

HORTULANUS

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



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COMING EVENTS

- 30 April/1 May** Roses by the Seaside - Aust. National Rose Championships and Conference, Kiama
Enq. rsnswsecretary@gmail.com; Phone: 0422 157 353
- 3 May** KHS Monthly Meeting: Speaker: Meredith Kirton—Easy Care Gardening
- 8 May** Mother's Day at Eryldene, 17 McIntosh St, Gordon 10am-4pm Bookings essential
Phone: 9498 2271 or 0422 596 292
- Until 14 June** Wildwood Garden, 29 Powells Rd, Bilpin. Friday-Monday 10-4pm Entry: \$10.
- Until 30 May** Gory'u Japanese Garden, 85 Baaners Lane, Little Hartley. Phone first: 0414 933 467
Entry: \$20.
- 7 June** KHS Monthly Meeting

MEMBER NEWS

We had an enjoyable April meeting and, despite the many weeks of very wet conditions, 49 members and friends attended the meeting. Unfortunately, access to the St Ives Community Hall was still not fully available with the steps from the main carpark in front of the shopping centre still blocked off. We are anticipating that these steps will be available for our May meeting. The main entry was from the glass doors at the rear of the hall which created some confusion. Hopefully, the main entry at the front of the hall will be available again in May. We will keep you informed.

Garden Clubs of Australia have advised us of their latest initiative - 'Treebilee'. They are asking garden club members to plant trees as a celebration of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee being celebrated this year. Prince Charles has launched the Queen's Green Canopy initiative and it is hoped that worldwide, a significant number of trees will have been planted by the end of the Queen's jubilee year. GCA would like to hear from you if you undertake such a project - <https://gardenclubs.org.au/>.

GCA would also like to remind us of their Photographic Competition. Great news for all you keen photographers! The prize money for this year's photo comp. has been increased. In each of the five adult categories, First prize-\$150; second prize \$100; third prize \$50 each. The 3 highly commended winners receive \$50 worth of products from our 5 sponsors as in the past. You can download an entry form from the GCA website (<https://gardenclubs.org.au/photo-competition/>) from next month and the closing date is October 1st. So why not give it a go?

Bryn Hutchinson, a horticulturalist with the Sydney Botanic Gardens, has contacted the Society regarding the RBG's Trial Gardens project. Bryn would like to hear from home gardeners regarding any new or even not so new cultivars that have not as yet been through a plant trial. This is where new cultivars are tested by observation and scoring in the RBG's trial gardens. This includes plants that have been specifically bred or could be a chance seedling that popped up in the garden. Generally, the trials last for one year for annuals and two years for perennials. Entering plants in the trial gives breeders an opportunity to get feedback on how the plant performs in Sydney's climate. If the plants are of sufficient quality, they will be showcased in the RBG's annual promotion of 'Best Performing Plants'. More information about the Trial Garden can be found on the following website: <https://www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/plants/plant-trial-winners>. To contact Bryn, send an email to: bryn.hutchinson@botanicgardens.nsw.gov.au.

Wonderful news from Maureene and Keith Smith - their recent plant sale just before Easter raised \$7,114 for The National Breast Cancer Foundation. Costa Georgiadis from Gardening Australia opened the sale and then spent best part of the day with them. Maureene says he spent several hundred dollars on buying plants for many of the youngsters who came along and then spent time with them telling them how to grow their new plants. Maureene and Keith's plant sales have now raised well over \$100,000 for their charity—what a magnificent effort!

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Don't forget to have a look at our [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/groups/2273344029640713) 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>.

APRIL SHOW BENCH

Again this month with a reduced number of people attending, the number of Show Bench exhibits was somewhat reduced also. However, there were some very lovely exhibits, especially among the dahlias and the roses and also the natives. In the potted plant section there was a very large pot of the Australian native hoya, *Hoya australis*, very much in flower. The Vegie section has some very nice citrus including a dish of Finger Limes, an Australian native citrus plant with a large number of thorny spikes. Although basically a sub-tropical plant, it will grow and fruit quite well in Sydney and will grow quite happily in a pot if needs be. The Decorative section caused some mirth in the 'Challenge with Foliage' category when one exhibitor chose to use a leaf to cover the more sensitive parts of several picture of nude males.

OUTINGS

The trip to the Southern Highlands was the first for over a year for the Society due to Covid-19 restrictions and for the 40 travellers, provided a very welcome break away from the usual routine. The first stop was at the Southern Highlands Botanical Gardens Plant Fair where some quite serious retail therapy was undertaken. Next was morning tea at the Corbett Gardens where we had to seek the shelter of the bandstand for our morning tea to escape some light rain. We then visited three gardens, the first being described as a 'town' garden with some lovely garden rooms and even some early bulbs in flower. After lunch in a local park we proceeded to the largest of the three gardens and were very impressed with the most attractive landscaping, interesting trees and shrubs and wonderful views over the surrounding countryside. Our last garden was again quite large, very well laid out by the previous owner who by co-incidence was a friend of one of our travellers. We were very impressed with the wonderful trees, especially a very large *Cupressus macrocarpa pendula*. Thanks has to go to our coach driver, Peter, who did a very good job of negotiating some very tight corners and pot-holed roads.



