

# HORTULANUS

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

**FEBRUARY 2019**

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

## COMING EVENTS

- Feb 5 FEBRUARY MEETING: Speaker: Gordon Cheers on Publishing, Plants and Preservation**
- Mar 5 MARCH MEETING: Speaker: Doug Rickard - All about Soil, the Lifeblood of the Garden**
- Apr 6/7 Collectors Plant Fair, Hawkesbury Racecourse, Clarendon**
- Apr 28 Maureene and Keith Smith's Huge Plant Sale in aid of the National Breast Foundation, 45 Parklands Avenue, Lane Cove North from 10am**

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

Hi!

We had another warm humid night for our final meeting of the year when 73 members, friends and visitors came along to enjoy themselves and exchange Christmas and New Year good wishes.

The President opened the meeting with an interesting and amusing commentary on the past year's activities. She then drew out the Lucky Door prize winners. Quite a few members took home a nice prize to enjoy over Christmas. At the conclusion of the talk by Paul Urquhart, members were invited to enjoy the delicious supper laid out on three tables in front of the stage. Many thanks to all who brought along those plates of goodies.

## MEMBER NEWS

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Frances MacKinnon. Frances was one of our oldest members at 97 and until fairly recently, an active contributor to the Society. She often brought in large baskets of produce she had grown in her garden, both fruit, vegetables and flowers and was a frequent exhibitor on the Show Bench. Indeed she won the very handsome silver cup which was on display at our 85th Anniversary.

Thank you to all members who so generously supported our recent Baa Baa Brew fundraiser in aid of farming families. Hopefully by now your plants and compost bins are showing the positive effects of the brew.

We have now sold all 100 of the 'teabags'. With a profit per 'teabag' of \$1.40 together with donations made by members we collected \$145.00. As you may recall, it had been your Committee's intention to donate the funds raised to the Red Cross Drought Appeal. However, we were to discover that this specific appeal only ran for the month of August. As the Red Cross has been working with the Country Women's Association of NSW distributing funds your Committee felt it was more appropriate that the funds we raised were donated directly to the CWA. We hope this meets with your approval.

## OUTINGS

Our main outing this year is to Toowoomba on 23-26 September 2019. Members received notification of this trip last December and expressions of interest were called for. To date we have received 40 expressions of interest and on this basis have gone ahead and negotiated with a travel company in Toowoomba for a four day-three night trip. The final cost of this which includes airfares, accommodation, all meals and garden entries, will be \$1480 (plus a single supplement of \$185 if needed). A non-refundable initial deposit of \$250 is required to secure a booking. As both seats on the flights to and from Toowoomba and bookings for the accommodation are in tight supply, we need to secure these as early as possible. The booking form (which has already been sent to all members) and the deposit are therefore required by Tuesday, 5 February (our meeting date). This can be brought to the February meeting in an envelope with your name clearly printed on the outside or mailed to Ms Helen Gilkes, 20A Normurra Avenue, North Turramurra 2074 no later than 5 February 2019. Because of the limited number of both seats on the plane and bookings at the motel, bookings will be accepted on first-come, first-served basis. Once we have reached our maximum number, we will open a waiting list. Please contact Ted Shaw (9979 3550) or Christine Rethers (9449 6245) if you need further clarification.

## GARDEN TABLE

There was no Garden Table at the December meeting but it will be in full operation at the February meeting so make sure you check out what interesting things are on offer. Do remember to bring in any of your potted-up plants or cuttings that you can spare and they will be sure to go to a good home.

## 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. 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 for sale.

**PLEASE NOTE THAT YOU WILL NOW NEED TO BRING YOUR OWN BAGS OR BOXES TO CARRY THE PLANTS YOU BUY!**

## SHOW BENCH

There was a good display of roses and an explanation was given as to what constitutes an Exhibition Rose and how it is different from a Decorative and a Floribunda rose. Hydrangea were doing well with many fine examples on show. Australian natives have done well this year with some lovely *Leptospermum* and *Banksia* on display. In the Decorative section the Christmas Carol exhibits looked beautiful. Some members had worked out what a Tussock Mussie was and produced some fine examples. Our Rhubarb growers are still producing some good examples of what a Rhubarb should be.

## MAIN SPEAKER DECEMBER



Our main speaker was Paul Urquhart. Paul gave an interesting and well-illustrated talk on how he had lived for years in the rather cramped inner city suburb of Redfern and then decided to move to the other end of the scale to a heritage-listed stone farm house surrounded by blue gums, a property called Chum Chum Farm. It is deep in the bush of Mangrove Mountain and to make life interesting there is a 300 metre drop nearby. Mangrove Mountain is on the north side of the Hawkesbury River. Here he had a lot of room to grow his favourite plants with very little effort. Each morning he described how he is greeted by some of his feathered friends such as the butcher birds. A brush turkey brings her chicks into his front yard and wallabies watch him from just outside the front yard. A lyre bird also comes along for a visit to its new neighbour. In due course the bronze winged pigeons

brought their friends, the fairy wrens and yellow robins, along to say 'hello'. One downside was the kangaroos that were keen to sample many of the new plants that Paul put in.

