

HORTULANUS

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

MAY 2017

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Website: www.khsgardenclub.org.au



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

COMING EVENTS

- May 2 **MAY MEETING: Robyn Bible will speak on Geraniums and bring plants for sale**
May 6-28 **Botanica Art Exhibition, Royal Botanic Gardens, Lion Gate Lodge 10-4pm daily**
May 13/14 **Bromeliad Society of Australia Autumn Show, Castle Hill Showground, Showground Road 9-4pm Saturday, 10-3pm Sunday—Displays and plant sales. Enq. www.bromeliad.org.au**
May 20 **Cactus & Succulent Society—Exhibition and Sale, Eden Gardens, Lane Cove Road. 8am—3.30pm Enq. www.cssnsw.org.au**
May 26-28 **Orchids Out West, Hawkesbury Racecourse, Clarendon. 9am-4pm**

Hi

It was a damp and cool evening for our April meeting with a bit of rain about, however that did not stop 62 enthusiastic gardeners and friends from turning out to enjoy themselves.

The President opened the Meeting welcoming four new members. It was announced that our current Treasurer, Peter Fisher, would not be standing for re-election at the AGM in September and without a Treasurer your Society cannot function. We are looking for a volunteer with some accountancy experience to fill the position. If you feel you could fill the position or would like more information, please contact the President, Doreen Clark, at the address at the top of this page.

MEMBERS NEWS

Maureene and Keith Smith's huge plant sale was a Huge! success. They raised \$7,300.00, a whopping \$1,200.00 more than the last sale. This is very much due in part to their community of neighbours and friends, many of them from the KHS, who helped on the day, donated cuttings and plants and gave them plastic and ceramic pots and then came and bought plants, all helping to raise the money given to the National Breast Cancer Foundation.

OUTINGS

Wednesday, 27 September - Leura

On this outing we will be visiting four gardens in the Leura area. We will have a guide with us from the Leura Garden Club and the home owners will be on hand to answer any questions we may have. None of these gardens will be in the Leura Gardens Festival which will be held the following week and we will be the only group at the time of our visit. The cost of this trip is \$70 which will include garden entries and morning tea but not lunch. Time will be given to visit Leura village for browsing the shops and lunch.

Friday, 27 October – Monday, 30 October

This four day/three night trip will be to Bathurst for the Bathurst Spring Spectacular. We will visit two lovely gardens on the way there, (Wild Meadows and Hillandale), have two days to look at the Bathurst gardens and then will return via Mayfield Garden on the Monday. The pricing of this trip is not yet complete but should be available shortly. Accommodation will be in a four-star motel.

For both of these trips we will be travelling in the safe and comfortable coaches provided by On Course tours.

All enquiries and bookings should be directed to Ms Helen Gilkes, 20a Normurra Avenue, North Turramurra - phone 9144 4826.

GARDEN TABLE

The Garden Table did a very brisk business with lots of goodies on offer. The big attraction was a big tray of young potted orchids donated by Richard Cusden. Thank you, Richard. Also on sale were Paw Paw and Justicia along with many other plants. These are all good healthy plants going cheap so go along and have a look, you never know what you will find and it all helps your Society.

SHOW BENCH

In spite of the rain the Sasanqua camellias and roses were excellent. Dahlias put on a good show alongside the Azaleas. The pink Vireya 'Lady Di' looked very nice. The tall Aloe 'Fairy Pink' was different. In the Vegie section two very nice large pumpkins gave the judges a difficult decision. In the Decorative section a large rabbit overlooked

the other exhibits. The Easter Hat would have looked very nice out at Randwick at Easter. In the Pictorial section exhibitors were reminded of the rules. The photograph should be of a plant that cannot be brought to the hall for any reason and the photo must have been taken within the last month.

RAFFLE

The Tibouchina 'Peace Baby' was purchased from Parkers Nursery by your Society. This was not your usual 3-4 metre Tibouchina but a much smaller one that only grows to about a metre. A book on roses, a very nice Justicia and the gardening gloves were donated by Christine Rethers, thank you Christine. The large owl was donated by Sonia Shipley. Sonia always had a lot of exhibits on the Show Bench and took out the Patrick Clark Shield on at least one occasion. The owl stood guard in her garden to warn off the 'enemy'. Sonia is no longer with us as she has moved to the USA to live with her son. Lastly, there was a \$20 voucher for Bunnings products. These are all good prizes and \$2 will get you three tickets from the man at the door so why not?

