

HORTULANUS

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

DECEMBER 2018



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

COMING EVENTS

- Dec 4 **DECEMBER MEETING:** Paul Urquhart will speak on the
 Trials and Tribulations of a Tree Change
- 2019
Feb 5 **FEBRUARY MEETING:**
Mar 5 **MARCH MEETING:** The Trading Table will operate

**DON'T FORGET OUR
CHRISTMAS SUPPER!**
Tea, coffee, soft drink supplied
PLEASE BRING A PLATE!



Christmas message from the President

December again, the end of a busy KHS gardening year. We have (cheerfully) coped with brush turkeys, possums and other fauna which belong elsewhere and produced some remarkable displays for our monthly meetings, especially for our 85th anniversary. Thanks to all contributors and to those who formed the important admiring audience. A special 'thank you' to all the helpers— there is plenty of scope to join in so why not think about it for the year ahead. Joining in can be good fun and a great way to get to know your fellow members.

*Your committee will soon start to plan for 2019, and we would welcome suggestions and ideas for the program. Let us know if you would like to learn about any special aspect of gardening or visit any particular area of horticultural interest within reasonable distance from Sydney.
Best wishes for a safe and relaxing Christmas and New Year.*

Doreen Clark



Note: The Society does not have a meeting in January—the next meeting is on Tuesday, 5 February, 2019.

Please note the following changes for the December meeting:

There will be the Show Bench and Lucky Door prizes in place of a raffle but NO Garden Table at this meeting. The meeting will start with Society business which will then be followed by our guest speaker, Paul Urquhart. We will then break for our Christmas supper. Members are asked to bring a plate. Tea, coffee and soft drinks will be available.

Hi

It was a warm humid night for our November meeting and despite competition from the Melbourne Cup 73 members and visitors turned out to enjoy themselves and exchange notes.

The President opened the Meeting by welcoming everyone. She then congratulated Keith and Maureen Smith who raised \$11,342 for the National Breast Cancer Foundation at their recent plant sale. This is a record amount. Member's attention was drawn to Penny Whipp's table and the bags of Baa Baa Brew which were going for \$4 a bag. Baa Baa Brew is sheep manure that can be dissolved in water to produce a very good liquid fertiliser. It can also be used in the compost heap to speed up composting. Penny will have the remaining bags at the December meeting—just the thing for the Christmas stocking. All proceeds go to the Red Cross fund to help drought stricken farmers.

MEMBERS' NEWS

The Society catered for the morning tea of the Cottage Garden Club recently and was recompensed with an amount of \$500. This was made possible by our members' very generous donations of both food and time for the event. There was a great response to the call for help from members, so much so that not all the food was consumed at the time and we were able to bring the remainder to the next meeting (having carefully frozen it to maintain its freshness).

OUTINGS

Your Outings Committee will be busy over the Christmas break planning the Society's outings for 2019. We would welcome any ideas or suggestions from you. Please contact Ted Shaw at a meeting or phone him on 9979 3930.

SHOW BENCH

While there were not large numbers of exhibits, the ones there were all first class. Roses were very good for the most part. Exhibition roses are single stem roses that have reached their maximum perfection. There is always only one flower per stem and they are shown in the vases provided. With decorative roses, there can be any number of buds and flowers and 3 stems are asked for. Exhibitors were reminded that the term 3 cuts means 3 stems. Hippeastrums were doing well with several fine examples on show. Orchids put on a interesting show. The Vegetable section was well supported with a new exhibitor appearing in the rhubarb section. A lot of thought and work had been put into the Decorative section with some beautiful results.

Please note: There will be a Show Bench at the December Meeting.

GARDEN TABLE

The Garden Table as usual was loaded with excellent plants, all going cheap. The offerings included Walking Iris, Begonias, Geraniums, Pelargoniums in flower, Tweedia, Water Iris and Alstromeria. These were only some of the plants on offer. Go along and have a look, you never know what you will find and the ladies are very obliging. **There will be NO Garden Table at the December meeting.**

TRADING TABLE

The Trading Table will operate at the March meeting so get busy potting up some plants to bring along. Don't forget that you get to price your plants and to take home the proceeds when they sell (less a modest 10% commission for your Society).

RAFFLE

We had several unusual plants for prizes this time. The Trail Blazers Lotus was purchased by your Society from Honeysuckle Nursery in Turramurra. The Botanica Book on Roses was donated by Anonymous, thank you Anonymous. The Peperomia 'Lillian' was donated by Gloria Myers, thank you Gloria. The Rhipsalis was donated by Doreen Clark, thank you Doreen. These are all good first class plants but you can't win one unless you give the man at the door \$2 for three tickets

MAIN SPEAKER NOVEMBER



This was Doug Purdie who gave a very interesting talk and slide show on urban bees and honey production. Doug pointed out that the queen bee and worker bees are the same type of bee except that the queen bee is fed royal jelly and this enables her to produce baby bees. There is only one queen bee in the hive and she produces all the worker bees (female) and the drones (males). If a second queen is produced, she will leave the hive with a lot of workers and this is the swarm of bees we sometimes see, out looking for a place to set up a new home, sometimes in an inconvenient place for you and me.