On the other side of the ledger Paul has had to learn how to make a septic tank work properly and found out quickly that he had to keep his gutters clean if he wanted to have clean water in his tank. He also learned how to cut down a very large camphor laurel tree that was doing its best to take over the farm. However, one got the feeling that in the main Paul was very happy with his 'tree' change

**Main Speaker February:** Our main speaker for February will be Gordon Cheers who is the president of the Tropical Garden Society. Gordon is an excellent speaker and his topic will be 'Publishing, Plants and Preservation'. The title sounds intriguing so it should be an interesting talk.

There was no Member Speaker in December because of the Christmas Supper.

**Member Speaker February:** This will be Ron Erratt who will show photos of the Society's trip to Crookwell.

## PLANT OF THE MONTH—HYDRANGEAS

Many of us would remember our mother's and father's garden, it was their pride and joy and for sure there would have been some hydrangeas planted in a strategic spot where they would catch the eye and admiration of visitors. These hydrangeas would have been descendants of hydrangeas brought to Australia many years ago from southern and eastern Asia where they originated.

Over the years, hydrangea have slowly slipped down the scale of desirable plants to have in your garden but things are changing with the introduction into garden centres of two new ranges of hydrangeas. The first of these was the Endless Summer range which came on the market 7-8 years ago. These flower on the new growth right through summer and being a long flowering plant, it overcame the problem of pruning the old hydrangeas and not having them come back into flower. With the Endless Summer range, flowers appear both on the old wood and on the new wood so pruning does affect the flowering of the plant as new wood is produced right through summer. A second range of smaller and more compact hydrangeas has come on the market in the last six months called the Magical Revolution



**Double hydrangeas**

range which will flower for almost 150 days of the year. This is almost six months of flowers that will almost cover all the green leaves. In spring the green buds open to profuse pink or blue flowers and then in autumn these colours slowly deepen to a deep burgundy. The compact nature of Magical Revolution with its voluminous blooms makes it suitable for pots on the patio or to use inside as a table setting that will outlast any vase of flowers. When used inside the pot should be placed in a brightly lit place but not in direct sunlight as this will burn the plant.

When grown outside, hydrangeas should face either east or south and be in a shady position. They do not like direct sunlight nor do they like to dry out so if your plant starts to show wilted leaves, give it a good drink.

Pruning: Hydrangeas should be pruned after flowering or in winter. Cut the flowering stems back to two fat buds. Don't prune stems that did not flower the previous summer as they will usually flower in the coming year.

Use a complete fertiliser in the spring as soon as the new growth starts. Hardwood cuttings taken in winter can almost be guaranteed to strike.

Double Hydrangeas: Just a few years ago in 2016 the first double hydrangeas arrived in Australia from Japan. They were a sensation and while being expensive, sold like hot cakes. Today they are grown in Australia commercially and sold under the Tea Time label. Should you be interested, enquires can be made at your local garden centre.



► It is time to inspect your lawn mower blades and change them if required. Blade bolts can be hard to get out sometimes so get hold of a pair of spanners that are the right size each end, with one end a ring and the other open ended. If the spanner is bent on an angle so much the better. If your bolts have a hexagon shaped hole in them then get yourself an L-shaped Allan Key. The longer the long leg is, the more leverage you will get.

► When you come to mow the lawn, raise the blades one notch. This will help retain the moisture in the soil much longer and keep the grass roots cooler during the hot spells. Don't waste water on your lawn trying to keep it green but save it for your plants.

► By now your pea plants will have stopped producing pods so cut them off at ground level and put the cuttings into the compost bin. Leave the roots in the ground as they are loaded with nitrogen rich balls which is just what your soil needs. The same thing can be done with beans as their roots also hold a lot of nitrogen which will be released as the roots rot in the soil.

► Work out some sort of a regular watering system for your tomatoes in the hot weather. If they don't receive water regularly, they will develop a hard skin and the tomato fruit will stop growing. Then the next time it gets water the fruit will put on a spurt of growth and the skin will crack, spoiling it.

► Check your azaleas, banksia and grevillea for yellowing leaves. This is usually a sign of an iron deficiency in the soil. Get a packet of iron chelate from your garden centre, it is not expensive. Follow the instructions and use it on the bed once a year. Plants normally find it hard to take up iron in its non-chelated form. Chelated iron is an iron molecule wrapped up in an organic molecule jacket which a plant finds easy to take up. Once the iron is inside the plant, it is easy for the plant to put it to work.

