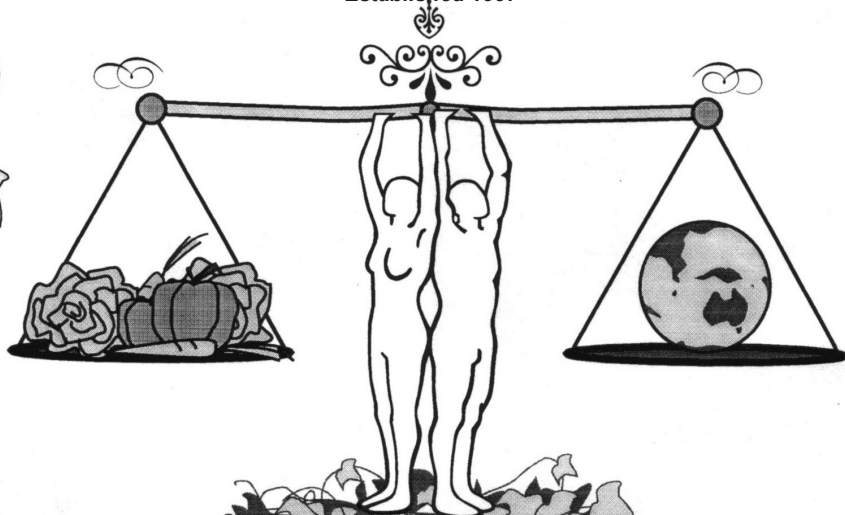


GOLD COAST ORGANIC GROWERS Inc.

Established 1997



NEWSLETTER

Volume 28, 2024 Issue 2
GARDENING IN WINTER

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OUR NEXT MEETING: JUNE 27, 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 - \$1each 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
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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: 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:
Jill Barber, Diane Kelly, Lorraine James, 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 gardeners 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 season's 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

Place-Holder Plants By Leah Johnston

Here's a mini space-filler tip about place-holder plants. Your soil wants to grow things, if you don't give it plants to grow, then weeds will grow.

Recently my amaranth plants (from GCOG - thanks Jill!) self seeded everywhere. It was actually handy having them quickly shoot up and shade other plants during summer and fill gaps to protect the soil. Once I was ready to grow something in that spot I just easily pulled them out and put them in the compost them, and the soil was alive, moist and pliable from growing something!

Speaker Recaps

January meeting by Leah Johnston

At our January meeting we welcomed speaker Graham Lancaster, the founding Senior Director/Manager of the Environmental Analysis Laboratory (EAL) at Southern Cross University. EAL is a commercial research and teaching analytical laboratory that has been operating for more than 30 years, specialising in agricultural and environmental analysis of waters, soils, plants, composts and fertilisers.

Graham said that organic farming, also called biological farming, carbon farming and regenerative farming, promotes and enhances soil health to support the soil biological foodweb to enable healthy plants and animals to naturally combat diseases, pathogens and cycle nutrients.

In natural systems and organic gardens the plants don't absorb nutrients directly, they need the microbes in the soil to break them down and make them accessible to the plants. In contrast, industrial farming uses synthetic fertilisers that were engineered as soluble nutrient salts which are "designed to bypass soil biology and directly feed roots osmotically or by cation exchange," Graham explained.

The way industrial farming tills the top layer of the soil it releases a lot of carbon into the atmosphere, whereas regenerative farming protects the top layer of the soil and keeps the carbon locked into it.

Healthy soil is amazing!

It:

- sustains biological activity

- stores and cycles nutrients
- decomposes organic matter
- inactivates and binds toxic compounds
- suppresses pathogens
- protects water quality and enhances catchment health.

Happily Graham reported that he has found more farmers adopting regenerative farming methods and ditching the chemicals because it gives them better results!

The more biology (life) your soil has the healthier it is and the better your plants will grow. Graham said the cheapest way to test your soil biology is to bury some clothes and if they decompose quickly then you have great soil.

Graham explained the importance of PH testing your soil: if it's too acidic and drops below 3 it will allow more iron and aluminium to be absorbed into your plants - which you then eat. If your PH is right the naturally occurring metals will be bound in the carbon in the soil and won't go into the plants you are eating.

February meeting by Leah Johnston

GCOG member Sarah Drew spoke to us about Backyards for Biodiversity (BFB), a Sunshine Coast organisation which helps people make their backyards more biodiverse.

When Sarah moved to Mudgeeraba she noticed she didn't have many birds or butterflies visiting her garden and she got sick of mowing her big lawn. BFB sent her information about how to improve her backyard for native wildlife with tips including:

- Grow local native plants.

- Provide flowering and fruiting plants, preferably native.
- Control weed plant species and remove or limit lawn.
- Provide species-specific shelter: mulch, rocks and logs, nesting boxes.
- Grow some food, and some native food for your family.
- Enclose pets.
- Avoid use of chemicals when controlling pests or other problems.
- Provide clean water.
- Learn about and celebrate nature.

Many native species are endangered and we can help their plight by growing their food plants and providing a safe habitat. For example, glossy black cockatoos can only feed on sheoak trees.

March meeting by Lorraine James

On Thursday, 28 March our club was treated to an amazing presentation from **Brymac Native Bees**, a native bee rescue and education centre from the Sunshine Coast.

Dean and Helen Bryant's talk was full of interesting facts and we were very lucky that they had driven three and a half hours to visit us the Thursday before Good Friday.

Helen and Dean gave us the following information:

There are over 2,000 species of Australian native bees, ranging from small solitary bees to the social stingless bees – these bees do not sting but can bite if agitated. Native bees are important for native ecosystems, pollinating native plants and they provide value to Australian agriculture.