MAIN SPEAKER

Our main speaker was Bernard Chapman, a professional horticulturist specialising in the maintenance of large private gardens. Bernard gave a well-illustrated talk on when and where to prune many types of common garden plants and shrubs. Bernard opened his talk by posing the question "Why prune"? He went on to explain that plants should be pruned if the plant is diseased, damaged or deranged - is getting out of hand and trying to do its own thing. The first step should be to stand back and assess the plant as a whole and decide what needs doing. First get rid of any dead, diseased or damaged wood. If the plant is topiarised, be careful to maintain its shape. If the plant has variegated leaves and has started to revert back to green leaves, cut it back to where the leaves are still variegated otherwise the whole plant will revert. Remember, many plants are reinvigorated by good careful pruning.



When to prune: As a rule of thumb if you are not certain when to prune, prune straight after flowering. The exception to this rule are fruiting trees and plants. If you prune after flowering you will get no fruit. Consider where the plant came from and if it comes from a warm climate it won't like being pruned in the cold weather. Avoid pruning in hot windy

weather. The less vigorous a plant is, the less it should be pruned. Deciduous trees can be pruned in the winter, however do not prune deciduous trees that flower in the spring but wait till they have finished flowering. Some plants will take hard pruning while others won't. Conifers are amongst those that won't take hard pruning because they don't shoot from old hardwood. Palms also do not take kindly to hard pruning as they have only one growing point. Many Australian natives will also not take a hard pruning so if in doubt check with your nursery. Hard pruning can stress plants by removing food from the plant, it can also shock the plant by exposing it to unwanted sunburn.

Aid to recovery: The importance of deep watering of pruned plants cannot be over stated, especially in dry weather. General fertilising will help but don't fertilise sick plants. Seaweed based fertilisers will lessen shock and improve vigour and general regrowth.

Pruning certain plants – hedges: Many hedges are grown for screening purposes and are grown quite thick so a regular light pruning will help keep them thick. When buying hedge plants, make sure that the final height is what you want. Hedges should be pruned so that they have a slight taper to the top which ensures that the bottom gets its fair share of sunlight. When pruning topiary, step back and study the plant frequently to make sure you are maintaining the shape. A wooden form of the required shape is useful when working on topiary.

Hydrangea: The best hydrangeas for the Sydney area are the Mop Top, Lace Top and the Oak Leaf varieties. All three can be pruned in late winter, getting rid of the dead material, diseased and damaged foliage and stems and cutting out any shoots that are not in the right place. Once you have finished pruning, feed and deep water the plants. With Oak Leaf varieties, cut last year's flowered shoots back to two or three buds

Tools: When buying tools always be prepared to spend a bit extra to buy tools made from quality steel. Learn which brands use the best steel as it saves money over time. Fiskars is a good reliable brand. A soft leather bag and belt to carry your tools will help in not losing tools. Use two sets of secateurs, one for use above ground and one to use below ground on roots but don't mix them up. All cutting tools should be cleaned after use with a disinfectant to stop the transmission of disease. Set one folding saw aside for use under the ground only and one for use above the ground. Pole saws and pole clippers that can be operated by hand are available to enable you to reach those high spots. If you are going to use a power operated pole saw or clippers check that you can handle it before you leave the shop as they can be very awkward. A lever action or geared clipper or lopper is a lot easier to use than a non-gearred tool. It was pointed out that the sap of certain shrubs and trees can attack the steel of your tools and Lilli Pilli is one such plant so clean your tools when you have finished using them. A spray with WD40 on your tools at the finish of a job is always beneficial.

Main Speaker May: The main speaker will be Robyn Bible. Robyn will speak on growing Geraniums and Pelargoniums and will bring plants for sale.

