

NAU MAI HAERE MAI

Seasonal Pānui

NGAHURU | AUTUMN 2024

MARCH GARDENS4HEALTH HUI

HEADWAY HOUSE



Tēnei te mihi ki a koutou katoa, mo to koutou tautoko. Thank you everyone for sharing your knowledge, your observations from the season passed, and your preparations for the coming months. When we are working together and learning from each other, we are growing as gardeners alongside our māra and our communities.

At our hui we discussed strategies for dealing with pūkeko, fruiting patterns of squash this season, the best manure for feeding garden beds, and seed saving. All topics are covered in more detail below.

Special thanks to Stacey and the awesome team at Headway House for hosting us. If you would like to host a seasonal hui in the future, please contact Ali at gardens4health@diabetesfoundationaotearoa.nz.

NEW TEAM MEMBER

THIS IS ALI, THE NEW GARDENS4HEALTH LEAD

Kia ora e te whānau! Thank you for welcoming me to this role with so much manaaki. I am a permaculture gardener, researcher, and educator with a drive to make healthy māra kai accessible to everyone in our complex and beautiful city. It is an honour to be on this journey with you all. Mauri ora!



Why rest your beds?

PREPARING BEDS FOR NEXT SPRING BEGINS IN AUTUMN WITH GREEN MANURE PLANTING

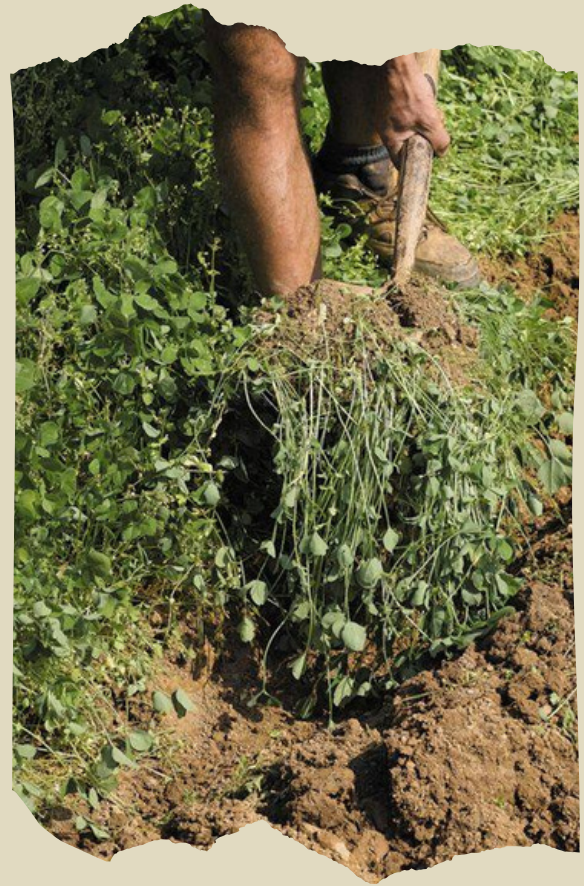
As we say farewell to the super productive seasons of kōanga / spring and raumati / summer, gardeners are not the only ones looking forward to resting. Our gardens have provided us with a bounty, and will need to have their energy and nutrients restored before next year.

Ngahuru / autumn is a crucial time to prepare garden beds for the kōanga / spring ahead. Planting green manure crops can reinvigorate soils with nutrients essential for plants to flourish. They can also suppress weeds, loosen compacted soil, and provide beneficial insects and microorganisms a safe habitat to see the takurua / winter through.

If you have grown fruiting crops this season such as cucurbits (squash, cucumbers, melons etc), nightshades (capsicum, tomato, aubergine etc), or brassicas (kale, cabbage, brussels sprouts etc), consider sowing a green manure crop over the next six months to restore the health of the soil for another bountiful year.

To grow green manure: remove annual crops from beds. Sprinkle seed blend of choice generously over soil. Rake through surface and cover with light layer of mulch and leaf litter. Water regularly until fully germinated. Leave to grow until first spring seeds are being sown indoors, at which point chop down and dig all plant matter back into soil to decompose and feed the new season of plants.

Green manure is beneficial for all beds of any shape, size, aspect, and method.



Green manure seed blends

KEEN TO GET GROWING?

Contact Ali for more information and a sample pack of green manure seeds. For large scale bed resting, bulk green manure mixes are available from Kings Seeds ([link below](#)).

AUTUMN GREEN MANURE BLEND

Our friendly foe, the pūkeko

As pūkeko are increasingly displaced due to the destruction of their wetland habitats, we gardeners find ourselves fighting, and often losing, an endless battle with these expert wading diggers.



Allium crops such as garlic and onion, kūmara tipu, and nitrogen rich greens are seemingly a favourite, but even rhubarb leaves are on the menu according to Anne from Communities Feeding Communities, whose crop was munched to oblivion by the birds.

Fencing crops at least 60cm high, and netting seedlings, can provide protection but can also be expensive. Liane from Papatūānuku Taurangi Earth Promise Centre has had success deterring pūkeko by sprinkling used coffee grounds over leaves of established plants.

