

DAVID STEPHEN'S

with monthly guide by
PETER CUNDALL

ORGANIC GROWING CALENDAR

AN UNCONVENTIONAL TOMATO CULTURE

An old method of invigorating tomato plants has been handed down by some Chinese market gardeners who worked in Australia earlier the century. You may like to try it. If you've heard of inserting copper nails into citrus tree trunks to improve the plant's health and vigor, then this idea may not appear too far-fetched. When your tomato stems have reached pencil thickness insert a 7.5cm long piece of fine copper wire right through the stem at a point just above soil level.

A single strand from seven strand earthing wire is ideal. The wire should be pulled through so there is an equal length on each side. About eight days after the wire is inserted, the plant takes on a healthier look, withstanding insect pests and diseases. The copper wire also has a tendency to enlarge each fruit. Mr Allan Brimble, a Victorian gardener, has lost about five plants only to disease in 37 years of growing tomatoes with copper wires.

TREE TOMATO (*Cyphomandra*)

This is a quick-growing, short-lived tree producing strong flavoured dark red fruits in late winter. Propagated by either seed or by cuttings, *Cyphomandra* must not be allowed to grow unimpeded, but should be pruned or pinched out at uppermost growing points to prevent the tree becoming top heavy when it is subject to wind damage. Start pruning once a height of 60cm is reached. It starts producing clusters of flowers in its second autumn, and you shouldn't have to climb a ladder to pick the delicious fruits in August and September.

HINTS FOR DAILY LIVING

- Where lawned areas are used for foot traffic, the surface can become badly drained and slippery during cold wet periods. A quick-short term remedy is to broadcast sawdust. This will eventually rot and improve the soil texture. Fresh sawdust will benefit from a generous addition of lime or woodash raked evenly through it to change it to a nice brown colour.
- Sow **celery** in one single row, spacing seedlings 40cm apart if you want to avoid the most damaging fungal disease, Septoria leaf spot. When celery is grown in a block, long periods of cool damp weather encourage the growth of the fungus, which can quickly spread, turning leaves and stems black with decay. If this stage is reached, the soil becomes contaminated with fungal spores, so don't let it go too far.

OCTOBER

ROOSTING TREE

The fowl run (or hen yard) is an ideal spot to grow a citrus tree. No other fruit or nut tree can survive the high nitrogen fertiliser constantly being deposited around its roots. Other important needs of citrus are for constant water and undisturbed roots.

SIMPLIFIED GARLIC SPRAY

It is hardly surprising that garlic, with its powerful antiseptic properties and high sulphur content, seems to make an effective fungicide. Soak one crushed clove of garlic in 570ml of water overnight, then strain through panthose into a sprayer. The same solution could be sprayed over seed flats and garden drills to destroy damping-off disease - a fungus that strikes emerging seedlings. Warning: do not deliberately breathe the atomised spray of garlic. The mustard oil content is potentially damaging to the lungs.

PETER CUNDALL'S GUIDE

One of the most destructive of all pests is codling moth grub, which attacks apples, quinces and pears. The moths are now becoming active laying their eggs upon or near the fruit. In a badly infested tree it is possible to see quick movements of the moths, in the evening, as they dart around the branches.

The safest way of controlling grub attack is to spray the trees about now with white oil emulsion, diluted with fifty parts of water. This overlays the eggs, preventing them from hatching out. If this programme is carried out every three weeks, making sure that the mixture is no stronger than specified, trees. It should be removed for inspection at least three times before it is finally taken off and burnt in late February or March.

POLLINATION PROBLEMS

Overcast conditions often result in a reduction of bee activity, while in very hot conditions flowers close and insects are unable to perform pollination. Similarly, bees find pollination difficult when the garden is being constantly watered. This is usually the result of poor pollination or inadequate watering during cob growth of sweet corn.

HOW TO RUIN SOIL STRUCTURE

One of the most controversial garden implements is the soil tiller or rotary hoe. Fast turning blades digging at one level, thumping and compacting in slow progression encourage hard pans. The result is poor drainage, rising acidity, and shallow rooted plants that respond only to water-soluble fertilizers.

If you must use a mechanical hoe, have slow-revolving blades which don't rotate more than three times in the same position, especially in heavy duplex soils where the sub soil is close to the surface.

FOLIAR FEEDING

All plants, from radishes to red apple trees, can absorb food through their leaves faster and more effectively than through their roots in many cases. Mineral deficiencies can be corrected quickly with a light foliar spray of seaweed extract (help) in the cool of the early morning. Repeat once a week until health is restored.

