

# HORTULANUS

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

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## DECEMBER 2023

### COMING EVENTS

**Dec. 5** KHS Christmas Meeting - **Speaker:** Mark Schuster, Technical Bushfire Officer, Ku-ring-gai Council

**2024**

**Feb. 6** KHS February Meeting - **Speaker:** John Siemon, Director of Horticulture and Living Collections at the Botanic Gardens of Sydney



### A Christmas message from our President

*On behalf of the KHS Committee, I wish all KHS members and their families a peaceful Christmas and a New Year filled with optimism for new gardening ventures. No matter the scale on which you garden, whether in pots on your verandah or on a ride-on mower to do the lawns, there is always a project to get you going.*

*The highlight for this past year would have to be our 90th Anniversary celebrations at our May meeting when we were joined by some of our local dignitaries. What a great evening that was! We have also enjoyed two lovely outings to see the Daffodils at Rydal and the beautiful gardens in the Berry region. In addition we have had a number of very interesting speakers and of course, have enjoyed each month the delights of our Show Bench displays. This does not happen by itself but requires the services of your very hardworking committee and we thank them for their all their help and splendid organisation. In addition to the Committee there are the very willing band of helpers without whom our meetings would not run as smoothly as they do. We thank each and every one of them for their contributions.*

*We will finish the year with yet another interesting speaker and our usual Christmas supper which we are sure you will all enjoy. We will be taking a break over the January holiday period and look forward to welcoming you all back again to our first meeting of the 2024 year at the beginning of February next year.*

*Evelyn Mason*



### MEMBER NEWS

Our Christmas meeting will start with our guest speaker, Mark Schuster, Technical Bushfire Officer, Ku-ring-gai Council. This will be followed by our Christmas supper and members are invited to bring a plate of something delicious, either savoury or sweet. The Society will provide soft drinks and tea/coffee.

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.

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## OUTINGS

Planning has started for our 2024 outings. The Society tries to have at least two outings each year with one of them being for one or two nights. The Outings Committee would welcome your suggestions as to where you would like to visit so please get in touch with the Secretary, Christine, if you have any ideas that you would like the Committee to consider.

## SHOW BENCH

The highlights of the November Show Bench were all the roses, both in the Cultural and in the Decorative classes. Hydrangeas also featured as did the fuchsias. Some interesting ideas were on display in the Decorative class 'Cage of Beauty'.

There is only the December meeting to go before the Show Bench competition closes for this year with the winners to be announced in the February Hortulanus and the prizes given out at the February meeting. The new Show Bench competition will start at that meeting. If you have not yet brought along something to exhibit on the Show Bench, this will be a good time to start.

## GARDEN TABLE

The Garden Table will **not** be operating at the December meeting so the next one will be when we return from the Christmas break at the beginning of February. Let's all get propagating!

## MAIN SPEAKER NOVEMBER

This was Ross Rapmund, Senior Horticulturalist at Harvest Seeds and Native Plant Propagation. His topics included a discussion of the collection of genetically diverse seeds and their successful nursery propagation. Ross emphasized that diversity is the key when collecting seed in the bush. Some seeds require the use of a vice to open them, others will simply shake out of their pods. Seeds will be dried and stored in airtight foil bags that are light and predator proof and these are carefully labelled with the location of where they were collected, the date of collection and other relevant information. These are then stored in a special seed storage room until they are required. Some seeds are contained in fruit that needs to be peeled or depulped and fermented which replicated their natural dispersal in the wild. Often this type of seed is difficult to store because of its high water content.

When it comes time to propagate the seeds, their specific needs must be taken into account. Some require special treatment such as scarification to break their dormancy. Some need to be planted when daylight hours are short, others when the day is long. Some require special smoke treatment to stimulate germination. Germination can be a matter of a few weeks to a few months. For some types of seeds, they need to be covered lightly but for others, no covering should be used. Orthodox seeds (those that are easily dried) can be stored by the Mt Annan Seedbank and some are sent to Kew Gardens in the UK for storage in the Millennium Seedbank.

Ross gave as an example of an orthodox seed the Christmas Bells (*Blandfordia nobilis*) which had its seeds collected in January and February, sown in March and germinated in May. Ross also gave descriptions of the special treatment given to some seeds. As an aid to germination, misting and bottom heat using foil matting with heating coils is used.

