

# HORTULANUS

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

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## MARCH 2026

### COMING EVENTS

- Mar. 3** KHS March Meeting - Speaker: Mark Massey of Mother Earth Nursery. Note: there will not be the KHS Trading Table
- Mar. 7-8** Hartley Valley Garden Festival, 10am-4pm both days. Gardens open: Highfields, Hartvale, Wild Meadows, Gory'u Japanese Gardens. Plant & artisan stalls, delicious morning & afternoon teas.
- Mar. 28** Begonia Society Sale, Federation Pavilion, Castle Hill Showground. 9am-2pm Entry free.
- Apr. 18/19** Oberon & District Garden Club - 8 autumn gardens open plus guest speakers, craft and plant sales. 9.30am-4pm. \$25 for all 8 gardens.

### MEMBER NEWS

The February meeting was well attended with 62 members and 16 visitors. The first item on the agenda was the presentation of prizes to the winners of the 2025 Point Score Competition. This was followed by our member speaker, Guy Vissel, who gave a talk on propagating camellias which was delivered with great enthusiasm and passion. After supper it was the turn of our guest speaker, Costa Georgiadis, whose talk on passing on our knowledge to future generations was both lively and delivered with great fervour which left many of us with food for thought.

### SHOW BENCH

At the February meeting the winners of the 2025 Show Bench competition received their prizes. Many congratulations to our winners and to all those who benched exhibits last year. The Show Bench is a highlight of our Society and we are one of the few societies that still have an active and indeed flourishing show bench.



1. Kym Swaby 2. Bob and Sue Ballinger 3. Evelyn Mason 4. David and Robin Stewart 5. Ted and Nancy Shaw  
6. Len Riordan 7. Denis Tamsett 8. Brenda Zimmerman 9. Jill and Peter Whitney 10. Vered Wagmann and Guy Vissel

**Section Winners:** Cultural: Kym Swaby Containers: Len Riordan Small Crops: Ted and Nancy Shaw

**Decorative:** Brenda Zimmerman **Pictorial:** Bob and Sue Ballinger **Encouragement Award:** John Darge (not present)

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The new Show Bench competition for 2026 has now started so if you haven't exhibited before, why not have a go this year. Don't hesitate to ask one of the committee if it is your first time and you are not sure what to do.

## OUTINGS

We have several exciting outings planned for the coming year. The first outing will be to two gardens in Mt Colah, the gardens of one of our members, Clare Bell and her near neighbour, Michael Hughes. This will be on Sunday, 29th March starting at 1.30pm. We will need to divide those attending into two groups so that half will visit Clare's garden first while the second group will go to Michael's garden and then after about an hour-and-a-half, we will change over. Afternoon tea will be served in Clare's garden. Michael Hughes' garden is a permaculture garden and Michael will explain how he gardens the permaculture way. The lower part of the garden is a bit steep but the whole garden can be viewed from the top. The cost will be \$10 and the Society will help with car pooling. A booking form is included with this newsletter. Bookings can be made with Helen Gilkes who will be sitting at the sign-on table on the way in or you may phone her on 9144 4826.

The second outing will be '*the big one*' - five days in Queensland from Wednesday, 8th to Sunday, 12th July 2026. We will travel to Queensland by coach with an overnight stay in Armidale and then travel on to Montville where we will be based. We will travel out from there to visit the Queensland Garden Show at Nambour as well as gardens and other places of interest on the Sunshine Coast and in the hinterland. We will finish the trip at the Gold Coast from where our travellers can fly back to Sydney. There is the option to stay on the coach for the journey back to Sydney with an overnight stay at Coffs Harbour, arriving back on the afternoon of Monday, 13th July. An invitation has been sent to members with all the details and a booking form. Please return this before 10th April.

For many years the Society has had a garden ramble during the spring months when we invite members to let us know if they would be willing to open their garden for a members-only garden visit. We ideally need three gardens within fairly close proximity with the possibility of having an afternoon tea in the last garden to be visited. Please let Ted, Helen or Christine know if you would be willing to participate. We usually start the ramble at 1.30pm on a Sunday afternoon and visit the gardens in order, finishing in the third garden around 4pm for afternoon tea. The date is usually worked out among the three participants.

