

HORTULANUS

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

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COMING EVENTS

KHS meetings remain cancelled for the time being due to COVID-19 but the Society's annual **Garden Ramble** will be held on 11 October from 1.30-4.15pm (see details below).

At the time of writing, the **Sydney Royal Botanic Garden, Mt Tomah and Mt Annan Botanic Gardens** are open but some of their facilities are closed. 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, there will be an exhibition of art (*Cultivate*) in the Lion Gate Lodge from 17—25 October 2020, put on in support of the Foundation and Friends. Artists who have exhibited in previous exhibitions will be showing their work and all of the artworks will be for sale. The entry will be from 10am-4pm and is free.

Out of town, **Wildwood Gardens**, 29 Powells Road, Bilpin have advised that their garden, nursery and café are now open. 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. **Mayfield Gardens** in Oberon is open 7 days of the week. **Highfields**, 111 John Grant Rd, Little Hartley, is open each weekend in October from 10am-4pm. Also in Little Hartley is **Wild Meadows**, 243a Coxs River Road, which is open on 17/18 October. Please check out the current status of these venues before travelling.

We have been advised that the **Collectors' Plant Fair** which was to be held at the end of September has now been postponed until April 2021. The new dates are 10/11 April 2021 and it will be held at the Hawkesbury Race Club, Clarendon. Let's hope that it is able to go ahead this time.

MEMBER NEWS

Garden Ramble: This will be held on Sunday, 11 October. Three of our members (Valerie Bray, Aubrey Knowles and Christine Rethers) have offered to open their gardens. Because of the current State Government restrictions, this will have to operate differently this year as we can only have 20 people at one time in each garden. What we plan to do is to divide up those who indicate they would like to come into three groups so that each group will be visiting each garden at a separate time. This way, each group will visit all the gardens but in a different order. All you have to do is let our Treasurer, Robyn Brown, know that you would like to come and if you will be coming with other friends who are members, who they are. (Note that because of the limited numbers in each garden, this ramble is restricted to members and family/carer/driver only). Robyn will then allocate you to a group and send you an email to say which group you are in, give you the addresses of the three gardens and at what times you will be visiting them.

Please note that Aubrey's garden has quite a number of steps and Valerie's garden has a steep driveway. There will be committee members there to help those who may need it. The visits will start at 1.30pm and you will have up to 3/4 hour in each garden. Time is also allocated for travel between gardens and we expect to finish at 4.15pm. Tea and coffee will be available in Christine's garden.

To book a place, Robyn can be contacted on 9452 5493 or by email to medway2@bigpond.net.au. **Bookings should be made by Friday, 9th October.** Please note that due to the current COVID-19 restrictions, we cannot admit anyone who has not pre-booked so please do not just turn up on the day.

Don't forget to watch the Gardening Australia program which will be going to air on Friday, 16 October when Maureene and Keith Smith will be featured. Because of COVID-19 they are not be able to hold their usual one-day Huge Plant Sale in October in aid of the National Breast Cancer Foundation but instead they are holding their sale by appointment. Members of the public can contact them for a time slot (9427 3550) on or after Sunday, 18 October, to come and browse the plants and make their purchases.

Don't forget to have a look at our Facebook page which has had some interesting contributions recently - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2273344029640713>.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN MY VEGIE GARDEN by Ted Shaw



Spring is such a lovely time of year, and early spring is the ideal time to prepare for planting vegetables which can be harvested during summer. Late August and early September is the ideal time for vegie patch preparation. Dig in the old plants from peas and snow peas to help add nitrogen for the next crop, add some agricultural lime to sweeten the soil, and dig in a good lot of cow manure which will give the new plants a good boost.

It's best to have some sort of a plan of what you are going to plant and where. For example, consider that smaller plants should not be shaded too much by taller plants, tomatoes should not be planted in the same position two (preferably three) years in a row to avoid tomato wilt disease, lettuce should be planted on several occasions (say monthly) to give a harvest over a longer period rather than all being ready at the same time.

By the end of September, it has normally warmed up enough to plant out seedlings or sow seeds directly into position. Each year I like to grow tomatoes (Grosse Lisse are great for the table and making relish), lettuce (Green Mignonette are quick growing and crisp), egg plant (Black Beauty is a good producer and for quality), beans (Banjo Dwarf is a good performer), cucumbers (Lebanese grows well and is good in a salad) and pumpkins (Queensland Blue if you have room in your garden). This year I'm going to try a few different vegetables – Tiny Tim tomatoes, Silver Beet, and Pickling Gherkins. It will be interesting to see how they grow and taste.

Now, here's an important tip which I should take more notice of myself. Follow the spacing directions provided on the seed packet or the seedling punnet.



