

Better earth *Secrets*

by Rocky Point

SPRING 2020



*Let your garden
spring into life!*

Warmer months, longer days, fabulous plant growth, bountiful flowers and harvests.

In this issue



- Seed Sowing Success
- Indoor Plant Revamp
- Rosella Romance & much more



Welcome to our new readers and subscribers. We hope you find our BES magazine, a treasure trove of helpful tips and advice on how to make your garden greener!

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Keeping the gardening momentum going!

Gardening is on trend, now more than ever



by Claire Bickle

Gardening is on trend, now more than ever!

Whether you're a mad keen vegetable gardener, indigenous plant enthusiast or indoor plant tragic the statistics are showing that people choosing to garden is definitely on the increase and in a big way.

With the recent world pandemic and people having to isolate in their homes/backyards and local suburbs the horticultural industry saw, and is still seeing, a massive surge in demand for plants and gardening related products.

This warms my heart because gardening is such a rewarding and beneficial hobby on so many levels.

Not just for yourself physically and mentally, but for the greening and cooling of our urban spaces, wildlife habitat creation, reduction in food miles, food sources for our valuable pollinators such as bees and for the aesthetics a garden brings.

Spring is here, so let's keep our gardening momentum going as we head into the warmer months, which give us longer daylight hours, fabulous plant growth, bountiful flowers and harvests.

Give yourself a "to-do list" to plan out your gardening tasks of; watering, mulching, fertilising, pruning, and planting. This way you can keep on top of it all and keep your garden looking its best.



Seed Sowing Success

Whether you are growing edibles or ornamental plants, a good reason to grow from seed is the fact that you often have a far greater choice of varieties to choose from to grow compared with already grown seedling punnets in-store. Growing heirloom vegetables and old-fashioned flowering annuals can be a really fun and rewarding exercise. It is also really cost effective!

The number of seeds in a packet compared with a punnet of seedlings is far better value. The average packet of seeds may be around \$3-4 compared to \$4 for a punnet of seedlings but you will get only 6-8 plants in a punnet for that amount compared to 50-1000 in the packet of seeds depending on variety. Plus, you can get a jump start on the season.



Direct Sowing vs Container Sowing

Some edibles and flowers are best sown directly into the garden. Edibles such as, all your root crops; carrot, beetroot, radish, parsnip, turnip and swede. This is because they detest their roots being disturbed after producing adult leaves and this occurs when they are being transplanted into the garden. Other vegetables that do best sown directly are legumes; beans, snow peas and peas and larger seeds such as

zucchini, squash and pumpkin. As a general rule of thumb it's the larger seeds that prefer to be directly sown. Flower seeds such as nasturtiums and sunflowers also prefer the direct sow method.

Fine seeds, for example lettuce, are best sown into punnets/containers and then transplanted once they are more established.



Growing from seed

What you'll need:

- Seed trays or appropriate containers that will hold mix
- Rocky Point Seed & Cutting Mix
- Seeds (check date and season)
- Liquid seaweed
- Plant labels – paddle pop sticks and a marker pen will do

How to:

1. Have your Rocky Point Seed & Cutting Mix on hand.
2. Select your container of choice – punnets, coir pots, recycled containers, seed raising trays. If using recycled containers, ensure they are washed before use and have some drainage holes.
3. Fill the container with Seed & Cutting Mix, tap down gently and press firmly.
4. Gently water the mix.
5. Sow seeds to a depth of 2-3 times their diameter. No deeper. For fine seeds, sprinkle them over the mix and then cover with a small amount of mix.
6. Water in gently with a liquid seaweed solution.
7. Label – plant name and date.

8. Keep warm, moist (not wet) and in a semi-shaded location until germination (a mini greenhouse maybe beneficial).
9. Thin and pick out seedlings once they have germinated and grown a set of adult leaves. Transplant the stronger seedlings to a larger container or plant them in ground. This needs to be done carefully as to not damage the new roots. Keep the strongest of the seedlings and discard the weaker ones when thinning out.

Grow what's in season:

Sowing seeds out of season will mean generally poor and probably no germination at all.





A Different Kind of Composting

Bokashi Buckets, Composta Pots & Compots

Adding or not adding compost to your garden beds really is the difference between a healthy living soil or just inert dirt where nothing seems to thrive. Here are some innovative options to get composting at your place this spring.

