

HORTULANUS

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

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COMING EVENTS

4 May Plans are well advanced for the first KHS meeting in over 14 months. This will be at the newly refurbished St Ives Community Hall, Memorial Avenue, St Ives. 7pm for a 7.30pm start of the meeting.

Gardens/event that will be available in April include:

Mayfield Gardens, 530 Mayfield Road, Oberon. The full garden will be open for the Autumn Festival from 2-25 April, 9am—4.30pm.

Wildwood Gardens, 29 Powells Road, Bilpin Fri-Mon only - from now until mid-June 10-4pm

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/>).

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

The Bath House Garden, 2 Forest Hill Drive, Oakhampton Heights, open 18 April 10-4pm

'Highfields', 111 John Grant Road, Little Hartley, open on 24/25 April 10-4pm

MEMBER NEWS

Sincere thanks to Peter and Sue Fisher, Doreen Clark and Yvonne ten Pas for opening their gardens on 13 and 14 March. About 47 members and friends enjoyed their wander around the three gardens and the refreshments at Yvonne's where they could sit and chat.



With the recommencement of meetings, we will be looking for volunteers to help with a variety of activities. Please let Christine know if you would like to help out with any of the following:

Give out name badges, help receive money for events, membership fees, etc.

Supper—set up, serve and clear away

Set up of the Show Bench and/or judging

Garden Table—set up and serve

Trading Table (twice a year) - check in plants, set up and serve

These jobs need you to be available before the official start of the meeting (say between 6.30 and 7pm). If you are interested, please email Christine (khs.secretary@gmail.com) or phone on 9449 6245.

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

The weather caused those planning the trip to the Hunter Valley Gardens on Thursday, 25 March, much anxiety as the heavy rains persisted until two days before departure. Many of the low lying areas of Sydney and right up the coast were flooded, with many roads impassable. However, thanks to the cessation in the rain and some welcome sunshine, the road to the Gardens was pronounced clear. Happily, we all agreed that we had a very splendid day, finishing up at Wyeec Nursery where many plants were procured.



WHY HEDGE WHEN YOU CAN 'HOYA' by Christine Rethers

A few years ago, we were faced with a dilemma—what to do with a tall and ugly paling fence on the western side of our garden which gets the morning sun but is sheltered from the afternoon sun. The obvious solution was to plant a hedge of *Camellia sasanqua* or *Murraya* or some such plant. The problem with this was that it would extend up to a metre into the garden bed, taking up precious growing space. Putting our thinking caps on, we finally came up with a solution—to cover the fence with *Hoya australis*, a luscious and vigorous native hoyo. *Hoya australis* grows naturally in the coastal regions of Australia from Cape York down to about Grafton but is quite comfortable with Sydney conditions. It flowers in summer and autumn and has umbels of white, sweetly scented flowers.

So, how to go about this. We planted our hoyo close to the fence using a mix of garden soil, compost and orchid bark for good drainage. We then attached a length of strong wire to run from the bottom to the top of the fence and as the tendrils grew, trained them up this wire using some ties. At the same time we ran the wire along the top of the fence—a post and rail fence is the easiest to attach a wire to but if the rail is on the other side, you can still attach the wire with a nail every metre or so. When the hoyo reached the top wire, it was now trained either side along the wire. After a few months, more tendrils appeared along this top one and these were allowed to drape down. Eventually, these continued to grow downwards until they reached the ground. They took root nicely here and we started the whole process again of training these up the fence. They wound themselves nicely around the downward facing tendril and continued upwards until they reached the top where they were trained to grow sideways again. This way, a long length of fence was covered over time. Ours has been growing for several years now and has covered many metres either side of the original plant.

If privacy is your main goal, it is possible to attach some trellis to the main fence and train the hoyo to cover this as well. If you have a country property or know someone who has, a hoyo fence is just about fire-proof as even in dry weather it remains succulent. The hoyo is best fed only very lightly with some pelleted manure or slow release fertiliser once a year. Too much fertiliser and it will produce leaves but not many flowers. The hoyo is a most obliging plant and provides endless cuttings that take root quickly if laid in some compost, wet newspaper or sphagnum moss (or even in a glass of plain water). We have many cuttings available from the prunings of our plants and are happy to give them away to anyone who would like to give this a try. Some will be on the Garden Table at our next meeting but if you are passing our place, just drop in and pick up some.



SOWING THE SEEDS OF THE WORLD'S RUBBER INDUSTRY.

Natural rubber comes from latex, a white substance produced by many plants. Scoring the bark of these trees (tapping) causes the latex (sap) to flow out like a sticky milk. Until the late 19th Century the majority of the world's rubber came from Central and South America where the latex-yielding trees grew wild, *Castilla elastica* in Central America and *Hevea brasiliensis* in the rain forests of Amazonia. Some latex-producing trees could be found in the wilds of India, *Ficus elastica* for example, but this was found not to have a latex that could be used commercially.