► Have you got a couple of fruit trees down the back that are coming along nicely? If you have not done it, do it now and set up some sort of regular watering program or else you could lose your fruit with all the hot weather about. Water well around the drip line where all the fine roots are near the surface. These are the ones that take up the water. Drive a fork or spike into the ground about 15cm so that any run off, be it from rain or your hose water, goes into the soil and is not lost. Space the holes out about 30cm apart. There is nothing quicker than lack of water to cause loss of fruit on a tree. Mulching will also help—water well first then apply a layer of mulch about 5cm deep right out to the drip line. However, make sure that you keep the mulch away from the trunk of the tree or you could cause collar rot.

► Do you have water tanks? When was the last time you cleared the netting filter in the top of the tank? You need to check it for holes as they can let mosquitoes in to breed. If you leave the debris in the filter, it will break down eventually and go into the tank with the possibility of blocking the exit lines. While you are at it, have a look in your gutters to check that they are reasonably clean? See if you can open a down pipe easily and if you can, give the gutters a clean out with a hose. Leave second story gutters to the professionals. Think about getting a good gutter guard installed—it will save you a lot of work.

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



**Question?** I am making up several pots for new plants and I am considering mixing in some water crystals. Do I just mix the water crystals straight into the soil or what?

**Answer:** Water crystals should be put into a bucket of water for an hour or two first before they are mixed into the potting mix. Wait till they are fully expanded and then you can put them into your potting mix. If you put them into the soil straight from the packet, the crystals will pull the water out of the potting soil and leave your plants high and dry. As an alternative, a granular soil wetter scattered over the top of the soil in your pot will ensure that when you water, the water will wet the soil in the pot evenly. Wetting agents, which include surfactants, reduce the surface tension of water so that it spreads and is absorbed by dry soil and potting mix. They help water transfer from particle to particle.

**Question?** I like carrots and this year I had a fine crop of seedlings that I duly planted out. However, the end result was a large crop of small useless carrots. What went wrong?

**Answer:** Carrots are one of those plants that do not like being transplanted. They often suffer from 'forking', a condition where they produce a lot of small below-the-ground roots instead of the one big root you want. Also, fresh fertiliser or manure can often produce 'forking'. Do your fertilising during your soil preparation stage, not afterwards. Carrot seeds are very fine so mix them with some fine sand before dropping them into the soil and this will make it easier to distribute the seeds evenly.

**Question?** I have two white bottle-brushes growing about two metres apart. I would like to grow a native ground cover beneath them. The idea is to retain the moisture in the soil during the hot summer months. Any suggestions?

**Answer:** Try Poorinda Royal Mantle. It is a ground cover grevillea with dark leaves and flowers well. Plant it in the middle and let it spread both ways. One plant should be enough.

**Question?** I am going to use liquid Weed and Feed on my lawn. How long must I wait before I can let my dog run on the lawn?

**Answer:** As soon as the grass is dry which is usually in about 48 hours. If you let the dog on the lawn while it is wet you could finish up with rusty dog foot prints on your paths. Discourage your dog from eating any of the grass for the first week. After the first week the grass should be safe enough for your pet rabbit to eat. When using Weed and Feed, keep it away from any concrete as the iron sulphate in the Weed and Feed will leave a nasty rust stain. Make sure you read the directions very carefully and keep the spray away from your garden beds.

**Question?** I have a nice Rhapsis Finger palm growing in my front garden but a lot of the long finger leaves are starting to turn yellow along the outside edges. The spine of the leaf and veins remain green and the branch itself seems to be okay. There do not appear to be any insects or bugs about. It does not make the plant look very nice so what can I do about it?

**Answer:** As there no insects about it is possibly a magnesium deficiency in the soil. Magnesium is an essential part of chlorophyll, the green stuff in a leaf. The magnesium deficiency can be cured by making up a foliar spray of 15-20gm of Epsom salts in a litre of water or by scattering 50gms of Epsom salts crystals over 10 square meters of soil and watering it in.

**Question?** Can I grow Dipladenia 'Red Riding Hood' in a pot?

**Answer:** Yes, but make it the biggest pot you can comfortably handle. Use a top grade potting mix and mix in some Osmocote general purpose slow release fertiliser. Position the pot near a fence or a trellis so that the Dipladenia will have something to climb on.

**Question?** When is the right time to prune a Murraya? Mine is always in flower and is getting out of hand.

**Answer:** The main flowering season for Murraya is in autumn so the time to prune would be in late autumn when most of the flowers would have finished.



Regards  
Hugh

'A Christmas Carol' and 'Rustic Charm'