A bee takes 50 days to hatch, while queens take 70 days. Hard-working na-

tive bees must consume 13 grams of honey to make 1 gram of wax, which they use to produce the wax cells out of their abdomen. Nurse bees then take this wax and make hatch cells out of it. The queen bee will inspect the wax cell and if it is not up to her standards (e.g. not enough honey in it, etc.) she will flap her wings until the nurse bees fix up the cell.

The queen is four times the size of the other bees. In some species the queen lives for 18 months to two years, whereas in other species she can live for up to six years! Native bee queens mate with one bee only in the hive, then she will sit in a honey pot for four days while the nurse bees feed her. After that, she is ready to lay eggs.

There are two types of bee swarms; one where the drones have been booted out of the colony after the queen has been mated and one where a rival hive is trying to take over. This is more frequent now because humans have destroyed much of the bees' native habitats.

Terracotta pots upside down make a perfect home for the bees and the Bryant's have rescued bees from letter boxes, ice



Australian Blue Banded Bee
Amegilla spp.

cream containers, potting mix bags, logs and water meters. Unfortunately, some people think they are flying ants and kill them.

Ants are native bees biggest and worst pest – they can get into the hive and destroy it. If a hive is under stress, it is susceptible to other pests – small hive beetle, phorid fly, syrphid fly and the pollen beetle.

Issues that can impact native bees are brood collapse disorder, thermoregulation (don't use plastic hives), cadaghi tree (flowering gum where the seed pods can germinate but also full of resin with a low melting point which can lead to suffocation) and the African tulip tree. This tree has evolved to be pollinated by hummingbirds and the little bees get trapped in the flower and die. These flowers are also toxic to the bees – cut these trees down!

Another problem is competition with the European bee – the Euros get out of bed at 12 – 13 degrees C, whereas the native bees don't become active until about 20 degrees C. The Euros can take all the available food, leading to starvation for the native bees.

Be very careful with commercial bee hotels that you buy – often these are made from imported timber and fumigated. They are toxic to the bees for about two years! To make a bee hotel, the tubes (bamboo, paper straws, pipe, etc) should be at least 12 – 15 cm long, with a circumference of 2 – 15 mm. Commercial bee hotels are often way too big in the circumference and too short in the length. Google DIY bee hotels and make one yourself. Keep bee hotels under cover, out of the rain and baking sun.

Compost Making Workshop By Jill Barber

It was a lovely day, and my daughter had invited me to go with her to see her newly acquired plot in the Varsity Vegies Community Garden. There was also going to be a compost making demonstration that I might be interested in, though I had been making my own compost very successfully for years. Might learn something, I thought, and it would be an experience...always interesting to see how differently people do things.

The garden was lovely: all the beds were curved; always easy on the eye to see curves in constructions. The president of the club, Chris, was there, and very friendly and helpful, as were the two young women who had started the compost making venture, Seed the Ground, in order primarily to save degradable material from landfill. They and their team, mostly volunteers, it seemed, go around regularly to cafes collecting their coffee grounds as well as food waste. Green garden waste, the nitrogen component for hot composting, would be from that community garden and others where they have set up as well, and for the dry, carbon element they collect bins of sawdust.

This day, it turns out, was their inaugural day for their new compost bin, designed by Jess, custom built, on a slab and with metal mesh sides to keep out vermin, and divided into two compartments. The front panels slide up and out of grooves, for ease of access, and a corrugated iron, hinged lid, which can be propped open, keeps out too much rain or sun. After cutting the fancy ribbon, volunteers proceeded to layer in sawdust from the

big garbage bin, and coffee grounds and food scraps they'd collected that morning. Members of the community garden were instructed to place their cuttings in a big garbage bin till the composters were ready to layer in some more.

After a tour of the garden for those interested, we were invited to join them for the morning tea they'd prepared, in the open shed for members' use.

I did learn something that morning that was worth a lot for me: my current composting system, being too wet and guggy, is not working because it has an imbalance – way too much nitrogen items, and needing heaps more dry waste to soak it up. They very generously let me take a good amount of the sawdust they had, and, as it happened, two days later I was invited to a tour of a local woodworking shed which I didn't know was just five minutes away from me! How perfect that was! There I found a ready supply of sawdust, and after adding heaps to my compost and working it in, I'm delighted to say that my compost is looking and feeling way better, with a pleasing amount of heat coming from it. What wonderful connections came my way, just when I needed them!



Gardening Wisdom...

By Diane Kelly

One of the things that I do when I am working on articles for the Club newsletters is that I have a look on the internet to confirm what I am reading in my library of gardening books. While I am very satisfied with the books that I have collected over the years, ranging from authors such as Annette McFarlane to Jackie French to the late Peter Cundall to Marjorie Bligh and Esther Dean (1977 edition with a foreword from Allan Searle) and on to the Seed Savers' Handbook and more, I find that googling "beetroot" or "what is the actual definition of biennial" gives me a wider perspective.

Today as I was writing about what vegetables we can grow in winter, I decided to have a bit of relaxation... I googled "quotes about gardening". I hope you enjoy the following bits 'n' pieces – some are true, some are droll, some make you think... and they are all about gardening:

From actor Helen Mirren – "Gardening is learning, learning, learning. That's the fun of them. You're always learning".

"The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago. The next best time is today." – a Chinese proverb.

"What I say is that, if a man really likes potatoes, he must be a pretty decent sort of fellow." – by A.A. Milne. Written by the author of "Winnie the Pooh" and so thoroughly English!

A Chinese proverb – "All gardeners know better than other gardeners".

"My neighbor asked if he could use my lawnmower and I told him of course he

could, so long as he didn't take it out of my garden". Eric Morecombe (British comedian and obviously a very smart person!)

Abraham Lincoln said "We can complain because rosebushes have thorns – or rejoice because thorn bushes have roses".

