

HORTULANUS

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

APRIL 2019



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Treasurer: Robyn Brown (0408 295 601)

Website: www.khsgardenclub.org.au

MEETINGS COMMENCE AT 7.30PM
ST IVES COMMUNITY HALL, MEMORIAL AVE, ST IVES

COMING EVENTS

- Mar 30/ Apr 14 Botanica Art Exhibition, Lion Gate Lodge, Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens Enq. 9231 8182
- Apr 2 APRIL MEETING: Kate Stanley—'All about Roses'
- Apr 6/7 Concord Garden Club's Autumn Flower Show, Concord Community Centre Enq. 9743 3402
- Apr 6/7 Collectors' Plant Fair, Hawkesbury Race Club, Clarendon. Enq. convenor@collectorsplantfair.com.au
- Apr 6/7 Westleigh Native Plants (Brian Roach), 47 Eucalyptus Drive, Westleigh—Open Day 9.30am-3.30pm
- Apr 11 Garden Design Series, Tattersalls Club, Sydney—Andrew Laidlaw, speaker Enq. 9231 8182
- Apr 27/28 Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens—Autumn Gardens Weekend, 9-4pm Enq. 4861 4899
- Apr 28 Maureene and Keith Smith's Huge Plant Sale, 45 Parklands Ave, Lane Cove North from 10am
- May 7 MAY MEETING: Stewart McPherson—'Plant Hunting with a Camera'

Hi

It was a hot and humid night for our March Meeting with all doors open and the ventilation full on and working hard. Some 76 enthusiastic members and friends turned out to enjoy themselves with friends and fellow gardeners. Our President opened the meeting, and welcomed new members Tony and Jan Wilkinson, Beth Bunyan and Janice Ho.

MEMBER NEWS

Garden Clubs of Australia with whom we are affiliated would like to survey the membership with a view to providing additional services for their over 700 affiliates other than just the *Our Garden* magazine and their national insurance scheme. To this end, we have been asked to survey our membership. When you sign at our April meeting in you will be asked to provide some very basic information – gender, age range, gardening experience and garden type. This will be totally anonymous. We will collate this information and send it to Garden Clubs of Australia. No other body or organisation is involved.

Vice President Ted Shaw drew members attention to our Website which is currently under redevelopment. He would like to hear from any member who has had experience in setting up a website and would be willing to give advice or lend a hand. If you are such a person, please contact Ted Shaw on 9979 3930.

OUTINGS

Toowoomba Trip (23-26 September): Travel and accommodation reservations have been confirmed for the 33 KHS members and friends who booked and paid a deposit for this trip by the close-off date. Thank you for the great response. If you have not booked but would like to be included on a waiting list in case someone is not able to come, please see Helen Gilkes at a meeting or phone her on 9144 4826.

Southern Highlands Trip—Thursday, 24 October 2019: The Society is booked in to visit Retford Park, Red Cow Farm and a private garden (still to be confirmed). Bookings for this outing will open at the August meeting but expressions of interest can be given to Helen Gilkes at a meeting or by phone (9144 4826).

TRADING TABLE

There were numerous bargains to be had on the Trading Table this month with plenty of interesting plants for sale including salvias, coleus, succulents and begonias plus some other rare and unusual species. A sincere 'thank-you' to Alison Wood, Patricia Gibson and Viv Lowther who ran it so expertly. The next members' Trading Table will be at the October meeting.

SHOW BENCH

The Show Bench was quite well supported, considering the very warm and dry weather we have been experiencing over the past couple of months. The dahlias were rated a special mention, the rose classes were well supported and the fuchsia were still putting on a good show. Pumpkins are also doing well with a couple of fine pumpkins on show. The Decorative section had some excellent exhibits, especially in the Culinary Delights class. There was a shortage of judges and Judith Williamson kindly stepped into the breach. Christine Rethers asked if anyone would like to consider becoming a judge. The requirements for judging include a good knowledge of the Show Bench booklet (which is sent to every new member) and an interest in learning the art of judging. Each new recruit undergoes a period of apprenticeship when they go on the job with an experienced member of the judging panel. Please let Christine know at a meeting if you are interested in becoming involved.

