

HORTULANUS

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

MARCH 2018



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Website: www.khsgardenclub.org.au

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

COMING EVENTS

TRADING TABLE at the
March meeting (see below
for further details)

- Mar 6 MARCH MEETING: Steve Falcioni of OCP will speak about what is meant by 'organic' and Beneficial Insects
- Mar 8 Garden Design Series, Royal Automobile Club, Sydney—Daniel Baffsky, speaker Enq. 92318182
- Mar 17/18 Concord Garden Club's Autumn Flower Show, Concord Community Centre Enq. 9743 3402
- Apr 2-30 Garden Art Month at the Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens Enq. <https://www.rbg Syd.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 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 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

Hi

It was a warm and rather sticky night for our first meeting of 2018 with most of the hall doors open to let in the cool air but it did not stop 93 members and visitors coming along to enjoy themselves and compare notes with friends and other members. The President opened the meeting and welcomed our main speaker, Stewart McPherson. Volunteers were asked to open their gardens for the Society's annual Garden Ramble in September where members can view other member's gardens. There is always a very nice afternoon tea at the end of the Ramble. Volunteers were also called for to help with the horticultural displays in the hall at the May meeting when we will be celebrating the Society's 85th birthday. Please contact Doreen if you would like to help.

MEMBER NEWS

A warm welcome to new members, David Pratt and Sunny and Doris Wee. Regretfully, we have to report the passing of Roma Doyle, a most enthusiastic member despite her age and increasing fragility, who was a great supporter of the Show Bench, often bringing in beautiful and unusual exhibits from her garden. She was also a fairly frequent caller on the Graham Ross radio programme and always had interesting questions to ask. A special 'thank you' to Cristina Scott who brought Roma to our monthly meetings when she could no longer drive at night.

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. We will only take a maximum of 45 people so get your booking in early as the trip is filling fast.

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. More details on the costing will be available shortly.

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. We will be staying at the 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.

GARDEN TABLE

As usual the Garden Table was loaded with goodies, all going very cheap. We even had a basket of preserves on offer. A Yellow Spider lily (Lycoris), Cleome "Violet Queen", Peace Lilies and Begonias stood alongside a pile of first class gardening books. Go along and have a look - nobody has to buy but you never know what you will find unless you look.

TRADING TABLE

The Trading Table will be operating at the March meeting. Members may bring in plants to sell and 10% of the proceeds will go to the Society with the rest to the member. Traders are reminded of the following requirements: only plants can be sold, all items should be in first class condition, pots should be clean with no soil, roots or stains on the outside of the pot. The plant must be disease- and insect-free with no damaged or dead leaves. Any weeds should be removed. The plant should be named and a paddle pop stick showing the owner's initials, the plant number and the price should be put in each pot. Paddle pop sticks will be available at the table. A book-keeping form, also available at the table, must be filled in. As the wonderful team who run the Garden Table will be looking after the Trading Table, **there will be no Garden Table for the March meeting only.** Plants will be checked in on arrival at a table outside the hall and the paper work will be signed off. The form to be completed is available with this newsletter—just print out a copy, fill it in and bring it with you when you bring in your plants.

SHOW BENCH

Show Bench exhibitors were reminded that judging commences at 7.20pm. By then all exhibitors should have their exhibits on the Show Bench and should be away from the Show Bench and sitting down. This will give the judges space to stand off and do their job.

Even with the mixed-up weather we have been having, the Show Bench is doing very well with some lovely roses on display. Dahlias were looking good and the fuchsia are still putting on a good show. The Ivory Curl tree (*Buckinghamia celsissima*) looked good. It is often planted as a street tree as is the fine red-flowering gum exhibit that was next to it. Despite the hot weather, begonias are still looking good. A lot of imagination had gone into the decorative section with some beautiful results.

RAFFLE

We had some very nice plants for on offer as raffle prizes The Euphorbia characias Silver Swan was purchased from the Honey-suckle Nursery by your Society. The fine Peace Lily was donated by Christine Rethers, thank you Christine. The gardening book by Don Bourke was donated by Ray Kench, thank you Ray.

These are all good prizes but you have to have a ticket to win one. Give the man at the door \$2 and he will give you 3 tickets and you never know your luck.