"If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need" - Marcus Tullius Cicero. Although this was written in around 50BC, it is one of my favourite sayings – both gardening and a good book bring peace.

"No single sort of garden suits everyone. Shut your eyes and dream of the garden you'd most love then open your eyes and start planting. Loved gardens flourish, boring ones are hard work" – a quote from Australian gardener and author Jackie French.

William Shakespeare (in his play "Hamlet") wrote "Do not spread the compost on the weeds". In the story, this

is not actually about gardening. However, please see the photo to show just what happens when something you don't want growing in front of your garden gate takes hold in your compost heap!

Penelope Keith (British Actor and Margot in "The Good Life" for those of us who remember the series) – "I plant a lot of trees. I am a great believer in planting things for future generations. I loathe the now culture where you just live for today."

And an encouraging word or two from Vita Sackville (English author and garden designer): "The most noteworthy thing about gardeners is that they are always optimistic, always enterprising and never satisfied. They always look forward to doing something better than they have ever done before".

Number twelve in this list is a picture – after all, "a picture is worth a thousand words".

So for all of the Gold Coast Organic Growers members:



Getting to Know... Janet Shearer

By Diane Kelly

Looking back through the various "Getting to Know..." series of articles for the Club newsletter which started back in February 2012 (thank you for that first interview – Roger and Pauline!) I realized what a vast range of experience and friendships our Club members have to offer.

Today's chat with Janet Shearer was no different. I was welcomed into Janet's home and offered a cup of tea as we chatted about life, Janet's garden and what she has learnt about growing things since becoming interested in gardening and then joining the Gold Coast Organic Growers several years ago.

Janet moved to her Varsity Lakes home some twenty years ago and this turned out to be one of my main impressions of the interview – just how much a garden grows and produces if it is cared for on a long-term basis. Janet's dream was that "I wanted my children to pick something off a tree and enjoy the goodness" and that thought continues today as she is able to harvest mandarins, passionfruit, dragon fruit, lemons, finger limes, sweet potatoes and much more from the well-established plants in her garden.

Janet has always enjoyed being outdoors – that time is her relaxation and achievement – and her children knew that if they interrupted her when she was gardening then she would put them to work! She did not come from a family of gardeners – her mother used to grow rosella bushes and make jam,



Weighted mulberry branches for easy fruit picking

and they did keep chooks in their property in Dutton Park but Janet was not taught about growing things. We had a chat about this concept – my parents were both very keen gardeners, but I don't remember actually being taught about how to grow vegetables or flowering plants. It may have been a style of the times, but how much knowledge has been lost that could have been passed on!

In 1991 Janet moved to Nerang and some gardening was done, but it was not until Janet moved to Varsity Lakes that her interest in planting and harvesting food grew. The property on which Janet lives has clay soil, which Janet described as being like quicksand. Rather than remove any of the soil she has worked on improving it by adding lots of mulch – sugar cane mulch by the trailer load is obtained from Jacob's Wells and successfully applied. There are bales around by the side of the house which are aging and which we imagined are just full of garden worms! Janet's back and front yard receive almost full day sunshine and only the southern side is shaded – this means Janet has become aware of

how much effect the heat can have on vegetables such as lettuce etc. The block slopes down to the back and an area in the middle tends to retain moisture, and the front yard has a problem with rain run-off that doesn't manage to go anywhere – the front lawn is very luxuriant!

So what is Janet growing? There are four passionfruit plants in the backyard and all are doing very well. The only problem they have had is that “something” was eating the green, outer skin of the fruit and causing them to fall off. Janet added a number of plastic snakes (enough to scare an interviewer who came across them unexpectedly!) to the tree in which the passionfruit vines have entwined themselves – and there has been no problem with damaged fruit since! So the mystery remains as to who was actually doing the damage.

The fruit production continues – dragon fruit (see photo of morning tea); bananas (cavendish); papayas; blue berries (Janet moves these around in pots to seek the right shade/sun ratio); mandarins (one tree is at least twenty years old and is possibly suffering from borers); peaches; lemons; finger limes; mulberries (enough to make pies to give to

friends and the excess to sell on Market Place); strawberries in a raised bed (safely netted) and pineapples. Janet also grows parsley (self sown), perpetual spinach and gardenias (Janet was given the twelve plants and they now make a hedge along the front of the property. She tells the story of a lady that often rides past on her bike with her daughter on the back and how she stopped and asked may she have a gardenia bloom because her daughter kept pointing and saying “denia”. It was a very apt example of a parent having educated the next generation about growing things!)

I was interested when Janet explained that she has given up on growing everyday food such as lettuce and tomatoes as they have been just too much work. Because of the full-sun exposure of the block a lot of care and time would be needed to look after them, so instead Janet has gone underground and has planted vegetables such as sweet potatoes and turmeric. She has also concentrated on fruit trees that don't require as much constant attention and yet are producing very well.

I asked Janet what her favourite thing was growing at the moment and her



answer was “dragon fruit”. She had prepared a bowl of pieces for us to have for morning tea and her enthusiasm was warranted – they were delicious and so sweet! Janet hand-pollinates some of the flowers herself (dragon fruit flowers only bloom for one night, so the chances of insect pollination are limited) and she feels that this results in larger fruit. She has some plants growing in her front yard and they have caught the attention of neighbours who want to learn more about them – and Janet is willing to share some of the fruit because she feels that this is what gardening is all about.

Janet has added lots of mulch to her trees around the backyard and she adds rock minerals and Sea Sol to the trees – she feeds the citrus trees a couple of times a year and they seem to have few problems – just some leaf miner at the moment. The mandarin tree has been a bit of a worry with borers and Janet has concluded she may have “killed it with kindness”. But the damaged limbs have been removed and time will tell how the rest go. The fruit has been attracting stink bugs but they are just removed and aren’t a huge problem.