Who's this stranger in Ted's vegie garden? Ted tells me he was having problems with two very persistent pests in his orchard and vegie garden, a brush turkey and a flock of cockatoos, that were intent on digging up the garden and stripping the trees of all their fruit. Well, Ted's birthday came along and his family asked what he would like as a present. He thought for a while and then said "A scarecrow!" So when their grandchildren arrived to celebrate his birthday, they all got together to make this wonderful scarecrow for him. They had a great deal of fun doing it and it has lasted very well. Apparently, when the weather is wet, the scarecrow is given a waterproof poncho to wear. Unfortunately, it was not completely successful in keeping away all the pests as the brush turkey is not phased by it at all and has returned several times to continue his digging. However, the cockatoos have given it a very wide berth so all is not lost. Ed.

POTATO GROWING - A brief update by Christine Rethers

Well, we are now one month further on in the potato-growing adventure and so far all is going as planned. The two



grow-bags and both pots have now been filled to the top with compost and all that remains to be done is to wait until the foliage grows to its maximum size. It will then flower and after this will start to die down. This is when some harvesting can take place. The grow bags have a flap at the bottom which can be opened and it will be possible to carefully pull out some of the new potatoes. I will keep you posted.

LAVENDER by Hugh Myers

With the prospect of very uncertain weather for the next 6 months and the need to fill a vacant space in the garden, what can you put in that space that is colourful, low maintenance and does not use too much water? Why not give good old-fashioned lavender a go?

Lavender comes from the Mediterranean regions where the summers are hot and dry but there is plenty of water available in the winter. Once established, lavender is drought tolerant. This is a characteristic that gardeners could be looking for in the not too distant future. If you give lavender too much water or humidity it will be attacked and killed by root rot. Many other grey leafed plants react in the same way when there is too much humidity.



Lavandula stoechas

Growing Lavender: Lavender requires a well-drained and sunny position. It will tolerate soil with a pH of between 6 and 8. Here in Australia a small quantity of lime or dolomite added to the soil will help things along. If you have a Soil Testing Kit it will pay to check your soil's pH a month or so after planting. Once established, an annual check of the pH will ensure lots of beautiful flowers and a delightful perfume.

In areas where your lavender may have died due to poor drainage or flooding, it would pay you to raise the bed. Mound up the bed so that it is 20-30cm above the surrounding area.

Growing lavender in pots is an option where soils are poorly drained. However, make sure the pots have very good drainage with several holes and a layer of coarse gravel in the bottom. The same gravel layer applies to the saucer or plate that the pot is standing on.

Fertilising: Lavender, particularly if they are stressed by damp conditions, need very little fertilising. A small amount of compost or slow release fertiliser in spring is usually sufficient. Avoid placing a layer of organic mulch around plants in humid locations or in poorly drained soils but instead, you could use a product such as crushed granite as a mulch.

Pruning: Lavenders tend to become woody unless they are pruned regularly after flowering. Pruning may be done in spring or late summer depending on the particular type of lavender being grown. Use shears or hedge trimmers to do the job and cut back by about a third but never cut into the old wood. Where plants are dying due to root disease, pruning is rarely successful as a way to restore vigour to the plant. Diseased plants are best removed and disposed of in the garbage bin. Improve the soil and if necessary raise the bed to improve drainage and then new plants can be planted in the autumn or spring with a good chance of success.

Pests: Because of the aromatic oils in the plant's leaves, lavenders have few pests. The odd caterpillar will appear and can be picked off and squashed (chooks like them). Spittle bugs will appear but apart from not looking nice, will do no harm. If they annoy you, cut off the twig they are on and throw it away.

Root Rot: Root rot is a fungal disease that is best combated by raising the bed and letting it dry out to the point where it is ALMOST dry before watering it again.

Lavenders are flowering plants that are low maintenance and reward well so why not give them a go?



Lavandula angustifolia

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



► It is October and spring has officially arrived. Keep an eye on your lawn as soon as we get some warmer weather as your grass will start to grow after its winter dormancy. Give it a helping hand by feeding it with a slow release lawn fertiliser. By using this you will minimise fertiliser run off caused by spring rains. The best time to use the

fertiliser is after rain when the soil is wet. To get an even distribution of the fertiliser, use a mechanical hand spreader. They are not expensive and are readily available. If your lawn has only recently been laid, use a lawn starter fertiliser. Your usual lawn fertiliser can be used on already established lawns. Lawns should be fed twice a year, that is in spring and late summer.

► Many of us will have a least one well-established clivia growing in a quiet corner. Now is the time to give it a 'short back and sides' clean up when they have finished flowering. Get rid of all the accumulated dead leaves underneath the main plant as this only breeds fungi and pests. Dump it in the rubbish bin. Clivias can get quite big if let go so divide the main plant into smaller clumps and plant them out. Alternatively, give some to your neighbour.

► Do you have some shrubs that you staked a couple of months ago sitting in a quiet corner? It is time to go and have a look at the ties as the plants will be putting on growth from now on. Check if the ties are tight enough as October can be a windy month. Alternatively, are they too loose? Loose ties can rub and ring-bark a shrub trunk in windy weather. Use soft ties like raffia or an old stocking on relatively large plants. Check your stakes and make sure they have not started to rot down at ground level. Stakes sold at garden centres are quite often made from the soft wood that is left over when cutting planks and they don't last long. Inspect them before you buy, especially the smaller diameter ones. Have a look for knots in the wood. A knot in a stake is a weak point that can snap very easily in a wind.