MAIN SPEAKER FEBRUARY



Our main speaker was Stewart McPherson, an expert on the rare and unusual plants that can be found in the remote jungles, deserts and little visited places of our world. Stewart, who has published several books on the subject, presented an excellent set of photos accompanied by an informative commentary.

Some of Stewart's points: The first plant shown was the Bat Plant (*Taca chantrieri* – with black flowers and *Taca integrifolia* – with white flowers), a wondrous rhizomatous native from the jungle floors of S/E Asia and southern China. It grows to 90cm high. It is available here in Australia in some nurseries (Friends of the Botanic Gardens plant nursery often has small plants for sale)and can be grown outside in warm areas or inside in Sydney. Pitcher plants with pitchers that can grow up to 30 cm long and are carnivorous in trapping insects can, with care, be grown in the Sydney area. In certain tropical areas they can be found growing in mountainous

areas up to 2000 metres.

Sarracenia are tall carnivorous pitcher type plants that are native to the sphagnum bogs of the Atlantic coast of America reaching from Florida to Labrador and inland as far as Wisconsin. Unlike the normal pitcher plant where the lid closes to trap an insect, Sarracenia lids are virtually immobile. We were also shown *Amorphophallus* plants from tropical parts of Asia that send a flower shoot up to 7 metres above the plant. This genus attracts pollinating insects by giving off a dreadful smell (like rotting meat). We were introduced to what is possibly the most unpleasant plant in the world (one of the *Rafflesia*) and the stench of this hairy plant can be smelled several metres away. It attracts flies that produce maggots and these pollinate the plant.

In complete contrast to the tropical forests is the Namibian desert in South Africa where quite often it does not rain at all for a couple of years. This is home to the curious stone plants (*Lithops*). These are plants that resemble a pebble or a small stone. They can transform bare desert country that has not seen rain for several years into acres of small beautiful flowers almost overnight when the rains come. Also in Namibia we were shown simple ground cover plants, *Welwitschia mirabilis*, which in its lifetime only produces two leaves. They are extremely long-lived and carbon-dating has shown some to be 1500 years old. Closer to home in West Australia are the Sun Dews, small carnivorous plants with sticky leaves that attract and capture insects which are then digested by the plant.

Note. Several members have been enquiring about where these exotic plants can be bought. Several local nurseries have had Sarracenia, Pitcher plants and Sundews on sale from time to time. They will also be available at the Collectors' Plant Fair at Clarendon on 7-8 April.



Sarracenia

Main Speaker March: This will be Steve Falcioni from Organic Crop Protectants—OCP. Steve will speak on what is meant by 'organic' and on beneficial insects in your garden. All those creepy crawlies in your garden are not necessarily your enemy, many are on your side. Come along and learn to tell the difference.

MEMBER SPEAKER February

Our Member Speaker was Ron Erratt. Ron presented a fine set of photos of his and his wife Christine's recent trip to Japan to see some fascinating gardens. The first garden visited covered almost 16 acres and had a small water garden within the main garden. Japanese gardens are usually made for peace and tranquillity and given loving attention. Except for autumn, the paths are spotless and the garden is a place where a person can shut out the world for a while and contemplate the beauty of Nature. We were shown a 100 year old house that had a tree with a branch that was almost 100 metres long. Many Japanese do not have

the room outside to grow a garden so they will often grow plants in pots and place them just outside the front door on the street. A trip up-country presented the unusual sight of Mt Fuji without its usual snow cap.

Other unusual gardens shown were the moss gardens and the raked gardens. The moss gardens are where stones and trees have been overgrown by moss with no other plants allowed to grow. A raked garden is usually an area that has been cleared of everything and a flat layer of clean white gravel spread out over it. A few strategically placed rocks completes the garden. Both the moss garden and the raked garden are meant for contemplation.

Member Speaker March: Penny Whipp will speak about the Garden Clubs of Australia Photographic Competition that is run in *Our Gardens*, their official publication. Hopefully this will encourage some of our members to get in and try their hand.

