Next meeting: Wednesday 8 March 2017

ROGI News

Doors open at 6.15 so members can visit the library, shops, stalls and seed bank or just have a chat before our meeting starts. Please be seated by 7pm ready for the guest speaker.

Salvation Army Church
Cnr McDonald Rd & Macarthur St
ALEXANDRA HILLS

Admission

Members: Gold coin
Visitors: $5

Please bring a plate of food (savoury/sweet or nibbles and preferably home-made) for supper after the meeting.

Tea/coffee provided.

You are very welcome to provide a quality plant to help share plants with other members (see p 22 for more on this) Remember to bring a bag/box/basket to take home your purchases and/or winnings.

Inside this edition

Euphorbia graminea 'Diamond Frost'

This perennial low-growing shrub flowers all year round and produces nectar that attracts beneficial insects such as butterflies and caterpillar-killing tachnid flies. It prefers morning sun and occasional watering. Definitely worth finding a spot for a few of them in your organic garden.

Thoughts from the potting shed

Dear ROGI member

I don't know about you – but I could do with a drink!

I mean water, of course. And as we come to (we hope) the end of a long, dry, brain-frying summer, we can only pray that we will get some rain in our parched back-yards soon.

Despite the recent tantalising weather predictions of a full week of wet weather, if there's any rain falling, it certainly isn't in my neck of the woods. So in the interests of my own mental health, I've decided just to block the BOM weather site for now, and let nature take its unpredictable course.

As they say, 'hope springs eternal', and I know sooner or later, we'll hear the patter of raindrops on our roofs and enjoy the cooling relief the rain will bring. All will be forgiven and forgotten – until next year.

Gardeners and farmers are eternal optimists when it comes to the vagaries of weather – because if you're like me, you're busily planning your fruit and veggie garden for the coming season. For me, it's back to basics with soil preparation and enrichment as the first step. A green manure crop will be dug back into my garden as well as some composted organic matter to improve the soil. This morning I've just received a delivery of sugar cane mulch bales from our friendly cane farmer.

It's one of the best times of year to grow and enjoy a wide range of home-grown edibles. Whatever your skill level, members can count on ROGI's many resources to help get the best results.

Our dynamic 'seed and seedling duo' (Sharr and Janet) are busily growing up a storm – with a range of strong and healthy organic seedlings being nurtured along for ROGI members to grow at home.

Janet and some eager customers at the seed bank and seedling table at the December ROGI meeting.

Members also have a great resource in our extensive library covering everything from general and targeted organic gardening books to backyard chicken management and sustainability practices. We regularly buy new books we think will be helpful to members. If you have any ideas for book purchases, just let your committee know. Check out and borrow a book from our librarian, Sophie, at our monthly meetings.

We also have some organic products available at our shop. While we have reduced the range, if there's an organic product in particular that you would like us to buy for you, Julia and Chris are happy to oblige.

Last, but not least, you can simply tap into the personal knowledge banks that ROGI members possess. Just come to our meetings and ask our gardening gurus if you have a particular question or problem.

Looking forward to seeing you at the next ROGI meeting on Wednesday 8 March.

Happy Gardening

Kathy

Coming Events

March	Tues 7	Herb Society meeting	
	Wed 8	ROGI meeting	
	Sun 12	Garden Visit	See p15
	Sat 25	Redlands Good Gardening Expo	See p21
April	Thur 6	BOGI meeting	
	Tues 4	Herb Society meeting	
	Wed12	ROGI meeting	
	Sun 23	Garden Visit	See p15
	TBA	Field trip to Mt Cotton farm	See p15

2017 Membership Fees are now due

- **Cash** payment at ROGI meeting
- **Cheques** made payable to *Redland Organic Growers Inc* - pay at meeting or to PO Box 1257, Cleveland 4163
- **Direct Deposit** BSB 633000. A/C 136137296 Bendigo Bank Capalaba Central

IMPORTANT! Reference - Your initials and surname are essential to identify who has paid.

If you pay your fees online, please be sure to complete a membership renewal form online at http://www.rogi.com.au/renew-membership.php

Member Category	Members Renewing For 2017	New member/s joining in...			
		Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct16-Dec17
Single	$30	$30	$22.50	$15	$37.50
Family*	$50	$50	$37.50	$25	$62.50
Pensioner Single**	$20	$20	$15	$10	$25
Pensioner Couple**	$30	$30	$22.50	$15	$37.50

* **Family** - two (2) adults residing at the same address and their children under eighteen (18) years

** Please provide evidence of **pensioner** status to claim discount

March Meeting

Organic growing in the Redlands

Ashley Palmer is a third generation Mt Cotton farmer. His grand-father migrated here from England and grew passionfruit, beans, bananas and strawberries. When Ashley finished school, he worked on the farm with his parents, Terry and Muriel, and they transitioned to farming organically due to health concerns.

Today, he still farms with his parents offering the community a larger variety of seasonal fruit, vegetable and nuts including custard apples, pawpaw, avocados, potatoes, leafy greens, onions, pumpkin and more. They also have a few cows and heritage chickens.

The variety of produce can change depending on temperature and rain but the family does its best to source plant varieties suited to the Redlands.

Ashley will share natural food production methods; explain the importance of soil health, and advise what to plant at this time of year.

Ashley and his family will have their farm produce for sale.

Shane Gishford will be selling fruit and vegetables as usual.
Kemp Killerby will be selling Australian native food plants.

February Speaker Gary Donaldson

Keeping Chickens the Microponics* Way

If you buy your chickens and you feed them a commercial chicken ration, the eggs produced will probably be more expensive than free-range eggs from the supermarket.

However, if you integrate your chickens into your organic gardening system, your eggs will be cheaper and fresher - and your garden produce will also be cheaper and better for it.

What breed?

My preferred breed is the commercial hybrid available from most good produce stores.

