

# DAVID STEPHEN'S

with monthly guide by  
**PETER CUNDALL**

## ORGANIC GROWING CALENDAR

### MINI VEGETABLE CROPS TO TRY

There is a wide seed range of miniature or half size vegetables available suitable for either containers and tubs or small garden plots. They generally require minimal fertiliser applications - over do the nitrogen salts and you'll get oversize growth in some cases.

Dwarf broad beans are atypical - Recommended for windy areas. In their 1990 catalogue (\$1.00 from P.O. SILVAN, VIC. 3795). New Gippsland Seed Farm offer the following mini-crops:

SLENDERITE BEANS  
 COLES DWARF BROAD BEANS  
 SUPERETTE AND VELOCITY CABBAGE  
 MIGNONETTE AND LAMBS LETTUCE  
 SUGAR BUSH WATERMELON  
 DWARF SUGAR / SNAP PEAS  
 SWEETHEART STRAWBERRY  
 GOURMET BABY BEET  
 MINI-WHITE CAULI  
 BUSH CHAMPION CUCUMBER  
 HONEY BUSH ROCKMELON  
 SPRING ONIONS  
 RADISH  
 TINY TIM TOMATOES  
 ROUND FRENCH / CHANTENAY / BABY CARROTS  
 Tokyo Cross mini-turnips produce edible leaves too, but the seed comes from the Thompson and Morgan range.

### WATERING WISDOM

The soil in your beds to be ideal, should have 50% air space and 50% solid material. Too frequent watering will saturate the soil to the point where all the air spaces are filled with water - a condition known as reaching 'field

## M A Y

capacity'. You will stop the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide from taking place and quite literally drown your plants.

To keep your crops growing well, you should irrigate to field capacity, then let your beds dry out to the point where the plant roots can no longer take moisture from the soil; then bring the soil back to field capacity again.

In general your vegetable garden needs the equivalent of one inch of rain (25mm) per week during the growing season. That translates into about 175 litres for every seven square metres of garden.

Overhead watering with a fine spray does not use water as efficiently as flood, drip or trickle irrigation. It can be too easily blown away from the target area vaporized by the sun or deflected by the large leaves of brassica, corn, tomato etc.

### HARDWOOD CUTTINGS

One of the easiest ways to propagate plants is to take hardwood cuttings - during late autumn and winter. Unlike softwood or semi-ripe cuttings, most hardwood cuttings can be struck in the open ground. Suitable are deciduous trees, vines and shrubs. Grape, blueberry, currants and gooseberries are the food crops that interest me: remove all underground buds of these cuttings (of 15-20 cm in length) as they can sucker.

The bottom or basal cut is made flat across and immediately below a bud. The top cut is made on a slant immediately above a bud.

Slanting the top cut is not to ensure water run-off as is often written, but to ensure that cuttings are planted the correct way up. Choose a sunny spot protected from the wind and turn over the soil with a garden fork, breaking up the clods in the process. Rake over the soil.

Make a V-shaped trench by pushing a spade into the soil to a depth of 10-15 cm (depending on the length of the cuttings). Insert each cutting, to a depth of two thirds its length, into the trench. The soil around each cutting must be firmed. Use your heels, it saves bending.

There is a slight drawback with hardwood cuttings - time. Your cuttings may need to remain in place until the following autumn before they are dug up and planted in the garden or given away to friends.

Points to remember: While winter and spring rains will keep the cuttings moist, summer heat will quickly dry them out.

Keep weeds away. Watch out for snails feeding on new shoots.

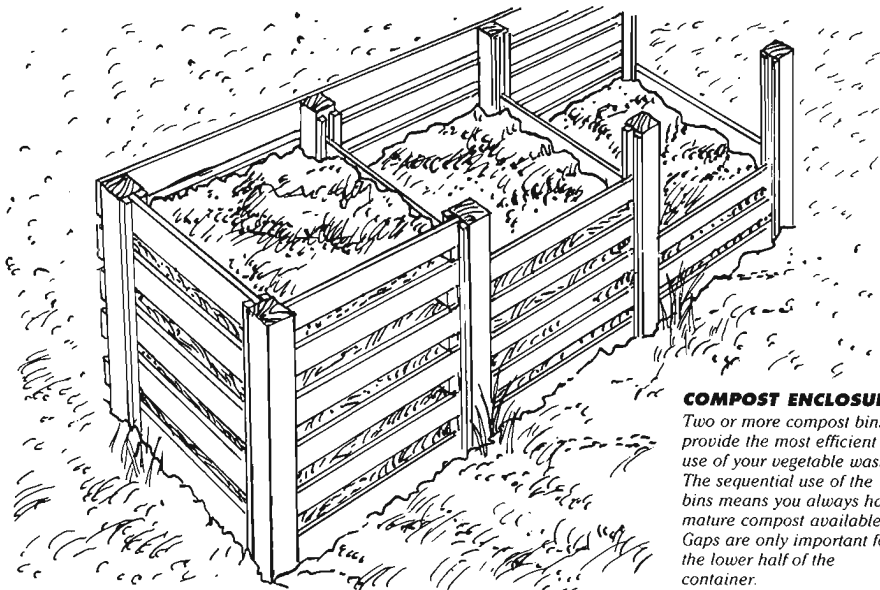
### AUTUMN

#### GOOSEBERRY MANAGEMENT

It's a pity that the gooseberry is often overlooked in favour of strawberry or raspberry, for it is possibly the most dependable of all the small fruits grown in cool climates. It is successful in a partially shaded corner of the garden where other crops would not thrive so well.

A well-grown and irrigated bush carries so much fruit that thinning is recommended as soon as they start to swell. Leave the fruits about one inch (2.5cm) apart for the ideal spacing.

After fruiting, rip out the tops of the young side shoots to about five leaves, for this encourages the bush to put its energy into the formation of its fruit buds. Mildew is the main problem to be aware of, so spray at the first sign with an organic fungicide.



### COMPOST ENCLOSURE

Two or more compost bins provide the most efficient use of your vegetable waste. The sequential use of the bins means you always have mature compost available. Gaps are only important for the lower half of the container.

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Lawns may have been stimulated into fresh growth as a result of cooler, moister conditions, but they will soon settle down into a state of semi-dormancy for the winter. Just the same, the value of mowing them at this time cannot be overstated. The mower will pick up many leaves which, if left to decay on the lawn will cause unsightly dead patches. If the lawn has not been renovated for some years, now is a good time to do the job. Scratch the surface with a stiff-tined grass-rake to bring up the matted dead grass lying over the surface. Do this before mowing because the mower will pick up some of the loosened dead material.