

HORTULANUS

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

NOVEMBER 2020



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COMING EVENTS

KHS meetings remain cancelled for the time being due to Covid but we are hopeful of recommencing our meetings early next year although probably in a somewhat reduced form. Stay tuned for updates. Regretfully, we will not be holding our usual Christmas Dinner this year because of Covid restrictions which require us to have a Covid marshal and restricted seating.

At the time of writing, the **Sydney Royal Botanic Garden, Mt Tomah and Mt Annan Botanic Gardens** are open. The Calyx has now opened with a stunning new display called inBloom—not to be missed. Whilst there, drop in on the Friends of the Botanic Gardens nursery which is open Mon-Fri from 11am to 2pm and Sat from 10am-2pm. In addition to the lovely plants, there are now also pieces of garden artwork for sale.

Out of town, **Wildwood Gardens**, 29 Powells Road, Bilpin have advised that their garden, nursery and café are now open but only until 2 November. Travelling further afield, you can visit **Windyridge**, 25-27 Queens Ave, Mt Wilson which is open 7 days of the week. **Nooroo**, also at Mt Wilson, is open at the weekends but only until 8 November. **Mayfield Gardens** in Oberon is open 7 days of the week. Also in Oberon is **Gairloch Garden** at 27 Blenheim Ave which is open on 31 Oct/1 Nov.

Highfields, 111 John Grant Rd, Little Hartley, is open each weekend until 22 November from 10am-4pm. Also in Little Hartley is **Wild Meadows**, 243a Coxs River Road, which is open on 21/22 November. Please check out the current status of these venues before travelling.

MEMBER NEWS

Garden Ramble: This was held on Sunday, 11 October when three of our members (Valerie Bray, Aubrey Knowles and Christine Rethers) open their gardens to KHS members. All the available places were taken and the ramble was pronounced a success. Huge thanks go to our garden owners for all the work they did in preparing their lovely gardens and also to the committee members and volunteers who ensured that the ramble went smoothly and all the Covid restrictions were observed. Attached is a page of photos taken in the three gardens.

Did you watch the Gardening Australia program on Friday, 16 October which featured two of our members, Maureene and Keith Smith and their Huge Plant Sale in aid of the National Breast Cancer Foundation? Weren't they good! Costa and his crew spent a whole day with them and they said how nice Costa was and that they enjoyed the whole experience. With the extra publicity, they have been inundated with bookings so hopefully they will be able to beat previous records of funds raised for breast cancer.



Not to be outdone by the Smiths, two more of our members were recently visited by Costa and his crew. Nancy and Ted Shaw's garden was the focus of Costa's and his crew's visit this time. They were both very pleased with the day's filming and repeated the Smith's comments on how nice Costa was. One item of interest—Costa's beard—has to be tucked up during filming as it muffles his speech! So it is even longer than it appears on the show. At this point they were not sure when the segment will go to air and it is possible that it won't be until next spring. They said they may return to take shots of their fabulous spring garden which was just past its best on the day they were there.

Don't forget to have a look at our Facebook page which continues to have some interesting postings. We now have 44 contributors and it has proved very useful in answering questions such as finding out names of plants.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2273344029640713>.

LORIKEETS IN THE GARDEN by Lorraine Nelson

For many years I have had a pair of rainbow lorikeets nest in an old gum tree in my garden. As a result of a severe storm last November, the tree was badly damaged, dropping two enormous branches. Because of this damage, the tree had to be lopped back and the place where the lorikeets nested was removed. I searched the internet and finally found a company who create native habitats for animals and birds. They came along and put in three internal nests in the remaining tree trunk. I am absolutely thrilled to have some tenants back again.

The company that installed the nests is Sydney Arbor Trees in Botany, Tel. 9666 6821, Mob. 0425 340 055 or 0425 330 283, Email: info@sydneyarbor.com.au.



Thank you, Lorraine, for this interesting article. I am sure this was not an inexpensive exercise and you are to be congratulated on helping our wonderful native wildlife. If you have anything of interest to contribute, we would welcome your article and photos that we can share with members. Just email to: khs.secretary@gmail.com. Ed.

THYME, the classic herb by Hugh Myers

As we are basically of European descent our food palate is slanted towards herbs, spices, and vegetables from Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. Of all these areas the Mediterranean contributed the widest range of herbs. We often think of parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme (remember the song) as the basic four herbs. However, parsley is the odd one out. It is not strongly aromatic, does not come from the same region and has a quite different oil profile. The real group should be oregano, rosemary, lavender and thyme. These four herbs are all from southern Europe, around the Mediterranean. All are members of the family Lamiaceae and are fully aromatic with similar oil profiles.

