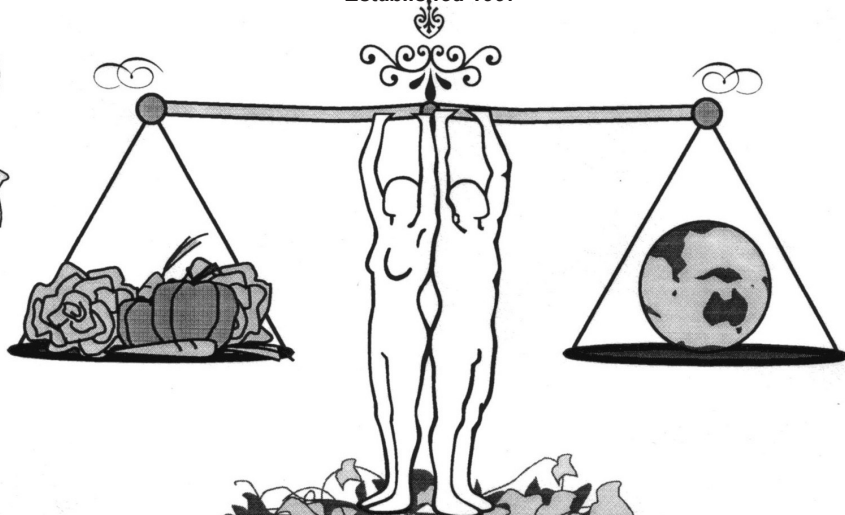


GOLD COAST ORGANIC GROWERS Inc.

Established 1997



NEWSLETTER

Volume 28, 2024 Issue 1
GARDENING IN AUTUMN

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OUR NEXT MEETING: MARCH 28, 2024

Notice Board

- 1. To promote organic sustainable food raising for home gardens and farms.**
- 2. To foster research into improved methods of organic farming and gardening.**
- 3. To provide information and support to all those interested in the various aspects of organic growing.**

Meetings Held:

The fourth Thursday of the month at the Elanora Community Centre, 26 Galleon Way, Elanora.

Annual Membership Fees:

Single: \$20. Family: \$30.

To renew or start memberships please transfer funds directly into our bank account, send cheques (payable to GCOG) to PO Box 210, Mudgeeraba Qld 4213, or just pay at the door.

Name: Gold Coast Organic Growers

Bank: Suncorp

BSB: 484-799

Account: 0014-21651

Seed Bank:

Packets are \$2.00 each.

Members' Market Corner:

Please bring plants, books and produce you wish to sell or trade.

Raffle Table:

This relies on the kind generosity of members to donate items on the night. Tickets - \$1 each or 3 for \$2.

Library:

Books, Videos, DVDs, Soil Test Kit available to members for 1 month.

Advertising:

1/4 page: \$15 an issue

1/2 page: \$25 an issue

Full page: \$40 an issue

2023-2024 Committee

President	Maria Roberson
Vice President	Lyn Mansfield
Treasurer	Diane Kelly 0403 473 892
Secretary	Deb Phillips 0422 680 784 debraps@gmail.com
Assistant Sec	Penny Jameson 0411 639 558
Membership Sec	Diane Kelly
Membership Asst	Penny Jameson
Newsletter Editor	Leah Johnston leahbryan9@gmail.com
Newsletter Assistant	Diane Kelly Jill Barber
Website Editor	Jorge Cantellano
Social Media E.	Maria Roberson
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Guest Speaker	Lorraine James
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Librarians	Gary Webb
Seed Bank	Lyn Mansfield
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Supper	Heather Ryan
Co-ordinator	Sue Webb

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Whilst every effort is made to publish accurate information the association (including Editor, Executive Officers and Committee) accepts no responsibility for statements made or opinions expressed in this newsletter.

Notice Board**Membership Renewals**

Pay online:

Name: Gold Coast Organic Growers

Bank: Suncorp

BSB: 484-799

Account: 0014-21651

Remember to put your Name and Membership Number (the number in brackets after your name) in the comment field.

Thank you to all those who renew their membership and contribute to the successful running of our Club:

Overdue: Ian & Margaret Lee (118), Melanie Glenister (486), Shelley Pryor (72), Murray & Judith Olver (105), Jan Wright (191), Cathie Hodge (304), Beth Orme (343), Rebecca Bowen (422), Janet Shearer (452), Justin Rogers (487), Kerri Beckwith (500), Doddie & Katie Panayi (501), Doug & Sally Beitz (441), Louise Newell (502), Barbara Talty (505), Meegan Keeler (358), Joan Hegarty (506), Sarah Drew (507)

February 2024: Roger & Pauline Behrendorff (232), Gary & Sue Webb (445), Kym O'Connell (470), Gail Dunkley (494), Lorraine James (508).

