

HORTULANUS

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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. 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. Unfortunately, we did not discover any interesting places to visit over the next two months but hopefully more gardens will become available as we move into the autumn months next year, Covid-providing.

MEMBER NEWS

Garden Ramble: The Society is hoping to hold another Garden Ramble in March 2021 but we can only do this if members help us out by volunteering to open their gardens. Ideally, we would like three gardens within fairly close proximity of each other. Although preparing a garden for viewing can involve quite a lot of work, it does have its rewards as many of those jobs you have been putting off will now actually get done! Please contact the secretary, Christine, either by phone or email if you would like to become one of those intrepid people.

Wonderful news from Keith and Maureen Smith—they raised \$14,080 (a current record) from their Huge Plant Sale in aid of the National Breast Cancer Foundation. They did this by making appointments for interested people to visit over the past month which allowed them to abide by the Covid restrictions in place at the time. They deserve many congratulations on their magnificent effort. If you missed the visit by Costa and the Gardening Australia crew, here is a website you can visit to view it: <https://iview.abc.net.au/show/gardening-australia/series/31/video/RF1905V031S00>.

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 and helping members with problems they may be having in their garden. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2273344029640713>.

NEWS FROM THE SYDNEY ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS by Christine Rethers

If you haven't visited the RBG recently, maybe now is the time to do so. What a gem we have, set in its simply superb location on Sydney harbour! It is looking particularly well-spruced at the moment. A visit recently with several fellow KHS members took us to the Calyx for a talk by one of the horticulturists, Paul Nicholson. With the help of some of the wonderful specimens from the RBG's behind-the-scenes collections, Paul showed us the weird and wonderful ways different plants have devised to enable them to be pollinated. Orchids, in particular, often resort to deception to entice insects to their flowers. For some species, just a single kind of pollinating insect is able to perform the task. He discussed the notable features of many of rare and unusual plants displayed on the day including orchids, cacti and succulents, bromeliads and tillandsias (air plants), and aroids to name a few. The talk lasted for one hour and then we were then able to walk around the beautiful and colourful display in the rest of the Calyx. I hope this brief glimpse of what is available at the RBG will entice you to pay it a visit sometime soon. Paul Nicholson's talks are given on the second Thursday of each month and are free (other than a small donation to enter the Calyx). You can book in via the RBG's website.



SOME GARDEN GEMS - Plants and trees flowering now in Sydney gardens



Alloxylum flammeum (Queensland Tree Waratah)

This member of the Proteaceae family is a North Queensland rain-forest species that grows into a medium-sized tree. However, it also grows and flowers well in our area of NSW. It is best purchased as a grafted tree and flowers after about 4-5 years of growth. However, a seedling-grown plant will also flower but just takes a bit longer. They may also be successfully propagated from cuttings. The flowers are quite spectacular and provide a great attraction for native birds. It has no special requirements apart from an occasional watering when newly planted. Once established, the Tree Waratah will tolerate quite dry conditions and even the occasional light frost. It is currently listed as a vulnerable species in its native habitat due to

land clearing and logging. The tree in the picture is only five years old.



Petrea volubilis This is a species of vine sometimes known as the Sandpaper Vine because of its rough leaves, from Central America that grows well against a wall or trained onto a pergola in full sun if possible. It starts to bloom in early spring but will rebloom several times over the summer months so it is rarely without a flower until the onset of winter. On a well-established vine, the entire plant can be a sea of blue at the height of its flowering. When first planted, it needs a bit of protection from severe cold but when fully established it will tolerate the colder weather well. An occasional feed and some water in very dry conditions is all that it requires. Unfortunately, this is a plant that is sometimes hard to find in local nurseries. If this is the case, it is recommended that you have a look online at Queensland nurseries and see if they will ship one to you.



Sprekelia formosissima (Jacobean Lily) This is another plant from Central America that grows and flowers well in our area at this time of the year. It is part of the Amaryllidaceae family and can be described as a summer-flowering bulb.

Its flowers stand about 30cm above the ground and it will spread to form very attractive clumps in the garden. Again, it is not a fussy plant but will appreciate the occasional feed. Sprekelia are generally very drought-tolerant. Mass planted in the garden, they make a real impact when in flower. Dormant in winter. (All these photos were taken in the garden of one of our members, Smila Smithers. Many thanks, Smila, for letting us publish them and congratulations on such well-grown plants. Ed.)



THIS MONTH'S FEATURE PLANT—THE GLADIOLUS



A beautiful example of a hybrid gladiolus in the garden of KHS member, Fiona Arnott

The gladiolus that we are all most familiar with comes from South Africa but there are many other gladiolus species that originated in the Mediterranean region and Western Asia. There are about 300 species of gladiolus and some of these are well worth seeking out for your garden. However, bear in mind the modern gladiolus that you see in the garden centres is a hybrid. It has stiff sword like leaves surrounding a flower spike that appears in the spring and can be a metre or more high. If this is too high for you, there are dwarf forms available that are less than half that height. All flower spikes carry numerous blooms in a very wide colour range.