From 1996 to 2020, 54 million square meters of wetlands in Aotearoa were destroyed, with over 90% being converted to grazing pasture. Like so many species, pūkeko have had to adapt to survive in a world where their natural habitats are being destroyed at an unprecedented rate. With no wetland habitats to return to, pūkeko are likely to be a part of our māra for many years to come.

Though no doubt an annoyance, pūkeko droppings have been found to contain high levels of potassium and magnesium: minerals thoroughly depleted in, and difficult to reintroduce to, our soil. Ultimately, pūkeko are making the most of a bad situation. And although they present a huge challenge for us in our food gardens, they also have a part to play in keeping our planet healthy.

At Gardens4Health our goal is to learn ways of working with, rather than against, the living world around us. Advice on humane ways to manage pūkeko is welcome, as are any insights to help us understand these birds better. Please share any tips you have on our community [Facebook page](#).

Fields of gold: using manure in the māra

There is one sure way to tell if you have found a gardener in the wild: present them with a bag of cow pats. If they crack a smile, you've found one!

The manure of ruminant animals is highly prized among green fingered folk, and for good reason. The four stomachs of ruminant animals are full of beneficial bacteria that completely break down the cell walls of their grassy feed, which means their droppings are not only recycling plant nutrients, but are also inoculating soil with an abundance of beneficial micro life. They are also capable of breaking down even the hardest of seeds, providing a naturally weed free fertilizer.



Like all organic fertilizers, this soil superfood should be used carefully. Fresh manure has a high content of ammonium and soluble nitrogen, both of which can burn delicate plant roots. If not properly applied, many of the nutrients in manure can burn off into the atmosphere as ammonia.

We recommend composting your manure for at least 3-6 weeks before applying to garden beds, either in your compost bin, diluted with water in barrels, or in bags. When applying, ensure the manure is worked into the soil or under a layer of soft mulch to keep nutrients from burning off.

A slim season for squash



During our hui, Sister Rosemary from Papatūānuku Taurangi Earth Promise Centre shared that their squash, while growing beautifully, had produced more male flowers than females this year, resulting in a relatively small harvest from a seemingly healthy plant. Many others had the same experience.

Our temperamental weather is one possible cause. A rapid swing between hot dry spells and cool heavy rain can cause innumerable challenges in the garden from mildew to split fruit, but monoecious plants will not produce female flowers without conditions stable enough for fruit to mature.

Another possible cause is an imbalance of nutrients in soil. High nitrogen levels will encourage green, leafy growth but will not provide the right energy for fruit to set. In order to produce fruit, plants need potassium which is highly concentrated in bird droppings.

Incorporating chicken litter into compost will increase the potassium content of soil. Where possible, keeping chickens / quail / geese / ducks on site opens a fabulous world of benefits. However, urban settings present many challenges to housing working birds on site.

Native trees will offer wild birds year-round shelter, food, and nesting space. The more bird life our gardens support, the more our soil will be enriched. We can also make use of the leaf litter trees shed throughout the year, and produce our own ramial wood chip to nourish heavy feeding crops.

For a hardy, highly productive, and versatile alternative, consider Rampicante for next squash season.

Saving seed

In the garden, our raumati / summer annual crops may be coming to the end of their life cycle, but they have one precious gift left for us: their seeds.

Saving seeds can seem like an intimidating process. But our ancestors relied on their intuition and intergenerational knowledge to save seed as it was necessary for survival. We all carry this wisdom within us, and embracing the process of seed saving connects us to our planet, our māra, and our tīpuna. It is never too late to learn and we have nothing to lose by trying!

Seeds should be saved from mature plants at the end of the parent plant's growth cycle. The most mature plants make the most mature seeds, and these have the best chance of germinating.

Seeds should be left to dry completely. A sunny windowsill will do the trick, or anywhere warm and dry. Moisture will rot seeds over time, so wait until your seeds are brittle enough to snap rather than bend.

Freezing completely dry seeds overnight will kill eggs and tiny critters that could eat seeds in storage. Once defrosted, store in jars, bags, or envelopes in a cool and dry environment. Wisdom from Kay Baxter's book 'Save Your Own Seeds' suggests that the dried flowers of chamomile, ground into a powder, can be tossed through seeds to prevent fungal growth.

Keep an eye out for our in-depth seed saving resource which will be available for download soon.





Planting guide for Ngahuru

PREPARE BEDS FOR REST OR HARVEST

For harvesting beds, pair alliums with brassicas, winter greens, and salad greens as companions. In separate beds, sow broad beans and hardy peas for harvest in kōanga / spring. Densely plant spring bulbs. Prepare fertilisers from comfrey / seaweed / manure for feeding after the first big rains settle.

For resting beds, sow green manure crops such as buckwheat and phacelia to improve phosphorous levels, tic bean and vetch for nitrogen fixing, and clover and daikon radish to break up soil hardened by drought. See link above for premade blend from Kings Seeds.



Workshops

ENCOURAGE NEW GARDENERS

Workshops are a great way to encourage community interest and participation. Contact Ali to set up a workshop with one of our team members.

[EMAIL ALI](#)

Free Resource

LIVING BY THE MOON

'Alright?' is a free online health and wellbeing service that offers daily updates on our rātaka / moon phase, and a free printable maramataka wheel.

[MARAMATAKA ONLINE](#)