Depending on where you buy them, they come in red, white and black.

While they lack some of the aesthetic charm of pure layer breeds (like anconas and leghorns) the hybrids have undergone genetic selection for egg production and food conversion efficiency. They tend not to become broody and they moult quickly.

How many do we need?

The first step is to work out how many eggs you want each week. Divide that number by 4 - the minimum likely number of eggs that you'll get from each chicken most weeks of the year. For example if you want a dozen eggs per week, you'll need three chickens.

If you care for your chickens properly, you'll actually get more eggs than this – which you can give to friends and family…or that you can sell to recover some of the feed cost.

The essentials

Regardless of your management system, chickens have certain basic requirements …

Water Access to clean, fresh water at all times is imperative. Nothing is more important to a chicken.

Food of adequate quantity and quality is needed for good health and consistent egg production.

Shelter can be simple so long as it gives clean, dry protection from weather extremes.

Health management in chickens is largely about prevention rather than cure – so good diet, clean dry shelter and parasite management are important.

Protection against predators - chickens are fairly robust but are no match for dogs, snakes … or three-year old terrorists.

How does '*Keeping Chickens the Microponics Way*' differ from the everyday practice of keeping chickens for a few eggs?

I keep chickens for three main reasons:

1. their eggs
2. their manure
3. the work they perform

It's the integration of these three things that leads to sustainable chicken-keeping.

To understand how to integrate chickens and gardening, take a look at the work of Dr Paul Olivier. This disarmingly humble man lives in Vietnam and devotes his life to empowering the poor through waste transformation.

Olivier is a world-leading thinker on the subject of waste transformation farming. He's developed a transformation model for biodegradable solid wastes.

Those wastes are divided into those which are putrescent and those which are non-putrescent.

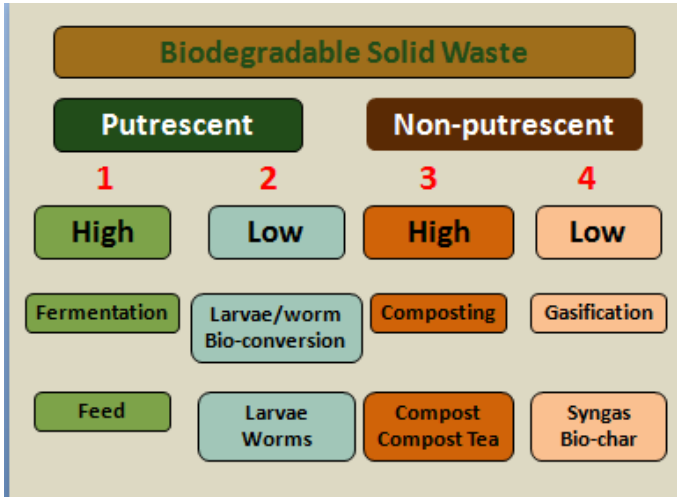
Waste within these two categories is either high grade or low grade, and these four types are ranked in descending order of nutrient content.

** Microponics is a name that I use to describe the integration of fish, plants and micro-livestock … on a small scale.*

Integration occurs where the waste products of one organism become the feedstock for other organisms.

Also known as waste transformation farming it is the means by which we leverage the value of small-scale food production.

Keeping Chickens continued



Type 1 waste (e.g. fresh food and spent brewery grain) contains a lot of nutrients. Ideally this waste should be used for feed for higher animals.
Lactic acid fermentation is the preferred way to transform Type 1 waste into feed.
High-grade putrescent waste should not be fed to larvae and worms, unless it has spoiled (and thus becomes type 2 waste) and can no longer be preserved as feed.

T**ype 2 waste** contains less nutrients. Generally there's no better nor quicker way to transform this type of waste than through the combined action of larvae and worms.
Low-grade putrescent waste that can be fed to larvae and worms shouldn't be composted. Larvae, worms and worm castings are far more valuable than compost.

Type 3 waste (e.g. leaves and coarse plant residues) is easily broken down by composting microbes into soil conditioners and amendments.

Type 4 waste (e.g. bamboo prunings, macadamia shells, wood shavings, twigs, rice hulls, etc) is the stuff that won't readily break down in the compost heap and is often carted to the tip. Type 4 waste, however, is ideal for the production of syngas and bio-char *(photo below of bio-char made from macadamia* hulls).

Putrescent: undergoing, or being able to undergo, the process of decaying or rotting.
Putrescent waste is therefore any waste that will break down and become smelly (or putrid)

In a nutshell, that's what waste transformation farming is all about. It's about ensuring that we put all so-called waste to its most appropriate use to achieve the highest value from each waste type.

Waste transformation farming is also the central premise of Microponics, a model that is infinitely scalable and was designed with the integration of chicken, pigs and cattle in mind.

For more information on Waste Transformation Farming:https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/22013094/Paper/Summaries/Alternative%20to%20Biodigestion.pdf

The Economics of Keeping Chickens

There are three aspects to chicken-keeping economics:

1. feed
2. manure recovery
3. the work chickens can do

1. Feed

Purchased feed is the biggest outlay when keeping chickens. Cost-effective egg production is largely about minimising the amount of purchased feed you use. You can do this simply by managing your chickens more effectively.

* Get the right breed – go for laying breeds. Light Sussex are beautiful birds but they'll eat more food and lay far less eggs than a lighter breed.
* Limit number of chickens to the precise number that you need to get the eggs your require.
* Cull the under-achievers.
* Ensure feeder design discourages wastage through boredom.
* Ration feed – limit amount to what the chickens need rather than what they'll eat.
* Don't feed the pests – when the chickens go to sleep at night, the rats and mice come, so remove or cover the feeders overnight.

I provide a premium layer mash and then set out to ensure that the chickens eat as little of it as possible by supplying my them with home-produced things that they'll eat.

This is a transitional arrangement in that my goal is to feed my chickens entirely without purchasing any proprietary rations.

