



GREENS~LEAVES

Dunedin Vegetable Growers Club Newsletter
February 2024

Meetings: 1st Wednesday of the month, 7pm
Venue: Dunedin Lawn Bowl Stadium,
 38 Tahuna Rd, Lawyers Head, Dunedin
Membership: Helen Flockton - phone
 0274222364 helen.flockton6@gmail.com
Club Email: dvgnz@gmail.com
Website: <http://dvgc.co.nz/>
Bank Account # 030905051590600
 (Please include your name as a reference)

Next Club Meeting: Wednesday 7th February

Q & A: David

Club Talk: Elizabeth Whitcombe – ‘Growing, Protecting and Harvesting Apples’

Speaker: Laura Green – ‘Landrace Gardening’

Garden visit: Carol Henderson, Anderson Bay, 17th February, 1pm



February competition:

3 alliums – three of the same
or a mix of onion varieties

January competition winners:

Ruth Bayne – Stella cherries
 Heather Wilson – Copenhagen
 Market Cabbage

Things to look forward to in February:

Garden visit

Hello Everyone,

Here is this month’s growing guide, a report on the latest garden visit and an introduction to handy perennials. We learn about organic matter and watering, and upcoming events.

Garden tasks for February – by David

Too late to sow: Any seeds except those below.

Last chance to sow: Seed of Asian vegetables, kale, radish, perennial spinach & especially turnips by mid February.

Last Chance to plant: Seedlings of Green Spouting Broccoli (by mid month) and Asian vegetables (by month’s end).

Plenty of time left for: Seeds of Asian vegetables, Silverbeet, onions and lettuce and seedlings of kale and perennial spinach.

Remember to sow: Onion seed should go in before the middle of March. St Patricks Day (17th) is a good reminder.

Too early yet for: Seeds of Broad Beans and Peas - though these can go in from the beginning of March until end of May.

Report on the visit to the Houston's Garden – by Ruth Bayne

On a hot summer's day Viktoria and Guy opened their garden to a group of about thirty interested DVGC members. Upon walking down their garden path my first impression was of an utterly charming mix of vegetables, edibles, and flowers surrounding their home, an English style cottage.

Viktoria explained that they are changing the established ornamental garden to one with a greater focus on being an edible garden. They are making canny use of all available space by replacing weedy or nonperforming plants with fruit and vegetables. Instead of lawn the garden in front of the house is now a grid of raised beds jam-packed with vegetables and flowers. Squeezed in around the edges are a glasshouse with tomatoes and young fruit trees including an apricot absolutely covered in ripe fruit. A second plastic house has comfy chairs for Viktoria and Guy to relax in the warmth of the sun in cooler weather, although their garden is so extensive and well cared for that it doesn't seem as if they will have too much down time.

Viktoria and Guy are trying out lots of different strategies to find what works for them, following their own interests, and learning as they go. Guy already makes apple cider each year from foraged apples and so they have planted several young apple trees, including the classic cider apple "Kingston Black".

They have found that the raised vegetable beds they initially made dry out quickly and require a lot of watering so new vegetable beds have been created in ground. The couple have established some of these new beds using Hügelkultur techniques and this has been a good way to break in new ground. Viktoria and Guy use a lot of compost in their garden for mulch and they like to use only their own compost in the edible garden as that way they know that it is free from any sprays or contaminants.

Last year they experimented by growing an early crop of potatoes at the suggestion of a member of their local community. They planted Swift seed potatoes into a new in-ground bed in August, using frost cloth to protect the growing shoots on nights that looked like frost, and they were rewarded with a very early crop. There was some excitement and suspense during our visit as Guy tipped out their potato-in-a-bucket revealing a well grown crop of new potatoes.



Around the side of the house are their four large compost bins made from recycled pallets and these were of great interest to many with lots of questions asked and answered about the couples' hot composting system. Guy explained that they store up potential ingredients beforehand until they have enough to make a new compost pile and then mow up all the material using a lawn

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mower. They choose not to include seeding vegetation to prevent weed regrowth when they apply the compost to the garden. Each compost bin is carefully lined with cardboard and the compost pile covered in order to retain heat. Guy has made a pipe with holes in it which he places in the middle of a new heap to aerate the pile and promote decomposition. On the day we visited you could feel a waft of real heat coming out of the pipe in the middle of the current compost pile.

Food Security with Easily Self-seeding and Perennial Plants – by Sue

Try growing these easy-care, easy to propagate vegetables, herbs and fruits that come year after year without much fuss in your garden or in pots. No annual sowing or buying of seedlings is needed. For those who are interested in the idea of continued sharing by planting, dividing and giving surplus plants to neighbours, friends and family, free plants and/or seeds will be available at our February meeting.

If you have surplus seedlings, cuttings or seeds of the plants we are introducing or have previously introduced, we greatly appreciate you bringing some along for sharing.

Perennial Brassica



is a hardy plant in the cabbage family, easy to propagate from pencil thick cuttings. Just stick them in the soil and keep moist. It tolerates dry and wet spells and lasts for several years before flowering. Once it flowers, it dies back, and new plants can be enjoyed elsewhere. A great plant in the background of a border, on the edge of a bed or food forest. The young leaves (especially after frosts) and shoots are tasty. With it, one is never without nutritious greens for stir fries, curries, soups or salads.

