

HORTULANUS

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

MARCH 2021



President: Ted Shaw, 2 Narla Road, Bayview 2104 (0411 274 503)
Secretary: Christine Rethers, 1 Wolsten Ave, Turramurra 2074 (9449 6245)
Treasurer: Robyn Brown (0408 295 601)

Website: www.khsgardenclub.org.au Email: khs.secretary@gmail.com

COMING EVENTS

Wonderful news—Ku-ring-gai council has informed us that the hall at St Ives is expected to be available for our meeting on 4 May. The renovations have taken much longer than expected but the hall now has a new roof and a new floor as well as some other additions. How we are able to run this meeting will depend on the Covid restrictions in place at that time but we have our fingers crossed that we will be able to hold something close to what we are used to. We should be able to give you more information in the April newsletter.

In the meantime, we have two events to offer members—a garden ramble on 13 and 14 March and an outing to the Hunter Valley Gardens on 25 March (see below).

Don't forget that 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 March include:

• **Hilandale** 287 Eusdale Rd, Yetholme, open 6/7 March, 9-4pm

• **Hartvale** 49 Sunray Avenue, Little Hartley, open 6/7 March, 10-4pm

• **Wild Meadows**, 243A Coxs River Road, Little Hartley, open on 6/7 March 9-3.30pm

• **Highfields**, 111 John Grant Road, Little Hartley, open on 6/7 March 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

Advance warning—the **Southern Highlands Open Gardens** weekend and Plant Fair is on 17 and 18 April 9-4pm (phone 4861 4899 for more information).

Collectors' Plant Fair, Hawkesbury Race Club, Clarendon is on 10/11 April. Go to their website for further information and to book tickets (<https://www.collectorsplantfair.com.au/>).

MEMBER NEWS

Garden Ramble, 13 and 14 March: Due to the Covid restrictions currently in place, the maximum number of people allowed on a private premise is 30 a day (excluding the homeowners). The three garden owners have therefore kindly agreed to open on the two days. You are invited to book in for **either** the Saturday **or** the Sunday visit. The gardens to be visited are:

1. Peter and Sue Fisher, 58 St Johns Avenue, Gordon—open from 1.30 to 2.30pm (both days)
2. Doreen Clark, 19 Parkwood Grove, West Pymble—open from 2.15 to 3.15pm (both days)
3. Yvonne ten Pas, 12 Kimbarra Road, Pymble—open from 3 to 4pm (both days)

The Society will provide refreshments in the last garden.

Bookings should be made with Robyn Brown and you need to let her know which day would suit you. Robyn can be contacted on 9452 5493 or by email to medway2@bigpond.net.au. **Bookings should be made by Thursday, 11 March.** Please note that due to the current Covid restrictions, we cannot admit anyone who has not pre-booked.

Following on from their wonderful success last year, Maureene 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 soon 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 47 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 (phone 9144 4826). Please send the form with payment to her at 20A Normurra Avenue, North Turramurra 2074. Bookings will close on 12 March 2021. Family and friends are very welcome to come along—there is still some space but don't delay as it is filling fast.

THE ABSOLUTE FINAL WORD ON POTATOES by Evelyn Mason

The humble spud... is there any vegetable more versatile than these tasty tubers? Grown around the world, spuds are the only vegetable to have had a year dedicated to them (2008 was the International Year of the Potato) owing to their importance as a food crop in combating world hunger.

So how did your spud growing go?

Well, last year I tried growing potatoes in a bag – 3 bags to be truthful! I purchased certified seed potatoes, the totally unknown to me, King Edward variety, and followed the instructions. After waiting the pre-requisite time, I dug them up, to a rather mixed response. A few were a respectable size, some were like chat potatoes and a bunch were the size of the top of my thumb!



The last word ... what better person to end our discussion on potatoes than our Point Score Champion for the last two years, Aubrey Knowles. It would appear that Aubrey grows his potatoes in the ground in his vegie patch and has no problem harvesting a very respectable amount of potatoes. As can be seen from the photo on the right, this was the harvest from just two plants.