If you are having trouble with a swarm of bees Google 'Bee Swarm'. You can call someone to come along and sort things out. Do NOT spray them with a pesticide as they can usually be safely collected and transferred to a new hive. Slides were shown of bee swarms that had settled on buildings in Castlereagh Street in the inner city and another that settled on the roof of the Shangri La Hotel near the Quay. These were removed by professional bee keepers in protective clothing and now produce honey in a more convenient place. While very active during the day, bees become almost dormant at night and this is when it is easy to remove a hive to another place. Worker bees are very active during the day and can fly up to 8 km in search of flowering plants and pollen. Once they find them they will return to the hive and perform a dance at the entrance to the hive to tell the rest of the workers where the flowers are. Worker bees have a life span of about 2 months while a queen bee can live up to 4 years. Raw honey in a hive can reach up to 40°C but is kept to 33 ° by the workers ventilating the hive by fluttering their wings. Dry weather can be a problem as it usually means there is no nectar about. Royal jelly is often sold as a health stimulant but it has been proved to be of not much use. A lot of honey is imported from China but this sort of honey is often diluted with sugar syrup so read the label carefully before you buy. Doug also had a number of small jars of honey for sale that had been collected from hives in various inner suburbs, each with its own a distinctive flavour.

Main Speaker December: Paul Urquhart will speak to us about the trials and tribulations of a tree change.

MEMBER SPEAKER

This was a photo presentation prepared by Bob Ballinger of the Society's recent visit to Tulip Tops and some gardens of members of the Canberra Horticultural Society. The beauty of the cool climate spring gardens was very well displayed and enjoyed by all present.

Member Speaker December: Due to the Christmas supper there will be no member speaker at the December meeting.

PLANT OF THE MONTH—WISTERIA



There are not many climbing plants that can compare with a good Wisteria in full bloom. These tough, long lived and drought resistant plants get better and better with age.

Wisteria are deciduous climbing plants that originated in the northern hemisphere where they have been cultivated and hybridised by Japanese and Chinese gardeners for over a 1000 years. However the first one to appear in Europe in 1724 was *W. frutescens* and it came from North America. It was almost a century later that *W. sinensis* from China and *W. floribunda* from Japan started to appear in Europe. As a result of the years of hybridising, we have a colour range from white through mauve and pale blue. Flower panicles range from about 20 cm to almost a metre long. The flowers appear in early spring followed by new green shoots. The leaves will remain until the following autumn when they will turn yellow and fall off.

When planting and growing wisteria, certain things should be kept in mind. Wisteria are vigorous, long lived plants and if grown on a frame or arch they will outlive the frame or arch. These supports sometime in the future will have to be replaced so when training the runners, tie them to the sides of the frame, don't let them twine around it. When buying a wisteria always buy from a reputable nursery and be careful with cheap plants as they may have been grown from seed and may not perform to specification. Best to buy named varieties and read the label carefully. Remember wisteria can take up to three years or even longer to produce their first flowers.

Wisteria should be planted in free draining soil in full sun. The exception to this is the Japanese 'Honbeni' which will retain its pink colour if planted under a deciduous tree. Make sure the soil is not compacted as this will impede root growth and drainage. Wisteria do not like wet feet. Build up the bed a bit above the surrounding soil to improve drainage. When preparing the soil, dig in lots of cow manure and compost and once a year spread a good thick layer of hay or straw mulch over the bed.

Pruning: Wisteria should be pruned twice a year. The first pruning is the major pruning and should be in late spring after the plant has finished flowering. Cut the long whippy bits right back and also prune back any young branches that are trying to go their own way. Another light prune in January should follow this but this is just a tidy up. There should be no more pruning until after flowering otherwise you could cut off flowering wood.

Once a Wisteria is established and 2-3 years old, it usually does not need any maintenance, just its annual 'haircut'. In long periods of hot dry weather, the vine might show signs of wilting so give it a good drink of water in the evening on several successive days and this will ensure that all roots get a good drink. A good thick layer of mulch will help retain water in hot dry weather. Something to remember if you have planted near a fence, wisteria are sun lovers and if your neighbour has more sun on his side than you have, the wisteria will try to go through the fence to the other side which is not good for the fence.

Pests and Diseases: Wisteria have few pests. Keep an eye out for bleached looking marks on the leaves or webbing between the leaves. This is caused by sap sucking mites. Spray three times at fortnightly intervals with Pest Oil (mineral) or Eco Oil (organic). Do both sides of the leaves thoroughly. Wisteria have a few diseases but the main one is Honey Fungus. This is a soil born disease that attacks weak plants. It is encouraged by wet or water logged soil. Improve your drainage or raise the bed a bit and dig in more organic matter.

