

THE WINTER PLOT

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at the garden gate with David

We are continuing to beaver away at seeking opportunities to our advantage and recently met with representatives of Bank of Queensland who are anxious to make their presence felt in the local community. They have verbally agreed to supplying two rainwater tanks which we will go ahead and install in the next few weeks – hopefully in time to fill with all that Winter rain that will be falling!

Gosh, remember the days when we could RELY on the Winter falls to replenish our dams, tanks and rivers. With three tanks to water seeds/seedlings, we should be in a better situation to maintain our vegie production into next Summer.

Congratulations to the greater number of members who have put in winter crops or Winterised their plots with green cover or black plastic. This is an excellent way of preventing weed growth and leaves your ground healthy and ready for cultivation in Spring. For those who have ground that is in need of care, please get onto it and at least turn it over or risk having it taken from you. Our waiting list is keen if you are not.

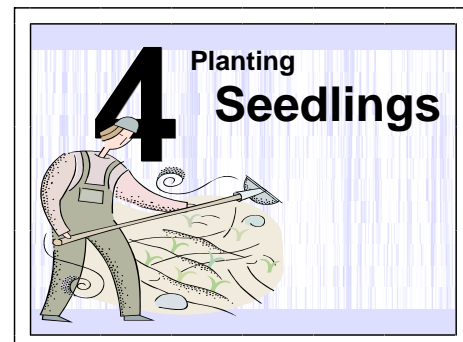
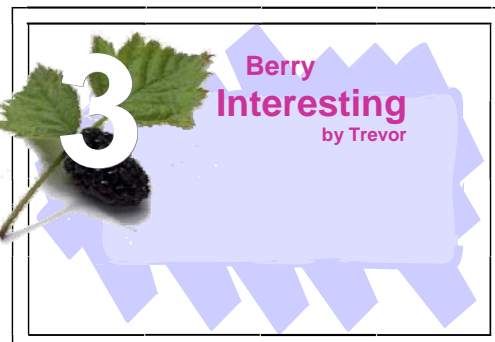
I am always heartened by the “quiet” work that goes on down there at the plot. The front fence garden is now brick edged and fertilised and planted, the garlic bed is dug and planted, the spud/pumpkin plots have been dug and are being fertilised, the shed has spouting ready for the new tanks, the disabled plots are flourishing and all this just happens.....

I know it doesn't JUST happen. It happens because we have people who are willing to put in an extra hour or three and all of us benefit from that willingness.

Thank you to who ever you may be. I do know some names but I hesitate to name you as I am bound to miss others, but we are all grateful to you. If you are not very forthcoming with your time, check your name and time for your share of the working bee roster - it is on the front of the shed - and then contact your leader for a job. If everyone gave as willingly as our regulars, we would be ecstatic.

Enjoy your gardening everyone. Keep on top of those slugs and snails and keep warm.

David



GARDEN COMMITTEE

Did you ever wonder how all of the tasks that make Ringwood Community Garden function get done? Who manages our membership of more than 60 gardeners, collects fees and pays the bills, negotiates and manages our lease and insurance, creates and mails newsletters, maintains the web site, arranges for delivery of manure/compost/wood chips, and maintains the garden grounds?

These tasks and many more are done by members of the Ringwood Community Garden Committee members who attend meetings to manage ongoing garden issues and plan for future improvements. In addition, each Committee member assumes responsibility for one or more major garden task.



Members of the Committee also identify other sources of financial support. For example, improvements like the water tanks were paid for by sponsorship – no rent money was used. The new tiller and the concrete paths and raised bed surrounds were funded through grants.

Committee members seek ways for the Garden to contribute to the community by planning public events and outreach visits. They also work with other garden groups to identify solutions to common problems.

We need gardeners who are willing to assume responsibility for a major garden task. Coordinators supervise the water and surplus produce distribution programs, manage communications, organize clean-ups, maintain the raised beds and flower gardens: all Committee activities require a coordinator.

Coordinator positions require a greater commitment of time than the four hours per year required of all gardeners.

All members are encouraged to consider Committee membership to attend meetings to determine the Garden's direction. We are always looking for suggestions to help make the Garden run smoothly. Leave a message on the Ringwood voice mail, 9801 4031 and a member of the Committee will contact you.

Weather means more when you have a garden. There's nothing like listening to a shower and thinking how it is soaking in around your green beans. ~ Marcelene Cox



berry interesting

Growing Thornless Blackberries

I've been asked the secrets of success in growing thornless blackberries. The following might be useful, and please feel free to ask me anytime as well, as I'm happy to help.

Site:

Good deep soil is best, and it needs to be well drained – brambles hate getting waterlogged feet. Consider building a raised bed if you have poor drainage, it helps. Before planting, dig in plenty of organic matter, and blackberries just love horse manure. I used about three bags for 10 metres by 1 metre when planting, and do a top-up every year. (See Fred for a good source of manure) Avoid chicken manure, it's high in phosphate, which blackberries dislike. If you have any couch grass on your plot, try to get rid of it before planting, it's difficult to remove from around established plants.

