

# HORTULANUS

Official Publication of Ku-ring-gai Horticultural Society Inc.  
NOVEMBER 2017



President: Doreen Clark, 19 Parkwood Grove, Pymble 2073 (9498 1677)  
Secretary: Christine Rethers, 1 Wolsten Ave, Turramurra 2074 (9449 6245)  
Treasurer: Robyn Brown (0408 295 601)

Website: [www.khsgardenclub.org.au](http://www.khsgardenclub.org.au)

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

## COMING EVENTS

- Oct 27-30 **KHS Trip to the Bathurst Spring Spectacular**  
Nov 4 **African Violet & Gesneriad Show, Burwood RSL, 9 Shaftesbury Rd, Burwood**  
Nov 5-10 **Garden Clubs of Australia Convention, Ulludulla Enq. [www.gardenclubs.org.au](http://www.gardenclubs.org.au)**  
Nov 7 **NOVEMBER MEETING: Ron Armstrong will speak about Streptocarpus and African Violets**  
Nov 11/12 **Bromeliad Fair, Concord Senior Citizens Centre, 9-11 Wellbank St, Concord. Sat 10– 4pm. Sun 9am – 12 noon.**  
Nov 24 **KHS Christmas Dinner at Terrey Hills Golf and Country Club (see below)**  
Dec 5 **DECEMBER MEETING and Christmas supper**

Hi Everyone,

It was a warm night for our October Meeting and 78 members and visitors came along to enjoy themselves with their friends and fellow gardeners.

Due to the absence of our President, who was away enjoying gardens and wildflowers in distant places, Vice President Ted Shaw stepped in and ran the meeting.

A request was made for volunteers to make themselves available to help run the Supper table should one of the current volunteers be unable to come. If you are able to volunteer, please ring the Secretary on 9449 6245.

## MEMBERS' NEWS

**Christmas Dinner—Friday, 24 November 2017** at the Terrey Hills Golf and Country Club, 116 Booralie Road, Terrey Hills, commencing at 6.30 pm. Cost—\$60 per person. This will be a very pleasant evening with fine food and good company. There will be drinks served on arrival followed by a two course dinner with wine included. Please let Helen Gilkes know (9144 4826) if you would like to make up a table (8 people). A booking form is included with this newsletter.

Keith and Maureen Smith had a very successful Huge Plant Sale, raising \$8961.00 for the National Breast Cancer Foundation. On the same day they also heard they had won the Lane Cove Open Garden competition.

Tony Gray had a few words to say on a new type of lawn mower with all mod cons that is now available at Bunnings. He suggested that members, when in Bunnings, have a look at it and see what they think.

Lost and Found. One potted cactus was left on the Show Bench. The owner should contact Hugh at the next meeting.

## OUTINGS

We have had three very enjoyable outings this year and the Outings Committee has already started the planning for next year's trips. They would welcome your input with suggestions for places to visit, either for one day or over two or three days. Please phone Christine (9449 6245) or Ted (9979 3930) if you have any thoughts or ideas on this.

## SHOW BENCH

Despite the long spell of dry weather, the azaleas and the rhododendrons seem to be enjoying it and have put on a fine show. The yellow clivia are also excellent. Wisteria is hard to exhibit, but the white one on the bench looked beautiful. We have some very good orchid growers and there was a fine show this month. The *Arisaema ringens* is an unusual plant; it hails from the cold foothills of the mountains on the border of Tibet and China, and can be quite hard to grow in the warmer Sydney climate. Our rhubarb growers are putting on a good show this season. The Decorative and Pictorial sections both had great displays.

## TRADING TABLE

Whilst there was no Garden Table available to members, those trading managed to fill three tables with a wide range of excellent plants, all going for sale at a maximum of \$10. Many of these plants were snapped up by members looking for that special plant. Most found what they were looking for. The trading session went well for everyone, traders, buyers and your society. A big thank you is due to the group of members who ran it, Alison Wood, Viv Lowther and Lorraine Nelson. The Trading Table will be in operation again next March, which will give you enough time to pot up and grow a few extra plants to bring along and sell.

