



THIS MONTH ▶ Squash ▶ Preserve your own tomatoes ▶ New cakes and muffins

A land of scorching sun and flooding rains

Get ready for disruptions to our food supply and higher prices, particularly for fruit and vegetables. Fire, floods and extreme heat are taking their toll on the nation's farms and already some staples such as lettuce, zucchini, nectarines and bananas are in short supply as growers in Victoria and North Queensland write off some crops entirely.



FLOODS ON THE MID-NORTH COAST

onions, beetroot and other small crop vegetables, near Cranbourne, south-east of Melbourne, says while much of Victoria's growing areas were away from the fires, they've suffered record heat, which saw 12 consecutive days above 40°C. Various crops that were near harvest, especially leafy greens, such as spinach and lettuce and radishes have been burnt either partially or completely.

Usually the crops can handle the heat to a degree, he notes, but the hot winds that roared through Victoria on Black Saturday (Feb. 7), destroyed a lot of crops that were just coming through the ground. ▶ 3

Peter Cochrane, president of the Horticulture Group within the Victorian Farmers Federation, reports, "Practically every crop that was directly sown [has] incurred quite a bit of damage. I'd

estimate in our area it's in the millions. I'm just talking my direct neighbours. But we wear that, it's part of farming." Mr Cochrane, who grows spring

F + V what's good in fruit+veg with Renata Field

NEW ARRIVALS

- ▶ **COOKING TOMATOES:** Make the most of them while they're in season.
- ▶ **CHILLIES:** Spicy local FD produce
- ▶ **FIGS:** Perfect right now.
- ▶ **LIMES:** FD limes are back! The yellow ones are the ripest.
- ▶ **ONIONS:** Fresh from the ground, FD onions are back.
- ▶ **BLUEBERRIES:** Delicious and nutritious

ON THEIR WAY OUT

- ▶ **ASPARAGUS:** Crisp and fresh. Try them

- raw or barely blanched
- ▶ **PASSIONFRUIT:** Sweet and juicy FD produce.
- ▶ **STRAWBERRIES:** Yummy punnets from Victoria
- ▶ **STONE FRUIT:** The last of the peaches and nectarines I'm afraid.

WHAT'S GOOD NOW

- ▶ **CAPSICUM:** Crispy and delicious.
- ▶ **CORN:** Super sweet. Great raw or steamed.
- ▶ **CUCUMBER:** Fresh local FD. Try a crispy white apple variety!

- ▶ **EGGPLANT:** Now mid-season.
- ▶ **GRAPES, GRAPES, AND STILL MORE GRAPES:** Lots of varieties to try
- ▶ **PEARS:** First of the season
- ▶ **PINEAPPLE:** Pure sunshine in a fruit
- ▶ **RHUBARB:** It's never not time for pie!
- ▶ **ROCKET:** Fresh, with a bite.
- ▶ **SEBAGO POTATOES:** Local FD
- ▶ **SQUASH:** Four varieties (see page 2)
- ▶ **TURNIPS:** Great in soups and stews.
- ▶ **WATERMELON:** Sweet fresh and juicy.
- ▶ **ZUCCHINI:** Perfect right now.

FD: Farmer-Direct

■ If you would like to ask me about anything, please email produce@alfalfahouse.org
■ For week-to-week fruit+veg availability: go to www.alfalfahouse.org/html/PRODUCTS/fruit+veg.htm

Cakes and bickies from Bibba Baking



SQUASH

PERFECT, DIFFERENT AND LOCAL

Late summer is the time for squash. We currently have four varieties, coming to you directly from Colin Amos' farm near Port Macquarie on the NSW mid-North Coast.

- Yellow squash has a mild flavour and can be eaten in just about every way – raw, boiled, steamed, baked or stir-fried.
- Dumpling squash are small with stripy skin (see photo above). They're sweet and tender, excellent for baking and stuffing.
- Pimplly squash are hard-skinned and can be stored up to a month in a cool dry place.
- Table queen, one of the most flavoursome varieties, has a sweet orange flesh that can be baked, steamed, sliced in a stir-fry or added to a raw blended soup.

