

HORTULANUS

Official Publication of Ku-ring-gai Horticultural Society Inc.

MARCH 2017

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**MEETINGS COMMENCE AT 7.30PM
ST IVES COMMUNITY HALL, MEMORIAL AVE, ST IVES**

COMING EVENTS

- Mar 7** MARCH MEETING: Jim Brydie—Growing Kingianum Orchids
Mar 31/Apr 1 International Orchid Fair, Castle Hill Showground, Castle Hill
April 4 APRIL MEETING: Bernard Chapman—Learn about Pruning
April 8/9 Collectors' Plant Fair at Hawkesbury Racecourse, Clarendon
April 27 KHS Outing to the Central Coast (see below for further details)
May 2 MAY MEETING: Robyn Bible will speak on Geraniums and bring plants for sale

**TRADING TABLE at the
March meeting (see attachment for further details)**

Hi

Well, it was a hot and sticky night for our first meeting of the year but you can't keep good gardeners down and 76 members and visitors turned out to compare notes and enjoy the evening with their friends. The President opened the meeting, welcoming all members and visitors to the start of a new year.

LOST and FOUND: An almost new men's extra large size windbreaker jacket was left behind in the hall after the February meeting. The owner may reclaim it from the President at the March meeting.

MEMBERS NEWS

Keith Smith reminded members that his well known plant sale will be operating on Sunday, 9 April from 10 am. The sale will be at 45 Parklands Avenue, Lane Cove North. All proceeds go to the National Breast Cancer Foundation. If you have any excess ceramic pots or dishes you wish to dispose of, bring them along to the next meeting and Keith will be happy to relieve you of them.

OUTINGS

Our first outing of the year will be on Thursday, 27 April 2017 to four interesting and different gardens (including two where there will be plants for sale). The cost will be \$65 per person which includes all garden entries plus morning tea and lunch. Full information is given in the attached booking form. This will be a popular outing so please make sure that you get in early with your booking.

Other dates for your diary: Wednesday, 27 September—a one day trip to visit four gardens in the Leura district.
Friday 27 October to Monday 30 October—a 4 day/3night trip to the Bathurst Garden Festival and Mayfield Garden.

GARDEN TABLE

The Garden Table was well stocked with a box full of Lycoris bulbs on offer as well as another box full of Ranunculus bulbs. April onwards is bulb planting time. For the herb lovers there were two boxes of herbs ready to use and a fine yellow and green Irisine was going cheap. These were just some of the plants on offer. Go along and have a look, you never know what you will find and it all helps your Society.

NOTE: There will be no Garden Table at the March meeting as the Trading Table will be in operation.

TRADING TABLE

The Trading Table will be in operation this month. If you are bringing in plants to sell, please read the instructions in the attached notice and fill in the form so that the helpers can mark off your plants. This will ensure that you are paid the right amount.

SHOW BENCH

The pictorial section is getting bigger and better and is becoming much harder to judge. The red-flowering gum creepy crawly in the Decorative section was very good and as it crawled, the Blue Cat looked on and considered it. Due to the weather conditions, the Vegie section was pretty bare. The garlic exhibit was unusual in that garlic do not like the heat and we have had a lot of that. For the keen gardeners who would like to grow it, Diggers Nursery in Victoria has a special line of warm climate garlic and now is the time to order. Variegated Euphorbia are not very often seen even though they are reasonably easy to grow. The two Paphiopedilum orchids are beautiful but they are

hard to grow and best left to the experts. Tillandsia the size of the one on the Show Bench are few and far between. They are low maintenance and easy to grow so why not give them a try. Streptocarpus with their green leaves and attractive trumpet flowers are always good in any garden. Oxalis like the one with the dark red leaves on the Show Bench are not the horrible weed that gets into our lawns but still are better grown in a pot. The type of banana plant on the bench with its upward growing stem of pink fruit is purely ornamental as the fruit is inedible. The fuchsias as always have put on a good show but due to the extremely hot weather conditions the rose section was bare.

RAFFLE

We had a wide range of prizes on offer which included five Australian gardening books donated by Mohammad, Mr Raffle himself. Thank you, Mohammad. The RHS Gardening Encyclopedia was donated by Anonymous, thank you Anonymous. Two wire frames for climbing plants stood to one side of the table, again donated by Anonymous. A pot of African violets and a fine Coleus were also donated by Anonymous, thank you Anonymous and a Heliotrope was purchased by your Society from Parkers Nursery. Last of all was a \$20 voucher from Bunnings. These are all good prizes so step right and \$2 will get you three tickets from the man at the door.

