing number of civil society organisations focused on environmental issues. Internationally this was brought to the fore at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit.

The significance of the broader national and international context was not lost on COGS. In May 1990, then president, David Odell, wrote in the newsletter,

These are times of change for organic growers as for too long we have been held to be eccentrics by the 'chemical' farmers but now with the rising tide of concern about environmental matters we now find that we're in the vanguard of these changes with the knowledge and experience to back up our opinions. This is not the time to feel smug about what we

have achieved or to keep this knowledge to ourselves but it is the time to share our knowledge and experience – in effect to lead by example – and to be positive about getting the right messages to those who still find it easy to rubbish us out of their own ignorance. (p. 2)

This sets the tone for the early 1990s, when a new committee was formed with the explicit aim of initiating a more concerted and planned program of external outreach to the broader community through the newsletter/magazine, convening seminars and workshops to increase their public profile and lobbying parliamentarians. To achieve this, in June 1991 the COGS committee decided to introduce five new committee positions: education, publicity/marketing, organic standards, lobbying and representation on bodies. As the society reached out to the community, it also looked inward, with 1992 marking its first efforts to systematically gather data on its members through the inclusion of a survey in the newsletters designed to ascertain ‘What type of people join COGS’. By this time, COGS had proven itself to be an important and useful organisation to the people of the ACT. It was responsible for managing a number of government and non-government grants and it sought to consolidate its successes and plan for the future. A key component of this planning related to community gardens.

REQUEST FOR MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

WHAT TYPE OF PEOPLE JOIN COGS? WHAT ARE THEIR INTERESTS AND EXPERIENCES?

In the last few years the membership of COGS has increased substantially to just under 300. This has been a very gratifying development for us, but it does mean that the Committee of COGS now has some difficulty getting to know all the members personally. Yet, to be able to select relevant speakers for our meetings, articles of interest for our newsletter, and perhaps topics for a seminar later this year, we do need to have at least a profile of our members.

Thus, to give us a clearer picture of the people joining COGS we have recently introduced a new more comprehensive application form. This (see over the page) has a questionnaire about the member's agricultural experiences and interests.

We would also like this information about our current members - So - WE ARE ASKING YOU TO ALSO FILL IN THIS FORM AND RETURN IT TO US (unless you have already completed it when you renewed your subscription this year!). You can return it to me at the monthly meeting, or you can send it to me at COGS' postal address i.e.

The Membership Secretary,
COGS.
P.O. Box 347,
DICKSON,
ACT. 2602

There are many other questions we would have liked to include but we did not want too long a form. However, if you feel that you would like to contribute any other relevant information please just include an additional note.

Thank you for your help
Michelle Johnson
(Membership Secretary)

ADDENDUM: I'd like to also request members that have not as yet renewed their subscription this year to do so soon. We value all our members, and for COGS to continue to promote organic growing we need your support.

Membership Application

CANBERRA ORGANIC GROWERS SOCIETY

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION (1 JAN - 31 DEC, renewal by 31 MAR)

TO: The Membership Secretary

Canberra Organic Growers' Society Inc.

P.O. Box 347 DICKSON ACT 2602

DATE

/ /

RATES: Joining fee / Lapsed members rejoining \$5 (\$2-50 concession) + below
Family or single \$15 (\$7-50 concession)

Concession - Pensioners / Full time students

NAME 1] _____ (BLOCK PRINT)

2] _____ (2nd family member)

CONTACT PHONE _____ H _____ W _____

NEWS-
LETTER

ADDRESS
LABEL

TITLE

(e.g. Jones Family)

STREET

TOWN

STATE

P/Code

VOLUNTEER WORK: Would you like to assist in spreading the organic
(Please tick your preferences) movement by providing assistance with: -

Library ☐ Newsletter ☐ Finance ☐ Committee ☐

Stalls ☐ Management of community gardens ☐

Education and promotion activities ☐

Other (please state) _____

We would like to know your experience / interests so the Society can
address members issues - Please answer the following questions: -

AGRICULTURAL EXPERIENCE

| (Circle choices) | ORGANIC | TIME YEARS | Country of farming Australia ? |
|-----------------------------|----------|---------------|-----------------------------------|
| SIZE | | | |
| 'backyard' | yes / no | | |
| small / medium / large farm | yes / no | | other _____ |

PARTICULAR INTERESTS (Please tick your preferences)

Vegetables ☐ Fruit orchard ☐ Grain production ☐

Livestock ☐ Composting ☐ Crop rotation ☐

Green manure ☐ Companion planting ☐ Biodynamics ☐

Control of pests, diseases ☐ Permaculture ☐

Scale of growing: - 'backyard' / small / medium / large farm.

Other (please state) _____

AGE _____ PROFESSION _____ RETIRED yes/no

A PLAN FOR YOUR GARDEN

The following plan was submitted to us by one of our members.

We have amended it slightly to express the principles of community gardening.

Try Planting:

Five rows of Peas

Patience, Perseverance, Perception, Presence and Personality

Three rows of Squash

Squash criticism, Squash snails and Squash slugs

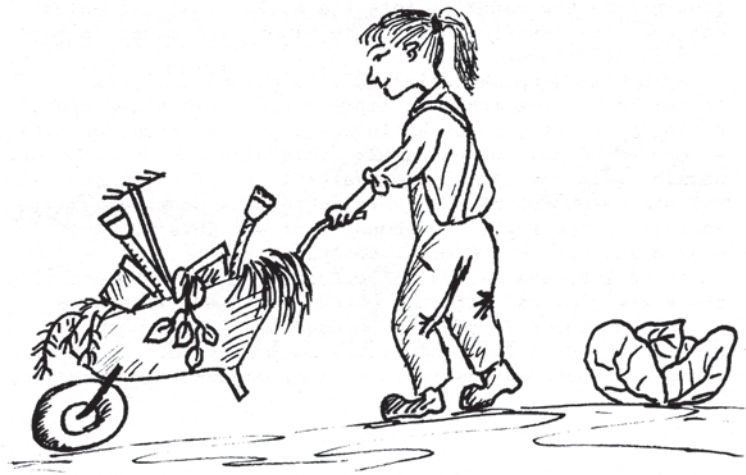
Five rows of Lettuce

Let us be faithful to our gardens, Let us be helpful to each other, Let us obey the rules of the garden, Let us use sound organic methods, Let us fulfil our obligations.

Complete the garden with Turnips

Turn up at meetings, Turn up with a smile, Turn up with new ideas, Turn up with new members, and turn up with a will to give your help at all times.

Practising these principles will surely assist in the creation of a very successful community garden.



COGS and community gardens

The first COGS community garden was a guerilla garden, lacking official approval for the first three years of its existence (Newsletter, March 1985). Called the Cotter, but also referred to as the Curtin garden, it came about after Chris Nazer, a City Parks and Gardens employee, organic devotee and COG member, suggested the idea to the society. The garden site was originally intended for the use of a group of unemployed people but ‘their organisation broke down’ and an offer to establish the garden was made to COGS (Newsletter, November 1989, p. 2). Early newsletters indicate that similar gardens were already in existence in Canberra, with references made to a permaculture community garden at Torrens (1978), a community garden at Duntroon that was ‘there to be used by anyone who has a use for it, unemployed, pensioners who want to grow some vegetables for themselves or some extra for sale’, and a Pialligo Organic and Permaculture Community Garden (November/December 1981).

While there is some conjecture, it is generally accepted that Australia’s first community garden was established in 1977 in Nunawading,⁴ Victoria by a local councillor who saw such spaces as a way of addressing social isolation and helping to reduce food costs for local families.⁵ Canberra’s gardens seem to have started around the same time, though the focus in the nation’s capital was on organic production as a means of improving human and ecological health. Within this context of growing local and national interest in community gardens, COGS seized the opportunity to establish their own garden with the following advertisement appearing in the May 1982 newsletter:

Anyone interested in access to a community garden – the doors will open at 7:15pm before the next C.O.G. meeting. Members will be available to

give information and arrange access to the plot. The plot has good soil, water is available and reasonable security is offered. (p. 1)

By September of that year, the garden was full, with twelve members and their families taking up plots and the then president, Rose Walters, declaring in that month's newsletter, 'The popularity of the community garden at Curtin has made it necessary to close any additional members admittance' (p. 2).

The success and popularity of the Cotter/Curtin garden led to a waiting list of over fifty people wishing to participate in a community garden in Canberra. In response, COGS soon set about gaining official approval for the establishment of two more gardens, one in the city's north and one in the south. To assist the approval process, COGS embarked on the journey of becoming incorporated. This required the drafting of a new constitution, which was completed in 1985.

Progress on community gardens, however, remained slow and it was not until 1988 that the first northside garden in Watson began. The search for a suitable space in Tuggeranong continued until 1989, when space was found on ACT housing trust land at Erindale and COGS was invited to apply for funding from the Territory administration to manage it. Though the processes to gain approval for the gardens were lengthy, once agreed on the gardeners were greatly helped by City Parks and Gardens staff, who assisted them to establish access to water in the gardens, as well as rotary hoeing and chisel ploughing the plots. They also assisted with the movement of carefully tended, humus-rich soil when the proposed expansion of the Cotter Road required the Cotter/Curtin garden to shift in 1989. The soil in this garden had been carefully attended to and enriched with copious amounts of horse manure from nearby horse paddocks, equestrian centres and the annual addition of the highly sought-after straw and manure from the Canberra Show. As Shirley Carden notes in her recollection below,

We had what I called wall-to-wall manure! We let it compost for a year

and break down to beautiful black soil, then shovel it on to the beds and have a deep recess then for more manure. It worked brilliantly.

The establishment of community gardens relied on the success of COGS applications for funds from the ACT government, from areas such as the ACT Office of Sport, Recreation and Racing (\$3,000 for the Erindale garden), and external grants programs run by non-government organisations such as Life Be In It (which provided \$2,000 for the Watson garden). The growing number of gardens (six by 1992) and gardeners (the Watson garden saw an increase from six people to sixty-six in three years) coupled with the ACT government's recognition of the society's capacity to manage these spaces effectively prompted COGS to formalise garden management approaches. Garden rules were developed and published in the magazine in November 1990. While these rules sought to maintain the relative autonomy of each garden through the use of local garden convenors and committees to manage their day-to-day running, some gardeners perceived the rules as interference in their existing set-ups. The Watson garden published their own set of 'aims and objectives' in June 1991 (p. 19) declaring that

The aim of the Watson plot is to provide a happy, friendly and co-operative environment of COGS members to grow vegetables for their own use.

The objectives of the Garden are:

1. To Provide a practical example of Organic Growing [sic]
2. To assist in the education of the general public with regard to Organic Gardening
3. That the Garden exist, grow and prosper through the efforts of the members
4. That everyone involved should have FUN

Today, there remains an overarching set of rules common to all gardens, with the capacity for each garden to develop its own rules

reflecting the uniqueness of each gardening space. The numbers involved in the gardens (and the number and location of gardens themselves) have waxed and waned from the 1990s until the present, as has interest in community gardens on a national level. In Australia community gardens have seen two key periods of strong growth in 1994–95 and 2005–now.⁶ The two boom periods in the ACT have occurred slightly earlier, 1988–1992 and 2001–now.

While community gardening has demonstrated its capacity to achieve a number of goals, including the promotion of healthy lifestyles, social inclusion and the facilitation of more sustainable living practices, these spaces also encounter numerous difficulties. From the establishment of the first garden, issues of water use, vandalism, stolen produce and the unwillingness of some gardeners to contribute to the ongoing maintenance of communal areas and to take up volunteer management positions have persisted. Despite these ongoing challenges, the COGS community gardens provide a space for people to produce organic food for themselves and their families. They also encourage people to engage and connect with the food system, the environment and their community in ways they may not have previously imagined they needed or desired. At the 1992 opening of the Oaks Estate garden, then president, David Odell, noted,

It is the social aspect of community gardening which was evident in the establishment of the Oaks Estate garden and which was remarked upon at its opening. Neighbours had found a new centre of interest, a new topic of conversation (there was a sense of pride as old skills were rediscovered, especially in growing magnificent pumpkins) and it took upon itself the atmosphere of a village activity where one had time to stroll, to chat and to linger. There was a sense of identity and a sense of belonging which was far removed from the usual frenetic pace of urban living and carried with it a sense of reaching back in time to firmly grasp those worthwhile values which had previously been slipping away. It was a nice feeling and one with which I was proud to be associated. (Newsletter, April 1992, p. 2)

Today, many gardens continue to have regular get-togethers, which aim to foster these feelings and values.

While the society's interest in community gardening did not subside, there was a temporary hiatus on the establishment of new gardens from around 1992 until the early 2000s (except for the Watson garden's move to Mitchell due to development in north Watson). During this time, COGS channelled its energies into other forms of community engagement and education. This was most obvious through the popular COGS display at the 1996 and 1997 Canberra Show, organised by Owen Pidgeon.⁷ The show generated significant public interest in organic gardening and led to the society's development of a more regularly accessible form of organic gardening education. This manifested itself in the COGS Backyard, a demonstration organic growing plot located at the xeriscape garden at the Weston School of Horticulture. While the plot thrived, even surviving the 2003 bushfires, COGS relinquished it in 2006 due to a lack of volunteers to tend the plot.

From the year 2000, COGS renewed its focus on community gardens, encouraged by growing community awareness of these spaces and a supportive political environment. In 2001, the society was awarded a grant from Healthy City Canberra for the establishment of new gardens and in the first half of the decade another six were formed (at Queanbeyan, Dickson, Holder, Cook, O'Connor and Kambah). While the drought and the possibility of stage 4 water restrictions threatened to derail the community gardens from 2007, the rain returned and so too did a renewed focus on the importance of organic, local food production. On the society's thirtieth birthday in 2007, then president, Adrienne Fazas, commented on the significance of community gardening,

The community gardens continue to thrive and enable over one hundred and fifty families to enjoy the benefits of fresh, healthy, seasonal food. The importance of local food production is becoming more widely acknowledged as the costs, both financial and to the environment, of

the production, transportation and packaging of produce are counted more carefully.

The gardens also provide a wonderful opportunity for members to learn from each other and develop a sense of community. (*Canberra Organic*, Summer 2007, vol. 15, no. 4, p. 3)

In 2013 these environmental, health and social benefits are widely acknowledged and COGS has played a key role in spreading this information through the community. Far from the lengthy, ad hoc and difficult processes involved in developing community gardens thirty years ago, community garden development in the ACT has become more streamlined, costs have been reduced and 'how to' information is more readily available. COGS has played a key role in bringing about these changes and it continues to support the development of Canberra community gardens. In 2013, COGS manages eleven gardens, stretching from Mitchell in the north to Erindale in the south and from Charnwood in the west to Oaks Estate in the east.

Conclusion

The Canberra Organic Growers Society has been instrumental in educating the Canberra community about organic food production, promoting organic food consumption and the joys of communal gardening. Over its history the society has faced the challenges of a lack of members, a lack of volunteers to join the central committee, provide magazine content, and convenors to manage the gardens, as well as having to adapt gardening practices to drought conditions. Despite these and many other challenges, COGS has remained true to its philosophical convictions and maintained its vigour from a time when organic production was a fringe activity to the present, where mainstream supermarkets stock their own organic brands. The flourishing community gardens, the recent introduction of the Backyard Gardening group and the reestablishment of a seed saving group attest to the strength of the society as a group of people with a shared philosophical approach to gardening. David Odell observes,

As organic growers...we give Nature a helping hand to accelerate the process of birth, growth, maturation, death and decay in the teeming world beneath our feet and through this process we believe that the world around us can be a better place. (Newsletter, September 1991, p. 2)

For the past thirty-five years COGS has helped spread this practice and belief across Canberra and its surrounding regions.

CONTROLLING SLUGS & SNAILS.

1. ROCK SALT. Sprinkle where they live.
2. BARRIERS of woodash, sawdust, eggshells, table salt, in a 2" wide strip round plants.
3. CINDERS. Contain no salt, and don't go soft.
4. BAIT. Sunken pots, cans etc., filled to the top with salty or soapy water. Lettuce leaves, cabbage leaves, sliced potato, wet bread, all attract them.
5. METALDEHYDE (e.g. DEFENDER) baits in traps or enclosed from the environment. (a NASAA standard -any comments?).
6. YEAST BREW. 1 cup water, 1 teaspoonful sugar, 1/4 teasp. yeast. Beer is no use after 48 hours. Bran soaked in Vegemite is also effective.
7. DEAD slugs or snails. They will keep away from their own dead.
8. LIME. But it dissolves in rain.
9. COPPER STRIPS. Sold commercially in America. Make your own from thin strips of copper sheeting.
10. SALT stuck on a plastic strip will last a season. Available commercially in America.
11. COMPOST. Keep compost and trash heaps as far away as possible from vulnerable plants. **Don't compost slug infested litter.**
12. GARDEN DESIGN. Keep vegetable beds well away from fences or walls where snails breed.
13. FLOWER-POTS. Upside down flower pots make good hiding places and can be emptied regularly.
14. MELON SKINS. When in season, fill empty half-rind with water and place near plants. Snails/slugs will rush for it and drown. Empty regularly. (In fact, water the plants with the dead bodies to deter others).
15. PUMPKIN. Marrow or pumpkin - large pieces - which have begun to rot can be placed flesh-downwards on the garden; slugs will be attracted and can be easily disposed of.
16. WEEDS. Keep lank, straggly weeds down to reduce cool, moist, shady areas where snails collect.
17. MOLASSES. Soak bran in molasses to attract snails. Empty regularly.

Memories of COGS



Betty Cornhill

Betty Cornhill is the founder, promoter and champion of COGS, and a life member. She was president in 1977, 1980, 1986 and 1989. Betty's vision of organic agriculture in Canberra has been realised in a society of eleven gardens and over 400 members.



My father's father was Sir Frederick Kitchener, brother of Horatio Herbert, whom we know as Lord Kitchener. In 1908 he was appointed Governor of Bermuda in recognition of his part in various wars and campaigns,⁸ and died in office in 1912 after an appendectomy. My father Henry, or 'Hal', was one of five children. My mother Winifred was born in Bermuda, and so was I in 1920.

Bermuda is subtropical, not tropical, and its capital, Hamilton, is close to the sea. It's north of the Caribbean, actually much further north and east than you think, and yet is in the middle of hurricane country. We lived on an island in Hamilton harbour which we had to swim to.

One of my memories from when I was six is of the first part of a hurricane passing over, and when the eye, the calm in the centre of the storm, arrived, my father swam over to the boat to make sure it was securely anchored. Then he encouraged us, my mother, my elder sister and me, to go for a swim: there was no wind at all until the other side of the hurricane arrived and the wind blew the other way. It all would last two or three hours. I had fun with hurricanes: I'd get my bathing things on, go outside and stand with my arms out, leaning way forward, and the wind would hold me up! The rain beat on me and it was really fun. Daddy didn't know that I stood outside. Mummy knew!

Bermuda has excellent brick-red soil, very fertile. I started gardening at age six. The family had dug a long trench outside the kitchen, put a good quantity of cow manure in it and planted geraniums. My dad helped me start my own garden with yellow, pink and white lilies.⁹

My father was quite entrepreneurial. He was a pilot and offered tourist flights, set up a pilot training school, and tried to establish an aerial transport service between Bermuda and the West Indies but couldn't get financial backing. He tried raising chickens, and had a dairy. He was the first man to pasteurise milk in Bermuda; it took a little while to catch on. He thought commercially growing tomatoes would succeed because they got a shilling a pound in winter and threepence a pound in the summer. They were eaten on Bermuda, not exported, delivered in bushel baskets to a grocer's shop. Bermuda was a great place for the bugs! We sprayed the tomatoes with lead arsenate, which was very poisonous and I had to clean them. Dad had an idea for growing the tomatoes: he imported steel rods from Canada, pushed four at a time into the ground and tied them together at the top to make a kind of teepee, and grew the plants up the legs. He thought this would keep them safe even in near-hurricanes, but one year a real hurricane destroyed 10,000 plants.