SAVOURY BAKE Make a stuffing by frying an onion with three tomatoes and a few mushrooms. Add basil, oregano, salt and pepper to taste. Halve squash (any but yellow), scoop out seeds, pierce the rind with a fork and fill hole with the stuffing. Drizzle with oil and bake at 180°C for 45-60mins. OPTIONAL: crumble dry bread and yeast flakes or cheese on top.

SWEET BAKE Halve a table queen or dumpling squash, scoop out seeds and place face down in a baking tray of water. Bake at 180°C for 20-30 mins, depending on the size of the squash. Meanwhile, mix half a cup of nuts with half a cup of dried fruit, add a few tablespoons of honey or maple syrup or agave nectar, cinnamon and 3 cloves. Stuff the partially-cooked squash with the fruit and nut mixture and return to the oven for 30 minutes or until tender; test by poking the flesh with a fork.

Renata



This month, we're trialling a range of new bickies, muffins and cakes from Bibba Baking, a small family business based in Alexandria. They're mostly organic, sugar-free and mostly gluten-free and vegan. There are a few lines that contain eggs or milk and the sweetener they use is fruit-based (apple, kiwi and pear, depending on what's in season). Their ingredients are sourced from suppliers such as Honest to Goodness and Demeter Farm Mill, which source stock from Australia wherever possible and from whom the co-op also buys. Bibba Baking began when three women with a history of food intolerances in their families came together and experimented with making healthy treats they could give their kids. You can try these treats on Saturdays in the co-op, perfect as a weekend treat.

MUFFINS

- (organic, sugar-free, dairy-free)
- Banana and Date (gluten-free)
 - Orange and Currant (wheat-free)



BICKIES

- (organic, sugar-free, egg-free)
- Muesli (gluten-free)
 - Dark Chocolate and Sultana (dairy-free and vegan)
 - Date and Ginger (gluten-free, dairy-free and vegan)

CAKES

- (organic, sugar-free, dairy-free and gluten-free)
- Dark Chocolate and Almond (no added fat)
 - Apricot and Almond (no added fat)
 - Carrot and Sultana

ALSO NEW IN GROCERIES

Loving Earth
Raw Dark
Chocolate
NOW IN BULK

A LAND OF SCORCHING SUN AND FLOODING RAINS . . .

FROM PAGE 1

Mr Cochrane predicts that over the next two to five months, there'll be shortages of crops that were directly sown from seed, such as carrots, parsnips, radish and spring onions.

Stone fruit has also been badly affected. Grower Ian McAlister says farmers have lost a lot of money. A fortnight of 41-48°C temperatures has severely burned some of the later varieties of the stone fruit he'd been harvesting. The heat also made picking unmanageable if not unbearable.

"You end up with smaller fruit but now the temperatures are back to normal, the fruit seems to have burst into life again and are splitting their skins at the tops. Not only do we have burnt fruit, we have split fruit. It's unsaleable - it won't meet the specs of the supermarkets."

While the fires raged in the south, Far North Queensland was in flood.

Mark Nucifora grows bananas just south of Innisfail, an area only just recovering from the devastation of cyclone Larry. With the roads out for up to two weeks, he wasn't able to get his crop out of the farm and down to market.

He estimates he's lost as much as 30-40 percent of his bunch trees and probably around another 5-10 percent of other trees around the farm and believes he may not fully recover for up to five years.

Closer to home, the North Coast Organic Growers, from whom we receive weekly deliveries of fresh vegetables, garlic and seeds, were also flooded (pictured above). As if last November's extensive hail damage wasn't enough, severe weather hit them once again in February. More than 300mm fell on Feb. 17, that's a foot in the old money! Two of our farmers were flooded in with power and phone lines down for days.