GROWING SWEET PEAS

Tradition tells us that March 17 (St Patrick's Day) is the time to start planting your Sweet Peas, however, this is not really true, Sweet Peas can be planted up to the first week or so in May. While they can be a bit of trouble sometimes they will reward you with a continuous show of flowers over a couple of months. Many of the climbing varieties can grow up to 2-3 metres and will need something to climb on such as wire netting, a trellis or a tripod with netting. If you don't have the space for climbers then a tripod with netting will provide the necessary support for the dwarf varieties that only grow to 35-60cm. Most Sweet Peas grown in Australia bloom in late winter to early spring with a multitude of colours ranging from white, mauve, red, blue and purple. Bicoloured flowers are also available.



Sweet peas need lots of sunlight and do not do well when grown in the shade. An ideal spot for climbers would be wire netting on a North-South facing fence. Good drainage is required as Sweet Peas do not take kindly to wet feet. A bed raised 15-20cm above the surrounding area should do the job. The soil should be alkaline with a cupful of agricultural lime added for every square metre. If the soil leans to heavy clay add a second cup of lime or gypsum to break it up. Spread a good thick layer of compost and cow manure over the bed and to make up for any deficiencies in the compost, scatter a good handful of a general purpose low nitrogen fertiliser along the line of where you are going to plant your seeds. Give the bed a good digging over to a depth of about 15cm and work everything in. Water in gently but thoroughly. In the Sydney area seeds can be sown from midsummer to late autumn. Once you have set up your bed, work out where any stakes, wire netting or tripods are to go and put them in place BEFORE you put your seed in. When planting the seeds, the soil should be nice and damp but not wet. Make your seed holes about 2-3cm deep and about 5-7 cm apart. If you check your seeds before planting you might find some smaller darker seeds but don't discard these as they are very likely the seeds of the darker flowering varieties of Sweet Peas. Do not soak your Sweet Pea seeds over night in water. As germinating seeds can be attacked by soil fungi it would be good practice to dust your seeds with a good fungicide like Mancozeb Plus or wettable sulphur before you drop your seed into the hole and close it firmly. Do not water for another 14 days by which time the seeds should be pushing up healthy young shoots. Once your seedlings have grown to about 15cm, tie a piece of string to the bottom of your netting and lead the young shoot over to the netting for it to climb on. Spindly plants can tip pruned to encourage them to put on growth. Once established plants should be watered sufficiently regularly to keep the soil damp but not wet. Once the buds appear, make a practice of watering every 14 days. When the flowering starts, remove all dead flowers every few days. This will encourage more flowers. Normally Sweet Peas are disease free but they can be attacked by Powdery Mildew. This can be treated by using Eco Fungicide (organic), Zaleton (a chemical systemic fungicide) or Mancozeb Plus (a chemical spray on).



► March is the end of summer and with any luck we may get a fair bit of rain. If the rain is heavy, keep an eye on any shrubs that are growing on a slope. The rain could soften up the soil sufficiently to allow shrubs, particularly newly planted ones, to be pushed over by the wind. Tall flowers like dahlias and chrysanthemums that have large and heavy flowers high up should

be staked but don't use string or wire to tie them as they could get choked. Instead use plant ties that can be bought in any garden centre or a piece of old stocking and firm but not too tight is the way to go.

► A long period of rain can leach any fertiliser near the surface out of the soil so after a longish period of wet weather give your plants a feed with a general all-round fertiliser. After fertilising give your plants a light spray of water to wash any fertiliser off the leaves as it can burn them.

► Are you into growing geraniums or pelargoniums? March is the time to take cuttings. Take 8-10cm long cuttings from just below a joint and remove all but the top two or three leaves. Cuttings can be grown in small pots in a mixture of sand and compost or sand and peat. Keep the mix just damp but not wet. Once you have a young happily growing plant, transplant it into the area where you want the mature plant to grow. The soil should be relatively low in nitrogen as with too much nitrogen you will get lots of leaves but very few flowers.

Geraniums and pelargoniums can be subject to fungal attack in prolonged wet weather. If you find that the stems of your plants are turning brown inside, it is a sign that the plant is under attack by a fungus. There is no cure for this disease so pull the plant out and dispose of it and the soil in the rubbish bin not the compost.

