

# HORTULANUS

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

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## FEBRUARY 2024

### COMING EVENTS

- Feb. 3** NSW Begonia Society Plant Sale, Federation Pavilion, Castle Hill Showground. 9am-2pm  
**Feb. 6** Frangipani Society—Sales and Demonstrations, Castle Hill Showground. 9am-4pm Entry free  
**Feb. 6** KHS February Meeting - Speaker: John Siemon, Director of Horticulture and Living Collections at the Botanic Gardens of Sydney  
**Mar. 5** KHS March Meeting - Speaker: Pamela Munro. Her topic is Bromeliads.

### MEMBER NEWS

There were 68 members and friends at the Christmas meeting and they enjoyed a very interesting talk by Mark Schuster, Technical Bushfire Officer, Ku-ring-gai Council. This was followed by Bob Ballinger's Agapanthus Seed Counting Competition. Members were invited to guess how many Agapanthus seeds were contained in a large jar. The person closest to the correct number was Jill Harrison who won the 'second' prize, a lovely plant. (The first



prize obviously went to Bob who had had to count them to find the correct number). 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. Our speaker, Mark Schuster, entertained us with Christmas music on his accordion. What a wonderful way to finish a very busy year of activities which included our 90th Anniversary which was held at the May meeting. We now look forward to our new year of hopefully equally interesting and enjoyable activities in 2024.



Don't forget to have a look at our [Facebook](#) page which continues to have some interesting postings. We now have 52 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 outstanding exhibits on the Show Bench at the December meeting. Of special note was a lovely and very large white hydrangea, of a size seldom seen before. One of the plants that really stood out was a very well grown and flowered Adenium (Desert Rose). This is a plant that is hard to keep alive in Sydney's climate, preferring warmer and drier conditions, so this particular specimen was exceptional. Also notable was the display of about five different orchids including a very large and well flowered *Brassia verrucosa* and a lovely yellow oncidium. The rhubarb challenge is on again with three very large greenish stems up against the smaller but redder exhibit. The redder stems won the day. There were some interesting decorative exhibits in the class called 'Trapped'. The pictorial class had two lovely pictures of a member's December garden.

This was the last Show Bench for the year and the results of the 2023 Show Bench Competition are as follows:

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

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Section Awards: **Cultural:** A Knowles & J Williamson; **Containers:** L Riordan; **Small crops:** A Knowles & J Williamson; **Decorative:** B Zimmerman, C Lukey (Equal); **Pictorial:** R Ballinger; **Encouragement:** Jeanette Bond and John Darge (Equal).

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. Please contact the Secretary if you are not listed but would like to know how you fared in the 2023 competition.)

The new Show Bench Competition for 2024 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 2024 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 Ian St Clair. Tickets are available at 3 tickets for \$2.

### **OUTINGS**

The Outings Committee has been busy investigating some interesting outings for members this coming year. Ted Shaw will be asking for a show of hands to gauge the interest for two possible multi-day outings.

We also plan to hold a one-day trip as well as a garden ramble. For the ramble we invite members to let us know if you would be willing to open your garden to a members-only garden visit. We ideally need three gardens within fairly close proximity with the possibility of having afternoon tea in the last garden to be visited. Please let Ted, Helen or Christine know if you would be willing to participate.

### **MAIN SPEAKER DECEMBER**



Our speaker at the December meeting was Mark Schuster, Technical Bushfire Officer at Ku-ring-gai Council. With more than 25 years of experience working with councils and other institutions as a Fire Ranger, Fire Planner and Ecologist both in New South Wales and Queensland, Mark gave us a detailed view of how professionals tackle the enormous problems involved with controlling fires, especially in a densely built-up area such as Ku-ring-gai.

Mark emphasised the need to know the flora and fauna of the areas of possible bushfire impact. The Ku-ring-gai local government area is a veritable hot bed of biological diversity as the area is 'peppered' with numerous habitat types that support over 800 plant species, at least 170 fungi and over 690 described fauna species. Ku-ring-gai's significant biodiversity stems from its diverse habitats and geological landscapes ranging from estuarine mangrove mudflats to steep sided sandstone gullies and ridges swathed in heathy

woodlands, open forest and riparian rainforest to shale-capped ridge tops with tall open forest. The area also gets one of the highest levels of rainfall in northern Sydney which helps support open forest dominated by tall blue gums, blackbutts, turpentines and ironbarks on the richer shale soils. Today many Council reserves and tree-lined suburbs provide important bio-linkages or corridors between the three large national parks (Lane Cove NP, Ku-ring-gai Chase NP and Garigal NP) and smaller reserves within and around the lower north shore. Corridors of vegetation come well up into the suburbs resulting in an extensive bushland-urban interface.

So what is the best way to protect our built-up areas from fire? It is necessary to strike a balance between asset protection and the ecologi-



**An example of hazard reduction burning in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park**

cal needs of the area. In the Ku-ring-gai LGA there is a huge bushland-urban interface (around 130km) with 38% of all residents sitting ‘on the razor’s edge’. The urban tree canopy is now over 70% coverage and embers can impact anywhere in the municipality. The general practice that is being adopted is to use fire to stop fire. The way to lessen the severe impacts of uncontrolled fires is to use prescribed burning, hazard reduction and eco-burning (mosaic burning). Mechanical clearing of vegetation and education and awareness for residents is also used. Good urban planning is essential so that people and bushfire prone areas are not mixed. Low-intensity strip burning results in low flame height so no canopy damage, excellent post-fire recovery and a 50% fuel level reduction.