RAFFLE

The raffle prize table this month was rather lean. Members are encouraged to bring along prizes which could be a nice plant they have propagated, a book, an item of garden equipment, etc. As it was, there was a big bag of spring-flowering bulbs supplied by the Society plus two plants donated by a member, a very nice coloured *Coleus* and a Thai Ginger (*Globba winitii*).

GARDEN TABLE

The Garden Table had a fairly wide range of different plants for sale including some *Stapelias*, *Iresine*, *Coleus* and some *Gaura* seedlings. Don't forget to bring along plants you have propagated or any surplus plants or cuttings from your garden. Sometimes you will find some real treasures on the Garden Table so make sure you check it out. Funds from the sale of these plants goes to help your Society.

APRIL MAIN SPEAKER



The main speaker for our April meeting was Dr Taylor Harrison from the Active Seniors Health Centre in Gordon. Dr Harrison spoke to us about the benefit of exercise for maintaining strength and flexibility, especially for gardeners. He explained that with exercise, if a person has not done any for a while, slow and steady is the way to go. He then showed us some exercises starting with the feet and explained just how important they are for maintaining good balance. For example, one exercise is simply moving one's foot in a circular motion while sitting. Calf muscles can be strengthened by moving up and down on one's toes. The number of repetitions should start at 10-12 times, twice a week. In general, strength exercises should be done twice a week but balance exercises can be done everyday. For strengthening thigh muscles, Taylor recommended some squats - lowering yourself slowly onto a chair with hands held in front. For a stiff back, he recommended swinging your legs backwards and forwards as well as across the body for about 20 second. Spinal flexibility can be helped by bending forwards, backwards and from side to side. Head movement can follow the same pattern. For hands lacking grip strength, Taylor suggested wringing out a towel. For hand flexibility he suggested spreading out the fingers—pushing them apart and then together again as well as making a fist and then opening the hand. During the talk Taylor had the audience try some of the exercises and was very happy when many of the members joined in.

More information can be found on the Active Seniors' website: <https://www.activeseniors.net.au/gordon-centre-1/>.

Main Speaker May: Over the past 25 years Meredith Kirton has demonstrated her lifelong commitment to gardening and horticulture in a varied career that has included writing, teaching, consulting, retail, guiding garden tours and designing as well as speaking at various events across Australia. She will be speaking at this meeting about Easy Care Gardening and how our members may be able to be involved.

APRIL MEMBER SPEAKERS

The member speakers for this meeting were Nancy Shaw and Christine Rethers. They were speaking about the best ways of coping with our very water-logged gardens after the unprecedented amount of rain that fell in the Sydney area during March (over 700 ml in most areas of our northern suburbs). As Nancy explained, healthy soils allow for oxygen to exist in the spaces between the particles of soil. During periods of heavy rain, the spaces are compacted and there are not enough air pockets which results in a limited oxygen supply to plants and quite a number of them will not survive. In addition, the humid atmosphere and constant wet can cause fungal diseases, both on leaves and in the soil, to flourish.

Some solutions: Nancy suggest that when the rain had eased, doing a good clean-up of the garden, removing dead plants and decaying leaves as well any soil that had banked up against plants. This will allow more airflow through the garden. When the weather allows, applying an organic fungicide such as Eco Fungicide can prevent fungal spores from spreading.

Another important thing is to check the drainage throughout the garden, clean out blocked drains and if necessary, build drainage trenches to get water away from low-lying parts of the garden. As heavy rainfall leaches out fertiliser in the soil, a fresh application of this may be necessary. This has the added benefit of giving your remaining plants a boost to help them to recover from the inundation. Keep an eye on trees in the garden, especially if it becomes windy, as the deluge will have weakened their root support in some cases. Some smaller trees will benefit from being staked until they are able to re-establish themselves. When the soil has dried out, it is a good time to apply a layer of good mulch all over the garden.

It is interesting to note that the main casualties are mostly with plants from drier climates such as the Mediterranean and Mexico. These plants include the lavenders, euphorbia, salvias, stachys, lychnis, and irises. The survivors have been plants from humid subtropical areas of the world and include bromeliads, begonias, impatiens, coleus, cannas and the like.

Both Nancy and Christine recommend holding off replacing lost plants until the soil had had a chance to dry out sufficiently. Christine suggested that even bulbs could wait for better soil conditions so as to prevent any chance of them rotting in soils that are still too wet.

Member Speaker May: Bob Ballinger will take us to Norfolk Island on a trip that he and his wife did recently.

