

HORTULANUS

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

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FEBRUARY 2025

COMING EVENTS

- Feb. 1** Frangipani Society, Bromeliad Society, Begonia Society, Geranium Society, Hills District Orchids —Sales and Demonstrations, Castle Hill Showground. 9am-4pm Entry free (Cash only sales)
- Feb. 4** KHS February Meeting - Speaker: Jarryd Kelly, Botanic Gardens of Sydney, 'Health and Resilience of our Living Collection'
- Mar. 4** KHS March Meeting - Speaker: Dr. Caragh Threfall, 'Innovative Urban Plantings'
- Mar. 8-9** Hartley Valley Garden Festival, 10am-4pm both days. Gardens open: Highfields, Hartvale, Wild Meadows, Harp Of Erin, Gory'u Japanese Gardens. Includes plant sales, food stalls, speakers.

MEMBER NEWS

It is with great sadness that we inform you of the deaths during December of three of our members, our two centenarians, Aubrey Knowles and Shirley Walker, and Simon Solomons. Aubrey was very well-known to many of you, having had the distinction of winning the Point Score competition's President's Shield for five consecutive years. Shirley was a very active member for well over 20 years, right up to last year when she came on the Society's outing to the Boongala Native Garden. Simon and his wife were great travellers so could not attend many meetings but kept in touch through our newsletter. Cards of sympathy have been sent to the families involved.

There were 70 members and friends at the Christmas meeting and they enjoyed a very interesting talk by Tammy Huynh, one of the ABC's Gardening Australia presenters. This was followed by Bob Ballinger's Turpentine Seed Counting Competition. Members were invited to guess how many Turpentine seeds were contained in the Christmas tree that was made up of them. Bob reported that there were 39 entries who averaged a guess of 708 seeds. However three of them were over 1,000 as the entrants had not read the 'under 1,000' hint so the average then came down to 595. The actual number was 449 and the person closest to that number was Melissa Lahoud who won the prize of a large box of chocolates. The Lucky Door prizes were drawn next and then we adjourned for our Christmas Supper—a lovely spread supplied by our members, with hot and cold drinks supplied by the Society.



During the meeting, Lorraine Emerson, President of Gardens Club of Australia, presented one of our members, Virginia Fischer, with GCA Life Membership. This was in recognition of work Virginia has done over many years in helping to produce the GCA *Our Gardens* magazine. Many congratulations, Virginia!

Don't forget to have a look at our [Facebook](#) page which continues to have some interesting postings. We now have 54 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>. Julie Iyengar, the administrator of our site, has kindly offered to help anyone who would like to know more and join up. Please let the Secretary, Christine Rethers, know if you are interested.

SHOW BENCH

There were a number of very lovely exhibits on the Show Bench at the December meeting. Of special note were the hydrangeas and roses. The Vegetable section had some very delicious fruit and vegetables on display including a small branch with olives attached—not something we see very often. In the class for native flowers, the bright red of the Christmas bush (*Ceratopetalum gummiferum*) contrasted beautifully with the white of the Tea Tree

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(*Leptospermum laevigatum*). There were some very imaginative exhibits in the decorative classes. The 'Christmas Cheer' class even had a bottle of alcohol (empty, we presume) along with some very Christmassy flowers. This was the last Show Bench for the year and the results of the 2024 Show Bench Competition are as follows:

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|-----------------------------|------------------|
| 1. A Knowles & J Williamson | 6. B Zimmerman |
| 2. D & R Stewart | 7. E Mason |
| 3. K Swaby | 8. S Ballinger |
| 4. T & N Shaw | 9. J & P Whitney |
| 5. L Riordan | 10. B Ballinger |

Section Awards: **Cultural:** Aubrey Knowles & Judith Williamson; **Containers:** Len Riordan; **Small crops:** Aubrey Knowles & Judith Williamson; **Decorative:** Brenda Zimmerman; **Pictorial:** Bob Ballinger; **Encouragement:** Denis Tamsett.

Congratulations to all the winners! The prizes will be awarded at the February meeting. (Please note that prizes are only for the top ten winners plus the Section award winners. Please contact the Secretary if you are not listed but would like to know how you fared in the 2024 competition.)

The new Show Bench Competition for 2025 will be starting with the February meeting. If you haven't exhibited before, you might like to think about bringing in something. There is a class in the Decorative section just for anyone who has not yet entered an exhibit in this section before. This year's competition finishes with the December 2025 meeting so you have 11 meetings at which you can compete. All the details are contained in the Show Bench booklet. Every new member is given this booklet when they join but if you have mislaid your copy, please just ask the Secretary, Christine, for another copy.