Keeping Chickens continued

Some things you can feed your chooks:

Weeds
Meat and fish scraps
Plate Scrapings
Garden residues
Fresh grass
Fallen fruit
Garden Pests
Worms
Flying insects
Compost
Eggs – cooked and unrecognisable

Also, you can grow specifically for your chooks:

Pigeon pea is a legume that grows well in backyards. The bushes produce copious quantities of pods which contain peas. These are what we know as split peas or the dahl that is highly prized by Indian cooks.

Comfrey is excellent poultry fodder and great for the compost heap.

Perennial peanut (aka pinto peanut *below*) is a leguminous ground cover and excellent chicken fodder.

Moringa trees are quick growing and everything on the tree can be used for something. The foliage is particularly nutritious and will be readily consumed by chickens.

Duckweed has dozens of uses, and

Duckweed: fresh above and frozen shards

chicken food is just one. Keep it fresh by feeding it out in a tub of water. Duckweed grows best in warm weather and surplus can be frozen in trays and then broken into shards for storage and feeding during cooler weather.

Wild bird seed *below* - not to feed directly but to sow and grow as fodder for chickens.

Plants are not the only thing that you can grow for your chickens.

Black soldier fly larvae (BSFL) *(bottom)* are a high quality home-grown ration ingredient. We use a BioPod to grow our BSFL but Google will reveal plenty of DIY options. Regular addition of Type 2 waste will see a steady flow of larvae.

One of the really great things about raising BSFL in a BioPod *(right)* is that, when they are ready for the chickens to eat, they self-harvest by climbing up an internal ramp and dropping into the collection chamber, avoiding the need to get too 'hands on' with them.

To state that the chickens like to eat the larvae is a gross understatement; they will eat them before anything else.

Adding Value

We can leverage the value of any feed that we do buy, and to existing Type 1 putrescent wastes, through sprouting, fermentation or bio-conversion.

Sprouting grain or seeds

Soak grain or seeds in water 2 or 3 days. Change the water each day.

Broadens nutritional profile and improves digestibility.

Fermenting Feed

Use purchased feed or Type 1 waste.

For feed or grain – just immerse in water

Should have a slightly sour 'cheesy' smell

5 day cycle – replace as you use

Preserves food - kills off harmful bacteria in Type 1 waste, enhances palatability and digestibility, makes the feed go further

Bioconversion

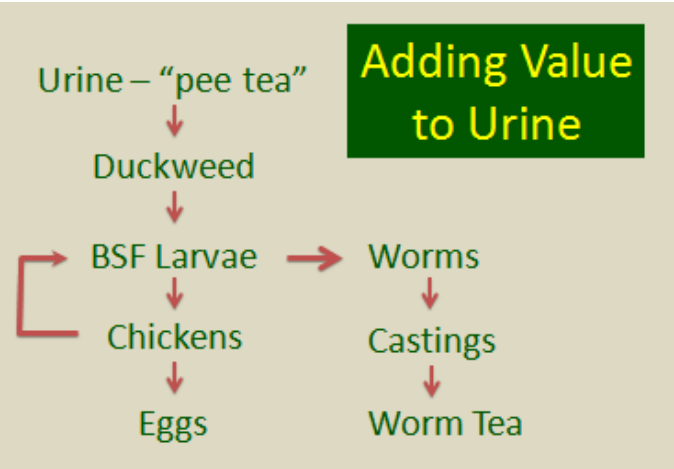
Arguably, the most interesting way to leverage the value of waste.

By feeding duckweed to BSFL you convert plant protein to high quality animal protein.

Tip a bucket of duckweed into the Bio-Pod. Such is the voracious appetite of BSFL that it is virtually gone just 24 hours later.

But the bio-conversion doesn't end here. The larvicast remaining after the BSFL have done their thing retains 50% of its original protein. It's "ripe" and full of bacteria – and makes ideal worm food.

I grow duckweed in one of my aqua-ponics systems. But don't despair if you don't have one of those. You grow duckweed using your own urine, then you feed the duckweed to your chickens and to BSFL. You take the BSFL and feed them to the chickens, for which you get eggs. What the BSFL leaves behind is fed to composting worms that yield worm castings and worm tea.



2. Manure Recovery

The second aspect of the economics of chicken keeping is collecting the manure.

To understand how poop features in 'chickenomics', I invite you to accompany me on a little mathematical journey.

A laying chicken will eat around 100g of dry feed and will produce around 160g of wet manure - per day.

Assuming 6 hens, that's 600g of feed and 960g of manure per day. By capturing at least half of that manure (say 500g), and feeding it to BSFL, you can expect about 100g of larvae per day.

* *Menhaden fish meal. Menhaden is a fish from the northern Atlantic which is ground into fish meal for Omega 3 rich pet food, as well as for other industrial products. There is some controversy about using the fish in this way as numbers appear to be declining.*

About 17% of a chicken's food requirement could come from what she excretes.

What's more, those larvae will be around 40% protein and 35% fat (the nutritional equivalent of menhaden fish meal*) and your chooks will eat them in preference to anything else you might feed them.

3. Work

Chickens demonstrate natural behaviours such as scratching, digging and foraging. Managed correctly, these activities can be directed toward:

Composting
Pest management
Fertiliser provision
Mixing – nitrogen-rich manure combined with carbon materials for composting
Spreading materials
Waste disposal – kitchen scraps.
Tilling

Currently, I keep our chickens in a chicken tractor (2.7m L x 1.8m W x 1.2m H) that's fitted with wheels so I can move it as required.

Leave a chicken tractor in place for a day, the chooks will graze the plants within.

Leave it in place for 2 or 3 days, and they'll eat everything including the roots.

Keeping Chickens continued

Leave it for a week and it will look like a moonscape with no living thing in sight and holes everywhere. You'll only need to rake it before being sowing or planting directly into it.

