

HORTULANUS

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COMING EVENTS

Due to the present Covid-19 situation, we are not advertising any open gardens or related events for the next month or so. For those who would like to venture out of Sydney, we suggest that you investigate gardens in Little Hartley and Mt Wilson, the Bath House Garden in Oakhampton Heights and Wildwood in Bilpin. The three Botanic Gardens in Sydney, Mt Tomah and Mount Annan are all open at the moment.

MEMBER NEWS

It is somewhat ironic that after a wait of some 22 months while the St Ives Community Hall was being renovated, our first opportunity to use it at our February meeting will not be able to go ahead due to the present very large rise in Covid-19 case numbers. Instead, our next meeting on Tuesday, 1st February will be an online Zoom meeting. We are going to give this a try and hope that you will give it a try with us. If you haven't used Zoom before, see below for details of a practice session we will be running for you the night before this meeting.

Our guest speaker will be Jacqui Maxwell, and she will be talking about "Nepenthes and other Carnivorous Plants in the Garden". Jacqui is the President of the Tropical Garden Society of Sydney and she has a lovely garden at Kariong which she will take us through. The Zoom meeting will open at 7:15pm for a 7:30pm start. Details of the link you will need to join this meeting is being sent to you in the email accompanying this newsletter. Depending how this Zoom meeting goes, we may use Zoom again if the COVID situation continues to make it unviable to hold meetings at the St Ives Community Hall.

If you are not confident about going online to use Zoom for our meeting on 1st February, please consider joining us for a quick practice session the night before. Most people will tell you that it is not hard to use Zoom, but we all need a little help to get started. This practice session will be held on Monday, 31 January at 7.15pm for a 7.30pm start. You may also find it helpful to view this YouTube tutorial beforehand if you are not sure about using Zoom: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9isp3qPeQOE>. Simply copy this URL and paste it into your search engine. You can download the Zoom program onto your computer or laptop ahead of time by simply typing **Zoom** into a search engine such as Google. For iPads or smart phone go to your app store and type in **Zoom** and download it from your app store. It's free – make sure you download the free version only. Alternatively, when you click on the link we send you, it will prompt you to download the program from this link. If you do this, we suggest you give yourself about 5-10 minutes to get it up and running on your computer or other device. To join in the practice session, send an email to Evelyn Mason (evelyn@emassociates.com.au) by no later than Sunday 30th January to book in. Evelyn will respond with details of how to join the meeting and how to get help if you are having trouble.

At this point, we are anticipating that the current Covid-19 situation will have improved by the time of our March meeting on 1st March and that we will be able to hold a face-to-face meeting in the St Ives Community Hall. We will keep you posted. If we do have our usual meeting, it will include the Show Bench and the members' plant sale so start thinking about what you have propagated you could bring along to sell.

Don't forget to have a look at our **Facebook** page which continues to have some interesting postings. We now have 50 contributors and it has proved very useful in answering questions such as finding out plant names and helping members with problems with their gardens. Remember that this is a private group and can only be accessed by members of our Society so nothing of what you post is distributed to the public at large. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2273344029640713>.

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OUTINGS



Your society is planning to visit the **Southern Highlands on Saturday, 23 April 2022** for the Autumn Gardens Weekend and Plant Sale at the Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens. We will visit the plant sale first, as soon as we arrive, followed by three or four of the open gardens, depending on how much time we have. Morning tea will be provided but we ask that you bring your own lunch so that we can keep the costs down. The cost of the coach and garden entries will be \$75. Bookings will not open until the beginning of March so that we have a bit more time to assess the situation regarding Covid-19. A booking form will be included with your March Hortulanus.

DECEMBER MEETING

As the St Ives Community Hall was not ready for us to use, our Christmas meeting was held in the Worship Centre of the Turramurra Uniting Church. To start the meeting, our president, Evelyn Mason, welcomed approximately 80 members and our special guests, Lorraine Emerson, president of Garden Clubs of Australia and Costa Georgiadis, presenter of the TV program Gardening Australia. Lorraine was visiting us to present life membership of Garden Clubs of Australia to one of our long-time members, Judith Williamson, who had served on the GCA committee for many years in various roles. Lorraine thanked Judith for her many years of service, especially in the production of the excellent GCA journal *Our Gardens*.



Next Costa spoke to us and he started his talk by explaining the difficulties of filming the program during the present Covid-19 environment and how they needed to film away from the general public. Fortunately, they were able to use private gardens such as that of Ted and Nancy Shaw as well as places like Boongala Gardens, a beautiful native garden in Kenthurst. He explained that when filming, there are usually only four people present—the producer, camera man, sound person and Costa himself. During the ten years he has been hosting the program, Costa said he was especially pleased to see an increasing number of women and young people now among the high achievers in the Horticulture industry. Getting young people involved was the most important way forward and he felt that clubs such as ours had a role to play in mentoring young people in our own families and passing on our cumulative knowledge. Costa also paid tribute to Peter Cundall who had just died and noted that Peter had died on World Soils Day (5 December 2021).