March 2024: Barry O'Rourke (185), John Palmer (357), Danny Li (384), Peta Sypkens (460), Heather Ryan (495), Catherin Goodacre (496)

April 2024: Tricia Oh (368), Terry Lewins (427), John Trama (437), Cheree Holland (475), Daniella Lawall (509).

Meetings

Our meetings are held on the fourth Thursday of the month at the Elanora Community Centre, 26 Galleon Way, Elanora. Doors open at 6.30pm with the meeting starting at 7pm.

If you would like to suggest a speaker for 2024, or would like to speak for five minutes on one of our Members' Nights please contact Lorraine James via lorrainejames@hotmail.com

Workshops

EdibleScapes Gardens welcomes visitors and volunteers. Gardening activities occur on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday from 9am to mid-morning.
<https://www.facebook.com/n.ediblescapes>

Newsletters

GCOG members are welcome to contribute photos and articles to our newsletter. Please send any contributions to Leah via the email leahbryan9@gmail.com

Contribution deadlines are:
Autumn issue: end of January
Winter issue: end of April
Spring issue: end of July
Summer issue: end of October

Thanks to this issue's contributors:
Diane Kelly, Leah Johnston and Maria Roberson.

View our Newsletters On-Line at:
www.goldcoastorganicgrowers.org.au/

President's Notes

By Maria Roberson

Hello Everyone,

As summer slides away, there is no better time to start planning your dream garden.

For those of us living in the subtropics, autumn provides some of the best growing conditions of all the seasons. Not only is the weather milder and kinder to our plants, the plant munching insects will start to slow down a bit too. It's such a relief to feel the first days of true autumn in the air and even though the change may not be as noticeable as it is in the more southern states, it is observable, and to me, heralds an exciting shift in my gardening routine.

What plans do you have for your garden this year?

*Are you downsizing or expanding?

*Are you experimenting with new plants or sticking to the tried and tested?

*Will you plant an orchard, a bush tucker garden or perhaps add lots of beneficial insect attracting plants?

*Are you opting for wicking beds, installing water-wise irrigation or getting up high to stay dry?

There are so many things to keep a gardener's mind and body active. No wonder gardening is considered such a healthy thing to do for the young and not so young alike.

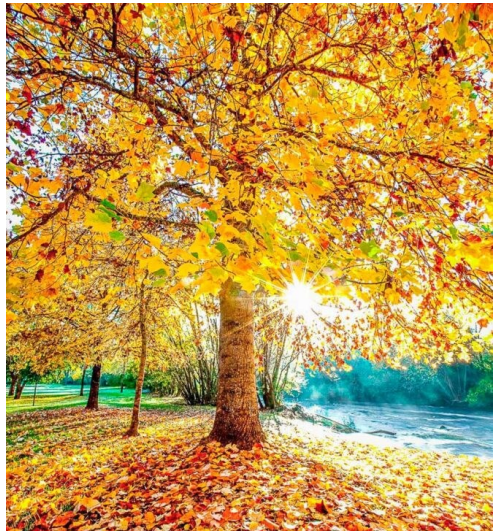
The seed table will be stocked with the new seasons seeds so you can get cracking with your planting. If you have seed requests and would like us to stock them, just mention it to our seed table volunteers and we will do our best to

source them.

Don't forget to borrow a book from our library on meeting nights. There are so many wonderful books to choose from and if you, like me, prefer information in hard copy you will definitely find something of interest.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our wonderful volunteers of 2023 and welcome those who have stepped up for 2024. It is because of these amazing people that we have such a wonderful club. We get to learn all sorts of things that make us better gardeners, we can have a cuppa and a chat and take home a prize from the raffle table or perhaps a gift from the share table. What more could you ask for?

Happy growing,
Maria



“Autumn is a second spring
where every leaf is a flower.”
- Albert Camus

Speaker Recaps

By Leah Johnston

At our November meeting we welcomed back club favourite, Jerry Coleby-Williams, who spoke about 'easy gardening': growing plants that self-seed and want to grow in our climate.

Growing trees with edible leaves is a simple way to grow food. Cut them back to keep them manageable and add the leaves you aren't eating to your compost.

Harvest edible wild greens, the plants (or "weeds") that grow naturally in your garden. These can include nasturtium, warrigal greens, nettles, chickweed and purslane.

Grow your own sprouts for fast and tasty nutrition: radish, mung bean, alfalfa, pea, turnip and mustard.

Vegetables are at their most nutritious state between the time they grow their first seed leaves and their first two true leaves. During the panic buying phase of the Covid pandemic when the shelves were bare of vegetables both fresh and tinned, there were still seeds available at the shops. Grow your own microgreens in a seed tray. Jerry grows Okinawa spinach and gynura.

If you can find a source of spent mushroom compost in winter you can pour it over an empty garden bed, keep it moist, and you'll soon have mushrooms growing.

Green amaranth grows on every colonised continent. Just disturb the soil and it is likely to sprout up.