I asked Janet about what other hobbies she has. Travel is a big interest; Janet has a broad social life and welcomes lots of friends to her home; and she has children and grandchildren – but the one thing she would not give up is her gardening. She enjoys providing garden produce to share with her friends. Janet has also recently joined a singing group and they will be performing at the Mudgeeraba Street Party in May (an event well-worth attending as it is now in its 16th year!).

There are lots of gardening books in Janet’s library and she enjoys watching

“Gardening Australia”. She likes to understand things and has an interest in “knowing thy enemy” – in other words, she enjoys reading about spiders and other challenging insects. Janet has learnt to respect such visitors and now looks under leaves to see how they live and tries to understand their behavior. A lesson she has also learnt was taught by a bee – she was watering a plant and accidentally sprayed a bee that ended up looking very sad and waterlogged and she realized that it is our responsibility to be mindful about what we are doing in the garden and don’t damage insects or other wildlife.

I asked Janet when did she join the Organic Growers Club and it was around 2020 when we were meeting in the hall behind the Pines Shopping Centre. At that time she was unaware of gardening organically but was told that the Club educated people, and so she was convinced to come along. Janet enjoys the learning and sharing of information that occurs during our meetings and values the education – and as a compliment to those experienced gardeners among us she commented that she “likes the knowledge from people who are not arrogant”. We then agreed that nature, gardening, failing and learning tends to keep us humble! Janet has also appreciated the chance to learn about things she hasn’t been aware of before – bush foods; being mindful of what she is doing in her garden; how many new things there are to try. “Education is so important”, said Janet, and she would like to have the chance to get together informally as a group in a garden location and to be shown exactly what to do about plants – how to prune; how to treat bugs and other problems; and to learn about what things do well grown

locally. Janet continued “It is easy to read about things, but it is hard to know how to apply them” – she feels as though she learns through trial and error – and that she sometimes fails her plants.

One of the gardening principles that Janet has learnt through experience is to not do more than she can handle. Time, health, family, work and other life constraints affect us all so Janet tries to only take on what she can manage for now and enjoys that. “Taking on too much is stressful, and we also need to learn from our mistakes and to ask for advice”. Only then, Janet feels, should we go ahead.

I asked Janet about her gardening goals for the future. Her reply? “I would like to maintain and make better what I am currently doing. I would like to increase the productivity of what I am growing”. And why? “Because after I do a session of gardening I feel refreshed and invigorated”. Janet also feels satisfaction and pleasure from eating the food that her garden has produced.

And my final question for our chat was “In one sentence ... what does gardening mean to you?” The answer was “Gardening means calmness and peace; fulfillment and achievement”.

Thank you, Janet – and as for your last sentence – “So say all of us!”

Plants for Free? Learn to Propagate!

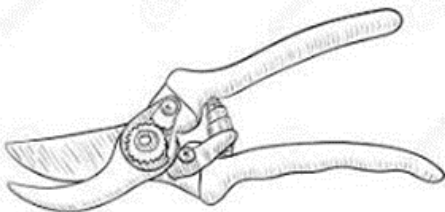
By Diane Kelly

Recently the Gold Coast City Council sent out their weekly newsletter and one of its headlines read “Get Free Trees for your Property”. Now it is not the first time that the Council has made that offer – I remember at the Mudgeeraba Show a couple of years ago you could select a number of native plants from the Council stall to enhance your garden. And there have been many other opportunities from the Council to get free plants since then.

But generally the chances of obtaining free trees are few and far between. So if you had the chance to obtain more of your favourite plants, ones that you have grown that suit local conditions, wouldn't you like some hints on how to obtain them? Well, let's have a look at plant propagation.

Geoff Bryant wrote a book called “Gardens for Free – a Propagation Handbook” and one of his opening sentences in it is that “there is still a considerable sense of wonder and achievement on striking a cutting”. Geoff then goes on to say “you should in no way be put off simply because you feel that your technical knowledge of botany is not up to the task”. And seeing that quite probably applies to most of us, let's have a look at a few basic principles of plant propagation – and how you can increase the number of bushes and shrubs in your garden for no cost.

There are two basic methods of plant reproduction. Firstly there is the basic method used by all species in which they reproduce by pollination and seed



production (and this includes the basic method of reproduction by spores as applicable to fungi and ferns). But then there are the alternatives – reproduction that does not require cross fertilization. These methods include layering, cuttings, grafting, budding and tissue culture.

Some plants carry out this second type of reproduction by themselves – many plants manage to reproduce by forming roots along their stems as long as they are kept in contact with damp soil. Even two different but related plants growing side by side in contact with one another can fuse together and produce plant reproduction. But the question is... how does plant reproduction work? After all, you cannot remove a piece of an animal or a human and have it reproduce... so why does it work with plants?

Basically the answer is that in plants there is a group of cell groups known as “meristems”. These are small clusters of cells that are concentrated around the growing points of plants – the root tips, the leaf nodes etc. These meristems can develop into any section of a plant – the leaves, flowers, roots or stems – it all depends on where they display as they become well developed. If they are under the soil, then they are likely to develop into roots, and those that develop above the ground will develop into leaves, stems and flowers. However – it is possible to take a section of stem growth which would normally be above ground and put it into soil – and then it will develop as though it had grown underground and it will grow roots. Thus we achieve the magic of a successfully struck cutting!

But let's take a few steps back from

that – we will take a look at three general types of propagation – division, cuttings and that done for tubers, corms and bulbs, but before then we need to look at what Geoff Bryant describes as our “Tools of the Trade”.

The first thing we need for learning to be a plant propagator is an “investigative mind and a desire for knowledge”. Geoff recommends that you read everything you can about the subject and, most of all, be prepared to experiment.

