

HORTULANUS

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

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DECEMBER 2024

COMING EVENTS

- Dec. 3 **KHS Meeting and Christmas supper: Speaker is Tammy Huynh, Gardening Australia**
2025
Feb. 4 **KHS Meeting:**



A Christmas message from our President

What a wonderful cross section of horticultural interests we covered this year. Our speakers came from all walks of the gardening world – from the Botanic Gardens to home grown enthusiasts, from bush tucker to frogs and native bees, from Kew Gardens to Australian beneficial and predator insects, from orchids to camellias and from an Ikebana master to a bromeliad hoarder.

Our thanks go to all those who have given so generously of their time to share with us their area of expertise. This thanks also goes to our members who have shared with us their travels stories and gardening tricks and tips. Thank you – we are all enriched by your sharing.

In addition, a special thank-you goes to the committee members and all the volunteers who have rolled up their sleeves and made each meeting a celebration of our love of gardening and all things horticultural.

The year is rapidly coming to an end but we have one more treat in store. Tammy Huynh from Gardening Australia, will be discussing Indoor Plants at our final meeting in 2024. And don't forget – the December meeting is not only a feast of information – it's a real live feast for the taste buds. Bring a plate, either savory or sweet, and bring your appetite. Come in your Christmas finery and don't forget to bring along your best show bench exhibits. Let's end this wonderful year in celebration.

On behalf of your committee, I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a very happy and fruitful New Year. Looking forward to seeing you all again on 4 February 2025 – fit and healthy.

Evelyn Mason



MEMBER NEWS

We welcomed 45 members and friends to our November meeting and enjoyed listening to our very enthusiastic young presenter from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney, Piret May, giving her take on how to deal with pest and diseases in the garden. Before this, Evelyn, our President, showed us some of the highlights of her recent trip to the UK and Europe. Our next meeting on Tuesday, 3 December, is the final meeting of the year. We will take a month off in January before resuming again on 4 February 2025.

The December meeting promises to be very busy—we will have our usual Show Bench (the last one of the year), the Guessing Competition organised again by Bob Ballinger, a presentation of Life Membership by the President of Garden Clubs of Australia, Lorraine Emerson, to Virginia Fischer, and then our lovely presenter, Tammy Huynh, from Gardening Australia speaking about 'Indoor Plants'. To finish up, we will have our Christmas Supper and we invite our members to contribute by bringing along a plate of something either savoury or sweet.

OUTINGS

Four-day outing to Bright, Vic. from Tuesday, 29 April to Friday, 2 May 2025 is now fully booked. If

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you would like to, we are still taking names for the waiting list. It is inevitable that some on the list will end up not being able to come. Please let Helen Gilkes know if you are interested. You can give her your name at the meeting or she can be reached on 9144 4826.

The trip to Little Hartley on 16 October went very well with over 40 members and friends enjoying the three gardens that were visited. The weather was kind and a lovely lunch was enjoyed in one of the gardens, 'Highfields'.



'Hart Vale'



'Highfields'



Lunch at 'Highfields'



'Wild Meadows'

RAFFLE

This month's raffle consisted of a very nice white hydrangea and a small flowering begonia, a lovely dwarf Browallia from the Society, a classic gardening book and some chocolates among other donations. Many thanks to all the donors. There will not be a raffle at the December meeting but there will be three Lucky Door Prizes instead. Don't forget to pick up your ticket when you sign in.

GARDEN TABLE

The Garden Table had a number of interesting plants on offer including some Bearded Iris rhizomes, and some ground covers, always useful in any garden. There will not be a garden table at the December meeting so the next time you will be able to buy plants will be at the February 2025 meeting.

MAIN SPEAKER NOVEMBER

This was Piret May, a horticulturalist who is currently working at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney. She is in charge of the Herb Garden and really enjoys her job there. Her topic was 'Natural Methods of Pest Management' and Piret used examples from her own garden to illustrate her talk. She opened her talk by asking 'What is a Pest?' She answered that question by stating that this was entirely subjective! Piret identified three main categories of pests: chewers (caterpillars, grasshoppers, weevils), piercing and rasping insects (stinkbugs, white fly, aphids, scale, mealy bugs, slugs and snails) or borers (citrus leaf miner, fruit fly, root knot nematodes, beetle larvae).