Other easy to grow crops he recom-

mended are lagos spinach, kings salad, wall rocket, celtuce and gac.

Jerry said it generally takes five years for a seed to adapt to our subtropical climate. By saving his own seeds and re-growing from them every year he has adapted his celery to now grow year round in his Brisbane garden.

Other tips he shared include:

- growing seedlings and cuttings in styrofoam boxes for insulation with old net curtains over the top to diffuse the sunlight and stop them drying out.
- plant seeds when the soil is dry and plant plants when the soil is wet.

At our January meeting we delved deep into soil health with speaker Graham Lancaster, who is the Senior Director/Manager of the Environmental Analysis Laboratory at Southern Cross University.

He said the cheapest way to test the biology of your soil is to bury some old clothes then dig them back up and if you only have the elastic remaining then you have healthy soil biology.

Soil PH is important for the health of your plants. If the PH gets too acidic, below 3, the iron and aluminium in the soil will be absorbed by the plants and go into your food. If your PH is correct then these naturally occurring metals will be bound in the carbon and won't go into the food you are growing and eating.

Graham said that healthy soil makes for strong plants which can withstand insect attacks. If your soil health is high your plants will have good levels of vitamins and minerals and you won't need to take vitamin tablets. He was optimistic that things are improving and more farmers are choosing to use organic farming methods for better success!

As Summer turns to Autumn

By Diane Kelly

This summer really hasn't been the greatest for growing vegetables – lots and lots of rain; lots of hot days; and lots of humidity. But as we journey through February and start looking toward some cooler, drier weather, it is time to start thinking about what to plant in our vegetable gardens in Autumn.

At this time last year there was an article in the Club newsletter that focused on capsicums, carrots and broad beans. This year, let's take a look at growing eggplants, cucumbers and pineapples.

Eggplants:

Also known as aubergines (or, in India where they grow at least 20 different species, brinjal) eggplants originated in the tropics. These vegetables were being cultivated in China as far back as the fifth century BC, and they vary from the green pea-sized varieties used in Asian curries to the bright red North African type and to the delicious purple and white striped Italian varieties. And we, of course, are familiar with the large purple fruit that we can grow here from August through to March.

Eggplants can be grown in pots, especially the varieties referred to as “mini-bunching” or Lebanese eggplants. These have clusters of small (8cm), finger-like fruit which are tender and have a mildly sweet flavour and a silky texture. The advice with growing eggplants in pots is to use a premium potting mix – eggplants are viewed as heavy feeders (but easy to grow).

Eggplants do best in well-drained, light

soils that have a high level of organic matter, but still tend to cope well with less than ideal conditions of soil fertility. When preparing the soil in your garden, aim for a pH level of 6-7. Also remember not to plant the seedlings where other members of the Solanaceae family have grown within the past 3-4 years as they tend to share many of the same pest and disease problems.

Grow your eggplants in a warm, sheltered spot in your garden – positioning them near a north-facing wall will provide reflected heat for them. Space the plants 45cm apart and consider adding a stake to the planting hole with the plant and then back-filling – the plants I have grown tended to be knocked about by the wind and so I tied them up to tomato stakes to avoid damage. (The plants can become quite heavy when they are fruiting well.) The plants should start to bear within 12 weeks and it is good to harvest them by clipping the young, firm fruit while the skin is bright and glossy.

What potential problems can your eggplants have? The most likely in our region would be fruit fly who will sting the fruit surface. Pegging paper bags over each



fruit can protect your harvest. Overwet, highly acidic or clay soil can cause root-rotting fungi – these are indicated by undeveloped, brown or soft roots. Contorted, knobbly root growth indicates root knot nematodes – rotating your crops will help solve this problem.

So, grow some eggplants this season – mixing with rich tomato sauces and other spicy and acidic combinations will complement the fruit.

Cucumbers:

Having grown cucumbers (mostly the Lebanese variety as I think they have more flesh) for many years I was interested to read in one of my gardening books that “although cucumbers have a climbing habit, most varieties are better grown along the ground, especially in areas with warm to hot summers. When on the ground, the fruit is less water stressed and more likely to remain tender, crisp and juicy”. So that’s an alternative to growing the plants up a trellis or trying some of the dwarf varieties.

Cucumbers have a wide range of eating potential – we mostly eat them raw, but you can use the young leaves in salads or cook them as spinach. The young fruit can be made into gherkins and pickles. But whatever your plan for them food-wise, remember that cucumber plants like well drained, moderately fertile soil with a pH level preferred of 6 -7.5. Good drainage can be facilitated by sowing the seeds on top of mounds – just create a well in the top of the mound to make watering easier – and cucumbers have a high need for water. Mulching reduces moisture loss and competition from weeds, and also protects developing fruit from fruit rot by preventing contact with the soil. As

the plants grow, pinch out the growing tips as this encourages branching and increases flower and fruit production.