## RAFFLE

We only had one prize on offer for the raffle. This was a fine Fuchsia purchased by your society from Honeysuckle Garden nursery. In the absence of our regular raffle ticket seller, Mohammed Aresh, Peter Fisher and Maureen Smith did the rounds selling raffle tickets. Thank you, Peter and Maureen.

## MAIN SPEAKER

Our Main Speaker was Mark Massey, a specialist in growing heritage and heirloom fruit and vegetables. Heritage fruit and vegetables are those that our parents and grandparents used to grow in their vegetable gardens, in the days when anyone with a backyard usually had a vegetable garden. It saved money and frequently became a matter of pride. These fruit and vegetables were full of vitamins and very tasty, fertiliser for these gardens usually could be found out in the street and cost nothing.



Unfortunately, with population growth and a vastly increased demand, fruit and vegetable growing has become a mass production business. One example is tomatoes, where 80% are produced in vast climate controlled greenhouses and irrigated farms resulting in many of the heritage plants disappearing. It is estimated that since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century over 1200-1400 of the old varieties of fruit and vegetables have disappeared.

An excellent set of photos of the Santa Monica National Heirloom Fruit and Vegetable Expo were presented. Here at the Expo over 2000 people a day came to see and taste fruit and vegetables that they would never see in the supermarket. One section was devoted to melons from all over the world, places like Morocco and India for instance. A squash,  $\frac{3}{4}$  metre long, stood out. Some of the old seeds were very tough and long lasting, an example being water melon seeds found in 1000 year old ruins have been planted and produced perfectly viable melons.

Mark spoke of the trouble that has been caused by some international seed companies selling seeds of basic grain crops like rice and wheat that produce sterile grain. This runs counter to the ancient practice of setting a small section of the crop aside to provide seed for next year's crop.

**Main Speaker November:** Ron Armstrong will talk about Streptocarpus and African Violets and he will bring along some plants for sale. This will be of special interest to many of us who love to grow and flower these plants.

## MEMBER SPEAKER:

There was no member speaker, instead we heard from Peter Thorburn, manager of the group of four Honeysuckle nurseries which has recently taken over Parkers nursery in Turramurra. He gave an interesting talk about his family's history in horticulture tracing it back to his great grandfather, the renowned botanist, Reverend William Watts. He specialised in mosses some of which can be seen in the Herbarium at the Royal Botanic Garden in Sydney. Honeysuckle Garden began as a small nursery in Mosman, but had to move on to another site in Mosman when the property was sold. It was pointed out that with the rapid rise in land values in the Sydney area, it is getting very expensive to set up a nursery in this city. Any to be found are generally in the outer suburbs. The Honeysuckle group is now run by three brothers with young horticulturist trainees being taken on as potential managers.

**Member Speaker—November:** Christine Rethers will show some photos from the recent trip by the Society to the Leura gardens.

## FEATURE ARTICLE—LET'S TALK ABOUT LAWNS

As the weather starts to warm up, so our lawns will start to wake up and grow a lot faster. Many of us spend far more time than we should pampering our lawns to achieve that lovely green sward that is so easy on the eye on a hot summer's day. Unless you are trying to achieve a show garden lawn, then it is time to ease off. The practical reason for growing a lawn is to provide a cover for a piece of ground so it will not dry out and produce dust in the summer and mud in the winter. A nice green lawn in the summer tends to make you feel cooler.

When it comes to mowing the lawn, some gardeners will try to save on mowing time by cutting the lawn too closely and almost all the green leaves are cut off. When this occurs the roots do not receive the nutrients that they would normally receive from the green leaves, resulting in a weakening of the roots and weeds will try to take over. A happily growing lawn will choke off many weeds. Adjust the height of your mower so that you cut off only half of the green grass leaves. If your lawn has a brownish look about it when you have finished mowing then you should raise the cutters a notch at a time, until you leave a cut lawn that looks green after mowing not brown. If, for some reason, your grass has got quite long don't cut it all off in one go. Do two cuts with several days between the cuts.