Local people long knew the useful properties of Caoutchouc, as the rubber tree was called. Amazonian Indians used it to waterproof clothing and dwellings against the drenching downpours of the rainforest while the Aztecs and the Mayans used latex from such plants as *Castilla elastica* to create balls for their ritual ball games.

Untreated rubber does not travel very well as it becomes sticky in hot weather and brittle when cold. This limited its usefulness to the Western world until 1839 when Charles Goodyear discovered that by mixing sulphur and lead into rubber and heating it, it produced a material that stayed dry and flexible even at high and low temperatures. The process became known as vulcanisation after Vulcan, the god of fire. Soon rubber was being used to make everything from beds containing hot water to help the Welsh miners with hypothermia to elasticising fabrics and insulating undersea cables. By 1860, the price of rubber had reached an all-time high, approaching that of silver.

Seeking to avoid having to rely on South America for supplies of rubber, the British Government hatched a plan for generating its own supplies of the most valuable rubber yielding species, *Hevea brasiliensis*. The plan was to acquire seeds from South America and set up plantations in the colonies with suitable climates. The Government offered to pay one of Joseph Hooker's contacts, Henry Alexander Wickham, £10 for every one thousand seeds he could obtain of



A rubber plantation

Hevea brasiliensis and send to England (to Kew). He set out in 1876 and a note in the Kew archives dated 7 July 1886 tells of his success. "70,000 seeds of *Hevea brasiliensis* were received from Mr H A Wickham on June 15. They were all sown the following day and a few germinated four days later. About 2,700 have been potted on, not quite 4%. This may be considered the total number of plants as very few will germinate after this date. Many hundreds are 15 inches high and are in a vigorous, healthy state."

An earlier attempt to grow rubber trees in the Calcutta Botanical Gardens had failed because the climate was unsuitable so Hooker sent the plants to Ceylon (Sri Lanka). He dispatched 2,000 *Hevea brasiliensis* and 32 *Castilla elastica* to Dr H K Thwaites at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Peradeniya. They were planted out and were soon thriving. In due course some were transferred to the Henerarathgoda Botanical Gardens and latex tapping experiments began. By 1892 one specimen had grown to a circumference of almost two metres and had yielded 3.25kg of dry rubber in five years.

Hooker also sent plants to Singapore, Jamaica, Monserrate, Queensland and Cameroon. The 22 seedlings he sent to Singapore gave rise to 1200 seedlings. These plants were inherited by Henry Ridley when he took over the gardens in Singapore in 1888. Ridley found he could tap the plants every day and they would always produce the same amount of latex.

In 1907 when a vulcanising plant opened in Singapore to make tyres, some of the Botanical Garden's rubber was used to make the first tyres from cultivated rubber. Convinced that the demand for bicycle tyres and other goods would soon outstrip wild supply, Ridley filled the pockets of visiting dignitaries with seeds to plant around their houses.

By 1930, 1.2 million hectares of the Malay peninsula had come under rubber cultivation. The total world production of rubber that year was 821,815 tonnes, most of which came from the Malay peninsula. The next biggest share of 240,000 tonnes was from the Dutch East Indies with Sri Lanka producing 62,000 tonnes. Brazil only produced 17,137 tonnes. Today, much of the rubber that is still produced naturally rather than synthetically has its roots in the 22 seedlings that were grown from the Amazonian stock that Kew sent to Singapore in 1877.



Extraction of latex from a rubber tree



► Autumn is back with us again and there are dead leaves all over the place, including your roof and gutters. If you are not using a gutter-guard, make sure you keep the gutters clear as they can quickly fill up with dead leaves. Leaves can also fill the valleys on your roof which are harder to access, especially if you live in a double storey house.

Cleaning these is a job for the professionals.

► Autumn leaves are a wonderful asset for every garden so don't waste them. Rake them up off your lawn and your paths and put them in your compost bin where they will break down into a delicious compost for your garden. Alternatively, if you don't have a compost bin, you can put them into sacks and then into a shady part of your garden where they can slowly decompose, ready to put back on your garden in spring.

► Now is the time to plan for your spring garden. Most of the bulb nurseries will have their spring catalogues available now so start looking through these for ideas of what to get. Remember, in Sydney both daffodils and tulips are really only good the first year they are planted so ideally, they should be replaced each year. Sydney does simply not get cold enough to initiate a flower for a second year. The same applies to ranunculus and anemones, as well as crocus. Bluebells, however, are fine and can stay in the ground until they have used up all their space when they should be lifted and replanted.

► Now is also the time to look through the rose catalogues. Planting bare-rooted roses in about July is the very best and cheapest way to increase your rose collection. In Australia, we have some wonderful rose growers, mostly in Victoria or South Australia but we also have a good rose nursery here in Sydney. Dr Google will quickly find you these nurseries. You can also start preparing the area where you will be planting your new rose by digging in some compost and cow manure as well as a handful of lime. When the time comes to plant your new rose, all you have to do then is to pop it in. Wait until the leaves appear before applying any fertiliser.