At high school I came top of the class, and with no university in Bermuda I went to McGill University in Montreal, where I studied agriculture, specialising in horticulture. It was here that I came across works by people such as Sir Albert Howard¹⁰ and Lady Eve Balfour.¹¹ I travelled across the Atlantic several times to do research at Haughley.¹² The war interrupted everything. With my horticulture degree, I was supposed to go back to Bermuda and help on the farm of course, but there was no way to get back. Nothing was taking civilian passengers, so I was stuck in Canada.

From Montreal I went to Ottawa, where my uncle found me a job in a chemistry lab doing research on how to make rubber from wheat for aeroplane tyres. Yes, wheat. Rubber was grown in Malaya, which was under the Japanese by then. With no rubber trees anywhere that our side

could get to, we had to look for alternatives. What we did was on a small scale and that was for one year. I was very young. I sat and read while the stuff was boiling and they felt that my heart was just not in it! I sat and read, we had fun and games with words during lunch hour, my boss was a delightful man and I got on famously with him, so it was a great shock when he said, 'That's all we want you for, thank you.' They'd found somebody who was more experienced in running a pilot plant.

I met my husband Louis in Canada. He was in the Royal Canadian Navy, seconded from Britain because he was a naval architect designing corvettes and ships like that. He returned to England after the war. I followed; we married in 1947 and lived there for ten years. We had an allotment near our house in England right from the first, when we were married. When I was pregnant, Louis would walk me over to the allotment and back. He believed in walking. Good exercise. The allotments in Cambridge were a lot closer to where people live than the community gardens are in Canberra.

How did we come to Australia? My husband had been looking for work in various places. A job in Hong Kong came up but a wife could not go. He tried South Africa but there was nothing doing. In the end he got a job in Australia with the Navy Department in Melbourne, and we migrated in 1958. We were offered a house in Williamstown but decided that Moorabbin was a much nicer place. The Navy Department moved to Canberra in 1963 and we came with them. It was better in Canberra than being in Melbourne and travelling for an hour or more across town to get to the Williamstown dockyard. Here he could walk to work and back. It was only a couple of kilometres.

Long after learning to garden in Bermuda and studying horticulture in Canada, I got the feeling that we were killing our animals and our farmers were killing themselves by using chemicals. I joined the Soil Association and the Henry Doubleday Research Association (HDRA), both UK-based, and the Victorian Compost Society in Melbourne.

Louis had been a shipwright apprentice in the Royal Navy, and in

those days they used asbestos in the ships. So in 1932 he's working in clouds of asbestos dust, all enclosed because it's inside the ship, and it gives him mesothelioma, a form of lung cancer. The Navy recommended wearing respirators – even back then they knew about asbestos – but they didn't insist on it. To help him, I was trying to grow food organically, food as medicine, and to learn more I joined the Natural Health Society (NHS) in 1970. This was a Sydney-based organisation with quite a lot of members, and it had a group in Canberra. I was able to use some land belonging to the South African ambassador's daughter and could grow vegetables there because they'd not used chemicals. Louis died in late 1971. He had never wanted a farm, but after he died I started the first organic farm around Canberra, out near Murrumbateman. This was in 1972. I wanted something to do. And I do have green fingers.

One of the members of the NHS was a Mike Lubke, who had purchased five acres (two hectares) of allegedly useless land near Bringelly, which he turned into a splendid showcase of organically based growing. His wife Joyce was a nurse and in 1980 published a book called *I Had No Say*, in which she scientifically demonstrated that natural health methods could cure illnesses. In 1976 the NHS held an organic festival at the Luddenham showground,¹³ and in 1977 I persuaded him to come to Canberra to give a talk to the local branch of the NHS. It was that talk that moved me to start an organic growing society in Canberra. I was keen to get people interested in organic methods, in growing fruit and vegetables without artificial fertilisers or chemicals.

Our very first meeting was at somebody's house out in the sticks. I think most of the people who came were from the Natural Health Society. The hostess put on a fantastic and very delicious-looking supper. I was late getting there and as I walked in a man was saying, 'We don't really need to have a president or a secretary or a treasurer. We'll just meet and talk over any problems we have', and before I could say no, everyone agreed and clapped and broke up for supper. I was furious with him because I knew what would happen: namely, nothing. Sure enough,

A WINTER SALAD

from Betty

This is a salad which can be made entirely from your garden, even in midwinter, providing you have grown the right things! It is also highly nutritious

Ingredients: Lettuce, chickweed (use the tips, not the stringy stems), Lamb's Lettuce, endive, chicory, Japanese purple mustard, onion tops or chives, the tiny leaves of thyme and oregano and marjoram, stripped off the stems, a small amount of celery leaves, Rocket, land cress and just a few dandelion leaves, and one small silver beet leaf. Break the leaves into the salad bowl, don't cut them, then add chopped celery stalks, grated carrot, and grated white radish (very easy to grow in the winter, and full of vitamin C).

Dressing: Drop two egg yolks in the blender, add one eighth cup of apple cider vinegar and one eighth cup of organic lemon juice, and a teaspoon of honey and a sprinkling of Herbamere, or other vegie salt. Turn the blender on, and slowly add oil. I use about half olive oil for the flavour, and the rest can be any polyunsaturated oil. One of my favourites is Grape seed oil. I have also used corn oil, peanut, sunflower, safflower, apricot kernel, walnut, almond, and even ordinary blended vegetable oil (out of a large tin, as oils can go rancid very quickly if not kept in the dark..and rancid oil is extremely bad for the health.

The dressing will thicken, and you stop adding the oil when it appears to be the consistency that you want it.

Serve the dressing separately, and also the chopped onion tops if you think someone does not like onion.

Sunflower and sesame seeds are a good addition and for a change, raisins or sultanas, and occasionally dessicated coconut.

There are many variations, and you will find that a salad a day keeps the Dr away. Which reminds me, chopped apple and of course parsley I forgot to mention.

there were no more meetings because we had no one to call any! This attempt fizzled out.

I arranged a second meeting in a little room in the Melba community centre, again mostly of Natural Health Society people. The table took up most of the room. We formed a committee and needed a president: there were two candidates and I won the vote. We had committee meetings in the small room but there was a bigger one where we had talks about mulching and the like. Cedric Bryant¹⁴ was one of the early speakers. The library got going when Hannah Enders and I were given the job of getting some books for it. We had two books given by the Natural Health Society and Mike Lubke got them to give us the money for six more. After that I used mostly my own money to buy books.

At one stage, for lack of general enthusiasm, the membership of COGS had declined to about thirty. I found that a good way to get people interested in COGS was to tell them about the chemicals being used in agriculture. When I was photocopying the COGS newsletter at the Environment Centre, I found their own magazine was full of information about these chemicals. They'd throw out pages that had gone wrong so I raided the bins and found all sorts of articles about chemicals. I was horrified. I asked them if I could use these stories in our newsletter, and they said yes. They told some amazing stories about the numbers of people dying from using DDT and other chemicals, especially in India and places where the people couldn't read English. People here took in what this was saying and every time somebody talked to me on the phone I would get them interested in the chemicals. Gradually I got the number of people in COGS up to ninety-six. It took about a year, and the membership didn't decline after that. From tiny beginnings, COGS now has over 470 members,

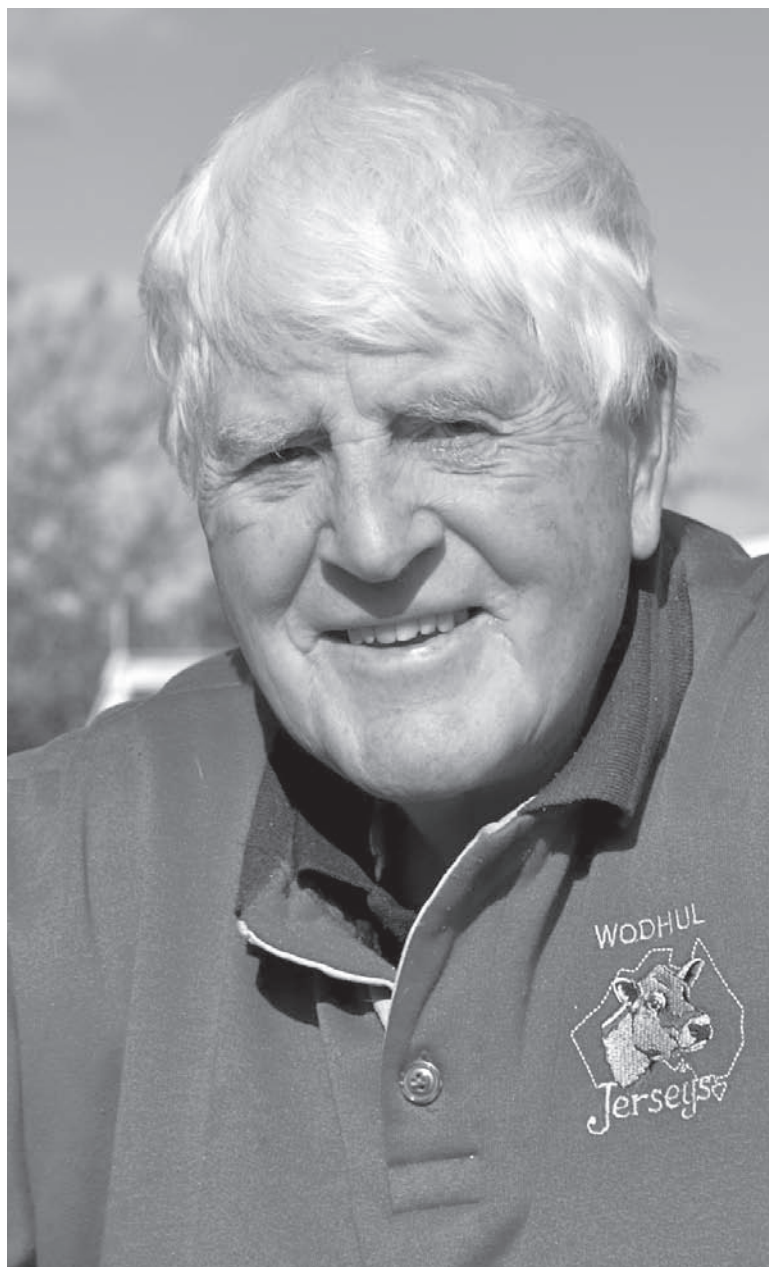
Zucchini Bread (makes 2 loaves)

| | |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| 3 eggs | 2 cups finely grated zucchini |
| 1½ cups raw sugar | 3 cups wholemeal flour) or 1½ SR |
| 3 Teasp. cinnamon | 2 teasp. baking powder) & 1½ plain |
| 1 cup oil | 1 cup walnut pieces |

Beat eggs, until light and fluffy, add sugar, then oil. Beat until thick and mousse-like. Stir in the grated zucchini. Sift together flour and baking powder and cinnamon. Fold this into the zucchini mixture with walnuts. Pour into prepared tins and bake in mod. oven for 1½ - 1½ hours. Test with skewer.

QUINCE JELLY Quinces are in season

Wash and cut up quinces without peeling or coring. Add juice of 1 lemon to every 6 quinces, cover with water and simmer till very soft. Strain through cloth, allowing to drip overnight. Measure juice by cup into preserving pan, and bring to boil. Add 1 cup of warmed sugar to each cup of juice, still till dissolved. Boil rapidly till it jellies. Pour into warm sterilized bottles and seal.



David Odell

David Odell served as president in 1985, 1987, 1988, and 1990–1992, the longest- and most oft-serving president. A number of people say they are glad of his steadying and progressive leadership.



Odell is an ancient Bedford name. There's an Odell castle in Bedfordshire, not that I have any claim on it. My father was the younger son of a younger son, so even though I'm the eldest it doesn't make much difference. I'm the eldest of three.

I was born during the Great Depression in 1932, which makes me quite ancient. Or mature, a bit like a cheese, probably going off. Dad survived the Great Depression and always had a 'Depression' mentality. He was always expecting times to get worse, and he'd have loved it right now because he'd see his predictions being fulfilled!

A lot of my organic experience comes from growing up in the Second World War. I was taught to Dig for Victory and be very thrifty with chickens and rabbits and the like. Everything had to be brought into England by ship. Of course there were submarines lurking, and the less the ships had to bring in, the less of a problem the submarines were. Naturally many things were scarce. Bananas were made available only to children under five; my youngest brother was under five at the time and he didn't want them. He'd never tasted them, so you can guess who helped him out: my brother and myself.

I was thirteen when the war ended. It was a very deepening experience and affected my whole outlook on everything I did. We coped with rationing and frugality for years. When I see the throwaway society

now I get quite upset because back then you never threw anything away because it might be useful one day. You'd repair things. Not now. I went to buy a handle to put in my block splitter, and it was cheaper to buy the whole block splitter and forget about the handle! That really upset me, it went against my ethics.

As a schoolboy, fourteen or fifteen years old, I worked for local farmers. We picked potatoes and peas, and I even drove tractors. I can do stooking and I can build haystacks as they used to when the threshing machine came round. It didn't matter if you were under age, in those days you joined in because you were one of the men. I was also sent to do the shopping because I was responsible. You had to have money of course, points for certain things and coupons for other things. I had to balance all this. I'd go with a big bag to do the week's shopping. I remember it was quite interesting to work all this out. I was very capable, I suppose, in the sense that I was being trusted to do it.

We had allotments as well as our home back garden with chooks and rabbits. I'd go round collecting vegetable scraps from friends and neighbours and we'd give them a rabbit at Christmas. We used to exhibit the animals and we'd get bran mash to mix with the boiled vegetables and scraps to feed them. One of the greatest feasts we ever had was when I did us a bantam each for Christmas. At sixteen I was the one doing the killing and dressing and preparing because that's the sort of thing you learned. I had a broad range of skills quite early on.

I always remember rationing for Sunday breakfast. I used to do a daily newspaper round but Sunday morning I cooked my own breakfast. We'd have a rasher of bacon and one egg, and that was the ration for the week. Eight ounces of margarine and two ounces of butter. For the week. You could have lots of bread and you could have lots of whale meat because that was unrationed. Sometimes we might have eaten horse, I don't know. I used to fry the rasher of bacon, and out of the fat from that I'd cook my egg, and if there was any fat left over I'd try to fry a bit of bread. For a long time I always had bread with my meals because bread

is a filler and you could eat lots of dripping on that, which is good for insulation. Potatoes too, or any of those root vegetables that you could grow. I left England before rationing finished. There was supposed to be rationing in Australia but in comparison there was nothing really.

I migrated from England in 1948 at age sixteen and arrived in 1949. I came out with the Big Brother Movement, the 'racist' white movement that got middle-class boys, brought them out here, promised them the world and gave them nothing. They came to the school I was at and showed us pictures of Bondi beach, sunshine, oranges and all that. I'd always had stars in my eyes. I'd read all the books on Australia I could lay my hands on, such as *Flying Fox* and *Drifting Sand* by an Australian author.¹⁵

We were each assigned a Big Brother. Mine was a very nice person, Dick Finlay, an accountant in the Commonwealth Bank building in Martin Place. He must have been very grand. He invited me to his house during the holidays and looked after me. I remember dining there and they didn't have a tablecloth on their nice table, but place mats. I'd never seen that before.

Then I was assigned to Stan Davison at Cunningham Plains, a sheep, wheat and cattle property. I got a lot of background there. He was very kind-hearted, although his wife was a bank manager's daughter and didn't let you forget it. Stan was a very humble person in a way, and when I think about it they didn't have much money. I remember him selling a big steer for £19, big money in those days. Then the wool boom came in 1952, when wool was worth a pound a pound. He was able to do lots of things that I hadn't realised he couldn't. He was very good to me and put up with me for a lot.

My family came out eighteen months after I arrived. Mum was horrified when she visited me, looked around and said, 'You can do better than this.' That's when I started thinking I could do better. I was prepared to be a pioneer and rough it, and it was pretty rough with an iron bed and flock mattress and lino floor. It was cold, too. My blankets

had a big hole in the middle where they were worn out. I used to fold them over a bit like a cheese and sleep on the edge.

Dad found work readily. He was a farm labourer for a while and I remember him coming in with blisters all over his hands, his hands bleeding because he'd been using an axe and things. One thing he really enjoyed was rabbiting. His idea of bliss was to have a horse, a sulky, a pack of dogs and go out rabbiting. He'd been a groomsman to a hunt and had a moth-eaten foxtail as a mounted specimen. He loved horses and dogs, and to have a horse and go out rabbiting was bliss. Mum found it a bit difficult; she often had to cook over an open stove and things like that to start with. They lived in the shearers' cottage for a while until they could move into somewhere better.

The summers were difficult for them, the heat and the flies, and they just didn't ever complain. That's something that I appreciate. I thought everybody came from a loving home and I've found out since that it's not true.

I went to Bathurst Teachers College, which opened in 1951. It was a two-year course, and my lot were the pioneers – 1951 and 1952. Later it became the Mitchell CAE and then Charles Sturt University. We went out from there with fire in our bellies! We built a tradition of togetherness and had our sixtieth reunion last year...they all looked a bit older. We were recruited to teach the baby boomers because, as a friend of mine said, if you were warm and vertical you got into teaching! They were almost desperate because the Korean War was on at that time and teaching was an alternative to going to war. My parents had thought I might be a banker but I didn't feel like banking; teaching was better. I enjoyed teaching but I didn't like the centralised authority.

From Bathurst Teachers College I was placed in a one-teacher school at Garfield near Bega. Everybody else wanted the north coast of NSW – and I said I wanted the south coast. Bega really was a backward community. I had children who were milking by hand and coming to school so tired that they would fall asleep at their desk. Their feet had

such calluses on them that they could walk over broken glass and not notice it. Some of them had never even seen the sea.¹⁶

What I found most difficult about adapting from British to Bega conditions was the seasons. I didn't mind it but the seasons did take me a little while to work out. After a while they were really natural. Sometimes I get a flashback but it doesn't last.

After I built the house, I became known as a chook expert, quite accidentally. What I did was to get chickens on credit and the feed on credit from the local co-op. I'd rear day-old chickens to six weeks and then sell them and pay the bills. Another thing on credit was calves I got from the saleyards. I knew the auctioneers and they didn't mind me having the calves on credit as long as I sold them back through them. This was about making money without having money.

It's interesting how you can make the most of your advantages when you don't have any money. That's why I grew tomatoes and things like that, I became an expert on tomatoes at the time. If you want to read my really serious article about growing tomatoes, look at *Earth Garden*, number 11,¹⁷ which has an article by me full of information. It was one of my first experiences of growing tomatoes. I was a primary school teacher at Bega West, not far away. At five to nine I'd still be in my gumboots and would get to school with green on my fingers from pruning tomatoes.

I've been more lucky than having money. In my childhood I had developed all these skills of self-sufficiency by digging, growing, and just being interested in what was produced. I came out here with lots of ideas of growing things. People here would say that I didn't need to raise my own food – 'Oh, you can get it cheaper down the shop. You don't have to do all that sort of rubbish' – but I was not convinced of that. Also, I've worked at making the most of opportunities that have come up. Some people see an opportunity and don't recognise it. Someone once said, 'Bite off more than you can chew and then chew it.' When I think about it, I see that my parents gave me the opportunity for a good education, and I've been able

to use that to help my children. I wasn't able to provide them money but I could make sure that they had a good background.

The Depression taught me to abhor waste. Don't throw things out, you might need them. I got ribbed at teachers college when I said I could darn socks. Darn socks? I got really ridiculed for that, but the point was that Mother taught us how to manage, iron and present ourselves. She may not have had a champagne income but she certainly knew good things and knew what was quality, and instilled that into us. We looked for quality and we aimed for it.