FROM VICTORIA'S SCORCHED EARTH TO FLOODS ALL THE WAY FROM FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND TO THE NSW MID-NORTH COAST

The cost to farmers around Australia could run into the millions, while the effect on the supply of fruit and vegetables won't become clear until they harvest what remains of their crops and assess the damage. Although the price of some fruit and vegetables has already risen, and shortages have proved a problem, we might not feel the pinch in our city pockets for some months to come. But feel it we will.

Horticulture Australia Council CEO Kris Newton says the current extreme weather conditions — the hot, dry south-east and cool wet north — are what the CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology both say we can expect more of as a result of changing climatic conditions.

— Stevie Bee and Renata Field

Adapted from reports on ABC Radio's *The World Today* Feb. 24, 2009/
The Australian Feb. 9, 2009

Good times to volunteer

- Monday afternoon to refill bins and jars.
- Tuesday lunchtime to give Shop Coordinators a break.
- Thursdays (7.30-9.30pm) to help with close up.
- Fridays (9am-noon) to help with the fruit+veg delivery and anytime after 11am to help refill bins and jars.
- Saturdays (10am-1pm and 3-5pm) to help with refilling, etc.
- Sundays (10am-noon) to help set up, around lunchtime to give Shop Coordinators their breaks, and in the evening (5-7pm) to help with close up. Today is also a good day to help with refilling.

If you're new to volunteering, before you do your first volunteer shift, we'll take you through some basic OH+S training and get you familiar with the shop and storeroom layout so you'll know where things are. It takes about a half hour. Tours are on Mondays at noon. To book in for a tour, please email Nija (coordinator@alfalfahouse.org).

4

for the diary

Next Management Committee meeting

Monday March 23

7.30pm at the Black Rose Bookshop
22 Enmore Road Newtown.

All members are very welcome and encouraged to attend.

ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE. There are a number of groups campaigning for immediate action on climate change including Sydney Climate Justice, Australian Student Environment Network and Friends of the Earth. FOE Sydney meets Tuesdays, 6pm at 22 Enmore Road, Newtown. Sydney Climate Justice next meets on March 19, 6pm, Level 1, 79 Myrtle Street Chippendale. More info email produce@alfalfahouse.org

Preserving TOMATOES

WITH GENEVIEVE DERWENT

Like many in the Alfalfa community, my family and I are always searching for ways we can lessen our impact on the planet. Part of this has involved thinking through

what we eat and when, particularly the “when”. I’ll admit initially it was daunting to face the prospect of months without eggplant or tomatoes or basil. But I soon learned there are rewards, as I’ve begun to feel profound joy at the arrival of new fruits and vegetables that herald the beginning of a new season. Once immersed in this way of eating, the thought of buying tinned tomatoes from the other side of the world starts to feel a little excessive. That said, the prospect of no tomatoes for sauces and curries and soups and casseroles and stews throughout the winter months isn’t something I’d want to contemplate. As with many questions about living more sustainably, we can learn from what previous generations have done and in this case, the answer is *preserve your own!*

Preserving tomatoes is quite simple, fun, satisfying and, in fact, kind of addictive. You can get together with friends and make a day and night of it! One weekend, we preserved 30 kilos of organic tomatoes then sat down to a roast vegetable lasagna made with handmade pasta, a wonderfully herbaceous green salad from our garden and an Italian grape and olive oil cake filled with the gorgeous sweet grapes currently on offer at the co-op. What a perfect way to spend a Saturday . . .

You can order 10 kilo boxes of organic cooking tomatoes through our fruit and veg coordinator, Renata (produce@alfalfahouse.org). I’ve found that 10 kilos of tomatoes fills about ten 750ml jars/bottles. While there are numerous ways to preserve tomatoes, I think the following method is the simplest and allows for the most versatile preserved tomato for eating in the cooler months. This method is called boiling water bath preserving.

WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- Tomatoes – the more the better
- A large pot that will hold a number of jars/bottles and allow them to be submerged in water

■ A rack of some sort that will fit in the bottom of the pot as the jars shouldn’t touch the bottom

■ Jars/bottles – preferably re-used and always freshly washed

■ New lids

■ A funnel or similar

METHOD

1. Chop the tomatoes and blend roughly. This helps ensure the bottling process runs more smoothly. In a pot or two, cook up the tomatoes for about an hour until they are thick and of a sauce-like consistency.

2. Meanwhile, keep your jars and lids in a sink or tub of hot water until you need them. You don’t want hot tomatoes going into a cold jar as this increases the likelihood of the jars cracking.

3. Once the tomato sauce is ready, pour it into your hot jars/bottles, using the funnel. Make sure you leave space between the sauce and the rim of the jar (around 1.5-2cm). This is to ensure that a vacuum can be created within the jar. Wipe the rims of the jar and keep them clean and tomato-free. The jar won’t seal properly if there’s anything that comes between it and the seal on the lid. Once the jars are clean, put the lids on.

4. Put the rack in the bottom of your large pot and place the jars on the rack, allowing a little bit of space between them. Fill the pot with warm water until the jars are submerged. Turn the stove on to a medium heat and slowly bring the pot of water to a gentle boil. The size of the jar determines processing time. For 750ml jars it took around an hour.

5. Once done, turn the stove off and leave the jars in the water to cool slowly. As they cool, push the pop-top button on the lid down. (A vacuum is created by the contents of the jar cooling.) If the jar hasn’t cooled enough it won’t stay down. If any of the jars don’t seal you can process them again in the boiling water or else put the jar in the fridge and use the contents within a few days.



Using this method you can preserve any number of tomatoey delights – salsa, relish, pasta sauce. And once you’ve mastered the art of preserving tomatoes there are a myriad fruit and vegetable preserving possibilities to explore. Enjoy.

SOME CAUTIONS

IMPORTANT NOTE 1: To ensure your jars seal properly, only use new lids. (Re-used lids could have damaged seals

from the acids in food.) Fortunately, most commercial jars are standard sizes and www.greenlivingaustralia.com.au has a range of different-sized new metal lids you can purchase.

IMPORTANT NOTE 2: There is disagreement on whether all tomatoes are acidic enough on their own to prevent the growth of botulism. Botulism grows in the absence of air in an alkaline environment and is potentially fatal and not something you want to mess with. Some people recommend adding a teaspoon of lemon juice to each jar of tomatoes to help increase the acidity level. I’ve never done this and so far have had no problems with any kind of food poisoning, so it’s up to you.

IMPORTANT NOTE 3: A little bit of grey discoloration forming at the top of the tomatoes over time is ok, as it could just be the tiny amounts of mineral deposit left from using metal utensils and cookware. However, if the grey discoloration is pervasive you may have a problem and should think twice about eating the tomatoes. Likewise if your tomatoes seem bubbly or smell fermented or are mouldy, it would be best not to eat them. This can happen if something has gone awry with the processing and the seal/vacuum has failed to form properly so better luck next time.

If you have a how-to for *DIY World*, please send them to info@alfalfahouse.org

Getting through the school day



School is back in full swing and the kids are busy, well, being kids. The weather's warm, they want to play with their mates and as a result they can simply forget to eat, or are simply not interested. You'll also need to remember that while you may choose healthy options for their meals, as they get older they like to eat what their friends are eating. And that's not always going to be the healthiest option. Best to keep those parts of their diet you have more control over simple, healthy and tasty.

Keeping school snacks and lunches simple is the way to go. Something that they can pick at rather than have to sit and tediously eat is often a good way to ensure they get the nutrients they need to make it through the school day. Hydration plays a huge part in concentration so make sure your children have their own bottle of water on hand and encourage them to sip from it throughout the day. It's a good idea to make sure the food they eat will help with hydration, especially in the warmer months. So look at adding slices of apple, a couple of small plums, pear slices, or even some chunks of watermelon. Keep fruit cool in their lunchboxes by adding a small drink bottle with frozen water, which they can later drink or use one of the new lunchboxes on the market that include a cooler section. Just make sure, if you have filled a lunchbox with juicy fruit,

that it seals well to avoid school bag leakages!