The moral of the story appears to be that here in Sydney growing potatoes in a grow bag is not very successful. It is better to grow them in the ground, possibly because the grow bags may heat up too much.



PLANNING THE NEXT VEGIE CYCLE by Ted Shaw

Most of those very enjoyable spring and summer vegetables are finishing up now, with just the last of them hanging on for picking. I'm going to try one more planting of the quick growing mignonette lettuce and some more dwarf beans. If the beans are too slow I'll dig them in to add nitrogen to the soil.

Apart from those, now is the time to start preparing for autumn planting of winter vegetables. I try to get these in during late February to early March so they can grow and be harvested in time to provide space in my garden for September planting of the next crops of spring and summer vegetables.

I've started pulling out and composting the crops that are past their best. Then I'll dig over the soil, add fertiliser (cow or chicken manures are good) and at this time of year add a good dusting of agricultural lime or dolomite.

When choosing the winter vegetables to grow, I pick only those that I like to eat. I like peas and snow peas, broccoli, brussels sprouts and cauliflower. I've tried onions without much success. Broad beans and turnips could grow well but I don't like them much. Sow the seeds for broad beans and peas direct into rows in the garden and for others, raise (or buy) seedlings for planting out when ready.

It's time to get cracking!

SOFTWOOD PROPAGATION by Nancy Shaw

If you haven't tried this before, it's not too late to have a go before the cold weather arrives. Cuttings are best taken September to February but can be tried throughout the year. Prepare clean plastic pots, secateurs, dibble sticks, hormone and propagation medium e.g. compost, propagation mix, propagation sand, perlite and vermiculite, or a mix of these. Fill the plastic pots with mix, water in and flatten. Rooting hormone can be gel, powder or honey.

Take cuttings from a healthy plant in the early morning. Keep them cool and moist until ready to use. The cuttings should be about 10cms in length and have 2-3 nodes.

If using a tip cutting, make the bottom just below a node. If making more than one cutting from a stem, make the top of the cutting just above a node and the base just below a node. Remove any flowers and remove the leaves from the lower nodes. If the leaves at the top node are large then cut them in half.

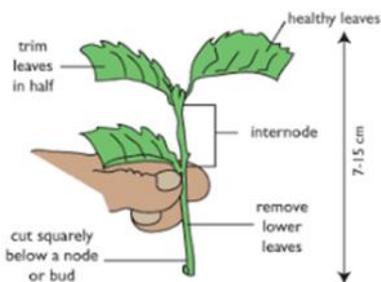
Using the dibble stick, make a hole in the potting mix for the cutting which has been dipped in hormone. Insert cutting into hole 1-2cm deep. Firm the mix around the cutting. When all cuttings are done, gently water.

Tag the pot with the plant name and date. Cover with a plastic bag or a cut-in-half plastic bottle. Keep pots in a warm spot out of direct sunlight and ensure the propagation mix does not dry out. Cuttings need to have air, water, humidity, warmth and light.

Once the cuttings develop roots it is time to put them into individual pots. Use a good quality potting mix. Use a flat knife to gently ease each cutting out of the pot and place in larger pots with the potting mix. Water well. Place in a protected area and gradually move them into the right environment for their species.

Some of the most successful plants to take cuttings from at this time of the year are the fuchsias and geraniums as well as rosemary and lavender. Semi-hardwood cuttings of hibiscus and hydrangeas are best left until winter, strangely enough.

Some cuttings will set roots in plain water—cuttings of coleus, impatiens, basil, mint and hoyas, to name a few, can all be successfully propagated this way.