## GARDEN TABLE

The Garden Table was doing very good business at the February meeting with a large number of different plants on offer. These included some Golden Lycoris and Paper White narcissus bulbs, succulents, Amaryllis, Aluminium plants (*Pilea cadierei*), Cape Gooseberry seedlings, white and purple Plectranthus, Bromeliads, Ajuga, and three *Amorphophallus bulbifer* (the Voodoo lily) plants. What a collection for members to choose from!



Voodoo Lily

**Note:** the Garden Table will be in operation at the March meeting so bring along any spare plants, cuttings, bulbs etc. that you may have.

## MEMBERS' TRADING TABLE

**Note:** Because Mark Massey will be bringing a van-load of plants for members to purchase at the March meeting, the Trading Table will be operating at the April meeting instead. Members may bring in a **maximum of 30 plants** to sell and 10% of the proceeds will go to the Society with the rest to the member.

Traders are reminded of the following requirements:

- \* Only plants can be sold.
- \* All items should be in good condition, pots should be clean with no roots protruding and no stains.
- \* The plant must be disease- and insect-free with no damaged or dead leaves and weeds should be removed.
- \* The plant should be named with a label or sticker. In addition, a paddle pop stick showing the owner's initials, the plant number and the price required should be put in each pot.

The form required to be filled in will be sent with the April Hortulanus on 29 March.

## MAIN SPEAKER FEBRUARY:



We were delighted to welcome Costa Georgiadis to our meeting and were pleased that he stayed the whole meeting talking to members and visitors and generally taking part in the meeting. In his talk he spoke about his work with young people and the need to foster their love of nature and the environment. He particularly focused on the role that older people have to play in passing on the love of the natural world to their children and grandchildren.

Both Costa and our member speaker, Guy Vissel, spoke about the loss of the natural environment to the insatiable appetite of planners and developers who remove older buildings and trees wherever they can to build more and more unsuitable developments where houses are so close together that no trees can survive.

Costa brought along a number of books and publications that sought to inspire younger people to explore and learn about the natural world around them. Costa's passion and enthusiasm for encouraging young people to explore the natural world around them will resonate with all of us.

**Main Speaker March:** This will be Mark Massey of Mother Earth Nursery who will be bringing some of his lovely plants for members to buy. Mark will be speaking about Rare and Unusual Plants.

### MEMBER SPEAKER FEBRUARY:



Guy gave a very spirited talk on the need for us to preserve some of our heritage in the form of camellia plants as many of the older plantings are now being bulldozed to oblivion as developers move into suburbs where camellias have been established for over a century and a half. He has taken it upon himself to propagate as many different camellias as he can in an effort to preserve many of the older varieties that are so quickly disappearing.

Guy spoke about some of the older camellia varieties and how he was attempting to grow on as many of these as he can. He took us through the steps needed to get suitable cuttings and prepare them for propagation. The medium he uses is simply a mix of perlite and peat which appears to be very suitable for camellia cuttings. Questions that remain unanswered were what he was going to do when he ran out of room in his garden for all his cuttings and what he was going to do with the cuttings as they grew up. We will have to leave that for another talk perhaps!

**Member Speaker March:** This will be Philip Sarkies who will speak to us about ‘Horny Gum Ball’. What an intriguing topic which we will no doubt all be up-to-date on after his talk!

### IN THE VEGIE PATCH IN MARCH by Christine Rethers

This month is all about getting ready for your autumn/winter vegetable garden while your summer vegetables are gradually finishing off their growing season. By this time of the year, tomatoes, cucumbers and zucchini are all looking a bit sad with yellowing leaves that may be suffering from downy mildew but just keep them going a bit longer while they are still producing a crop. Beans and lettuce will be wanting to go to seed so you can leave a plant or two to collect seed from and pull the rest out. As each of your summer crops finishes their growing season, pull them out and refresh the soil by digging in your home-made compost (if you have it available) with some pelletised fertiliser and cow manure. If you didn't put dolomite lime on your soil back in spring, do it now, just a light dusting. It's time to go to your garden centre and browse through the punnets of the different kinds of vegies available. Look for punnets where the seedlings look young and healthy and avoid punnets that have roots protruding from the bottom (they have been there too long). These can be planted in your well-prepared vegie bed. Don't forget to water in your new plants to settle them into their new home. Plants to put in during March or April are the brassicas as they take a long time to mature—think here of broccoli, broccolini, cauliflower, cabbage and kale. Peas and broad beans can wait another month or two.