MEMBERS' TRADING TABLE (March meeting)

Advance notice - members may bring in up to 30 plants for sale to fellow members so start thinking about what you will have ready for the March meeting. Full details and the forms required will be in the March *Hortulanus*.

GARDEN TABLE

The Garden Table will be in operation at the February meeting so bring in any of your plants that you have been propagating over the summer months as well as any cuttings or seeds that you have collected and saved. Don't forget that this is where you are likely to find some absolute treasures, the likes of which you will never find in the local garden centres.

RAFFLE

As usual, we will have a plant (or several plants) donated by the Society. Further donations from members would be much appreciated. Make sure you look out for our raffle ticket seller who this month will be Maureen James. Tickets are available at 3 tickets for \$2.

OUTINGS AND GARDEN RAMBLE

The four-day trip to the Beechworth and Bright area of North-East Victoria from 29 April to 2 May is fully booked but we have opened a waiting list as we know that we will inevitably have a few people who will drop out. If you would like to put your name on this waiting list, please see Helen Gilkes at the Sign-on Desk when you arrive or give her a ring on 9144 4826.

The other outing of the year will be a one-day trip to the Bundanoon Garden Ramble where 8 gardens will be available for us to view. This will be on Saturday, 25 October and further details will be available closer to this date.

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.

MAIN SPEAKER DECEMBER

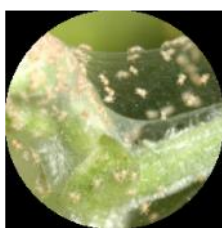


This was Tammy Huynh who is a presenter on the ABC program Gardening Australia. Tammy's topic was 'Indoor Plants 101' - a Beginner's Guide to Caring for Indoor Plants. Tammy stressed that there is no such thing as a true indoor plant. However, there are plants well suited to growing in lower light conditions. Most plants need bright, indirect light conditions so the room they are in should be well-lit where you plan to place your plants. There are a few plants that will tolerate low light levels but not necessarily thrive. For your pots, you can use any premium quality potting mix that is suitable for your particular plants. Most importantly make sure that the pots you use have

adequate drainage as no plant will tolerate prolonged 'wet feet'. Before watering your plants, it is important to check their moisture level. One of the best ways to do this is to apply the finger test - if you poke your finger into the top of the pot and it feels wet or damp, wait a little longer before watering. When the time comes for repotting, just move your plant up one or at the most two sizes. Overpotting (putting the plant in too big a pot) will result in too much moisture round the plant and a risk of it rotting. Repotting is best done in the warmer months. Pests are an inevitable part of looking after plants, wherever they are kept, even inside. Tammy recommended using an insecticide such as Yates Natures Way or Eco-neem. Take the plant outside to do the spraying.



Mealybug



Mites



Aphids



Scale

Tammy then took us through some of the plants that are suitable for indoor cultivation. These include Devil's Ivy, Syngonium, Philodendron, Sansevieria and Anthuriums,

The benefits of having plants in your house or apartment are significant. Plants have been shown to filter air pollutants and improve air quality by 25% in the house. They can help remove Volatile Organic Compounds that are present from paints, cleaners and furniture finishes.

As a 'thank-you' from the Society, Tammy took home a couple of rather rare Anthurium plants, sourced especially for her from a specialist grower. She also managed to win one of the Lucky Door prizes!

Main speaker February: This will be Jarryd Kelly from the Botanic Gardens of Sydney, speaking on the 'Health and Resilience of our Living Collection'.

MEMBER SPEAKER DECEMBER: There was no member speaker because of the Christmas Supper.

Member speaker February: This will be Bob Ballinger who will show us photos of the three gardens in Little Hartley that the Society visited in October of 2024.

IN THE VEGIE PATCH IN FEBRUARY by Christine Rethers

Hopefully everyone is harvesting bumper veggie crops by the basketful. Remember that the more you pick, the more you will get. If you leave your cucumbers, zucchini, corn, tomatoes, beans and the like to grow very big, the plant will think it has done its job of producing seeds for the next season and will stop producing.

It's time to think about your autumn and winter crops like broccoli, cabbage, cauliflowers, peas and snow peas, and broad beans, and get some seeds going. They will then be ready to plant out in late March or April. All of the above mentioned vegetables can be started from seed so why not give it a try. When putting your seed into seed trays, try to avoid sowing them too thickly. When they come up, be quick to thin them out, leaving about 6-8 plants in each seed tray (depending on what it is you have planted). I often then plant these individually into small pots when they have their second lot of leaves and grow them on before planting them in the garden in about May. Crops like carrots, beetroot, parsnips and radish prefer to be sown straight into your garden bed and then after thinning them out, left to mature in situ.

