
PERMANEWS

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Permaculture Noosa Meeting	2
President's Report for February 2015	3
Plant Profile - West Indian Gherkin/Maxixe Cucumis anguria	4
Bellbunya	6
Robin Clayfield's Recipes	7
Links - Youtube	8
Quote of the Month	8
Book Review	9
Perma Blitz at Fekonia Mountain	10
Seed Savers Group February Meeting	11
Ferment Your Way to Good Health	12
About Chinampas	13
Yandina Community Gardens Update	17
Gardening Tips: how to deal with drought	20

This newsletter is emailed to members free or can be purchased at the meeting for \$2

Permaculture Noosa Meeting

19th February, 2015

at COOROY MEMORIAL HALL, 7:00 pm for a 7:30 pm start.

Permaculture Noosa meetings are FREE and open to the public. Beginning at 7pm with a Marketplace where members share their surplus home grown produce by giving, exchanging or selling it. The meeting starts at 7.30pm and supper (gold coin donation) will be served at 9pm. Cooroy Memorial Hall, Cooroy (next to the RSL)

PRESENTATIONS:

• Basket making from nature

Pauline Chant was taught by her mother and she made her first basket when she was nine years old. Her work today is the very embodiment of sustainability. Most of Pauline's weaving material is sourced from her own property or local area and sometimes she calls on other gardeners to part with their prunings for her basket making. In recent years Pauline has dabbled in other mediums for her work, including paper, clay, kelp, bark, fabric, wire and plastics and recently has found that using permaculture plants such as vetiver and lemon grass is another new avenue to pursue for her baskets and paper making. Pauline has led classes and workshops in basket

making over several years locally and at "Gatherings" and also on visits to Fiji and Hawaii.

For the meeting Pauline will bring a variety of completed baskets to show, and talk about the different weaving techniques, where the material was collected and how to harvest, prepare and store the fibres. A variety of materials to will be used to demonstrate how to construct a small garlic basket at the meeting.

• Keeping your seed varieties pure: How to prevent cross pollination

A presentation by Elisabeth Fekonia an award winning, accredited permaculture teacher on how to do correct seed saving to keep varieties pure. Elisabeth holds regular classes on all thing permaculture and will explain how to keep your seed varieties pure for true to type seed.

For further information:

email info@permaculturenoosa.com.au

President's Report for February 2015

This year we will be celebrating 21 years of Permaculture Noosa and to mark the event I went to see Anne Wensley, a life member, to borrow her almost complete collection of permaNews since 1994. I will be making the mammoth effort of scanning in all the editions and put them all on disk to make them available to the membership. All you newcomers will be able to get glimpses of who was there in the earlier days and what was going on and also see of the joy and struggles we went through as we were trying to become self sufficient. Leafing through the pages the memories came flooding back to me especially as I saw the articles that I wrote since the early days. There are so many memories I have of permaculture Noosa, especially of all the people that have come and gone over the years. Along with the original people that have stayed on, I would have to say it's been very worthwhile to have been a part of this evolving and dynamic group of people. Who knows how long this organisation will be around- I hope for many more years to come as more people are beginning to grasp how vital we are to the community. Permaculture has been building up quite a reputation and so many people are now growing at least some of their own organic veggies and keeping a few chickens in the backyard. We are here to help people to take more steps in that direction with education and support through our monthly meetings and open gardens.

I hope you feel as excited as I am to be a part of Permaculture Noosa and contribute where you can to keep the many perma wheels turning.

We are now looking at a new sound set up as the old speakers are too heavy and complex to use. We still need a sound person but this job will soon change to be a much easier one to man (or woman) and there is also a position for someone to monitor the permaculture Noosa website and FaceBook page. We are also saying goodbye to Bronwyn McIntyre as a member of the committee and supper person and Tom Kendall is also stepping down as a committee member as his own commitments are taking up so much of his time. Thank you so much to both of you for your generous support of your time and energy and the call is out for a new supper person and at least one if not two more committee members to fill the void. We need enough people on the committee to make sure we reach a quorum as not everyone can make it to the meetings every month. It's also a great opportunity to get more involved and to have your say in how we run this very worthy organisation.