After-school snacks can go a long way to picking up slumping energy after a long day – just think of the 3pm 'hunger pangs' to which most adults succumb.

No one wants an overtired grumpy child in the evening and at bedtime and by preparing a small, healthy snack to replenish their supplies, children have the energy to get through to bedtime.

A very quick and easy snack for cooling down on a hot afternoon is an old favourite: frozen grapes. Grapes are currently available in abundance and will keep well in the freezer for a long while. Not that they will last that long. If my house is anything to go by, they'll be eaten well before their use-by-date. All you need to do is wash the grapes, pluck them from their stalks and put them in the freezer in small bags or containers. Freezing them in serving sizes is helpful for quick and easy access. Put them in freezer first thing in the morning and they will be ready for the afternoon – or freeze them at their freshest when you get home from shopping and have them ready for the week.

Just ten grapes will supply nine percent of their vitamin C and K requirements as well a small percentage of several of the B vitamins and vitamin A. Grapes also contain such minerals as potassium, magnesium, manganese and iron. So a good all round healthy snack.



Pastas get binned

The gravity bin makeover continues apace. The pastas have joined the beans and now live in see-through bins (pictured above).

Our Sponsor-a-Bin drive also continues to attract donations, both from members and our suppliers. We now have \$1310 in the kitty from members, \$1030 in cash from suppliers and so far more than \$1000 in sales of in-kind donations from suppliers, which together will allow us to buy about 30 gravity-feed bins. In fact, we've ordered 10 bins already.

A big thank you to The Australian Pumpkin Seed Company, Olive Green Organics, Honest to Goodness, AlterEco Pacific (in-kind donations of chocolates), Organic Trader (in-kind chocolates) and Sonoma Baking Company (in-kind maple syrup-flavoured toasted muesli as well as cash).

5

Urban Orchard moves

The local produce swap is on the move up the road to the DIY Markets (opp. Newtown Station). It's still the last Saturday of the month and still from 10am-noon. Urban Orchard is where you share excess produce (fruit+veg, herbs) from your garden, and/or food you've gleaned from your neighbourhood. No cash, completely informal, plenty of fun. You can even swap recipes and tips.

AN INITIATIVE OF ALFALFA HOUSE

FREE 2009 CALENDAR INCLUDING FREE SAMPLES+GIFTS

Don't forget to pick up your free Alfalfa House calendar next time you're shopping or print your own from the website's NEWS page. Each calendar features a number of coupons that you can redeem for free samples and gifts. During March, spend \$50 and receive \$5 worth of feijoas.

PRINT YOUR OWN CALENDAR. GO TO

www.alfalfahouse.org/assets/downloads/ah_calendar09.pdf

My Vegie Curry

GLUTEN-FREE. CAN BE VEGAN. SERVES 4-6

CURRY PASTE

- 1 tsp each cumin seeds, coriander seeds, fenugreek garam masala, turmeric (use fresh turmeric if available), black peppercorns
- 1/2 tsp cloves
- 5 cardamom pods
- 3 whole dried chillies (or less or more, depending on how hot you want it)
- 5 kaffir lime leaves, cut into very thin slivers (use scissors)
- 1 lemongrass stem, finely chopped
- 1 2cm x 2cm knob of ginger or galangal, finely chopped
- 1/2 cup fresh coriander