► Chrysanthemums do well in March but they are a tall plant with brittle stems and heavy flower heads. To save them from wind damage put a couple of stakes around them and crisscross some strings around the stakes. The strings will stop the flowers swinging back and forth in the wind. It will also hold the flower heads up where you can see them without getting down on your knees.

► Black Spot, the bane of all rose growers, is always about but a lot can be done to prevent it taking hold in your rose bed. First, get rid of any accumulated rubbish from under your rose bushes as it only harbours diseases and put it in the garbage bin not the compost. Thin out the foliage of your rose plants so that the air can circulate much more freely. If your roses are jammed up tight

together, take out the weaker ones to gain air space. Don't grow ground covers under your roses as it only encourages humidity which fungi love. Don't water your roses late in the afternoon when the water can lay on the leaves all night as this increases the general humidity which will encourage fungi.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



Question? I have a nice Cabbage Palm growing in the corner of my backyard but it has grown too tall and is hanging over the fence and dropping leaves in my neighbour's yard. Can I cut the crown off together with a metre of trunk and expect it to reshoot another crown?

Answer: Don't cut the crown off as if you do you will kill the palm. This applies to all palms. Always check the label for the

height before you buy a palm as some can grow to 35 metres high.

Question? We have a number of miniature Bougainvillea growing in pots and one has been attacked by something that has left a grey powdery film over the leaves. This film is steadily killing my Bougainvillea. I tried Confidor but it did not work. What can I use?

Answer: The first thing to do is move the infected pot well away from the healthy pots. Your Bougainvillea has been attacked by Powdery Mildew, a fungus which can travel on the wind. Confidor is a systemic insecticide for long term protection against sap sucking insects so it is of no use on a fungus. Spray your plant with either Eco Fungicide (organic) or Mancozeb Plus (chemical). As this type of fungus travels very easily on the wind, have a close look at your other nearby plants and make sure they are clean.

Question? My cane begonias are flowering very well but they are starting to get away from me so can I prune them back and if so how far can I cut?

Answer: Yes, you can prune all begonias. Cane begonias can be cut back quite a bit. You can take off up to two thirds of a cane annually to help you maintain the required shape and size you want and every so often you can take out completely (at ground level) any canes that are more than two or three years old. This should be done towards the end of the winter. Cane begonias can be fertilised with a slow release fertiliser like Osmocote for Exotics. Drop a bit in the hole if you are planting a new one. Once planted give them a drink of a good general purpose liquid fertiliser every 3-4 weeks. If your begonia is in a pot, a drink of liquid fertiliser every two to three weeks would be appreciated. This is due to the fact that the fertiliser leaches out of the pot during watering. The canes you have cut off can be put into a pot with propagation mix and will produce new plants.

Question? Is it too early to start pruning my Gardenia? It is quite a large shrub but is starting to look rather untidy.

Answer: Yes, you can prune your Gardenia back fairly hard now and while you are about it, have a good look around it for any dead or diseased wood and get rid of it into the garbage bin. Look around inside the shrub and see if any pests or insects are setting up their winter homes there. Once you have pruned the shrub, give it a drink of a good general purpose liquid fertiliser. This should trigger a flush of new growth that will form the base for next season's growth and flowers.

Question? Are Nerines hard to grow? I would like to plant some along my front fence.

Answer: No, they are not. They grow to about 70cm high and about 30cm wide. A clump of 3-4 can be quite eye catching when in full bloom. They require full sun or part shade depending on the variety, check the label when you buy. When planting, make sure the position is more or less permanent as they do not like to be moved around. Their main roots are semi-permanent and can break off. When planting, about half the pointy end of the bulb should be left exposed. Newly planted Nerines can take up to two years before they flower. Keep the soil a bit on the damp side but not wet.

Question? The foliage of my Phoenix date palm is looking very unhappy. Instead of being a nice dark green, the leaves are quite pale green and when I checked the leaves, I found that the space between the veins had gone yellow, even though the veins remain green. The old leaves have remained green. What is going on and how do I fix it?

Answer: This has all the earmarks of iron deficiency in the soil. Iron is part of the chlorophyll-making process, hence the yellow leaves. Get hold of some iron chelate and follow the directions on the packet. Iron chelate is an organic form of iron and is easily taken up by plants.



Regerals
Hugh

'Fun with Foliage'