IN THE VEGIE PATCH IN MAY by Christine Rethers

Hopefully you have got all your seedlings into the ground by now. If, like me, you got them in early and they have rotted off in the huge rainfall that we have been experiencing, it is not too late to get down to the nursery and pick up some nice seedlings to replace the ones you have lost. Look for seedlings that are not too big and leggy—these have been sitting around for too long and have lost a lot of their vigour. Now is the time to give your plants a good liquid feed and keep this up about every two weeks. The soils are still quite warm and they should grow strongly for the next month or two. You can sow broad beans either now or at the end of winter. I prefer to put them in now even though you will not be harvesting them until at least September or October. By the time spring comes they are already at least waist high and ready to go ahead when the warmer weather comes. Sometimes those planted in early spring do not crop as well if the very warm weather comes early.



Have you tried growing globe artichokes? They need a bit of space but you can buy advanced seedlings in the nursery and with a bit of luck you may get an artichoke or two to harvest round about late spring even from young plants. Just plant them about 90cm apart in well-manured soil and they should rocket ahead. Don't leave it too late to harvest the heads as the younger heads are much nicer to eat than older ones. If you haven't cooked them before, they should just be put in a saucepan of cold water, brought to the boil and simmered for about 15mins. They are done when a knife into the stem end goes in easily. Serve them with mayonnaise or a vinaigrette dressing or look up a recipe for how to use them in other ways.

GROWING SWEET POTATOES by Maureen Smith

Have you ever thought of growing sweet potato? They are very slow growing, like many root vegetables, but generally give a healthy crop that makes it worthwhile. I had put off growing them after my first attempt, when they ran rampant over the vegetable patch. It was like the 'Day of the Triffids', the more mature of you will probably remember that book by John Wyndham. However, once I adopted the container method, I have grown them happily ever since.

I grow mine in a small plastic garbage bin, but any reasonable sized container will do as long as you can put drainage holes in the bottom. Because they take so long to mature, now is not too early to begin. To grow the slips (the small plants used), you need a medium size sweet potato or two or three depending on the size of the crop you want. Suspend it, blunt end down, in a glass of water. The best way to do this is to stick 3 small toothpicks into the potato, located so that the bottom two thirds of the potato is suspended in water. Change this water every couple of days.



From this tuber slips will grow, both below and above the water. The ones below the water will eventually grow roots and provide strong healthy slips. If you need more, once the top half has started to grow slips, these won't have roots, so cut them off and submerge them in water and roots will develop. Patience is needed here as it can take up to 2 months before they are of sufficient size to plant out. As the slips develop, they can be used as an attractive house plant for a few weeks.

Sweet potatoes are vulnerable to frost so don't plant them out until the last frost is over. To plant out, fill your container to 2 thirds or thereabouts with a good mix of soil, compost and worm castings, if you have them. Remove excess leaves from the slips, leaving just a few at the top and plant out as you would any seedling. Water them in and watch them grow. It can take 3 -4 months or so to harvest time and browning dropping leaves tell you when that is. You can harvest the sweet potatoes individually by just digging around in the container with your hands. That way the remaining crop keeps fresh. Enjoy!

YOUR MAY GARDEN by Maureene Smith

► Autumn is a lovely time of year to garden, particularly after the devastating summer we have had. It is a good time to put in new plants as the soil is warm enough to give them a head start before winter sets in. However, this year we have the problem of absolutely waterlogged soil which may well have compacted. A good tip I heard recently is to aerate the soil with a fork, just like you aerate lawns.

► It is still a month too early for bare rooted plants from most of the major nurseries but not too early to start thinking about it, checking out the catalogues and deciding what to buy and where to put it. Roses, flowering and fruit trees can often be purchased for far less than when the plant is potted up and flowering. However, you can start preparing the place where you plan to put your bare-rooted plant by digging over the spot and incorporating some cow manure. Remember not to fertilise your newly planted tree or shrub until the leaves actually appear and the plant is actively growing.

► Despite the weather, purple/blue flowering plants have not only survived but flourished and could be worth a spot in your garden. Both the large Tibouchinas, (Alstonville) and dwarf (Jules) are flowering wonderfully right now as is the Dichorisandra, commonly known as Blue Ginger though not a ginger at all.

► Another shrub flowering right now and it will go on flowering well into winter, is the Vireya Rhododendron. This is a tropical compact variety that works in pots or in the ground. It comes in many colours, loves dappled shade or morning sun and there is even an Australian native Vireya, Rhododendron lochiaie, which has reddish pink flowers.

► With the gentle warmth we are now getting, its easier to tackle those necessary tasks such as cutting back spent perennials and dividing clumps that have grown too big. Often large clumps result in fewer flowers so it is a good idea to do this every 3 or so years. Day lilies, for example, will benefit from this and give you more flowers next season. Rake up leaves for the compost heap or just to use as mulch. Don't neglect your lawn, an autumn feed will rejuvenate it ready for winter. The best task of all, look around and just enjoy your garden.

Some photos from the Southern Highlands trip