Elisabeth Fekonia, president

Plant Profile - West Indian Gherkin/Maxixe Cucumis anguria

The following is an extract from Mother Earth News:

After a few years of growing many varieties of pickling cucumbers and getting too many pests and diseases, we went outside the box in 2013 and tried some West Indian Gherkin seed from Monticello, where they used to be grown by Thomas Jefferson (and some of the enslaved people, no doubt). These are not closely related to actual cucumbers, but are used similarly. (They are not the same as Mexican Sour Gherkins, either.) I saw them growing in the Monticello garden when I was there for the Heritage Harvest Festival in September 2012, and they are certainly robust and productive in hot humid weather. This seems like a great crop for disease-prone gardens – no trouble with cucumber leaves turning yellow!

West Indian Gherkins are prolific and drought-tolerant, and show no sign of any of the many cucumber plant diseases or pests. Because the healthy vines cover the ground, there is no room for weeds, making it an easy crop to grow. Our pickles turned out well and are becoming quite popular! We grew even more this year. Next year, I want this to be the only pickling cucumber we grow! It is a rambler (long vines) so maybe a trellis would be wise if space is tight.

Because West Indian Gherkins are open-pollinated and don't cross with actual cucumbers (or watermelons, despite the look of the leaves), we save our own gherkin seeds, and a little money in the process. In late September this year, I harvested four 5-gallon buckets of gherkins (one for seed, 3 for pickling) from a 50-foot row we abandoned over five weeks previously.





Because West Indian Gherkins are open-pollinated and don't cross with actual cucumbers (or watermelons, despite the look of the leaves), we save our own gherkin seeds, and a little money in the process. In late September this year, I harvested four 5-gallon buckets of gherkins (one for seed, 3 for pickling) from a 50-foot row we abandoned over five weeks previously. These plants survived that period just on rainfall, as we pulled out the drip tape back when we thought we were done. And there was only about 3-inches of rain, almost all of it in one week, with nothing in the other four weeks. Before I saw these

gherkins growing at [Monticello](#), I had no idea of their existence. Now I'm starting to hear about them in more places.

[William Woys Weaver](#), author of [Heirloom Vegetable Gardening](#) wrote about them for MOTHER EARTH NEWS in 2008. He discovered that they originated in West Africa, rather than West Indies, and that they can be pickled, eaten raw or cooked like zucchini. [Read more](#).

Seed is available from Monticello, [Seed Savers Exchange](#), [Trade Winds Fruit](#) and [Reimer Seeds](#). These round cucumbers with soft spines are an unusual and attractive crop. When first forming, they look like miniature watermelons, and might lead to that old question "Is a cucumber a fruit or a vegetable?" Botanically a fruit, in the kitchen, a vegetable.

I've learned that West Indian Gherkin is resistant to some species of Root Knot Nematodes, so we plan to grow it in our hoophouse as part of our rotation of nematode-resistant crops for a bed there which produced some gnarly-rooted tomatoes this year. We'll get soooo many pickles! It's a very productive crop for us.

* **Editors Note:** the bowl of gherkins in the photo was grown in my garden at Sunshine Beach. The plants seem to need very little water or nutrients. They also suffer very few pests or diseases and taste very good!

Bellbunya

Organic Swap-Meet Cafe & Healing Day - from 9 am Thursday 26th February

Swap – Buy – Sell – Share – Meet - Network - Healing

Bellbunya's Sustainable Kitchen Organic Cafe welcomes you on the fourth Thursday morning of the month, at Bellbunya Community in Belli Park, from 9am to 1pm. Enjoy delicious, healthy, fresh food in the Sustainable Kitchen Cafe, including our signature "Dandelion Chai" and a range of delicious organic, vegan and gluten-free cakes, iced herbal tea, and other seasonal dishes. This is a free platform where you can bring any excess produce, home-made preserves or plants to sell or trade, and support each other by local purchasing, swapping and networking.

Music in the cafe is provided by talented locals or plants (also locals!) at Bellbunya, via "the Machine for the Music of the Plants" - the first and only of its kind currently in Australia. At the same time, a healing day will be operating where people can bring their therapy/healing modality to share, or receive a

treatment for \$15. If you are a healer, this can be an opportunity for people to become known and network with other people in the area, and to share your modality. Our free talk each month is a high point for the morning! Come along to explore another aspect of life and living.