In addition to propagation by seed, the company also uses cuttings and Ross outlined how this is done. Some cuttings are dipped in Clonex Purple hormone treatment and then planted into a 50:50 Vermiculite/Perlite mix while other types are planted in peat plugs. The process of root formation was illustrated. Again some cuttings take weeks to form roots while other will have roots after as few as 10 days. However, not every type of cutting will strike, with 0% struck on one collection of the pine-leaved Geebung (*Persoonia pinifolia*).

Ross illustrated his very interesting talk with a demonstration of the propagation techniques he uses and Ted (our technical guru) was able to project this onto the wall so that everyone in the hall had a good view of what Ross was showing us. This is the first time we have used this innovation so it was pleasing to see how well it worked.

**(Harvest Seeds and Native Plants supplies plants, seeds and tube stock to wholesale and retail customers and is located at 281 Mona Vale Road, Terrey Hills Phone 9450 2699. Ed.)**

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

**MEMBER SPEAKER NOVEMBER:** This talk on the genus *Agapanthus* was prepared by Bob Ballinger but given by his wife Sue due to his absence after recent surgery. Bob noted that the *Agapanthus* was first recognised in and named 1788 by a French botanist, Charles Louis L'Heritier de Brutelle. The name originated from the Greek for 'Love Flower'. It is in fact a species of herbaceous perennial from South Africa. Unfortunately it has become an invasive species in some parts of the world including Australia and New Zealand. The plant has been used for medicinal purposes and is considered to have anti-inflammatory properties. However, it is poisonous if eaten and its sap can cause skin irritations. The cluster of flowers forms an umbel and the number of individual flowers on an umbel can be up to 100. In turn, each flower will produce 25 seeds, hence the importance of dead-heading after flowering.



*Synoum glandulosum*  
(Scentless Rosewood)



*Kunzia pomifera*  
(10 days after striking)

Bob has devised a competition which will be held at the December meeting when he will bring in a jar of Agapanthus seeds which he has counted. A prize will be given to the person who submits a guess closest to the actual number. As a hint, he suggested the number is between 1 and 100,000!

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

### **IN THE VEGIE PATCH IN DECEMBER/JANUARY by Christine Rethers**

All should be ticking along in your veggie garden with the tomatoes filling out and beans ready for some light harvesting. Don't forget that you must pick them and not leave them too long as otherwise the plants will think that they can go to seed and stop producing fresh new beans. The same goes for your other crops like zucchini and cucumbers.



It's time to pay some attention to our citrus trees. Keep a close eye on them for two things—Citrus Leaf Miner and the Bronze Orange Bug (Stink Bugs). If you get distorted new leaves with a white thread-like pattern on them, you have definitely got Citrus Leaf Miner. It is important to pick off the affected leaves and put them in the garbage bin not the compost. A light summer tip prune won't hurt at this time of the year but when the new growth starts to appear, check again for Citrus Leaf Miner. You could try a fortnightly spray with Eco Oil as this will deter the small moth that causes this problem from laying its eggs on the

**Citrus Leaf Miner** fresh young leaves. Stink bugs are a curse as they not only damage the new growth on your citrus but are also dangerous to us if we get some of their spray on us, especially near our eyes. You can often smell them before you see them. If you see them, knock them off into a bucket with some soapy water and a splash of vinegar in it. That should despatch them smartly. I have also used a can of Mortein fly spray effectively—this has the added advantage that it will reach up quite high where I can't always reach to knock off the beasts.



**Bronze Orange Bugs**

While you are paying attention to your citrus, don't forget that a feed at this time of the year won't go astray. You can use any proprietary brand of citrus food—they all seem to work well. However, I suggest that you water the ground around your citrus first, then scatter your fertiliser and then water this in. You will get maximum benefit this way. Make sure you keep weeds and grass away from around the base of your citrus to avoid introducing collar rot. This can be terminal unfortunately, if it is not caught in time.

### **PLANT OF THE MONTH - JUSTICIA by Maureene Smith**

Justicia is the largest genus in the family Acanthaceae, a family well suited to the Sydney climate. There are over 700 species of Justicia and they are native to the tropical and warm temperate areas of the Americas, India and Africa. The genus is named after James Justice, an 18th century Scottish horticulturalist and gardener with a keen interest in botanic experimentation. Why he was honoured with having this genus named after him I have not been able to find out. Justicia are evergreen, perennial plants and shrubs, often with strongly veined leaves and flowers of many varied colours - cream, yellow, red, orange, violet, pink and white. Many parts of the plant are used medicinally in different parts of the world. They would probably be considered an old-fashioned plant but there is such a variety of them that they are well worth considering for your garden. This article will look at a few of the varieties that are generally available in Sydney. Some are not to be found in garden centres but are often brought to garden clubs as potted plants or cuttings. Most will strike easily from a cutting.

