

HORTULANUS

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

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FEBRUARY 2026

COMING EVENTS

Feb. 4 KHS February Meeting - Speaker: Costa Georgiadis
Mar. 4 KHS March Meeting - Speaker: Mark Massey of Mother Earth Nursery plus 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 and your chance to wander through these fabulous acreage gardens.
Apr. 18/19 Oberon & Dist. Garden Club - 8 autumn gardens open plus guest speakers, craft and plant sales. 9.30am-4pm. \$25 for all 8 gardens.

MEMBER NEWS

There were 58 members and friends at the Christmas meeting and they enjoyed a very interesting demonstration by Lanny Pramana who showed us how to put together a lovely Christmas decoration as well as a Christmas wreath. These were then added to the Lucky Door prizes which were drawn next and then we adjourned for our Christmas Supper. This was a wonderful spread supplied by our members, with hot and cold drinks supplied by the Society.

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.



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 as well as a number of very nice Phalaenopsis orchids. In the class for native flowers, the bright red of the Christmas bush (*Ceratopetalum gummiferum*) brightened up the whole display. The Container section, included a beautiful red Mandevilla covered in flowers and a very nice Anthurium. The Vegetable section had some very delicious fruit and vegetables on display. There were some very imaginative exhibits in the Decorative classes. The 'Christmas is Coming' class included several Santa Claus, the Mixed Arrangements were skilfully put together and 'Inspired by Vegetables' had some clever and amusing entries.

This was the last Show Bench for the year and the results of the 2025 Show Bench Competition are as follows:

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

Section Awards: **Cultural:** Kym Swaby; **Containers:** Len Riordan; **Small crops:** Ted and Nancy Shaw; **Decorative:** Brenda Zimmerman; **Pictorial:** Bob and Sue Ballinger

Encouragement: Denis Tamsett.

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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 2025 competition.)

The new Show Bench Competition for 2026 will be starting with the February meeting. If you haven't exhibited before, you might like to think about bringing in something. This month there is a class in the Decorative section just for Men ... let's see how many of you men will have a go! This year's competition finishes with the December 2026 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, seeds, rhizomes or bulbs 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 Kerry Wills. Tickets are available at 3 tickets for \$2.

OUTINGS AND GARDEN RAMBLE

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. At the moment, this is still in the planning stage but basically we will travel up 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 on the Sunshine Coast and in the hinterland. We will finish the trip in the Gold Coast from where our travellers can fly back to Sydney. Those who don't want to fly back can stay on the coach and travel back to Sydney by coach. Put these dates in your diary - we will have more information for you shortly.

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 Lanny Pramana, a floral artist who has won numerous Floral Art competitions including the Grand Champi-



on in Decorative Flower & Garden for seven years in a row at the Royal Easter Show. Lanny showed us first how to put together a very impressive Christmas decoration suitable for a sideboard or table and then a Christmas wreath. Whilst not much of the two decorations were made using actual plant material, they were nonetheless very beautiful to look at.



Main speaker February: We are delighted that Costa Georgiadis, the Gardening Australia presenter, will be visiting us again this month. The topic of his presentation is unknown at the time of writing but knowing Costa, he will not be at a loss for words.

Member Speaker February: Guy Vissel will be giving us a masterclass on propagating camellias. Those who went on the last members' garden ramble will no doubt remember seeing the very large collection of camellia cuttings in Guy and Vered's garden. Ted Shaw will video his presentation and put it up on the wall so that all members will be able to see how Guy goes about this task.

IN THE VEGIE PATCH IN FEBRUARY by Christine Rethers

Hopefully everyone is harvesting bumper vegie 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 but they will then also need thinning out so that they can grow on to maturity without being overcrowded.

Would you like to try something new? I wonder how many of you have had a go at growing Okra—well Ted Shaw has and here is his account of how he went about it.

Have you tried to grow anything different lately? How about Okra?

I'd never heard of Okra when I saw a seed packet that looked interesting. Something different can be a challenge. The seed packet said: "This unusual member of the hibiscus family has an important part in African, Indian and Mediterranean cuisine, as well as in the American South where the red variant was developed. Very prolific and tolerates cooler growing conditions.

STEWs – SOUPs – FRY – GRILL – STEAM – DRY!

So I decided to grow it just to see how it performed in the vegie patch. The seed packet gave me instructions which I followed.

In early spring, I planted seeds in a seed tray of seed-raising mix. The seedlings emerged after seven or so days and I kept them moist until they were about 50mm tall. I potted them up into 75mm pots, and then planted them out when about 100mm tall. When planting out I treated them just like my tomato plants, about 60cm apart and with a stake to tie them up as they grew.

