

HORTULANUS

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

MAY 2021



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COMING EVENTS

4 May **KHS Meeting**, St Ives Community Hall, Memorial Avenue, St Ives. 7pm for a 7.30pm start

Gardens/events that will be available in May include:

Wild Meadows, 243a Coxs River Rd, Little Hartley 22/23 May 9-4pm

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

1 June **KHS Meeting**, St Ives Community Hall, Memorial Avenue, St Ives. 7pm for a 7.30pm start

MEMBER NEWS

For our first meeting since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, we ask you to observe the following requirements:

- If you are feeling at all unwell, please do not attend.
- Please sign in at the front desk, preferably using your own pen. This is for insurance purposes.
- If you are able, please use the QR code that is displayed on the way in.
- The chairs in the hall will be spaced at 1.5m. Please do not move them.
- Hand sanitisers will be supplied at several places in the hall—please use them.
- The wearing of masks is not mandatory but you are welcome to do so if you wish.
- Please make sure you observe social-distancing at all times.
- At supper, we will serve tea or coffee at the counter and individually-wrapped cakes and biscuits will be available on the table. Please observe social distancing when waiting to be served and around the supper table.

As required by the NSW Government, we have drawn up a Covid Safety plan, a copy of which is being sent with this newsletter. Our Covid Safety Officer is Doreen Clark.

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

Front desk—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

For these jobs need you to be available before the official start of the meeting (say between 6.30 and 7pm). Don't forget, if you are new to KHS this is a very good and quick way to get to know your fellow members and we can't function the way we would like without your help. If you would like to be involved, please email Christine (khs.secretary@gmail.com) or phone on 9449 6245.

Speakers:

For our first meeting in over 14 months, we have two guest speakers coming. The first will be Lorraine Emerson who is the new president of Garden Clubs of Australia. She will bring us up-to-date on the big restructuring of the organisation that has taken place in the past few months and also tells us about the GCA Biennial Convention which will be taking place in Townsville in September.

The second speaker will be Jeremy Critchley of The Green Gallery, a wholesale nursery located in Dural. Jeremy is a delightful young man who has built up a large and thriving plant business from scratch as he will no doubt tell us. He has appeared on Better Homes and Gardens and is currently involved in supplying the plants that comprise the green wall in the Calyx in the Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens. In addition, he also supplies and cares for all the plants in the planter boxes in the Sydney CBD. These are most impressive with a wide variety of interesting plants including herbs such as parsley. Jeremy will bring along a selection of plants including indoor plants for us to buy.

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

After the successful visit to the Hunter Valley Gardens, we are now planning a 1-day trip in the Sydney area in late August/early September to Auburn Botanic Gardens to see the beautiful Japanese garden and cherry blossoms, the E G Waterhouse Camellia Garden, Caringbah and a visit to one or two private gardens in the area. We will be able to give more details closer to the time.

SHOW BENCH

The new Show Bench Point Score competition for this year starts with the May meeting and finishes with the December meeting. The Show Bench schedule is attached so have a good look at it and bring in some of the lovely things you have growing in your garden. For new members, we have two Show Bench stewards who are there to give you any help you may need—you just need to ask.

GARDEN TABLE

The Garden Table will be operating at this meeting so we encourage you to bring in any cuttings or spare plants you have potted up recently, bare-rooted rhizomes, bulbs and the like. These are sold at very reasonable prices and the proceeds go to help your Society.

RAFFLE

The Society always provides an interesting plant for the raffle but we encourage you to contribute also by bringing in something nice from your garden, books, garden accessories and the like. However, please remember these should be something you would like to win yourself so should be of good quality. The tickets are 3 for \$2 and the proceeds go to help your Society.

GROWING BROMELIADS INDOORS

The main requirement to grow bromeliads indoors is access to light. To achieve a good shape and colour, they need to be placed in a well lit room or near a window with a warm sunny outlook. Low light or a dark corner will cause most bromeliads to slowly lose their colour and the leaves will become distorted. In addition, low light can make it difficult to get your bromeliads to flower inside the house. An ideal compromise is to grow your bromeliads outside and bring them into the house when they are coming into flower and that way, they will look their most attractive. One way to overcome the problem of not having enough light is to use artificial lighting. Special plant raising fluorescent lights can be bought from lighting companies or nurseries together with the instructions for their use. These special lights emit light at wave lengths that are very similar to those of daylight. They have proven to give good results when it comes to producing good colour, shape and blooms. Placement of the lights is governed by the intensity of the light required. The lights can be left on for 12 – 18 hours a day, either controlled by a timer or manually.

Another requirement for bromeliads is humidity. Most homes today have some form of heating in the winter and cooling in the summer and both will dry out the atmosphere. This problem can easily be fixed by sitting each pot or container on a layer of pebbles in a saucer and keeping it moist. A daily misting in summer is also beneficial.