I could see that opportunities for education in Bega were going to be limited for the whole family, so we moved to Canberra in 1966. I bought a half-acre block at the top of Port Arthur Street in Lyons. Lyons at the time was a bit remote. I could see there was going to be a town centre at Woden, while other people wanted to buy on Cotter Road because it was closer to civilisation. But I'd looked at a map.

From Bega West I went to Lyneham High. I was at the end of my tether and quit teaching.

To earn an income, I'd hire a rotary hoe for a weekend, do hoeing jobs that I'd collected, take the hoe back, pay for it and keep the difference. I went into selling cars. I even did chimney-sweeping, which I thought of as a job for my eldest son but realised it wasn't suitable for him. In the end I thought, 'What does anybody do when they're in Canberra but join the Public Service?' That's when I started doing my law degree. If I'd realised the law degree would take me eight years to finish, I would have thought differently. It was interesting but it was a battle, and during that time I divorced, which didn't help. I got over that and then decided I wanted a block of land. I bought one of a number of miners' cottages in Queanbeyan for \$15,000, fairly cheaply. I had \$5,000 and borrowed the other ten. I spent three months doing it up, getting rid of all the rubbish, painting and decorating it and renting it. In 1983 I sold it to fund this land in a rural setting overlooking Bungendore and lived out here building the house.

That's when I further developed my organic growing and have been trying to put all my ideas into practice. I like urban agriculture and I wanted to make something out of what wasn't here before. You could say that I've always been organically minded – and everybody else would be if they were sensible at all!

I'd heard about COGS but was uncertain of it. I went there and found that it was in tune with all the ideas I'd had and now I could expand them. I thought I'd come home. Betty who started it all is a wonderful lady and had grown COGS to about sixty members. Somehow or other, and being who I am, I got into an executive position very quickly. I was vice-president in 1984 and president in 1985. My time as president coincided with a lot of public interest and we expanded from sixty-two members to over 300. This was a big jump, and it almost became 'in' to be part of COGS. A lot of the members were ladies and I told them, 'You are the people who can influence what you eat because it's for your children. You've got to tell people what you want. If you believe in organics you've got to start.' Somehow or other, that seed must have germinated.

I did several TV interviews – I used to have an Akubra hat and tried to look conventional. In the early days of the organic movement, people thought that anything organic was all muck and mystery. People wouldn't touch it with a barge pole because they couldn't understand how you could live without superphosphate and the Green Revolution. They thought thinking of the microbes in the soil was too difficult. It was all fringe stuff, and I decided to get out of that fringe and become acceptable.

The large numbers also meant that I had to think of ways of keeping 300 people happy. We were organic gardeners so of course community gardens were one activity, but we had other activities like seminars and conferences. We had a big conference at Sutton with a number of guest speakers. We presented topics like Wonderful Weeds and a debate on Dig versus No Dig. I lost the debate every time but I love digging. I still

love digging. Not so much lately but I was taught to dig properly when I was at school, how to get it level and nicely done. I can take pride in the skill and art of digging. It's an art that's very difficult for some people to understand. I did love digging and turning over that fresh soil and seeing the worms. You don't have to do it; most just fork things over. You also rake properly by not doing it all in one hit but spreading it smoothly.

On a field day at my place someone said to me, 'You're not really organic, you use a rotary hoe!' From that comment I've learned to beware of the purist. The purist becomes a zealot and the zealot becomes a fanatic!

We had a competition for the COGS logo. Jeannetta Main designed the logo but I insisted on having the date included.

Apart from the introduction of the COGS logo, the most significant activities were the seminars and field days where we developed our local expertise and sources of information because at that time there were no other sources we could call on. COGS also provided the umbrella organisation for the formation and expansion of the community gardens, not only to promulgate organic ideals but to provide a single voice to government for applications and grants.

POTTING MIX RECIPES

from Dorothy Berndsen, for a full barrow-load of soil mix:

1/2 barrow river sand

1/2(approx) soil

4 spades very fine tan bark or perlite

2 spades peat moss

1 spade ash

some sifted crushed bone

MIX ALL THOROUGHLY by placing on the ground and shovelling from one heap to another.

from Joyce Wilkie:

| | | most vegs | seed |
|-------------------|-----------------|-----------|------|
| for drainage- | coarse sand | 1 | 1 |
| for water-holding | vermiculite | 1 | 1 |
| | soil | 1 | 1/2 |
| for fertility | { compost | 1(1/2) | 1/2 |
| | { worm castings | 1(1/2) | |

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Notes: I like to get my potting mix ready now. If buying ready made, add some good river sand, then transfer the lot to a garbage bag and leave in the sun which provides "solarization" and kills off most of the "baddies". I put in a cup of warm water with one tablespoon of Epson salts in the water, close the bag up and humidity does the rest. (Rose Elliot)



Peter and Shirley Carden

Peter and Shirley Carden are stalwarts of the organic movement in Canberra. They played key roles in the society's management until they left Canberra to establish their own certified organic farm near Berry, on the NSW South Coast.



Peter: I was born in 1930. My first memory of gardening is during the war when I was a young teenager. I remember responding to a little booklet that the government had put out about growing your own vegetables, so I struggled with my garden trying to grow vegetables on a clay patch in Ipswich. I'd go to a gully full of what I thought was compost. It was only dead leaves and other vegetation, and I'd drag it up and try and make a garden out of it. I'm afraid it wasn't very successful. I lived with my aunty who was a gardener. Not much of it filtered down to me really.

Shirley: The way I got interested in weeds is due to a neighbour in Yarralumla where we'd built our house. Every year he'd plant a beautiful and successful vegetable garden. At the end of the season he'd have the most incredible weeds growing a metre high or so and about a metre across. He'd very carefully take them all out of the garden to the tip.

In my gardening I put all our weeds back into the garden around the fruit trees. After I asked him not to take the weeds to the tip, but rather just throw them over the fence, he noticed what beautiful black soil I had around my fruit trees, and also that I had no weeds because a lot of weeds won't grow in good soil. It got to the stage where he wouldn't give me his weeds! Even so, we had the most beautiful fruit in Yarralumla.

We came to Canberra in 1954 from Adelaide. Peter was working at the Weapons Research Establishment. His boss got a job at the ANU and Peter took the opportunity to visit him. As a result he was offered a research job there.

Peter: That was Sir Mark Oliphant, head of the department and a big name. Canberra in 1954 was pretty rudimentary. No lake. We stayed until 1988.

Shirley: The old bridge used to get flooded and you couldn't get into Civic from the south.

We built our house at the end of Hopetoun Circuit, Yarralumla, and we were away during 1962. This was fortunate because our sons would have gone under the graders doing all the landscaping for the lake. A dairy farm was there, and every afternoon at 3.15 the farmer came over from the Corkhills on his little cow pony to take the cows home for milking. And many's the time our sons and their friends would be up a tree with a bull underneath! Yes, it was a completely different place. When we came back, the lake had started to fill.

Peter: We didn't have to do much gardening when we were young, did we? I remember I used to grow fruit trees – that was my thing.

Shirley: And I put the vegetables in around the fruit trees.

Peter: It wasn't organic, though.

Shirley: No, we used all the sprays and things, much to my horror now.

Peter: I learnt that you could get good fruit if you worked at it. But it certainly wasn't organic, and I wasn't organic.

Shirley: Another important influence on me was the herbal scene. There were lots of people like Traudy,¹⁸ who remembered living in little villages in Europe with no doctors where people were treated with herbal remedies. We had all sorts of speakers like Dorothy Hall coming to speak to us, and I became absolutely absorbed in growing herbs.

I got to the stage of giving lectures at Hawker College, a five-week course, three hours a night. I gave talks all over the place. When Woden Plaza started up, they had a conservatorium where they held community meetings. I gave a talk over there to a hundred people. Later, the secretary asked me to come again. It was incredibly popular because herbs were just becoming of interest to people.

Peter: Rachel Carson's book¹⁹ is what really sparked interest in organic farming and growing. People could see that DDT was not good. But you can go too far the other way and say no chemicals at all.

Shirley: We spent a year in England in 1972. We lived fifteen miles out of Oxford in a 300-year-old farm cottage. There was an excellent library close by which had a good selection of cook books. I took to making all our own bread, and pizzas, and things with yeast. I also took out gardening books. The garden had lots of herbs and that's when I first became interested in herbs. After we came back here, it was starting to become popular.

Peter: That was the time where I had to make a decision about my career, and so I went all sustainable. I thought that energy was the thing and sustainable agriculture had to go organic.

Shirley: I learnt about how good herbs were for health, and I wanted to serve them up to my family so that they enjoyed them. I came up with the very popular green drink. I've got two daughters in Canberra, and if I take a green drink to one family, the other family's immediately on the phone asking, 'How come they got a green drink and we didn't?' I serve herb bread at all our get-togethers and the children absolutely love it. It's like the green cheese omelette: these foods have lots of herbs in them, and I'm using them to give my family energy, to build up their immune system and stop them getting all the illnesses going around. It works. I gave two sets of herb notes called 'Everyday Herbs for Healthy Living'²⁰ to the COGS library. Fifteen pages in a green folder.

GREEN DRINK

No matter what you have wrong with you, green drink will help you. That sounds like a tall order, but try it and see. It has helped many people.

INGREDIENTS:

Leaves and young shoots of any or all of the following:

Dandelion,
Lemon Balm,
Chickweed,
Yarrow,

Stinging nettle,
Peppermint,

Comfrey (if you are not afraid of the alkaloids in it, which according to Dr Culvenor can give you liver cancer, but I and many others have been taking it for the good of their health for 20-40 years, and my liver, when tested along with 39 other people's proved to be perfectly normal. Also Andrew Hughes, an 87 year old, whom I met recently home on a visit from Japan, where he lives and is working for world peace, and where he grows, sells and takes daily, comfrey in the form of tablets, is so healthy he looks like a healthy 60 year old. He walked from his son's house in Braddon to my house in Campbell, for a pleasant morning's walk!

Borage

Wheat grass

Barley grass

Other tender grasses, when young.

Dock or spinach leaves may be added in small amounts if you have not got enough green leaves.

Blend the leaves in the blender with purified water, adding the juice of a lemon or if organically grown $\frac{1}{2}$ a lemon, skin and all for the Bioflavonoids. This will keep the juice green.

Honey: I add honey, 1 dessertspoon. But many people dilute the juice with fresh or bought apple juice, or even pineapple juice. For children especially this makes it into a treat.

After blending, strain and drink, the fresher the better. Good for all sorts of ills, and to give you GOOD HEALTH.

We started off in married life in Mt Isa. I was a teacher, and when the fumes came over the town I'd have to stop lessons because the children would be coughing and spluttering. We tried to grow things like radishes and lettuces, and they'd just shrivel up and die. You couldn't grow anything there.

Peter: We could buy vegetables from a Chinese gardener who lived some way out. Somehow or other he escaped the fumes. We didn't grow anything in Adelaide; we were only there for about eighteen months.

Shirley: COGS came out of the Natural Health Society and the people who wanted to do something about their health rather than spending a fortune at Hopewood.²¹ I was brought up in organic ways. My dad was an Englishman who came out to Australia with his brother to grow sugarcane using cheap Kanaka labour. When that was banned, it was the end of the venture. Instead, he grew fruit and vegetables and people used to approach him for advice on how to grow things. He was looked up to because of his incredible skills at producing both quantity and quality.

I had a brother who taught at Gatton Agricultural College,²² and of course he had to follow the system and use all the deadly sprays. I went along to see him at one stage and he had all his farmer friends there. They were all talking about the poisonous sprays they used and the effects these had on them. He died from cancer a couple of years ago. He wasn't organic so much, but I was.

Peter: My mother and grandmother were natural health people; I think it's because they were both a bit sickly. I was brought up with special diets and vegetable juices and visiting dieticians who had great charts on the wall showing how food went through your body. I suppose that's why I was drawn to Shirley in the first place. I already had an interest in sustainability, but Shirley was the driver. I don't think I would have joined COGS unless she'd been there. After she took it up, I found there was some sort of science associated with it, and that made my ears prick up.

Shirley: I used to weed people's gardens and my method of gardening was written up in the *Canberra Times* a couple of times. David Odell and I were interviewed on 666²³ as well (see Appendix A for transcript).

Peter: Here's another one that I wrote to the *Canberra Times* (see Appendix B). It showed my scientific interest in the whole thing, because that was my expertise really. I was a scientist, and my association with COGS helped combat the notion that we were a lot of 'muck and magic' people.

Shirley: Peter has a doctorate in engineering physics. He was a scientist. Back then he didn't have much of an opinion of the grassroots organic growers, I'm afraid.

Peter: The scientist in me was trying to root out the mystery and get organic gardening onto a scientific basis.

Shirley: Biodynamics works by spreading bacteria, and it can be done on a broadacre basis by spreading a bacterial brew.

Peter: I think the jury's still out about that, but I thought the interesting thing was the soil science. Very important, soil science, microorganisms, worms and so on. Conventional farming was wrecking the soil structure. I was sure of that. Take Alan Druce,²⁴ for example.

Shirley: Alan suffered greatly when he started going organic because it took time to become profitable. He stopped using chemicals because he could see too many children in the area dying from leukaemia. It took some years to make the conversion but he stuck to it, and now his property is living proof that organic works on the broadacre.

Shirley: My strong point is herbs, and I make a green drink. In fact, I can do all sorts of things with my green drink! We always had the green drink in the summer at the COGS meetings, with healthy cakes and things, no white sugar, anything like that. We used to sell it at Commonwealth Park to raise funds, and we could never have enough of it.

Peter: It calms people down. For example, there was a proposed venture with the Brindabella Community Arts Association,²⁵ which in the end went nowhere.

Shirley: They wanted us to advise them on growing organic fruit and vegetables. Half of them wanted to join up with us and the other half didn't. To work something out, David Odell, Peter and I went to a joint meeting. We took along supper with lots of green drink. The meeting was getting rather heated so David Odell slipped off into the kitchen and came back with a tray of green drinks.

Peter: He says, 'We'll have a break, we'll all have a green drink.' And it calmed us down.

Shirley: The people drank it up and said, 'Oh, that was nice, can we have another?' We took it around again, and then we all sat down quietly and discussed what we came to discuss.

Peter: It took the heat out.

Shirley: And the next morning David rang me up and said, 'Thank God for green drink!'

The community gardens were also important for the gardens. Chris Nazer organised it [the first Cotter garden] for us. He was a member of COGS and worked for City Parks and Gardens as a horticulturist.

A riding school was near the community garden. One day Traudy and I went with our little carry tarp to the riding school and asked if we could get some manure. The manager was happy about that, and as we were walking back with our load of manure between us to the community garden, he said, 'You know, I could bring you a trailer load if you'd like.' We accepted at once!

He delivered the trailer load, we made him a cake and we gave him some vegetables. Then he said, 'You know, if you pay for the hire of a truck, I could clean up all the manure around the riding school and bring you the lot.' So every year he'd work all day long bringing massive loads

of horse manure and sawdust, and we would pay him in vegetables and freshly made cakes. We had what I called wall-to-wall manure! We let it compost for a year and break down to beautiful black soil, then shovel it on to the beds leaving a deep recess for more manure. It worked brilliantly.

At the community garden you learn by your mistakes and your successes, and you learn by everyone else's mistakes and successes. Here's Traudy's way to grow carrots. She would get the bed ready by having grown a leaf crop in it, and as the weeds came up she'd rake it through, and then lay fence palings across the bed. She'd have a fence paling and then a space the same width, all the way along. She'd put the seeds in damp sand in an ice cream container, leave it for three days and then sprinkle that between the palings. Visualise a row of carrots, a row of palings, and so on.

The palings kept the weeds down, and the carrots got a good start because the seeds had been in damp sand. They'd come up before the weeds; in fact, she'd have no weed problem at all. Because she mixed the seeds with sand the seedlings were evenly distributed and didn't need thinning. After a while, when the plants were about so high, she'd take away the palings and end up with the most incredible carrots you could ever hope to find.

All very simple. The two of us used to demonstrate it; she would show how it was done and I'd do the talking!

We had one man [at the Cotter garden] who liked to grow organic things for his family, but he was a bit erratic. He'd come in for a few months and then disappear. On one occasion we were having an open day. His garden was full of weeds and looked messy. We asked him to tidy his garden but he didn't turn up, so Traudy and I weeded it. Here was this great bed full of weeds and under the weeds were carrots about that thick, absolutely beautifully crisp, not woody in the least. They had a living mulch of weeds.

This is not Traudy's story, I read it somewhere, but it's a good one. Carrots need firm soil. A woman was planting out carrot seeds and her preschooler ran across the bed. She got very cross with her daughter and

told her not to do it any more. When the seeds came up they came in the footsteps of the child! Which proves that you must have carrots firmed down properly.

We had a carrot thief who had a plot at the community garden but never seemed to do much. She let the cat out of the bag by saying that she only visited the garden late in the evening to pick carrots – but she wasn't growing carrots. Only Traudy was doing that!

When they started the National Association,²⁶ with monthly meetings in Sydney, the people who were getting it together weren't necessarily organic growers as such. Further, they actually said that they wouldn't be getting in touch with grassroots people like Mike Lubke.²⁷ This upset me. And no, the grass-roots people weren't scientists, but they simply knew by experience that they could grow things without poisons.

Peter: Els Wijnen and Sandy Fritz wanted to start a national body. It was all to do with being able to sell produce certified as organic. The movement was Australia-wide. Shirley and I were the two delegates from COGS, and we'd go to meetings in Sydney. Some people there were grass roots and some were 'politicians'. One thing that annoyed us was that the government had a clear policy, a framework into which we could slot the association. Government would provide all the finance for the organising and so on because a precedent had been set by helping oyster growers. These had the same sort of problem as we did and got grants from the government and had advisors on how to set up standards. But no, our 'politicians' didn't want that.

Shirley: They didn't want Big Brother looking over them!

Peter: We thought that was a bit silly because, being from Canberra, we live in a government town and know how it works.

Shirley: And they didn't want to use the word 'organic'. It had to be 'sustainable'. It seemed as if they half expected an organic movement to fail, and that a sustainable movement was on a much firmer footing.

We used to have some fun and games. That's why I call them 'politicians'. They ended up running NASAA.

Sandy lived down at Berry where we had our farm, and we had problems with Sandy down there. We formed an organic organisation, which got a lot of interest and people came from hours away to attend our meetings and discuss organic methods. But eventually 'politics' intruded too much and it fell through.

Shirley: What we're trying to do now is to get Bee Society members to grow their own bee fodder. We don't have any disease with our bees.²⁸ I plant masses of rosemary, and lavenders, and thymes, and things like that, and after living on the farm I'm quite convinced that if you give the bees healthy fodder then the bees are healthy.

All over the world apiarists are becoming interested in bee problems. In Europe you can have thyme honey, borage honey, rosemary honey, lavender honey. They grow their herbs with their bees.

Peter: There's a lot of going back now to old techniques but mixing them with modern ones such as integrated pest management. We visited a pecan farm up near Moree where they buy in predator insects. That's just marvellous. Fancy spraying your trees with insects instead of chemicals! And yet it's really a technique that's ages old because that's just what people did once; they'd grow hedgerows and so on, places where birds could live and all the predators, spiders and so forth. They'd come out and do their job, and go back again.

Shirley: We were fifteen years on the farm. We had bees, milking goats, chooks, fruit and nut trees, bush tucker plants, lots of productive native plants, and masses of herbs.

Peter: Our farm was a certified organic farm, properly inspected. We were very reluctant to leave it, but it just got too much.

