

HORTULANUS

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COMING EVENTS

Unfortunately our meeting venue, the St Ives Community Hall, is still in the process of being renovated and the earliest we can expect to be able to use it is now April. Due to the current Covid restrictions, the number of people who can participate in a meeting is at present also restricted so we have decided to not to try to hold a meeting until the circumstances allow.

However, in the interim we have two events to offer members. The first is a garden ramble on 14th March when three of our members will open their lovely gardens. At the moment, under the present Covid restrictions, the number of people who can visit a private premise is restricted to 5 only but we are hopeful that this restriction will be lifted closer to the date of our ramble. We will keep members informed and ask for bookings when we can be sure the number of participants is sufficient to warrant the organisation of this ramble.

On 25th March we are planning a trip to the **Hunter Valley Gardens** in Pokolbin. As you will recall, we offered this trip last year but had to abandon it due to the Covid restrictions that were put in place at that time. Further details are given under Outings (see below).

In the meantime, our wonderful Botanic Gardens are open (Sydney, Mt Annan and Mt Tomah) and are definitely worth a visit. Other gardens that will be open in February include:

‘Wild Meadows’, 243A Coxs River Road, Little Hartley, open on Saturday, 20 February 9-4pm

‘Highfields’, 111 John Grant Road, Little Hartley, open on 20/21 and 27/28 February 10-4pm

Gory’u Japanese Gardens, 85 Baaners Lane, Little Hartley, open 7 days 9-5.30pm, pre-booking required.

The Bath House Garden, 2 Forest Hill Drive, Oakhampton Heights, open 21 February 10-4pm

MEMBER NEWS

Following on from their wonderful success last year, Maureen and Keith Smith will be holding another Huge Plant Sale to raise funds for the Breast Cancer Research Foundation. It will be held from 14 to 28 March and will again be by appointment only. Appointments can be made on their website, www.thepropagatinggardener.com.au. The booking system is expected to start in a couple of weeks so if you are interested, keep checking the website.

Don’t forget to have a look at our Facebook page which continues to have some interesting postings. We now have 45 contributors and it has proved very useful in answering questions such as finding out plant names and helping members with problems with their gardens. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2273344029640713>.

OUTINGS

Thursday, 25 March 2021: a 1-day trip to the **Hunter Valley Gardens** at Pokolbin. The all-inclusive cost of \$75 will include transport, morning tea, lunch in the Gardens and the garden entry. Also included is a 35min shuttle train trip around the gardens. We plan to stop for a visit to the very lovely Wyee Nursery on the way back. A booking form is included with this newsletter and bookings should be made with Helen Gilkes. Please send the form with payment to her at 20A Normurra Avenue, North Turramurra 2074. Bookings will close on 12 March 2021.

POTATOES — the final word by Christine

This is indeed a sad and sorry tale of dashed high hopes. It started back in August of last year when, in response to a member’s query, I wrote an article about how to grow potatoes. I felt I knew a quite a bit about this topic as, while growing up back in the UK, the potato patch was a regular feature of my parent’s garden. I got quite enthusiastic about trying to grow this vegetable in my own back yard and enlisted the help of some of Diggers Garden Club grow bags and seed potatoes. I followed the directions which included adding soil every few weeks to the grow bags until the soil level reached the top. The potato plants grew well and seemed to be flourishing. Then everything changed when we got some 40 degree days back in November. The tops wilted and the potatoes stopped growing. Gradually the tops dried off and finally there was no more to be seen. I decided to harvest them a couple of weeks ago and was hugely disappointed to find there was not much more in the way of decent-sized potatoes in the bags than those I started with although there were quite a few marble-sized ones. Fellow member, Evelyn Mason, also tried growing them, this time in the ground, and got a similar result. I would be pleased to hear from any member who has had greater success and learn the secrets of growing potatoes in the Sydney area. Please send your email to khs.secretary@gmail.com.

DAHLIAS by Evelyn Mason

I know dahlias went out of fashion a few decades ago but as far as I am concerned, they are a 'must have' in my garden. Second to my roses, they have pride of place and just like roses they require some consideration and attention.

Like roses, dahlias need de-heading to encourage repeat flowering but they don't generally require the repeat spraying against blackspot equivalents. But they do need supporting and over the past years I have gone from doing nothing to scouring the neighbourhood for off-cuts, from the clumping bamboo to purchasing star pickets from Bunnings and possibly everything in between.



Today the tree dahlia is about halfway up this structure

My oldest dahlia was purchased at Bunnings almost 25 years ago. It is pink, almost dinner plate size and is called the 'Pearl of Heemstede'. Oh, and it grows to 2 metres!