Harvesting time for most cucumbers is 10-12 weeks unless you are growing varieties specifically for pickling (“Perfection Pickling”, “National Pickling” or “Midget”) – these should be ready after six weeks.

Potential problems? Excessive humidity results in increased fungal diseases and can also make flowers fail to set fruit. Powdery mildew can also occur, with the secondary symptom of leaf burn happening. Small fruit that turn yellow and fall from the plant probably have not been successfully pollinated, and plants will also naturally shed excess fruit that are beyond the capacity of the plant to carry



to maturity. Exposed and windy conditions can also result in the scorching of the foliage.

When reading about cucumbers I came across this photo which looks like an interesting combination of trellis and horizontal growing – without the problem of the fruit touching the soil.

So for when you are ready to make a tomato, onion, cucumber and cider vinegar salad, prepare some gazpacho soup, or cook some pickles – grow some cucumbers now.

Pineapples:

Here is a fruit which is very easy to grow; can be planted all year round in our region; and which requires lots of patience – you might have to wait for 18 months for your plant's first harvest. Related to ornamental bromeliads, the pineapple fruit develops at the end of a flower stalk which emerges from the strappy foliage. The plants grow to half a meter and will have a one-meter spread. The easiest way to grow a pineapple is by planting the foliage top of another one that you have particularly enjoyed. Remove the top from the fruit and cut away any remaining flesh and then leave the top to dry for a couple of weeks. The leaves will remain green, but the base will begin to dry out. Prior to planting, strip some of the lower leaves to create a stub at the base of the tuft of foliage – you may already see immature roots beginning to form when the lower leaves are removed. Alternatively, you can also obtain suckers from established plants and grow them – just cut the suckers off with a sharp knife.

Pineapples are very hungry feeders and the size of the harvest will be largely dependent on the amount of nutrients and water the plant receives. So plant the tops or the suckers into compost-enriched soil (at 1 meter intervals) and apply liquid fertilizer and additional compost at regular intervals. As well as food, pineapples also require perfect drainage (raised beds are recommended) and they prefer slightly-acid to an acid soil – a pH of between 4.5 and 6.0. The plants grow best in full sun but can tolerate part shade, and

remember that they need good air circulation.

A couple of good things about pineapples (apart from the sweet fruit):

1. Pineapple plants don't need to take up valuable vegetable garden space. Instead use them as border plants along ornamental gardens.
2. Pineapples are largely a pest-free crop!
3. They are a drought-tolerant plant - but remember that lack of regular watering will mean smaller fruit.

About three months after flowering the fruit will be ready to harvest. You can twist the ripe fruit from the plant, but using secateurs is preferable for home gardeners as that ensures that the shallow-rooted parent plant doesn't get accidentally wrenched from the soil.

So look around for a nice, sweet pineapple or two to start a new crop – and remember that the plants need to be grown from tops or suckers as they do not develop seeds.



Let's Grow Something a bit Different

By Diane Kelly

One of my favourite gardening books is Annette McFarlane's "Organic Vegetable Gardening". As well as giving advice on starting a vegetable garden; planting, maintaining and harvesting vegetables; and what pests you may expect to encounter, the book also gives a planting guide. The list advises when a variety of vegetables can be grown throughout the year and there are details for over 120 different vegetables that can be grown in our region.

But in spite of having such a wide range to choose from, it is very easy to grow just the vegetables we are familiar with or the ones that are our favorites. And it is the same with fruit – it is easy just to grow the usual oranges and lemons in our backyards. Considering this idea I decided it was time to learn about some of the more interesting fruit that can be grown locally and so I contacted Club member Penny Jameson and asked if I could come and chat about what fruit trees she has planted. So here are some of them, along with a bit of information about each.

Soursop: Penny mentioned in our January meeting that she had recently picked her first soursop fruit. I must admit that I had not heard of soursop trees or seen their fruit and so this was the fruit I was most interested in.

Soursop fruit are also known as "graviola". The trees are native to the Americas and the Caribbean and they are tropical evergreens that can grow to a height of 8-9 meters. Penny's tree has been growing for four years – the trees usually fruit between 3-5 years and

should reward you with up to 24 fruit each year. Soursop trees are usually grown from seed and they tolerate a variety of soils – but they do need to be sheltered from the wind and mulched well. They enjoy a warm climate with high humidity and the fruit can grow to 20cm long and can weigh as much as 4kgs.

Soursops are part of the custard apple family, but whereas custard apples have a smooth skin, the skin of soursop fruit has small spikes (but which are quite soft and don't hurt). The flesh inside is white with a small number of shiny black seeds – the seeds are said to be toxic and thus avoided. And contrary to the fruit's name, it is sweet and quite delicious! Some say "it tastes like a combination of mango and pineapple", and others say it tastes like "a mixture of strawberry and apple with a bit of citrus" – but however you may describe it, the fruit is well worth growing the tree for! Just cut the fruit horizontally and scoop the flesh out with a spoon. Alternative usages are making a syrup from the fruit; turning the flesh into a pulp and freezing it for future use in smoothies etc; or making ice cream with it. You can tell that the fruit is ready to enjoy when it swells and the spikes start to space out. The leaves of the soursop tree can be used to make a tea and also have considerable medicinal value. Although the fruit are very perishable and are rarely seen



outside local markets, the tree would be well worth growing if you have the space.