MILK CARTON SEED TRAY

A litre milk carton makes a workable seed tray with a little work. Rinse the carton and staple the mouth shut. Lay the carton on its side with the stapled end facing up. Make a slit in the centre of the top side down its entire length then make slits along the width at the top and bottom. Bend down the long flaps formed by the cuts and staple them to the sides of the carton. This will make the sides a lot stronger and keep them from bellying when the carton is filled with soil. Punch holes along the bottom, staple a label on the end and you've got it!

INSECT CONTROL HINT: Soapy water is the most effective organic spray for home gardeners to use against aphids on roses or cabbages.



John Brummell OAM

John Brummell is a ‘country boy’ who takes sustainable agriculture very seriously. He has long been keen to use organic growing facilities to help the underprivileged of society.



I was born on a wheat farm out at Tamworth, growing crops, animals, living on a farm. That’s how I was brought up, a farm boy. You can’t take the farm out of the farm boy. My parents had come in from out around Moree where it was very dry. My father bought the farm in 1929, the year I was born, so I was a Depression kid.

Dad grew wheat, cattle, sheep, pigs and a few vegetables. We’d usually have wheat porridge for breakfast. Our cow gave us milk, cream and butter, and chickens for eggs. We probably grew about three-quarters of the food we ate.

Dad was a fairly progressive farmer. He was starting up a new farm so he got a tractor: this was the time when tractors were coming in and replacing horses. We were only seven miles out of town and had a car, but Dad soon figured out that the new telephone would be a great boon because, if you needed a part ordered for your header, or if something broke down and you needed to get a new part, instead of taking two hours to stop, go into town, see the supplier, come home and go back the next day or the day after and get the part and finally bring it home – he could ring them up and quote the part number and save a lot of time and distance. He was the first bloke in the district to get a telephone.

However, his best friend was a little more articulate and perhaps a little more far-sighted – he was trying to set up what he called a ‘model

farm', which in those days was not organic versus chemical, but rather concentrating more on cosmetic things. He grew trees and liked to set out the farm so that it was an attractive place to be. This man was progressive for those days, going after new things, very forward-looking. While I was near or in my teens, he was a great fan of Louis Bromfield,²⁹ whose approach I thought was absolutely fantastic, helping create an almost idyllic rural situation. Contour the farm, install fishponds, plant tree belts and attract birds. That became and still is my ideal of farming and growing plants. I collected most of Bromfield's books and over the years built a large library. Our house was burnt down in the fires³⁰ and I lost all my papers and books.

One might say I was almost born 'organic', although in the 1930s the word was not used in its modern sense. Dad used a bit of fertiliser, probably superphosphate, but not much of it and certainly no weedicides and pesticides. I cannot remember the vet ever setting a foot on our place or even on the neighbour's. I recall only one occasion in all my first twenty years when one of my uncle's draft horses got caught in the fence and cut his leg. They got the vet out to fix that, but there was none of this modern business of running back and forth to the vet with some sort of horrible problem.

Another formative person was the farming neighbour who was very interested in Yeomans and his Keyline farming system³¹ using the chisel plough. I can remember when chisel ploughs came in and that, almost for the first time I think, all the farmers became aware of the hard pan which they had been building into their cultivation owing to the types of implements being used. The chisel plough broke up that hard pan – and so chisel ploughs stayed in. The other formative thing if we're looking at books is Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*.³²

Later I became a teacher. I was always a Christian, and as a high school teacher I served overseas on a mission school in Borneo for fourteen years. We came back to Canberra in 1970 and soon afterwards Bill Mollison hit the headlines with his permaculture system.³³

It seemed like a good idea to me. While I grew up a farm boy I never

owned my own farm, but coming off a farm you're very interested in production – you have to be, that's the whole idea. You're growing food and you're growing as much food as you can. While I still think permaculture is a good idea, I have my doubts as to whether it can be highly productive enough. People might argue with me on that but I've always been a permaculturist in the sense that I believe if I've got responsibility for one part of God's creation then it's up to me to use it and care for it.

So in my vegetable garden I try to use every part and grow a variety of things, little plants, big plants for shade, all types. I'm still interested in ensuring that we produce as much food as we can in a sustainable and organic way. Dealing with world hunger nowadays is important.

I'm getting a bit hazy now on the details of what brought me into COGS, because I think it had some connection in the 1970s with a permaculture group or society. I would have been one of the original members of that; and somehow it was connected with COGS – but I may be wrong there.³⁴

Soon I heard of it and Betty Cornhill, and probably attended a few meetings. I was taken by their magazine, which came out pretty regularly. I kept them all. Just before the fires, it must have been the late 1990s or 2000, they sent out an appeal for old copies of the magazine. I had a pile of maybe ten or fifteen years' issues, so I donated them all. Just as well: my house was destroyed in the fires.

It seemed to me that organic growing in COGS is all commonsense, I agreed with it and didn't need to be converted. There were some good hints on how to do things organically and so on, and by then of course the organic versus chemical debate was in full conflict. And I was on the right side.

I've spoken on three occasions to COGS, I think. The first time was about a new form of settlement I will tell you about shortly. The other two times, several years apart, were to do with describing what was happening with fusion horticulture.³⁵

But for the sake of history and your own interest, and you might even

revive this, I've always been a bit of an ideas man; I like making up ideas and theories in a range of areas. When we came back to Canberra in 1970, I joined the Department of Education, where I worked for twenty years until I retired. Part of my job was in educational planning, not really the hands-on stuff like now, but more the theory and policy and all the rest of it. I developed an idea that one of my sociological friends suggested I call Enhanced Community Lifestyle. In the 70s and 80s with Woodstock and the like, and also in Christian circles, there was talk about communes, communities and the like.

I'm a bit too much of an individualist to actually want to go and join those things myself as such. Instead, I formed an idea that is a sort of compromise. I showed a plan to a few of my friends. I gave a talk to COGS one evening and I submitted it to the government with the idea that an area in a suburb or even a whole suburb might be built like this. I got a nice letter thanking me for it but nothing ever happened.

Now here is a rough diagram of what I had in mind (see Appendix C). This is a street; the red is house blocks around that. The new type of settlement would be in here within a circle, oval or rectangle; I've made it a circle because it's in Canberra. Build standard houses around the perimeter on 500-square-metre blocks. At the back you've got space for 1,000- or 2,000-square-metre blocks. Some of them might be small like this one, some might be bigger, they might be a slightly odd shape owing to the subdivision pattern.

This person has nothing: they might just want to have a few bees or breed turtles or birds in their backyard. They don't want anything more than a quarter-acre block, but they'd like to live in what I call a community – a community which exists only in the sorts of things they're collectively interested in, not paying to be a member of a particular thing with a name on it. Some only want to do a few little things so they're happy just to buy a small block. We get a mixture of people who don't want any extra land, some people who want a little bit of extra land, and other people who might want a horse or even a cow.

The other thing was that the government regulations for this thing would allow people to have bees, animals, chooks and things like that, so that if you bought into that there would be no complaining about the smell of the chook manure or the rooster crowing at three o'clock in the morning! You would accept that you were living in a rural environment; that's why you put them all together.

I can't vouch that that was the exact name, but I think it was Enhanced Lifestyle Community. I thought that in the middle we have this common area, which could be an enclosed permaculture type of area with access to it by a little street. The idea of having it enclosed is for security because if people have sheep and cattle or other animals, and growing their vegetables, you've got to protect the land from the vandals and idiots and thieves and hoons driving their cars over the beds. So I thought, well, if you've got houses all around it and just this one entrance – you could even have a gate – people could do what they wish. You could have it as a permaculture set-up, but it's up to people who buy the block what to do with it.

I've always had a vegie garden. When I came back to Canberra, I made a vegie garden, a worm farm and a compost heap. I grew as much of my own vegies as I could then and still do. Perhaps one thing that sets me apart is that I don't think organic means being untidy. Some people are the keenest organic growers you could meet and yet there are weeds all over the place and they haven't pulled out the old tomato vines. The place is an eyesore. I'm not saying those people aren't doing well and growing good food, maybe they grow even better food than I do, but I do think that there's no reason why an organic garden can't be attractive. I'm not talking about pulling out every weed, you know, but if I drive in a stake, I like to drive it in so that it's not got a lean on it! And if you've got tomatoes, you plant them more or less the same distance apart. I'm trying to feed myself, not necessarily the neighbours, and keep a garden well so that when I go into it, I feel this is a nice place to be.

Talking about Yeomans and the Keyline Plan, I certainly thought the

genius of his system is that the methods and changes don't involve high tech. The idea basically is to stop water rushing downhill or straight into a stream; the longer you keep it on the surface of the soil, the more will soak in. Spread it out and slow it down so that it has time to soak in. My wife comes from Albury, and one of our visits there coincided with an open day by the Keyline farmers of the Kiewa Valley. It's a relatively small valley. There must have been about fifteen or twenty farmers who somehow had decided that they'd all go Keyline because a Keyline doesn't finish at an artificial boundary. There was an open day and I went to see it in operation. There certainly seemed to be evidence of it working and improving things. The interesting thing was that one farmer had built a dam up high, made an outlet in the dam and a bank on the contour, and had dug a channel. I can still remember this demonstration: he turned the tap on and water gushed out, filled the channel a foot or two deep, and then all the water at the same time started to flow down over the pasture. Instead of it being a gushing torrent, it was simply trickling down evenly over the pasture.

The other person I've continued to keep an interest in and who I've heard speak a couple of times is Peter Andrews.³⁶ In a sense, he has a similar method to Yeomans but with a different application, which is that the longer and deeper you can keep the water in a stream or watercourse before it flows away, the more it's likely to soak sideways from the stream and into the surrounding soil. He probably feels like committing suicide when he comes to Canberra and sees all these concrete banks aiming to get the water out of town as fast as possible! I think it's a fantastic idea to maintain the water in the landscape for as long as you can and to let it soak in, instead of pulling out reeds and poisoning willows.³⁷

I've not ever been particularly attracted to biodynamics. I am just not impressed by the idea of energy running around one metre below the surface of the earth and being caught in a cow horn and somehow transforming manure in the horn. Rather, I've always thought that it's probably another form of worm juice, and I'm a great advocate of that.

A lot of people know how good this is, but I think it's even better than people realise. I've got plenty of worm juice, so I spray it left, right and centre, and I've discovered that it's much better than Bordeaux mixture for beating curly leaf on stone fruit.

Biodynamics seems to work in certain respects, and my hard-headed but open-minded nephews on a grazing property up at Glen Innes have the same idea as I do. They don't believe in the philosophy of it but they do use the BD500 spray³⁸ and are registered biodynamic growers.

I think just the fact that they're [followers of biodynamics] organic first of all matters most, and I think that some of their compost teas are good simply because they've got the right ingredients to do something good in the soil. If it's nettle tea or the like, then I'm all for it. In my liquid manure bin, I put nettles, old broad bean vines, comfrey, make a big cocktail and just put it out, slap it around. That's all I've got time to do.

Why do I like gardening? It's obvious from my background that I'm interested in growing things. First, I simply like being in the garden, growing things, clearing away the debris from last season, making the compost tea, putting manures in the soil, digging stuff in and so on. If I finish a clean-up in, say, May or August and the garden looks good, then even if there's nothing much growing in it I still feel that I've had a good day and go to bed satisfied. Then I put the seeds in and wander around for the next week or two asking, 'Is anything there yet?' Up it comes and I mulch it. As it grows, I watch over it, keep an eye out for pests, and then harvest.

For me, one of the most aesthetically and emotionally satisfying experiences is to grow a good pumpkin vine. I don't know why, but pumpkins seem to epitomise growing; they come at the end of summer, they're a bright red colour, they last for a long while.

At the Youth Haven³⁹ horticulture we had individual plots like those COGS has, but even in that set-up it wasn't really possible to grow pumpkins. We made paths because we thought the place should look

nice, and somebody could mow the lawn in between. Now, obviously if pumpkins are all over the paths, you can't mow at all and next thing you've got weeds everywhere. So we all agreed from day one that we'd grow only the little bush pumpkins on anyone's plot. We also had about a quarter of an acre or so on a bit of a slope, so we ploughed it up with a rotary hoe, and every three or four metres dug a channel down the slope and planted our pumpkins.

We ended up with hundreds of pumpkins in the patch – Queensland blue, red hubbard, butternut and others. We'd wander around in amongst the growth trying to count them, but after a frost or two the leaves would all go down and there were these red and grey and blue globes all over the place. We'd get the trailer and a gang and go and pick all these pumpkins. Yes, the thing I really like most about gardening is harvesting pumpkins. It's so personally satisfying, planting, harvesting, clearing, picking [pumpkins], the cycle of life, caring as I say for a corner of God's creation, all those things.

Second, I knew that gardening offered potential as a therapy for people from Burnie Court⁴⁰ and for refugees. Over the seventeen years we had the garden program, we could see the therapy in action with all these people. About forty-five to fifty people went through the program. Most of them were long-term stayers, which says something in itself. None of them really reverted to drugs. (Well, one fellow did; after he left us, he reverted to alcoholism.) While they were there, for most of them there were no major criminal or mental health problems or crises. That was the therapy and it was great to see that what I expected to happen actually did happen. Very satisfying.

Third, people have become aware of the need for food security because the world is running out of food. This is not a new thing, we've been running out of food for twenty years or even longer. I see this as the next stage of my development in relation to organic growing. Organic is sustainable and we all should be into sustainability. It's all about organic, sustainable living.

So arising from phase 1 and phase 2 of my development, as it were, is this phase 3 of trying to promote sustainable food production and all that goes with it. We're trying to promote the whole concept of sustainability, not only here but overseas. I had some Ugandan postgraduate students from the ANU come out on Wednesday to look at our re-assembling of the aquaponic system,⁴¹³ which is still going well. Both are women. One of them is a lecturer in Forestry and the other works for a mining company in rehabilitation of the environment after or around the mines. They're very interested in the potential of aquaponics for their own community. This is all part of what I'm now doing at that particular level.

First, and speaking as a person on the edge looking in, COGS has always been, as far as I can see, a vital hub for discussion and education. Every month, people come together, share ideas, a talk, recommend the latest book and so on, all of which is the corporate community development of people with like-minded interests being involved in not only an interesting hobby from a personal point of view but also in a very satisfying and increasingly useful social exercise.

Second, I think the COGS magazine, particularly in the early days when there wasn't that much around on organic material, did – and still does – perform a very important function for the three or four hundred people who belong to COGS.

Third, the development of the community gardens is a fantastic achievement. I don't know whether there are many other organisations in other cities around the world that have managed in ten years or whatever to get so many of these gardens set up. Partly it's Canberra, I think: the government has decided to support them.

The fourth thing is the City Farm,⁴² which I think is a great idea.

I think farmers are a pretty creative bunch in their own way. This is fairly well acknowledged. When you're droving cattle or sheep, or sitting on a tractor for three hours straight, what do you do? You think about things, analyse. People often commend farmers for their originality and

new ways of doing things. There's a very big competition each year, Invention of the Year in Farming.

I find too, you might call it meditation, when you're in the garden for the afternoon, two until five, pulling out weeds and planting things. A lot of it's repetitive so you don't have to concentrate. It's a time for contemplation and meditation, and that's when I think a lot of us think about the condition of the world. All those good things that Hugh Mackay talks about.

Farmers have to be inventive, they've always got to fix things or invent some new machinery. If something breaks, you figure out how to fix it, or if you want a piece of equipment that might cost \$500 or £500, you ask, 'Is there another way to do this?' This is where field days are useful. There's a tremendous amount of ingenuity out there.

Farmers are very important, really, the fate of the country is in their hands, but a lot of people don't think so. It was interesting to see the spat in the *Canberra Times* generated by Julian Cribb's article on big agribusiness taking over family farms in America and Australia. Next day there was a letter from the chief executive officer or something of an agribusiness who got stuck into Julian, and then this other fellow got stuck into me about how cheap food is, that I'm against cheap food, and all this sort of nonsense.

It's the lack of understanding of that sort of thing, and I've had it happen before with other people who believe that if it's bigger it's better and all that farmers do is whinge. There was a bloke last night on the television, ABC I think, attacking Barnaby Joyce. He had a column in yesterday or the day before, and was sticking up for the farmers and family farms as opposed to agribusiness. This bloke, some big agribusiness type, was quite virulent in his attack, saying we need investment to develop Australian agriculture. They're well organised and unfortunately I think many have got the ear of government. The Green Paper on the National Food Plan is really trying to have it both ways. You'll see that page after page, paragraph after paragraph, sentence after

sentence, yes, we acknowledge that food security is an emerging issue and there's a need to maintain our farming community, but we do need to balance agribusiness and the miners and the government is trying to do this, that and the other.

So if in twenty years' time somebody says we're in a hell of a mess now, the government will say, 'We always realised that, and if you look at page 21 we said back then that there was a food security issue.' They're not calling spades, spades. I'm very afraid that it may be a pretty useless sort of exercise, and the tragedy is that once the final comes out, it's written in concrete. They'll say that you who criticised it had your chance to put in your submissions and these were all given due consideration, but the consensus of the government and all the experts and all the stakeholders is reflected in the White Paper; this is the policy for the next ten years so just go away and live with it.

It's very frightening, very frightening.

The last point I'd like to make is this. I think there is a window of opportunity for Canberra to show a lead in some of these progressive things such as aquaponics and some of Julian Cribb's ideas. Not saying no agribusiness, not saying no big capital, but also not saying to agribusiness you do it all and let the farmers fall by the wayside. We're saying the backyard growers have got to be involved, the farmers have got to be involved, the regions have got to be involved. Agribusiness can play a part in it; if they want to put up a twenty-five-hectare glasshouse, fine, but don't stop the refugee or the displaced farmer who wants to set up a two-man business and grow a million dollars' worth of produce. That's what we're asking.



Arno and Nel Struzina

Arno Struzina was vice-president in 1988–89. He brought an Architectural approach to garden design. Nel has always been involved in gardening and today she and Arno live in a small rural town on land which they rehabilitated and which now boasts a splendid garden.



Arno: I grew up in Berlin, where we had a Schrebergarten.⁴³ In it we each had a little plot, very neat and orderly because of the German character, and yet great togetherness too. Kids were part of it and they could help with growing things. At times we'd have a fest together to share the produce. Today my younger sister is very involved with a plot outside of Berlin.

Nel: We lived in Leeuwarden in the Netherlands, with a garden at the end of a dead-end street. Everybody had two beds, each a good size. There was no particular organisation but it worked. I remember the lovely strawberries we grew and I ate my fill when I wasn't supposed to. Growing your own food I think is particularly meaningful to people who lived in a time of war where nature strips were turned into vegetable growing areas. At my school I think it was only fourth, fifth and sixth grade that did gardening. We got a plot and were given carrots and beetroot seeds. In half of the plot we could have flowers and vegetables in the other half. The principle of growing your own food goes back a long time. In a city where there was no room we were taught gardening at school, just as we learnt to knit socks and other practical skills. This sort of training seems to be lacking now.

Arno: At home in Canberra with not much space, I had an espalier row

of fruit trees, and it really worked well. We decided that not only did we want to grow more but also we would like to grow with other people. The community aspect meant a lot to me and Nel. I can't remember the first time I set foot on a COGS garden. I had been aware of the Cotter Road garden for a while because we went along Cotter Road quite frequently. I'd see these gardens and say to myself, 'I wonder what's going on there? Something serious,' because there were always new things happening.

Organic growing is important. It is statistically possible to demonstrate the health issues rising in the community along with the amount of chemicals used in food growing. There's no doubt in my mind that a large part of the populace gets food that is under-mineralised, dead by the time it's on the table, lacking flavour. An organic garden can overcome all that.

The European tradition of setting aside land in cities for food production on a domestic scale is coming back. It needs now to be taken far more seriously for mental and physical health, and happiness. To do that you need people at a high level of government educated to the fact – not so much philosophy and practical things – but that it's actually worth money. It actually pays to have happy, healthy people. An economist like Schumacher⁴⁴ could show them that you could save a million dollars in health care by spending \$5,000 for a community garden. I'm not sure of the exact figures.