Over the years I have tried various supports and this year I am hoping I have finally created a dahlia support masterpiece!!! Back in September a friend pruned his clumping bamboo and I drove home with the sun roof open in the car and large lengths of bamboo sticking out of the top and then I got to work. In fact, I built 2 structures – one for the newly obtained cutting of a tree dahlia (I've never grown that before) and one for my favourite pink dahlia.

I've tried simple stakes and a triangle of stakes, I've tried using old pantyhose, garden rope and rubberised string – all have their advantages and disadvantages. So far, the bamboo is still standing and hasn't fallen over yet from the weight of the pink dahlia.

Maybe next month I might have to report on its continued success, or lack thereof, as the pink dahlia clump continues to grow.



And the pink dahlia is overflowing from its supports.



TED'S LITTLE HELPER

My name is Jesse and I am two years old. I like to help Nanny and Poppa in their garden. I love helping Poppa picking his tomatoes. There are lots of big ones (Grosse Lisse) and some small ones (Tiny Toms). Sometimes there are grubs in them and we put them in the bin. We put the tomatoes in a box to ripen, with a cage over the top so the brush turkey can't eat them. I like to put little ripe red tomatoes in my mouth, but I don't eat them because I don't like them. But I do like Nanny's Tomato Relish.



Nancy's Tomato Relish Recipe

Ingredients

6 lbs (2.7 kg) ripe tomatoes
2 lbs (0.9 kg) onions
1 lb (0.5 kg) apples
3 tablespoons salt
2 lbs (0.9 kg) sugar
3 teaspoons dry mustard
2 tablespoons flour
1 tablespoon curry powder
half teaspoon chili powder
2 pints (1.1 litres) dark vinegar

Method

Peel & slice tomatoes, onions & apples.
Sprinkle on 3 tablespoons salt.
Let stand overnight.
Drain off brine.
Mix dry ingredients with a little of the vinegar.
Boil tomatoes etc. with balance of vinegar and sugar for 10 minutes.
Add other mixture.
Boil for about 2 hours or until thick.
Bottle in sterilized jars.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Doomsday Vault: A recent addition to the global network of seed banks is the Svalbard International Seed Vault. It is located on the Norwegian island of Spitzbergen which is half way between Norway and the North Pole. The vault is deep inside a remote mountainside and it aims to safeguard all known varieties of food crops. Dubbed the ‘Doomsday Vault’ it will act as a backup store for the global network of seed banks. In choosing the location, experts assessed the likely impact of climate change and the effect of natural catastrophes. They chose a site that would not be affected by flood waters and would be cold enough to provide good natural refrigeration in the event of a power failure. The fate of the Philippines National Seed Bank exemplifies why backups are vital. It was destroyed in 2006 when a typhoon tore through the area. Seed banks in Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq have similarly been lost completely.



The Highgrove Florilegium: In 2008 HRH the Prince of Wales revived the tradition of using botanical illustrations to record a plant collection when he published ‘The Highgrove Florilegium’. The limited edition of two volumes contains the work of more than 70 contemporary international artists, depicting some of the plants growing in the garden of the Prince’s 120-hectare Highgrove Estate. The illustrations include the vivid orange blossoms of *Fritillaria imperialis* by Sally Crestwaite, a rhododendron with pink and lavender flowers by Lizzie Sanders, a delicately-portrayed magnolia by Mayumi Hashi and a large leek by Kathrine Mansico. Limited to 175 numbered sets, the Florilegium cost £12,950 with all the royalties going to The Prince of Wales Charitable Foundation.



Keeping plants ship-shape: Bringing plants back from foreign climes presented a problem for early plant collectors. With the long slow sea voyages, many leafy cargos fell victim to the variations in temperature, being soaked in sea spray, lack of light and too little fresh water. In 1829 Nathaniel Bagshaw Ward discovered that plants had a much better survival rate if they were placed in a closed glass box with sufficient water and soil. The plants saturated the air in the box with water vapour which condensed on the glass and dripped down into the soil thus keeping it moist. The boxes became known as Wardian Cases. A Hackney (London) nurseryman, George Loddiges, reported that “where I used to lose during the voyage 19 out of 20 plants that I imported, now 19 out of 20 of the plants survive”.



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



▶ While February is theoretically the height of summer, it does not mean you can sit back and just look at your garden. It is time to do some pruning, with the future in mind. If you have some hydrangeas that have not been pruned for a while, it is time to get out the clippers and cut them back. One of the main advantages of pruning

hydrangeas in February is that the new growth has time to mature and summer pruning reduces the size of the bush. This frees up space that can be used for planting spring annuals or bulbs that flower in late summer and autumn. Crinum and amaryllis are good examples of such plants.

▶ If you have dahlias or chrysanthemums, go and have an inspection and check whether they need staking. The windy weather is not too far away and a plant blown over is not the way to find out that the plant should have been staked. The two main things to remember when staking are not to get too close to the main stem, as you could drive the stake through the tuber and don't choke the plant by tying the binding too tight.