RAFFLE

We had five prizes on offer this month. The Zonal Geranium 'The Pinks' was purchased by your Society from Honeysuckle Nursery in Turramurra. In addition there were two packets of Mr Fothergill's Cosmos seeds. The book 'Paradis Found' and some gardening gloves were donated by Christine Rethers, thank you Christine. These are good and useful prizes but you have to give the man at the door \$2 to get three tickets. All money goes to your Society, so step right up.

MAIN SPEAKER MARCH



Doug Rickard was the main speaker and his topic was 'Getting to Know the Soil in your Backyard'. Doug first took us through a simple description of the chemistry of the soil which highlighted why soil composition was of major importance to plants. Then Doug pointed out the four things we should know about our soils: the type of soil we have got; how well it drains; its pH; if it has any nutrient deficiencies. He tackled each of these points in turn.

Finding out what type of soil you have got: Soils are a mixture of sand, silt and clay particles and the percentages of each determines your soil type. He then went on to explain how to test your soil to find out which type you have. If you have a sandy soil, these can be improved by the addition of compost. However, if your soil has a high percentage of clay, you may need

to dig in some gypsum, clay breaker or sand, as well as compost.

Finding out how well your soil drains: Doug again went through a description of checking the drainage of your soil which will tell you whether you should raise the garden bed, add more organic matter or sand to improve drainage, make a pond or just plant lots of plants that like wet feet.

Finding the pH of your soil: The best way is to use a simple pH test kit (which can be obtained from your local garden centre). The best kit is the one which uses a colour card to test the acidity or alkalinity of your soil. The neutral level is 6.5 to 7.5 which suits the vast majority of garden plants. There are of course, acid-loving plants such as plants in the Ericaceae family which includes all our Azaleas and plants that prefer an alkaline soil such as Daphne, Lilies, Clematis and Geraniums. To bring acidic soils back towards neutral, the addition of dolomite lime will help and to neutralize an alkaline soil, sulphur or aluminum sulphate will help.

Finding out if your soil has a nutrient deficiency: The plants themselves will tell you if your soil is lacking nutrients. The three primary nutrients are nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus. A lack of nitrogen will result in yellowing, stunting and premature maturity, showing first in the oldest leaves. A lack of potassium will result in scorched margins and spots surrounded by paler areas, showing first in the oldest leaves. A lack of phosphorus results in stunted growth and smaller leaves. There are also a number of secondary nutrients and micronutrients and Doug provided us with a table showing what happens when any of these are deficient.

Doug left us with a handout outlining the main points in his talk. If you were not at the meeting and would like a copy, please contact the Secretary (khs.secretary@gmail.com).

Main Speaker April: This will be Kate Stanley, an expert rose grower, who will speak to us about 'Growing Roses'. We all love roses and Kate has promised us a very different kind of presentation—should be most interesting!

MEMBER SPEAKER March

Our Member Speaker was Bob Ballinger. Bob and his wife Sue, both keen heritage rose growers, recently attended the 14th Heritage Rose Society Conference in Perth. Besides the Conference there were a number of side trips to visit many of the members' gardens in the south west corner of Western Australia where the climate is warm and there is a reasonable rainfall. Bob presented a fine collection of photos of the many rose gardens visited. Many of these gardens were quite large covering more than an acre of ground and were full of a wide range of roses. The trip went from Perth south to Albany by an inland route and returned to Perth via a more coastal route. Bob and Sue were able to name most of the roses, no mean feat given the great number of different roses they saw. Bob remarked on the warm hospitality shown by the country-folk during their trip. Sounds like they had a wonderful time.