Feijoas:

Another fruit that Penny has growing in her backyard is feijoas (also known as “fig guava”, “guavasteen” or “pineapple guava”, depending on the country of source). Described as “the easiest of trees to grow”, feijoa trees need a lot of space – another description is that they grow as wide as they are tall. But they can be productive for up to 30 years; they don’t mind drought conditions (although they need regular watering when they are fruiting); and they are tolerant of an amount of salt in their soil. They are tolerant of partial shade, but once the summer temperatures rise above 32 degrees fruit set can be affected. Surprisingly feijoas grow in the UK and Scotland – but they do not fruit annually in these locations.

Feijoa trees can be grown from either seeds or cuttings – and be aware that their growth will be slow for the first year or two. The trees have a silvery-grey appearance and are quite pretty – they are good as an ornamental tree, or they can be shaped into a hedge or topiary. They can cope with full shade through to partial shade and will appreciate having good compost or aged manure added to the soil where they are to be planted. As they grow, tip

prune the trees to make them fruit earlier – and always remember to water them well when they are fruiting.

Feijoas have few pest problems, although when grown in New Zealand they are affected by the guava moth. Bees and medium-size birds (such as mynas, or blackbirds in the higher regions) are the pollinators of feijoa trees.

The fruit of feijoa trees grow to the size of a chicken egg and have a sweet flavor and juicy flesh. You will know the fruit is ripe as they will fall to the ground, but it is better to pick them as soon as they come away with the lightest touch so that they avoid being bruised. Also, it is better not to pick them earlier and ripen them off-tree because they will have less flavor. The fruit of the feijoa tree is a creamy white and you can also eat the skin (although some find it too bitter). As with soursop, cut the fruit length-wise and scoop the flesh out with a spoon. The flowers of a feijoa tree are also edible – you can make a sorbet of them; add them to pies or crumbles; or even include them in salads. But be quick – the birds like to eat them too! And remember – one eaten flower equals one less fruit!

Cumquats (or kumquats): This is a fruit that takes me back in time to my aunt’s garden in Melbourne – this was my first memory of “kumquats”. Cumquats (this is the Australian English spelling – most other countries use “kumquats”) can grow well in warm or cool climates as long as they have a well-drained soil and enjoy at least six hours of sunlight each day. Cumquats are hardy trees which should fruit in their third year and they are grown for both their fruit and their decorative appearance – they have fragrant white



flowers and very brightly colored fruit as well as the choice of variegated leaves. Cumquats can be grown in either a garden or a pot as dwarf varieties are available – but remember that they are heavy feeders and need lots of nutrients at all of the foliage, flower and fruiting stages. The trees will also appreciate being staked until they are fully established. Keep your new tree well-watered, especially during its first summer.

Cumquat trees should be fed four times a year; they will do well if they are mulched with either straw or sugar cane or lucerne hay. Be careful not to mulch near the plant's stem so that the chances of fungal infections are reduced, and also hand-weed around the base of the tree to avoid harming its surface feeding roots. In the first two years any fruit should be removed so that robust trees are established and remember to remove any shoots that emerge below the graft union.

As your tree begins to fruit, be aware of fruit drop (which indicates irregular watering), fruit fly, and leaf miner. After your tree has fruited and been harvested, trim it into shape. Cumquat fruit have a tart, citrus flavor which works well in jams, marmalades and preserves. You can also eat the fruit whole (the seeds are also edible) and you will notice that the skin is actually sweeter than the flesh. Many images of cumquat jam are of the fruit remaining in full shape, but a soft, smooth jam is what I remember as being delicious on toast.

And some more... So these are three of the less usual fruit trees that Penny is growing, in addition to cherry guavas, figs, blueberries and mulberries. But there are a couple of other photos from Penny's garden that I would like to share with you.

1. Jasmine seeds: Growing up a staircase that reaches up to the back deck of Penny's house is a stephanotis plant, also known as a Madagascar jasmine. The vine itself is green and healthy, and the flowers are a larger version of the usual jasmine. But what was intriguing were the seed pods. Penny had shown me how the pods contained feathery, white attachments to their seeds, and how they had matured, split and then had been blown

across the back lawn. As they looked for a new home to grow in, they were very delicate and quite amazing.



2. Desert roses: Desert roses are an easy-growing, drought resistant plant and Penny has a couple of them growing in pots in the front yard. But the thing that almost out of place was the plant's seed pod. We didn't open one up, but the pods seemed intriguingly disproportionate to the size of the plant. Desert roses can grow up to 2 meters in height, but are usually grown in pots and are actually well suited to bonsai.