Chicken tractors are okay, but I'm now seeking even greater integration.

We've set up the tractor as night quarters for the chickens *(below)* with a view to capturing the night waste for the BSFL.

During the day, the chickens are let out into our soil pit (*below*). This is a shallow pit which contains about 12 cubic metres of decomposing tree waste. The chickens scratch around inside this fenced enclosure looking for bugs and weeds to eat. This is, in computer parlance, the default position.

I've designed an integrated backyard modular micro-farm based on modules that I call microCosms.

Each measures 2400mm X 1200mm x 400mm deep and provides about 3 square metres of growing space. They're set up as raised wicking bed gardens *(below and right)*.

***Microcosm**…..a community, place, or situation regarded as encapsulating in miniature the characteristics of something much larger.*

In some of these, I'll grow edible plants – and, in others, I'll produce forage crops for my micro-livestock.

I'm also fabricating a series of portable covers, so the chickens can clean up spent crops and other plant residues or to feed on forage that we've grown especially for them.

In summary:
Get the right breed and the right number
Harvest the poop
Provide your own feed – and leverage its use
Make them work for a living

Gary Donaldson

ROGI is planning a return visit to Gary's place on Macleay Island later in the year. Stay tuned.

Plant Clinic

Q: What is wrong with my lemons? The lemon is two toned, with being yellow on top and dark underneath. Sophie B

A: Melanose.
Suggestions:
Use copper oxy chloride (sparingly and in low concentration)
Prune and destroy dead twigs and branches.
Remove debris from under trees.
Apply fungicides.

More information:
Melanose, caused by the fungus *Diaporthe citri*, is a major factor causing citrus fruit blemish. All citrus varieties are susceptible. Melanose can affect trees at any age and damages fruit, leaves, twigs, branches, and in some circumstances, the main trunk of the tree. Damage is superficial and does not affect internal fruit quality. On the fruit, leaves and small twigs, small, dark brown to black spots are produced which are raised and rough to touch. The spots are superficial and can be removed with your fingernail. The incidence of melanose usually increases as trees age and the amount of dead wood in the canopy increases.
http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/138205/Managing-melanose-in-citrus.pdf

Q: Why are my lychee fruit small and empty? M and M Foley
A: Two possibilities – lack of water and/or lack of boron
Suggestions:
Ensure sufficient water during fruiting period.
Apply SB6 boron (available from Shane Gishford)

More information:
Boron helps control the transport of sugars in plants. It is important to cell division and seed development. As a micronutrient, the amount of boron in soil is minute, but among micronutrients, boron deficiency in plants is the most common.

Q: What is the best method to deal with 'farmer' ants throughout whole garden, bringing all their sucking insects with them?

A: Suggestions:
Sprinkle diatomaceous earth (DE) across their path and around the trees and plants. It dries out their bodies.
Put sticky glue wraps around tree trunks. Make sure that the tree isn't touching anything else e.g. other trees, a wall or fence as ants can access the tree in ways other than via the trunk.

More information:
Aphids are sucking insects that commonly feed on plant sap and secrete a substance called honey-dew. This sticky substance is a favourite food of ants, who milk the aphids.

This is a symbiotic relationship as both receive benefit from it— protection for the aphids and food for the ants.

When you see lots of ants on a plant, you probably have an infestation of aphids. Beneficial insects such as lacewings prey on aphids.

Plant Clinic

If you have an interesting-looking pest, wonder if your plant is a weed or has a deficiency or a disease, Plant Clinic may help.

Bring along the insect or plant (as many parts as you can (in a sealed plastic bag if it's diseased or seedy) and fill in the form. Place the plant parts together with the form on Plant Clinic table well before the meeting starts. Someone will look and may be able to answer your questions.

Please be aware: we do our best but there may not be anyone who can identify your plant, especially if not related to organic gardening.

Field Trip Burow Farm

As we walked up the drive to Linda and Ian's home we knew we were in for a wonderful afternoon as his German ancestors had chosen a magnificent site for their farm.

The view from the house over their tranquil farm and shed, where Ian grows sprouts and makes microbes to enrich the soil, extended out over treetops to the Islands in Moreton Bay. Understandably the land has been much loved by Ian's family with Ian being the fifth generation of his family to farm it.

This view out to Stradbroke Island from the house over one of their three dams looked so lush and green that you wouldn't think we had just been through a very hot dry spell.

Ian is a very passionate organic or bioorganic farmer who is keenly interested in new ideas, techniques and is willing to try Nutritech solutions and research their new natural products.

He quoted that a test of chemical residue in German office workers had indicated that 98% of them had levels of chemicals three times higher than the safe level even though they had not worked on a farm, and concluded that this came from the food they ate.

Farmers and gardeners often believe that more is better so use more spray or fertiliser than necessary leading to toxicity.

Although Ian has not used chemicals on his property for at least 10 years, he is producing more per tree and his farming is more sustainable.

His avocado trees produce 400 – 500kg per tree and it takes him four days to pick the fruit from one lychee tree. Each lychee tree yields two to three tonnes of fruit.

With his new methods of farming he gets greater efficiency, more and better quality fruit on a relatively small number of trees.

Making his own microbes has meant that he has been able to reduce the cost of fertilisers. Just 100 litres of the microbial solution he makes up with added fulvic acid is enough to stimulate growth for one hectare of land. The microbes do the work for you. Worm 'tea' has the microbes in it as well which is why it is so good for plants.

While healthier trees mean they are less susceptible to attack, Ian still uses fruit fly baits.

Above: Compost that Ian had made since November from forest mulch and microbes that eat the cellulose, like a probiotic.

Avocado

Ian grows five kinds of avocados – Rincon, Feurte, Shepherd, Sharwil and Hass.