Member Speaker April: This will be Sue Sharp who will tell us about her country garden. Sue and her husband presently have a property in Cowra and Sue has developed from scratch not just one but two large country gardens.

FEATURE PLANT—THE BEGONIA

Begonias come in a number of different groupings, each of which require more or less the same sort of growing conditions. The first and largest are the **tree begonias** which in contrast to other begonias need to be grown outside. They have erect and almost bamboo-like stems without branches. They are good sturdy outdoor shrubs with many of them producing spectacular clumps of large flowers and a long flowering period.



Bedding Begonias

Shrub begonias: True to their name these begonias are bushy in their growth. They produce many branches which can be pinched out to maintain the shape of the shrub. They make excellent outdoor shrubs in the garden.

Thick-stemmed begonias: As the name implies these begonias have thick stems right from the ground up. The stems can be short or tall with some of them tapering towards the top. They are usually grown in pots.

Rhizomatous begonias: This is the largest branch of the family with hundreds of species and hybrids. They have rhizomes (soft fleshy thickened stems) running along the surface of the soil, producing roots on the underside.

Semperflorens: Many gardeners know these begonias as Wax Flower plants or Bedding Begonias. Semperflorens are bushy plants with erect succulent stems and glossy leaves. They have a long flowering season and are ideal for garden borders or window boxes. However, they are usually treated as annuals and need to be replaced each year.

Rex begonias: These beautiful plants are actually rhizomatous begonias but because of their distinctive foliage have been put in a class of their own.

Trailing or Scandent begonias: This class of begonia grows best in a hanging basket in a shade house. They are relatively easy to grow and produce trailing branches which can be pruned back lightly after flowering.

Growing soil: If grown outside some of the more hardy begonias will grow in good garden soil that drains well and has a slightly acid pH. The pH of the soil should be checked every 6 months as the regular use of fertilisers can change the level of acidity. Begonias do not like heavy soil with clay mixed into it so lighten up this type of soil with lots of compost. Most important is that the growing mix is free draining as begonias hate wet feet. Begonias will grow well in a mix of sharp sand and peat moss or any other humus-rich material to which some good quality fertiliser for flowers and some Trace Elements can be added. If you are buying your potting mix, make sure it is a top of the line mix and that it meets Australian Standards. Look for a premium red tick potting mix.

Fertilisers: Many kinds of fertilisers can be used. Well-rotted cow manure is a good one, blood and bone also works well. If using a water soluble fertiliser, use it at half strength. Slow release pellets like Osmocote or Nutricote are also suitable for begonias. Begonias growing outside should be fertilised during periods of active growth.

Watering: All begonias like to grow in soil that is a bit on the dry side. Let the potting mix or garden soil almost dry out between waterings. If your garden soil is well drained as it should be, your begonias should be able to cope with rain. However if they show signs of root rot due to the rain, raise the bed a bit if you can, otherwise try to open up the soil with some fine gravel, NOT limestone chips as they will change the pH of the soil.



► Do you have a bag of tulip bulbs sitting out in the garden shed waiting to be planted out? Now is the time to start negotiations for space in the vegetable draw of your refrigerator. Tulip bulbs have to be convinced that they are passing through a period of very cold weather over the next 6 weeks to replicate the climate of the northern hemisphere region where they originated. Our winter is too warm to initiate the growing and flowering process properly.

► Annuals can be given a boost with a good drink of Aquasol or Thrive. Do not use these liquid fertilisers on your camellias or azaleas they are very high in nitrogen and this will encourage the growth of foliage not flowers which is certainly not what you want. Check the fertilisers in the garden centre that are made specifically for camellias and azaleas. The nitrogen content should be in the range of 4-6.

► Many of us have plants that are growing in large heavy pots and tubs that are not easy to move. Give the soil a good turn over and dig in lots of compost and cow manure but be careful with the roots as they could be closer to the surface than you think. Scatter some general purpose slow release fertiliser over the soil and work it in. Cover it with a layer of mulch and water well.

