

HORTULANUS

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

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APRIL 2025

COMING EVENTS

- Apr. 1** KHS Meeting: Kathy Bradfield 'Your Garden, Weeds and Other Things'
Apr. 11 Eryldene, 17 McIntosh St. Gordon. Open Friday Garden Tours 10am-12.30pm
Apr. 12/13 Collectors Plant Fair, Penrith Showgrounds
Apr. 26/27 Southern Highlands Autumn Gardens and Plant Fair. Info. <https://shbg.com.au/open-gardens-plant-fair/>
Apr. 29-May 2 KHS Trip to Bright and North East Victoria (see below)
May 3/4 Bromeliad Autumn Show and Sale. Castle Hill Showground Sat. 9-4pm, Sun. 10-3pm
May 6 KHS Meeting: Madeline Ward - 'RBG Native Meadow Project'
May 9 Eryldene, 17 McIntosh St. Gordon. Open Friday Garden Tours 10am-12.30pm

MEMBER NEWS

The March meeting was well attended with 59 members and 10 visitors. Brisk business was conducted at the Members' Trading Table with over \$600 dollars' worth of plants sold. The range of plants was impressive and quite a number of members went home with some very nice plants at bargain prices. Many thanks go to the hard-working Trading Table team of Viv Lowther, Robyn Brown, Fareeda Siddiqui and Alison Wood who handled the whole proceedings very smoothly and efficiently. Our next Members' Trading Table will be held at the October meeting so there is plenty of time to start propagating some of your special plants. It was encouraging to see that a couple more people have joined the list of sellers. If you need help with propagation, there are plenty of members who would be prepared to give you some help so just ask one of the committee.



March Trading Table doing brisk business

OUTINGS

The trip to Bright and North East Victoria on 29th April to 2nd May has filled very nicely but as expected there are a couple of places available now if you would like to come. However, you will have to decide quite quickly as in a couple of weeks we will be paying for the motel rooms we have booked and any not used will have to be released. If you are interested or would like to know more about the trip, please contact Helen Gilkes on 9144 4825 or see her at the April meeting.

A one-day outing to the Bundanoon Garden Ramble on Saturday, 25th October has been organised and our coach booked. More details will be available closer to the date. It's always a great outing and a special treat to see some of the beautiful cooler climate gardens of this region of the Southern Highlands.

SHOW BENCH

Roses and dahlias competed for pride of place on the Show Bench this month with some very lovely exhibits of both species. The hibiscus were in full strength, both the single and doubled flowered varieties. The Container section had several very nice *Euphorbia milii*. Apart from being rather spikey, they all have very nice flowers and flower over a very long period of time—worth growing in a dry and warm spot if you haven't tried before. In the Vegie section, it appears that tomatoes are still producing with a number of very nice exhibits on display. All three Decorative classes were well filled with very nice and interesting exhibits. The 'Luck of the Irish' had some innovative entries and the 'Tussie-Mussie' class had some very pretty posies on display.

GARDEN TABLE

The Garden Table will be up and running again at the April meeting so bring in any plants or cuttings that you can spare. There are always some bargains to be had very cheaply so make sure you have a good look. This is a good time of the year to split up some of your large clumps of perennials so why not bring in some pieces to share with other members.

RAFFLE

There were three very nice plants donated by the Society on offer. Other prizes, donated by members, included a kokedama containing what looked like a fig and a very useful pair of snips as well as some nice looking chocolates. Many thanks to those people for their donations.

Your donations are always welcome - something nice that you wouldn't mind winning yourself. \$2 gets you three tickets so don't miss out.



MAIN SPEAKER MARCH:



The guest speaker this month was Dr. Caragh Threlfall, Senior Lecturer in Pure and Applied Plant Biology, School of Natural Sciences, Macquarie University. Her topic was 'Designing Innovative Urban Plantings for People and Animals'. Caragh's first point was that cities are critical places for conservation and many cities occur in locations crucial for biological conservation. There is a commitment to stop and reverse biodiversity decline by 2030. Caragh asked how exactly can this be achieved and what are the most viable approaches. Cities can play a critical role in addressing global biodiversity decline.

Ensuring healthy urban ecosystems is no small task, urban land is simply too expensive in some cities. So, to protect biodiversity, we need to capitalise on the opportunity to integrate new habitat in built, constructed spaces. We need more out of our greenspaces - we need multi-use spaces. This is the challenge and there has been an increase in policies supporting this agenda. Places like golf courses, green roofs, backyards, streetscapes and parks can all play a part.