► To keep your compost heap running, turn it over every couple of weeks and make sure it stays damp but not wet. A compost heap needs air as well as water. To get air into the middle of a heap, block one end of a perforated PVC pipe and drive it into the centre of the heap vertically. This will let air into the middle of the heap and also let you get water into the centre when required.

► Your pot plants will all be wide awake now and looking for a feed. Give them a feed once a fortnight with a top-of-the line general liquid fertiliser. This can be done on a regular basis right through spring to autumn while the plants are in active growth.

► Tomatoes straight off the vine, what could be tastier? Now is the time to give it a go. You can try egg plants at the same time in another bed. There are two things to remember when planting tomatoes. Don't plant tomatoes in the same place two years running as they lose their resistance to disease quite quickly if you do. Don't plant potatoes and tomatoes near to each other they are both in the same family (Solanum). Build up your soil with compost and stake the tomato plants to keep the fruit off the ground. Plant some marigolds in amongst the tomato plants as protection from nematodes and have parsley growing amongst them to provide a home for ladybird insects that thrive on aphids and mites.

► By now your winter-flowering bulbs will have finished flowering. Scatter half a handful of poultry manure per square metre around the bed and give the bulbs time enough (about six weeks) to absorb this before cutting away the dead foliage. The dead foliage can go into the compost for recycling. Once you have picked up the dead foliage, put a nice layer of mulch all over the bed and let it rest throughout autumn and winter. Alternatively, scatter some seeds of a short-lived summer flowering annual that will be finished by the time your bulbs are ready to emerge from their dormancy.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



Question? Is it too late to plant tulips? I have seen some bulbs on sale at my local garden centre?

Answer: Yes, it is far too late. Things are starting to get too warm. Tulips like the cold weather, the colder the better. You will have to wait now until next autumn to put them in. Treat them as annuals as most places in our area are far too warm to get a second flush of flowers. Plant a new lot of tulip bulbs each year.

Question? I have a nice row of sweet peas growing along my back fence. The plants have lots of buds but they turn yellow and drop off. Is there anything I can do about it?

Answer: Some sweet peas are more susceptible to bud drop than others. Bud-drop usually occurs during periods of dull and cold weather which causes buds to turn yellow and fall off. The problem will correct itself as the weather warms up and there is more sunshine. Erratic watering can also cause bud-drop so make sure you keep the water up to your sweet peas. Just damp, not wet, is the way to go.

Question? I have a nice healthy viburnum hedge out the front but it is being attacked by some insect. I have sprayed it several times with pyrethrum but it does not seem to work. Is there something else I can use?

Answer: It sounds like your viburnum is being attacked by the two-spotted mite which can be very destructive on many ornamental shrubs. If you look closely you should be able to see the webbing that has been spun on the underside of the leaves and between the twigs. This pest tops the list of common pests that have become resistant to common pesticides that are available to the home gardener. Many contact pesticides will not work. Use a systemic pesticide like Confidor which is taken up by the plant from the soil. The insect picks up the Confidor from the sap of the plant and dies. The process can take up to two weeks to work. Another way is to spray the plants with an oil-based insecticide such as Pest Oil which is mineral based or Eco-oil which is organic based.

Question? Our rhubarb is producing green stems and I would like to know how to get them to go red.

Answer: You cannot change the colour of your rhubarb. It is the variety that determines the colour. Some like Victoria are greener while others like Silvan Red are redder. Rhubarb likes an acidic soil with a pH of 5.5 to 6.5. You need to check your soil. Also add lots of organic matter to the soil to improve the drainage as these plants don't like wet feet.

Question? When should I fertilise my lawn?

Answer: There is no point in fertilising weeds so have a close inspection of the lawn as it is around now that many weeds get off to a flying start by seeding while it is still cool and your main lawn grass is still dormant. If you dig out these weeds, they usually come out easily. If you find some onion weed in your lawn, don't dig it out as you will for sure leave some behind. You need to poison it with glyphosate so you get the whole plant in one go. It will take about two weeks to die. Once you are satisfied that you have got all the weeds out, use a spreader to spread the fertiliser thinly. Hand spreaders are quite cheap and you can lay the fertiliser down evenly. Being too generous with lawn fertiliser is not a good way to go as you will burn the grass. Give the grass a good watering both before and after fertilising.

Question? Can I prune my Kangaroo Paws now?

Answer: Yes, if the flowers have died back. Get rid of any diseased leaves into the rubbish bin not the compost. Give the bed a good clean up so that the air can circulate freely in amongst your plants and fungi can't get a hold. Leave any flower stems about 20cm long. Kangaroo paws carry a second dormant bud at the base of each stem and these can now go to work. With any luck you will get a second flush of flowers.

Do not let them take
your temperature when
going into the store!
It's a scam! They're
erasing your memory!
I went in for bread and
milk and came out with
six bottles of wine.

Regards
Hugh