I had a lot of upper respiratory problems and in the end I found garlic inhalations absolutely wonderful, and so is honey with propolis. They clear it up and prevent it coming back. I think about a third of the people in Australia are on antidepressants. Growing fruit and vegetables ought to be the best antidepressant there is. It's part of a whole lifestyle. In COGS you've got over 400 people already thinking this way.

Shirley Carden inspired us to join COGS. I don't remember when.

Arno: It was 1983. Our children were not interested in gardening at all!

The meetings at the Griffin Centre were important, and there was always great enthusiasm. The whole thing was alive and bubbling, so much enthusiasm about what we can do and what we will do.

The Cotter garden was very higgledy-piggledy, very different to how I worked. While I was never one for growing things in strict rows, there was just too much untidiness, which I found really hard to take. In fact everybody commented on the disorder and we all tried to deal with it but didn't get anywhere. We were told by Parks and Gardens to tidy it up because it was visible from Cotter Road. The other gardeners were concerned that it would be made too formal. Because I've got an architectural background I wanted to draw a plan and give the whole thing an overview so that everyone would know what's where. Perhaps even labelling individual plots. I drew up a plan and put it on the wall of the small shed (see Appendix D for a plan of the Cotter garden after it was moved).

My time in the garden was limited because of my work but I got there most Saturdays for a couple of hours. We brought our children only a few times. They didn't want to work, of course! These days neither of us can do heavy gardening any more.

There were some very memorable people in COGS. Betty had the high ideals and was the driving force. Someone has to drive these things or nothing will happen. David Odell was very good at keeping everything running smoothly. He was a great grower too. Traudy Kalivoda was an outstanding person, hard worker, helpful, friendly. I liked her very much; she put a lot of work in. Other outstanding characters would be Peter and Shirley Carden; they were wonderful, makers of the community garden. Traudy was a planner, Peter was good at keeping records, and Shirley was good at writing.

We always tried of course to interest people in coming to the meetings and joining us. I think we regularly brought new people along, almost dragged them to the meetings.

Nel: Hoping they'd do some work, of course.

Arno: Yes, but even just join up. A lot of people came along already all fired up about organic growing, and there was a lot of discussion at meetings. We set up more formal discussions on organic growing, things

like site selection, soil composting, growing seedlings and watering. A lot of people came in new to organics. They might have no land of their own, living in a flat, and needed teaching. I tried to have plots at the community gardens ready and open to let them get busy quickly. But we could see our space was running out.

We set up a library to enthuse people. Shewell-Cooper⁴⁵ is an early author. And this is probably the foundation stuff: *Malabar Hill* by Lewis Bromfield. We had that in the library at COGS and I would make sure we had a way of checking books in and out. Grass Roots magazine as well. And then there's the newsletter, which became an outreach.

Nel: A very interesting thing that I remember was when one of growers bought a fruit and vegetable dryer. She demonstrated it at a meeting, what a good job it did, and how she was using it at home. She talked about apples strung on string and so on to dry them. She was very keen but it does take electricity and I'm not fond of bottling and jamming and all that. A common problem with gardening is when you have too much at once, what do you do with it?

Arno: In COGS we could never meet the demands people had when they came to meetings wanting to buy produce. At meetings, we had a small produce table and it was gone almost before people sat down for the talk.

In the days when we were growing organically in our own little garden in Chifley, there probably would have been no certification in Australia.⁴⁶ In COGS I remember trying to get Karen Bottomley to take some of our produce in the very early days when she operated out of her home before she set up the shop in Griffith.⁴⁷ It was always very difficult. She was heading towards certification, which you need if you want to sell – if you say it's organic, you have to be able to prove it.

The main reason I opted out of COGS – there may have been others – was this insistence, running for years if I remember rightly, that we must get certified. I couldn't see any strong reasons why we needed to. I thought that certification is one thing for a commercial enterprise but

how would you certify COGS? With twenty different plots in the garden, how would you make sure that everybody is being strictly organic all the time? We would need to measure every single plot somehow.

This scheme went on for some time, and Betty went to meetings in Sydney at the drop of a hat. I didn't get involved.

Nel: Here in Major's Creek,⁴⁸ people grow things and put the surplus in boxes outside the pub. 'Help yourself.' Sometimes they even provide paper bags, and they bring along their produce to meetings I go to here. Here we've given tomatoes to the chooks.

Society 'throws away' its older members. It's the seniors who've got most knowledge from life's experiences, and it would be good to share it.

Arno: Maybe you could have senior members sharing a community gardening plot with a younger person.

Nel: Costa⁴⁹ is wonderful. He gets with the children and teaches them to grow vegetables. I think it's delightful.

Arno: One thing I couldn't get COGS to accept was beehives. I had eight on my carport roof in Chifley. Betty wouldn't let me put any of them in the garden. Apparently Parks and Gardens wouldn't permit it. I've still got the hives.

COGS now has eleven gardens, over 400 members, a waiting list for most gardens, and offers of land for another seven gardens: I'm really thrilled that you came and told me this. It means that it wasn't all for nothing. Now this makes me feel good. This was the vision, but I never expected eleven!

The world is heading more and more into globalised vegetable growing almost, a foolish thing in my book, which can only lead to disaster. We need to turn around. I'm really committed to seeing people empowered to grow some of their own food and build community through that. The potential is enormous; there's so much soil that is alienated or just not used at all.



Bob and Traudy Kalivoda

Bob and his wife Traudy came to Australia in 1959 as refugees from Czechoslovakia. Traudy joined COGS in 1982 and was a member for about six years. They are warmly spoken of by their contemporaries.



Bob: Both of us were born in 1926. We were thirteen when the war started and eighteen when it ended. Czechs were not trusted in the army. I think the Nazis sent them to work in the factories in Germany. Before the fall of the communist system, I couldn't visit home, but we've been back twice now, in 1990 and 1997. We are still happy living in Australian and think we are very fortunate.

Kalivoda? 'Voda' means water, and 'kali' has something to do with softening linen so they could weave it at home. It was a trade. In our town, each house has a name describing the trade carried on in it. These names date from 100 or 200 years ago, and while the name may have stayed with the house, the trade didn't. We had about a half a dozen or more Kalivodas living in our area. My grandfather was one of seven sons and two daughters. Further back we have connections with Poland and then Moravia. Our family has a crest.

Traudy: In my youth I hated gardening because my mother always made me weed overgrown areas, and she was annoyed when I pulled out an onion or whatever by mistake. It was so boring and so exhausting! I didn't want anything more to do with gardening – until I had my own.

My interest in organic growing actually comes from Czechoslovakia. To grow vegetables, my parents rented a strip of land next to a little creek. We could water from that. The owner of the land was a small

farmer, and a carpenter and tiler, but he was also a very advanced farmer. He said you can use that land provided you don't use artificial fertiliser. Mum said that's fine because we had rabbits and chickens at home and so we would use that manure only. He agreed and from then on my mother wanted nothing to do with artificial fertilisers. She was right. If it is not natural, then it shouldn't be used in the dirt: it will grow into the food.

During the war, even though I hated gardening, we grew our own vegetables. My parents were also allowed twenty-five tobacco plants each; fifty plants is quite a row of tobacco. That field provided us all the cabbages we needed, and potatoes and other vegetables. It was a kilometre away from our house. I still didn't like working there, or helping them bring home the produce when I came back from work. I went by train and had to walk three kilometres. The last kilometre was very hard and I had to carry a lot of things and it was tiring. Gardening was always something I didn't like all that much...an inconvenience.

Bob: My parents used to do a big barrel of sauerkraut and on the bottom were hard ribs of cabbage. Those bits were all I wanted!

Traudy: My parents never put them in because they took too much room. When I was about ten, I had to stomp the cabbage with my feet...

Bob: Me too...

Traudy: ...and it went up to my elbows. Every Sunday we had sauerkraut with pork and dumplings.

We started making and selling sauerkraut here in Australia, so did Gordon Laws. He was one of the first COGS members. Gordon and Claire are both dead now. Gordon was eighty-six when he died and Claire was more than ninety.

My son has become a gardener lately. My daughter lives in Nowra with a big garden and teaches the children gardening and cooking. This is good. She likes continental cooking and her husband likes it

– now. Originally he didn't. He's one of family of twelve and they eat everything, because if they don't, there's nothing left!

Leftovers are useful. I made a pizza yesterday from leftovers. Stupid to eat two days the same and it needs less cooking. If Bob doesn't like it, I remind him that for one and a half years in the Italian refugee camp he ate the same thing every day and there was never any change.

Bob: Pastaciutta!

Traudy: Pastaciutta. No change, ever. Maybe the pasta had a different shape sometimes. This was before we came to Australia. Even the ship coming here was Italian and on it there was still nothing else!

Bob: But they had those pizzas, remember? I've never seen them here. We had to pay thirty lira for them in the camp on the Adriatic. There were a lot of Poles there, most of them from Venezia Giulia on the border with Yugoslavia. Our son was born there.

We needed to be resettled somewhere. We didn't know much about Australia then. People who had gone there wrote letters back about the spiders and snakes and that was all we knew. I was working for the Australian immigration people in the camp on a very low salary because I could speak German.

First I wanted to go to Canada. Because we were married we could also have chosen Brazil, Chile or Venezuela. Finally it was a choice between Chile and Australia. Where do we go? Chile we don't know. Australia we don't know. Toss a coin!

Traudy: But we didn't have a coin because Italian money was all paper. We were so poor we had no coins from anywhere. However, we still had a Czech silver coin given to us as a christening present for our son.

Bob: It came up Australia.

Traudy: Somebody up there looked after us, because we could have gone to South America. We have never regretted coming to Australia.

Bob: We got to Fremantle in 1949. The first thing I saw was all those red roofs. ‘Oh no, what’s that? It looks like a refugee camp!’ We were sent to Bonegilla, then I was sent to Canberra to work, which was good, and Traudy was sent to Cowra.

Traudy: It was only for a fortnight. After that, I went to Pialligo to live on a farm; they needed somebody to help with the morning milking because their daughter wanted to go on holidays. I was there for three months.

Bob: I designed and built our house, and we have lived in the same house ever since. We set up a business in Queanbeyan, which lasted for quite a long time. We had wine cellars in Civic, then in Ainslie, and lastly at Oaks Estate. The Queanbeyan business was a continental delicatessen.

Traudy: We had Hungarian customers, Poles, Germans, Austrians, some French. Never any Australians. In Queanbeyan at that time were plenty of new Australians. The streets were just about full of them.

Bob: We got supplies from Sydney. One shipment of salt herrings came by rail to Queanbeyan. They rang us. ‘Come and get it. It smells!’ And the smelly Port Salut cheese. They wrote ‘Received in a smelly condition’ on the top!

Traudy: When I heard of the organic growers in Canberra, I straight away latched on to the idea. Betty Cornhill, who had lived for ages in Campbell, was one of our first contacts. Their growing principles made sense.

We owned land in Queanbeyan in 1950 where we built a garage and grew a bit of salad vegetables. We were not very successful because nearby people had goats and cows which always found a way into our garden. We had no good fences! Starting a garden can be very expensive, and you must do as much yourself as possible. This can be hard work.

I don’t know when we had the first organic garden – 1982, I think. I didn’t join straight away as I was working and the kids were still at home.

We weren't able to feed ourselves from gardening. I think we always bought more than we grew. The growing season is not long in Canberra, plus back then I was working and didn't have all that much time to garden. There's always something you want or need that doesn't grow or that you can't grow. We always needed the greengrocer. For a time when I had the community garden plot I had more – only then I had too much!

I took on the Seed Bank⁵⁰ because somebody had to do it and I ran it for some years. In 1988 we went overseas so I gave it up. I still collect seeds. It's very hard to keep everything and to stop things cross-breeding. I remember at home my grandmother had a small farm. She liked to swap seeds with other famers but I don't know why. I've been growing from the same seeds in the same place for probably the last fifty years. I never found out why back at home they said they had to change them.

People say I'm good with carrots. Well, I have held one or two Sunday demonstrations. They need to grow strongly before the weeds come. I mix the carrot seed with dry sand, plant in rows and firm them down. Firming down is important. They need space so thin sowing helps. Weeds are the great curse. I put old palings between the rows to keep them down. This helps a lot and makes them easy to remove.

I've grown pumpkins for two or three years in the backyard and every time the best pumpkins go over the fence!

As to COGS people, I've lost contact with them all. I can't go to meetings any more.

Now I can't stay out of the garden. I like to get out of the house, go outside and do something. Gardening involves a lot of walking and moving. It's good for health.

Bob: We're always talking about how many people we know that are dead now. At our age we are very lucky.

Traudi and Mary's Tips for Summer Gardening

by Sylvia Maseyk

This article is the result of another wonderful morning spent chatting with Mary Flowers and Traudi Kaliwoda. The main theme of our conversation was that when planting summer crops, judgement is needed when deciding which vegetables to put in early and which to leave until you're absolutely sure of no late frosts.

The following vegetables are frost tender and are safer planted from November onwards unless very well protected: beans (runner & French), capsicum, cucumber, eggplant, melons, potatoes, squash, sweet corn and tomatoes.

The following are less sensitive and can be planted from September: beetroot, carrots, lettuce, parsnips, radishes, silverbeet, spinach, white turnips.

Seeds planted in November will develop into much stronger plants which will quickly catch up in size with those transplanted earlier as seedlings.

Direct sunlight is the best provider of strength to young plants, although some may be interested in establishing seedlings in a glasshouse. For community glasshouses the main worry is keeping a tab on seedlings. The lack of moisture, overheating and ventilation must be monitored. It would be ideal if one could check the glasshouse at least twice each day. Those interested should read relevant literature on glasshouse management.

Late Starters (Frost Sensitive)

The following are best planted from November onwards:

Tomatoes: Seedlings will lose up to one-third of their size and strength when transplanted out in cold weather - Traudi's golden rule is not to plant tomatoes out before 15 October. Tomatoes benefit from a sunny, warm and sheltered aspect such as a north-facing brick wall. A neighbour of Traudi's has successfully grown tomatoes in the same bed against a north-facing brick garage wall for some 20 years, each year replacing the soil.

Tomatoes need really good, well-composted soil and ideally should be planted following a green manure crop. Mary and Traudi have had mixed success with early varieties such as Apollo and suggest these be protected from frost by encircling with empty bags such as those used for superphosphate. Heat can be generated by placing lawn clippings (mostly dried out, so as not to draw nitrogen from the soil) over the edge of the bag which touches the ground.

Capsicum, Cucumber and Eggplant:

Much the same requirements as tomatoes - good soil, plenty of organic matter and don't plant too early. Plants should be mulched after soil has warmed up (applies also to tomatoes). Plants cannot take up nutrients unless the soil is warm but mulching too early slows soil warming.

Cucumbers can be established in a glasshouse but Traudi doesn't recommend this as cucumbers don't transplant well. She remembers her mother planting cucumber seeds in half eggshells and transplanting the seedling with eggshell intact. This method reduces stress on the seedling. Traudi suggests gently cracking the eggshell to make it easier for the roots to pass through after transplanting.

Melons: Although frost-tender, these need to be planted early (October to early November) as they have a long growing season. Melons should be planted in the sunniest and warmest available part of your garden. Because they require such a long, hot growing season, melons are not recommended for Canberra: even for experienced gardeners success is difficult.

Beans: require a nice rich soil and are best not planted before November in case of a late frost.

Squash and Zucchini's: Seeds should be sown direct where possible, but the requirements for one household can be met with a couple of seedlings, which it is probably more economical to purchase.

Pumpkin: Can be established in the glasshouse or a very warm, protected spot with a rich soil. Pumpkins are hungry feeders and will benefit from the application of some blood and bone.

Sweet Corn: Seeds should be sprouted on damp paper (as described for peas in the Spring Quarterly) before sowing. For corn, the "sprouts" are really roots, not shoots. To ensure that the newly-sprouted roots don't tangle or break, make sure that seeds lie flat on the paper and handle them as little as possible.

Any seeds that don't sprout using this method should be thrown away as they will not germinate in the soil either.

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The Sugar Snap Pea

by Traudi Kalivoda and Mary Flowers

The sugar snap pea is a wonderful vegetable - easy to grow, productive and tasty. Eaten fresh from the vine they are absolutely delicious. Sugar snap peas can be cooked, stir fried or frozen but most organic gardeners - and especially children - will enjoy them right off the vine.

Sowing is best done in early February for an autumn crop or August to early October. As sugar snap peas don't like it too hot, seed packets indicate that they are always suitable plants for our colder Canberra climate. I found with all peas that sowing in May is a waste of time as we get no pollination from insects at this time of the year.

Sugar snap peas are deep-rooted plants and prefer slightly alkaline soil; eg soil rich in compost. As a legume they

produce their own nitrogen but require phosphate and potassium rich soil.

Prepare 15cm trenches enriched with well rotted compost. Plant seeds in zig-zag fashion along trench 7-8cm between them. Fill trench with soil and gently firm down. Don't water the plants a great deal before they flower. Once flowers appear, water twice weekly around the base of the plant. The plants require a firm 1.8 metre trellis.

Harvest any time after the pods fill out - about 70 to 75 days after sowing seeds. Sugar snaps are sweetest and tastiest if you let them get really rounded and fat.

Traudi and Mary's Tips for Summer Gardening

continued from previous page

A recent example from Traudi was the germination of only 14 of 30 seeds. This certainly saves digging, planting and watering garden beds for less than 50% germination success. With the pre-sprouting method, all the sprouted seeds you sow should become seedlings.

When sprouted roots are about 1cm long, (this takes about 5 days), seeds should be sown in small individual punnets and the seedlings thus obtained transplanted as per suppliers instructions.

Potatoes: Should be planted in a good friable soil without too much nitrogen, which makes the tops leggy at the cost of tubers, or lime, which causes scale. Potatoes like potassium and plenty of compost. It is usually recommended that rows be 75 to 90cm apart, but if the soil is rich and well-composted, rows can be as close as 60cm. Sets within rows should be about 30cm apart.

When plants are about 15cm high, bring the soil up around them into hills. When soil is warm, the plants should be mulched heavily with compost, or with semi-composted straw or leaves retained from autumn.

Traudi has unsuccessfully tried growing potatoes by covering the sets with hay or straw, a method recommended on the *Gardening Australia* TV program. Traudi has found too much light is able to get in, turning the potatoes green and inedible. Rice husks may be a good alternative as they settle closer around the plant, and should allow in less light.

Sweet Turnips: Are better left for January planting as winter vegetables. These are very susceptible to green butterfly, which is also more prevalent in earlier months.

Hardy Crops

Brassicas: For winter crops plant seeds in late November to January for transplanting from February onwards. Brassica seeds need the soil to be firmly packed to germinate.

It is possible to grow cauliflowers for summer eating but Mary believes that it is not worth the trouble for the home gardener as they are very susceptible to butterfly and usually all ripen within a short period, creating a glut.

Traudi suggests that it is uneconomical to try to grow Brussels Sprouts in Canberra.

Root vegetables: including carrot, parsnip, beetroot, white turnips and radishes all require nice deep ground and rich friable soil, improved with manures. Parsnip will self-seed quite well anywhere in your garden while turnips will germinate very quickly (about 4 days) provided the nights aren't too cold. Long white radishes are recommended for taste and ease of growing.

Lettuce, Spinach and Silverbeet: are all easy to grow, responding well to good, nitrogen-rich soil.