Caragh went through three urban spaces that can be used for the purpose of increasing biodiversity - green spaces, streets and habitat trees. Caragh's study compared both public and private green spaces and found the presence of large old trees, native vegetation, more complex vegetation, absence of bright lights at night and proximity of these features to each other all helped to increase the biodiversity of the locations. This was helped by the creation of 'unmanaged' zones, absence of human access, presence of rocks, logs and dead trees - all places for increased habitats of both flora and fauna. This applied to streetscapes as well as open green spaces.

Part of Caragh's work involved developing a palette of plants that would enhance the biodiversity of an area. This was applied to certain areas and data collected on how successful this type of planting was in increasing the biodiversity of the area being tested. In one study there was a very noticeable increase in the number and variety of native bees using the areas studied. In the case of butterflies, there was a significant increase in the numbers sighted but no increase in the number of different species. Ku-ring-gai Council has been particularly cooperative in these studies,

installing the Woody Meadow Project in 2023.

Caragh found when investigating Sydney's bat population, of the 19 species she found, 7 of these are threatened. Although hundreds of nesting boxes have been installed in our area, many of these go unused. It is thought that the design is not suitable for a number of bats and further research will be needed to find out why. Of the lessons learnt, not all approaches work successfully. For long term success, a partnership between community, land managers and scientists will be necessary. New approaches need to be monitored and evaluated.



Ku-ring-gai Council's Woody Meadow Project in St Ives Chase

Main Speaker April: This will be Kathy Bradfield and the title of her talk is 'Your garden - weeds and other things'.

MEMBER SPEAKER MARCH:



Our member speaker was Phil Sarkies who spoke to us on the work he does as a Bush Care Officer with Willoughby Council. Phil brought in examples of some of the rare and endangered plants in the area under his supervision. This included *Epacris purpurascens* var. *purpurascens*, a lovely white or pale pink flowered *Epacris*. This is listed as a vulnerable species. Efforts were made to make cuttings but only 35 of these cuttings have survived. These are being planted back in the reserve where the original plant was discovered. The second plant Phil described is the *Xylomelum pyriforme* (Woody Pear). A well-established example of this was found in a private garden and seeds were recovered

from it. These have now been propagated and will be put back into the bushland areas where it is thought they would grow well. The third plant which is rare in the area (only one plant) is the *Telopea speciosissima* (the Waratah). So far propagation of the seed from this plant has not been successful.



Left to right:
Epacris purpurascens var. *purpurascens*, *Xylomelum pyriforme*,
Telopea speciosissima

IN THE VEGIE PATCH IN APRIL by Christine Rethers

Autumn is the best time to get more organics into the soil for autumn and winter crops. Dig in manure, compost, mineral fertiliser and microbes, biochar and anything else that aids nutrient uptake and water retention.

All the cool season vegies can be planted now, particularly brassicas such as broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, brussels sprouts, kale, bok choy and pak choi. Brassicas are nutrient-hungry plants so pump up the soil with manure, compost, slow-release fertiliser and spreadable soil microbes a few weeks before planting.

Leafy greens such as spinach, silver beet and rainbow chard thrive in autumn and will require liquid fertilising to produce large nutrient-dense leaves.

Peas and broad beans can be planted directly in the ground in April. They prefer the night-time temperatures to drop significantly from the daytime temperatures to do well.

Root vegies such as carrots, turnips, beetroot, onion and garlic can also be planted, remembering garlic is a long-term crop and will occupy the space until November/December at the end of the year.



Cauliflower

ATTRACTING BIRDS TO OUR GARDENS by Ted Shaw

We have all noticed the decline in the number and types of birds in our gardens, with fewer small birds now and a predominance of the larger aggressive birds. Here are a few simple tips that we can use to try to restore the balance, attracting more small birds especially back into our gardens.

1. Grow the right plants -create layers of groundcovers, small to medium shrubs and trees to provide year-round food and shelter. Shrubs are essential for small birds for protection and to provide nesting sites.

Try to use plants that are native to your local area as they thrive in local conditions and provide the right food and shelter for local birds. Tip prune plants when they are young to create the density that small birds like.

If native plants are really not your thing, try using the above principles when selecting exotic plants for your garden.

2. Birdbaths - providing a water source in the garden always encourages birds to visit. Install a simple birdbath or a pond with running water. Be sure to keep the water clean by emptying and refilling every few days. Don't place the birdbath in the open but put it close to dense shrubs or under a small tree so the birds can see when there's danger and they can retreat to a safe haven.



3. Should we feed the birds? This is a very debatable issue. Many people love feeding birds and it provides an opportunity for children to interact with our native wildlife. It also does encourage more birds into our gardens. Other people strongly oppose feeding birds claiming that it increases their dependency on food handouts and can lead to the spread of disease through bird populations. The debate will continue.