By mowing regularly you could be said to be harvesting a crop (grass). As you will be doing it regularly through the summer, the clippings can go into the compost bin. Remember during their growth period those clippings have drawn a lot of nutrients out of the soil and it needs to be replaced. From time to time, say at about 4 monthly inter-

vals, those nutrients should be replaced either by spreading the well rotted grass clippings over the lawn and watering in or, if you are not running a compost heap, by using one of the readily available lawn fertilisers, such as Dynamic Lifter for Lawns. Whichever fertiliser you use, follow the directions on the packet. Too much fertiliser can 'burn' your lawn and too much is, quite often, not a large amount. Whenever you fertilise your lawn always follow up with a good watering.

With the likelihood of a hot dry summer in the offing, it could pay dividends to give your lawn a good dose of a soil wetter such as Amgrow's Wettasoil or OCP's Eco-hydrate. Soil wetters will make the soil very receptive to any rain that comes along and you won't lose any with run off. Seasol make a liquid soil wetter that combines both Seasol and a soil wetter. Soil wetters are usually good for about 6 months.

Regular mowing will usually keep annual weeds under control by cutting them off before they flower and go to seed. Perennial weeds usually have a long tap root and need to be either poisoned or dug out. A lot of weeds in a lawn can be killed by just sprinkling ammonium sulphate on them. Do this at the hottest part of the day and water in well the next day. The weed area will go brown for a couple of weeks and then come back to a lush green. Should you decide to use one of the commercial weed killers that are readily available, first check what sort of grass you have in your lawn. Many of the commercial weed killers are specific to a particular grass so, as usual, read the instructions on the packet closely before you buy it. Persistent weeds like bindii are easy to dig out with a hand weeder or a bayonet like tool. Get them out before they flower. The bright green winter grass is a matter of timing. It is easy to pull out of the soil after a good shower of rain but do it before the weed goes to seed. Getting rid of onion weed from a lawn can be a long term job. Poisoning seems to be the best way but it is a case of keeping at it. Onion weed produces a major bulb and lots of bulbils. The first poisoning will only kill the main bulb and the bulbils will continue to grow, so in due course you will have to poison them too. You might have to do it three or four times but keep at it and you will eventually kill them all. Don't dig them out, this is never 100% effective as there are always a couple of bulbils you will miss

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



▶ As there is likely to be a hot, dry summer in front of us, it is time to do some preventative maintenance, starting with your roof gutters. Over the last month or so large quantities of dry leaves have been drifting around on the wind and many are now sitting in your roof gutters and need to be cleaned out. Dead leaves are a fire hazard any-

where but particularly if you live in a bushy area and they can block underground drains without any trouble at all. Fit a diversion valve to your down pipes so that you can divert the water and leaves out onto the ground when you are clearing the gutter with a hose. If you own a high pressure water blaster, extension tubes and a universal head are available and these will often enable you to clear your gutters without using a ladder. Two-storey house gutter cleaning is a job for the professionals only.

▶ Many of us have rain water tanks that are connected to an irrigation system. When was the last time you cleared out the leaf trap in the top of the tank? If left there, leaves will gradually break up into fine enough particles to pass through the filter netting and get into the tank. From there it is only a short trip to the filter on your irrigation system and once that is blocked, your plants are starved for water.

▶ Are you growing cacti or succulents in earthenware pots? If you are then it is time to get a regular watering program in place. Even though many of these plants come from hot, dry areas they still need regular watering in the hot weather. Terracotta pots can be regular cactus cookers in the summer. Either establish a regular watering program or move your pots into a cooler area. However, remember that they will still need a drink during the hot weather. Keep an eye on the soil and water it when it is almost dry. During the cold weather most cacti and succulents go to sleep and rely on whatever water is available from nature.

▶ Give your compost heap a turn over with a garden fork and see if it is drying out. Dry compost heaps stop decomposing. Good working compost will feel like a damp squeezed out sponge. Take a handful and smell it and if it has an earthy smell about it then all is well. If you say "ugh" then it is too wet and should be turned over with a garden fork to dry it out.

▶ Many bougainvillea are vigorous climbers and without you being aware of it they can get out of hand and take over an area. Another unpleasant feature is that many have large vicious thorns so gauntlets and long sleeves are the order of the day when you start to prune them. Get in early and cut those long, soft shoots that are coming away from the main stems. If the main stems are waving about in the breeze, tie them back to a support, not too tight or you could choke them off and they will die

▶ May bushes will have finished flowering by now so it is time to get rid of lots of those dead stems. Some of these can be fairly large, but dead wood is of no use to any shrub so get rid of it. This will encourage the shrub to produce more young green growth and more flowers next spring.