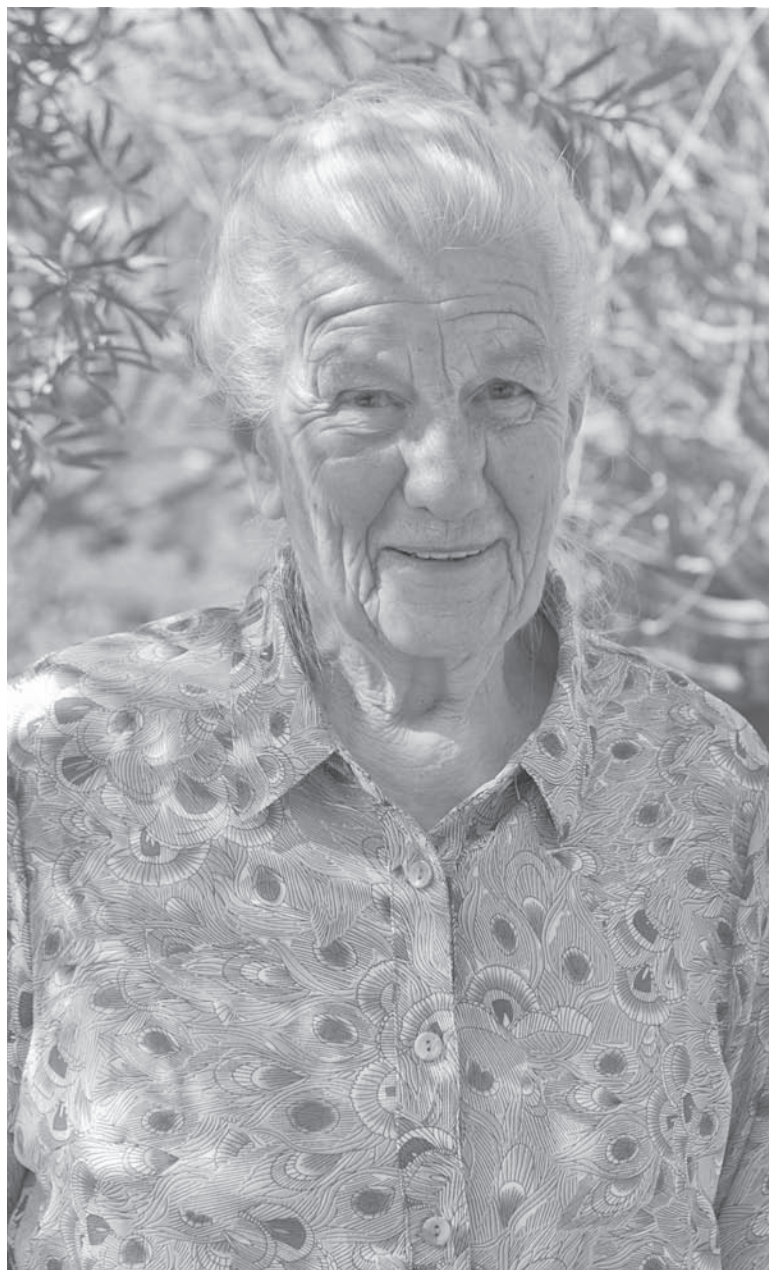
General Tips

Mary and Traudi recommend keeping up with the liquid manure described in the article in the Spring quarterly. This should be applied **after watering, not to dry soil**. Watering the plant first assists to further dilute liquid manure, which should already be diluted to the colour of weak tea before being applied. A couple of sad tales were recounted of the demise of plants fed on liquid manure without watering!

The other important thing to keep up is the mulching of plants, after the soil has warmed up. Anything can be used, including sawdust, straw or grass clippings which have already been somewhat decomposed. For strawberries, pine needles can be used, but these are not recommended for other plants.

Next quarterly, watch for Mary and Traudi's tips for autumn as well as their special article on Successful Asparagus Growing.





Mary Flowers

Mary Flowers comes from a farming background. She attributes her good health to the exercise and food gardening at her Cotter community garden provides her with. She is a keen advocate of green manure.



My mother's father came from Yorkshire in England, and her mother was born in 1856 in Tasmania of Irish parents. Dad's father and mother were both born in 1850 in Scotland; at age fourteen he was down the mine at Kirkcaldy. He must have wanted something better because he went across to the Clyde River to Dumbarton, where the shipbuilding was – that's where the *Cutty Sark* was built – and became a carpenter and a joiner.

I think that's where he met my grandmother because her father and a brother were working there also as carpenters. He came out with his family to Tasmania in 1882 and worked as a carpenter and at various other jobs. In 1900 he and my father, Hugh Keddie, bought a farm on the upper Leith Road and named it 'Braeside', where I grew up.

'Braeside' was a mixed farm – not big – with twelve feet of wonderful volcanic soil. It has an eastern outlook and is not too far from the sea. We were almost completely self-contained. We had wonderful fruit trees and an orchard with, I think, thirty-two apple trees in it. We'd kill a lamb or a pig when required, shoot rabbits down on the flats, and buy a bag of flour and sugar at times. On the old jinker, it was eight miles into Devonport to get the sugar and flour – and eight miles back. Mum was nearly forty-one when I was born in 1921, and I'm the eldest; my

sister is two years younger and my brother is six years younger. So when I was born, Mum was in her forties on a farm with no electricity and no running water. We had tank water for drinking and well water for other uses. She made all our clothes, and said, 'Many a night I burnt the midnight oil,' because it really was oil, an oil lamp.

I don't think the Depression bothered us as much as other people. I was nine and ten when it got bad, and my days were filled with walking 2½ miles to and from school and helping out at home. I was not much aware of a Depression being on at all! To get to high school was another walk across a paddock to a little railway station to catch the Devonport train. Later on we got bikes and rode them to Leith Station, which was all downhill, but to come home we walked. It was very hilly round Forth and Leith.

I was eighteen when the electricity got to us. Each farmer living along the upper Leith Road from Forth had to pay for electricity poles along the public road and for the poles on his private property. We had nine poles down to our house. It was wonderful when it was switched on! Dad was mad about cricket, and his cousin used to come over on a Saturday night to listen to the wireless. It was battery-powered, but these batteries were big and needed a large cabinet to hold them. Still, it was the ant's pants! The wireless ran until the battery went flat – and then out would come the car battery.

On the farm, Dad did things in a way that at the time was quite normal and now we call 'organic'. We used Clydesdale horses that gave us a couple of dray-loads of wonderful black manure for the vegie garden every spring. Dad grew Bismarck potatoes. When we put them in, he'd have had Algerian oats being grazed off a bit, then turn this in with a plough as he planted the potatoes by hand. He spent days cutting them up to get a good eye, then he made long trenches, walked along them sprinkling blood and bone and dropping a spud in at each footstep. It was really hard, cold work just after the end of June or in early July. We got a bit of frost but not too much as we were near the sea. When

I first came to Canberra, I thought I'd grow some cinerarias because I had some at home. I very smartly said goodbye to them with the frosts!

We had chooks and I could find a nest of twenty-one eggs up a tree or somewhere. A few wild ones out there maybe, but they were organic eggs. Mum made our butter with our little old separator and churn. They'd milk six or eight cows, and then set off to work in the fields. I don't know how my parents did it. They both worked really hard, and I think this is what hastened my mother's end. She was utterly exhausted at eighty-two.

My brother sold the farm in 1995 because his son didn't want it. The younger generation is abandoning the land and it's a worry, and so is farming being taken over by agribusiness. I hope that agriculture can be made fashionable again and the young people will come back.

I went nursing at age nineteen, before the farm had a telephone. After a month away from home I could have leave for one night a week, to be back again by eleven o'clock. I set off one Friday and, because they had no telephone on the farm, I had no way of telling them that I was coming home. All I could do was walk in carrying my case. I left at about five o'clock by bus and didn't arrive until eleven. Of course they were all in bed in the pitch dark when I arrived unannounced. They were still glad to see me, though!

As a nurse I lived in the nurses' home. No social life because we were too tired, and matron's room was by the door we went out and came in, but we made some wonderful friends. I've got one left from our group, still out on a farm on her own. I do wonder how many people in this generation will live to that kind of age. Diets are so poor today.

I met [my husband] John hiking in Cradle Mountain, Lake St Clair. He was on his own because his friend had got some steel in his eye and couldn't come. I was with three girls, one nurse, one dietician, and an ambulance driver. Two of the girls were sisters and they'd been on the trip with their parents many times, at times on horseback. Bessie the dietician thought John wasn't getting enough to eat, so he stayed with us

to be fed properly. Later we dropped him off at Tarraleigh power station to catch a ride to Queenstown.

John later wrote to all of us, and of course he wrote to me. We corresponded for a while. In 1947 I went up to Brisbane with a friend to do nursing. On spec we went to Cairns but couldn't get a job or accommodation because it was the wrong season and the hospital accommodation was booked out, and so we came back in a second class train to the nurses' club in Brisbane. Next day it was back to nursing as usual.

Later that year I flew to Melbourne, phoned John at five to five – he always liked to remind me of that – stayed a few days, and then returned to working in the Launceston General Hospital. Some time afterwards I went to Melbourne to work, and there John and I were able to see each other and his family. He worked in the Department of Trade and during a week's leave from university studies in September 1948 John and I were married and lived in Melbourne until the entire department was moved to Canberra in 1950.

Our house was 1 Weston Street, Yarralumla, which at that time ended at Newman Street. In 1959 we moved to 7 Abbott Street, close by where I still live. Back then it was really out in the sticks. We had no shops and left a billycan on the front steps overnight for milk. I tried growing my own vegetables and remember sowing a nice patch of carrots in August or September – an awful storm in October washed the lot away. I wasn't at 'Braeside' any more, with quite a different climate to northern Tasmania. To learn what would grow here, I attended evening lectures given by a Mr Feathersone at the old technical college in Kingston. He was most emphatic about growing a green manure crop, to be turned in the second week of September before it ran to seed, in order to put humus into the garden soil. I tried it and it really made a wonderful difference. This is what Dad did on the farm, I suppose, but he never called it green manure. At Cotter [garden] now, we always put in a green manure plus compost.

Our first encounter with COGS (COG as it was then) was in the

newspaper. This was an advertisement for a meeting and the guest speaker, a lady, was to talk about bees and honey. This interested John because we'd had two hives in our garden from 1976 after he'd been to lectures on bee-keeping at the CSIRO. Her house was way out near Woden somewhere. John took his equipment and helped her collect her honey at her home. We saw her two or three times after that, and then lost contact. Betty [Cornhill] was still out at Murrumbateman on her farm, and I believe it had terribly poor soil. I remember the first time she brought some carrots in! Yes, I thought she must have had great trouble growing those. Then she moved back into Canberra, and was at COGS when we arrived. It was Betty who got everything going and saw it all the way through.

We joined COGS in 1984, and by August of 1985 or 1986, we had a plot at the Cotter Road garden. This garden wasn't that large an area, with only eight or nine people growing. We were able to grow some lovely vegetables. John shared my passion for organic gardening, and helped with the extra tasks of routinely collecting horse manure, spent hay and straw from places including the showgrounds after events. He was convener in 1989 when we were given notice to relocate by 30 August. The government planned to widen the Cotter Road, and we had to move from right next to the roadside to an area further away.⁵¹ It was not a great distance, but still, the shed, tools, and plants all had to be moved. Herbie Konkel and John drew up the plans and laid out the plots, water pipes and taps. We moved a lot of soil ourselves, but Parks and Gardens kindly moved a truckload of soil from the old garden, which was a great help. Betty, Traudy, Michelle, Richard, Herbie, Andy, Chris Napier (from Weston College), John and I worked many hours to move into the new area.

We had a lot of fun. It was really pioneering where we went to, just a rotary-hoed empty area. It looked like very sandy soil but it had clay as well. I remember walking to the corner of the block where my plot was to be, thinking it looked like a heap of stones. But it was clay, hard solid clay!

We gathered bags of horse manure from the north Curtin paddock and later from the equestrian enclosures near the entrance to the Cotter Garden when their competitions were on. Betty organised two loads of straw with lucerne and cow pats from the Canberra showgrounds when the show finished on Monday morning, which was delivered to Cotter. In those days anyone could collect manure and straw for their own garden from the showgrounds.

John died in 2005 at the age of eighty-nine. After falling over in April [2012] in my home garden and breaking my pelvis, I've decided to keep only one Cotter plot for this year perhaps, the one with the asparagus. I've been in and out of hospital and I'm walking again without a stick, which is wonderful, but for someone my age it could have been a lot worse. I'm sure my good diet has helped, and getting out to Cotter for two or three hours at a time, two or three times a week has kept me fit. So many of my friends are sick. I've got two here, the same age as I am, who have had such long illnesses. Not me. Fresh air and exercise; you forget everything else and it does you the world of good.

The techniques of biodynamics and permaculture are all very good. Mollison's the permaculture chap. His book's marvellous,⁵² but I don't know if you could do it really well here in Canberra; the climate is too hard. On Saturday night, there's Costa. It's really fascinating what he does, and so is his marvellous work with the children.

I'm sure a lot of today's health problems come from what people are eating, and from environmental pollution. I hate to think what the young people of today will be like when they reach forty years of age. Not all of them of course, but it'll really hit the ones who don't bother thinking about what they eat. I wonder if the people who've gone into these high rise units are at all interested in this sort of thing. You think they'd want more gardens for their families. The fact that COGS has opened up more gardens is wonderful.

I'm sure having your own fresh vegetables helps, and so does using other organic things. In 1990 and 1991, Traudy, Betty and I grew silver

beet, sweet corn and white turnips for Karen Bottomley, who was running a business making up cartons of organic food for sale from her house. Now she has the organic vegetable store in Griffith with Richard Odell's organic butchery near by.

To me, 'organic' means 'correctly grown'. It means that it's had plenty of compost added and – this is very important – the soil has had green manure put in every year. It repays you, too; you can see the difference and taste it. The family, John and our three boys, always said that our vegetables were very enjoyable, and that was lovely. I was horrified when I learnt about food irradiation. I suppose it's still going on. Just what does it do to food? Do we really know?

My neighbour came out today. I had seen him only once since my fall, and I was able to give him a couple of big bags of frozen boysenberries. It's just lovely to get your own fruit. I used to make jams and relishes, but I don't know whether I'll do it any more. Mind you, growing your own food can be a lot of work. I'd go out and work for three hours, pick all the vegetables I wanted, that's good, but then come home and have to clean them! That's tiresome.

When I was young, we had very limited vegetables. We had turnips – I love swedish turnips. I put a bit of sugar on them and mash them up. Often we'd mash a parsnip and carrots together, and that was nice as a vegetable. I love potatoes; we had wonderful potatoes in Tassie, a very early crop. I love green peas. French beans. Carrots, of course. Parsnips, onions, swedes, pumpkins, salad vegies, chives, garlic chives, herbs...the list goes on! Broccoli is not one of my favourites but at Cotter we always grew it. It's one of the easiest vegies to grow. I never had much success with brussels sprouts, though. We also grew beautiful cauliflowers, celery. What else? Cabbage of course, tomatoes, cucumbers, and salad bowl lettuce self-seeded everywhere. Iceberg lettuce too.



Joyce Wilkie and Michael Plane

Joyce Wilkie and Michael Plane joined COGS in the early 1980s. Their growing style had been ‘organic by default’, and experience with modern organic pioneers confirmed their stance. They continue farming organically on a small rural property near Canberra.



Joyce: The perception of what organic gardening is and does has completely changed since COGS was formed in 1977.

Michael: Seriously changed, because a lot of people were getting away in the earlier days with growing second-rate produce, calling it organic and demanding very high prices for it.

Joyce: We didn’t even refer to ourselves as ‘organic’ until we bumped into COGS; I can tell you exactly the day that we met COGS. We’d been gardening in Canberra for a number of years and I was at home, mother of two very small children, and I wanted to make some money. So I published a planting calendar for this area, because I was trying to deal with the cold Canberra climate and its short vegetable-growing season, I’d become really interested in growing vegetables in cold climates. Mike had introduced me to people in places like Maine and Vermont who were self-sufficient, and these interested me because they showed that it was possible to grow food in cold-climate areas. There’d been all those real pioneers in the good old days, who were able to grow enough food and either store it or cellar it for year round production; when I moved to Canberra from Melbourne in 1979, there seemed to be this same flurry of summer activity. There still is! It hasn’t changed!

I was doing anything I could to make money, spinning wool to make custom fingerless gloves and selling a planting calendar I had made. We were at an environmental fair on the lake. Mike came back from a walk and said, ‘Joyce, you have to go to this Canberra Organic Growers stall. They’d be interested in your planting calendar,’ and that’s when we discovered we actually were organic! They asked us to come to a meeting and talk about it, and in many ways that launched us. This must have been in the fairly early days of Canberra Organic Growers.

Michael: We were organic by default; we were just people who grew good food, and didn’t use chemicals, and knew about mulching, compost, and self-sufficiency. I’d been involved with people like Scott and Helen Nearing⁵³ and...

Joyce: ...Ruth Stout.⁵⁴ In those days we never thought about how to grow our food. We came as complete innocents. In 1975 I was doing my graduate work in Melbourne, renting a room in a house with a messy backyard overgrown with blackberries, cleared out by a bunch of friends got together by the woman I was renting the room from. She told them to bring all their gardening tools and as much labour as possible, and she’d do the party afterwards. They did a complete garden makeover. There were four or five fruit trees left, which her parents had planted, and an enormous empty piece of ground, which immediately started growing more blackberries. This was on very fertile, very deep Melbourne soils, with a good climate and in an area that had been chicken farms. A friend of mine pointed out to me, ‘Well, you know, Joyce, you don’t just spend your life weeding blackberries, you plant vegetables!’ He took me down to a shop and bought some seed, and I’ve been growing vegetables ever since. I left Melbourne in 1979. My professional background is as a structural geologist.

Michael: And I was a vertebrate paleontologist. I did my graduate work in 1964 and 1965 at Berkeley on a scholarship from the Australian

government, and it was there that I became aware of the Nearings. This was the heyday of the first Back to the Earth Movement. When I came back to Canberra – where I was headquartered although I worked out in the field a lot of the time – I brought a number of books back with me and started looking for land outside Canberra. I'm not a city person and Canberra backyards didn't appeal to me at all. They're too small and too close to the neighbours.

Joyce: That was also the start of the whole Vietnam thing and public action. Universities were a wonderful place to be in those days.

Michael: It's still the 'Peoples' Republic of Berkeley'. It's one of the few cities in the world where McDonald's can't turn a buck. We were back there in 2010. I needed to find a public toilet and found a McDonald's and went in (that's about all you can really deposit in a McDonald's). I couldn't believe this place! It was run down and dirty and had virtually nobody in it. We were staying with an old university acquaintance of mine from the 60s who reckoned that it'd close down shortly as nobody in the city would ever go there.

Joyce: The whole local food movement came out of Berkeley in the 60s. It was a good time to be there. In Canberra as a geologist, I worked in the Research School of Chemistry in organics. The top floor of that building was all organic phosphates; you could smell them when you walked in the front door! I was in complete ignorance; I had absolutely no idea what they were cooking! There seemed to be a disproportionate number of cancer events on that top floor, and it would be interesting to look at the statistics on that one. It was noxious! I worked there for three years and met Mike, came out here [to their rural homestead near Gundaroo], had kids and got to know COGS. I got quite involved with COGS for a number of years while the children were small.

COGS provided another pivotal moment for me, and that was very, very much to do with Betty Cornhill. She was really the power to be

reckoned with then in COGS. In those days there were only two, maybe three community gardens, and Betty was strongly campaigning for new ones. ECO-AG 90⁵⁵ was coming up, and normally she would have gone but was booked to go on holidays instead. She asked me if I would go; I said definitely ‘Yes’, and so COGS funded me as their representative. Betty, bless her cotton socks, who never holds back, put my full title on my badge: ‘Dr Joyce Wilkie, Canberra Organic Growers Society’. Suddenly, from being a mum at home and out of my academic career and wondering where it was all going, I was catapulted into the Who’s Who of the organic growing industry. I was definitely going through a period of ‘Oh dear, I’ve been at home out in the country for five or six years with two small children, plugging away at self-sufficiency and growing vegetables, what am I going to do next?’ Whatever it was, it certainly wasn’t going back to work as a scientist: that idea just terrified me! Suddenly I was in an environment where people were taking notice of my qualifications. It all worked in my favour; it was a really, really wonderful opportunity.