Special types: There is a great range of species and cultivars now available to add to the familiar hybrids. Baby gladioli or Painted Ladies (such as *Gladiolus colvillei*) only grow to 30 -40 cm high and come in a great range of colours including many with contrasting markings. Others worth seeking out include *Gladiolus tristis* with its pale creamy yellow flowers, *Gladiolus natalensis* with red to yellow flowers and *Gladiolus cardinalis* with its rich red flowers with white markings. If you are interested in growing some of these, enquire at your garden centre as to the whereabouts of a specialist gladiolus nursery that can supply you with corms or seed.



Gladiolus tristis

Various species flower at different times of the year, some in the spring while others will flower in the summer or autumn. While gladioli make a great display in the garden and are a major cut flower commercial crop, they can also be grown successfully as a pot plant by using the dwarf forms.

Climate: The suitability of the climate depends on the species you have chosen to grow. Most do well in both warm and cool districts but there are others that will also do well in the tropics. Gladioli grow best in full sun with protection from strong winds.

Soil: Gladioli should be planted in well-drained soil with a high organic content. Manure or compost should be well dug in and mixed up a month or more before planting.

Planting: Corms should be planted 8 to 10 cm down and about 15cm apart. In warm areas, corms can be planted from middle to late winter. In cool areas, plant from spring to early summer. Plant small cormels that are not full planting size separately about 2-3cm apart and the same depth. Species gladioli can be grown from seed sown in the spring. The main catch with growing from seed is that it takes 2-3 years before you get flowers.

Fertilising: In soils that have been enriched with organic matter, supplementary feeding should not be necessary. In poorer soils, mix a complete plant food through the soil before planting.

Watering: Water well after planting and then do NOT water again until leaves start to appear. During the period of growth and flowering, give the plants a thorough weekly watering.

Problems: Thrip can be a problem as they suck sap from the foliage and flowers and can be a perennial problem in some areas, especially where it is warm. Deep coloured flowers show the damage more readily than the lighter colours. In bad cases, spray the plants with an insecticide such as Natrasoap, Confidor, Baythroid or Mavrik. Because several diseases can attack the corms, gladioli should not be planted in the same place every year. Plant only sound healthy corms and discard any with soft or dark spots. To help avoid any problems the corms can be dipped in a disinfectant solution before you plant them.

Cutting: Cut the spikes needed for indoor decoration when the second flower on the spike is opening. Cut the flower stem without removing the leaves if that is possible. Change the water in the vase daily and remove the lower blooms from the spikes as they fade.

After flowering: After flowering lift the corms as soon as the foliage begins to yellow. Cut off the old leaves close to the corm and dry the corms in a warm dry and airy place for 2-3 weeks. Clean the corms by removing the old roots and the outer sheath of the corm. To increase your stock of gladiolus, remove the small cormels from the parent bulb and store them separately. These cormels will produce full size corms that will flower in their second year. If thrips are bad in your area, it would be wise to dust the corms with an insecticidal dust before storing them. A light dusting of wettable sulphur would do the trick.



Gladiolus byzantinus



► From now on the temperature is only going to go one way and that is up and your lawn grass is going to do the same thing. So, it's out with the mower and have a look at the blades - you want to cut the grass, not tear it. If they need changing, do so or take it to your mower shop and have them change them for you. Raise the blades one

notch as longer grass will keep the soil moist longer and you won't have to water the lawn so much. It will also suppress weeds such as oxalis and bindii.

► Water your garden early in the morning to avoid encouraging mildew but if you have to water in the afternoon, leave enough time before dark for the moisture to dry off the leaves. This reduces the risk of mildew or other fungi attacking the leaves and you won't have to fight off any mosquitoes that happen to be about. Mildew will often attack roses, pumpkin, melons, zucchini and cucumber. Spray these plants with a solution made from one-part cow's milk and 10 parts water. This remedy won't reverse mildew damage but it is an effective preventative. Alternatively, you can use Eco fungicide

► If you have any citrus, banksia, camellia, grevillea or azalea, go for a walk around them and check the leaves. If any of them are showing signs of being stunted and mottled, there is a very good chance there is a shortage of iron in the soil. Get hold of a packet of iron chelates from your garden centre. It is not expensive and is a form of iron that the plants can take up easily. It will take about a month for results to start to show.

► Have you got a bed of young plants that are just starting to come along nicely? They will need protection from the hot sun over the next couple of months. Rig up a shade cloth screen over them. Shade cloth comes in various grades starting at 50% which means it cuts back 50% of the sun. A few garden stakes driven in around the bed to hang the shade cloth off is a simple matter. The shade cloth can be tied to the bottom of the stakes and this will also help to keep the insects off if you are growing young vegetables. At the end of the growing season you can always salvage the shade cloth and stakes to use again next year.

► Have you had a look in your compost bin recently? If it is ready to use then now is the time to use it. Put a good thick layer of compost and mulch over that area of your garden that will be exposed to the hot sun over the next couple of months. Give the beds a good deep watering before you spread it.