► Now the grass is starting to slow down, it is time to give your lawn mower its annual inspection. The next time the tank is empty, don't refill it but give your mower a good look-over. Turn it upside down and check the blades to see if they need changing. Are they moving easily? Check that the blades still have plenty of life in them and are not badly worn. Have a look at the main blade housing. Is there any wear around the rim? If there is, you might need to fit a piece of metal to the rim to protect it when you are mowing near a path edge or gutter. Gently pull out the rip cord and check for wear. You don't want to have it break and wrap itself around your ears. Inspect your air cleaner paper filter and give it a good dust off with a brush. If it is very dirty, get a new one. Give the mower new spark plugs and this will make for easier starting. Mower blades can be awkward to remove if you don't have a good tool kit. Mower shops will do it for you but it is not particularly cheap.

► A lot of gardening equipment these days is operated by lithium batteries. If you are considering buying a battery-driven machine of any sort, make sure the price on the label includes the battery and charger. You would not be the first person to find that the battery and charger are extra, usually up to a \$100 or so.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



Question? I have been looking around for a decorative climbing vine to grow over a lattice frame. A friend suggested that I try a Virginia Creeper. As I don't want something that will run wild all over the place, what do you think about growing a Virginia Creeper, can it get away from me?

Answer: In a way your friend is right as a Virginia Creeper will put on an excellent show in autumn. However, if you do not keep a close eye on it, it can run riot and get into a lot of places where you do not want it like gutters and up into the eaves. If you do go ahead with it on a lattice frame, keep it cut back sufficiently so that you do not have to use a ladder to prune it.

Question? How can I blanch my celery? I understand the stalks will get lighter and sweeter if I do?

Answer: Blanching or whitening celery stalks is a time-honoured practice whereby the celery stalks are covered for two or three weeks before harvesting. This will lighten the colour and sweeten the flavour. Wrap the stalks with a light excluding barrier such as a brown paper bag or a few sheets of newspaper tied into place. Alternatively slip a cardboard milk carton that is open at both ends over the plant.

Question? Can I lift my dahlia tubers now that they have died right back?

Answer: Yes, carefully lift them out of the ground and give a gentle brush over with a paint brush to get rid of any loose soil. Get rid of any that look diseased. Store them in a cool dry place out of the sun such as in your garden shed where the air can circulate around them and pests like rats and mice cannot reach them.

Question? My stephanotis has lots of brown pods on it. Should I pick the pods now?

Answer: Yes, pick them now and put them in a paper bag. They will dry out and split. The seeds will stay in the bag and you will not have to hunt for them on the ground. They can be planted in spring.

Question? Can I add shredded paper from my computer to my compost heap?

Answer: Yes, but be careful do not add shredded glossy paper as there are some nasty chemicals in the glossy surface and usually it is waterproof and won't breakdown easily. Ordinary El Cheapo paper breaks down easily. Keep the compost nice and damp but not wet and turn it regularly.

Question? I have planted some Correa Dusky Bells. Will they bloom in the cold weather?

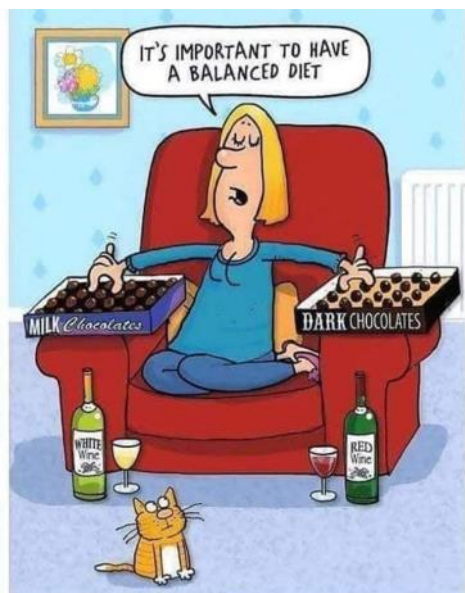
Answer: Yes, this is one of the reasons people value them so much as they put on a good show when most other plants are not flowering because of the cold weather. Correa also attract birds to your garden, they love them.

Question? A couple of weeks ago I went looking for some asparagus plants but could not find any. When do they become available?

Answer: It is a little bit early yet to buy asparagus crowns—they usually become available in late autumn. Asparagus are a perennial vegetable that can be harvested for many years once they are established. The main thing to remember when starting out growing them is that it will take three years before you get your first usable crop.

Question? How far apart should I space my spring onion seedlings?

Answer: 10cm is usually considered far enough. Dig lots of good well-rotted compost into the soil and keep the soil damp not wet.



Question? How will I know when my pumpkins are ready to harvest?

Answer: Check the colour—is it the nice rich colour that you would expect of the variety you have planted? Also, you can give it a tap and if it sounds hollow it will be ripe. Also, the skin of the pumpkin should be hard. Cut the pumpkin so that you are leaving about 2cm of stem on it and then store it in a cool and dry place until you are ready to use it.

Reverend Hugh