

WORMCAST'S

July 2012

The newsletter of the
Gloucester Garden Centre Worm Club



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Welcome! to four new Worms who joined us this month - there's not much space to mention your names- hope you don't mind!

In the draw for June were Marilyn Schneider, Norma Knox, Gloria Smith and Judy Gilray. First out of the gumboot was Judy, who can collect five roses of our choice next time she's in! For those who missed out, or those who have yet to hand in their card with six stamps, *nil desperandum!* The prize for July will be exactly the same - five choice bush roses!

Winter Works - what to do to keep warm in the coldest months...

You can cut back on watering during winter, but keep an eye on any pot plants that may still dry out quickly. Understand too, that a cool, windy day can dry out your plants quicker than a warm but still day would, so be vigilant!

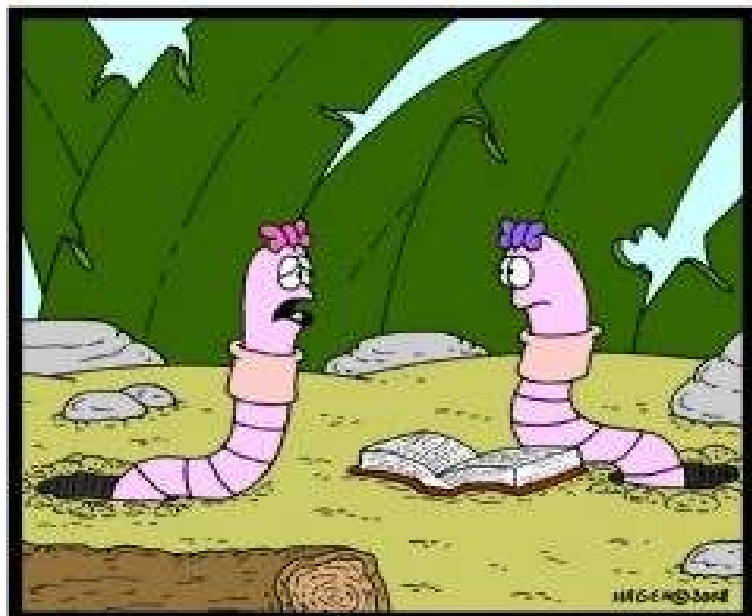
Avoid the application of high-nitrogen fertilizers on frost-sensitive plants as they encourage new growth that is particularly susceptible to frost damage you don't want to spark up new growth *too* early!

Keep your lawns healthy through winter by spiking the ground with a fork to improve water penetration. Use a wire rake to remove lawn thatch, then apply a handful of dolomite per square metre to control moss.

Spray the lawn for bindiis (see Worm's specials later in this edition!), and keep your mower at the highest cut for now.

FAST FACTS: Vermiculite (which is from Latin and means 'full of worms') is a mined mineral, and is heated to form the structure gardeners know. Originally developed as bedding for racehorses allergic to hay, Vermiculite promotes faster root growth and quick anchorage for the young roots of cuttings and seedlings, and helps retain air, plant food and moisture, releasing them as the plant requires them. It's also good for storing bulbs and root crops, and it's cheap!

Other uses include: insulation, as a concrete additive for home-made pizza ovens, as a substrate for incubating eggs, as a bedding for animals allergic to hay, for mushroom growing, for glassblowing, and as a packing material for delicate items! You can also eat it, but it's tasteless, has no nutrition, and is probably poisonous. But you can eat it (if you really want to risk it). Just \$1 per litre!!



I blame TV, computer games and the internet:
None of my kids are bookworms...

Selected readings of my short stories are now available on CD as 'talking books' **FOR FREE** to Worms. You can listen, appreciate, crave for more stories, and then decide to buy the whole book!
Beat *that* for an outstanding offer!

Some Worms Specials up to 99.5% discount off products this month! See later details!!



Am I pea-ing right?

So far so good - no mildew yet in my grossly over-crowded pea-patch. We've harvested our first two peas (although they were a little undersized, and didn't quite make it to the kitchen). **Monthly reports will follow...**



This picture is just for Karen who's afraid of peas
SUFFER KAREN...SUFFER!!!