SIR JOSEPH BANKS



Joseph Banks was a philanthropist interested in natural history, science and global affairs. His love of nature grew out of exploring the country around his ancestral home in Lincolnshire. By the age of 17 he had a herbarium (a collection of dried plant specimens) and went to Oxford University hoping to hone his skills as a botanist. On inheriting considerable wealth from his father in 1761, at the age of 18 years he quit university without a degree and two years later joined HMS Niger on a voyage to collect plants, animals and rocks from Newfoundland and Labrador. In 1768, having already been elected a Fellow of the Royal Society due to his potential to excel in the natural sciences, he was invited to join Captain James Cook on an expedition to the South Pacific. The main aim of the expedition was to observe the passage of Venus and calculate the size of the solar system. However, what Banks and his 8 staff also planned to fulfil was to record the natural history of the places that the 'Endeavour' visited. These included

South America, Tahiti, New Zealand, Australia and Java. When the expedition returned to England in 1771 Banks brought home 3600 dried specimens of plants of which 1400 were new to science. There were 14 new plants introduced to cultivation in Britain that year, including Eucalyptus (now Corymbia) gummifera and Dianella caerulea from Australia.

Banks planned to join a second voyage departing the following year but his request for 15 staff including two French Horn players received short shrift from Cook. Banks then withdrew from the expedition. From there on Banks remained mostly in Britain. However, he was responsible for transferring numerous plants to and from the country through his role as unofficial director of Kew Gardens. Banks sent Kew botanist, Francis Masson, to gather plants from the Cape of Good Hope in 1772, Archibald Menzies to the Northwest coast of America in 1791 and William Kerr to China in 1803. He also dispatched Allan Cunningham and James Bowie to South America in 1814 from where they brought back many species of eucalypts, acacia and pittosporums.

As well as introducing many plants to the United Kingdom, Banks influenced the choice of plants taken by the first settlers to Australia. Having experienced the land himself, he said that he had no doubt that the soil of many parts of the Eastern coast of NSW between latitude 30 and 40 were sufficiently fertile. He equated the climate there to that around Toulouse in France. He put together a *portmanteau biota* of suitable European vegetables, herbs, berries, fruit and grains for the settlers to grow. It was this European flora that ultimately helped the newcomers thrive.

Banks' vision of plants playing a central part in shaping societies was also put into practice through the botanical gardens set up in the British colonies. He regularly exchanged seeds and advice with the directors of the various botanical gardens in parts of the far flung Empire such as India, Sri Lanka, St Vincent, Trinidad and Jamaica.

The French naturalist, Baron George Cuvier, remarked of him "He spreads over all of the gardens of Europe the seeds from the South Seas as he has distributed ours in the Southern Sea". His name lives on in Australia in the various Banksia shrubs that decorate many of our gardens.

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



► Are you considering planting a banksia? Choose the right one and it will put on a spectacular show for you. The flowers last quite a long time. Check how high it will grow before you buy it. Some of them can grow quite high. As a precaution, don't plant it under a power line or the electricity people will cut off about around two thirds.

► Should you be thinking about Sweet Peas, now is the time to get the soil ready. Fork up a mixture of half cow manure and half mushroom compost into the topsoil. Rake in a handful of dolomite per square metre. Leave the mixture settle for 1 or 2 weeks before sowing your seeds or planting your seedlings. If your sweet peas are climbers, make sure that they have something to climb on when they start to shoot. Above all, have some snail protection at the ready.

► Many Bottle Brush varieties produce an autumn flush of flowers. As this autumn flush finishes, trim just behind the old flowers to stimulate even more flowers in the spring. This will also help the shrub maintain a compact form.

► Have you got a Murraya hedge? This is a good time to give it a nice tidy up with the hedge trimmer. You can put the clippings through your shredder and into the compost heap. Tip a watering can full of water mixed with several desert spoons of molasses in it over the compost heap to get it moving.

► Have you some potted camellias that you have not had a look at for a while? Go and have a look at them and check the soil for moisture, particularly if we get a spell of warm weather. A lack of moisture at this time of the year can affect and diminish the flower display.