What to do with all that lovely basil you have now in your garden? The most obvious solution is to make pesto. Here is what I do (you may do differently but I know this will work) so here is the recipe. I am not giving you exact quantities because that will vary depending on how much basil you have available.

Pesto Sauce: First, put about a 1/2 cup of pine nuts (or walnuts) on a tray and pop this into a warm oven to toast for about 10 mins. Gather your basil leaves early in the day before the sun has a chance to wilt them. Give them a good rinse and spin or shake them dry. Put them in the food processor and add the pine nuts, 2-3 garlic cloves (peeled and chopped), 3/4 cup of grated parmesan or pecorino cheese and about 1/3 cup of good olive oil. Blend until it all comes together. To store, put it into a sterilised jar with a light coating of olive oil to stop the top from discolouring. I store ours in the fridge but if I have made a large batch, I put the rest in the freezer (it will defrost beautifully when needed).



Suggestions for use: spoon it over pasta or gnocchi, spread it on crackers to have with drinks, drizzle it over plain boiled or baked potatoes, use it as a sauce over baked or steamed fish or chicken, spread it on a home-made pizza. **Tip:** when you take some out of the jar to use, put a thin layer of olive oil over the top again when you put it in the fridge to stop the top layer from discolouring.

If you harvest your basil regularly and only take the top third of the plant, you will be able to have a second or even a third harvest from the same patch of basil.

YOUR FEBRUARY GARDEN by Maureen Smith

If you grow roses, it is essential to keep dead-heading the repeat-blooming varieties to keep the flowers coming all through the summer months. It takes approximately six weeks after dead-heading for a rose stem to produce a new bud. In Sydney, the autumn months of March and April often produce the best flowers because the sun's intensity is less and they keep their colour better. At the same time, a good feed of a fertiliser suitable for our hungry roses will be most beneficial. Make sure you water round the roses first, then apply the fertiliser and then water that in very well.

Dahlias are blooming their heads off right now but be aware that windy weather will wreak havoc with these top-heavy flowers and stems. Make sure you provided sufficient support for the taller varieties in the form of stakes or cradles. Again, it is very important to dead-head dahlias to keep them producing new flowers. Note - put small flower pots on top of the stakes to protect the eyes when working around the dahlia plants.

If you have agapanthus in your garden, **please make sure you cut off the seed heads** as the flowers finish. This is really important as the seeds wash down into our creek systems and from there into the bush where they become a real menace.

January and February are the months for the leaf-rolling caterpillars that particularly attack abutilon shrubs. They can quickly transform a lovely shrub into a horrible-looking mess. If you have this problem, the quickest and best solution I have found is to use this opportunity to trim back your abutilon and so remove quite a lot of the curled leaves. Make sure you put these prunings in your green waste bin and not the compost heap. The plant will respond within a month or two by producing new growth and by that time the leaf-curling caterpillars will have finished their life cycle and the new growth will not be affected. Alternatively, you could try using a spray of Yates Success Ultra but because the caterpillar is rolled up in the leaf, this is often not very successful.

Now is the time to check out the nursery catalogues for new roses, spring-flowering bulbs and the like. Getting in early with your order means you will secure the best selection. You will have to wait until probably July for bare-rooted roses to be delivered but it is always worth the wait. You may get your bulbs a bit earlier but it is advisable not to plant them until the weather is much cooler, say late April or May.

Evelyn, our President, adds the following: Dahlias are prone to infections by mites. Don't let the mites get a hold of the plant as they will ruin it. Cut off any affected leaves and buds (the leaves will be narrow and stunted and the buds won't open). I sprinkle Richgro Bug Killa granules onto the soil and water them in. Then I spray with Yates Mancozeb. Spraying needs to occur every couple of weeks until it's under control. The Bug Killa sprinkling lasts several weeks – read the instructions on the pack. It's not easy to buy the granules. Bunnings didn't stock them last time I checked as the product is known to affect bees. Check with your local nursery.

Black spot on roses is another problem at this time of year, especially after all the rain and humidity. I've found a two-prong strategy seems to work best. I sprinkle Richgro Black Spot & Fungus Killa and then spray with Yates Rose Shield. Remove any affected leaves and put in the green bin. Feed both dahlias and roses now. They are hungry feeders.

Christmas Meeting