MAIN SPEAKER



Our Main Speaker was Lesley White who runs a small nursery in Dural that specialises in Hydrangeas. She conducted an interesting discussion on the pros and cons of growing Hydrangeas, using some of the cuttings she had brought to illustrate the points being made. The name Hydrangea is derived from the Greek words meaning 'water vessel'. It was given the name because of the shape of the seed pods which resembled water vessels. All hydrangeas do well in the temperate parts of Australia. The further north you go into the warm areas, the more difficult they become to grow. They do well in the coastal areas of NSW and will withstand small amounts of salt when near the sea.

With regards to the blooms they have two distinct forms. One is the well known Mop Top or Hortensia hydrangea, *H macrophylla*, which has a mass of sterile florets formed into a round head. The other form is the Lace Cap which has a cluster of fertile flowers in the middle surrounded by a ring of large and coloured sterile florets. Mop Tops grow very well in dappled

shade, particularly if it is afternoon shade. If continuously exposed to strong afternoon sunlight, the flowers will fade. Water requirements increase if hydrangeas are planted in the sun.

There are more than 100 species of hydrangea. In the Sydney area, as well as the Mop Tops and Lace Caps, it is possible to grow *H paniculata*. This species can stand very cold conditions and produces masses of large creamy white flowers. It can grow to 1.5 metres. Another that does well here is the oak leafed hydrangea, *H quercifolia* which is also cold hardy and in cool areas the leaves can turn scarlet in the autumn and remain for weeks before falling off. It can grow to 2.4 metres.

Colour changing: The colour of *H macrophylla* hydrangea can be changed from pink or blue by changing the pH of the soil. If you wish to change the colour check the pH of your soil first. The appropriate colour change chemical is available at your garden centre but will only work if it is applied to the soil in winter before the main growth starts.

Propagating: Cuttings can be taken at almost any time of the year. Just take cuttings with three nodes and pop them in a pot. Put the pot in a shady place and keep it moist.

Fertilising: Scatter a generous amount of well rotted cow manure around each plant at the beginning of spring and water in well. This should last for 12 months.

Pruning: Pruning is best done in autumn or early winter. If you fail to prune flowers will still appear but the quality and quantity will fall off. Cut back to a pair of fat buds. Old plants that have not been pruned for a number of years should be cut back hard, taking out all the old stems. You won't get any flowers next season but it will rejuvenate the plant for the following years.

Main Speaker March: The main speaker for March will be Jim Brydie. Jim is an expert orchid grower and he will speak on growing the native Kingianum Orchids.

MEMBER SPEAKER

Ray Kench presented some excellent pictures of a recent spring trip to the well-known Mayfield Garden. Mayfield is a large private garden in the Oberon district that has been under continuous development for a number of years. The climate is hot in the summer and very cold in the winter with ice and snow forming at times. The homestead sits on at the base of a hill with a small chapel up on the top of the hill. The chapel was built for the owners' daughter's wedding. From this position much of the estate can be seen. A man-made cascade tumbles down the hill and in the distance a tall pylon and pool mark the boundary of the property. The well-laid paths were lined with fine examples of shrubs and trees including several varieties of dogwoods and maples. Where there were open areas masses of bluebells, daffodils and tulips could be found. Crab apples had been espaliered to form arches in some places. Masses of rhododendrons put on a beautiful show. Even the path to the toilets was lined with flowering shrubs and plants. Another path had been converted into a floral tunnel by espaliering some wisteria. Construction of further garden area is an ongoing. The water gardens are a special feature of the place.

(NB The Society has an outing planned at the end of October to Mayfield Garden and the Bathurst area so members and friends might like to keep this in mind if thinking about a visit).