A terrarium is another method to grow these humidity loving plants. Cryptanthus will do very well when grown this way because of the high humidity. Old fish tanks or wide see-through containers will also work. Fill the bottom with a layer of gravel or a similar medium then top up with a good porous potting mix, preferably one with charcoal in it. Place the plants in it and artistically position a piece of driftwood or a few rocks to enhance the bromeliad landscape. Keep the growing medium moist and mist the plants occasionally. Do not cover the top of the terrarium as they need fresh air as well.

The genera that adapt most successfully to indoor living relatively speaking are the Cryptanthus, Nidularium, Guzmania, Neoregelia and Aechmea. These are mainly the big coloured soft leaf bromeliads. Cryptanthus can brighten up your kitchen or bathroom with a few of them placed on a windowsill. Neoregelia carolinae tri-colour looks dramatic on a low coffee table especially at flowering time when it is flushed with crimson. A similar plant, Aechmea fasciata, looks striking with its beautiful pink inflorescence and blue flowers peeping out of its urn-like form. Nidularium does not need as much light as other bromeliads. In their natural state they grow down on the floor of the jungle and are usually in heavy shade so these plants are used to the poor light and do well inside a house where the light is limited. They do however require more humidity.



Cryptanthus



Guzmania



Neoregelia



Aechmea fasciata



Nidularium

Bromeliads require lots of fresh air so try to place them where they will receive good air circulation. It is a good idea to take them outside occasionally and give them a good gentle hose down every month or so get rid of the dust and any pests. They will reward you by looking clean, healthy and vibrant.

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



► Winter has arrived and the morning temperature has gone down into single figures. The weeds are happy and are starting to sprout all over the place. If it is not raining, it is time to put the winter woollies on, take a firm grip on the weeding tools and go out to wage war on all those weeds that have come up over the last few weeks. Weeds, as you

well know, are the fastest growing plants in your garden.

► Winter grass is fast growing and easily removed with a hand fork. If yours has started to go to seed, be careful and try not to spread any of these seeds or you could be wasting your time. Remember the old saying – one year's seeding means seven years weeding. Oxalis is best removed by hand as it is usually low enough for the mower to miss it when mowing. Take a minute or so to search out the tap root and get the whole plant. Don't leave part of the tap root behind it will only shoot again.

► Look closely for Bindii and again find the tap root before trying to lift it. Kids appreciate the removal of Bindii as its spikes hurt their and your bare feet. Thistles should be removed carefully before they go to seed. Each of those little 'parachutes' have a seed attached to them and can drift a long way around your garden. Thistles are easily dug out, just make sure you get the lot. Most weeds can be removed by using a hand weeder. Certain weeds should not be dug out but poisoned. Onion weed is one of these as it sets a lot of small bulbils and you will be sure to miss some if you dig them out. Another is Mullumbimby couch. It can have a tap root up to a couple of metres long and can reshoot quickly. Spray with a glyphosate product and this will kill most weeds. Large weeds should be dug out as if you pull them out, you usually break the tap root and leave part of it behind. Digging weeds out can be a job that makes your back ache from bending down. Go along to Bunnings and have a look at the range of gardener's seats. You might find one that helps.

► Do you have a large area of paving that has gone green and is slippery and is getting a bit dangerous? It is time to clean it. Probably the best way to clean it is with a water blaster such as a Karcher. Burning does not do a good job and chemicals quite often stain the pavers so wait for a warm day and use your water blaster. They range in price from \$150 upwards. For high up areas like gutters, there are extension tubes that can be bought and a three-metre extension made up.

► At this time of the year there are usually lots of dead dry leaves about and blocking your gutters. A good light tool for cleaning under the edge of the tiles of a valley gutter is a hand operated pole saw. They are very light and the saw tip has a large flat hook on it which is only a couple of millimeters thick so that it can be laid on its side and slid under the edge of valley gutter tiles to clean out the accumulated rubbish that could divert water under the edge of the tile. This can be done without having to get onto the roof. The pole is usually about three metres long.

► Have you got some well-established camellias? Have a look around the base of the trunk as quite a few camellias set seed at this time of the year and with the damp weather we have had it should not surprise you to find a bunch of young seedlings coming up. Lift them and pot them up as they make good presents and cost virtually nothing. You never know, you might get a brand-new hybrid.

► Lawns in general will be slowing right down from now on so give them one last mow. Don't forget the edges, then mix the grass clippings with some nonglossy paper from your shredder and dump the lot into your compost heap. Water well with some water that has had a good dollop of molasses mixed in it then give the heap a good turn over. In about a week the heap should be getting nice and hot which will speed up the compost making process before it cools down after a week or two.

