



Five Villages Community Garden Association President's message November 2021



Hello gardeners,

As mentioned last month we have applied for grant funding under the **Black Summer Bushfire Recovery Grants** Program to support a significant community garden build at Yulunga Reserve. Grant applications are presently being assessed and there will be no announcements of successful applications until late December. We'll keep you updated on any news but in the meantime attached are some very preliminary concepts of the location and what the garden layout might look like. Irrespective of whether the grant application is successful or not it is likely that we will go ahead with an edible garden at this site in the future.

Many of you would be aware that the **Manyana Rural Fire Services Brigade** will be relocating its main operational station in next few years. The present RFS Station at Cunjurong Point is on Shoalhaven Council managed land and future intentions for use of current assets at the site are not known. With this in mind **FVCG has proactively written to Shoalhaven Council seeking information on the future of the site** and formally expressing interest in becoming a site occupant. FVCG has assessed the site and consider it would be perfect for a community garden HQ as it has an ideal aspect and significant existing infrastructure which can be readily repurposed. We recognise that the site may also be suitable for other worthwhile community purposes and activities, so we have suggested to Council that a multi-purpose community asset would be appropriate. We envisage there will be broad community engagement and consultation prior to any decisions being made by Council. Once again we'll keep you posted.

Now for something completely different.

At some point most avid veggie gardeners will have a crack at growing tomatoes; there's nothing that tastes better than your own homegrown tomatoes. There is endless information around on growing tomatoes, so I didn't want to get into any detail; but I did want to examine that vexing question: **to pinch or not to pinch?** This debate relates to whether it is beneficial to pinch out the lateral stems (the small branches that grow out between leaves and the central plant leader) or leave them. If you leave them in place each lateral will continue to grow and form a new branch, flowers and fruit; and you then end up with a much bigger, fuller, broader, messy tangled up plant.

There are two camps of tomato aficionados, those that pinch out laterals, and those that do not. Those that do pinch claim that less is more, while the other side claim that by not pinching lateral growth you get more plant with more opportunities to form fruit. Arguments for removing laterals are that you form



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a plant that is stronger, fitter, tidier, and better able to deliver on quality fruit development. Overall, there is agreement that by removing laterals you do get less fruit but far superior fruit. I must admit I'm in a third camp; I do a bit of both, a bit of a fence sitter. Frankly, this usually results from tardiness more than anything i.e. I forget to check, and laterals get away un-pinched. Lateral pinching tomatoes is an ongoing process throughout the growing season, it requires weekly if not daily inspections. Laterals can develop so quickly that if you miss a week they get away, then you feel too guilty to cull them as they've already started to develop flowers!

So don't stress just experiment, pruning tomato plants is an optional technique. I do agree though that you end up with a tidier, healthier plant with better quality fruit if you do prune. At the very least you should consider pinching some laterals out when the plants are young, and you should definitely prune or pinch any low branches that become yellow or brown. This will create airflow and help stop the spread of pests and diseases and allow the plant to put energy into fruit production. Until next month happy gardening!

Dennis Buttigieg
President



Left:

Pop down and have a seat -
The reclaimed timber bench
and arbor at the RFS garden.



Right:

Beautiful spring flowers in
the fire-resistant garden at
the Manyana RFS station.