Costa joined members after his talk for the very nice Christmas supper supplied by the Society. A special thank-you to Jenny Watsford and her team of helpers who put together the over 80 supper boxes.



Shortly after visiting us, Costa was present at the 2021 Australian Academy of Cinema & TV Arts (AACTA) Awards ceremony at the Opera House where he received the Logie Award for Favourite Australian TV Host. He also picked up the award to Gardening Australia for the Favourite Australian Entertainment Show. The photo is of Costa with his AACTA Logie, sitting in the garden of Christine and Theo Rethers after spending the day filming there. Their garden will be used as the backdrop for Costa's presentation on the Gardening Australia program on Friday, 18 March. That now makes three KHS members' gardens that have been used in the program recently (including the gardens of Ted and Nancy Shaw and Keith and Maureen Smith)—is this some sort of a record??

IN THE VEGIE PATCH IN FEBRUARY by Christine Rethers

In the heat of summer, most peoples' vegie gardens will be in a holding pattern. Hopefully, you will all be harvesting plenty of tomatoes, beans, cucumbers and corn with good pickings of the cut-and-come-again lettuce. Now is the time to start thinking about the autumn and winter vegies so get down to the garden centre and start looking at what seeds you might like to buy.

As your summer crops finish and you pull them out, this will be a good time to clean up the area and lightly dig it over whilst incorporating some generous amounts of cow manure and pellets such as Dynamic Lifter as well as a dusting of lime. It is a good idea to do this about a month ahead of when you will be wanting to plant your next crop as it gives the soil time to rejuvenate and revive.

Generally seeds planted in punnets during February and March do well as the night-time temperatures are still high enough to encourage quick germination. Preferably use a seed-raising mix and keep the soil damp but not wet. Mist-ing the surface will do the trick nicely.

There are lots of autumn and winter vegetable seeds you might like to consider but of the ones to be raised in punnets think about English Spinach and Silver Beet, brassicas such as Cauliflower, Kale and Broccoli, Broad Beans and Peas (both Sugar and Snap Peas) as well as Lettuce (many different kinds to choose from). Crops like Radish, Beetroot and Carrots are best sown straight in place. You can now buy 'seed tapes' which have seeds implanted in a strip of paper. You just lay this tape down on the prepared surface and cover it very with a light cover of soil. The seed then come up at the appropriate spacing so the row does not have to be thinned out later. If you miss the boat with seeds, you will always find vegetable seedlings in the garden centre from about March onwards.

GROW YOUR OWN PESTO OR SALSA VERDE by Maureene Smith

Soft herbs, basil, chives, chervil, tarragon and coriander, grow abundantly from spring through summer and are the basis for some great condiments to brighten up your meals.

Basic Pesto or Pesto Genovese is a simple blend of basil, pine nuts, cheese, garlic, salt and olive oil. If you feel like a workout, do it in a mortar and pestle or alternatively with a food processor or stick blender. If using the processor or stick blender, it is important to chill everything down so that the Pesto doesn't oxidise and become bitter. Chill the blades and bowl for 10 minutes and soak your basil leaves in a bowl of ice for 3 to 4 minutes and then dry thoroughly.

Pesto Recipe:

Pulse 2 cups sweet basil leaves and 1/3 cup pine nuts until broken down then add 1/2 cup of grated pecorino or parmesan cheese and 2 cloves garlic. Pulse some more and scrape down the sides of the bowl. Slowly whisk in a 1/3 cup olive oil and season with a pinch of salt. This will make at least a small jar which you should store in the fridge. As you use it, cover the remainder with a layer of olive oil to stop it oxidising.

You can swop the basil for coriander or try a tarragon, chives, chervil and parsley mix. If you don't like pine nuts, use walnuts.

Whatever your choice all these beautiful soft herbs can be easily grown either in the garden or in pots. All will tolerate sun or part shade, but all need plenty of light to thrive.

BASIL can be grown from seeds or seedlings, in pots or in the ground, and is the easiest of all herbs to grow. Make sure you put your plants in a bright sunny position and give them some liquid fertiliser to push them along. Harvest often by cutting back to a double set of leaves which will encourage bushy growth. You can get both the green and purple basil which basically taste the same or a Thai basil which has a more aromatic taste. Basil is an annual so at the end of summer you will need to pull it out and wait until next spring to put in your next crop.



CORIANDER is best grown in place direct from seed. The easiest and quickest way is to lightly crush the seeds with a rolling pin so that they split in half. Soak them overnight before scattering them where you want them to grow. Cover with a light sprinkling of soil and water. You should see seedlings emerge within a week. Coriander is prone to bolt in hot weather so regular sowings will ensure a good supply. Coriander will self-seed if you leave it or you can collect the seed and save it to use in Asian dishes.