Brett & Nicole's Limestone Permaculture property at Stroud Road is this month's fascinating 'garden'. The property was originally part of a dairy farm, and still retains a few of the original buildings. It's just over an acre in size, and when the couple took possession just two years ago, it was a blank canvas, ready to 'paint' with crops!

Brett was drawn to permaculture from the ranks of the organic gardening enthusiasts, and strives for sustainable living and perennial organic crop production in harmony with nature. Although there are very occasional (and necessary) exceptions, everything is organic where possible, and there's almost no wastage. The garden is designed to minimise the work required, which is just as well, since despite its comparatively small size, Brett grows an astonishing 140 fruit and nut trees as well as all the vegetables!

The aim is to imitate nature as closely as possible, conserving soil nutrition and water, and planting a complex mix of crops to both utilise space and make use of companion planting for pest and disease management and soil care. Anti-insect netting plays a big part in protecting crops, along with other natural products, and not even leaves or bird droppings are wasted!

In order to keep track of the nutritious food he produces, Brett keeps detailed records of his plantings, including an extensive full plant index, lists of locally occurring plants, a micro-climate design, seed-saving record, and of course a spreadsheet detailing everything that isn't noted elsewhere.

The favoured fertilisers are powdered seaweed, fish emulsion, wood ash for potassium, and poultry manure from Brett's own ducks and chooks. No doubt the family's two Dorper sheep (Nugget & Peaches) contribute their own offerings too! Brett's also a big fan of the herb comfrey, which he uses to provide even more potassium to promote flowering. Comfrey also composts well to release nitrogen, phosphorus and several micronutrients, plus it helps deter slugs and snails and the encroachment of grass into the vege beds. Oh yes, and it's also good to help heal broken bones and swellings in the limbs!

The garden receives at least five frosts a year, but still produces bananas with the right care. The bananas are covered to protect from predators through the warm months, and against the cold during the winter.

Virtually all the veges are now grown from seed - much of it home harvested. Brett's seed rack is well labelled and impressive, and there's almost always something hanging in the shed drying - when I visited it was broccoli, radish and basil.

The property is on an impressive hillside with a great view, but far from being a disadvantage, Brett chose the block for its excellent drainage, and further utilised the gradient with a series of ingenious swales (see notes about swales in this Wormcasts) to catch runoff water and nutrients from further up the slope, so that nothing's wasted.

In June when I had a look round, zucchini, beans, squash, cucumbers and other summer crops weren't in evidence of course, but amongst more familiar plants I saw were peas (growing over the Hills Hoist!), pumpkins, numerous edible flowers (including calendulas and nasturtiums), kiwifruit (with fruit), chokos, paw-paws (with many fruit!), leeks, onions, artichokes, and even some capsicum, tomatoes and chillies yielding their last few fruits for the season, along with heaps of others, as well as some more unusual flora.

"What's that big purpley cabbage-looking thing?" I asked. Brett told me it was purple mustard from the Brassica family. Mustard green manures are tilled into the soil preceding potato, tomato crops etc, to act as bio-fumigants that are toxic to parasitic nematodes. I spotted some tall, purple-flowered Amaranth too - the leaf form is used as spinach, and the grain Amaranth is for making flour and for chook food. The flowers, waving their bright, fluffy panicles 2m and more high, are just plain pretty!

The ride-on mower makes its way comfortably between the swales and the welter of useful plants stops the weeds making their way to the surface - there's very little weeding to do, which is just as well given the intensive scale of the project!

In the charming little dam grows Taro, or 'elephant's ears' - usually an ornamental, but here in this edible garden, the corms are cut off and used as a potato substitute in soups and stews. Brett grows very little that can't be eaten or used somehow else.

At the lower side of the property is a neat and tidy hothouse with twin-skinned corflute cladding, in which grow tomatoes, basil, eggplants, and beetroots, and where Brett holds over the sub-tropical seedlings.