The Schedule for the day:

- 8:30 am Healers arrive to set up (and have a cuppa if they choose)
- 9:00am Organic Cafe opens. Swap-meeters are invited to set-up food & produce displays, label & price items
- 10:00am Free talk - Clare Rose on aromatherapy (details <http://www.bellbunya.org.au/events-calendar>)
- 12:00pm Free Tour of Bellbunya

A relocalisation initiative for a sustaining future....

Contact Amandala at Bellbunya for more information on 07 5447 0181 or email Amandala on mn8amanda@gmail.com

Bellbunya is at 114 Browns Rd, Belli Park, 11 km from Eumundi on the Eumundi-Kenilworth Road

Robin Clayfield's Recipes

Making Your Own Pasta: Pasta can be created very simply, & made quite nutritious by the use of whole wheat bio-dynamic flours and added vegetables. Rye flour can be used if preferred or required by diet.

You will need:

- mixing bowl
- rolling pin
- knife

(Or you may like to purchase a pasta making machine.)~

Basic Recipe for Egg Noodles

- 400 gm wheat flour
- 3 eggs
- 2 1/2 tbs olive oil

Combine the ingredients into a firm dough. Divide into several pieces and leave to sit for 10 minutes. Take one segment at a time and flatten with the rolling pin on a floured board into a long shape. Sprinkle flour on the top as well to prevent the rolling pin sticking. Cut the dough into strips for lasagne or roll up and cut into thin circles. Unravel these and hang up or leave to dry on a clean board for spaghetti. Pasta may be cooked while it is fresh or left to dry. Once dry it can be stored

for some months in an airy cupboard. It might go mouldy if it is stored in an airtight container. You can achieve any colour pasta you like by the addition of vegetables. To the basic recipe add 250gm of your favourite colour vegetable such as carrots, silverbeet or spinach, red cabbage, grated beetroot or tomato paste. To prepare the vegetables, steam until just cooked. Puree in a food processor and then mix in with the dough. Recipes (Please note that the use of eggs is not compulsory in pasta making and from a food combining perspective it is desirable not to include them.)

Egg Noodle - A yellow coloured pasta: Add 4 eggs to 350gm flour

Pinky-Red Pasta: Add 3 or 4 tbs of tomato paste to 350gm flour - you could also add some chilli sauce if you are feeling adventurous!

Spinach Pasta: Add 250gm spinach to 350gm flour, along with 2tbs olive oil and some dried parsley or mixed herbs.

Herbed Pasta: Add chopped chives, parsley, garlic, black pepper, basil, oregano, marjoram, tarragon or thyme. This will add to the taste of any pasta. Turmeric or saffron can be used to colour the pasta yellow. If you are using a pasta machine, once you have flattened out the pasta, simply feed it through the top of the machine - roll up each individual strand and allow to dry.

YOUTUBE LINKS

The internet is a great way to access information about Permaculture. Youtube is one of my favourite ways of learning. Here are some you will find of interest:

- **GROW BIOINTENSIVE: A Beginner's Guide** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lhct1SqYJls&list=ULff-fzyWNSRw&index=7>

A series of videos on biointensive gardening for the beginner. Well presented and a useful reminder to experienced gardeners too.

- **Biochar Workshop Parts 1-5** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svNg5w7WY0k>

Biochar Workshop led by Bob Wells, soil scientist Jon Nilsson and Patryk Battle. Learn how to make biochar and its many beneficial uses including greatly enhancing soil life and fertility. Discover innovative ways to maximize its uses for dynamically carbon negative farming and gardening

If you have any sites or links you'd like to share send them to <mailto:permanews@permaculturenoosa.com.au> Entries for the newsletter are welcomed and can be sent by email or post . PERMACULTURE NOOSA.INC PO BOX 619 COOROY QUEENSLAND 4563 <http://permaculturenoosa.com.au>

Quote of the Month:

Cooperation, not competition, is the very basis of existing systems and of future survival.