To Compost or Not to Compost

By Diane Kelly

William Shakespeare wrote the original “To be or not to be – that is the question” – so apologies to him as we apply the question to our gardens – “to compost or not to compost”.

In his book *The Compost Book* author David Taylor starts off with two very good reasons to compost – one is that it reduces your carbon footprint (composting reduces the volume of disposable waste that you send to landfill) and, more importantly, “composting converts decaying vegetation and animal waste into humus. Humus in turn absorbs both moisture and nutrients – and when you add humus-rich compost into soil, you obtain the highly productive growing medium of loam”. And as Wikipedia explains, “loam is considered ideal for gardening and agricultural uses because it retains nutrients well and retains water while still allowing excess water to drain away”.

So we can assume that we should compost. But my question has always been “how do I know if what is going into my compost heap has an adequate range of nutrients?” In other words, if there is not enough variety, will my vegetables be deficient – and in turn, will what we eat be limited in food value.

Following on from the January Club meeting and our guest speaker from EAL in Lismore’s comments about the value of compost I decided to investigate just what things can I add to my compost heap that will at least go part way to supplying its requirements. So here are eight of the main nutrients and the details of how they can be added to your

tumbler or compost bin.

Nitrogen: *Preferred sources:* lucerne hay; stinging nettles; fish waste and comfrey. *Ideal sources:* animal manures; hoof & horn manure; legumes (such as clovers); *Next choice:* blood & bone; fresh lawn clippings; urine. **Note:** Use these source materials in compost or as mulch. Aerobic compost (which requires ventilation) retains more nitrogen than anaerobic compost (which operates without oxygen) (whilst using the same source materials).

Phosphorus: *Preferred sources:* bonemeal; hoof & horn manure. *Ideal source:* rock phosphate. *Next choice:* blood & bone; lawn clippings; fresh green leaves; animal manure and egg shells. **Note:** Use rock phosphate to make up 2-4% of the heap to make a high-phosphate compost. (Phosphorus is needed for cell division and to aid the growing tips of plants, and thus is vital to seedlings and other young plants.)

Potassium: *Preferred sources:* certified organic potassium fertilisers. *Ideal source:* bracken; fish waste. *Next choice:* blood & bone; leaves; animal manure; wood ashes; fine granite dust.

Calcium: *Next choice:* Bone; ground limestone; seashells (such as oyster shells); wood ashes; gypsum. **Note:** If using lime, use agricultural limestone only; too many wood ashes will cause loss of nitrogen and may form layers that limit air and water movement.

Sulphur: *Preferred choice:* Elemental sulphur; fresh green organic matter; cabbage leaves. **Note:** Elemental sulphur does not leach from the soil as sulfate forms do. To correct a sulphur deficiency purchase sulphur, some-

times called “flowers of sulphur” from a garden centre or mineral supplier. Use as a maximum of 0.5 per cent of the original heap.

Magnesium: *Preferred source:* Epsom salts; fresh green lawns and weeds. *Ideal source:* lawn clippings. *Next choice:* finely ground dolomite or mica (micas are a group of silicate minerals). **Note:** To correct a magnesium deficiency, dissolve Epsom salts in a watering can and sprinkle the compost heap as it is constructed.

Trace elements (general): *Preferred source:* kitchen waste. *Ideal source:* fresh green leaves; seaweed (including fresh, liquid and powdered forms); weeds. **Note:** Use a variety of materials to ensure the best spread of trace elements.

Iron: *Preferred source:* dandelion; stinging nettle. *Ideal source:* silver beet; seaweed; iron chelate (this helps keep iron available to the plant). **Note:** Use these materials as a leaf spray. (Leaf sprays: collect; wash and steep in water for several weeks.)

Conclusion: Compost is good. A variety of nutrients is good. And how to tell if your vegetables or other plants are deficient in any way is a whole different story...



Happy composting !!!

A Garden has Grown a Community

By Diane Kelly

Some 9 or 10 years ago the Mermaid Waters Multicultural Garden was established with its mission statement being “To create a friendly, vibrant and healthy community place for the promotion of cross-cultural contact, by building an edible garden, learning organic growing, and encouraging sustainable living.”

Working with the Gold Coast City Council, the founding members established an area in Crocker Park which is a peaceful oasis just behind the shopping centre at the corner of Sunshine Boulevard and Markeri Street. Five large vegetable and herb plots were developed over time and the group had free access to the town water supply; a storage facility; and use of a pavilion which allowed the group to get together each week and share a morning tea and a few hours together to swap their gardening knowledge. Once per season the group members brought along food from their own gardens to combine with what the garden plots were producing – up to sixty people got together to share these occasions.

Each week the community members also worked hard looking after the garden plots – there was always plenty of weeding, watering and planting to do. Ideas, cuttings and seeds were shared and many people developed their own backyard gardens because of the sharing at the park.

