

# HORTULANUS

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

APRIL 2018



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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

- Apr 2-30** Garden Art Month at the Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens Enq. <https://www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/visit/garden-art-month>
- Apr 3** APRIL MEETING: Lorraine Emerson will speak on the Green Wall of the Calyx at the Botanic Gardens
- Apr 7/8** Collectors' Plant Fair, Hawkesbury Race Club Clarendon Enq. [www.collectorsplantfair.com.au](http://www.collectorsplantfair.com.au)
- Apr 8** UNSH Autumn Rose Show, Galston Community Centre 11-5.30pm Enq. 9653 2202
- Apr 12** Garden Design Series, Royal Automobile Club, Sydney—Michael Cooke, speaker Enq. 92318182
- Apr 21/22** Autumn Garden Weekend and Plant Fair, Bowral 9-4pm Enq. [autumngardens@shbg.com.au](mailto:autumngardens@shbg.com.au)
- Apr 24** KHS Outing to Mt Wilson (details below)
- Apr 29** Maureene and Keith Smith's Huge Plant Sale, 45 Parklands Ave, Lane Cove North from 10am
- May 1** MAY 85th ANNIVERSARY MEETING

Hi

It was a warm and wet night for our March meeting but it did not stop 73 members and visitors turning out to have an enjoyable evening with their fellow gardeners. The President opened the Meeting by welcoming the three new members. An appeal was made to members to volunteer to open their garden for a visit by other members in September. Please contact Doreen if you would like to volunteer. Three gardens are required for this garden ramble which is an annual event and always finishes with an excellent afternoon tea. There is still plenty of time for you to get your garden in order and put on its best face so give it a go and it will be very much appreciated.

Recently an advertisement for a hand held battery powered planting hole digger appeared in the latest edition of the Garden Clubs of Australia 'Our Gardens' the magazine. The company advertising the product would like to hear what gardeners who have used it think about its performance. Please contact the Secretary if you have used this device and are willing to pass on your comments.

## MEMBER NEWS

A warm welcome to our new members Margaret Cleary, Penny Williams and John and Jacinta Costa Bir. Very best wishes for a speedy recovery go to Frances Kench who has had a period of time in hospital but is home again now and recuperating. Sincere congratulations to long-time members, Laurie and Joan Logue, who have just celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary. Don't forget Maureene and Keith Smith's Huge Plant Sale on Sunday, 29 April at 45 Parkland Avenue, Lane Cove North from 10 am. You will be sure to find some interesting plants and the money collected goes to the National Breast Cancer Foundation.

## OUTINGS

**Mt Wilson, Thursday, 24 April:** we will travel to see the autumn colour in three of the best gardens—Bebeah, Nooroo and Windyridge. We have booked the Village Hall for our lunch break in case of rainy weather. To keep the cost as low as possible, we are not providing lunch. However, the Society will provide tea, coffee and some slices for afters. The cost is \$65 per person and a booking form is included with this newsletter. Please see Helen Gilkes at the meeting if you would like to book a place. Payment is due no later than our meeting on 3 April.

**Canberra, Thursday 27 to Friday 28 September:** this is a one night/two day trip. On the first day, we travel to Canberra to visit Tulip Tops, a garden with spectacular plantings of tulips in a delightful garden setting. On the way, we visit Perennial Hill, a wonderful garden developed by Julie and Craig Hulbert where many kinds of plants are displayed in 'garden rooms' to great advantage. Many of these plants can be purchased in their on-site nursery. Overnight we will be accommodated in Queanbeyan. The following morning, we will be hosted by the Canberra Horticultural Society (founded 1929) as we visit several of their members' gardens. On the return journey, we will have lunch at Goulburn and visit the historic Riversdale garden. A great trip seeing new things in familiar territory. The cost will be \$405 per person twin-share with a single supplement of \$70 which covers your accommodation in the 4-star motel, all meals and morning teas plus all garden entries.

**Crookwell Garden Festival, Friday 9 to Sunday 11 November:** This will be a 3-day/two night trip and include up to 10 open gardens in the Crookwell area, including an Edna Walling garden. Also included will be visits to gardens on the way to Crookwell. We will be staying at the 4-star Goulburn Heritage Motor Inn for the two nights and travel will be provided by On Course Tours. More details will follow. For any early enquiries, please call Ted Shaw on 9979 3930.