(Bill Mollison on the Principle of Cooperation, Permaculture- A Designer's Manual)

Book Review

Organic Fruit Growing* by Annette MacFarlane

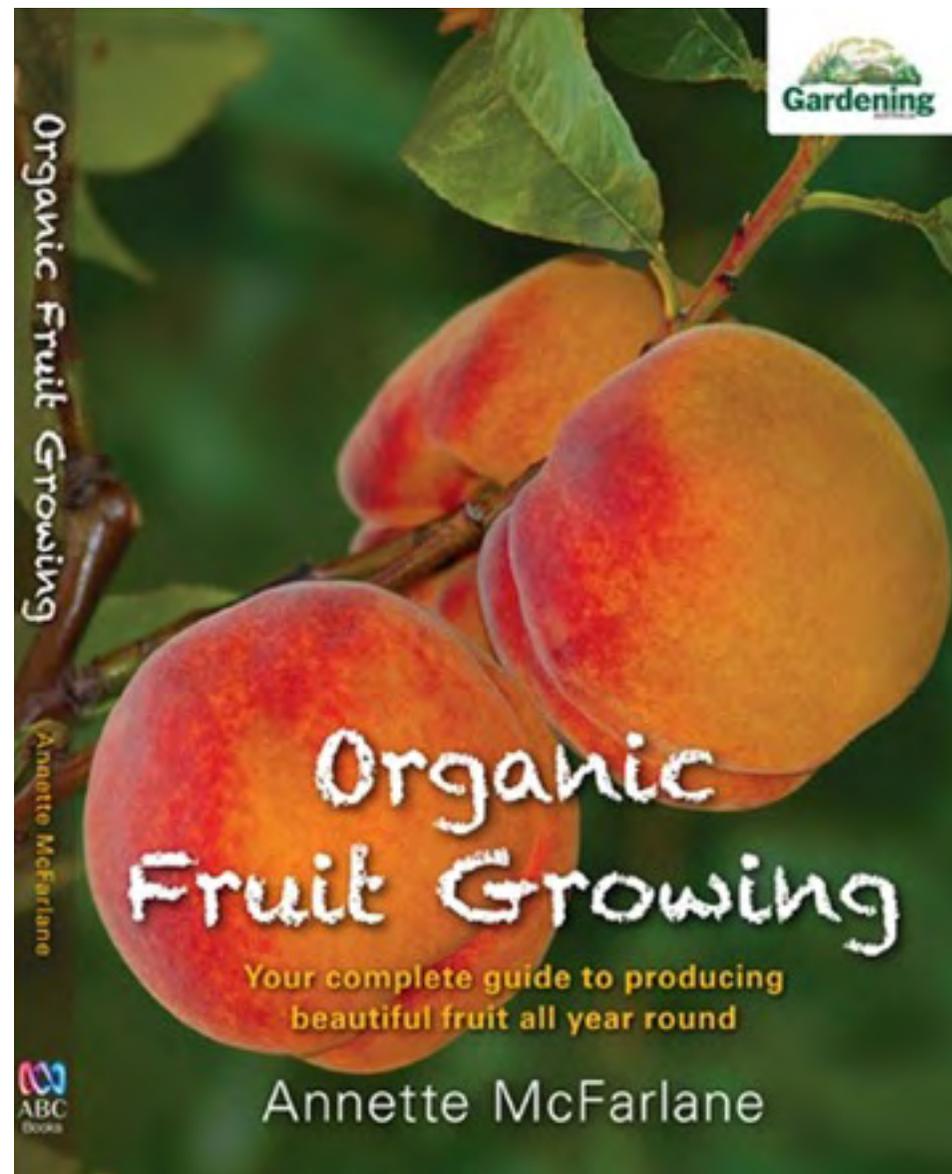
Best-selling author Annette McFarlane takes on organic fruit growing in a companion book to her enduring classic *Organic Vegetable Gardening*. In this practical, no-fail guide, Annette makes fruit growing easy with advice on:

- soil preparation and drainage
- water wise design
- nutrition
- coping with climactic variations (including drought tolerance)
- propagation
- purchasing and planting
- pruning and training
- pollination
- how to cook with various fruit (recipes provided)
- pest and diseases and how to control them organically.

Complete with profiles of 60 shrubs, vines and trees, including unusual fruits such as carambola, grumichama and granadilla, and specific advice on how to best manage their requirements, *Organic Fruit Growing* will show you, whether a novice or experienced gardener, how to supply family, friends and neighbours with fruit all year round.