Those who feed birds can follow some simple guidelines to help minimise the potential of harming our birds. Don't put out too much food as they don't really need extra. Avoid putting out bread and meat. Wash bird tables regularly to minimise disease spread.

4. Avoid overuse of outside lights - many small birds rely almost entirely on insects for their source of food. Excess and unnecessary use of artificial lights in or near our gardens is taking its toll on garden insects.

5. Secure pets - domestic cats kill millions of our native birds every year. To protect our birds, attach a bell to cat collars if they must spend time outside and keep them inside at night.

Dogs can also stop birds from visiting and living in our gardens. The presence of a dog in the garden or an outside deck can deter some birds. Choose to keep your dogs inside more.

(Acknowledgement: Reference was made to *Gardening Australia* magazines when writing this article.)



Fairy Wren



Spinebill



Willy Wagtail

YOUR APRIL GARDEN by Maureen Smith

Autumn is truly with us and it is both clean up and planting time, both very satisfying tasks in the garden. Rake up fallen leaves for your compost bin or heap. Cut back grasses and shrubs which are past their prime. Remove any dead wood and deadhead spent flowers.

It is also a good time to tidy up those clumping perennials, both natives and exotics. If the clumps are newish, just remove the dead leaves and flowers, but every three to four years it is a good idea to rejuvenate them by dividing the clump. Dig around the clump to loosen the root ball and then lift it out. Shake off the excess soil and then pry or cut the clump into sections, ensuring each section has adequate roots and leaves. If unable to pry apart with your hands a sharp knife, spade or even a saw can be used. These divisions can be replanted in various spots in your garden or given to gardening friends. When replanting, water well with a seaweed product to help the plant settle in and develop a new healthy root system.

Autumn is also the time to prune or plant maples. It is also great season for introducing new trees to your garden and if you like the vibrancy that a Japanese maple can give, you could also look at *Euphorbia cotinifolia* (Copper Plant) or *Cercis canadensis* (Forest Pansy). Both are strikingly beautiful deciduous feature trees. The milder weather means minimal stress for the new trees and allows them to acclimatise and establish good root systems before the heat of next summer. Again, it is a good idea to give a good dose of a seaweed solution which will help to prevent transplant shock. Seaweed solution is also said to help build resilience for frosts, if we get any!



Euphorbia cotinifolia



Cercis canadensis

Some of the new native shrub hybrids could also be planted at this time. They have the advantage of being able to withstand the increasing summer heat as do many of the salvias, particularly those that hail from Mexico.

It is about the right time for some spring bulbs to be planted, think anemones, bluebells or Dutch iris. All of these will lie dormant in your garden after flowering, ready to surprise you, spring after spring.

Lastly, there is always the constant chore of weeding. Every weed you get before it flowers and seeds will save you much time in the future.

BLUE-BANDED BEES (*Amegilla cingulata*)



Blue-banded bee

This article was prompted by one of our members, Lynette Hunt, who sent in this picture of the blue-banded bees 'roosting' on the stem of a plant in her garden. She said that she has counted up to 50 bees at various times. After some research into this, we found that it is the male blue-banded bees that roost together in small groups at night, out in the open, hanging onto twigs or stems with their mandibles. They vigorously shake their legs and wiggle their abdomens when a new bee arrives to settle. Eventually they

all tuck their legs under their bodies and go to sleep. After warming up in the morning, they go on their daily routine of foraging and looking for a female to mate with. Blue-banded bees are solitary bees, meaning the females dig their own nests in the ground or in old logs and don't usually travel more than 300m from their nest to forage.



Lynette's roosting bees

Blue-banded bees are one of Australia's most beautiful native bees. They are about 11mm long and have bands of metallic blue fur across their black abdomens. They perform a special type of pollination called 'buzz pollination'. They do this by grasping the flower and shivering their flight muscles, causing the pollen to sheet out of its capsule. They can then collect this pollen and carry it from flower to flower, thus pollinating the flowers. Tomato plants respond especially well to this type of pollination. Some of the Australian native flowers also require buzz pollination, e.g. Hibbertia.

Research is being conducted at present by the University of Adelaide in developing Blue-banded bees for commercial greenhouse grown tomato pollination.

As a bee in the garden, Blue-banded bees are almost always non-aggressive and rarely sting. They are found in all states of Australia except Tasmania and the Northern Territory. They live in forests, woodlands and heath areas as well as in our urban gardens. It was always thought that they only visited blue or purple flowers but this is not true. However they do appear to be attracted to blue objects, including clothing.



A Blue-banded bee buzz pollinating a tomato plant flower

The female Blue-banded bee builds a solitary nest but they are often quite close to one another. They especially like soft sandstone to burrow in. Cells at the end of the tunnel they make contain an egg with a pollen/nectar mixture for the emerging larva to feed on.