## TRADING TABLE

There was no Garden Table in March, however the Trading Table had three tables packed with excellent plants for sale. Nothing over \$12 and all in first class condition - what more could you want. Your Society took a 10% commission but the traders receive 90% of the sale price and everyone is happy. Did you go and have a look? Sincere thanks to Alison Wood, Patricia Gibson, Viv Lowther and their helpers who made it run so smoothly. The next Trading Table will be in at the October meeting so you have plenty of time to pot up and grow on some cuttings to bring along. Give it a go!

**Note:** The Garden Table will be back in operation for the April meeting so don't forget to check it out.

## SHOW BENCH

We had a fine show on the Show Bench. The Nerines and Belladonnas were doing very well with the brilliant yellow Lycoris a stand-out. Dahlias were looking good with the not-so-often seen single dahlias a real stand-out. When preparing an exhibit for the Show Bench take a little bit of extra time when setting it up, stand off and look with a critical eye as this is what the judges will do. The Vegie section was light on but the solitary pumpkin was a beauty. The Decorative section was well supported and showed a lot of thought and imagination.

## RAFFLE

We had several excellent prizes on offer for the raffle. The fine Dipladenia 'Jade White' was purchased from Elegant Outdoors Nursery by your Society. The blue Streptocarpus was donated by Christine Rethers and the tall cactus was donated by our well known member, Anonymous, thank you Anonymous. These are excellent prizes and it only costs \$2 for 3 tickets and you never know your luck but no ticket, no chance to win.

## MAIN SPEAKER MARCH



This was Steve Falconi from Organic Crop Protectants (OCP), the well-known producer of organic non-chemical pesticides and weedkillers. Steve gave an informative and well illustrated talk on how many well-known pesticides, weedkillers and fungicides marketed as being organic do not conform to the strict Australian Standard AS 6000 which sets out the requirements as to whether a product can or cannot be marketed as being organic. He pointed out that if a product did conform to Australian Standards it would be marked on the label as 'Aust. Certified Organic'. The corresponding body in New Zealand is NASSA.

Natural organic herbicides and pesticides must reach a certain high level of performance before they can be classed as of AS 6000 Standard. The Standards Department puts them through a stringent set of tests over a long period of time. A major test on organic pesticides or herbicides is to find out what their impact is on the environment before permission is granted to label the product 'Aust. Certified Organic'.

Some of the deceptive terms used to describe products bearing well known names are organic, organic based, natural, low toxic, ecofriendly and chemical free. Steve gave a number of examples of products marketed by well-known manufacturers that used the various organic descriptions in a very loose way. It was pointed out that chemical fertilisers and pesticides can build up in the soil to the detriment of your plants. Copper is a good example with plants using very little copper so the residue is left in the soil where it can accumulate and eventually affect your plant. Organic fertilisers simply breakdown and become part of the soil.

Particular mention was made of OCPs latest organic weedicide 'Slasher' which is a contact only weedicide and does not penetrate into the soil. Steve moved on and presented a second set of slides illustrating the 'good insects' that are on your side and the 'enemy' the insects that damage or kill your plants. An illustrated book by Jayne Davenport was on sale to help members sort out the goodies from the baddies in the insect world. A brief talk and description was given of the predatory mites that are available commercially and can be used to counter severe infections of destructive pests. Once they have cleaned up the pests the predatory mites either move on or die.

At the conclusion of his talk Steve had a large collection of organic herbicides and pesticides (guaranteed) for sale at bargain prices which were enthusiastically purchased by members.

**Main Speaker April:** This will be Lorraine Emerson. Lorraine will speak on the Green Wall in the Calyx in the Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens. The Calyx is a spectacular climate controlled exhibition area recently finished in the Gardens. Should be most interesting.

## MEMBER SPEAKER MARCH

Penny Whipp gave an interesting and well-illustrated talk about the up-coming Our Gardens Photographic Competitions. Our Gardens is the magazine published by the Garden Clubs of Australia. We were shown some beautiful pictures of past prize winners, one of which was a mother possum and baby – not a favourite subject for some of our members. The other opportunity to send in photos is for inclusion in the 2020 Calendar.

For those that wish to enter either of the two photographic opportunities, all the necessary information and entry forms are available on the Garden Clubs of Australia website at [www.gardenclubs.org.au](http://www.gardenclubs.org.au). Select GCA Photo Competitions or Pictorial Calendar 2020. Contact Paul Lucas, GCA Photo Competition Co-ordinator, at [photocomp@gardenclubs.org.au](mailto:photocomp@gardenclubs.org.au). As the lady said, let's get snapping!