The Bokashi Bucket

bokashi.com.au

- A system that works on fermentation rather than composting.
- An enzyme is used and is distributed throughout the shavings that you apply between the layers of kitchen waste you place in the bucket.
- Once the bucket is full, leave it for a week. The final stage is to bury fermented organic matter for final decomposition.
- Benefits: No smell, it's compact and easy to use in any kitchen.
- Once your Bokashi Bucket is ready you can either add it to an existing compost bin or heap or bury it in the garden.
- If you're a bit handy you can make your own fermentation compost bucket from scratch, even the enzyme.





Composta Pots: When worms in pots is a good thing

composta.myshopify.com

- The Composta Pot is a donut shaped pot on legs, that has a small lidded tower right in the middle of the pot.
- This tower is where you place your composting worms and bedding to start off.
- Then you place your household kitchen fruit and vegetable scraps into the tower to feed the worms. Here in this small tower, the worms break down your scraps.
- Fill the pot space around the tower with a good quality potting mix, like Rocky Point's Grow More Premium Potting Mix and plant your favourite edibles and flowers.
- The nutrients that leach from the tower are worm castings and liquids that will continually feed the plants.

Compots: In-ground composting systems

compot.com.au

- These are a nifty invention that allow you to compost all of your kitchen waste (meat, citrus, onion, oil, animal waste and anything biodegradable) directly within your garden beds.
- Compots are a plastic basket type pot with holes in the sides, that are placed down within the soil profile. Only the lid of this compost pot can be seen from the surface.
- Installation just requires you to be able to dig a hole deep enough to accommodate the Compot.
- To place kitchen scraps and or garden refuse into your Compot you just have to lift off the lid and place the material down within the pot. Then replace lid. Ideally soak your kitchen scraps in any kitchen waste water beforehand and add that at the same time.
- Worms live outside the pot living off the nutrients that leach out of the pot. Their castings outside the pot improve soil along with the leachate that is produced from the Soldier Fly and the "Frass" (Soldier Fly castings) also improve your compost, happily breaking it down.





Norfolk Village State School

Indigenous Planting Day

The Better Earth Program team were excited to be a part of Norfolk Village State School's recent Indigenous Planting Day held as part of National Reconciliation Week and National Environment Week.

Along with the Jarjums, we assisted in planting out their new garden of native species, bee and bushtucker varieties which also included the critically endangered Ormeau Bottle Tree. This garden is on the school grounds and will be used as an outdoor learning and connecting space for students. It is also aimed at improving the biodiversity in the area by attracting more wildlife and bees.

Rocky Point and the Better Earth Program are proud to be partnered with schools like Norfolk Village State school to bring education on greener gardening practices and making the earth better for our youngest generation.





Lawn Refresh

Spring Lawn Care

Spring is a great time of year to rejuvenate your lawns. The warmer temperatures and longer daylight hours are your lawns cue to get going again for the growing season.

- Top dress to even out any humps and hollows with Rocky Point OptiLawn Top Dress. This should only be done during the warmer months of the growing season.
- Renovation – aeration/coring/scarification may be needed to dethatch your lawn.
- Check soil pH levels. Acidic soils are more likely to have weed species taking hold.
- If it is acidic add dolomite (follow packaging instructions).
- Apply a complete balanced, slow release fertiliser in spring, summer, and autumn
- Deep weekly watering is better than daily light watering.
- Add a liquid seaweed/wetting agent to aid water infiltration and drought proof your lawn.

- Weed control watch. Monitor on a weekly basis. Prevention is better than cure and a healthy strong growing lawn is less likely to have many weed species invading its growing space.
- Begin organic pest control measures for lawn grub, using eco-neem.
- Mow regularly (twice each week if necessary) removing 1/3 of the leaf blade at a time.
- Mow without a catcher to return the clippings to the lawn to add extra nitrogen.



HEALTHY WARNING
This product contains micro-organisms that may be harmful to your health. Read the health and safety advice on the label. Avoid contact with eyes. Wash your hands thoroughly after use. Avoid contact with clothing. Do not eat or drink from the container.

R Rocky Point
Making the earth better.

OptiLawn

Top Dress



Soil Improver | Adds nutrients to
Fertilise & protect roots

Specially formulated for a greener,
healthier, more luscious looking lawn

- Suitable for all grass varieties including buffalo
- Improves soil structure & health
- Ideal for levelling uneven lawn
- Slow release fertiliser
- Granular wetting agent

R Rocky Point - is a environmentally friendly brand and more
Australian gardeners need to make the earth better.