Field Trip Burow Farm

He told us how some compost he bought had been toxic and he used fulvic acid to clear it up but some of his trees died back. Rather than cut them back he waited until they had started to sprout new leaves and were recovering before doing so. He thought it best to encourage new growth and then prune.

Ian considers the longer the grass the better, as it keeps the soil cool and protects the living organisms in the soil. However he had recently slashed it as he wanted to spread compost and fowl manure.

The roots of the mature trees extend for at least a metre further than the drip line so the compost and chicken manure were distributed by his machine over the soil between trees.

Above: Avocados ripen after being picked.

Ian told us an indication of when they were ready to be picked was their size and if the shiny skin had dulled. If left on the tree the fruit falls off as this particular one had - and the seed has begun to germinate and the flesh had gone rubbery and yellow.

Above: Feurte fruit

They started planting avocados in 1968. The trees take five years to bear fruit. When fruiting is finished Ian chops them back and gives them calcium and gypsum.

Above: Ian talking to the ROGI group. Linda Burow drove Garry and Maisie up the hill.

Above: Grass in the background indicates how tall it grows. Linda said that they often have trouble seeing where they are driving as the grass is so high. The land is very steep and varies from rocky to clay.

Pest Control

Ian is always looking for natural solutions and these birds are being raised to eventually be released to attack ticks which are plentiful on the property. For the first three months, they need to be caged. They will then join the chickens but unlike the chooks they don't dig out roots and are not as destructive.

Above: young guinea fowl

Field Trip Burow Farm

The Bug Catcher

Above & right: This bug catcher was voted 'best Australian Invention of the Year' in 2000.

It consists of solar collectors that power a purple light high on the end of the pole and a second one above a bowl of swirling water.

At around six pm the light on the pole comes on for ten minutes and then turns off and the lower light above the water comes on and attracts all the bugs to it. They fall off it and into the swirling water below. They are then washed down to the collector below which is emptied every few days and the insects are given to the hens who love them. It minimizes the bad bugs.

The bug catcher is situated high on the property and the high light can be seen switching on and off from the house.

Unfortunately, the inventor was unable to find a manufacturer here so the technology went to China.

Lychees

The 25 year old lychee trees are huge. Ian puts nets over the trees when the fruit is nearly ripe. We were incredulous as the trees are so big. It certainly is not be an easy task even with a cherry picker as the netting would be caught in branches. He prefers not to leave the netting there as it makes the temperature drop by a couple of degrees and the trees grow better fruit with the extra heat and sun.

To encourage colour and improve the taste of the fruit he foliar sprays with potassium sulphate which is quick and efficient. Best times to spray are before 10 in the morning and after four in the afternoon.

Field Trip Burow Farm

Ian has found through experience that it is best to prune the trees as you pick the fruit and after spraying them with potassium sulphate as the fruit is all ripe enough to be harvested. it takes four days to harvest from one tree.

After pruning, the trees need to be fertilised- requiring calcium, magnesium and boron.

Lychee trees that have been doing well occasionally die for no apparent reason. Ian likes to propagate them for himself and others.

Propagating Lychees

Ian showed us how he propagates lychee trees and this method could be used for most trees. It is an improvement on the usual marcotting method using a 'Root a Pot'.

Above: Ian cut off a branch to show how it is done but usually you would select an upwardly -growing branch and cut off the bark all around the branch as shown.

Above: Fill the 'Root a Pot' with moistened peat moss, coir or sphagnum moss.

Above and below: Close the 'Root a Pot' and fasten sideways.

Above: clip lid on and fasten from the top.

There is a compartment for water at the base and you can add water to prevent it drying out.

This is why it is important to choose an upwardly-growing branch.

When the roots are visible growing in the base of the 'Root a Pot' you can cut the branch below the pot, open the pot and plant the tree.

Ian has been achieving a 100% strike rate with this method.

Field Trip Burow Farm

Growing sprouts

Ian has two units for growing sprouts. These are fitted with shelves and the seeds are placed on trays. Every two hours the watering turns on and there is a controlled air flow. You don't need fertiliser with sprouts.

Above: In this section Ian is sprouting mung beans, barley and wheat grass.

Above: Ian is experimenting with several different types of seeds to provide colour and variety to cater for restaurants. Mixture includes alfalfa, red and green radish, and broccoli.

Above: Dense root system of the wheat grass

Above: Shelves containing trays of wheat grass that Ian juices and packages for sale

Field Trip Burow Farm

Brewing Microbes

Ian showed us how he grows microbes for use on his farm.

He pumps up 500 L from his dam but as the water has to be sterile (free of all unwanted microbial life), he adds 50 ml of bleach for every 100L of water.

He bubbles air through the solution to eliminate chlorine into the atmosphere. He then adds food for the bugs and then some microbes.

Air is bubbled through the solution and as the microbes multiply it froths up. Depending on the temperature, after about 18 hours there will be heavy frothing indicating that the microbial cultivation is complete.

The system is then turned off as the bacteria don't require any more oxygen.

The bacteria in solution have about a two-week lifespan and can be applied at a rate of 100L per hectare.

The use of fertilisers is vastly reduced as these busy little organisms do the work and improve root growth, nutrient uptake and, it is even claimed, fix nitrogen from the atmosphere.

Above: Soon after the aerator was switched on, the solution started frothing indicating that the bacteria were multiplying

Thank you, Linda and Ian for your hospitality and sharing your wealth of experience and knowledge with us.
It was an inspirational afternoon.

Mary Irmer

Garden Visits

Sunday 12th March 3.00pm
Ian and Jill Nixon at Birkdale

This visit is the 'after' of the 'before' garden visit in March 2016 shortly after they moved into the property. See the changes that have been wrought in a mere twelve months and maybe offer suggestions for future improvements.

Sunday 23rd April
Toni Bowler at Sheldon

This will be a garden visit with a difference. After looking over Toni's garden, we'll be getting hands-on - making a mosaic for our own gardens.