Member Speaker March: Alice Miller will give a presentation on her visit to Longwood Gardens, Pennsylvania USA

FEATURE PLANT Tillandsias



Tillandsias are mostly epiphytes and belong to the Bromeliad family. They have evolved into a remarkable genus that has adapted to a wide range of conditions with many having the amazing ability to capture all the water and nutrients they require from the air via small scales on the leaf surface rather than having to use their poorly developed root system. There are close to 600 species, varying from 5cm to 3m high with many more varieties to choose from in a huge range of shapes and sizes. Tillandsias grow in a wide variety of places and climates ranging from sea level to high altitudes and from the humid swamps of the Everglades (Spanish Moss. *T. usneoides*, is a Tillandsia)

to the high dry deserts of the Altoplano of Peru and Bolivia. Most species form rosettes of green, grey or red foliage. Those that come from the arid regions usually have a silvery foliage to reflect the heat while the soft green foliage species are generally native to the humid forests and adapt well to pots. Those species from the arid areas do better when mounted on a wooden or cork slab and can be mounted almost anywhere – they just need some protection from very hot sun. Flowering can occur anywhere up to 20 years after a seed has been planted- it depends on the species. A mature plant will produce from 4 to 20 flowers over a period of a few months. The flower sheath of some species can be quite spectacular and long lasting. Flowers are mostly tubular and come in a range of colours from violet, white, pink, red, yellow and green. After a few years a mature plant may produce many offsets forming a dense clump and these offsets can be removed when half grown to start new plants.

Location: Tillandsias, due to their structure and tolerance of a wide range of conditions, do well in most parts of Australia. The ideal environment for the amateur grower is outdoors in a frost free area under partly shaded conditions. In colder areas, depending on the plant, it might require protection from winter rains and frosts so an undercover area with good light is needed. Green leafed species need filtered sunlight the year round while the grey or silver leaved plants can be grown in almost full sun or partial shade all year. Only a few species need winter heating and most will adapt to the cold if planted in the warmer months. Indoors Tillandsia require a bright, well lit area with the best locations being on or near window sills that have lots of light but are protected from the strong direct sunlight.

Planting as air plants: Tillandsia can be attached to an object using plastic coated wire, tie wire, fishing line, hot melt glue, nails or any non toxic glue such as PVA or Gel grip. Do not use copper wire, galvanised products, treated timber or any glue that emits a strong smell as your Tillandsia will absorb any toxic material from the air into their cells. A novel way is to tie them to a piece of fishing line and hang them in the air attached to a door frame or glue them to a window in a well lit area. Driftwood, paper bark logs or cork slabs are ideal for mounting Tillandsia.

Planting in a pot: The potting mix should be a very open and well drained. Use a fairly coarse pine bark or a mix for epiphytic orchids.

Watering: Tillandsia require regular watering as they usually have no access to water via their poor root system like normal plants and have to rely on water stored in their leaves. The roots main job is to anchor the plant to the rock or whatever that it is growing on. Water can be supplied by a hose, watering can, spraying or by dunking. In all cases a thorough soaking is required to fill the cells of the plant. Water is lost by the plant through transpiration which in turn is governed by the sun, heat and relative humidity therefore on hot dry sunny days the plant might need watering every two or three days while on the other hand a plant in a dark cold moist area watering every 2-3 weeks would be sufficient. Tillandsia should be allowed to almost dry out between watering. It is easy to tell if a plant is getting enough water as the leaves will soften and become limp if they are not getting enough water.

Fertilising: Tillandsia normally will not require fertilising as they will pull their requirements from the air.

Pest: Scale insects are small sap suckers which appear as soft brown spots that can easily be pushed off with the finger nail or wipe them off with a damp soft cloth. Spray with a suitable insecticide at half strength. Never use white oil on Tillandsias as the oil will smother the natural breathing pores of the plant and kill it. Mealy bugs are small soft white insects which resemble a small white sticky piece of cotton wool and are found clustered in the leaf axils and could be hard to reach. Wipe them off or spray with Confidor.

Other problems: Lower leaves brown at the base usually indicates heavy, poorly drained soil, over watering or planting too deep. Rolled or stuck together leaves is a sign that the air is too dry or the centre vase of the plant has dried out. Mist the air more frequently or water more often. Brown leaf tips could be the result of poor drainage or overwatering, a dry atmosphere or alkaline water. Brown patches on the leaves can be caused by strong sunlight, very high light intensity if indoors or poor drainage. Bottom leaves straw or light brown is usually a sign of normal ageing. The old and dried-up leaves can be carefully removed.

HUGH'S CORNER WHAT SHOULD I BE DOING IN MY GARDEN?