The Latin name for the genus under discussion is *Thymus* and there are around 350 species that occur across Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and into Western Asia. The main species that has been grown around the world since 2000 BC is *Thymus vulgaris*. It originated in southern and south eastern Europe and was carried across Europe by the Roman Empire. Both Roman and Greek soldiers used it as a symbol and a source of bravery and courage in battle, with many soldiers wearing a sprig to give them strength in battle. Its use medicinally goes back to before Hippocrates when some of its uses included using it as an antiseptic to reduce infections and diseases. It was a key ingredient in posies used for protection during the Black Death plague. The famous herbalist, Nicolas Culpepper (1616-1654), praised it 'as a notable strengthener of the lungs' and an excellent remedy for the disease in children called Chin Cough, Whooping Cough today. Thyme is an excellent antiseptic and tonic and today it is still used as a respiratory remedy. Like many medicines used in ancient times its usage was not understood but has been substantiated in modern times

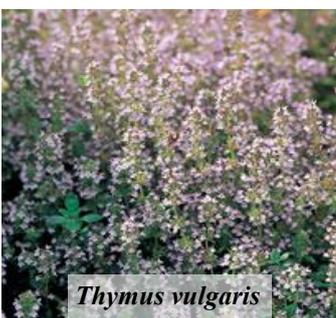
The whole genus consists of small perennial shrubs with thin wiry stems that are usually low growing, spreading plants or are light ground hugging mats that make a carpet of green with their foliage followed by a flood of colour from their flowers. The foliage is small and lanceolate with a pungent aroma when crushed. Like most members of the Lamiaceae family, the flowers consist of heads of flared tubular florets. Thyme flowers are generally arranged either a tight head of uneven tubes or loose heads with a few florets. Colours range from white to mauve, purple or pink. There are also several with yellow flowers and even a couple with red flowers.

Uses of thyme: Over the centuries thyme has been used as a culinary herb (fresh, dried or powdered) and as a medicinal herb. The oil was also used medicinally and also as a pesticide. It is one of the classic herbs in many cuisines. The French herb mix, Herbes de Provence, is a good example where a strong pungent flavour is required. Most herbs lose the keynotes of their flavour when dried but thyme retains 90% of its flavour and both the fresh and dried forms can be used in cooking.

The key ingredient of the thyme flavour is Thymol which is one of the most used constituents of popular Essential Oils. Thymol is a classic phenol and along with Carvacrol is widely used for its flavour and antiseptic properties.

Both are found in other aromatic herbs such as Oregano, Bergamot and Satureja. The oil Thymol is used in large quantities around the world and is popular here in Australia with aroma therapists.

Growing Thyme: Thyme requires very well drained soil as it will not tolerate wet feet. It can be very drought resistant and does not mind a moderate frost. The ground cover varieties are excellent rockery plants or can make a low traffic lawn. They look really good when planted along the edges of terraces or in large patio pots. When planted as a ground cover carpet, the mass of late spring colour can be spectacular. The upright forms of thyme make excellent hedges surrounding herb gardens or can be used in traditional style in parterre plantings. All forms of thyme grow well in medium to large pots.





Plant pot grown specimens about 30cm apart in a well-drained sunny spot in the spring. Pick the fresh leaves as required and for maximum productivity do not let the plants flower. Divide the plants every 3-4 years and replant. If you do not have a garden, then thyme will grow quite happily in a pot on a windowsill. The soil should be kept damp not wet. If too wet the plant will die.

Thymus serpyllum (Creeping thyme)

TICKS

With the weather warming up, foliage putting on growth and the grass shooting up, gardeners will be moving into the shrubbery and vines to cut them back before they get out of hand. Be careful though as ticks are also on the move and can easily drop or be shaken onto the gardener.

There are many kinds of ticks but the species which is most encountered along the east coast of Australia is the Australian Paralysis Tick (*Ixodes holocyclus*) and the Brown Dog Tick. Both ticks can occur on many animals as well as on humans. The Australian paralysis tick causes the death of animals particularly dogs and cats and illness in human beings.



Whenever the illness of a human being or an animal is suspected of being caused by a tick, it should be referred to a doctor or a vet as the case may be. The Australian female paralysis tick has four development stages, the last three being as a parasite of man and animals. Only the female is a blood feeder. She inserts her mouth parts and injects an anticoagulant so that the blood will continue to flow. It is the anticoagulant which appears to be toxic. The mouth parts are barbed to hold the tick to the skin.

The symptoms that point to the presence of the paralysis tick can include pain and irritation at the site of the attachment, loss of appetite, lassitude and depression. Once located the tick should be removed. Because of the flatness of the mouth parts and the backward projecting barbs the tick should be grasped with a pair of forceps or tweezers and moved sideways to disengage the barbs. Do not squeeze the body as this will only inject more poison into the site. The male tick is quite small and does not feed on blood. It is not a pest to human beings or animals.

Removal of ticks from your garden: The elimination of ticks from your garden is not possible without insecticides and removal of the animals that are the natural host of the tick. However, the following procedures will reduce the number of ticks.

Reduce or eliminate moisture from known tick areas. Reduce weeds and unwanted vegetation and keep the grass cut where possible. Exclude or discourage (but do not kill) bandicoots as they are the natural host of the paralysis tick. Spray areas known to harbour ticks using an approved insecticide. Read the label to make sure it is approved for ticks. Ask at your garden centre.