Mark brought along some of the information sheets and brochures available from Ku-ring-gai Council and recommended that we all become aware of our particular bush fire situation depending on where we live in the area. He also recommended that we all have a Bush Fire Survival Plan. Copies of the document relating to this is available from [www.rfs.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au). To answer the question ‘So What Can I Do?’ Mark recommended that we check out the five steps in the Council’s ClimateWiseCommunities document— <https://climatewisecommunities.com.au/>.

**Main speaker February:** John Siemon, Director of Horticulture and Living Collections at the Botanic Gardens of Sydney, will return to speak to us again. His topic will be the Living Collections of the Botanic Gardens Sydney. John was the keynote speaker at our 90th Anniversary meeting in May last year.

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

**Member speaker February:** This will be Phil Sarkies who will talk to us about ‘Weeding without Chemicals’.

### **IN THE VEGIE PATCH IN FEBRUARY by Christine Rethers**

Hopefully everyone is harvesting their 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.

A couple of years ago Nancy Shaw shared her wonderful Tomato Relish recipe with us. It is reproduced here for you to try—you won’t be disappointed.

### **Nancy’s Tomato Relish Recipe**

#### **Ingredients**

3 kgs ripe tomatoes	3 teaspoons dry mustard
2 tbs flour	1 kg onions
1 tbs curry powder	0.5 kgs apples
half tsp chilli powder	3 tbs salt
1 litre dark vinegar	1 kg sugar

#### **Method**

Peel and slice tomatoes, onions and apples. Sprinkle on 3 tbs salt and let stand overnight. Drain off the brine. Mix dry ingredients with a little of the vinegar. Boil tomatoes, onions and apples with the rest of the vinegar and sugar for 10 mins. Add the spice mixture. Cook for about 2 hrs until thick. Bottle in usual way.

### **Pollinating My Pumpkins by Ted Shaw**

Last summer my pumpkin harvest was down and I attributed that to the shortage of bees in our gardens. So this summer I decided I should put into practice what I’d been hearing people say was a way of overcoming the bee problem – I would try pollinating the pumpkin flowers myself. There were a few things I needed to know first. Pumpkins are monoecious, meaning that each plant has both male and female flowers. In practice, a pumpkin plant develops many more male flowers than female flowers and many male flowers come out first before the first female flower. Male flowers and female flowers are different. Female flowers have a stigma within the flower (Fig 1) and an ovary where the flower meets the stalk (Fig 2), and male flowers have a stamen (Fig 3) and no ovary. To pollinate the female flower, I pulled the petals off the male flower to make a ‘brush’ of pollen (Fig 4), and then wiped the ‘brush’ around the stigma of the female flower to complete the pollination. If fertilisation occurs, the ovary starts to swell (Fig 5) and the fruit develops (Fig 6). I think this process has been quite successful. I have more pumpkins developing than last summer, and there are still flowers coming as the pumpkin vines continue to grow. There is still that question though, did I do it or did the bees? This same process can be applied to zucchini, squash, melons and even the smaller cucumber flowers.

#### ***Pollinating Pumpkins***



**Fig. 1**



**Fig. 2**



**Fig. 3**



**Fig. 4**



**Fig. 5**



**Fig. 6**

## CREPE MYRTLE by Maureen Smith

Have you noticed how beautiful the crepe myrtles are looking? Because of their non-invasive root systems, they are often used as street trees and in North Sydney they have done that most effectively. They have pruned them to create a short trunk and a rounded lollipop of foliage. With their varying colours the red, pink and white flowerheads, they are looking quite spectacular at the moment. Some people prune them to maintain a multi-limbed shrub, which when in bloom is most eye-catching.

Crepe myrtles are part of the Lagerstroemia family, the name coming from the Swede, Magnus von Lagerstrom, who supplied Carl Linnaeus with plants he had collected on his travels in Southeast Asia with the Swedish East India Company.

It is not only the foliage that makes the crepe myrtle such an attractive plant, it also sheds its bark throughout the year resulting in an interesting mottled appearance. Thus, even a flowerless, leafless tree has a special beauty, displaying its pink, cream and orange trunk. Crepe myrtles are often pollarded, that is the removal of the upper and lower branches to promote a dense head of foliage the next season. Ostensibly, this is what they have done in North Sydney. Pollarding, however, is a contentious issue, with many landscapers opposed to it. Some believe it makes for a top-heavy tree, others that it will over time weaken the tree.

Crepe myrtles are reasonably fast growing. Being deciduous they give winter sun but provide an excellent shade for summer with the added bonus of their colourful and long-lasting flowers. They are relatively carefree, needing little attention other than a prune and it is your choice to pollard or not to pollard.



*Crepe myrtle unpollarded*



*Crepe myrtles pollarded*



*Winter pruning of pollarded trees*



*Trunk in winter*

## YOUR FEBRUARY GARDEN by Christine Rethers

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 the flower pots on top of the stakes—put there 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 at this time of the year. 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 pruning in your green waste bin and not the compost heap. The plant will respond within a month or two to the pruning by producing new growth but 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.