CURRY

- 2 tbsp curry paste
- 2 kaffir lime leaves, torn in half
- 1 tbsp oil or ghee
- 1 can coconut milk
- 3/4 cup water
- 100g firm tofu, cubed
- 1/2 large kumera, diced
- 1 large zucchini, sliced
- 1 cup green beans, topped and tailed, cut in half
- 4 tomatoes, seeded and diced
- 1 cup cauliflower if available, cut heads and stems in half
- 4-6 stems and leaves of leafy green (kale or silverbeet), cut into medium-sized pieces
- 2 cups andean mix (quinoa, amaranth)
- a pinch saffron
- 2 cardamom pods



CONDIMENTS

- 1 banana, sliced
- 1/2 cup desiccated coconut
- pappadams (use about 1/4 cup oil)
- 1 cucumber, diced
- 1/2 cup plain yogurt (cow or sheep)
- 1 tsp cumin and garam masala
- pinch of paprika

METHOD

- Dry-fry the dried spices in small pan for 30 seconds to release the flavour, transfer to a mortar and pestle and grind. Add lemongrass and half the ginger plus half the coriander, grind to consistency of a paste. You will only need 2 tbsp of this paste so store any remaining in an airtight container in the fridge. (If not using fresh spices it will last about 3 weeks, about a week if adding the fresh.)
- Steam kumera and shallow-fry tofu (in ghee or a little oil) and set aside.
- Prepare andean mix (using reduction method: 2 cups of mix plus just over 2

cups of water, bring to boil and then reduce the heat to simmer for 15 mins (until fluffy). You can add a pinch of saffron and 2 cardamom pods whilst boiling – keep on a low heat to ensure it doesn't go cold.

- Heat pan, add oil or ghee and once very hot, add curry paste, allowing paste to fry up for about a minute, then add coconut milk and about half the water plus kaffir lime leaves. Bring to boil, reduce heat, add kumera, zucchini, beans and cauliflower and simmer for 10 minutes, add tomatoes, zucchini and silverbeet. Add remaining water and simmer for 20 minutes on a low heat.

Whilst curry is simmering prepare the condiments:

- Slice banana and in a bowl, roll in coconut.
- Dry fry cumin and garam masala and grind in mortar and pestle.
- Add yogurt to a bowl and stir in cucumber, spices. Sprinkle with paprika.
- Shallow-fry pappadams, dry on paper towel (make sure the oil is very hot) – depending on size of pan you can fry 3-4 at a time.

SERVE

In bowls, place the andean mix (take out cardamom first), spoon over curry and top with remaining fresh coriander. Place condiments in separate serving bowls.

■ *All past recipes are on the website. Go to www.alfalfahouse.org/html/recipes.htm*

6

POSITIONS VACANT

Two spots on the MC

There are two vacancies on the co-op's board, known as the Management Committee (MC). If you'd like to help shape the direction of Alfalfa House, why not join? To find out more, including Directors' Duties as well as the minutes from the meetings, go to www.alfalfahouse.org/html/who_are_we.htm. If you'd like to chat to an MC member about it, email coordinator@alfalfahouse.org.

PRICEWATCH

Product	Alfalfa House* Cert. Organic	Health Food Store Cert. Organic	Supermarket Cert. Organic	Supermarket Not Organic
Quinoa, 100g	\$1.23	\$1.20	NA	NA
Shampoo (crap-free), 100ml	\$2.46	\$4.00	\$2.05	NA
Apricots, Turkish, 100g	\$1.84	\$2.80	NA	\$3.11
Sesame oil, toasted, 100g	\$1.72	\$2.40	NA	\$2.17
Bananas, Cavendish, 100g	\$0.31	\$0.56	\$0.80	\$0.48

SURVEY NUMBER 6, MARCH 2009 ■ NA: not available

*PRICES ARE WITH THE BASIC 10% MEMBER DISCOUNT.

– Compiled by Jo Rose

FEED THE eNEWS

This newsletter is your voice and a great way to communicate with other members.

Please feel free to send in your hints, tips, ideas, suggestions and recipes to feedback@alfalfahouse.org

E-News is edited and designed by Stevie Bee for Alfalfa House Community Food Cooperative Ltd