

HORTULANUS

Official Publication of Ku-ring-gai Horticultural Society Inc.
MARCH 2022



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COMING EVENTS

- 1 Mar** KHS Monthly Meeting—Speaker: Libby Cameron - ‘A Floral Ride Through India’ plus Members’ Trading Table
- 5 April** KHS Monthly Meeting
- 9/10 April** Collectors’ Plant Fair, Hawkesbury Race Course, Clarendon.
<https://www.collectorsplantfair.com.au/>
- 10 April** Keith and Maureen Smith -Plant Sale in support of the National Breast Cancer Foundation, 45 Parkland Ave, Lane Cove North from 10am to 3pm (Covid regulations permitting)
- 23 April** KHS Trip to the Southern Highlands (details see below)
- 30 April/1 May** Roses by the Seaside -Aust. National Rose Championships and Conference, Kiama
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MEMBER NEWS

At long last we will be able to hold our March 2022 meeting in the newly refurbished St Ives Community Hall. The meeting will be open to members and friends. Please note the following:

- Masks are no longer mandatory
- The hall will operate at 1 person per 2 sq.m.
- The QR code check-in will not be operating but we ask you to sign in as usual at the front desk for insurance purposes.
- Disinfectant wipes and hand sanitisers will be provided for your use.
- Refreshments will be served to you during the supper break. Please observe the 1.5m distance rule when waiting to be served.

Don’t forget to have a look at our [Facebook](#) page which continues to have some interesting postings. We now have 51 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>.

OUTINGS

Your society is planning to visit the **Southern Highlands on Saturday, 23 April 2022** for the Autumn Gardens Weekend and Plant Sale at the Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens. We will visit the Plant Sale first, as soon as we arrive, followed by three of the open gardens. Morning tea will be provided but we ask that you bring your own lunch so that we can keep the costs down. The cost of the coach and garden entries will be \$75. A booking form is included with your March Hortulanus. Bookings may be made with Helen Gilkes at the March and April meetings or by mail to 20A Normurra Avenue, North Turramurra 2074.

MEMBERS’ TRADING TABLE

The Trading Table will be operating at the March meeting. 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 first class condition, pots should be clean with no soil, roots or stains on the outside of the pot. 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 and a paddle pop stick showing the owner’s initials, the plant number and the price should be put in each pot. On the form there are two sections, the first half is your record. The first column will be ticked off by the

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sales team as the plant is received. The second column is for the number of the plant so each plant will have a number from 1 to 10. The third column is for the plant name – if you don't know the name then a short description. The fourth column is the price you wish to receive for this plant and the fifth column is the price that the plant sold for. On the second half of the form you should repeat this information so that the sales team can keep a record which they use to process your payment. If you want to bring more than 10 plants, then simply use another form but continue the numbering, e.g. the next set of plants will be numbered from 11 up to 20. You will receive your payment at the next meeting. They will hand back the first half of the form to you at the end of the meeting. **Please take home any of your unsold plants.** Paddle pop sticks and extra forms will be available at the table. Plants will be checked in on arrival at a table outside the hall and the paper work will be signed off.

As the wonderful team who run the Garden Table will be looking after the Trading Table, **there will be no Garden Table for this meeting only.** The form to be completed is available with this newsletter –just print out a copy, fill it in and bring it with you when you bring in your plants that you want to sell. **Please bring your own bags or boxes for your purchases.**

SHOW BENCH

There will be the normal Show Bench with all the usual classes at our March meeting and the Schedule for this is being sent with this newsletter. We are going to trial a slightly different way of recording the results: you will fill in a Show Bench card for each of your exhibits as usual, making sure that you put the correct class number on each card as well as your name and the name of your exhibit if possible. The judges will then mark the places on the cards of the first and second place winners. We will then pick up **all** the cards so that we can keep a record of the winners and the number of exhibits in each class. **Please do not remove any of the cards** and please make sure your handwriting is legible.

FEBRUARY MEETING

This meeting was our first ever Zoom meeting and some 29 members participated. The meeting was chaired by our President, Evelyn Mason, who started with some announcements about up-coming events and of course, a joke. She then introduced our speaker, Jacqui Maxwell, who is the President of the Tropical Garden Society of Sydney. Jacqui's topic was Nepenthes and other Tropical Carnivorous Plants in her Garden in Kariong, near Gosford. Jacqui has a large and sheltered garden on a fairly steep and rocky slope so many of her treasured plants are in pots and