30L



Indoor Plant Revamp

Spring is a great time to **Repot, Revamp and Revive** your indoor potted plants.

Indoor or outdoor, plants in pots will at some stage need to be re-potted. Why? Because potting mix does not have an infinite life. It eventually runs out of water holding capacity and structure.

Plants will need re-potting when they have outgrown their pots. They will also need re-potting when a mix has started to break down, this is to ensure they have adequate water retaining potting media around them.

Spring is also a good time to fertilise as plants will start to produce new growth. Use a slow release fertiliser and a liquid fertiliser application, as this will give your plants the nutrients to look their best. Liquid seaweed is like a health tonic for your plants. It will

make them more disease and pest resistant and more tolerant of drying out periods and temperature extremes.

Give your indoor plants a spring clean too. Remove any dust or grime with a warm damp cloth. Alternatively pop them outside in a shaded location to give them a hose down or even use the bathroom shower.

There's always the option to do a bit of spring redecorating by purchasing or propagating some new indoor plant additions for your home collection.

We've got bags of growth potential





Here is a selection of some of our favourite indoor plant varieties

- Swiss Cheese Plant (*Monstera deliciosa*)
- Maiden Hair Fern (*Adiantum* species)
- Rubber Plant (*Ficus elastica*)
- Fiddle Leaf Fig (*Ficus lyrata*)
- Arrowhead Plant (*Syngonium podophyllum*)
- Devil's Ivy (*Epipremnum aureum*)
- Happy Plant (*Dracaena massangeana*)
- Chinese Evergreen (*Aglaonema* species)
- Peace Lily (*Spathiphyllum*)
- Mother-in-law's Tongue (*Sansevieria*)
- Zanzibar Gem (*Zamioculcas zamiifolia*)
- Flamingo Flower (*Anthurium* species)





What are No-Dig gardens?

You guessed it. They are gardens that require no digging!



The Quick Facts

- Ester Dean developed the no-dig garden method in the late 1970's.
- Great for areas where the soil is heavy clay, very sandy or there is no soil at all (concrete or pavers).
- Traditional no-dig gardens are based on a layering of various materials, like a lasagne, with water being added between each layer.
- No-digs are basically composting gardens, requiring a balance between carbon and nitrogen.
 - High nitrogen materials include animal manures, grass clippings, Lucerne Mulch & green vegetable matter.
 - High carbon materials include shredded paper, straw, sawdust, finely chopped up garden pruning's, Sugar Cane Mulch & wood chips.





Create Your Own No-Dig Garden

1. Lay down a thick layer of wet newspaper. (The newspaper layer is to suppress weed growth by blocking out any light). Sprinkle with blood and bone, then place a thick layer 30cm of coarse brown material on the bottom.
2. Alternate layers of high nitrogen materials (Lucerne Mulch, manure and compost) and high carbon materials (Sugar Cane Mulch, dry leaves etc.). In your high nitrogen layers, Lucerne should be used in a thicker application than manure. Be sure to wet each layer thoroughly as you go.
3. When all the materials are used, place a layer of compost and top with Sugar Cane Mulch or straw as a mulch. This is to prevent moisture loss and any weeds germinating. Generally, leave the no-dig garden for 1-2 weeks before planting.
4. Time to plant – create small pockets within the top Lucerne/compost layer and fill with a little extra compost. Plant your chosen seedlings into the compost pockets. Water in well with the addition of a seaweed solution.

Avoid planting root crops and seeds directly in newly created no-dig gardens. Wait a few seasons until a good composted layer of Lucerne has accumulated.

Leafy crops such as silver-beet, spinach, lettuce, as well as tomatoes, flowers and various cucurbits work wonderfully in no-dig gardens, and it is best to use seedlings rather than seeds while the garden is young.

Note:

This is just one particular recipe/method, there are many other options and ideas of how to construct a no-dig garden and the materials to be used.





Fruit Tree Planting Checklist

Spring is a great time to plant fruiting trees, and shrubs.

Preparing your soil thoroughly in advance, choosing a variety of climatically appropriate fruit tree species and cultivars and following these basic tips, can see you successfully producing and harvesting some form of fruit every month of the year.