Have a good working environment. This means an area that has a bench at which you can either sit or stand for long periods of time. Make sure your bench is well lit; has adequate ventilation; and is kept clean and tidy. You will also need a shelter of some type for seed raising and hardening off of young plants. (A friend built me a deep plastic tray with tall handles and a shade-cloth cover designed to fit and it has worked well to shelter seeds as they propagate and also stop any bush mice eating the seeds I've planted.)

Have a top grade pair of secateurs – and this is one area it is wise not to skimp on. Purchase secateurs that are easy to clean – and Geoff recommends the types that have replaceable blades.

A good sharp knife – or even two because it will be handy to have one for general use and then one for very detailed use. Keep that second knife really sharp as you will need it for budding and grafting. Again, buying a knife which has replaceable blades is a good decision.

In his book Geoff then goes on to recommend a list of items 5-13. These

are things that make your propagating efforts easier and more successful. So consider having a good quality spade; a sharpening stone (for keeping your secateurs, knives and spade in top condition); a hand mister (a spray bottle to keep your cuttings moist); trays and pots; a soil sieve (essential for making consistent seed-raising mixes); root forming hormones (known as “auxins”, these speed up the growing process); soil mixes (Geoff prefers his home-made mixes to bought varieties); and other practical items such as labels, marker pens; cleaning rags, tape etc. And Geoff also recommends you have a notebook or a diary to record what things are done when!

Now by this time you might be feeling somewhat overwhelmed. So let's start off with the very simple method of propagation of **Division**.

Division: This is the method of simply breaking up established clumps of plants into a number of smaller pieces. There are a couple of things to consider, such as knowing when to divide; knowing what the smallest amount is best to divide plants in to; and what after-care may be required.



Plants suitable to propagate by division fall into three categories:

Those that form clumps of fibrous-roots. These roots can be either cut or broken apart; planted; and then regarded as new plants. This type of division can generally be done at any time of the year.

Then there are the plants (such as lilies or flax) that have distinct foliage clusters and fibrous crowns. These can be cut or divided up with only a few roots remaining attached to each division. Such plants should be treated carefully and may need to be planted in some sort of nursery care until they are established, although in most cases they will survive if planted out straight away. Dividing this type of plant can occur throughout the year, but is generally more successful in early spring.

The third category of plants is those who have fleshy crowns with foliage emerging at many points. These require careful cutting and each division will need at least one growth point if it is to survive. This type of division is best done just as the plants are emerging from dormancy and when the first hints of new growth allow you to easily identify the actively growing shoots.

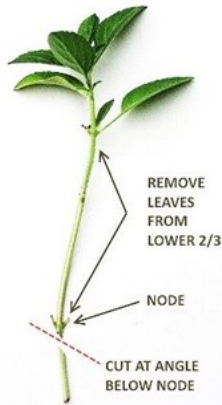
The over-riding factor to dividing up plants in this manner – using a spade or a knife – is that each division should contain some portion of root (the more the better) and at least one growing or dormant shoot, preferably more. And a hint... until you have the necessary experience, err on the large side of each section.

Cuttings: If your gardening experience has been anything like mine, you have been to a friend's place; you've admired that pretty, flowering plant that is attracting bees; and you've taken home one or two cuttings – or more, depending on how optimistic you are. Successful or not, you will be reassured by Geoff that successful propagating by cuttings is well within the scope of the average gardener.

There are six main types of propagating

by cuttings: stem, softwood; semi-hardwood; hardwood; root; and then leaf cuttings. So let's have a look at each of them:

Stem cuttings: By far the most common style of stem cutting is tip cutting which includes the growth at the end of the stem. These can be cut from a main or side shoot. Stem cuttings don't *need* to include a growing tip if the wood is of the right type, but generally tip cuttings will strike more quickly. Prepare the cutting (whose length should cover two or three nodes) by stripping off the lower leaves; trimming the remaining foliage; dipping the cutting in root-forming hormone and then insert in cutting mix.



Softwood cuttings: This type of cutting is usually taken in the spring and are quick to strike. They are taken from a soft section of the young, growing stem of a plant and because they are prone to wilting and drying out rapidly they do need considerable care. Spray misting works well with softwood cuttings.

Semi hardwood cuttings: This method is used for deciduous or evergreen plants and the cuttings tend to be quite firm as they are taken from where the green stem is starting to turn brown. They are typically larger than softwood cuttings, but still require adequate moisture and humidity.

Hardwood cuttings: These are pieces

of stem from deciduous shrubs or trees taken during winter when the plant is dormant and has lost its leaves (the plant will re-shoot in spring). The stems are very firm and hardy.

Root cuttings: This is a method that can be used to propagate plants such as comfrey and horse-radish. Dig up the parent plant; shake the soil from the roots; and then cut each root into 10 centimetre sections from the tip of the root. Remember to leave some root remaining on the main plant so it can be re-planted. Each root section will turn into an individual plant. The Gardening Australia article on this method says that you can put the root cuttings into a prepared trench, cover them, and then transplant them into their permanent beds when they begin to shoot. Water the cut root pieces well – and don't forget to label what you have planted!

Leaf cuttings: There are a few methods for taking leaf cuttings. Firstly, an example of petiole cuttings (a method commonly used for African Violets). In the past I've done this – you remove a leaf from the plant (choose a healthy-looking one); trim the stem (petiole) back to 25-50mm long; and then put the stem and enough leaf of the cutting into the soil and cover them so that the leaf remains standing upright. With other plants, the actual leaf can be cut in to parts and each is planted – but make sure you know which way is up for the plant to grow. Small plantlets should start to appear within 6-8 weeks.