▶ At this time of the year just about every caterpillar in the book is out and about looking for something to eat. Don't bother picking them off but go down to your garden centre and get yourself a bottle of Dipel, Following directions, spray the shrubs and bushes that are being attacked. Dipel will only kill caterpillars and nothing else. They lose their appetite and die of starvation in a couple of days.

▶ Many snails climb up into shrubs to feed. To stop snails climbing up, lay a ring of sawdust around the trunk. The sawdust clings to the sticky foot of the snail, stopping it from sliding along the ground.

▶ Many of us have a tibouchina growing in the garden. Tibouchinas are a large soft shrubs with brittle branches and they should be pruned twice a year to keep them compact and to stop the branches waving around in the wind and thus breaking off. All the prunings can go into the compost heap after shredding.

▶ If you are serious about your compost heap, mix up a watering can full of water and molasses. Mix three or four desert spoons of molasses into one full watering can of water and wet down your heap. The mixture of molasses will encourage the growth of the bacteria that break down the composting raw material. Molasses can be bought from the horse supply shop behind the flower market on Mona Vale Rd. Don't forget to turn over your compost heap regularly with a fork.

► It is time to run a check on your roses and trim them for their autumn flush. Cut back any spent flower heads to a fat bud. Check under all rose shrubs and get rid of any rubbish, dead leaves etc. This sort of rubbish only harbours pests and diseases. Put it in the rubbish bin not the compost. Stand off and have a look at your rose and if necessary, prune out any dead branches that could hinder air circulation through the plant.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



Question? Where can I find a nursery that is a specialist in Protea. I want to start a protea bed in my garden and would like to plant several different kinds of protea.

Answer: Protea specialists are few and far between but Kulgoa Nursery in Terrey Hills and Bunnings, Belrose are stockist for one of the main suppliers of proteas. Proteas are

not fast growers; I have one that took three years to produce a good display but it was worth waiting for. You will need full sun and a well-drained sandy soil. They can grow quite large so make sure you have the space.

Question? Is there such a thing as a small gardenia? I have a small garden bed out the front with not much room. I live in a unit; the garden bed receives sun for quite a long period in the morning but not in the afternoon. Have you any suggestions?

Answer: The smallest variety of gardenia is *Gardenia augusta* 'Radicans'. This is a very good rockery plant with low growth and slightly trailing branches, glossy foliage and masses of small flowers which are miniatures of the larger flowers. Should you have trouble finding it, ask your garden centre and they should have no trouble finding it.

Question? I want to plant a NSW Christmas bush near my front fence. What sort of soil do I need and how tall do they grow?

Answer: The NSW Christmas bush is usually grown in a sandy loam as it does not do well in a clay soil. It needs good drainage and does best in a position where it is not subject to the wind. It can grow quite tall, up to 10 metres in its natural habitat but smaller in cultivation, so don't grow it near power lines. Power lines are only 8 metres off the ground. The electricity boys will cut it back if it gets into their wires. A dwarf form, which grows only to 3m, is available from Brian Roach's native nursery in Westleigh (0418 115 630)

Question? I was away for a week or so just when my beans were producing a good fresh crop. When I got back most of the beans had matured into hard fruit. Can I eat these mature beans?

Answer: Yes, you can eat them but they will not be very nice. Allow some of them to mature to the seed stage and then grow a new crop. The warm weather is going to be with us for a while yet. Just keep the soil damp not wet. Beans should be picked while they are young and tender and full of goodness. Constant picking encourages the plant to produce more fruit. If you wait till the beans are large and mature, they could be attacked by disease or insects and will be tough to eat. The same rule applies to peas also.

Question? I want to place a potted gloxinia inside my house. Where is the best place to put it?

Answer: A gloxinia should be placed in a position that has plenty of light but is sheltered from direct sunlight and draughts. Gloxinias are usually grown in pots that seem a bit small for the size of the leaves and flowers. They are also grown in a potting mix that has lots of peat in it. Watering is also very important for these plants if they are to grow well. They should be kept moist but not wet. Don't just dribble some water onto the soil - the best way is to stand the pot in a tray of water for about 15 minutes then stand the pot outside for a while to let the excess water drain away before bringing it inside again.

Question? Can I transplant a big Kangaroo Paw?

Answer: Yes, but wait till autumn when it has finished flowering. It will have gone dormant by then. The clump should be thoroughly soaked, you could leave a hose to drip all over it at night to soften the soil. When the new position is ready for occupation, carefully lift the old plant with a good strong garden fork. Try not to damage the roots. If the old clump is too big, gently remove the new young plants from round the edge of the old clump. These small plants can be potted up and used as gifts. You should be able to lift the main plant now and plant it in its new home. It should not be planted any deeper than it was in its old home. Keep it damp not wet until it has settled down and started to grow.



Regards
Hugh