► When was the last time you fertilised your lawn? Was it back in early spring so if it was then, you should give serious thought to giving it another good feed now to help it over the dormant period during winter? Otherwise you could finish up with some bare patches in your lawn. Use one of the dry lawn fertilisers. There are a wide range of

these available from the old Shirley's No17 to the organic based Green Keepers Choice or the Slow Release Lawn Builder from Scott's. Check the watering instructions as they can vary from straight away to up to a fortnight. While you are checking the water instructions, also have a look at the mix and see if there is any iron sulphate in it and if

there is, be very careful not to get the fertiliser on any concrete or it will stain. Should the lawn have already been fertilised this summer, give it a boost by spraying with one of the liquid lawn fertilisers.

► Now is the time to stop thinking about winter flowering bulbs and plant some. Try some jonquils as they are low maintenance and while the flowers are not particularly spectacular, they will spread a lovely perfume through your garden. Jonquils should be planted 10-15cm down with the neck pointing upwards in soil with lots of compost or cow manure in it. Bags of Bulb Growing Mix are available at your garden centre. Jonquils do not have to be lifted when they have finished flowering so just let them die right back and clean up the dried out foliage. Don't over water as if they get too wet you will lose them to rot. Give them a feed of bulb food every few months to help them on their way to next season's show. Should you wish to grow them in a pot plant them at the following rates: 4 bulbs to a 15cm pot, 10 to a 30cm pot and 15 to a 40cm pot.

► One for the Gerbera growers. Check your plants to see if the foliage is getting too packed together. Get rid of the old leaves so that the air can circulate freely amongst the foliage but be careful while doing this that you don't damage the crown of the stem or you will get no flowers. While you are at it, check the backs of the leaves for oval shaped green scale along the mid rib and if you find them, spray with Pest Oil (mineral) or Eco Oil (organic) under the leaves. Check again in a week's time.

New Products: Seasol have come on the market with a new planting gel. The gel contains Seasol and added nutrients plus the ability to store water and release it into the root zone as required. The gel retains the ability to store water for about 5 years. It could be worth a look at if you are planting out perennial flowers or shrubs. Organic Crop Protectants have introduced an organic herbicide. Organic herbicides are usually few and far between as they are normally a chemical. Called Slasher, it is a non-selective herbicide that is used as a spray. The active ingredient is nonanoic acid (also known as pelargonic acid) that has been extracted from pelargonium leaves. If you decide to trial it, as always read the instructions BEFORE you open the container and try it on a small area first.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS	
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Question? I wish to grow some cabbages in my vegetable garden and had in mind to grow some Chinese cabbages. We live in a low lying area which gets quite cold in the winter so will Chinese cabbage grow okay in this sort of climate?

Answer: Unfortunately, Chinese cabbage do not take too kindly to frosty weather and they will bolt to seed very quickly. You would be better off waiting till spring and the warmer weather arrives.

Question? I have just planted some bedding begonias. How long will they last and when will I have to replace them?

Answer: Bedding begonias are usually planted as annuals but they can last quite a lot longer in frost free areas. They need morning sun and good drainage. In common with most begonias they are subject to attack by powdery mildew. The best way to reduce the risk of attack is to be careful how you water. Water the soil under the leaves early in the morning and don't water the leaves. This will give any leaves that have got wet time to dry out early in the day. As powdery mildew can spread quite quickly, keep a Yates Rose Gun handy and at the first sign of attack, spray them. If the powdery mildew has got away from you, then spray with Triforine and follow the directions.

Question? We have been given a Stanhopea orchid as a birthday present. Where should I hang it?

Answer: Stanhopeas are interesting plants and they prefer a warm humid climate with a minimum temperature of about 10 degrees C. They will tolerate quite high temperatures when in a shady situation with high humidity. Because the flower stems will push through the lining of the basket, the basket should be hung up in dappled sunlight in a tree. If a tree is not available, hang it from a frame under 70% shade cloth. Keep the water up to it in the warm weather, misting it when the humidity gets low. Only an occasional watering is needed in the winter. During the growing season, feed it with a half strength liquid orchid fertiliser once every 3-4 weeks or scatter some blood and bone onto the soil and water in. Stanhopeas



are relatively disease and pest free. You can expect flowers round about Christmas, depending on which species you have. Stanhopea flowers have a strong perfume that is not always agreeable with everyone.

The wonderful flower of the bromeliad—Aechmea fasciata

Regards
Hugh