- Soils: check soil pH, drainage, and organic matter levels.
- Location: Most fruiting trees and plants require a full sun position, which equates to 5-6 hours of direct sun per day.
- Know which fruit and their cultivars do best in your location.
- Are there male and female trees or does it require cross pollination? This will mean you may need more than one tree for successful fruiting to occur.
- Are chilling hours required? This is the number of hours needed below a certain temperature to allow for flowering to occur.
- Locate the graft on grafted specimens. When planting do not bury the graft.
- Moist planting holes – fill your planting hole with water first then let it completely drain before planting. This can be done several times to ensure that the soil to be surrounding the fruit tree is moist at planting.
- Liquid fertilise with fish emulsion and seaweed to reduce transplant shock.
- Stake – if necessary.
- Plant at a suitable depth by planting at the level it is within the pot/bag. Do not have roots exposed on the surface but also do not plant too deeply.
- Mulch and water in well after planting.
- Set a watering schedule. Longer watering less often is better than little and often. Longer watering will encourage deeper root systems, which improve your tree's stability and drought hardiness.
- Have a fertiliser plan. How often and how much will depend on the type and the age of the tree. For best results and soil health use a variety of fertilisers; rock dust minerals, manures, compost and liquid applications.
- Pest and disease watch. Check your trees on a regular basis as early detection of pests is key to successful eradication and curbing damage or fruit loss.
- Pruning. This will vary greatly depending on the fruiting tree or plant being grown. Do your research based on tree type to ensure pruning is done correctly and at the right time of year.
- Prepare soil by digging in ActivGrow Soil Improver and/or Cow Manure Plus in an area twice the width of the fruit tree pot and to the depth of the pot.





Cucumbers are go!

(Cucumis sativus)

Culture:

The Cucumber is classed as an annual vegetable vine. It is fast-growing and an easy to grow warm season crop in temperate and subtropical zones. For the tropics, the dry season is preferable.

Usually grown as a sprawling vine, the cucumber, with its tendrils will also happily grow up a trellis or teepee. This is advised as the fruit can be spoilt if left lying on the soil. It also helps to maintain good airflow around the vine, which will in turn prevent any fungal problems getting a hold. Train your cucumber vines by pinching out the apical bud and encouraging more side shoots.

Full sun, good drainage, a soil pH of 6 to 7.5 along with a compost-enriched soil (Rocky Point ActivGrow Soil Improver is ideal) are essential for maximum cucumber production. Cucumbers also require consistent watering.

Picking your cucumbers often will encourage more flowers and fruit. If you leave them on the vine too long, they will become hard, dry and bitter.

Diseases:

High humidity and shaded growing locations are the main causes of powdery mildew on cucumber vines. Make sure plants are grown in airy, sunny positions and avoid overhead watering in the afternoon/evening. Use a registered organic fungicide if an outbreak occurs.

Did you know?

The term cool as a cucumber: meaning calm and composed, self-possessed. This idiom may be based on the fact that in hot weather the inside of the cucumber remains cooler than the air and cool to touch. This may be due to its high-water content.

Other edibles to plant in Spring

- Basil
- Squash
- Rockmelon
- Silver Beet
- Tatsoi
- Capsicums
- Zucchini
- Okra, Beans
- Ceylon Spinach
- Spring Onions
- Eggplants
- Sweet Corn
- Lettuce
- Radish
- Tomatoes
- Rosella
- Pumpkins
- Pak Choi
- Tomatillo
- Chillies
- Watermelon
- Rockmelons
- Bok Choi
- Amaranth

Azaleas

Azaleas are one of the most floriferous of flowering garden shrubs. There are a multitude of colours, sizes, and flower forms to choose from, from the old-fashioned full sun loving single varieties, to the double flowering semi-shade lovers and then there are the tiny flowered Kurume forms.

Azaleas grow well in both pots and garden beds, and even make wonderful bonsais, feature plants and hedges.

Azaleas Growing Quick Tips:

- Azaleas, like camellias, love an acidic soil.
- To start check your soil pH, it will need to be around 5.5 – 6. If it is higher than this add some powdered or liquid sulphur to the soil to lower the pH.
- Good drainage is essential but ample water is also needed whilst your azaleas are establishing and during extended periods of drought. Improve poor draining soils by adding organic compost (not mushroom as it is alkaline) and gypsum.
- When planting use an azalea and camellia planting mix to back fill the hole (this will already have an acidic pH) as well as some organic compost.
- Water in well with some liquid seaweed.