Under ultra-fine vege net (1m x 6m costs \$6.50 from the Garden Centre) grows anything that gets attacked by grubs, such as cabbage, caulis, broccoli, lettuce etc, and even in the smallest vege beds, mini swales have been built to utilise water and stop erosion (see photo). No more cabbage-white butterflies!

The bananas have all been propagated from plants that were there when Brett and his family moved in, and around the Jacoranda grows a profusion of strawberries. The garden must be a paradise for the kids!

And there's never a dull moment - not even in winter! Just two weeks after my visit Brett was at the Garden Centre picking out a few more fruit trees, and plans are afoot at the moment for another hothouse structure, utilising some recycled, and some new materials. Collecting it all was quite an investment in time, but less so in dollars-out. Brett is adept at sourcing cheap recycled materials now, and most of the infrastructure is recycled, although the sheep enclosure shows the very professional finish of quality, well-built fences, gates and shelters.

As usual, the pictures that follow tell many more stories. I think you'll agree that the photos show the healthiness and overall 'feel-good' qualities of this highly productive patch, where the drive is to grow as much as possible as naturally as possible. The first few shots are of the fairly empty block just two years ago, followed by the many improvements and additions made over the last 24 months (compare the 'before and after' scenes!), and finishing up with a few samples of what's going on at the moment.

And so we leave Brett, Nicole and their family working at something they love (at the same time as holding down full-time jobs!), and looking after the land with great devotion and care.

Where do they get their energy? From their overwhelming enthusiasm of course!

Oh yes - and good, wholesome, home-grown produce! It's always easier when you've got a dream to chase!

They're a shining example to us all 😊



The old dairy buildings



These areas are now full of veges!
(See below)



The newly-planted pond



Vege beds developed over the past two years





Comfrey borders



↑ Sugarcane (first used as duck bedding so it feeds *and* mulches!)...
...and old carpet to suppress weeds whilst cucumber and pumpkin vines are allowed free rein later ↓



Bananas growing in a swale



The pond today



Edible flowers: Calendula & Nasturtiums



Wrapped paw-paw, and bananas



Seed raising



Peas, Comfrey, & Hills Hoist!
The peas feed the soil for the grape vines on the 'Hill's Hoist Vineyard'!

(Peas are 'just a bonus'!)



Seed-saving racks



Highly productive swales



Mini swales!



Edible bounty everywhere you look!



Artichoke



Swales - what actually are they?

Artificial swales are long, low mounds designed to manage runoff water, filter pollutants, and increase rainwater infiltration into the soil. Swales as used in permaculture are designed to slow and capture runoff by spreading it horizontally across the landscape. This type of swale is created by digging a ditch along the contour and piling the soil on the downhill side of the ditch to create a level area, usually down as far as the next swale.

Why not start growing YOUR own food?!

Usually **cheaper**, always **tastier** and mostly **more nutritious** (coz they're **fresher!**), plus you know just what's gone into your crop! Here's a baker's dozen of **quick** and **easy** guidelines for anyone who hasn't grown their own vegetables before, and is thinking of having a go. It's all much simpler than you might think!