Nepenthes
Tropical Pitcher Plant

troughs. Although Nepenthes (pitcher plants) are found in and around S.E. Asia and the islands of the Philippines and Borneo and Sarracenias (the other large group of carnivorous plants) are found mainly in North America, they both have similar characteristics of using insects trapped in the digestive juices contained in their hollow and open-to-the-air stems for their main source of food. Jacqui took us through the growing requirements of the Nepenthes first: **light**—morning sun preferred with some shade for the rest of the day; **moisture**—they like to be kept damp but not wet, watering once a day in summer and once a week in winter is a good rule of thumb; **humidity**— they like plenty of humidity which is needed to produce the pitchers so in very dry conditions a micro spray with the hose will be of benefit; **temperature** –while some Nepenthes come from very tropical regions and require greenhouse conditions, most are very tolerant of a wide range of temperature; **nutrients** - Jacqui was reluctant to recommend any kind of fertiliser for the soil because they get most of their nutrients from digesting insects that fall into their pitchers and she noted that where they grow naturally the soil is low in nutrients. Possibly one or two Osmocote Slow Release pellets can be dropped occasionally into the pitchers; **growing media** - this can be either orchid bark, coir chips and perlite or sphagnum moss and perlite, the choice is yours (Jacqui uses sphagnum moss and perlite); **containers** –water-well pots are useful or a pot with a saucer under it to hold in a bit of extra moisture can also be used.

Jacqui then went on to show us some of her Sarracenias (the North American pitcher plants). These tend to be dormant in winter and can be cut back completely as by then they tend to look a bit bedraggled. Jacqui grows her plants in shallow bowls and pots which she fills first with scoria for drainage then a mix of peat moss, horticultural sand and sphagnum moss. She moistens this mix and then plants into it and tops it with some more sphagnum moss for a more decorative effect. Again, these plants get most of their nutrients from insects that fall into their pitchers and should not be given extra fertiliser. As they are bog plants, there should always be some water present in the bottom of the pot or tray they are grown in. These will produce flowers right at the beginning of the growing season in spring which stand up above the new pitchers and look really pretty.

The best place to buy either type of pitcher plant is at selected nurseries or at some of the plant fairs such as the Collectors' Plant Fair or the Kariong Plant Lovers Fair. Jacqui then took us round the rest of her lovely garden and showed us some interesting Hebel sculptures. Jacqui and a group of friends used some of the lockdown time during the Covid pandemic to produce some interesting and very artistic sculptures.



Sarracenias

IN THE VEGIE PATCH IN MARCH by Ted Shaw

Growing Vegie Seedlings for Autumn Planting

In last month's Hortulanus, Christine Rethers encouraged us to plant seeds now for autumn and winter vegetables. Of those suggested, I have sown seeds of Cabbage, Cauliflower, Broccoli, Silver Beet and Lettuce, and I used a seed raising mix with some additional fine perlite.

I planted the seeds at the start of February, and they were up within 3 to 4 days. It turned out that I sowed too many seeds in each punnet and they grew tall and leggy quite quickly. After two weeks I pricked out and replanted about 8 per small round pot containing potting mix with a little slow-release fertiliser. The growth of the replanted seedlings has slowed but they are looking strong and healthy. They should be ready to transfer into the vegie patch by about mid-March when they have a good second set of leaves.

Normally I try to have enough seedlings to plant out so that I can put two in each spot, then after a couple of weeks if both survive, I take out the weakest one or move it to a spot where neither have survived. There are always leftovers to donate to other family gardeners. It's not too late to give it a try!



Cauliflower seedlings in seed raising mix



After two weeks

Cauliflower seedlings replanted into potting mix

Top tip! If you have any pumpkins growing, now is the time to put some straw or sugar cane mulch under them to prevent contact with the soil which can rot them. Don't harvest them until the leaves start to die back and the stem turns brown. They should be stored in a cool, dry and preferably dark place until they are needed for the cooking pot.

INDOOR PLANTS by Maureen Smith

Nowadays the choice of indoor plants is almost infinite but the prices can vary and become very expensive if you seek the latest and rarest. But any indoor plant is a good idea, not only for your decor but for your health. They purify the air and remove many of the toxins created by modern living. As far as decor is concerned, there will be one to fill any need, large, small, trailing, low light to bright indoor light.

Light is the first thing to be considered. Many plants will thrive in low light but others will need a brighter but indirect light. No matter where you put your plant, it's a good idea to give it a quarter turn once a month to even out the light it receives. You also need to consider whether the spot you have chosen is good for all seasons.

Watering is also important as some like to dry out between waterings and others like to remain moist. However, none like soggy roots. Many indoor plants originally came from the tropics and like humidity. This can be supplied by a saucer of stones or gravel with some water on which the plant can sit or alternatively, a regular spray with a misting bottle.