And they grew quite nicely, developed flowers, and then produced these strange colourful fruit pods. Now I need to find a suitable recipe. The ones I've read say something about cooking so they are not 'slimy' – that doesn't sound too good. Another challenge!



Ted's okra plant

Thank you, Ted! Jenny Watsford and Christine Rethers took up the challenge and after a rather rocky start, both managed to produce two different dishes that were not hard to cook and tasted very nice. Below is Jenny's recipe:

Roasted Okra (side dish for 4)

Ingredients

250 gm okra
2 tablespoons oil
1 tsp minced garlic
½ tsp smoked paprika
½ tsp fennel seeds
½ tsp ground cumin
½ tsp salt

Method

Preheat the oven to 200 degrees C. Line a baking dish with baking paper. Combine sliced okra, oil, garlic, paprika, cumin, fennel seeds and salt in a bowl. Mix well to coat the okra. Put the okra in a single layer in baking dish and roast for 25-30 minutes until okra pieces are crispy. Serve as an accompaniment to anything you wish.



Roasted okra

The other dish, cooked by Christine, was **Okra Mediterranean Style**. The okra was cut into chunks then fried with chopped onions and some minced garlic. Christine also added a diced green chilli but this is optional. She then added two large tomatoes that had been diced quite small and cooked this down in an open frying pan until the tomato was soft and the okra was cooked. A seasoning of salt and pepper was added plus 1/2 teaspoon each of ground allspice, coriander and paprika. The result was a very tasty side dish that would go well with lamb chops, steak or even fried fish. This dish served two people.

YOUR FEBRUARY GARDEN by Maureen Smith

February on average is Sydney's hottest month so not a good time for planting or any of the too arduous gardening tasks. When we do get a good shower or two of rain and the moisture has gone down a few centimetres, it is a good idea to top up the garden beds with a good covering of mulch.

It's also not a good time for heavy pruning but a bit of snipping and deadheading here and there can tidy up the garden and prepare it for autumn. Deadhead spent flowers from perennials and annuals especially plants like agapanthus as the seeds can easily spread into the bush. Old flowering stalks of daylilies and the dead leaves that are around the base can be removed. As the flowers die off, lavender shrubs can be lightly pruned to remove them and give the shrub a good shape but never cut as far down as the old brown wood as this will not shoot again with new growth.

Tidying up your garden at this time can leave some bare looking patches and these can be filled with temporary potted colour or a quick growing temporary plant like *Tradescantia zebrina*. This will cover up a dull area with vibrant silver, green and mauve leaves. The good thing is its very easy to get rid of when it is no longer needed.



Tradescantia zebrina



Shasta Daisy

Now is the time to think about what you might plant in the autumn or winter. I have just been reading about Vita Sackville West, the English garden designer, and am inspired by her on two fronts. Firstly her philosophy of cram, cram, cram every chink and cranny in your garden with plants. As well as giving weeds little chance to grow, I believe it helps keep moisture in the ground and protects the roots from our increasingly harsh sun. My other inspiration is her white garden and although not intending to have a completely white garden as was one of the rooms at Sissinghurst, I am looking to introduce pops of white throughout our garden. In shady areas they can provide a bright spot and elsewhere a striking and cooling contrast to other plants and foliage. At the moment I am considering shasta daisies, white-striped liriope, white Japanese anemones and hydrangeas, both mophead and oakleaf.



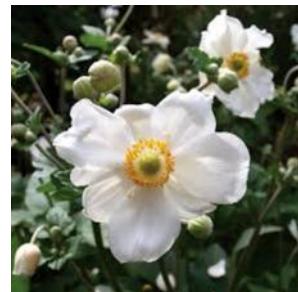
Liriope



Leaf-roller caterpillar

This is a good time of the year to give your abutilon a trim, especially if they have been attacked by the leaf-roller caterpillar. Make sure you put the trimmings in the green waste bin and not your compost so as to remove the caterpillar completely from your garden.

If you are growing basil, you can prolong its useful life by removing the flower stalks. If you leave them on, the plant will 'shut up shop' and stop producing new growth.



Anemone (Wind Flower)

February is probably the month when you think about your garden or courtyard rather than doing something about it ... except, of course, for an early morning deep watering. The bulb catalogues will be available very soon and you can have an enjoyable time selecting what you would like to plant in your garden for spring flowering.

Christmas 2025 Meeting