**Member Speaker April:** Doreen Clark and Nancy Shaw will give a short talk and a practical demonstration on 'Pruning Bromeliads'

## WHAT HAPPENED TO MY CACTUS?

The best way to protect your cacti from pests and diseases is to keep your cacti strong, healthy and growing well. Probably the most important thing with growing cacti is correct watering. The majority of cacti come from dry areas and many gardeners assume because of this they don't need to be watered. This is wrong, cacti need water like any other plant. The trick is to wait until the soil has almost dried out then water your cacti. They are not like other plants which they are watered every two or three weeks. During the cold winter months cacti will go almost dormant and require very little water. Rainfall is usually sufficient. Fertilising. Probably the most convenient way to fertilise your cactus is to use a slow release fertiliser that has been formulated for cacti and contains trace elements. It should be low in nitrogen. Follow the directions and scatter the pellets on the surface then work them into the top of the soil. Do this in the spring and the fertiliser will slowly feed your cactus right through the summer.

Cacti can be attacked by all the usual sap sucking insects with disastrous results. Some of the more common pests encountered are aphids, mealy bugs, scale insects, two-spotted mite and thrip. Two-spotted mite, aphid and thrip can be controlled organically with Eco Neem while mealy bug can be handled with Natrasoap. Eco Oil can be used on scale. Make regular checks particularly if you have shrubbery or long grass growing nearby.

Soft rots and root diseases are almost impossible to treat so you are better off cutting out the diseased part. Use a very sharp knife and cut well back from the disease. Check the cut and if there is any discolouration showing in the main stump cut back further. Dispose of the bits in the rubbish bin not the compost. Most rots are caused by too much water.

Growing cactus indoors. Generally cacti do not take too kindly to growing indoors for any length of time as they are a plant that likes lots of light. If you can manage the light requirement indoors, cacti are easy to manage. A good situation would be a window ledge that gets lots of sunlight but don't put your plant where it touches the glass.

Buying cacti: Most good garden centres have a reasonable range of cacti for sale. Inspect any cacti that you are going to buy closely. It should look clean, healthy and firm with no soft spots or decaying areas anywhere on the plant. It should not look pale or elongated. This usually indicates that the plant has been kept too long in a low light area. The plant should be clear of any insects such as mealy bug which look like small white sticky patches of cotton wool. Look for them behind the spines.

## NEW PRODUCT—BEEKEEPER

All gardeners know that bees in the garden are a must particularly if you are growing vegetables or fruit. Over the last 10 years since the introduction of Confidor, a systemic insecticide, the number of bees about has dropped dramatically. They pick up the Confidor via the pollen and it kills them. Anything that can bring bees back into your garden is a very good thing. Amgrow have introduced a product that can be sprayed called Beekeeper. It consists of honey bee attractant fragrances plus honey bee attractants and controlled release formulation aids. If you are having trouble getting your vegetables mature properly or getting your fruit trees and berry bushes to fruit properly then this could be worth a try. This product is available at most garden centres and is not particularly expensive.



► It is April and we are well into autumn. If you are thinking about planting some tulips then it is time to negotiate for space in the refrigerator for your tulip bulbs. Tulip bulbs need about 6 weeks in the crisper to convince them that it is winter and they should start making new plants for spring. Do not put them near fruit and vegetables as these emit ethylene, a gas that will affect the newly formed flowers in the bulb.

► If you are growing tomatoes keep an eye out for White Fly. These are tiny little moths that are 3mm long and congregate on the underside of the leaf to suck the sap out of it. As they can be present in their hundreds it does not take long to damage the plant. Turn the leaves over and have a look. Spray with a mix of pyrethrum and horticultural oil but don't spray if it is going to be a hot day.

► Many of us grow the Syzygium (the Lilli Pilli) as hedges or just as a handsome shrub that in many varieties has edible berries. Unfortunately the pest Psyllid also fancies their leaves. The presence of this really tiny insect is only revealed when small ugly lumps appear on the leaves. First remove the affected leaves as there is nothing you can do this year about the insect and the damage has been done. Watch next year and at the first sign of damage, spray with a good soap-based spray such as Natrasoap. In the mean time feed the shrub well with a good native fertiliser and keep the water up to it.

► Some weeds can be a curse because as fast as you pull them out, they regenerate and up pop some more. As the weather cools down, the weeds don't grow so fast and don't produce so many young weeds. Take a weeding fork with you the next time you walk around your garden and get rid of those young weeds so they won't have time to set seed. Should you find Mullumbimby Couch in your lawn, you can't mistake its bright shiny leaves, make sure you get all the runners as they can go up to half a metre under the ground before they pop up and produce another weed.