Piret then went on to explain that most if not all of these pests had a natural predator—a good guy that liked nothing better than a good meal of those bugs most of us regard as pests. She also posed the question—what is our individual tolerance for these pests? Will a few caterpillars spoil our cabbages or can we pick off those we can see and put up with the rest? A number of pests such as stink bugs can be removed by hand (always wear eye protection for this job) and some such as aphids can be hosed off. She noted that the main problem with some of the so-called eco-friendly solutions is that they are non-selective. Eco Oil, which is an organic remedy, can also remove the 'good guys' along with the pest we are trying to control.

Piret's main solution to this dilemma is to encourage and use the 'good guys' to keep the unwanted pests under control. For example, ladybirds and their larvae can eat vast quantities of aphids; parasitoid wasps lay eggs in aphids and caterpillars and the subsequent larvae eat their host insect; some beetles and their larvae will feast on mealybugs and so on. These beneficial insects can be purchased if you have a very heavy infestation of a particular bug at Bugs for Bugs: <https://bugsforbugs.com.au/> and Good Bug Shop: <https://goodbugshop.com.au/>.

She pointed out that we all can attract these beneficial insects to our gardens by planting suitable host plants. The main characteristic of these plants is that they have tiny flowers as most of these insects have small mouth parts for feeding on the flower's nectar. On her list of suitable plants were Queen Anne's Lace, dill, fennel, coriander, salvias, cosmos and marigolds to name a few. It is important to aim for a diversity of plants.

Some of the common predator insects:



Wasp laying eggs in an aphid



Wasp eggs in a caterpillar



Praying mantis



Assassin bug



Spider wasp



Lacewing

MEMBER SPEAKER November

Evelyn Mason was our speaker and the title of her talk was 'My 2024 Greening Odyssey'. Evelyn told us that on her and her husband's recent trip to the UK and Europe, she was interested in how people in so many countries are trying to bring back vegetation, biodiversity and insects. In Arundel, West Sussex, she was fascinated by the Bee Friendly stickers on shop windows and posts. The whole town was trying to encourage more bees into the area. They even had beehives in the centre of town.

In Eastern Europe, Evelyn was fascinated by the number of old large and shady trees growing in the city centres. She assumed that they were planted to provide shade and cooling. In Bulgaria, in particular, the central parks were not flower parks but shady areas for people to sit and escape the extreme summer heat. Trees in urban areas were in so many of the Eastern European towns and cities they visited. This gave them a softness that was not reflected in the Communist style buildings that had replaced far too much of the original architecture.



There will be no Member speaker in December.

IN THE VEGIE PATCH IN DECEMBER/JANUARY by Christine Rethers

The summer months can be quite tough for the vegetable garden with the extra heat and sometimes less natural rainfall to contend with. It is a good idea to protect your vegetables with some light shade cloth. Even the light white netting that we recommend for protection from insect attack will provide some shading for tender plants like lettuce. The other protection is to apply good amounts of mulch to the soil which helps to retain moisture and keeps the roots of your vegetables from getting too hot. Home-made mulch, sugar cane mulch, lucerne hay, pea straw and some of the proprietary brands of mulch are all good but a word of warning - do not apply them so thickly that natural rainfall cannot reach the soil. Probably 4-5 cm is sufficient depth to provide some protection whilst still letting water through. It is important to harvest crops like beans, cucumbers, zucchini and the like whilst they are still young and tender. If you leave them on their vines too long, the plants think that they have completed their life-cycle and will go into seed production. If you keep picking, the plants will keep producing.

One vegetable that you can continue to sow is the radish. The idea is to sow just one row at a time. From seed to maturity is approximately 4-5 weeks so if you plant just one row each week, you will maintain a nice supply for the kitchen over the summer months. There is nothing nicer than a lovely fresh radish to eat as is or sliced in a salad.