Your plant is living in a pot so keeping up the nutrients is necessary—and don't forget to dust! Leaves covered in dust find it hard to use the process of photosynthesis so a regular wipe over with a moist cloth helps keep them healthy and good looking. Some people like to add a drop of mineral oil to this damp cloth for shinier leaves. Ficus certainly benefit from this 'beauty' treatment.

So now to your choice of plant/s. Those that thrive in low light include *Dracaena trifasciata* (formerly known as *Sansevieria trifasciata*). It's colloquial name is Snake plant or Mother-in-Law's Tongue. They come in a variety of green, grey or yellow forms, are very tough and need infrequent watering. Another easy care plant is *Epipremnum* which is often sold as Devil's Ivy. This plant loves to trail or climb over a structure. It is important to let it dry out between waterings. Another plant that should dry out between waterings is *Syngonium*, the Arrow plant. These fast growers come in a variety of forms from pale pink, through pale green to dark green. Other low light lovers are Parlour Palms and *Aglaonema*.

If your spot is brighter then consider the Ficus. Both *F. elastica* and the Fiddle Leaf ficus will grow into quite substantial plants and you would be advised not to plant these in the garden as they can grow to over 30m. They like to be in bright light but not direct sunlight. Don't overwater and let the top 5cm of soil dry out in between waterings. *Ficus elastica* Tineke is a beautifully variegated form.

Other easy care medium light lovers are the many different types of *Crassulas*, the Jade plants. In fact most of these will thrive in some direct sunlight. Prune them regularly to keep them bushy. As these are a succulent, don't overwater, just keep the soil moist. *Peperomia*, a species with numerous forms either trailing, upright or clumping, are a popular indoor plant. Let the top 2 centimetres of soil dry out between waterings. *Peperomia* watermelon is particularly attractive as a terrarium plant.



Dracaena trifasciata



Ficus elastica
Tineke

For those areas of full sunlight, you really can't go past succulents. Kalanchoe in particular are very easy care and if you want flowers, the Kalanchoe blossfeldiana comes in many varied colours.

Plant nurseries now carry so many different indoor plants that there is no excuse not to have at least one or two or maybe three of these.



Kalanchoe blossfeldiana



Watermelon Peperomia



Syngonium

YOUR MARCH GARDEN by Maureen Smith

► Now is the time to think about trimming your hedges after the incredible summer of growth that we have had. Don't forget a slight narrowing from bottom to top helps to keep growth healthy at the lower levels. Fertilise and water well. If your hedge is Lilli Pilli, then check for psyllids. These sap suckers cause ugly bumps on the leaves. Trim off what you can and then spray with Eco Oil to suffocate the rest.

► Now is the time to repot your Cyclamens, after their summer dormancy. Take the corm out of the pot, clean off any old soil and of course discard any soft or rotting corms. Repot in well-draining potting mix and place the corm so that the top half is sitting above the mix. Water once and put in a shaded spot until shoots form. When this happens you can fertilise (I use slow release) and water regularly.

► Autumn is a good time for planting so why not try something new, a climber perhaps. There is a wide variety to choose from, many with beautiful flowers. Mandevillas and Trachelospermum (Star Jasmine) are two and there are always the exotic bougainvilleas which come in a myriad of colours. All these grow in pots as well as in the ground and all they need is a nice sunny spot. The Mandevillas and Trachelospermum can provide good cover for an unsightly fence or wall, and look good even when not flowering.

► Irises and Day Lilies can also be planted now. Both need a sunny spot. The rhizome of the iris should be planted just below the surface to protect the rhizome and roots from sun scalding but ensuring they get plenty of warmth. Give some space between rhizomes as they will clump over time and need to be lifted and divided about every three years. The problem with irises is that there are so many beautiful varieties and colours it is hard to choose what to plant. Day Lilies need to be planted a little deeper than irises and the crown should be about 5cm deep. Similar to irises, they will clump over time and should be lifted and divided every 3 to 4 years.

► Any shrub that will flower on the next season's growth will benefit from a prune in March and one of these is the hydrangea. Any stem that has already flowered can be cut back to two plump healthy buds, cutting just above the node. These prunings can make good hardwood cuttings if you like to propagate. You don't need to prune a non-flowering stem unless you are tidying up the bush and reducing height but if you do, don't prune so far down the stem, while still look for two healthy buds. Any old stems that look past their 'use by' date can be cut back right to the base. Don't be hesitant when pruning your hydrangeas as they are tough and will bounce back with vigour and reward you with beautiful flower heads.

► As always there is the regular maintenance, hopefully the weed growth will have slowed down a little, but it is an ongoing task. One of the best solutions for this is to fill every available space with wanted plants and to mulch.