Finally, let's take a quick look at propagating tubers and corms:

Tubers: A tuber (such as potato; ginger, yam and garlic) is an underground stem of a plant that acts as a food reservoir. Tuberous plants are commonly deciduous perennials that experience a period

of dormancy, such as when your potato plants dies off. You can then harvest the produce you need, and also save a number of the potatoes for planting out for the next crop. To achieve maximum production, cut the tubers into pieces for re-planting. Again, as with other cuttings, plant the tuber or pieces right side up – where the eyes are facing.

Corms: A less common name, corms are like a bulb, but differ in three ways – a corm doesn't have the scales of bulbs; a corm withers away and a new and larger corm forms on top; and corms form their roots around a central core. Once the papery covering of a corm is peeled away you will be able to see growth eyes – cut the sections up as with a tuber, but ensure that at least one eye per section is retained. Examples of plants with corms: elephant garlic; taro; freesia; water chestnuts and celeriac.

I'm sure many of us remember the times when Maria has talked about just how many vegetable plants can be produced from a packet of seeds – in contrast to buying a lettuce; some tomatoes or snow peas (still selling at around \$25.00 per kilo in the supermarket) from the shops. So the concept of propagating by cuttings is similar – don't pay \$15.00 to \$20.00 for a potted plant – grow your own via cutting from a plant in your garden that has successfully been grown in our local area.



What Vegetables Can We Grow In Winter?

By Diane Kelly

Back in the early 1900's American author H.P. Lovecraft wrote "My favourite outdoor activity is going back inside". But Mr Lovecraft lived in New England USA, where winters are long and cold and where it snows a lot so maybe he had good reason to feel that way.

However, here on the Gold Coast our average winter temperature is 21 degrees, so we have good reason to be outside enjoying our backyards – and growing some vegetables at the same time.

So the question, as autumn fades into the sunset, is "what vegetables can we grow in winter?" For this edition of the newsletter I've chosen four vegetables – three are considered easy or very easy to grow, and number four is considered difficult.

Easy to grow: Beetroot. This is a vegetable that doesn't appreciate excessive heat and humidity, so it will do well when planted during March to September. The root tubers can be boiled, steamed or baked (wrapping them in tin foil to bake keeps any juice stain at a minimum) and enjoyed eaten hot, or they can be grated and eaten raw when added to a salad. The leaves can also be eaten raw or they can be simmered and teamed with roasted beets, lemon and yoghurt.

Beetroot come in a range of shapes and colours from deep red to yellow or white. The seeds can be planted in seed trays as they transplant well as long as they are kept moist when

moving them, or you can put the seeds directly into the garden bed. The soil should be prepared to a pH level of 6.5 to 7.5 and the area needs to receive plenty of sunlight and adequate watering. Be careful not to add too much manure to the soil where you are growing beetroot because too much nitrogen will result in plenty of top growth, but at the expense of root development.

It is recommended that beetroot seeds be soaked in warm water just prior to planting as this speeds up germination. Beetroot seeds are clustered together so if you end up with multiple seedlings, remember to thin them back to just the one plant – if removed carefully, the thinnings can be transplanted to produce additional plants.

As the beetroot tubers begin to swell they tend to force themselves up out of the soil so you may need to hill the plants to keep them vertical. When the tubers reach about 10cm in diameter they are ready to harvest because they will become tough and fibrous if left much longer. Beetroot are largely free of pest and disease problems, although the foliage may get chewed by insects. Saving the seeds of beetroot is considered “for the accomplished seed saver”. One of the reasons for this is that the plants need short nights and long days to initiate flowering. Beetroot is both wind and insect pollinated, so different varieties will need to be isolated from each other. But, if you do achieve saving the seeds, you will be pleased to know that they can keep up to four or six years!

Easy to grow: Silver beet. When I went shopping this week I saw containers full of rich, green silver beet and, seeing it can be eaten steamed or raw



(or battered and fried in the Italian way), it is another versatile plant to consider growing this winter.

Surprisingly silver beet is part of the same family as beetroot – *Chenopodiaceae* (coming from the Latin “cicia” which is the name of the common beet) but silver beet differs in that it does not produce a bulb. “Silver beet” is the name given to the plant pictured here – it has the dark green, crinkled leaves. Then there is “perpetual spinach” (also known as “spinach beet”) which has the green stems and vibrant, lighter green leaves. And then there are the chards which have red or yellow stems and lighter green leaves. As a general rule, the paler the leaf colour, the more subtle the flavour.

The “Seed-Savers Handbook” describes each cluster of seeds as a “multigerm” which will contain between two and five seeds. So if you plant an unbroken cluster you will need to thin out the plants. An alternative is to break the clusters up by placing them in a bag and then softly pressing against them with a rolling pin. Another hint is that it is wise not to over-manure the plants as undesirable nitrates will concentrate in the leaves and turn them blueish. As with beetroot, soak the seeds in warm water prior to planting. The seeds can be sown directly into the garden bed (at a depth of 1-2 cm) or put into seed trays to be transplanted as seedlings, and they should germinate within 10-14 days.

Choose a spot that has fertile soil; good drainage; and is sheltered from strong winds to plant your silver beet. The plants will require plenty of nitrogen, potassium and water to produce large, well-shaped leaves – if they are water or nutrient-stressed, then they are more likely to bolt to seed.

When it is time to harvest, choose the largest, outside leaves (new growth forms on the inside of the plant) and always leave 4-5 leaves on the plant. It is also a good idea to balance the frequency of harvesting with the rate at which the plants are producing replacement foliage. And, as we all know from experience, it is necessary to check the plants regularly for snails, slugs and any other unwelcome visitors.

Easy to grow: Kale. Kale is a part of the *Brassicaceae* family – named by the Romans as a term for “cabbage” - and is part of the group also known as “collards” or “borecole”. They are actually non-heading cabbages that produce smooth leaves (collards) or frilly leaves (kale) and which have a long growing/harvesting season. Leaves can be tightly curled; oak-leafed or flat and come in a range of colours. The plants that are sold as ornamental varieties are edible, but usually inferior in taste to the vegetable varieties.