The other thing that happened was that we decided to become an organic farm. It’s all about systems and sustainability; we’re not just growing vegies out the back. What I learnt from my time in Melbourne is that we need to build a system involving animals.

COGS gave us an amazing, very steep and interesting learning curve. It was very instrumental in getting us to where we are now.

Michael: COGS sent both of us as delegates to the NSW and ACT State Council of Organic Growers, which later was involved in setting up NASAA.⁵⁶

Joyce: I’ve always been interested in educational things, so I was involved in that, although more for the state council than for COGS. To travel to these meetings and actually do something, with the entire *raison d’être* being to elect two board members for NASAA, was not really useful. These days you could probably do it all over a Skype call

once a year. I felt that this organisation produced nothing, so I did a few things with primary school gardens and projects and a bit of publicity.

Michael: We ran a school garden at Gundaroo Public School. It was brilliant! Keeping up the energy for these things is very difficult; and the science teacher looked on it as having a half-day off every week. We'd teach the curriculum and do the practical side of it with the kids, which we thoroughly enjoyed, but...

Joyce: It didn't deeply penetrate.

Michael: It pre-dates Stephanie Alexander,⁵⁷ Alice Waters⁵⁸ and the school gardens happening now, but it's all documented.⁵⁹ There was a bit of a stir when The Land newspaper ran a front-page story about the Gundaroo school garden. We did it in an interesting way: we grew things that intrigued children. Strawberries to start with, which they were allowed to graze, and then coloured lettuces. Gundaroo Public School's colours are red and green, so we grew a bed of lettuces that said 'GPS' in coloured lettuces, Floriade-style. The kids were allowed to harvest the lettuces and take them home. We grew garlic, which they harvested, braided and sold, so they got economic lessons. We grew wheat, which informed them about where their bread came from. We had intended to turn the wheat into corn dollies, a lovely handicraft for them, but I don't think this ever happened.

Joyce: We learnt lessons then that will come up in Stephanie Alexander's scheme. There's a new subject called Sustainability in Canberra high schools now, and agriculture and any kind of market gardening covers so many parts of the science curriculum. You can get almost every learning outcome in a science curriculum using agriculture or horticulture, and if you have a teacher at the school whose job it is to run that course, suddenly you're in a completely different situation. It's not dependent on volunteer labour, hallelujah, because that's where it comes unstuck. When you've got committed members of staff working with committed principals and funders, then you have a whole different paradigm.

Michael: Think about it: you can incorporate mathematics, because the planning of things requires them to do some maths; then biology about not only what's on top of the ground but also what's under the ground, physics, and chemistry.

Joyce: And design; at Gundaroo they built a worm bin out of Besser blocks, which means learning how to lay building blocks. Then there's the cultural and equal opportunity aspects. We took the students to the trail of Aboriginal food plants in the Botanic Gardens.

With all of this, if you're involving volunteers, then you've got to involve ownership; and I think using school grounds as community gardens makes a lot of sense because a private school is outside the jurisdiction of the ACT government. One of the problems with COGS is that some people grow food in excess and they should be able to sell it. I don't know what's true now, but under the former Parks and Gardens rules, produce could not be sold.⁶⁰

It's good that public land is overseen by a government authority, but it's not good that people who are using that land can't be free to cover their costs. You can of course barter food, and so you meet for a food swap that, who knows, may take you into a grey area where no money is exchanged but profit is made.

Michael: I think that there are those of us who are contrarians, and who always will be; the government can introduce whatever regulations it likes, but there are always ways around them. It's the contrarian farmers of the world who've moved things forward, not the regulators.

Joyce: Joel Salatin⁶¹ is one such. It's he and the Betty Cornhills who get into this sort of grassroots, backyard stuff. There's an environmentalist called Paul Hawken who travels and talks a lot. He's bit like Joel Salatin or Michael Pollan, touching base with a worldwide network of little groups of little people who are working almost in isolation for localised economic control of their own lives. COGS would fit in here; in terms

of the planet, it's a tiny body in a small place. Hawken says there are millions of people involved, that this is no small revolution. This is something that is deeply penetrating our culture, and it's completely anachronistic and it's completely revolutionary. It's a quiet, humble revolution, and it's part of the people; I think it's great!

Michael: We can feed the world, we know we can feed the world, but only if there are significantly more people growing food than are currently doing so in a commercial sense. The only way we can get over that hurdle is to allow people more freedom to grow food in every possible, available space. This means allowing city farms, and also farms on university campuses; this has happened in the US where six Ivy League universities have actually got farms on them, worked by volunteer students. We can grow food in people's backyards, on balconies, on rooftops, many places. We need to increase the numbers of people growing food from the present 2–3% to something like 30–35%. Everybody needs to be valued for the contribution they make; and COGS certainly makes a contribution.

Joyce: Farming has to be glamorised, growing food has to be glamorous. There's quite a few celebrity chefs, but when it comes to celebrity farmers there are very few, such as Joel Salatin. It's easy to be sexy if you're a chef, if only because you've got money! Farmers don't tend to have much, especially the kind of farmers we are. There's not much spare time, especially if you're farming organic vegetables. You just have no spare time to do the celebrity stuff. We need to raise the social status of farmers and gardeners in our society. It's got to be celebrated!

I think that the community gardens have a wonderful role because worldwide there's always people who know how to grow vegetables; they've always been there, they always will. I think we've gone through a bit of a Dark Ages; the skills are not as honed as I would like to see them in the general population.

When our children were really tiny and Mike was still working at a

paid job in Canberra, we'd all drive to town on a Friday. I'd drop him off at work and often find myself at the Cotter Garden. There would always be somebody there. Gardening is a craft, and when you garden with other people you chat and learn. In those early days I learned heaps about what grew in Canberra, and we exchanged plant cuttings. I've got a berry crop which came here as a single, or maybe three, little sticks from Mary Flowers, and now it provides us every single year.

David Odell was an interesting man; and he was a good president. He was very calm and Betty was full of energy. It was a very interesting combination those two, because Betty was the one with the initiative and ideas that she was able to drive to fruition, while David was much more steady, keeping everything going in the same direction, and he did it tirelessly for years!

But I didn't last. We got involved in farming and because of our experience with COGS we were really focused on making this a productive organic vegetable farm. Probably 95% of COGS members are backyard growers, and back then it wasn't of much interest to us – but that has changed, I have to say. Reflecting on the world and where it's going, I think we have become more interested in what's happening in urban areas. It's going to be very important. Now I get the occasional phone call, 'Will you come and speak at COGS?' and I usually say, 'Yes.' Nobody's invited me recently, and that suits me fine.

Michael: Yes, we're over-committed!

Joyce: Our lives have really got crazy busy and we love it that way, but keeping track of it can be really hectic. I'd just like a whole day where I did absolutely nothing except read some trashy novel! But it never seems to happen these days.

The Bungendore Farmer.

Our president David,
Out Bungendore way
Solves Goliath problems
The Organic way.

He keeps nameless hens,
The ones that do lay,
Does President David
Down Bungendore way.

In sheds of deep litter
They can scratch all day
And eat up the peelings
Down Bungendore way.

Some farmers grow prickles,
Others merely complain
"The secret," says David,
"Is try to sustain."

"We can't all be winners,
And take all the 'loot'.
Sustainable living
Bears the very best fruit."

Let's all work together
And try as we may
For sustainable living
The Bungendore way!

(inspired by our president's address at the meeting on 27/8/91)
June Foster



Rasima Kecanovic

Rasima Kecanovic came to Australia in 1979 for a visit and stayed. She is an active and enthusiastic member of COGS in the Cook community garden. Her European gardening background is an important element in her dedication to organic growing.



I was born in Bosnia, in Brekovica, which is a small town just outside of Bihac. Bihac is a beautiful small city situated on the River Una and surrounded by a high mountain range called Pljesavica. Both of my parents have passed away but I have seven other siblings, most of whom are still in Bihac. Gardening in Bihac is a common practice for most people who have the luxury of accessing land. Most of my siblings are professionals but every one of them has a vegetable garden. This is just what happens there. People love fresh produce and you can't get any fresher than from your own garden.

I've got that heritage and tradition. It's a given, no matter what role you play in life, if you are lucky enough to have land then you will have a veggie plot. I think this is probably Bosnian culture, but generally most of the south and east of Europe have a strong gardening culture. We love our food and to have the best we are prepared to work for it.

During my childhood we didn't have junk food like here (sausage rolls, fish and chips, and so on). Everything was freshly made. Although now things have changed there... I had just turned seventeen when I came to Australia in 1979. My older sister had already moved here and missed the family, so she encouraged me to come out and spend some time with her. I expected to spend a year and maybe two in Australia –

and have been here ever since. At seventeen I was at the right age and stage of life to consider making such a fundamental change.

Even so, I still have very strong ties with Bihac and my dream is to own a cottage over by the river. It's such a beautiful place, I visit it often, and it has the perfect environment for a vegie patch, chook pen, smoke house! Good land, good soil and an idyllic setting! I keep wondering what more could you want?

I formed my opinions quite young growing up in a culture full of natural living. I have lived away from that culture for a long time, so I'm probably more of a stranger than a Bosnian. But people are interested in what you learn elsewhere and I love sharing knowledge. There they see the Australian in me, and here they see the Bosnian. That's fine, I don't actually mind the two cultures colliding like that. I think picking the best out of both is really the ideal way to live. One of the things I'd love to do – and I will do, eventually – is to go to different countries and look at their ways of producing organic food. Places like the Middle East and Asia would be interesting. Take Turkey, for example; I love the idea of Turkey, and their food is just incredible. They talk about these fabulous vegetables. I don't even know what some of the greens are! Egypt and places like that also talk about a healthy green, which we do not grow here, but in their culture it is a staple vegetable that appears with every meal.

I joined COGS in 2002. The Cook garden had just started and I discovered it by chance; it was a friend who saw the COGS newsletter in the organic food shop at the Belconnen Fruit Markets. Knowing how passionate I am about gardening, she brought it to my attention and immediately I knew what I had to do. Prior to that I didn't know anything about COGS or the community plots. I might have seen something along these lines on television in other countries where they use community plots as their way of growing food and socialising.

I joined the Cook community garden specifically because at the time it was on my way to work, so I had this idea that I would do gardening

on my way to and from work. However, water restrictions came in shortly after that and changed watering times, so I had to take special trips to the garden anyway. I still do and, to be honest, I don't mind. It's my outing to my 'little farm', as I call it. The only issue I have with this garden is that it's quite close to Bindubi Street, which is very busy and noisy. With unleaded petrol, we don't get lead coming into the garden from the traffic so that's a help. It's very close to the gardens and now we've opened a couple more plots, which are almost up against the fence facing the road. The noise is a real problem. We are in this lovely setting and most of the day all you hear is cars passing by.

Canberra has a considerable number of community gardens and COGS seems to be growing, which is great to see. In my time at Cook I have seen a number of people come and go for different reasons, of course, but I know some left because of lack of time built into their day/ life for the garden. A productive garden requires attention and work. So while the idea of organic gardening sounds great, it does require commitment.

As I understand it, organic gardening is completely chemical free. It is based on the concept that all is natural. We don't use any chemicals in COGS gardens and if we do need to deal with pests and diseases, we use natural techniques such as sprays made from garlic and chilli, companion planting, using flowers, and so on.

'Organic' is also about understanding your soil and improving your soil using natural means. It's about self-sufficient gardening with minimum use of resources such as water. This is where mulching comes in. I'm giving it my best shot. When I have more time to spend at the plot with lots of nurture given to the plants, I can get as good, if not a far better crop from my garden, than I would if I was using chemicals to fight off enemies. I have chooks and I recycle everything. My compost bins are well utilised. In fact not much goes to the garbage bins from our household. Between us, the dog, the bunny, the duck and the chooks, we have a very natural recycling system.

Generally I believe that a lot of people like the idea of organic gardening but when they realise how much work is involved, they perhaps find it too hard. You really need to commit and be there regularly to nurture your garden in order to get produce out of it. Planting lovely seedlings in spring and waiting at home for the harvest season cannot give you a good result. You need to work on it at all times.

The government's resolution to provide all new subdivisions with space for community gardens is the start of an important attitude change. It gets people involved and active; the best part is that you can produce fabulous food in quite a small space. We don't have a large backyard ourselves (about 400 square metres) but the number of fruit and nut trees, including a small veg plot and decorative plants, we have managed to squeeze in is quite amazing. So if you think creatively, you can feed a whole family from a small plot.

The idea of vertical planting can save a lot of space and of course there is the idea of pot planting for those who only have balconies. It can be just as effective with a bit of thought put into it. In my backyard I keep most trees miniature so that I can manage them. I try not to let them out of control. Even the cherry tree is kept to size so that I can reach the top. I still have a lot of young trees and I've got all the fruits and nuts that we like to eat. I keep them small so that I can manage them and not have too much produce. I'm not sure if people would have the patience to stand under a fruit tree picking off the curly leaves. It works though. You wouldn't want to be standing underneath a huge fruit tree picking each curly leaf – small trees are do-able.

I have always loved the idea of gardening. Even as a young woman, wherever I lived, I've always found a way to have a few herb pots. If there was an opportunity to create a small plot, I made an effort to do that. I've always had a keen interest and I think that probably stems from Mum and the culture I grew up in. Mum was a keen gardener. She loved nature in its totality. She cared about it and I guess from young years she taught me to care about it too. When I joined the Cook garden, it was just

a few months after Mum had passed away and I've dedicated that garden to her. Working in the garden not only connects me with her in some spiritual way but it is good exercise and a wonderful way to produce food, and even more importantly it is also a great stress release. After a hard day's work in the office, going to your garden to commune with nature and get some fresh air does a world of good. So gardening in my opinion has many benefits. I'm sure the doctors would agree with me.

With me, there's definitely always been a history of gardening. I have often said to my partner that I would not be able to live in an apartment or a dwelling without a garden – unless I absolutely had to of course!

It's important for my mental health and physical health. I've tried going to the gym to exercise but nothing beats a hard working day in the garden as a form of exercise. Yes, I have had a sore back on a few occasions when the day was perfect for gardening and I lost myself in it without a break, but I'll take a sore back from gardening any time over a sore neck from computer work!

The work I do is health-related. Particularly our dietitians would have a keen interest in the organics for their patients. Apart from encouraging others to look at this side of life and apart from recycling as much as we do – and this includes wherever possible purchasing products that are more environmentally friendly – it is personal. I play a big role in informing people of the benefits and I lead by example wherever possible. My biggest push in all of this is to encourage reduction of waste and to use resources wisely. Just because a resource is plentiful, it does not mean that it should be abused.

At the Cook garden, we have some elderly members and if health becomes an issue they tend to let go of the plot, which is understandable. This was the case with a couple of people when I was the convener. However, in my observation, I think a lot of people quit because they leave town or find that they just don't have enough time to give to the garden. In these cases, their plot becomes a weed plot and eventually they pass it on.

It's good to try gardening and I admire people who do, but if the 'marriage' doesn't work out, then give an opportunity to someone else. It really requires a commitment not just to do the physical work but to learn about gardening and how to get the best out of your small bit of soil without abusing natural resources.

It takes time to build up a garden but I think with the right knowledge and attitude it can also be quite quick. I think a lot of people were turned off over the past decade by the water issues [the decade of drought]. Having such dry summers one after the other made it very difficult even for the most keen gardeners. I found the past few years difficult too. I wasn't getting as much out of the garden because of the drought – it was tough. Mulching was the key. I found that even during the drought I used to go there no more than once or twice a week. Certain plants were happy with a good watering once a week. Unfortunately some of the more delicate plants suffered. I laid mulch down quite thickly, so it could have been anywhere between fifteen and thirty centimetres deep. For some of them it should have been even deeper for that level of watering. It was important to replenish the mulch as it did decompose leaving the roots bare again. So if you didn't do that, you faced the same problem.

And then last spring I lost half of my crop to too much water! The rains were overwhelming. My potatoes and onions drowned. We had to dig drainage ditches. I had areas that were just sludge. I remember sinking in some areas almost to my knees. So there you go, one extreme after another.

In Bosnia nothing would grow in winter. However, people know how to preserve everything. So you would have all your root vegetables stored in such a way that they would last the winter. Those that you could not store, you preserve them or freeze them.

My mother had a double brick cool room where she stored most of her food including fruit. It was very effective. If you can't grow throughout the year, you grow enough to last you the year but you must

have proper storage. People pickled a lot, so pickled vegetables were the specialty of the season. This is also where the smoked meats came in as well. As a child I remember winters in Bosnia full of delicacies that we didn't have in summer.

I preserve as much as I know how. I don't waste much from the garden, everything is either preserved, eaten fresh, given away or the pets will have it. Even with cherries, I have my little system where I'll preserve cherries for some sweets, I'll even freeze some, but the ones that are cracked or damaged I share with the chooks. I tend to make cherry juice from this sort of cherry and the chooks will eat the rest. They love cherries.

There are only so many jars you can preserve and I give away a lot as well. In summer, not all of our fruits are producing enough so we do still buy fruit but most vegetables we get from the garden.

In winter I buy more because then we don't have enough variety. I have my winter crop so I would have a lot of the greens from the garden. I'm learning how to stretch out the growing season by consecutive planting. For example, I have in the past planted potatoes two or three times per year so that I would have new potatoes all the way to the end of autumn.

My backyard is my mini-supermarket. The ideal would be to have more land for a proper, really beautiful set-up garden where I can properly rotate crops and have the space to do so and hopefully head towards self sufficiency. Might be a bit ambitious but why not? If I had the space I would do all gardening at home, partly for convenience, but also having my veg plot in the backyard means that I would attend to it more often. Ideally, I would still like to be involved with an organisation such as COGS. There is still plenty I could learn from COGS and hopefully contribute as well.

We all need to learn. I've learned so much even though I come from a culture where gardening is common; there was still so much I didn't know. I wasn't a gardener when I was growing up but I guess I learned

from watching other people. There was still a lot to know and understand about the soil and when to plant things and when not to plant things. For me it was quite experimental and I'm still experimenting.

When it comes to learning, I pick up some of it by myself and some from other people. There are a number of ways you educate yourself about organic gardening. I think COGS provides information and I have learnt a lot from COGS and its members. We share information and I believe it saves a lot of experimental time. There is the COGS website as well but I remember when I was the convener I would print off information sheets of all you need to know about COGS and organic gardening for the new members. I called it in the induction package, even though courses and information sessions were provided from time to time to those who were interested. But of course I have learned a lot from other people, even television programs such as *Gardening Australia*. I still miss Peter Cundall⁶² and his passion for gardening. Whenever I meet a person like him who's passionate about the gardening, I believe that passion rubs off on me.

Knowing when to plant to get the best crop is really crucial. People use all sorts of techniques. Some of our gardeners are guided by the moon phases for their planting timetable. Some of us follow advice from the more experienced gardeners. There is a lot of information available now on the Internet on gardening, which is fabulous. I really like the COGS magazine. It offers interesting articles, guides, recipes and sometimes really good hints on gardening and food preservation. I love its planting guide; it helps me each season. The Internet is great and I use it a lot, but a hard copy guide such as the newsletter is a good reference.

In Cook, the average plot size was thirty to fifty square metres when I joined, and I started with a thirty-square-metre plot. One of my neighbours left shortly after I joined, so I took her plot over as well and combined them to get seventy square metres. It is a good size plot and I can grow most of the food we need. There are only two of us, but I believe I could feed a family of three or four because during the peak

growing season I give away quite a lot of produce. I would still like a much larger plot!