► The drainage of tubs or pots should be checked at least once a year. Tilt the pot or tub over on an angle and slip a couple of pieces of wood under it so it won't drop down and catch your fingers. You can feel the condition of the drainage hole, or alternatively slip a mirror under the pot. You can clear a blocked hole with a small sharp knife. If you wish to get the tub or pot permanently off the ground, slip a couple of pavers or house bricks under it. You can also use pot feet that you will find in your garden centre.

► Have you been growing dahlias and have a fine show of flowers? If you keep dead heading them, they will promptly produce some more flowers for you. This process can go on for quite a long time before the cold weather comes along and your plant decides it has had enough and starts to die down.

► Are you looking for a small tree that will give you a colourful foliage display in the autumn garden? For colour you can't go past a Rhus tree, they are magnificent. The one to look for is Rhus typhina, the Staghorn Sumac. Warning: don't even think of Rhus (Toxicodendron) succedaneum as most people get a violent reaction when they come in contact with it. An alternative is the Chinese Pistachio tree whose leaves are almost the same colour. Neither tree grows very tall. To get a better idea of what is available, go along to your garden centre and ask to see their Flemings Tree Catalogue. They will be happy to show it to you and get in your choice.

► Keep an eye out for powdery mildew. It is out and about at this time of the year. It is a fungus that looks like a white powder and it can travel on the wind to attack many plants. At first signs, spray the affected plant(s) with either Triforine or Mancozeb Plus fungicide, don't let it get away from you.



Question? We have moved into a new house and for the last 6 months I have been trying to get a garden going along the front of the house and under some bay windows. Twice now I have planted camellias but in each case they have failed to take. I dug in a lot of compost but still they failed to grow. What is going wrong?

Answer: Check the pH of your soil, it should be a bit on the acid side. I think what has happened is some of the builder's wet concrete has got mixed up with the surrounding soil and it has become very alkaline. Camellias are acid lovers and would not take kindly to soil that is strongly alkaline. Try scattering wettable sulphur at the rate of 50gm per square metre and water it in well. Check the pH in midwinter and repeat if necessary.

Question? I have a pine tree down the back and something that looks like a big bunch of hair is hanging off one of the branches. It is about 50cm long and looks quite interesting. What is it and should I get rid of it?

Answer: This sounds suspiciously like a mistletoe. Mistletoe is a parasite and if left in place, will kill the branch and eventually the tree. It sends its roots into the branch and along the trunk and gets its food from the tree. Cut the branch off near the trunk. Mistletoe seeds are brought by birds and there is such a thing as a mistletoe bird that is small and quite attractive.

Question? I would like to grow a Firewheel tree (Stenocarpus sinuatus)? How tall do they grow?

Answer: The Firewheel tree is narrow-growing but fairly tall Queensland rainforest tree, reaching in time to about 20 metres in height. Don't plant it near the fence line as a fair bit of it could finish on your neighbour's side. Plant it 5-6 metres from a fence in full sun. It will flower in Sydney from February to about April. Firewheel trees are low maintenance but a drink of water every now and then in the summer will be appreciated and produce more flowers (which the nectar-eating birds just love).

Question? Can I plant strawberries now? I love them.

Answer: Yes, you can plant them now. They get their name from the fact that if left to grow on the ground there is a very good chance that the soft skinned fruit will rot or get very dirty. A layer of straw is pushed under the foliage to get the fruit off the ground. Keep an eye out for snails and slugs as they love them just as much as you do.

Question? When can I take the old cones off my Banksia ? There are lots of new ones coming on and the old ones look pretty shaggy.

Answer: I usually wait a couple of years till they are thoroughly dried out and can be snapped off by hand. Some people let them stay on till they drop off while others remove them not long after they finish flowering, so the choice is yours.



Reverend Hugh



Decorative: 'Culinary Delights'