Keep an eye on how your tomatoes are going. If the leaves around the bottom of the plant are getting a bit yellow, just take them off as it could be that they have been affected by a fungal infection. It is a good idea to take off the bottom leaves anyway to prevent soil being splashed onto them when you water. It is a good idea to put mulch around your tomatoes—this can be home-made compost, sugarcane mulch, lucerne or pea straw. Just don't put it on too thickly so as to prevent water reaching the soil. Make sure you keep tying the new growth to the supports you have put in as windy conditions will result in bent or broken stems. Watch out for pests such as fruit fly and caterpillars. If you are growing the larger fruiting varieties, fruit fly can be a real problem and the only sure way to protect your fruit is to cover the tomatoes tightly with fruit netting. Small tomatoes like the Tommy Toe and Cherry Tomatoes are usually not affected by fruit fly attack.



An Easy Water Feature by Maureen Smith

If you would like a water feature but do not have access to power for a pump or a suitable position to use gravity feed, what about a pot pond? All you need is a waterproof container large enough to fit in a few plants. Depending on the container you select, you may need to seal the inside to ensure it is waterproof. Wooden half barrels and the like can look attractive but they may leach into the water so would need to be carefully lined with a PVC pond liner.

Your choice of plants is important, both for aesthetic reasons and in order to keep your pot pond healthy. For instance, floating plants such as Water Lettuce and Water Hyacinth help reduce algae. Both these are invasive in the wild so should be disposed of carefully but are quite safe in a pond pot.



In deciding what to plant, the position of your pond is important. Is it going to be viewed from all sides or just from one angle. If from all sides, put your tallest plant in the centre. A yellow water Iris with its tall upright foliage could look good. Alternatively, you can place this or a similar tall plant to the rear of the pot. Other tall plant suggestions are Colocasia Black Magic or one of the Eleocharis grass varieties. Another possibility is Golden Sweet Flag which is a yellowy/green grass which grows to about 25cm. These will help to keep the water in your pot clear.

It's important not to overcrowd the pot, you want to be able to see some water. Some Water Mint tumbling over the side of the pot is a nice addition and this sweet-

smelling plant will attract butterflies. You can also float a cut flower or two for a bit of variety.

What about mosquitos, you well may ask. Well, there are several solutions. Mosquito larva are generally at the top of the water so if when you top up your pond pot, as you will need to do regularly, you can overfill it and most of the larvae will pour out and die. Alternatively, you can now buy what are called mosquito dunks – a larvicide. These little tablets are excellent to deter mosquitos from standing water. As your pond pot is relatively small compared to a normal pond you would only need a quarter of one each time. Another solution is a solar-powered fountain which will keep the water moving and mosquito larvae cannot live in moving water. Another option is to get some small native fish that will happily keep your pond free of mosquito larvae.

The advantage of a pond pot is you can move it around and very easily change its looks, so why not give it a try?

YOUR DECEMBER/JANUARY GARDEN by Maureen Smith

December is such a beautiful time in Sydney gardens full now of all the lovely flowering shrubs and trees. The Jacarandas have been wonderful (never mind those dropping petals) and now the Frangipani are just bursting into flower. Lavender, Osmanthus and a great variety of Salvia are also heralding the coming summer. Don't forget the climbers - Star Jasmine and big pops of Bougainvillea colour are all around.

But also let's not forget the chores. If you planted some seedlings during November, now is the time to give them a gentle feed with some seaweed or worm tea. There's always the weeding. With the bit of rain we had, the weeds are pretty vigorous and not only unsightly but stealing the nutrients from your plants. Again, mulch always helps as bare earth is just an invitation to weeds.

If you are planning to go away this month, it is time to get your potted plants in a good condition to withstand the weather, whatever that may be. If you are lucky enough to have a friend or relative coming to your home to water, then grouping your pots together is a good idea as is topping up the pots with mulch. As long as your bathroom has good natural light, a good trick for indoor plants is to put a small amount of water in the bottom of the bath and put your plants in there. They can last for at least a couple of weeks.

Whilst thinking of watering, it is a good idea to train your plants to withstand long dry periods. You can do this by deep watering, then extending the period between waterings rather than using the little but often approach.

Trim your spring flowering plants as they die off to encourage new growth and blooms.

December is of course gift giving time and for those of us who haven't been clever or organised enough to have potted up our own Christmas gifts, the nurseries have some beautiful offerings. They may be a bit old hat but I always think the red Poinsettia is very Christmassy.

Season's greetings and enjoy your garden!



'Season's Greetings'