Field Trips

Mt Cotton Farm 'Muriel's Farm'
April—date to be confirmed
Following on from Ashley Palmer's March presentation to ROGI, we will visit his family's organic farm at Mt Cotton.

Green Harvest & Bugs for Bugs
June—date to be confirmed
More information closer to the date.

As always, spaces are limited, so get in early.

Please book with Toni B. on 0402323704 or events@rogi.com.au or at the ROGI meeting.

Toni welcomes suggestions for workshops and field trips related to ROGI's organic growing interests.
Also, discuss with Toni when you'd like to host a Garden Visit at your place.

ROGI Shop News

Survey

Most regular members will have noticed that there has been an ever-decreasing supply of products for sale at the ROGI Shop table over the last six months.

We have now almost exhausted the old stock and we need to make a decision on the way forward.
Hence, this informal survey.

We realise that a lot of these products are now available for impulse buying at garden centres, hardware and produce stores.

However, we need to know what you as a member want for the future from the ROGI shop.

- Do you wish us to have products available at monthly meetings?
- If 'Yes', what products are you interested in buying or ordering?
- How often would you be prepared to order and/or buy these products?
- What quantities are you likely to need at any one time?
- Would you like printed information on any products or would you be happy with a website for you to access and print your own?
- Any other comments.

Here are some of the organic garden products the ROGI Shop could supply:

Fertilisers

Organic Xtra, Organic Booster, blood and bone, Turf Master, biological products as shown at Ian Burow's farm, etc.

Soil amendments

Dolomite, gypsum, Mulch Mate, Garden Mate, Zeolite, Biochar, rock dust, etc.

Natural Pest & Weed Controls

Diatomaceous Earth, Weedless, BurnOff, Fruit Fly Traps, Neem Oil, etc.

ROGI is able to access the above products at reasonable prices.

There may be other products you know about or would like us to supply. If so, please indicate and recommend a source.

Please forward your replies to the ROGI Shop co-ordinators via email to juliageljon@gmail.com or hand to a committee member at the next ROGI meeting.

Happy Organic Gardening
Julia Geljon

ROGI Library News

Next time you borrow a book from the ROGI library, please consider writing a review of the book.

It doesn't matter whether you thought the book was wonderful and valuable to you in your gardening endeavours, or whether it was such a waste of your time that you gave up after the first few pages. Let us know what you thought about it and why.

We have a broad range of library books, covering all aspects of the food–growing spectrum—including how to:

- collect and save seeds
- make compost and improve your soil
- design your garden
- grow every type of plant
- know what to plant and when
- identify, prevent and treat weeds, pests and diseases
- grow native plants
- use permaculture
- choose and grow fruit trees
- keep chooks and bees
- use companion planting
- grow and use herbs
- recognise and use edible weeds

There are also books that give you food for thought, covering such topics as sustainability, self-sufficiency, environmental concerns and the philosophy of food.

So there is plenty to choose from.

Visit the library at the next meeting and borrow a book or two ... and tell us about it.

Seven super easy vegies from seed by Linda Brennan

I often have people tell me how difficult they find it to grow vegies from seed. I reckon with a little know-how it's as easy as growing from a seedling but with so much more satisfaction. So, I'll give you some insights into why you'd do it, the easiest vegies I've found to grow from seed, with some insights into success.

Why grow from seed?

Most of our vegie plot is raised from seed. It's cheaper than buying seedlings, as the price for a few hundred seeds is so much cheaper than that for six little plants. Your pack of seeds may be viable for years in good storage conditions and you can sow as few or as many as you like. For just $3 or so you get many, many seeds and thus plenty of plants.

You will have a much wider variety of plants to choose from. Seed catalogues like Eden seeds, Select Organics and Green Harvest have a broad range of plant varieties that you choose from to suit the season and your conditions. Of course you can choose the colour, size and flavour you want.

You may never have to buy seed again. Planting non-hybrid and heirloom variety seeds means you get viable seeds after the plant has gone to flower. Save the best and plant them next season. So really, after you've grown and harvested seeds again, you are getting free (well almost free) food.

Seeds often do better than seedlings. You may have planted directly into the soil, so you won't get stunted or twisted roots from trans-planting root crops. Buying large sized seedlings also means that many of them are root bound. This sets back your plants for life.

These are my seven super easy vegies to grow from seed

Beans With autumn around the corner, I grow Purple King climbing beans among others. They are so generous with their yield. Water them too much directly after planting and they'll rot in the ground, so I usually water once then leave a few days until they germinate unless its frightfully hot and dry.

Radish are so fast, you'll have ready to eat little radishes after as little as 4 weeks. Never buy punnets! Sow into rows you've made with a stick or dibber to about 1cm deep. Buy long reds, long pink and whites or round red varieties.

Lettuce is sensational in autumn, so I'll be putting in Paris Island Cos and butter lettuce from our seed bank. Sow in rows or blocks and to thin out simply eat the babies that are crowded. A lettuce plant will go to seed quickly in warm weather but don't just toss out the flowers and fluffy seed heads. Keep them and dry them off in a bag.

Vegies from seed

Snow peas are so simple, it's a sin to buy punnets. I sow two seeds in the same hole in the soil, 20 cm apart and wait to be over-loaded by snow peas. A little lime when prepping the soil supports pea health while growing.

Asian greens eg pak choy and tatsoi (pictured) are open cabbage-type plants. Sow individual seeds a hand width apart in rows about 30cm apart. They need constant moisture as do all leafy greens so don't let them wilt. At harvest time, snap off the outer leaves first to extend the harvest

Sweet corn are greedy feeders so add plenty of manure and compost to your soil before planting. Corn grow well with two seeds per hole so they help each other stand up. Sow them 30 cm apart and in blocks of six or more rows for good cross pollination. I also feed them again with more of the same food when they are about six weeks old.