1. **Find a site that gets at least 6 hours of sun each day if you can.**
2. **Overestimate** the area you need - once it's full and cropping you'll want to extend it!
3. Whether you're planting into the ground or building raised beds, **add as much organic matter as you can** to feed the soil and improve its structure. A sprinkling of lime is beneficial for most veges too - if in doubt please ask us. Never add lime and fertiliser at the same time, or you'll lose the nitrogen into the atmosphere as ammonia - wait a week or so between treatments.
4. **Make sure the drainage is as near perfect as possible.**
5. **There are 3 seasonal vegetable categories:** Spring sown, Autumn sown and all year round. We have information sheets about what to plant at different times, or you can look on our website at www.gloucester-garden-centre.webs.com.
6. **Be gentle with seedlings** planted out of punnets - preferably separate their roots carefully in a bucket of water.
7. **When sowing seed**, make sure you don't cover the seeds too deeply. Most seeds germinate and grow best when covered with about their own diameter of fine soil, but be careful not to let them dry out. Plant peas and beans into moist soil and don't water them until you see the sprouts emerging.
8. **Be consistent with your watering** - too dry causes growth checks or death, and too wet can cause fungal diseases. Watering in the evening can cause mildew - morning watering is best. An occasional good soak encourages deep root systems and drought resistance.
9. **Mulch your veges** with sugarcane to help retain moisture and suppress weeds - but allow space for the plant of course!
10. **Fertilise** at least fortnightly with fast-acting liquid feeds during the growing season, as well as adding more organic compost and bagged manure if you wish. But don't overfeed root crops like carrots or you'll end up with all leaf and no root.
11. **Prevent pests and diseases** as far as possible by keeping a weed-free garden, watering the roots not the leaves, making sure there's plenty of light and a good air flow, and by rotating crops. Crop rotation reduces the build-up of particular pests and diseases, and helps reduce nutrient depletion from the soil. (Ask us about crop rotation if you like).
12. **Pet-friendly snail-bait** is usually a must, or consider Escargo (see later in this Wormcasts for details of Escargo)
13. **After all that**, please ask us about the most eco-friendly controls for pests and diseases - it may be as simple as netting your cabbages to stop the white butterflies. If you have a problem that you can't identify, please bring a sample to the shop so we can try and help you.

WORM SPECIALS!!!

1. Rhubarb & Asparagus Crowns: 3 for \$15!
2. Jerusalem Artichokes: 8 for just \$5!
3. Yacon Corms - not \$1000 each - just \$5 each for Worms! (99.5% discount!!)
4. All potted trees 10% off for Worms!
5. Lime Sulphur - 15% off for Worms!
6. Extra Special for Right Now! - Hose-on Bindii spray - the timing's perfect and the price is right -
- spray now with a **50% discount!!**
7. Escargo just \$17.50 for Worms!
8. 5kg Native plant food ~~\$11.50~~ just \$6!!

Why Worms are smarter than people...



Life is great! No need to hunt or gather food:
A bit of dirt every day is all I need...

Escar-go

This *beautifully* named product costs a little over \$20 a litre, or just \$17.50 if you're a **Worm** (which you are!). With a litre you can paint a strip 100m long which slugs and snails simply won't cross for three or four years. It's not absorbed by the plants or soil, and is totally harmless to animals... even snails! (They just find it extraordinarily distasteful!). It's ideal for raised beds, and will also stop them climbing trellis, poles and trees. **\$17.50 - A Worms-only Special!**

Ages of Sage - Eags of Geas

Sage - *Salvia officinalis* - a Roman centurian at the time of Pliny the Younger, once wrote: "There is no reason for a man to die young when he can grow sage in his garden". It's an all-round elixir for the blood, skin, eyes et al, plus it wards off evil spirits (guaranteed by the Church of the Holy Cabbage - lettuce pray...). Now is a good time to plant this most useful and extraordinary culinary and medicinal herb, but it doesn't like wet feet, so ensure perfect drainage, or plant in pots and hanging baskets. (Tastes great with chicken, turkey, pork, damper and even fish)

Lime or Sulphur?

No! - both - lime-sulphur! - that's what to spray for fungus infections, including black spot and mildew on your recently pruned roses, or those deciduous trees you're just about to cut back. It also kills mites and many insects, especially those that hide in cracks in the bark. Drench the plant and the surrounding soil once you've carted off your prunings. **What's more it's 15% off for Worms this month!**

Treat Bindiis Now!!

If you don't want to hand-weed the spiky little buggers, use our discounted hose-on bindii spray right now while the time is right, ...it's 50% off for Worms!! **Beat that!!**

What NOT to give the chop!

DON'T prune blueberry ash, Grevilleas, Banksias, or Magnolias - they all flower in spring and you'll end up with no flowers. And leave your flowering cherries, peaches and plums alone now for the same reason. But it's not too late to prune your fruiting trees if you haven't got round to it yet... **DO IT NOW!!!**

(Then spray with lime sulphur - it's on special!)



**HAPPY
GARDENING!!**