Many languages were spoken among the group, ranging from Danish to



Samoan to Chinese, and many different types of seeds and cuttings were contributed to these fellow gardeners. And when you come from a different country and you have to adjust to new foods and flavors in Australia, having access to Okinawa spinach seeds or Pandan cuttings and more is welcome. The group also went on outings to such places as “Bellis” in Brisbane’s bayside and to other gardener’s backyards. And all these things succeeded in building a community.

But, as with all good things, time passes and things change. The garden plots in Croker Park will once again be returned to lawn and the Mermaid Waters Multicultural Garden group won’t be meeting and working together in the same way. Health issues, age, new stages in life and different types of interests mean that, after many years of sharing meals, activities and gardening, maintaining the gardens is not viable.

But, as with all good things, their legacies live on. The members of the group now have a much better knowledge of organic gardening; many have learnt new skills – preparing different foods; being taught a new language by their Club friend/s; and growing their own

food – and most importantly, the friendships are living on. Each week part of the group gets together for a coffee and chat, and so that sense of community continues. Plus the group’s Facebook page is proving effective in keeping the communication and sharing of knowledge and experiences going.

So the gardens may be going, but the mission has been achieved – and some of the areas are still beautiful.



VEGETABLES

MARCH:

Asian Greens, Beans (French), Beetroot, Broccoli, Cabbage, Capsicum, Carrot, Cauliflower, Celeriac, Celery, Chili, Endive, Garlic, Kale, Kohlrabi, Leeks, Lettuce, Mustard Greens, Onions, Parsnip, Peas, Potato, Radish, Shallots, Silverbeet, Snow Peas, Sweet Potato, Sweet Corn, Tomato.

APRIL:

Asian Greens, Beans (French), Beetroot, Broccoli, Cabbage, Carrot, Cauliflower, Celeriac, Celery, Endive, Garlic, Kale, Kohlrabi, Leek, Lettuce, Mustard Greens, Onion, Parsnip, Peas, Potato, Radish, Shallots, Silverbeet, Snow Peas, Spinach, Sweet Potato, Sweet Corn, Tomato, Turnip.

MAY:

Asian Greens, Beans (French), Beetroot, Broad beans, Broccoli, Cabbage, Carrot, Cauliflower, Celeriac, Celery, Endive, Kale, Kohlrabi, Leek, Lettuce, Mustard Greens, Onion, Parsnip, Pea, Potato, Radish, Shalots, Silverbeet, Snow Peas, Spinach, Tomato, Turnip.

HERBS

MARCH

Annual: Borage, Calendula, Chamomile, Chervil, Coriander, Dill, Garlic, Italian parsley, Misome, Mizuna, Nasturtium, Rocket.

Perennials & Bi-Annals: Catnip, Chives, Perennial Coriander, Fennel, Hyssop, Lavender, Lemon Balm, Marjoram, Mint, Mushroom Plant, Oregano, Parsley, Rosemary, Sage, Salad Burnet, Winter Tarragon, Thyme, Upland Cress, Winter Savoury.

APRIL

Annual: Borage, Calendula, Chamomile, Chervil, Coriander, Dill, Garlic, Italian parsley, Misome, Mizuna, Nasturtium, Rocket.

Perennials & Bi-Annals: Catnip, Chives, Perennial Coriander, Fennel, Hyssop, Lavender, Lemon Balm, Marjoram, Mint, Mushroom Plant, Oregano, Parsley, Rosemary, Sage, Salad Burnet, Winter Tarragon, Thyme, Upland Cress, Winter Savoury.

MAY

Annual: Borage, Calendula, Chamomile, Chervil, Coriander, Dill, Garlic, Giant Red Lettuce, Herb Robert, Italian parsley, Misome, Mizuna, Mustard Lettuce, Nasturtium, Rocket.

Perennials & Bi-Annals:

Catnip, Chicory, Chives, Perennial Coriander, Fennel, Hyssop, Lavender, Lemon Balm, Lovage, Marjoram, Mint, Mushroom Plant, Oregano, Parsley, Rosemary, Sage, Salad Burnet, Winter Tarragon, Thyme, Upland Cress, Watercress, Winter Savoury.

FRUIT TREES

MARCH

Custard Apples: Fertilize trees – 20 gms of organic fertiliser per sq m to drip line. Harvest every 3 to 7 days. If mealy bug is a problem spray individual fruit with pest oil or wipe on metho and water (30% metho + 70% water).

Figs: Close to end of season.

Lychee: Less watering is required, but don't let the trees dry out. If Erinose mite appears, spray every 10 to 14 days with wettable sulphur from pinhead size new growth to fully open and hardened off.

Low Chill Stone Fruit: Water needs to taper off now as trees begin to defoliate.