*Justicia carnea* is sometimes known as Brazilian Plume flower. It is an upright evergreen shrub with showy spikes of pink, white or yellow flowers from early summer to autumn. Although it will grow in the sun it prefers dappled shade. Prune regularly to keep bushy and deadheading will prolong the flowering.

*Justicia brandegeanaea* is otherwise known as the Shrimp Plant due to the shape of its flowers. The flowers themselves are white but with different coloured bracts surrounding them that can be red, tomato pink and yellow. They come from Mexico so don't mind the sun or part shade. You can get flowers most of the year but they are at their best in summer and autumn.

*Justicia rizzini* is sometimes known as the Firecracker shrub. Its common name comes from the profuse yellow/red tipped flowers that cover this shrub from autumn to spring. Unlike many of the Justicia, *Justicia rizzini* has small dark green leaves and forms a small compact shrub, covered tubular bell-like flowers. It grows best in part shade.

*Justicia betonica* is a large shrub with upright spires of white bracts enclosing small pale pink/mauve flowers resembling candles. These attractive plants flower in summer and although are okay in shade, they prefer the sun. They form quite a large shrub up to a metre high and should be cut back hard in winter. As they regrow it is a good idea to tip prune them to stop them getting leggy. *Justicia betonica* is one of the Justicias that are used medicinally. A poultice of their leaves is used for boils and swellings in Sri Lanka and Malayasia and in parts of Africa it is used as a skin balm.

*Justicia scheidweileri*, the Purple Shrimp plant. Certainly, this is a different Justicia. It is low growing with attractive dark green foliage streaked with silver which is most attractive. The burgundy bracts with mauve flowers sit above the foliage from spring to autumn. It is an evergreen perennial that does best in dappled or full shade.

*Justicia americana*, the American water-willow. This is another unusual variety and is probably only obtainable where you buy aquatic plants. It is an herbaceous perennial with bright green lanceolate leaves and orchid like flowers. It will grow in sun to part shade and flowers in spring through to summer.



*Justicia rizzini*



*Justicia carnea*



*Justicia brandegeana*



*Justicia betonica*

### **YOUR DECEMBER/JANUARY GARDEN by Maureen Smith**

Although fortunately, despite El Nino, we have been having a bit of rain lately, the December/January gardening chores very much involve watering and mulching. At this time underground watering systems are a blessing but if not available, regular deep watering, early in the morning, is the go. Keep an eye on the mulch and if necessary, top it up. You don't want to have it too thick, about 7cm or so, or you will prevent that precious rain from seeping through. If you haven't already done so, it's a good idea to move any pots you can into a shadier spot to help protect the plants from the summer sun, which in Sydney can be quite harsh.

Deadhead any roses that have finished flowering and check them for aphids and black spot which may need treatment. After flowering a good feed will spur them on to better things.

Do keep an eye on your hydrangeas which will be blooming now. As their name suggests, hydrangeas are thirsty plants and appreciate very regular watering.

It's not too late for some potted colour or annuals for a summer garden show. Asters, marigolds, petunia and zinnias are all in the nursery, ready to go. Whilst you are at it, get a couple for the vegetable patch as companion plants to help deter those flying creatures ready to eat your crop. I don't think there is any scientific evidence to support the theory but a clump of marigolds in the veggie patch never goes astray.

Gardening in your garden's shady spots is a wise move at this time of year and can be very rewarding. There are many plants that grow well in dense shade, even with the competition of tree roots. Rhizomatous begonias are one such. They come in an infinite variety of leaf shape, colour and textures - silvers, purple/black, light green, some with whorls, others splayed like an open hand. They can form a beautiful tapestry under your trees. Another genus to look at is Plectranthus. Nico and Swedish Ivy are two very contrasting varieties. If planting is too hard, a host of pots can be your answer. At a Beecroft Garden Club Open Day I once saw a mass of bromeliads in pots under a tree, so closely packed together you were not aware of the pots. This is an idea I have copied in a couple of places in our garden.



Plectranthus Swedish Ivy



Zinnias



Bromeliads



Marigolds

Season's Greetings