Inspect your pets every day or second day. If ticks are found, then remove them with forceps. If you have pets go along to your vet and pick up his pamphlet on ticks and this will bring you up to date.

Your chemist will stock a product called Medi Freeze. This is a plastic 'gun' that is full of ether. When sprayed onto a tick it will freeze it to death very quickly. This way there is very little chance of breaking up the tick when removing it by using tweezers. It is safe to use on children over the age of four. Make sure you read the directions carefully.

py bits and runners in hand by cutting them well back. They will also be shooting along the trunk and these shoots can be rubbed or pulled off if they are in the wrong place.

► Growers of Cape Honeysuckle (*Tecoma capensis*) should go and inspect their shrub and make sure it is not getting away from them. Cape Honeysuckles can grow quite away along the ground from the main plant before they pop up again. They are a beautiful shrub but keep an eye on them or you will have more than you bargained for



► How are your Wisteria going? By now they will have put on lots of flowers and the flowers will have died back. Remove the dead flowers and then stand back and have a good look at the shrub. You are looking for those long whippy bits that have decided to go off and do their own thing. Wisteria can be a very vigorous shrub so keep those long whip-

py bits and runners in hand by cutting them well back. They will also be shooting along the trunk and these shoots can be rubbed or pulled off if they are in the wrong place.

► It is time to work a good layer of organic mulch into the soil around your camellias. Remember camellias are surface rooting plants and the soil needs to be kept cool with the moisture retained in the top layer of soil throughout the hotter months of the year. The mulch should be loose for good aeration and should be spread over the ground to a bit further than the circumference of the foliage. Mulch to a depth of 5cm for established camellias but more sparingly in the case of younger plants because of their much smaller root systems.

► With camellias keep an eye out for root rot as it can occur in all camellias. The most resistant ones are members of the *Camellia sasanqua* family. Root rot is caused by the fungus *phytophthora cinnamoni* being present in the soil. The fungus is activated when the soil is overly wet or badly drained. Pale and listless foliage usually announces its

presence. If in doubt check the feeder roots. White feeder roots indicate a healthy root system while brown roots point to the presence of phytophthora. There is no cure for this in infected plants. These days nurseries offer Camellia japonica and Camellia reticulata plants that have been grafted onto Camellia sasanqua root stock. This gives the plant more resistance to phytophthora attack.

► At this time of the year most gardeners are down on their knees pulling out weeds. Be careful as you lift the weeds and use a hand fork to dig them out. If they show signs of being in seed, carefully put them in a bucket so that you don't distribute the seeds more widely. Remember the old adage—*one year's seeding equals seven year's weeding!*



Question? I have some vacant space down the back and would like to grow a brugmansia. Do they grow very big and is there anything I should know about them? I have two young children and a dog.

Answer: There are a couple of things you should know. Most important is that brugmansia are poisonous. So it is a

case of long sleeves and gloves when working on one. Wear eye protection also. It is also advisable to keep young children away from the plant. Depending on which brugmansia you buy, they can be up to 4m high and 5m wide. There is a wide range of brugmansia available and they come in many colours, heights and widths. Read the labels and you should not have any trouble finding one to suit your needs. They like full sun to part shade and can be planted year round.

Question? I have been given a very nice sansevieria (Mother-in-laws tongue) and want to put it inside the house. What sort of position does it need? It is in a large pot.

Answer: Sansevieria thrive in good light and will do well near a sunny window in a bright room. They also tolerate part shade but will stop growing in complete shade. Plants that have been left in the shade for a long period should be brought into the bright light in stages, not in one move. They are tropical plants and will not continue to grow in temperatures below 15 degrees. If the temperature goes below 15 degrees make sure the soil is almost dry. If the temperature is heading for single figures, find a warmer spot for your plant as they do not like those sort of temperatures at all.

Question? I have a nice hibiscus in my front garden. Normally it gives no trouble but this year it is showing quite a lot of yellow leaves. The leaves look quite healthy. What can I do to make these leaves go green again?

Answer: This looks like a shortage of iron in your plant's diet. Get yourself a bottle of iron chelates from your garden centre. Follow the instructions and in about a month the leaves should start to turn green again.

Question? Can I grow asparagus from seed?

Answer: Yes you can but it will take three years before you have a usable crop. You would be better off going to your garden centre and buying some one year-old crowns. That way you will save a year. Do not harvest any spikes during the first year, rather wait until the following year. Once you have your first usable crop, the plants will crop every year.

Question? I am starting to get a lot of brown flesh in my Meyer lemons. What causes this and what do I do about it?

Answer: There are a couple of different possible causes. It could be a trace element deficiency in which case use a good fertiliser designed for citrus. Your lemon should be given a good feed at least twice a year, spring and autumn. It could also be an attack by stink bugs (bronze orange bug or the spined citrus bug). There are various ways of chemically controlling these (check with your garden centre) but if you can, try spraying your tree with Eco Oil once every couple of weeks and this will help to keep them away.



The Most Accurate Graph I've Seen So Far During This This Pandemic!!

*Regards
Hugh*