CHERVIL, a less common herb, is also grown from seed sown directly. Chervil has a more delicate flavour than the other herbs, probably best described as between parsley and tarragon. Chervil will also self-seed. It is delicious with eggs, scrambled or in an omelette.

TARRAGON is unusual in that its flowers are sterile so it can only be grown from cuttings or root division. It is important that you plant French Tarragon not the Mexican or Russian varieties as they lack the beautiful anise flavour which pairs well with chicken and is essential for a Bearnaise sauce. Tarragon dies down and can completely disappear in the cooler months so it is best grown in a pot. If grown in the ground you can forget it is there in winter!

PARSLEY—Curly or Flat leaf? I believe curly for decoration and flat leaf for culinary use, but it is really an individual taste. Parsley grows from seed or seedlings. I always let a plant go to seed and then scatter the seeds willy-nilly, so I always have plenty of parsley, the most useful of herbs, growing somewhere in the garden.

MINT There are many varieties of mint—chocolate, spearmint, etc. but the common mint would be the most useful for culinary use. It will grow in sun to shade as long as it is kept adequately moist. Mint is grown from cuttings and is a hardy perennial so that once you have some, it just regenerates for you. It can be invasive, so growing it in a pot or confined ground area is best. Some people plant it in a pot in the ground, but be warned it can escape from there. Mint is an important herb in cooking, from mint sauce for roast lamb, through tabouli to salsa verde.

Salsa Verde is a herb sauce that has as many uses as there are recipes for it. Here's one:

2 cloves garlic, 2 cups parsley leaves, 1 cup basil leaves, 1 cup mint leaves, 1/2 cup of capers, 3 or 4 sweet gherkins, 6 anchovy fillets. Chop altogether quite finely. Mix in 1 tb of Dijon mustard and 3 tbs of red wine vinegar. Stir in some olive oil until the mix is the right consistency. Taste and season as necessary with salt and pepper. Great to use with grilled steak or lamb cutlets, fish or even vegetables.

These are just a few of the soft herbs now available. For more variety you can grow Sorrell, Dill, Lemon Verbena - makes great tea - or Shiso and Mitsuba from Japan.

YOUR FEBRUARY GARDEN by Maureen Smith

▶ With the hot, humid and wet weather we have had in January, a major task in the February garden will be to deal with those rampant weeds and the abundant growth on shrubs and perennials. Camellias are a good example, particularly if you have camellia hedges. They need to be pruned back now before the buds appear to make sure you don't lose all your next season's flowers.

▶ This is also a good time of the year to prune your azaleas. Trim back long and lanky growths and take out any dead wood. They can also be trimmed into shapes such as balls or 'clouds' which looks very effective when they flower. The best ones to use for this purpose are the small-leafed varieties (Kurume azaleas).

▶ Both the camellias and azaleas will benefit from a good feed now—use a generous application of cow manure and some pellets formulated especially for these plants. They are acid-loving and will react badly if you use anything with lime in it.

▶ Another task is to prepare for any autumn planting you may have planned. Make sure the area is weed free and well composted.



▶ Some people say you should wait until March, but sweet pea seeds can be happily sown in February. They need a sunny position with well composted soil and something to climb on. Dwarf varieties can be grown in a basket from which they can trail to make a lovely show. I have seen sweet pea seedlings already in the nursery, but the easiest and best method is to grow them straight from seed directly into pots or into the garden.

▶ What to plant in a shady corner of the garden? One of the best and one that does well in the Sydney area is the coleus. There are many different ones with a variety of leaf colours and leaf shapes to choose from. These can often be obtained from friends, as cuttings take root very easily, either in a glass of water on the window sill or directly into a pot. Most people will be happy to share their plant and perhaps you can offer them a cutting from a different one of yours in exchange. They are often not very happy in winter so make sure they are in a protected spot and take some new cuttings as insurance, especially as they have a reputation of being quite short-lived.

▶ Kalanchoe with its many varieties survive well in our increasingly hotter gardens so if you haven't ventured yet into succulents, I am sure there is a kalanchoe that would be right for you. They don't all have to grow in pots. For example, Kalanchoe Silver Spoons and Kalanchoe Copper Spoons are two handsome plants that do equally well in pots or in the ground.



Kalanchoe Copper Spoons



Kalanchoe Silver Spoons

▶ It is time now to start thinking about bulbs for the coming spring. The bulb catalogues will be available shortly and you can spend some fun hours pouring over the many and varied bulbs that will shortly be available. In our temperate climate, many bulbs such as tulips and hyacinths need to be treated like annuals. They will benefit from around 6 weeks in the crispness of your refrigerator and should not be planted until the ground has had a chance to cool, say from around the end April. Both these do probably better in pots than in the ground. Daffodils, anemones, ranunculus, crocus and Dutch iris will all be happy in a bright and sunny spot in the garden. Prepare the spot you have chosen now by digging in plenty of compost and cow manure.

▶ This time of year many gardens and balconies are looking their blooming best so whatever you do make sure you leave time to just enjoy!



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