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



► Over the last few years a weed grass called Annual Rye Grass has been appearing more and more often in lawns. This weed grass, if left to its own devices, will rapidly take over your lawn and over run your prized Buffalo grass. Annual Rye Grass is a loosely clumping weed that grows to about 30cm high and has bright green leaves 15cm to 20cm long. The seed spike grows to about 25cm long and carries about a large number of

very small seeds. Once the plant is mature, the wind will scatter these seeds far and wide and they will take root very easily. Annual Rye Grass is shallow rooted and easy to pull out so you don't need a herbicide. The main thing is to remove it before it goes to seed. Once you have the mature plants out keep watching for the young ones that will be there waiting to come up. While you are at it, check for Winter Grass before it goes to seed. This also comes out easily.

► With the hot summer weather with us for the next couple of months, it is important to keep the roots of your plants cool. Give your beds a good deep watering, stick your finger into the soil to see how far the water has penetrated, it should be damp but not wet down to around 10cm. To keep it cool, lay down a good thick 5cm layer of mulch.

► Caterpillars are out and about now. Some are very small but what they lack in size they make up for in numbers. It does not take them long to make a mess of a shrub or plant. Spray any plants or shrubs being attacked by caterpillars with Dipel. Dipel is a bacteria that only kills caterpillars and nothing else. It causes the caterpillar to forget to eat and the caterpillar dies of starvation. It is effective for about four days and does not kill bees. Spinosad, the other common caterpillar killer, will kill bees.

► Keep a close eye on your hanging baskets. Check the moisture content regularly, a hanging basket swinging in a warm breeze will soon evaporate the moisture in it. If you have a number of hanging baskets, set up a regular watering program. It is nesting time and birds love the coconut fibre used in hanging baskets. To save your baskets, put a bundle of coconut fibre somewhere nearby where the birds can find it. A bowl of water will attract the birds away from your baskets as well.

► If we get a couple of warm wet days, start watching your roses for Black Spot or other fungi. If you find them, spray with Mancozeb Plus or Triforine. Triforine is a systemic fungicide while Mancozeb Plus is a contact fungicide. While you are about it,

clean up any rubbish under your rose bushes as this can harbour the fungi.

► While you are walking around your garden, run your eye over any Azaleas and Rhododendrons you have. You are looking for small yellow spots on the leaves. This is a sure sign of White Fly, a tiny sap sucking insect. They usually make their presence known when you are watering as they will swarm up into the air but not go far away and come back when you move on. White fly will also attack beans and tomatoes. To get rid of them, spray with Eco Oil or Eco Neem, both are organic. Natra Soap which is based on soap and leaves no residue is also very good. You can also install a 'watchman' in the form of a bright yellow board covered in a layer of grease. Hang it near your shrub. The yellow attracts the White Fly and they get stuck in the grease.



Question? What has happened to my poinsettia? I bought it as a dwarf plant in a pot and the label said it was a dwarf and would only grow to about a metre. It is well past that now and still going strong. What is going on?

Answer: There is no such thing as a dwarf Poinsettia. The plants sold at Christmas time are specially grown for the Christmas trade and fed a hormone to keep them small. Eventually the

hormone runs out and normal growth resumes.

Question? The new leaves on one of my roses are all very small and distorted. They are not growing well at all so what has gone wrong?

Answer: This has all the earmarks of over-spray with Glyphosate. Have you been spraying weeds nearby? There is not a great deal you can do about it now as it is too late. Let your rose keep growing and give it plenty of Seasol or PowerFeed which could help.

Question? I have a Snow flake plant (Euphorbia leucocephala) growing outside my front fence. It only flowers on one side. What is going on?

Answer: Is there a street light on the side where there are no flowers? Euphorbia belong to the same group of plants as Poinsettia. This group of flowers need long dark nights to flower well during the day. The street light is convincing your plant that it is being subject to very long daylight so it does not flower. The only thing you can do is move the shrub to a place where it will be dark all night.

Question? I have a fairly large NSW Christmas Bush and I take quite a lot of foliage from it at Christmas time for decorations. It needs a tidy up to get it back into reasonable shape. When can I do this?

Answer: Wait till the foliage is well past its peak, then cut out the dead wood first and start shaping by trimming the young green wood only. This will give you a good dense bush. Once you have finished pruning, mulch underneath with well-rotted manure. Then give it a good deep watering.

Question? I have been given a beautiful Gloxinia in a pot. I was told that I could grow it inside without any trouble. Is this right?

Answer: Gloxinia do well inside. Put it in a position where it is well lit but not in direct sunlight or in a draught. Be careful with the leaves as they are brittle. The pots are usually fairly small and can dry out quite quickly so keep the potting mix damp but not wet. Stand the pot in a dish of water for about 15 minutes and let the potting mix draw up the water. Then stand the pot in the sink and let the excess water drain out. Don't leave the pot standing in water all the time or you will rot the roots. When the plant flowers, don't let the flowers get wet as they will discolour quickly.

Regards
Hugh

Decorative:



'Mainly Roses'



'Surprise Box'



'Arrangement with Succulents'