▶ Your gardenias and azaleas have had a really good season this year so give them a 'thank you' by watering in some iron chelate at the recommended rate and add a teaspoon of Epsom salts to every 4.5 ltr of water as a bonus.

► Low maintenance native westringia can grow quite large and what looks like a huge shrub can be quite hollow inside. It is here that you will find quite large dead branches, up to 4-5cm in diameter. They are usually brittle and can be broken off. Remove them as they only encourage fungi and disease.

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



**Question?** My rhubarb has green stalks how can I change this to red?

**Answer:** You cannot change the colour of your rhubarb stalk, it is green because of the variety. The usual green variety is 'Giant Victoria' which is very sweet while 'Silvan Giant' is one of the reddest. Rhubarb likes an acid-

ic soil in the pH 5.5–6.5 range. Add lots of compost and organic matter to the soil. Rhubarb dislikes poorly drained or infertile soil so keep an eye on the drainage and feed your plants.

**Question?** What is causing the leaves of my lemon tree to turn yellow? Is there anything I can do about it?

**Answer:** Yellow leaves in a lemon tree are usually caused by a mineral deficiency in the soil. If the new leaves turn yellow first and it spreads down to the older leaves, it is usually a magnesium deficiency. This can be rectified by dissolving two teaspoons of Epsom salts in half a can of water. You can water in around the tree or spray the foliage. If, however, the reverse occurs and the old leaves yellow first, then it is very likely an iron deficiency in the soil. This can be overcome by watering in iron chelate at the recommended rate in spring, summer and autumn. The tree will be dormant in the winter. It will take about a month before you start to see a change in leaf colour.

**Question?** I have a large pot of sweet peas and while they develop lots of buds, I get very few flowers. Most of the buds turn yellow and drop off. What is going on?

**Answer:** Some varieties of sweet peas are more prone to bud drop than others. Long periods (a week or so) of dull and cold weather can cause the buds to turn yellow and drop off. As the weather warms up and you get more sunny days the bud drop will stop. Another cause of bud drop is not watering regularly. Start watering on a regular basis and check the soil moisture by poking your finger into the soil every few days. Nice and damp but not wet is what you are aiming for.

**Question?** The fruit on my passionfruit vine are getting pin holes and hard woody brown spots on them. I am also losing quite a few fruit. They are breaking off and dropping to the ground. What is causing this and is there anything I can do about it?

**Answer:** Your passionfruit are being attacked by fruit fly. Look for a small reddish-brown fly. The best way to protect your fruit is to bag the individual fruit in fine mesh bags. They are easy enough to make or you can buy them. Pick the ripe fruit and get rid of any infected fruit in the rubbish bin.

**Question?** I am having trouble with possums eating my vegetables. I have a bed 2 metres long and a metre wide. My vegetables are low growing like cabbage, lettuce and root vegetables like carrots. Have you any suggestions?

**Answer** Probably the easiest way to protect your vegetable bed would be to build a coarse wire mesh fence around it using star pickets as uprights. Use a strong wire run through the top hole of the pickets to support the wire mesh. Bend the top of the wire outwards for about 15cm and leave a spiky edge on it. Coarse wire mesh is quite cheap and metre long star pickets are not expensive either.

**Question?** I have a fairly large clump of viburnum that normally gives me no trouble but this year it looks decidedly sick. The leaves are being attacked by something and dying. They turning yellow and have rusty brown spots and holes in them. I tried spraying with Pyrethrum but it was not successful. Is there anything else that I can use?

**Answer** It seems like your viburnum has been attacked by Two Spotted Mite. This pest is tiny but if you look on the underside of the leaves, you will probably be able to see the webbing. Unfortunately, it has become resistant to many common contact pesticides so try spraying with Eco Oil or Pest Oil which can be quite effective also.



**Decorative Section:  
Hand-held Posy**

*Regards  
Hugh*