Tomatoes are simple. As we all grow cherry tomatoes from compost intentionally or otherwise, replicate nature's success and sow yours into compost and worm castings. Give tomatoes a fertile spot, with blood and bone or Organic Xtra pellets.

Extra insights for success

Prepare the soil well so it's fertile, moist and easy to dig.

Choose to plant fresh seed that's been stored in a cool dry spot

The first watering should be with seaweed plus worm farm liquid if you have any, to encourage germination. Once planted, keep the seed bed moist. Don't let your seeds or plants dry out.

Start fertilising with a liquid feed eg Liggy Max* when your seeds have germinated and grown leaves. They need a feed once or twice a week when young and less as they grow older and spread their roots into the fertile soil.

**Liggy Max is an organic certified fertiliser that's been composted with beneficial soil microbes. It gives wonderful results and is very economical. Contact me if you'd like some.*

Connect with all the latest in organic classes at www.ecobotanica.com.au

Fig trees infested with Fig Tree Leaf Beetle

Poneridia semipullata

The Fig Tree Leaf Beetle has proven a challenge this season as I have not had the opportunity to visit the trees every day to kill these little blighters! The damage has made the trees look very bedraggled with skeletonised leaves and some leaf drop.

Both larvae and adult can cause damage to the leaves. It is native to northern areas and usually would live on big rainforest figs and do little damage but unfortunately it hits smaller backyard fruiting figs pretty hard.

The larvae are responsible for most of the damage on new leaves in spring and summer, when they feed in groups. With a bad infestation, they can skeletonise the leaves quickly, reducing the tree's capacity to photosynthesise.

The adult beetles are about 10mm in length, brown in colour with a black dot on the thorax and the base of the wing covers. The adults are solitary and eat the edges of both new and old leaves leaving a scalloped pattern to the leaves.

This pest pupates in the ground below the tree and there can be more than one generation in a season so they are sneaky pests that can reoccur after you thought all the damage had been done.

Solution:

Encourage birds into your garden as they love feeding on the larvae. If the tree is small, the insects can be removed by hand or squirted off with water. You can try squashing (rubbing out) the egg clusters found on the undersides of leaves, they are about the size of a 5 cent piece.

When the grubs first hatch they stay together and this makes them easier to squash.

In severe cases chemicals can be used – I have researched and pyrethrum or derris dust has been suggested.

I am going to try neem oil spray on one of my trees as a test case.

Mary Irmer found this and submitted it to the newsletter. I'd love to hear from anyone who tries it to see if it really does work. Does the cone get too soggy?

While we're on the subject of unusual things in which to sow seeds, please let us know if you've tried anything else interesting.

Plant of the Month

Cabbage

My deep memory of a vegetable that my mother destroyed in the kitchen was the cabbage. When it came to cooking it she made it watery and boring, adding nothing to it - it was boiled to an inch of its life. If it was on the plate I knew I was in for a long night sitting at the dinner table till it was all gone.

Now it's my time to cook for my family and I have a bit of respect for the head of cabbage. I cook it lightly, adding seasoning and adding butter and honey before serving. There's never any left on the plates at the end of the meal.

I also shred raw cabbage adding heaps of colourful slices of other vegetables to make a fresh coleslaw salad - a beautiful way to respect this very old vegetable the cabbage.

Growing cabbage

Sow seeds 1 cm deep and1 cm apart. If using Janet's seedlings, transplant them to the garden with four or five true leaves. Set leggy or crooked stemmed plants deeply, up to their first true leaves. Space seedlings 45 to 60 cm apart in rows 60 to 90 cm apart.

Plant successive crops every two weeks or plant early and mid-season varieties at the same time so that they come to harvest at different times.

Grow cabbage in well-drained soil rich in organic matter. It grows best in soil pH of 6.5 to 7.5. Add plenty of well-aged compost to beds before planting.

Cabbage requires regular, even watering. Uneven watering can result in stunted or cracked heads. As plants reach maturity, cut back on watering to avoid splitting heads.

Fertilize when plants are established with a high nitrogen fertiliser. For me this is where all the chicken poo goes because we want high-nitrogen compost that gives us big leaf growth.

Cabbages will be ready for harvest in 80 to 180 days from seed - depending on variety. Cut cabbage when heads are firm and the base of the head is 10 to 25 cm across. Harvest before the weather becomes too warm.

Cut heads leaving outer leaves behind attached to the stem. Small heads will grow from the stalks for later harvest.

Cabbage pests

All members of the cabbage family are much loved by caterpillars.

There are two main villains.

The cabbage white butterfly has whitish wings that are marked with black blotches. Its hungry green caterpillar eats the leaves – very obviously – from the outside.

The caterpillar of the cabbage moth is sneakier – it tends to munch in the centre of the cabbage.

These are a few things I do to win the whole head of cabbage in the end.

- Handpicking. Every caterpillar removed is one less moth laying eggs in the weeks to come. (yes it takes time but I now see I have free protein for the chickens!)
- I also use large pieces of eggshell scattered amongst the cabbages to confuse the white butterfly. The theory goes that it will mistake the eggshells for other butterflies laying their eggs and leave the area looking for less populated plants to lay its eggs on.
- Using netting is useful to exclude the creatures from the whole bed I have not used this method but I understand it is effective.
- Always keep a garden diary. This will help you remember what month the little darlings were around, what method you used, what not to plant, what you did plant, what was planted near them, what did not work, what measures you took and the time you planted, when you pulled items out and so on. Such a valuable tool to have.

The seed bank has seeds of:

(left to right)

Early Jersey Wakefield
Tokyo Bekana
Bok choy
Golden Acre
Red Express
One Kilo Slow Bolt
(Chinese cabbage wombok)

$1 for members and
$2 non-members






Redlands Good Gardening Expo

Saturday 25 March 9am-3pm

Our Expo is just around the corner and we are looking for volunteers to help spread the word on the benefits of organic gardening and to attract new members to ROGI.