This book is available in all good book stores and selected nurseries late August,early September 2015 or by mail order from Green Harvest or ABC Books

* Organic Fruit Growing is available from the PN Library



Perma Blitz and Pizza Party at Fekonia Mountain

DAY: Sunday the 1st of March 2015

TIME: 3.00 pm

PLACE: 383 Black Mountain Road, COOROY

Despite suffering some enormous losses and setbacks which have not only caused her much pain, but badly affected her capacity to make a living, our indefatigable president Elisabeth has continued to give her all to her duties at Permaculture Noosa and the sustainable agriculture movement in general. Elisabeth is still dependant on crutches and is finding it difficult to maintain her property and gardens at Black Mountain. In short, she is in dire straits and desperately needs our help. It would be great to have some people come and do some whipper snipping (Elisabeth's whipper snipper unfortunately has given up the ghost). The gardens are also in need of a tidy up with all the recent rains, and the driveway is in need of repairs and will greatly benefit by throwing rocks into the ruts for safer driving. We can finish a couple of hours of work with a pizza party so it can turn out to be a fun social event. Due to the state of the driveway it will be best to carpool to avoid the chaos of parking as it is not easy to negotiate right now. The date for this event is for Sunday the

1st of March at 3pm. Bring along your garden tools and some topping for the pizza and Elisabeth will provide the dough and trays to bake them on.

For car pooling arrangements, please contact Elisabeth by email info@permacultureproduce.com.au or mobile 0432 180 523.



Seed Savers Group March Meeting

DAY: Thursday, 12 March 2015 (we meet on the second Thursday of every month)

TIME: 9.30 am to 11.30 am

PLACE: 'A Touch of the Past' Coffee Shop, 18 Reserve St, Pomona.

MARCH'S MEETING TOPIC: Jobs in the garden in March.

Want to know more about what grows best at this time of year? How to collect and save seeds from plants growing in this area and how best to deal with this sub tropical climate?

Permaculture Noosa's Seed Savers Group meets on the second Thursday of every month at 'A Touch of the Past' coffee shop in Pomona. While we work we exchange information on seed saving and more generally on recent successes and failures in our gardens.

Everyone is welcome to join us for a cuppa and a chat. In March we meet on 12th.

During the meeting we process and package seeds that have been saved by local gardeners. Once in small packets, our aim is to distribute the seeds through various means to gardeners

on the Sunshine Coast, so that crops that have proved successful in this region can be kept in circulation from one year to the next.

The processing and packaging tasks are very simple and require no previous experience. Hope to see you there.

Ferment Your Way to Good Health

Is your digestion playing up? Do you feel bloated and uncomfortable after a meal? You will most likely be short on the friendly bacteria that are naturally found in the human gut. I have just written a new book on how to ferment your own food so that you can introduce all these friendly bacteria into the food you love to eat. Fifty recipes aimed mostly at the beginner with a few challenging ones for the adventurous. This could open up a whole new world for your wellbeing when you begin to ferment your own food. It's also a great way to extend the season of the vegetable garden and use up surplus veggies.

How does kimchi cucumbers sound to you? How about your own sauerkraut, Korean kimchi, fermented bean paste and miso! You will be surprised at how easy it is.

For \$25 a copy this will be the best investment for your health and wellbeing. See **Elisabeth Fekonia** for more info.



About Chinampas

Chinampas are probably the most fertile agricultural system ever devised

Chinampas are also described in the book “Permaculture: A Designer’s Manual” by Bill Mollison (available from the PN library).

Chinampa is a method of Mesoamerican agriculture which used small, rectangular areas of fertile arable land to grow crops on the shallow lake beds in the Valley of Mexico

Description

Sometimes referred to as "floating gardens," chinampas were [artificial islands](#) that usually measured roughly (29.9 m × 2.5 m). Chinampas were used by the [Aztecs](#). In [Tenochtitlan](#), the chinampas ranged from 91.4 m × 4.6 m to 91.4 m × 9.1 m. They were created by [staking out](#) the shallow lake bed and then [fencing](#) in the rectangle with [wattle](#). The fenced-off area was then layered with mud, lake sediment, and decaying vegetation, eventually bringing it above the level of the lake. Often trees such as *āhuexōtl* (a [willow](#)) and *āhuēhuētl* (a cypress) were planted at the corners to secure the chinampa. Chinampas were separated by channels wide enough for a [canoe](#) to pass. These "islands" had very high crop yields with up to 7 harvests a year. Chinampas were commonly used in pre-colonial Mexico and Central America.