► Many of your larger shrubs will be dropping a lot of leaves at this time of the year which can go straight into the compost heap. You can then go and check your shrub for diseased or rotten timber. If you find it and it is not too bad, cut it back to either the trunk or a major branch. Try to leave good clean timber where you have cut, don't just rip off branches. Keep an eye out for any pests or diseases that might have been hiding under the bark. A large screwdriver can be used to test if the bark is loose. If it is, get rid of it and see what is going on underneath. Now that you can reach the base of the trunk where it goes into the ground, give the trunk a good poke in several places with your screwdriver. If you find rotten timber, make a closer investigation and if you find more rotten timber consider if the shrub or tree is worth saving. This applies particularly if it is a tree we are talking about. It is advisable to call in an arborist if you value the shrub or tree.

► One for the cacti growers - for those of you who have cacti outside growing in pots, it is time to consider moving them to a warmer place like against a brick wall that gets the sun for a few hours every day, the wall will act like a

heat bank and keep your cacti relatively warm. Also put your cacti pots on blocks to get them off the ground. This not only lets them drain well but also reduces their risk of getting too cold. During winter the cacti go dormant so ease right off with the watering as usually rain that we get during the winter is more than enough for your cacti until things in the spring start to liven them up again.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



Question? I wish to grow a Kentia palm in a pot. Is this possible and can I move it indoors?

Answer: Kentia palms are a bit on the slow side to grow and can stay in a pot for quite a long time - up to 12 years. If you intend to keep the palm in the pot then I suggest that you get two large pots one larger than the other. Plant your palm in the smaller one then put the smaller one inside the larger one. This way you will be able to keep your palm cool. Kentia palms do well indoors but a spell outside in a shady spot every 3-4 months would be much appreciated. This way the plant will get a wash when it rains. When you have it inside, poke your finger into the soil at least once a week. The soil should be damp but not wet. When the plant is inside, keep it off the floor and out of drafts.

Question? I have had a shrub appear in my back yard recently that I have never seen before and it is growing quite fast. The flower looks like a white hibiscus with a dark centre. It is about a metre high and a metre wide. It looks nice but at the rate it is spreading it could become a pest. What is it and should I get rid of it?

Answer: This is a good description of *Pavonia hastata*, a member of the Hibiscus family. It is often found along roadsides and on wasteland. To keep it under control, remove the flower head before it sets seed as it can become very weedy. Chip out the plant with either a hoe or a mattock then put down a good layer of mulch on the cleared area. Keep an eye on any cleared area and pull out any that reappears. *Pavonia* spreads by seed so don't give it a chance to get established.

Question? I have had a clump of mushrooms come up in a damp shady corner of my back yard. How do I know if they are safe to eat?

Answer: Don't try them. The difference in appearance between a poisonous mushroom and an edible one can be very little at times. You are better off buying them from Woolworths where only cultivated mushrooms are sold.

Question? I have used one of the seaweed extracts quite successfully for many years but recently I heard that seaweed extracts are not fertilisers. Is this true?

Answer: Yes, when a seaweed extract is applied to the soil it activates and stimulates the myriad soil organisms and then these make whatever nutrients may be available in the soil more readily available to the plants. The resulting improvement in plant growth may give the impression that the seaweed has a fertilising ability but in fact it demonstrates that good healthy soil on its own can produce good strong growth in plants.

Question? I have heard about Zeolite in the past but do not know what it does or how to use it.

Answer: It is a mineral mined in Australia and because of its honeycomb structure, when added to the soil it improves its ability to hold essential nutrients. Perlite is a somewhat similar material that can be used for similar purposes.

Question? The new growth that is forming on the top of my backyard palm tree is not looking very happy at all. It is all limp and bending over and looks like it could be dying? Is there anything I can do about it? The palm is about four metres high.

Answer: By the sounds of it, it would appear the palm is under attack by the fungal disease *Phytophthora* which is preventing movement of sap and nutrients up to the top of the palm. Make up a solution of Fongarid and water. Follow the directions and spray it right up into the crown of the palm. Make sure you use enough to have it run down the trunk. Then make up a second batch and drench the soil around the base of the palm tree. If you are lucky, you may be able to save your palm.

Question? I have a patch of small bright yellow flowers appearing in a back corner of my garden. There are about a dozen narrow petals on the flowers. The flowers look quite nice. What are they?

Answer: This is the Fireweed and you should definitely get rid of it before it starts to spread everywhere. This weed is spread by seed so it is good practice to cut off the flower heads and bag them before you start to remove the plant.

Ideally Fireweed should be removed before the seed producing stage is reached as it can produce 30,000 seeds in one season. The seeds are mostly spread by the wind, animals and birds.



Regards
Hugh