Mango: If any anthracnose fungus is visible, spray with a copper based spray every 2 weeks, or with 25 mls leaf microbes and 5 grams wettable sulphur per 1 litre of water.

Passionfruit: The water can be tapered off. Harvest fallen fruit under vines every 3-4 days.

Pawpaw: Plant out new trees. Apply boron now. 1 teaspoon per mature tree. Spray leaf microbes (25 ml leaf microbes per 1 litre of water) if black spot is seen.

Persimmon: Main harvest time. Decline water needs. Apply a little super fine lime and gypsum – 50 gms per sq metre of each.

Strawberries: Plant out new runners. If you want to leave last year's plants, prune only.

Bananas: Give stools a high organic potassium fertilizer – 200 grams per stool (any organic fertilizer that has added sulphate of potash).

Citrus: If any fungal problems arise, spray with pest oil and leaf microbes. Add the pest oil + 15 ml per litre of the leaf microbes. This will also control the citrus leaf miner and scale.

Pruning Citrus: Citrus trees need little pruning. If over-crowded, thin out after fruiting. Don't thin oranges or grapefruit severely but mandarins can be shortened back to the second or third shoot down the branch. Lemon trees are taller and less compact so keep them to a size easier to handle. Old trees can be cut severely but will take a year or two to recover and bear.

APRIL

Custard Apples: Peak harvest period. Harvest every 3 to 7 days. Watering can be tapered off. If you have not done your spraying for mealy bug, do it now. Spray individual fruit with pest oil or wipe on metho and water (30% metho & 70% water).

Figs: Taper off the water.

Lychee: Don't let trees dry out. Check for Erinose mite. Spray with wettable sulphur.

Low Chill Stone Fruit: Fertilise trees with a high organic potassium fertilizer, 50 gms per sq meter to the drip line of trees. Prune trees now – 1/3 to 1/4 of the tips can be taken off. Any inward or downward wood can be pruned.

Mango: Apply gypsum if soil pH is 6 or more. If below 6 pH, apply lime. 50 gms per sq m of either. Continue with copper based spray for anthracnose or with 25 mls leaf microbes and 5 gms wettable sulphur per 1 litre of water.

Passionfruit: Water can be tapered off. Harvest fallen fruit every 3-4 days.

Pawpaw: If you have not applied boron, apply now. 1 teaspoon per mature tree. 40% of annual fertiliser can be applied now to mature trees (20 grams per sq meter of a high organic potassium fertiliser).

Persimmon: Main harvest time. Declining water needs. Apply a little super-fine lime and gypsum, 20 gm of each per sq m.

Strawberries: Plants should be coming away well. A little organic potassium fertiliser can be applied now. Use fish emulsion or kelp spray regularly over plants to keep in good health. Add 20 mls molasses per litre of water + 10 mls leaf microbes.

Bananas: De-sucker plants, cutting at ground level. Cut out centre with a sharp downward motion around the circumference to the centre, forming a well. If they do not die, use 20mls of kero to the bottom of this well.

Citrus: If any scale and fungal problems still exist a further spray with pest oil and leaf microbes will be needed. Add the pest oil + 15 ml per litre of the leaf microbes. Early

varieties can be picked this month.

MAY

Custard Apples: Peak harvest period, harvest every 3-7 days. Don't let trees dry out.

Figs: Dormant period. Don't let trees dry out.

Lychee: Don't let trees dry out. Fertilise trees this month. Mature trees (5 years and older) 1.5 kg organic fertiliser with sulphate of potash added per sq m to the drip line of trees. (For trees under 5 years, use only 50 grams.)

Low Chill Stone Fruit: Fertilise trees with 50 gms of organic fertiliser with sulphate of potash added per sq m to the drip line of trees. Prune off 2/3 of new growth.

Mango: Apply gypsum if soil pH is 6 or more. If below 6 pH, apply lime, 50 gms per sq m of either. Mature trees (5 years and older) 1.5 kg organic fertiliser with sulphate of potash added per sq m to the drip line of trees; water in well.

Passion-fruit: The water can be tapered off. Harvest fruit every 3-4 days under vines.

Pawpaw: If you have not applied boron, apply now. 1 teaspoon per tree. 40% of annual organic fertiliser can be applied e.g. 20 gms per sq m.

Persimmon: Decline water needs. Apply a little garden lime and gypsum, 20 gms per sq m.

Strawberries: Plants should be coming away well. A little organic fertiliser with sulphate of potash can be applied now. Use fish emulsion or kelp spray regularly over plants to keep in good health.

Bananas: Keep up the water. When fruit are formed, bag fruit with banana bag, tie bag to top of stem and drape down to bell. Leave open at bottom for air. Cut off bell to get larger fruit.

Citrus: Harvest should start this month, and continue until August. Keep up watering.

Avocado: Add garden lime, 20 grams per sq m to drip line and gypsum 20 grams per sq m again to drip line. Early varieties can be picked. Don't let trees dry out.