Cape Gooseberry



is a South American plant native to Peru and Colombia, in the night shade family. It is easy to grow from seed, like a tomato plant. Ripe berries are sweet and rich in Vitamin C. Unripe berries, leaves and flowers are poisonous. Picked in their casings the fruit continues to ripen and can be enjoyed raw in salads, dried or cooked into jams etc. It does not tolerate frosts and is best cut back in autumn but keeps producing through the winter under eaves or in sheltered spots in the garden. It is a very drought tolerant plant, thriving on sunny, dry banks. Link: <https://www.superfoodevolution.com/golden-berry-plant.html>.

Organic matter the key to holding water

Featured in the ODT 11th January 2024

A book extract from:

Vege Patch from Scratch, by Jo McCarroll (published by Upstart Press, RRP \$44.99)

‘SUMMER comes and everything in the garden goes, or rather grows, into double time. You need to be everywhere, picking and planting, weeding and watering. And watering and watering. I know it seems basic, but you’d be amazed how many problems that under-watering, over-watering and even irregular watering causes, especially over summer. Forgive me for stating the obvious but plants need water. Water is as vital to plants as it is to you and me. And gardeners think watering successfully is all about the action of watering, as in how and when you apply water. But actually, it all comes back to the soil (spoiler alert: in gardening, it always comes back to the soil).

Because when you water a plant, you are applying water to the soil in the fond hope that your vegetable crops will get the benefit. But good soil is both a sieve and a sponge. A sieve in that water needs to be able to move through it. If soil stays saturated, then all the pores — those spaces between the mineral particles and organic matter that make up soil — fill up with water and there is no oxygen available to diffuse into the roots. Your plants will effectively drown.

But you also need soil to be a sponge, as in to hold water around the roots so the plants can take it up as they need it. With large pores (or macro-pores, which have a diameter of more than 0.08mm), water moves easily through them and drains away. But smaller pores (or micro-pores, which have a diameter of less than 0.08mm) are small enough that surface tension holds the water in place. But with very small pores, like you find in very fine, silty soil, the water can be held so tightly to the particle surfaces that the force of osmosis in the plants’ roots is not strong enough to pull it up. So even though the soil is holding on to any water you apply, it is still not available to your growing crops.

So, watering is not only about how much water you apply but about how much water your soil is able to hold around a plant’s roots. That water is called plant available water (PAW). The PAW in a loamy soil can be three times as high as a sandy soil after both soils have been wet to the same degree. And the easiest and quickest way to increase the PAW in your soil is by adding organic matter.

Organic matter in soil — whether that’s compost you have applied, winter green crops you have chopped and dropped, or any other soil amendment you have applied that was once alive and is now in a process of decomposition — acts like a sponge. It absorbs and holds water. Some types of soil organic matter can absorb up to 20 times their own weight in water — and that water is released slowly as plants need it’.

ShareWaste

A great way to build neighbourly contacts and compost/soil at the same time and put kitchen and garden ‘waste’ to use locally, instead of exporting and then importing it:

<https://www.sharewaste.org.nz/>

Trading Table

Thanks to all who contribute to the interesting variety of plants, cuttings, seedling, seeds and materials on the trading table, very much appreciated.

From Garden to Table:

Easy Blackcurrant Jam with Optional Chilli (Rocoto)

<https://tinandthyme.uk/2021/07/easy-blackcurrant-jam/>

Black currant syrup – Ross Gilbertson

5 Litres ripe black currants (2L = 1.5kg)

2 Litres water

3tsp citric acid or 1.25 cups apple cider vinegar

600ml sugar per 1 Litre of juice

Bring water to boil and add citric acid or vinegar.

Add currants and simmer until very soft. Mash currents as much as possible.

Strain liquid and measure.

Add sugar and bring back to boil.

Bottle.

All the black currant recipes you will ever need:

<https://tinandthyme.uk/2019/07/all-the-blackcurrant-recipes-you-will-ever-need/>

2024 subscription \$15 payable now – most convenient online

If not paid by March, the newsletter will be suspended. Please advise of email address (new members) or any change of it at welcome desk or by email to Helen Flockton (see header).

Committee members

Consider becoming a member of our friendly team that meets once a month to nut out and organise the program for the club.

Supper

Thanks to all for contributing to our enjoyable suppers.

February helpers: Jane Healey and Monica Blaser

Blueberry Country Southland NZ

<https://southlandnz.com/listing/blueberry-country/725/>

Riverton Harvest Festival 23rd & 24th March 2024 – two days of great workshops

<https://www.sces.org.nz/heritage-harvest-festival-2024>

DVGC stall at the South Dunedin Street Festival 16th March 2024

We plan to sell produce and plants and to generally promote home food growing and our club to the public. Get propagating and sowing for our stall at the festival in six weeks time!

Donations of produce and plants to Presbyterian food bank most welcome. Bring items to next club meeting for collection, or directly to their Moray Place premises.



DO YOU HAVE SURPLUS BACKYARD FRUIT?

WE'LL PICK IT AND GET IT OUT TO THE
COMMUNITY.

COMMUNITY FRUIT HARVEST ŌTEPOTI DUNEDIN

HOW IT WORKS

- Just before the fruit is ripe (ideally!) contact our coordinator: 021-0273-1251 , harvest@ourfoodnetwork.org.nz
- We'll contact volunteers near you and arrange a day and time to pick
- Fruit will be given to food banks, street pātaka/pantries, or to other organisations who process it into yummy baking or other goods which are then given away freely

Please note we will not take damaged, rotting, or small amounts of fruit. We can only pick fruit that is reasonably safe to reach.