One vegetable that never ceases to amaze me at its high cost is garlic. Australian garlic is rarely below \$30 a kilo. However, it is really easy to grow your own and the good thing is that once harvested, it stores really well. However, it is important to buy garlic from a company such Diggers or The Seed Collection as the garlic in the shops is often from overseas and has been dipped in a solution to stop it from growing. Once you have your head of garlic, divide it up into individual cloves and select just the biggest to plant into well prepared soil which has had compost, cow manure and a sprinkling of dolomite lime added. Plant each clove, pointy end up, approximately 5cm deep and spaced about 7cm apart. Water well and then leave until the surface is quite dry before watering again. It is very easy to rot the cloves by overwatering before they have a chance to start growing. Garlic takes a long time to grow to maturity so if you plant in March/April your plants will not be ready to harvest until October/November. This means they need to be planted somewhere where they can remain undisturbed for that time. They are ready to harvest when the tops start to go yellow and droopy. Dig them up carefully, shake off the loose soil and hang them up in a cool, dark and dry place to harden off. This could take a few weeks before they are ready to use. They will keep for many months if stored correctly.



**Tip:** Some people plant garlic in their flower beds as garlic is a very good insect repellent.

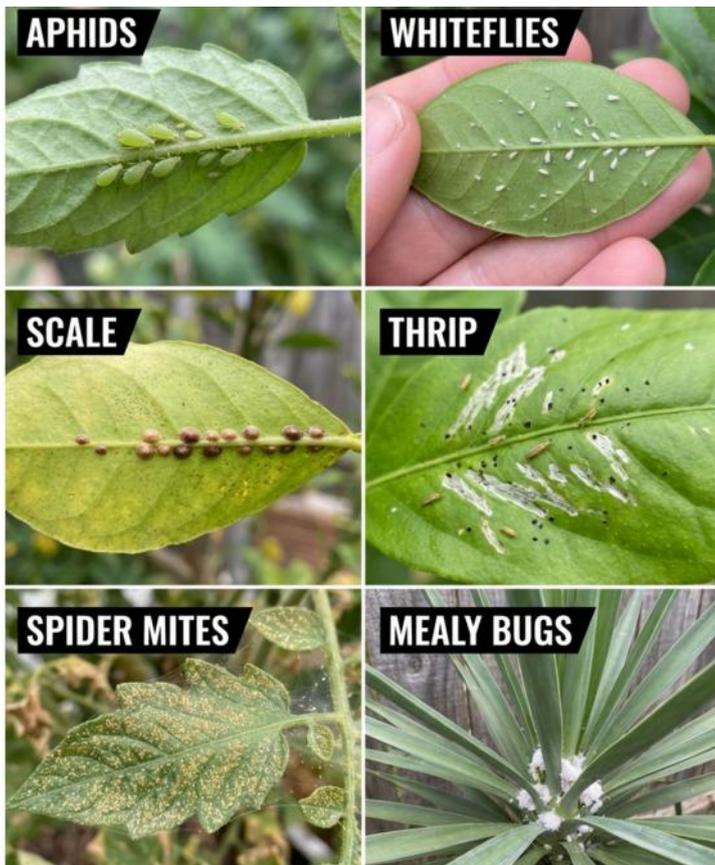
**The Saffron Crocus:** This is another very expensive item used in cooking that can be grown in our own gardens. Saffron prices typically range from AUD 4,000 to over AUD 5,900 per kilogram for high-quality, retail-grade, or wholesale, depending on grade and origin (e.g., Iranian, Spanish). Globally, prices can average USD 5,000–8,000+ per kg due to the labour-intensive harvesting of the 150,000 flowers required for 1 kg of dried saffron.