History

The earliest fields that have been securely dated are from the [Middle Postclassic period](#), 1150 – 1350 CE. Chinampas were used primarily in Lakes [Xochimilco](#) and [Chalco](#) near the [springs](#) that lined the south shore of those lakes. The [Aztecs](#) not only conducted military campaigns to obtain control over these regions but, according to some researchers, undertook significant state-led efforts to increase their extent.^[5] Chinampa farms also ringed [Tenochtitlán](#), the Aztec capital, which was considerably enlarged over time. Smaller-scale farms have also been identified near the island-city of

Xaltocan and on the east side of Lake Texcoco. With the destruction of the dams and sluice gates during the Spanish conquest of Mexico, many chinampas fields were abandoned, although remnants are still in use today in what remains of Lake Xochimilco.

Among the crops grown on chinampas were maize, beans, squash, amaranth, tomatoes, chili peppers, and flowers. It is estimated that food provided by chinampas made up one-half to two-thirds of the food consumed by the city of Tenochtitlán.

Chinampas were fertilized using lake sediments as well as Night soil and rich earth from the bottom of lakes.

Maize was planted with digging stick *huictli* with a wooden blade on one end.

The word *chinampa* comes from the Nahuatl word *chināmitl*, meaning "square made of canes".

Most of this information is derived from Wikipedia.

A very good article by Rodrigo Lañado can be found on the Permaculture Research Institute Website:

<http://permaculturenews.org/2013/05/28/chinampas-2-0-an-elegant-technology-from-the-past-to-save-the-future/>







Model of Chinampas on display at the Aztecs Exhibition, Melbourne Museum, July 2014

YANDINA COMMUNITY GARDENS UPDATE

1. **LIVING SMART SATURDAYS Workshop List**
 2. **Upcoming events/workshops on the coast**
 3. **Items For Sale**
-

1. Living Smart Saturdays

This project has been assisted through the Sunshine Coast Council grants program. Yandina Community Gardens is pleased to offer the latest array of free workshops as part of our collaboration with the Sunshine Coast Council's Living Smart program. The workshops aim to stimulate your skills to live in a sustainable way, and to share what you learn with others. We urge you to bring your friends, neighbours and family of all ages to share and learn.

Saturday, 21st February, 2015.

Due to the current weather forecast, it has been decided to make an early call and CANCEL the workshop due for this Saturday, Feb 21st!!

The topic will be re-scheduled to a later date in the year!!

We apologise for any inconvenience!!

2. Upcoming workshops/events are as follows:-

Sat Feb 28 • Guided Garden Tour • 9.00 am

Want to be inspired about what – and how – to grow in the sub-tropics? Then come along for a free garden tour to see permaculture principles and design ideas in action at Yandina Community Gardens. Meet at the aquaponics system for a 90 minute (approximately) tour of the gardens. Wear a hat and bring your water bottle.

Bookings are NOT required for any of these workshops unless specified. All workshops are free.

Workshops commence at 9:30 am unless otherwise specified and duration is approximately 1½ to 2 hours. The roster for Saturday mornings is constantly in need of new names; the work is not hard and there are lots of interesting people to talk to, so, if you want to join in, have a pleasant morning and either collect or impart some knowledge (or both), please don't be shy about putting your name down. And rest assured you will not be left on your own - you will always be placed with one of our more experienced volunteers, who will be only too happy to show you the ropes.

If you would like to volunteer on a Saturday, please email Shay Holmes if you can work some Saturdays.

Her email address is shaydah46@gmail.com. Remember, volunteers are always most welcome every Monday, Tuesday

and/or Saturday at the gardens and, aside from the social aspect, there is always lots to learn. Another benefit is that any produce ready for harvesting is shared among the volunteers, so it becomes a good way to help reduce your weekly food bill.

Did You Know???

Centrelink 'voluntary work' obligations can be met by becoming a volunteer at the Yandina Community Gardens, working alongside our very knowledgeable permaculture volunteers. (Contact your local Centrelink office for more details regarding Volunteer requirements).