► Many people have the popular Robyn Gordon grevillea in their garden. It flowers all year round but the flowers die back over time. Clip off all the old dead flowers and this will encourage the plant to put out more flowers.

► Keep an eye out for the African black beetle and the brown Argentinian scarab beetle at this time of the year. Just knock them off your plant and squash them before they have a chance to lay their eggs..

► Time to give your roses a good clean up. Clear out all those leaves and rubbish from under your floribunda roses as they will only harbor nasty bugs and fungi. Put the rubbish in the garbage bin not the compost heap. A good thick layer of organic mulch will keep the rose roots cool during the coming hot weather. Give the rose plant a good prune back by about one third and this will encourage flowers in the New Year. Foliar feed once a fortnight with one of the good seaweed fertilisers. This will encourage healthy growth and a burst of new flowers.

► Have you got an irrigation system? Give it a good cleaning up as you are going to need it over the next 3-4 months. Clean all the filters, both on the pump and the inline ones. When you are satisfied that the pump is working properly, turn it on fully and follow your drip or sprinkler lines to make sure everything is working properly. Replace any fittings that are not working. They are cheap enough to buy. Close attention to the system's fittings will save a lot of trouble with your plants. A dead plant is not the way to find out you have a problem with your irrigation system. If your timer runs on a battery, check this too and change the battery if necessary. Batteries are not expensive.

► If you have plants growing under the eaves of a roof, check them regularly for moisture in the soil. Plants growing under eaves quite frequently miss out on the water from those short sharp showers that we get in the summer. Keep the water up to them and don't let them dry out on you.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



Question? I have a Strawberry Sundae hybrid grevillea shrub. It is a good healthy shrub but it does not want flower. How can I get it to flower?

Answer: There are a couple of possible causes for it not wanting to flower. The first is that it is not getting sufficient light. This is often a problem when grevillea are planted

under a tree and they have to compete for light, water and nutrients. This leads to vegetative growth as the shrub strives to reach the sun. The shrub could also be getting too much nitrogen either from too much nitrogen-rich fertiliser or naturally rich soil. Try adding some sulphate of potash to tip the nutrient balance toward flowering.

Question? We have a large wisteria growing on a frame but the frame has rotted and is collapsing. The shrub is too heavy to lift but we wish to keep it. Have you any suggestions?

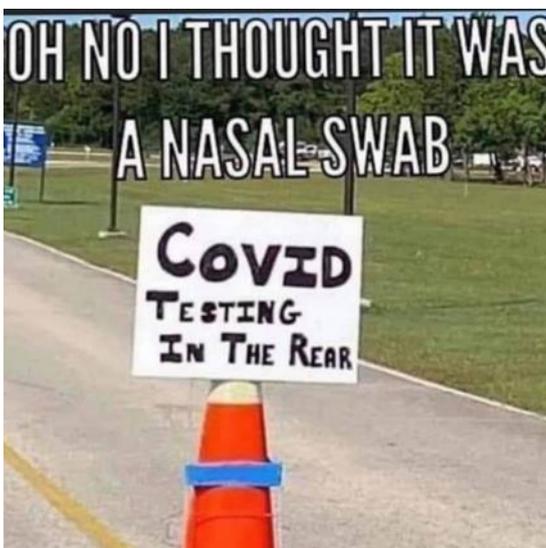
Answer: First you have to bite the bullet and cut the shrub right back so that it is manageable. The cuttings can go into the compost. You won't get many flowers next year. When you build your new frame, use the best treated timber and galvanised bolts. Use steel footings set in concrete to hold the uprights. The more work you put into the frame, the longer it will last. Wisteria is a vigorous shrub and should get a regular prune each year so that it does not get away from you again.

Question? I have just had my first crop of Protea flowers and they put on a beautiful show. Now all the flowers are dead so when can I remove them and how far back do I cut them?

Answer: Proteas flower well towards the end of winter but by now will need pruning. Cut the dead flowers off about 20cm behind the dead flower. This will encourage the branches to spread out and the plant to bush up.

Question? I am having trouble with my rhubarb. Some go yellow after planting, others grow well for a few months then go yellow with purple patches on the leaves. Then the stalks go limp and the plant dies 2-3 days later.

Answer: You have just given a good description of a fungal disease called Aliernaria which attacks leafy crops, especially those that come from cool climates. Rhubarb likes a cool moist summer (not the warm moist summer we get here in Sydney). Near perfect drainage is needed for plants to escape fungal attack during moist conditions above 27 degrees. You could also try growing your rhubarb in 30cm pots and put them somewhere protected from the western sun. Water well on alternate days. Go easy on high nitrogen fertilisers. If you are using mulch and manure, don't let this touch the base of your plant. Rhubarb should be lifted and moved to a different place every four or five years. Prepare the new patch well with plenty of cow manure and compost about a month before moving your rhubarb. They are best moved in late winter.



Regards
Hugh