Cook has a large waiting list to access a garden plot and it probably always has. I'm hearing suggestions from other members to extend the Cook garden. Obviously it's a popular spot and I would think it possible to take a bit more land from the horse paddock next door. That would be good to see.

Most people stick to their own plots and their own growing. We do share produce, seeds and seedlings from time to time. Some gardeners are quite social and they will say hello to everyone, stop and chat and share knowledge and produce, others are more private. They do their work and they leave quietly. We have social gatherings and working bees that give us an opportunity to meet everyone, but unfortunately not all plot holders attend. Of course there is a core group of people that tend to attend all events so we get to know each other quite well.

As time passes I am seeing more young families. It's nice to know that the younger generations are interested. Generally you'll find that one partner is more interested than the other. Even in my case, I do the gardening as I love it but Clive is less keen. But he will help me with the heavy jobs that I am not able to do myself. I have three stepchildren and five grandchildren. At home we've got a houseful of pets. Two of the kids live up in Brisbane and one is in Sydney. The one in Sydney comes more often, so she tends to enjoy more of the home-grown produce than the other two who don't frequent here as much.

Personally, the benefit of being in COGS is great. The Cook garden wouldn't be there if it weren't for COGS and my life would not be as rich if I didn't have my Cook garden. Now that I'm getting a bit more time for my gardening, I would be happy to be more involved, particularly in the education side.

I could use the plot at Cook even more effectively given more time. Time is the essence. To utilise the soil, the land to the best of your ability you really do need to invest time. In this climate you can grow all year

round. A lot of us feel time-poor. It's also about where we place our priorities. If you can afford to attend to your garden only once a week, you'll get what once a week gives you. If you're there every day, then you will get a lot more from your effort. I know a couple of gardeners at Cook who are there practically every day and you can certainly see the difference between their plots and the others. As the old saying goes, 'What you put in is what you will get out.'

Appendix A

Transcript of radio interview with Shirley Carden and David O'Dell

REPORT OF RADIO INTERVIEW (1987)

SHIRLEY CARDEN and DAVID ODELL were interviewed on Radio 2CR on the aims and activities of COGS. The interviews were held on Friday 4 September at the 2CN studios. A follow-up interview will be held before the COGS Gardening Course of 6 and 7 November.

Interviewer :We will now have a discussion with members of a Society whose aim it is to look for natural means of improving soils and to produce nutritious uncontaminated food. The organisation is the Canberra Organic Growers' Society and two representatives of the Society are with me in the studio now. They are David Odell and Shirley Carden. Welcome to you both. Shirley, if you could just come a little closer to your microphone. I would like to ask you about the Society. Could you tell me when it was formed and how many members do you have?

Shirley :Well, we have just over a hundred members at present and it was formed in 1978. It started from the Natural Health Society of Canberra and it really consists of the practical people who wish to do something about their health. They are more interested in going out there and growing things to improve their health rather than reading about it and so on.

Int :What are the substitutes you use for chemicals and pesticides to produce good crops?

David :We don't use any substitutes in that sense of fertilisers except compost and naturally produced manures, and we find that if you grow plants in a healthy fashion, they tend to stay healthy, and we find you can grow things without the need of pesticides and -

Int :Just making sure the soil is good and it's got plenty of compost and manure.

David :That's right. The soil is a living soil. You find that there is no need for these artificial pesticides and weedicides.

Int :What about the control of natural insect pests? How do you endeavour to do that or how can you if you don't use pesticides?

David :Well, as I said before, I find that in growing tomatoes, for instance, I never had to use "tomato spray", simply because the tomatoes are so healthy that they chuck off any predator and if by chance one or two did become infected with a grub it is far easier to pick these out by hand rather than to use a spray which is, well, a blanket approach.

Int :So you've never actually resorted to a spray.

David :Never, never, the only thing I ever use is a "spray water".

Int :Your organisation is involved in a Bicentennial project with the Brindabella Arts Community. Perhaps you can tell me more about that.

Shirley :Yes, that is a Community Garden and City Farm idea. People can have plots there where they can grow their own vegetables. They will be assisted. Manure will be brought in bulk and they will also be given advice on how to grow organically. Also, we do have a Community Garden along the Cotter Road, which has been operating for about six years.

Int :How large is this Community Garden?

Shirley :That one has 15 plot holders. It's unofficial because it's in an area of land which will be taken over to widen the Cotter Road eventually. So, it's just a temporary thing. But, it's been incredibly successful.

Int :What are some of the crops being grown there at the moment?

Shirley :It's just a vegetable type operation, where people grow their own vegetables. It isn't large enough to grow fruit trees. Quite a few people grow flowers and herbs and vegetables and smaller things like currants and gooseberries and that type of thing.

Int :Yes, why are they actually growing them there than in their own back yard?

Shirley :Some people live in flats, others have older gardens where they have too much shade. The roots of the larger trees have taken over and they haven't sufficient room. Other people with young families find that they can't grow enough on their suburban block. So, they like to grow their potatoes and pumpkins there. They find that that way they can support their family and can be almost self-sufficient.

Int :I have to go out there to grow my own vegetables because I've got a very destructive dog.

Shirley :You'd be most welcome.

Int :And it's also very hard, of course, as you say, to grow vegetables if you're in a flat.

Shirley :Yes.

Int :Well nigh impossible just about.

Shirley :It's also wonderful therapy for the people there. To grow things, you learn so much from each other. You learn from each other's mistakes as well as from people's successes. So, it's a wonderful learning process.

Int :So, how many people have got plots out there?

Shirley :Fifteen.

Int :Yes, fifteen. I believe there is also a seminar and a workshop coming up in November. Would you like to tell me a little about that?

David :Yes, Terry, this is quite an exciting project, because we are finding that we have so many enquiries and people

saying, "How do you do this - you know - grow things successfully?" What I said before might have seemed quite radical but it nevertheless is quite true and to answer some of these questions we are arranging a workshop, a practical workshop on Friday, 6 November, and also on Saturday 7. The Friday evening session is a presentation of papers and that is on soil preparation, sowing, weeding, how to make compost, all the practical useful things. Then on the Saturday morning we will be demonstrating these at the Cotter Community Garden. So that people can actually see what is done and how it's done and as Shirley pointed out, we've learned so much from each other. We want to bring this workshop into being simply because we get so many enquiries at our monthly meetings that we find that we need to have a practical demonstration to go with the theory of it.

Int :So, that is coming up in November.

David :Yes, November 6.

Int :You mentioned making compost successfully. I've never been successful with that. What is the proper way to make compost?

David :Well, the trouble with organic growing it's not easy. It involves quite a bit of physical effort. Especially making compost can be quite heavy. But at other times people can make it quite simply with a compost tumbler in smaller quantities. Really, compost is a cooking of organic matter and animal manure in a heap, getting it brought up to a temperature which kills all weeds, seeds and other things you don't want in the garden, and then, when it breaks down into cool, fine mulch it's ready to be incorporated into your garden. Sometimes, depending on weather, it can take six weeks to six months.

Int :What sort of materials do make the best compost?

David :Well, anything out of the garden.

Int :Anything at all?

David :Any vegetable matter.

Int :Apart from the weeds, of course.

David :Well, you can put weeds in, too, and this is the exciting thing about it. In my own garden anything from the garden goes into the compost and anything from the poultry goes into the garden and it is just a recycling of all the natural resources.

Int :Well, just quickly, what sort of results do organic growers get in competition with, say, conventional growers that use pesticides and what have you?

David :Well, the first is the taste. I tried to bite into a bought tomato the other day and I found I was just trying to chew into some -

Int :Did you get any taste at all?

David :I didn't get any taste at all and when I compare this with my own tomatoes, which are a delightful fruit on their own - and that's the first thing. The other things is that you know that you are getting something that is not contaminated by pesticides or weedicides.

Int :Well, thanks for coming this morning. Good luck for that Bicentennial Project and thank you very much for your time.

David Odell and Shirley Carden from Canberra Organic Growers Society.

C O G S S H R E D D E R

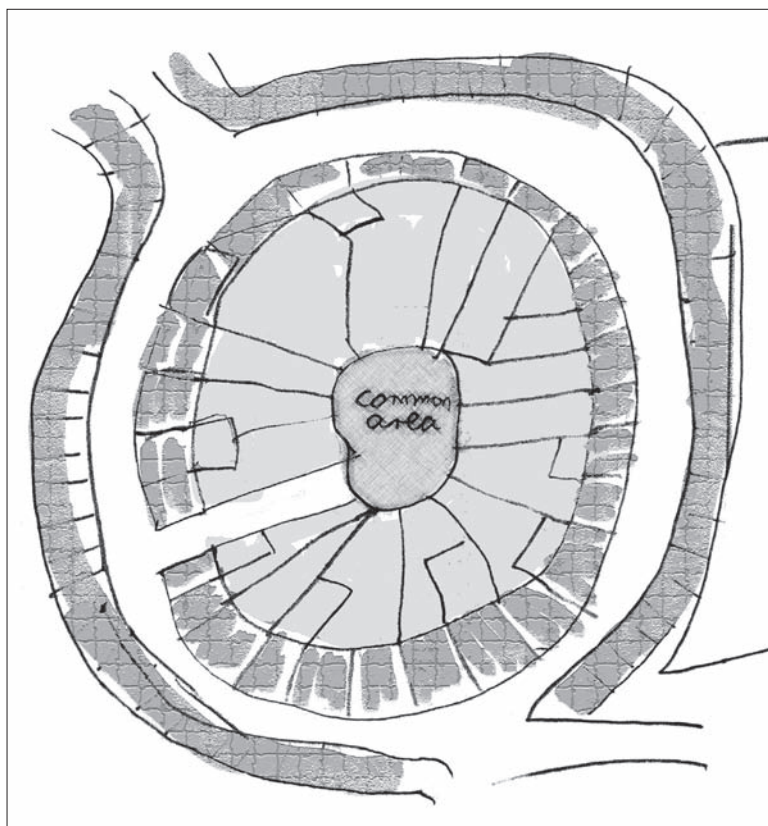
A volunteer is required as caretaker for our shredder. This involves storage and organising the servicing and hiring out.

The fee for use of the shredder is \$10.

Appendix B

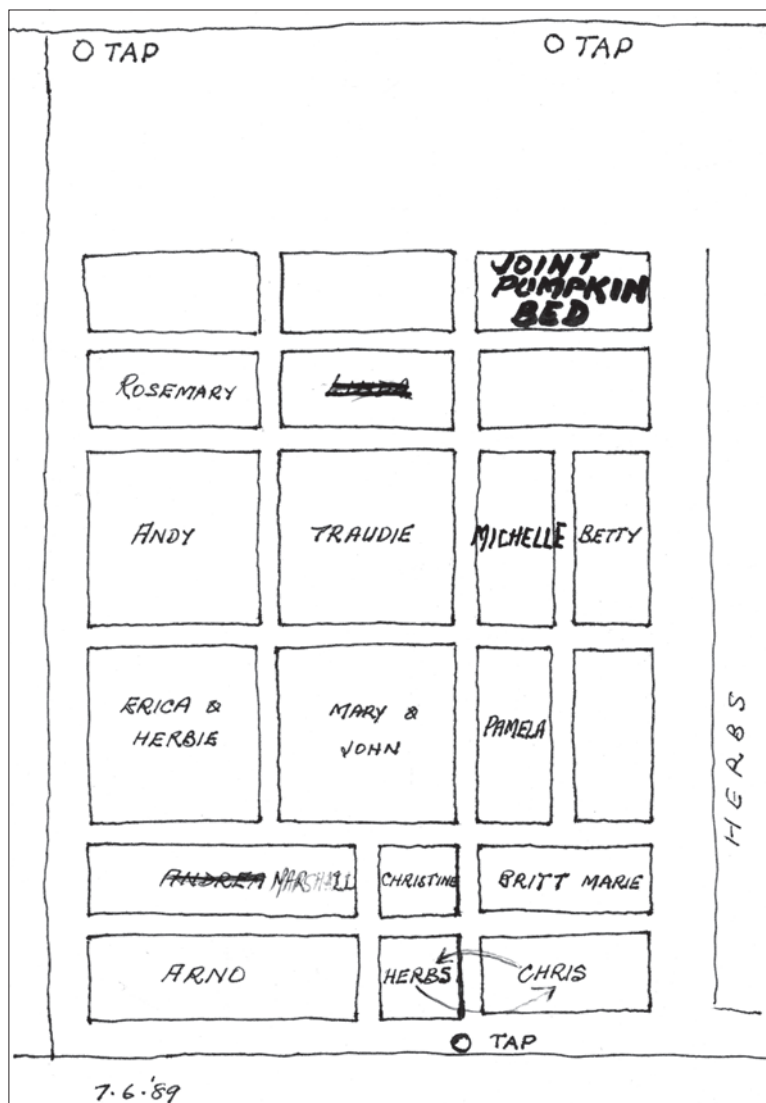
Appendix C

John Brummell's plan



Appendix D

Plan of the Cotter garden after it was moved



Notes

1. ESDD 2011, Background Paper 5: Food, Canberra, ACT Government.
2. The Australian Garden History Society, *A Gardener's City: Canberra's garden heritage*.
3. COGS and a number of its members were closely connected with NASAA. Part of the COGS membership fee went to NASAA to support its lobbying, advocacy and certification work. Two of the COGS members interviewed for this book, Betty Cornhill and Joyce Wilkie, have also played important roles in NASAA.
4. There is some anecdotal evidence that suggests others may have developed earlier, but the majority of published data supports the assertion that this was the first garden.
5. Brandenburg, cited in Nettle, C. 2010. *Growing community: starting and nurturing community gardens*. Adelaide: CANH and Health Australia, p. 309.
6. Nettle, 2010. Op. cit. p. 313.
7. Owen Pidgeon was a COGS member and runs the organic Loriendale orchard, specialising in apples.
8. The Anglo-Sudan War and the Boer War, both late nineteenth century.
9. To be precise, *Zephyranthes* sp.
10. Sir Albert Howard (1873–1947), English botanist and organic farming pioneer.
11. Lady Eve Balfour (1899–1990), English farmer, educator and organic farming pioneer.
12. Haughley Green in Suffolk, site of the first long-term, side-by-side scientific comparison of organic and conventional farming methods. Balfour wrote *The Living Soil* based on her experience.
13. Near Liverpool in the south-west of Sydney.
14. Well-known Canberra garden designer, still practising.
15. Francis Ratcliff, 1938.
16. About twenty kilometres away.
17. An Australian magazine of sustainable living and alternatives established in 1972.
18. Traudy Kalivoda's recollections are part of this collection.
19. *Silent Spring*, 1962.
20. Call number 372 P H.
21. A health retreat near Sydney.
22. About eighty kilometres west of Brisbane.
23. 666 ABC Radio Canberra.
24. 'Green Grove,' 1,074 hectares near Ardlethan, one of Australia's oldest certified organic farms. Alan

Druce turned to organics in 1962; he found it a difficult transition to make, but a successful one.

25. COGS was awarded a Bicentary grant to establish a 'model farm' in partnership with the Brindabella Arts Association; however, the tensions remained, the project was abandoned and the grant money was returned.

26. Starting NASAA (National Association for Sustainable Agriculture, Australia), incorporated in 1987.

27. Organic farmer near Bringelly, NSW. See Betty Cornhill's story.

28. The Cardens maintain two beehives on their property.

29. Louis Bromfield (1896–1956), American author, conservationist and early organic growing proponent. His Malabar Farm in Ohio was one of the first to ban pesticides.

30. The Canberra bushfires of 2003, which destroyed 470 homes on the city outskirts.

31. Percival Yeomans (1904–1984), designer of a system of contour ploughing to control rainfall run-off.

32. Rachel Louise Carson (1907–1964), American marine biologist and conservationist. Her 1962 book *Silent Spring* helped advance the worldwide environmental movement.

33. Bill Mollison (1928–), Australian researcher, developer of the permaculture system of ecological and environmental design intended to achieve sustainable agricultural systems.

34. The ACT Permaculture group was formed in the late 1970s and for the first few years the Permaculture and COGS newsletters were distributed together.

35. Fusion is an Australian Christian organisation supporting young people and their communities to help them find meaning and purpose, and thereby promote physical, mental and emotional health and well-being.

36. Peter Andrews, Australian grazier and racehorse breeder, inventor of Natural Sequence Farming. This is a set of technique for managing fluvial patterns to restore the original hydrological patterns of Australian rural areas. They appear effective but run counter to commonly accepted practices.

37. This is what beavers do in North America. The Mulloon Institute near Canberra demonstrates this principle and there it is very effective. Streams and rivulets are no longer incised drainage channels but rather act as very large sponges.

38. BD500 spray is made according to bio-dynamic principles. It is basically fermented cow dung and is used to improve soil fertility.

39. The Lions Youth Haven is a not-for-profit organisation owned and supported by Lions Clubs in the ACT and Queanbeyan. Among other things, it allows young people in crises to find refuge and support. Youth Haven horticulture engaged a number of marginalised groups

- including the unemployed and refugees in large scale communal organic gardening initiative. See www.lyh.org.au
40. A block of public housing flats, now demolished, in the Canberra suburb of Lyons, which became notorious for its large number of troubled and disadvantaged residents.
41. Aquaponics is a system where fish and plants are grown together: bacteria convert fish wastes to nutrients for the plants, and the plants filter water for the fish.
42. A new (2011) proposal to establish a learning hub comprising community garden plots, small animals, sustainable buildings and educational courses, with the goal of promoting sustainable living and healthy food production.
43. German allotment garden. Berlin alone today has 833.
44. Ernst F. Schumacher (1911–1977), German economist and thinker. Author of *Small is Beautiful* (1973), which the *Times Literary Supplement* describes as one of the 100 most influential books published since the end of World War II.
45. Dr Wilfred Edward Shewell-Cooper (1900–1982), British organic gardener, proponent of the no-dig gardening method and author of a number of gardening books such as *Cut-Work Gardening* (1963).
46. There was none in the early 1980s.
47. Karen Bottomley established Mountain Creek organic store at the Griffith shops.
48. About sixteen kilometres south of Braidwood, NSW.
49. Costa Georgiadis, current compère of ABC TV's *Gardening Australia*.
50. COGS runs a Seed Bank or a Seed Library. Members may contribute seeds to it and of course take seeds from it for their own use. Its operation has been somewhat sporadic over the years, necessarily relying on volunteers. Traudy's stewardship of the Seed Bank was of great service to the members.
51. As of October 2012 the road has not been widened.
52. Bill Mollison, 1988, *Permaculture: A Designer's Manual*.
53. Scott Nearing (1883–1983), Helen Nearing (1904–1995), American authors who wrote extensively on living 'the good life' in Vermont and later Maine, USA, involving a simplified lifestyle based on organic horticulture.
54. Ruth Stout (1884–1980), author from Connecticut, best known for her 'no-work' gardening books and techniques such as year-round mulch.
55. Conference title: Towards safe sustainable agriculture.
56. National Association for Sustainable Agriculture Australia.
57. Stephanie Alexander (c.1940–),

Australian cook and food writer, known for her foundation which supports primary school kitchen gardens.

58. Alice Waters (1944–), American cook and food writer, creator of the Edible Schoolyard program at the Martin Luther King Middle School in California, and promoter of organic growing.

59. http://www.allsun.com.au/SchoolProject/HTMLfiles/000_

OpeningPage/content_OpeningPage.html

60. This has changed; as of at least 2012, licence conditions permit certain sales.

61. Joel Salatin is an author and ‘beyond organic’ farmer in Virginia USA.

62. Peter Cundall (1927–), horticulturalist and former compère of the ABC TV’s *Gardening Australia* program.