If you require more info on any topic, or indeed, if you have any ideas on how to make the gardens a more sustainable, social, productive, better, educational or happier place, please email info@yandinacommunitygardens.com.au

Garden Opening Hours

Monday 8 am to 12 noon

Tuesday 8 am to 2 pm

Saturday 8 am to 12 noon

The Living Smart workshop series is constantly being updated so be sure to keep checking our website for the latest workshop program.

www.yandinacommunitygardens.com.au

3. For Sale At the Gardens

• Check out our **extensive range of tropical and sub-tropical edible plants** in the shadehouse. All these plants have been propagated from plants grown in the gardens and are available for **\$2.00** per plant (NOTE: If you purchase **12 or more** of the **same** plant, the cost is **\$1.50** per plant) – fruit trees are **\$5.00** per plant. We also have a range of larger, more advanced plants for sale, ranging in price from **\$5.00 to \$15.00** - just ask one of the volunteers for help with these plants.

Wicking Bed in a BOX – We now have broccoli box wicking bed kits available for sale. These boxes include everything you need except seeds or seedlings. Cost is **\$20.00**

Organic seeds available for **\$1.00** packet–check out our range.

Dr Grow-It-All liquid fertiliser – \$14.00 for a one litre bottle available to members/\$16.95 for non-members. We are now a licensed refill station for Dr Grow-It-All and **the refill service is available** to both members and non-members (refill your empty Dr Grow-It-All containers at **\$6.00** per litre for members/**\$8.00** for non-members).

Bio-Char - Members \$25 per 4kg/10ltr ; Non-members \$30 per 4kg/10ltr (Bulk biochar - please bring your own bucket)

Kama knives from Green Harvest at **\$12.00** each – ideal for cutting weeds at the base of trees and shrubs and for harvesting non-woody mulch plants.

Biota Booster is a pioneering non-GM biotech liquid product. It is safe for humans, animals, fish and the environment. It rejuvenates and improves the soil and is available for **\$30** Members & **\$35** Non-Members.

"**Good Bug Mix**" seeds from Green Harvest are available at **\$5.00** a packet.

Permaculture Noosa Recipe Book - Recipes using the tropical and sub-tropical vegies we grow in our gardens - **\$5.00**

Pest and Bug Control Chart – lists out what to grow or spray to control the bugs in your garden – **\$3.00**

BOOK - You Can Have Your Permaculture and Eat It Too – Robin Clayfield \$36 Members, \$39 Non-Members

BOOK – How Can I Use Herbs In My Daily Life – Isabell Shipard \$37 Members, \$40 Non-Members

Member Items For Sale

1 WEEK OLD JAPANESE QUAIL FOR SALE \$2 each

Multi colours, unsexed.

Ph Dave 0414066482 (Doonan)

Gardening Tips

Dealing with Drought (it will come again!)

The Most Efficient Way to Store Water Is In The Soil

Avoid water leaving your property

Your property is a huge catchment area. Take advantage of this by directing runoff from driveways and paving on to lawns and gardens. Use porous materials like gravel on walkways so that water can soak in and become available to trees and shrubs. Incorporate mulch filled swales into larger garden beds and on sloping land. They will serve as infiltration pits when heavy rain falls.

Recycling organic waste so that the soil holds moisture

There are some good commercially available compost products available from your local nursery. Unfortunately, most have been pulverised, deodorised and pasteurised. They contain nutrients and are a source of organic matter, but much of the life we hope they will inject into our soil has generally been processed out of them. There is really no substitute for home made compost. Resolve to recycle all garden clippings and kitchen waste back into the garden. Compost bulk garden waste in a heap. Buy a bin or bury kitchen scraps. Work your way around the garden digging holes 30cm deep between

existing trees and shrubs and bury kitchen scraps each day. Other strategies for improving the moisture holding capacity of soil include incorporating coir peat into the soil. Avoid gimmicky, synthetic products. Read the label, if you need to wear gloves and a mask to use it don't bother. It cannot be good for the soil.

Use seaweed and other wetting agents

Always water new plants in with liquid seaweed. It stimulates soil organisms like fungi and bacteria, which in turn help release nutrients to plant roots. Seaweed increases the disease resistance and drought tolerance of plants by thickening cell walls. Seaweed is also a wetting agent. In other words, it helps the soil to absorb and retain moisture – but keep in mind that it takes time to work. For more instant results try one of the commercially available products available. Organic Crop Protectants has a product called Eco-Hydrate that actually helps soil absorb moisture from the atmosphere (dew and humidity).

For more information consult “Successful Gardening with Annette McFarlane”:

<http://www.annettemcfarlane.com/feature.htm>