MEMBER SPEAKER

The member speaker was Christine Rethers who spoke about growing orchids in the garden. Christine made the point first that most orchids in the wild grow on trees or rocks—they are epiphytes or lithophytes. We grow them in pots simply for our convenience. So in the average garden there will always be places where orchids will grow and thrive quite happily. For most orchid fanciers a shade house would be the minimum requirement and a heated glass

house would be the ultimate. She pointed out that she has a shade house that is closed in using shade cloth around the sides and roof. It has 'doors' of fly-proof netting that use magnets to close up when you pass through. It also has a clear polycarbonate roof covering three-quarters of it. Inside it has shelving and orchids can hang from the roof or on the sides. However, she pointed out that whilst it is nice to have a shade house, it is not an absolute necessity. She uses pergolas to hang pots of orchids from and also puts them on fences. She also hangs orchids in pots or baskets on trees. However, she pointed out that there are other ways of growing orchids. Some like the native Rock Lily orchids, *Dendrobium speciosum*, grow happily on rocks. Another native orchid, *Dendrobium kingianum*, will also grow on rocks as well as on tree branches, especially the Callistemon. Attaching them with a soft tie such as nylon stocking, their roots soon find their way into the bark. Many other orchids can be attached in this way. However, it is essential that the tree does not shed its bark so Eucalypts are usually not suitable. Many bromeliads can also be grown in this way and orchids and bromeliads grow happily together, making an attractive display. Other orchids that are happy growing on trees are the Soft Cane Denrobiums, Miltonias and some Oncidiums. If you want to know more about growing orchids, there are a number of orchid clubs in the Sydney North Shore area where members will be happy to help.

Member Speaker May: The Member Speaker will be Rosemary Baldwin. Rosemary will speak on 'Rosemary's Garden'.

FEATURE PLANT Growing Rhubarb



Rhubarb has been with us for many years and historical records tell us that it was grown in China under the name 'Da Hang' around 2700 years ago. The Chinese powdered the roots for medicinal purposes. It appeared in Europe in the 18th century where it became popular as a food in pies and tarts. A perennial, rhubarb is a generous plant that does not need much maintenance. It is a relatively tall vegetable that has red or green stalks that are topped by large green leaves. The stalks are the only part that is eaten. The large leaves contain oxalic acid which is poisonous to human beings. While rhubarb tolerates most soils it will help the plant take root and grow well if when planting, the soil is

enriched with lots of compost and cow manure. Mature plants do not require lots of fertiliser. Rhubarb do best in areas that have a chilly winter, however they are resilient enough to grow in most other areas. When grown in sub-tropical areas, the stalks tend to be green rather than red and may not be as sweet as the red stalked varieties.

Growing rhubarb: Rhubarb can be grown from seed but the end result is quite often unsatisfactory so it is much better to use mature roots or crowns and divide them into pieces, each bearing one or more buds. Crowns should be planted about a metre apart with the bud just below the surface. It usually takes a new planting about 15 months to produce its first crop. The first crop should not be harvested. Keep the soil damp not wet and remove any flowering shoots that may appear. In late autumn the remaining leaves will die back and the roots go almost dormant, coming to life again in early spring. A good rhubarb plant should produce approximately 2 kilos of usable stalks each year. Rhubarb plants have a productive life of 5-10 years after which they should be replaced.

Fertilising: Rhubarb should be fed in the summer with a good liquid fertiliser formulated for vegetables. Check the container for application rates. Alternatively sprinkle a good general purpose vegetable fertiliser around the plant after the crop has been taken and water in well.

Harvesting: Begin 'pulling' the stalks in January-February. Hold the stalk close to the ground and pull up with a twisting action, always leave four stalks on the plant, do not completely strip it.. Do not remove any stalks after February. Mature rhubarb plants can be 'forced' to produce a crop early by covering them with a bucket and then covering the bucket with straw or compost. The crop should be ready in about six weeks. Any particular plant should only be forced every third year.

Diseases: Crown rot - the terminal bud rots and the tissue below the crown decays. The sticks will appear spindly and dull coloured. There is no cure so dig the crown out and dispose of it in the garbage bin. Do not replant in the affected area. Honey fungus - look for white streaks in dead brown tissue of the crown. Orange toad stools will often appear around the affected plant. There is no cure for this disease so dig the plant out and burn it.

New Products: For those gardeners who prefer to use organic pesticides or herbicides there are a couple of new products available. Yates Nature's Way have produced a citrus and ornamental spray based on pyrethrum, canola oil and seaweed. Available as a hand-operated spray gun, it will kill leaf miner, aphids, scale and white fly. The Richgro range of pesticides now market an organic insect spray based on garlic, chilli and pyrethrums. It is marked 'safe for use on edible crops'. Yates Fungus Gun is now available with a systemic chemical pesticide spray. The active ingredient is myclobutanil. It can be used for fungus control on roses (black spot), flowers and ornamentals. Ants: Ant Rid is based on borax decahydrate. It is a powder that can be used either inside the house or outside in dry areas. Worker ants take the borax and feed it to the queen ant. The borax kills the queen and the nest is destroyed.