Kale is regarded as the hardiest of all the brassicas but their seedlings should be planted deeply as that will produce a more stable plant that won't topple over as easily. As with headed cabbages, kale are best planted so that the first set of true leaves is at ground level. Space the seedlings out at 40cm or more for easy harvesting. Kale are hungry feeders so a regular supply of nutrients is required for a continuous

harvest of leaves. Hilling compost around the stems of established plants will add extra nutrients as well as stabilizing top heavy plants – although you may need to stake plants that are grown for six months or more.

You can start harvesting your kale plants after about eight weeks and they should continue producing for up to twelve months or more. Kale can be enjoyed in a number of ways ranging from a simple sauted kale with garlic and olive oil touched with a few red chilli flakes (pictured) to a pork and kale soup and on to a more elaborate kale salad with cranberries, almonds and goat cheese.



Difficult to grow: Onions. Difficult to grow or not, where would we be without onions to flavour our stews, soups, casseroles and sandwiches? Onion is a hardy biennial (meaning that it takes the plant two years to complete its biological life cycle) that originated in the southern parts of Russia and Iran. It was interesting to read that UN officials have found old varieties of onions in Iran that show resistance to thrip (and if you've ever had an infestation of them in your shallot patch you will know how useful that would be!).

There is a wide variety of onions, ranging from tree or top set onions; potato onions; shallots; bunching onions; and self-perpetuating onions. Onion seeds rapidly lose viability so ensure fresh supplies for planting and be prepared for

slow germinating (14-21 days) and slow growth of seedlings. Direct sowing of onion seed is preferred as transplanting is fiddly and should be done at 10cm intervals (or thinned out to that distance) and 30cm between rows. Add the onion seeds to moderately rich soil that has perfect drainage and make sure the plants are able to grow in full sun. The advice is to grow onions after lettuce or cabbage where the soil has been well prepared, but where no excess nitrogen exists. If the soil in which your onions are grown is too rich, then it will produce top growth at the expense of the bulbs – and the bulbs don't keep as well after harvesting. You may note that onions tend to pull themselves up to the surface of the soil as they grow, but they don't require hilling.

When it is time to harvest and the bulbs are mature (at around 24 weeks) cease watering so that the onions are cured – this will give maximum storage life. Traditionally onions are harvested when the tops brown off, but they can be picked at any time. Also, bending the foliage a few weeks before harvest can help force the bulbs to dry off more quickly and completely. Once the bulbs are harvested, store them in a dark, dry and well-ventilated area.

One piece of good news about onions and location – they are much sweeter when grown in warm climates. I've read in travel books about people enjoying their raw onions and the Seed Savers Handbook speaks of how the Spanish and Iranians “chomp into them as we eat apples”.

So there are plenty of options for growing vegetables at this time of the year – the planting guides give a wide variety during April through to September. And, seeing we started off this article

with a quote, let's end with another one just in case this turns out to be a very cold, or even a very wet winter – all we have to do is keep on gardening! As Russian playwright Anton Chekhov wrote

“People don't notice whether it's winter or summer when they are happy.”

VEGETABLES

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, Shallots, Silverbeet, Snow Peas, Spinach, Tomato, Turnip.

JUNE

Asian Greens, Asparagus Crowns, Beetroot, Broad Beans, Broccoli, Cabbage, Carrot, Cauliflower, Celeriac, Celery, Endive, Kale, Kohlrabi, Leeks, Lettuce, Mustard Greens, Onion, Parsnip, Peas, Potato, Radish, Shallots, Silverbeet, Snow Peas, Spinach, Sweet Corn, Tomatoes, Turnips.

JULY

Asian Greens, Asparagus Crowns, Beetroot, Broad Beans, Broccoli, Cabbage, Carrot, Cauliflower, Celeriac, Celery, Endive, Kale, Kohlrabi, Leeks, Lettuce, Mustard Greens, Onion, Peas, Potato, Radish, Shallots, Silverbeet, Snow Peas.

AUGUST

Artichoke, Asian greens, Asparagus, Beans, French, Beetroot, Capsicum, Carrot, Celeriac, Celery, Chili, Cucumber, Eggplant, Endive, Gourd, Kale,

HERBS

Leeks, Lettuce, Luffa, Marrow, Melons, Mustard Greens, Okra, Peanut, Pumpkin, Radish, Shallot, Silverbeet, Squash, Sunflower, Sweet Corn, Sweet potato, Tomato, Zucchini.

MAY

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

Bi-Annuals: 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.

JUNE

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

Perennials & Bi-Annuals: 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.

JULY

Annual: Borage, Calendula, Chervil, Chamomile, Coriander, Dill, Giant Red Lettuce, Herb Robert, Italian parsley,

Misome, Mizuna, Mustard Lettuce, Nasturtium, Rocket.

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

AUGUST

Annual: Borage, Calendula, Chervil, Chamomile, Coriander, Dill, Herb Robert, Italian parsley, Misome, Mizuna, Giant Red Mustard, Mustard Lettuce, Nasturtium, Rocket. Perennials & Bi-Annuals: Catnip, Chicory, Chives, Perennial Coriander, Fennel, Hyssop, Lavender, Lemon Balm, Lovage, Marjoram, Mint, Mushroom Plant, Oregano, Parsley, Rosemary, Sage, Salad Burnet, Thyme, Upland Cress, Watercress, Winter Savoury.

FRUIT TREES

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.

Passionfruit: 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.