The saffron crocus looks just like any other crocus and is available from Diggers and other retailers. I suggest growing them in pots because our moist and humid summers can rot the dormant bulbs. Growing the saffron crocus (*Crocus sativus*) in pots requires a well-drained, sunny position, using a premium potting mix supplemented with sand or perlite. Plant the corms 10cm deep and 5–10cm apart in late summer. Keep soil moist during growth, but allow it to dry out during summer dormancy to prevent rot. The flowers appear in late autumn/early winter. Harvest the red stigma (3 per flower) as soon as the

flowers open in the morning (you may have to use tweezers to do this). Dry the threads on a paper towel for 2 weeks before storing them in an airtight container.

## IDENTIFYING SOME OF THE NASTIES IN OUR GARDENS



*All of these can be found in most gardens in our area. They can also be found on pot plants and house plants.*

- Aphids - are small green, black or orange sap-sucking insects. To remove them, a strong jet of water will dislodge them. Spraying with Eco Oil or even soapy water will suffocate and kill them. Ladybirds, both the beetle and larvae, love them.
- Whiteflies - very small white sap-sucking flies that are always on the underside of a leaf and will fly up in a cloud if disturbed. Spraying the underside of leaves with water will deter them. To remove them, an insecticide may be needed. Natural predators include lacewings and ladybirds.
- Scale - a waxy-coated sap-sucking insect that has an affinity with ants as it produces a honeydew that ants feed on. This honeydew can cause sooty mould. The best organic solution is to spray them with horticultural oil (Eco Oil). They can also be removed with a brush. Ladybirds are a predator.
- Thrips - very small sap-sucking insects found on the underside of leaves. Damage appears on the upper side of leaves as silvery flecks and patches. Peak damage is done during very dry weather. Spraying the underside of leaves with water is a deterrent. An insecticidal soap can also be used.
- Spider mites - very hard to see and always on the underside of leaves. Spraying the underside with water helps as do horticultural oils.
- Mealy bugs - fairly large sap-sucking white insects, easy to see. Small infestations can be removed with a cotton bud dipped in methylated spirits. For large infestations, use Eco Oil or Neem Oil sprays.

## YOUR MARCH GARDEN by Christine Rethers

It's autumn and time to start thinking about planting for spring. Winter flowering annuals such as violas, pansies and primulas can go in over the next couple of months. It is also time to start planning what spring flowering bulbs you want to plant. Many of the online nurseries that sell bulbs have their new catalogues available now so go and check them out and make your purchases. However, it is a bit early in Sydney to plant them so you are better off waiting until April or May when the soil has had time to cool down.

Now is the time to sweep up all those falling leaves from your lawn and driveway and put them in your compost. Deadhead and liquid feed the summer flowering annuals to keep them going a few more weeks. As they die off, trim back your perennials such as summer flowering salvias, penstemons, achilleas and asters.

Bearded iris can be lifted now if the clump has grown very large. They grow on rhizomes and any piece that has already flowered will not flower again and so can be discarded. Spread out the new rhizomes and replant them in soil improved with aged cow manure and compost. Make sure that the top of the rhizome is level with the top of the soil as they need the heat of the sun on the rhizome to flower well.



If you grow hellebores, now is the time to cut off all the old leaves, leaving only the emerging leaves. This way you will get a better flower display in the late winter. At the same time it is advisable to feed your plants with aged cow manure mixed with some pelleted fertiliser. It is also the time to lift and divide clumps if they have become too big. Think about bringing some clumps to sell on the Garden Table. Hellebores will seed prolifically so make sure you cut off the flowering stems when they are finished. Most of the seedling plants are not the same as the originals and often not worth saving.



If you grow strawberries, you will have noticed that they are sending out runners now with new small plants at the ends. These can be collected when they are big enough and planted up in pots or directly into the garden and they will then replace the old mother plants that will be close to the end of their life cycle. Strawberries like a good feed so make sure you give them plenty of pelleted or liquid fertiliser. When planting out a new strawberry bed, make sure you put plenty of a mulch such as sugar cane around them to deter one of their biggest enemies, the snail or slug. A net thrown over the top will deter their other big enemy - birds coming down for a feed.