► If you are one of those lucky people with an Ivory Curl Tree (*Buckinghamia*) growing in your garden, the flowers will be finished by now. If you can reach them, now is the time to prune off the old flower stems. It will keep the tree tidy and also encourage more flowers next year. A mature *Buckinghamia* can be comparatively tall so don't climb a ladder but use a hand pole lopper as it is safer and the stems of the flowers are not thick.

► For those with an irrigation system it is time to reset the ON-OFF program to its winter program. Your plants won't need as much water in the winter. Run a check on your sprinklers and make sure they are all working. Replace any that are giving trouble - they are quite cheap.

► Over autumn and winter your lawn growth will slow right down so don't mow it too short as it will only encourage weeds to grow. However, your lawn and plants in your garden will still enjoy a drink of a weak liquid fertiliser like Thrive or Aquasol every three to four weeks. Both of these are high in nitrogen and this will encourage leaf growth. Don't put high nitrogen fertilis-

ers on Camellias or Azaleas at the moment as it will only encourage leaf growth at the expense of flowers. This should trigger a flush of new growth that will form the base for next season's growth and flowers.

► Don't forget to start collecting all the fallen leaves from the deciduous trees in your garden. If left in a quiet corner somewhere for a two or three months, they will slowly rot down into the most delicious compost which by spring should be ready to put on your garden. Alternatively, they can be added to your existing compost bins.

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



**Question?** I have just grown a good crop of celery and the plants look big, strong and healthy but they have all gone dark green and have a bitter taste. What went wrong and what do I do to fix it?

**Answer:** You have just missed one vital step in celery growing which is called 'blanching'. Your plants will have reached ma-

turity about 10-12 weeks after planting and at this stage they should be blanched. This is done by loosely wrapping all the stalks in light cardboard or cloth so that they are shielded from the light for three weeks. This will make the stalks go quite a pale shade of green and become much sweeter. When harvesting take a couple of stalks from individual plants, not all the required stalks from one plant, and this will extend the life of the crop. Some of the very small forms of celery can be blanched by simply mounding the soil up around the plant.

**Question?** I am getting long brown strips in my street lawn and whatever it is, it is steadily killing large patches of my lawn. It is not Army Worm as I have been out checking at night and there is nothing there. What do I do to save my lawn?

**Answer:** This is a fungus called Brown Patch so spray it with Mancozeb Plus making sure to follow the directions and about two weeks later spray a second time. Two weeks after this give your lawn a good feed with a first class lawn fertiliser and water in well. Keep the water up to the lawn and the grass will slowly grow back into the dead patches. Have a look at the pattern of the dead grass. Does it go from letter box to letter box? If so, it could be the postman's motor bike carrying the fungus from house to house. Have a word with him.

**Question?** Several large patches of my lawn have turned yellow but there does not appear to be any pest or disease on them. When I got down to inspect the yellow places, I found that I could pull out large clumps of grass without any trouble. What is doing this and how can I fix it?

**Answer:** All of these signs point to the presence of Curl Grub. Curl Grubs are the larvae of the small black African scarab beetle or the small brown Argentinian scarab beetle, both of which are about 15mm long while their larvae are C shaped white grubs up to 25mm long. To bring the grubs to the surface where you and the Currawongs and Magpies can get at them, pour a bucket or two of soapy water over the affected area. Use a bio degradable detergent. To kill them in the ground, soak the ground with Eco Neem (organic) or Eco Grub. Confidor (a chemical) can also be used. It is a systemic pesticide that is taken up by the plant and makes the plant lethal to pests that attack it.

**Question?** I have a large sloping garden bed in my backyard that I would like to fill with a low maintenance native ground cover. I also want to stop the weeds. Have you any suggestions?

**Answer:** The Grevillea poorinda 'Royal mantle' can spread out over 5sq metres and has dark coloured foliage. Growing to about 30cm, it is a tough plant and always seems to have some flowers on it. Another is Viola hederacea, the native violet. This is a tough native that requires very little maintenance. Plant several Violas fairly well apart and let them grow into each other. They do not grow very high.

**Question?** Are lichen parasitic? I have some growing on the trunk of a large shrub. It is star like and looks quite interesting. Should I scrape it off?

**Answer:** I would not get rid of it as it is quite harmless, even beneficial you might say. Lichen is a combination of a harmless fungi living in harmony with a green algae. They make their own food from water and sunlight. Lichen are a good indicator of air quality and will quickly die off if the air is polluted. They remove carbon dioxide from the air and in some cases put out nitrogen which goes down into the soil and benefits the plant they are on.



Regards  
Hugh

'Luck of the Irish'