We will need help in a variety of ways and there's something to suit your skills and talent for as much or little time as you can spare.

Here are some ways you can help:

- Setting up and taking down the display
- Helping give information at ROGI display
- Assisting with the seed bank and seedling sales and enquiries
- Showing visitors 'How to take cuttings', 'How to make a seed pot from news-paper and then sow seeds in them'
- Being a general floating helper to go 'wherever' as needed
- Being a stage manager

Information and training will be supplied for all the activities.
Please let me know your preference of time/s and which activity/activities you can help with and we will schedule accordingly. Bronwen Thomas events@rogi.com.au

Above: making seed pots and sowing seeds
Below: the ROGI information stall

Share house available

Wanted:
Eco-minded person/s interested in organic gardening to share large older style home at front of rural trucking property along Redland Bay Road, Capalaba.
For more information please phone 0438 176981

Above: Cockatoo plundering seeds from the sunflower plants. Many seeds drop to the ground to be snapped up by the chooks waiting below.

Seed Bank Request

- Please **return seedling pots** the month after you have bought the seedlings so they can be re-used.
- Please bring along **other clean used pots**— small sizes only, up to 120mm diameter. The almost-square ones are good.

Seed-raising Mix

The ROGI seed bank **seed-raising mix** (a blend of coir peat, vermiculite, perlite and biochar) has proven to be quite successful at getting the little blighters to come up!

We put it in recycled yogurt or ice cream containers.

One litre = $0.50
Two litres = $1.00
Four litres = $2.00

We are able to offer wonderful prices as we source well and we are a not-for-profit group. Our passion is to get you gardening and growing more food.

Sharr Ellson

Special Offer

When you buy five packets of seeds from the seed bank, you will receive one litre of the special seed-raising mix to sow them in – free!

Please note: this guide is for sowing seeds, not seedlings.
There may be several days or even weeks between the optimal time to sow a seed and to transplant a seedling that you may have bought from a nursery.

Seed Sowing Guide

March

Basil
Beans; climbing, snake, French
Beetroot
Borage
Capsicum/Chilli
Carrot
Cauliflower
Coriander
Cucumber
Eggplant
Leek
Lettuce
Marigold
Pigeon pea
Potatoes
Pumpkin
Purslane
Radish
Silver beet
Spring onion
Spinach (Brazilian, Egyptian, Warrigal)
Spring onion
Squash
Sweet potato
Sweet corn
Tomato

April

Artichoke; Jerusalem a/choke
Asparagus
Bean: Lablab, Madagascar
Bean—French
Beetroot
Broccoli
Brussels sprouts
Cabbage
Capsicum/Chilli
Cauliflower
Carrot
Celery
Chicory
Endive
Florence fennel
Kohlrabi
Leeks
Lettuce
Onions/garlic
Potatoes
Radish
Silver beet
Spinach: (Brazilian, Egyptian, Warrigal, Kangkong)
Sweet potato
Tomato
Yacon

Keep in mind that these are only guides.
Be aware that micro-climates and weather conditions may mean that certain seeds may be sown before or after the recommended times.
ROGI Seed Bank is available at ROGI meetings and Garden Visits.
$1 per packet for members. $2 for non-members.

Exchange plants, cuttings, seedlings and home-grown produce

Please consider contributing to any or all of these at various times.

ROGI Rewards

Gift-quality plants and other garden-related items brought along by members. Everyone who attends a meeting is eligible to acquire a ROGI Reward. ***Please label plant with its name and variety before placing it on the table.***

Members' Sales

Items you have produced that are surplus to your requirements and that **you wish to sell** to other members eg eggs, honey, seedlings, jam, lemons – things that have cost you money (and time and effort) to produce.
Please ensure items are labelled, named and priced. It is preferable that you staff the stall yourself.

FREE swap/share/give-away

(This is for members only)
For those items you don't want payment for eg shredded paper, unwanted volunteer plants (named, please) or cuttings, surplus chillies, empty pots or strawberry runners and so on.
This is where you may want to work out an arrangement with other members to do some swapping outside of the meetings.

Remember to bring a bag/box/ basket to take everything home

ROGI is a beneficiary of the My IGA Card Program for the **Cleveland IGA** store.
This is how it works:

- Pick up a My IGA Card next time you are in the Cleveland store
- Register online
- Tick ROGI as the community group you wish to support

Then, every time you shop in the store and use your card, not only do you receive discounts, you are also helping to raise funds for ROGI.

ROGI uses its funds to help provide more services to members such as new library books, discounted gardening products, paid expert speakers, and free or low-cost field trips and workshops.

Did you know?

You can go online and read every edition of ROGI News since September 2014. Go to www.rogi.com.au and have a browse.

We'd like to hear from you.

For example, send us:

- A story about your garden
- A photo of an interesting plant
  An article about an unusual plant
- A request for items or information
- Specific garden or nutrition info
- A recipe for home-grown produce
- A notice that you have something to give away or sell
- A handy technique or tip
- A current affair to do with organic growing
- Anything else to do with organic growing
- A review of a ROGI library book

Please send your items to the editor and help keep ROGI News topical, interesting, local and relevant

info@rogi.com.au

April Newsletter Deadline

Please send your contributions to the newsletter editor by 22 March for the April edition.

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www.facebook.com/groups/redland.organic.growers

Stinging nettle *(Urtica dioica) flourishing in an old wheelbarrow (to keep it from biting arms and legs).*
Nettle can be made into a tasty and satisfying soup, along with a bit of butter, potato (or sweet potato) and carrot to give it body, and a good stock to give it depth.

*G**arlic chives** (Allium tuberosum) are blooming now and are quite decorative and also attractive to beneficial insects. The leaves and flowers are both edible. It self-sows readily.*