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



► After all the rain we have had over the last few months the soil is almost water logged. It is time for Frangipani growers to check the soil and drainage around their plants. Frangipani do not tolerate cold wet feet as the roots can rot. If you find excess water, dig a trench about 10cm deep around the drip line and fill it with gravel. Lead the

trench away from your plant. Grass will grow over the gravel and hide it but the gravel will keep excess water away from your plant.

▶ Are you considering planting some strawberries in your garden, may be as a border. Check the pH of your soil first. Strawberries prefer an acid soil so don't use mushroom compost or compost with lime in it. Work in some iron chelate into the soil two weeks before you plant. Stop using nitrogen rich fertilisers as they encourage soft rapid growth that is susceptible to frost damage and attack by mildew. Switch to using a potassium rich 'flower and fruit' type fertiliser or better still one of the liquid seaweed based fertilisers that contains no added nitrogen. These will encourage strong healthy growth.

▶ It is almost May and temperatures are starting to fall so it is time to give your citrus trees and fruit trees their final feed before they go to sleep for the winter. Rake in some poultry manure and iron chelates out along the drip line, then give it a good watering in.

▶ Even though the weather is cooling down Citrus Leaf Miner are still about in large numbers. They can be controlled by spraying with one of the horticultural pest oils such as Pest Oil (mineral) or Eco Oil (organic). Spray under and over the leaves every couple of weeks at least three times.

▶ Raise the cutters on your lawn mower one notch as that extra bit of growth by the grass will help it cope with any cold and frosty weather during the winter.

▶ If you are planting bulbs for a spring show, make sure you plant them the right way up and at the right depth. If planted too deep or the wrong way up the bulb may not have enough energy to correct the problem. On the other hand if they are planted too close to the surface, they can be affected by above ground temperatures, either hot or cold. They can also be dug out and damaged by birds and animals. If in doubt either check the packet label or ask your nurseryman to look it up. Should you be putting in a lot of bulbs, there are some simple inexpensive planting hole tools available. They are usually graduated on the side so you get the correct depth and are worth a look. The exception to the rule of pointy end up is the Anemone. With this bulb, they look like chocolate drops, the pointy end is the root not the shoot so it is pointy end down with them.



Question? How well do Grevillea stand up to the cold weather? I am in a frost prone area

Answer: There is a whole range of hybrid grevillea that are frost tolerant down to about -5°C. Check the label of the plant you fancy and if it is not there ask the nursery people. Most grevillea will give some flowers all the year and produce a good display in the spring. All grevillea

grow well in full sun or part shade. When transferring a plant in a pot to a permanent site in the ground, first tip prune the plant then soak the pot in a bucket of water for about 20 minutes. The plant should literally fall out of the pot. To ease transplant shock, grevillea can be fertilised with a low phosphorous native plant fertiliser. Once planted keep the soil damp until the plant has settled down and has a firm grip in the soil. Once planted and established, a light pruning after flowering will encourage more flowers.

Question? Two winters ago I gave my frangipani a heavy pruning as it was getting out of hand and now it is not producing any flowers. What has gone wrong? All I am getting is green leaves and no growth. How can I encourage more flowers?

Answer: Often the act of heavy pruning can shock the plant and it sulks for a few years and does not produce flowers for a few seasons. You are better off doing a number of lighter prunes over a longer period of time. Give it a feed of fertiliser that has a high phosphorus content to trigger it to flower. Try some Thrive as it has a fairly high phosphorus content.

Question? We have a bed of dahlias that used to produce large beautiful flowers but now the flowers are quite small and mediocre. We water and fertilise them regularly but still poor flowers. What has gone wrong?

Answer: When was the last time you lifted and divided your tubers? Dahlias should be lifted every season after they have finished flowering and died back. Lift them and store them under cover. Leave the soil around the roots. In September they will begin to shoot. When this happens you can divide up tubers and replant them. Each tuber should have a shoot or bud on it for it to take and grow.



A stylish Easter Bonnet

Regards
Hugh