- Mulch with Rocky Point Tea Tree Mulch or Cypress Mulch.
- Maintain consistent watering for the first couple of growing seasons and when there are extended periods of drought.
- Fertilise in autumn and spring with a camellia and azalea complete fertiliser. And use a fish emulsion and seaweed combination in between times.
- Leading up to spring regular applications of liquid or granular potash (potassium) will encourage more vibrant and plentiful blooms.
- Prune after flowering to maintain shape and size.
- If growing in a pot use a camellia and azalea suitable potting mix, like Rocky Point Coco Pro.





Sunflowers

(Helianthus annuus)

What could be more cheerful in the garden than a batch of flowering sunflowers?

In the subtropics and tropics, you can grow sunflowers virtually all year round. For those in cooler climatic zones planting in spring after the last frost is the best time.

These cheery flowering annuals come in a range of colours, flower forms and sizes. The traditional yellow such as “Yellow Empress” and “Sunbird” are always a winner but there are also double flowering forms like “Teddy Bear” and other colours too like Italian White, Evening Sun (burgundy) and the “Giant Russian” sunflower.

Sunflower Growing Quick Tips:

- Grow as directly sown seeds.
- Sunflowers need a full sun position with good drainage.
- Incorporate plenty of organic matter into the soil before planting.
- Consistent watering is required, especially during dry and hot weather.
- The flowers are edible, as are of course the seed.
- They are a favourite for many bee species, butterflies, and other beneficial insect species.



Other flowering annuals to plant in Spring

- | | | | | |
|-----------|---------------|-------------|--------------|---------------|
| • Alyssum | • Marigold | • Vinca | • Dianthus | • Strawflower |
| • Begonia | • Petunias | • Zinnia | • Cleome | • Torenia |
| • Dahlia | • Salvias | • Celosia | • Coreopsis | • Rudbeckia |
| • Aster | • Nasturtiums | • Cockscomb | • Gaillardia | |
| • Cosmos | • Verbena | • Portulaca | • Gomphrena | |



Rosella Romance

(*Hibiscus sabdariffa*)

Rosellas need full sun and free draining soil (they hate wet feet) high in organic matter. Additions of potassium in a liquid or powdered form (liquid potash or sulphate of potash) to encourage better flowering and fruiting is advised throughout spring and summer.

Planting: Sow from seed or plant as seedlings. Seeds will benefit from a soaking in warm water for a short period of time for better germination.

Height: A very ornamental fast-growing annual bush to 1.5 – 2m tall

Flowers/Fruit: The beautiful lemon coloured small hibiscus like flowers are soon followed by the edible bright red calyx/seedpods.

Uses: These fruits can be used to make jam, jelly, cordial, tea, dye, sauce and more.



Rosella Jam / Jelly

I prefer making jelly to jam. I find you will need around 6 plants to ensure you have enough fruit for jam or jelly making.

500g Rosellas

1 Green Apple

1 Lemon

1 cup of Sugar (for every cup of pulp or liquid)

1. Wash whole rosellas, and place in the cooking pot with one grated green apple then add enough water to cover it all. Bring to the boil and simmer until Rosellas are tender and soft without having fallen apart.

2. Strain and throw away the pulp (pop this in the worm farm or compost bin).

Note: If making jam do not discard the fruit pulp.

3. Place the juice of one lemon into the liquid.

4. Then for every cup of liquid add a cup of sugar.

5. Place back on the heat and bring to a rolling boil until the jelly starts to set. Then bottle in dry sterile jars and seal.

6. If your jelly/jam is not setting, boil for a bit longer and or add more lemon juice or some jam setter.

How do you know if it's set?

Place a saucer into the freezer so it is cold. Once chilled bring the plate out and drop a few drops of the rosella liquid onto the saucer, let it sit there for 40 seconds and then run your finger through it. It needs to crinkle when you do this for it to be ready.





Up top

Sprinkled on top of your soil, Rocky Point's ActivGrow® concentrated Fertiliser Pellets add essential nutrients and minerals from above



Top up

Specially formulated to boost tired soil Rocky Point's ActivGrow® Soil Improver is the perfect way to top up your garden's growing potential

ActivGrow® Organic Soil Improver and Fertiliser Pellets a dynamic duo above and below ground




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