Planting:

Space about 1½ metres between plants, preferably along a side of your plot, and provide a trellis. I use three levels, with the top one being about 1½ metres. This is plenty high enough, and avoids shading neighbouring plots in summer. Best planted when plants are dormant, usually June to August. Water in plants, preferably with a seaweed based solution. If, like me, your planting is east-west, expect the berries on the north side to be a bit wind and sun damaged, particularly in hot dry windy conditions. This can be partly overcome by gently turning the immature fruit southwards into more shade, and growing a tall crop like sweet corn on the north side.

Cultivation:

For the first couple of seasons, the plants will be busy establishing themselves. Wrap the new seasons growth around the trellis wires, being careful not break the canes. Pinching off tip growth from longer growing canes encourages branching. When cultivating around the plants, don't till deeply, as the plants are shallow rooted. I don't dig my plot within about 60cm of the plants. Mulching is

beneficial in Summer – I use pea straw, as it provides nitrogen when it breaks down, suppresses weeds, and retains moisture. Blackberries need a good supply of water from flowering to Autumn.

Pruning:

Do this in winter/early spring, after the plants have dropped their leaves. Cut out the second season's growth, which will be the one that fruited, and train the growth from the last season along the trellis. Don't be too rigorous about this for the first two years, give the plants time to establish first.

Cropping:

Don't expect anything first year, and a "taste" the second year. After that, the crops will get heavier, given good seasons. I picked over 80 kg one year at the "old" Community Garden, from 10 metres of berries. Netting is essential, or the birds will do your picking for you – sadly, they don't believe in sharing. Given that you defeat the birds, berries are "jam-ripe" when fully black, and "eating-ripe" when they pull off the plants easily. Cropping usually starts mid to late January, and continues to late February/early March. Berries are high in pectin, and jam normally sets easily after adding sugar at a 1:1 ratio. I use less sugar, and it takes a bit longer.

Picking

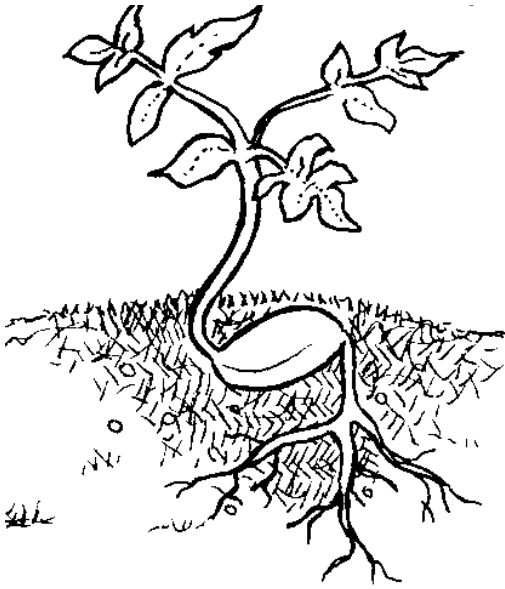
Don't pick wet berries unless you are going to use or freeze them immediately; otherwise, they will go mouldy quickly. Wear old clothes when picking – while the berries are thornless, **they can still stain**. (But a cold soak and wash overcomes most of it)



"Where do I get plants?"

Try New Gippsland Seed and Bulbs,
9737 9560,
usually available June/July only

Planting seedlings



When to plant

Seedlings can be planted out into the garden when they are about 4cm tall and have developed their second set of leaves (following the first 'cotyledons' that emerge from the seed). They should be full and strong, rather than 'leggy'. Some gardeners prefer to keep seedlings in the nursery, where it may be easier to protect them from pests and keep them watered, until they're bigger and stronger.

Avoid planting out at hot and windy times of day, as the plants will dry out quickly. Dawn or dusk of an overcast day when rain looks likely is ideal.

Biodynamic gardeners use the cycles of the moon to help decide when the best time to plant is. According to this

method, seedlings are best planted out in the week following new moon.

Some people who are on speaking terms with their plants like to give them 24 hours notice before they plant them out, or even ask if it's ok first...

Hardening Off

The plants you propagate (or buy) are usually grown in a sheltered, protected environment. They will need to be hardened off so they will suffer less of a shock when they go into the ground. Before they are planted in the garden, leave them for two to three days in a place with similar conditions to where they will be planted.

Planting the seedlings out in the garden

Push aside any mulch and make a hole one and a half times the depth of the pot with a hand fork or trowel. Fill in the bottom of the hole with compost and mix in with a little of the surrounding soil.

Squeeze the pot gently to loosen soil, then tip on its side so the plant slides out. If your seedlings are in egg cartons, newspaper cups, or other pots that will break down, they can be put straight in the hole without removing their containers.

It's generally best not to disturb the roots of the plant. However, if the roots have become 'pot bound' and are circling the pot, you may want to loosen them, either by 'tickling' gently or - if very tightly bound - by using a knife to make centimetre deep cuts from top to bottom at intervals around the root ball.

Place the plant in the hole and fill in with soil - make sure the soil level remains about the same as it was in the pot. Firm in gently.

Water your seedlings in well with a watering can or hose with a rose fitting. Always water newly transplanted plants, even if the soil's already moist. Keep your plants well watered for their first few days in their new home.

From the Community Gardening in SA Resource Kit. May be reproduced for use in community gardens.