JUNE

Custard apples: Harvest every 3 to 4 days as fruit matures. Don't let trees

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

Lychee: Do not let trees dry out. Minimal watering is needed. Check emerging flowers for flower caterpillars. If more than ½ are infested, spray with pyrethrum or garlic spray.

Mango: Don't let the trees dry out.

Passionfruit: Don't let the vines dry out. Keep up the fish emulsion or kelp sprays every month. Small amount of organic fertiliser with added sulphate of potash can be applied to vines, 20 gms per sq m – for example, large vines = 100 gms; small vines = 50 gms. Pawpaw: Spray with wettable sulphur if powdery mildew is a problem. Minimal water. Pick fruit at mature stage with ½ colour to have full flavour.

Persimmon: Dormant period. Minimal water required at this time.

Strawberries: Feed with organic fertiliser with added sulphate of potash. Also use fish emulsion and kelp spray regularly over plants to keep in good health. This will prevent fruit rot. Pick fruit when fully ripe. Keep plants fully watered – try not to wet the berries. This will prevent fruit rot. Mulch plants so the berries do not lie on the soil. Pine needs are good.

Bananas: Keep up the water and bag fruit. 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: Harvesting should be well under way. Keep up watering.

Avocado: Early flowers should appear this month. Keep up water needs. If you

have not applied garden lime and gypsum, apply now as per June instructions.

JULY

Custard apple: Harvest every 3 or 4 days as fruit matures. Don't let trees dry out. Apply garden lime to soil – 20 grams per sq m to drip line – for example, a mature tree, 1kg.

Figs: Keep well mulched.

Lychee: Do not let trees dry out. Minimal watering is needed. Check emerging flowers for flower caterpillars. If more than ½ are infested, spray with pyrethrum or garlic spray. **Low chill stone fruit:** Peak water needs. Water trees 2 weeks before flowering and 3 weeks later. In late July start blossom thinning. Winter prune late varieties. 50g of organic fertilizer with sulphate of potash added per sq m to drip line of trees. Mature trees – 1 kg.

Mango: Don't let trees dry out. Continue with copper based spray or leaf microbes for anthracnose if visible.

Passionfruit: Don't let the vines dry out. Keep up the fish emulsion or kelp sprays every month. Small amount of organic fertilizer with sulphate of potash can be applied for vines. Large vines – 1 kg; small vines – ½ kg.

Pawpaw: Spray with wettable sulphur if powdery mildew is a problem. Minimal water. Use copper based sprays or leaf microbes if black spot is about. Pick fruit at mature stage with ½ colour to have full flavour. **Persimmon:** Minimal water required at this time.

Strawberries: Feed with organic fertilizer with sulphate of potash. Spray fish emulsion and kelp regularly over plants

to keep in good health. This will prevent fruit rot. Pick fruit when fully ripe. Keep plants fully watered, but try not to wet the berries. This will also prevent fruit rot. Mulch plants so the berries do not lie on the soil. Pine needles are best for this.

Bananas: Don't let the stools dry out. Keep fruit covered and cut off bells. **Citrus:** Pick mature fruit when fully ripe. Keep up irrigation.

AUGUST

Custard Apple: Leaf loss should occur this month. Low irrigation. Mulch trees. This month is the best time to prune custard apples. 1/3 of old wood needs to be taken off.

Figs: Pruning can be carried out. Be very vigorous. 1/3 can be cut off.

Figs are only produced on new wood of the new season's growth. Give trees a good feed of organic fertiliser with sulphate of potash. Mulch well.

Lychee: Increase irrigation. Flowering should start this month. Fertilise trees with an organic fertiliser with potassium sulphate. Give mature trees 1 kg and small trees ½ kg.

Low chill stone fruit: Carry out final thinning. Stone hardening will occur this month. Continue with high irrigation. Prune out water shoots and dense foliage for better sized fruits. Use fruit fly control programs, for example netting or an attractant method.

Mango: Don't let trees dry out. Once flowering occurs spray with copper based spray or leaf microbes for anthracnose, if visible.

Passionfruit: Vines will start to grow this month. Apply a little organic fertiliser with

sulphate of potash and mulch vines at least 2 to 3 metres out from the base. 1kg for large vines and ½ kg for smaller vines.

Pawpaw: Spray with wettable sulphur in the evenings for spider mite.

Persimmon: Flowering will start in early varieties. Mulch trees. Low irrigation.

Strawberries: Apply small amount of organic fertilizer with sulphate of potash. Keep up irrigation. Pick fruit when fully ripe.

Bananas: Don't let stools dry out. Keep fruit covered and cut off bells.

Citrus: Flowering will occur this month. Increase irrigation. Fertilise tree with organic fertiliser with sulphate of potash, 1kg for large trees and ½ kg for smaller trees.

Brisbane Organic Growers Handbook

Green Manure By Jill Barber

I know it's a bit late to be sharing this (and I know I have written/spoken? about it before), but I find green manuring is such a brilliant way of fairly easy fertilising of our vegetable gardens. It gives a marvelous amount of nitrogen to our soil, adds humus to it, and makes it lovely and loamy. It also is a great way to use those garden beds over January and February (and some of December and March, if the summer's anything like this one we've just had!), when it's too hot, in this part of the country anyway, for most vegetables to grow, and too humid for us to spend much time in it ourselves!



So, it grows readily at this time, and doesn't need to be cut down till the end of the heat, when it's starting to cool down; forking it under traps the nitrogen and adds the humus as it breaks down, and it only takes a week or so for it all to break down and give you wonderful soil to grow in!

At the forking under stage, I also add rock minerals (Vegemate) and my compost, finishing it off with mulch, then let it sit there till I'm ready to plant in it – about now.

If you're thinking it's too much work, it's true that Graeme worked with me on it, but I've done it before myself, and I reckon if an octogenarian can do it, most of us can, and it's so worth it!