► Down in the vegie patch keep an eye on any pumpkins you might have. As the stems start to wither, it is time to lift the pumpkin and store it in a cool dark place. As your beans finish, cut the plant off at surface level and leave the roots behind. The roots are loaded with nitrogen, just what the doctor ordered. Tomatoes will be finishing up soon so when you have finished harvesting, pull them out and replenish the bed with compost and cow manure. A light dusting of dolomite will also be beneficial. Fork over the area and leave it for a few weeks until it is time to plant seedlings of your winter crops such as broccoli, peas, spinach and the like.

► At this time of the year mildew is common on cucurbits such as melons, cucumber and squash due to the seasonal increase in the humidity. Avoid overhead watering and ensure good ventilation and plenty of sunlight to the plants to reduce the severity of the mildew. A regular spraying with Eco fungicide will also help and it is safe for humans and beneficial insects.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



Question? I wish to plant some Leyland cypress 'Leightons Green' along a fence line for privacy and to shade my house. Is this a good choice?

Answer: NO, do not plant this tree or any of its relatives in a suburban situation, near buildings or driveways. It is a large vigorous tree that quickly out-grows its welcome.

Leightons Green grows to over 20 metres tall in less than 20 years and to keep it trim, it has to be pruned every four to six months. It will cast dense shade and has a large root system which will rob your garden and your neighbour's garden of moisture and nutrients. In addition, it can disrupt foundations and driveways. Less troublesome plants to use are the large sasanqua camellias, photinias, and various lilly pilly.

Question? I have been told I should top dress my lawn with soil but nobody tells me why this is necessary.

Answer: The short answer is "NO" it is not necessary. Many years ago it was a common practice, however in these days of more enlightened gardeners you should spread a top dressing over your lawn only if there is a necessity to level out lumps and hollows. Spreading some gypsum in spring and autumn will do a good job of opening up clay and compacted soils.

Question? Why do my carrots have all tops and no roots?

Answer: The soil you are growing them in has far too much nitrogen in it. Don't apply any fertiliser the next time you plant a crop and avoid using animal manures. The major soil elements required by all plants are nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. Carrots are no exception to this. Nitrogen stimulates the foliage, phosphorus develops the roots and potassium improves the flavour and colour of the carrot. Animal manures, composts and a number of fertilisers contain large amounts nitrogen and this can cause the tops to grow at the expense of the roots. It is a good idea to grow carrots in a patch where you have previously had a leafy vegetable but do not add any extra fertilisers.

Question? I want to plant an orange tree in my backyard. I have in mind either a Washington Navel or a Valencia. Which of these would be considered the better eating orange and how do they compare with each other?

Answer: The Washington Navel is considered the best of all eating oranges. It has a rich sweet flavour. The fruit is large with a deep orange slightly rough skin that is easy to peel. It has no seeds and fruits from May to September. It is best enjoyed fresh i.e. peel and eat. The trees are medium sized and do well in our mild coastal climate. Valencia oranges start to mature in September and reach their peak of sweetness and juiciness through November and December. They will then hold good internal quality until the end of summer. Although the skin may turn green (regreening), the internal fruit quality is unaffected by this. The Valencia oranges is the most widely grown orange in the world due to its oils, juicing qualities, wide climatic adaptability and it's very long ripening period. It flowers in September and from then on until late summer the tree will carry ripening fruit and be developing next season's fruit simultaneously. The fruit is of medium size, sweet with a few seeds.

Question? Is it true that if I don't harvest my zucchini at the right time they will become marrows ?

Answer: Yes, harvest them when they are about 10-15cm long. Frequent picking will produce more flowers and thus more zucchini. Marrows, however, are perfectly edible and can be cut in half length-wise, stuffed and baked.

Question? Is it true that if I fertilise my lawn regularly, I will get less weeds?

Answer: It is true that a well fertilised and managed lawn is less likely to be invaded by weeds than a poorly fed one simply because of the dense sward of grass that covers the soil. It also true that if you have bare patches in your lawn weeds will grow there before the grass does.



Regards
Hugh

Costco has a great sense of humour!