

HORTULANUS

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

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MAY 2026

COMING EVENTS

- May 2/3** Bromeliad Autumn Show and Sale. Castle Hill Showground Sat. 9-4pm, Sun. 10-3pm.
May 5 KHS Meeting: Ian Thompson will speak about 'Garden Insects - Friend or Foe?'
May 9/10 Eryldene, 17 McIntosh St, Gordon. Mother's Day Teas 11am-3pm. Bookings needed.
May 16 Cacti & Succulent Society: 'Growers Collab', Hawkesbury Showground. Entry: \$7 online or \$10 at the door.

MEMBER NEWS

The Members' Trading Table was held at the April meeting and the 55 members and friends were enthusiastic purchasers of many of the lovely plants that were on offer.

The Members' Garden Ramble is a long-standing event each year (with a few exceptions during the Covid years) and the Committee is asking members to volunteer their garden. We start at 1.30pm on a Sunday afternoon at the first garden and then progress to the second and hopefully a third garden where we assemble for afternoon tea. The date is worked out between the three participants. Please contact Christine at the May meeting or by phone to let her know you would like to participate. We can guarantee that you will end up having the best garden in the neighbourhood (after the effort you put in to tidy it up).

Expressions of Interest: Children's Gardening Night

We were all inspired by Costa's enthusiasm for involving the younger generations in the joys of learning about a garden, propagation and growing plants, how insects can be both beneficial and a pest and so on. We are therefore excited to invite expressions of interest for a fun and engaging Gardening Special designed specifically for primary-aged children or grandchildren. At this stage we are attempting to find out how many would be interested.

This program aims to spark curiosity about the natural world while developing practical skills in planting and caring for a variety of plants. Through hands-on activities, children will explore topics such as soil health, sustainability, seasonal growing, and the importance of caring for our environment.

For further information or questions, please contact David Stewart on 0412553961 or Robin Stewart on 0413807418. We look forward to growing, learning, and getting our hands dirty together!

OUTINGS

Our trip to the Queensland Garden Festival and Sunshine Coast from 8th to 12/13th July is now full. We have established a waiting list as it is almost inevitable that not everyone so far booked will be able to make it. If you are thinking that you might like to come along, please let Helen Gilkes know at the May meeting or phone her on 9144 4826.

SHOW BENCH

Hibiscus, dahlias and salvias were in abundance and looking lovely. Of special note, there was a beautiful double white Desert Rose (*Adenium obesum*) and a towering plant of *Hoya australis*, covered in flowers. The tuberous begonia was in full flower as was the *Cattleya interceps*. In the Vegie section, there were several nice-looking pumpkins and a tray of limes, signifying the start of the citrus season. The Decorative section had some interesting exhibits in the 'Easter Celebrations' class and a very creative exhibit in the 'Rustic Charm' class.

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GARDEN TABLE

The Garden Table was not operating at the April meeting as the Members' Trading Table was in operation. However, it will be up and running again at the May meeting and members are invited to bring their potted-up plants, cuttings and bulbs, etc. Don't forget to check out what's on offer as you will often find some wonderful treasures.

RAFFLE

There were three very nice plants donated by the Society on offer as well as other prizes, donated by members – all-in-all a total of 14 prizes! Many thanks to those people for their donations. Your donations are always welcome - something nice that you wouldn't mind winning yourself. \$2 gets you three tickets so don't miss out.

MAIN SPEAKER APRIL

Dr Alex Carthey, a Senior Lecturer at Macquarie University, spoke to us about a project she is working on called ReHabitat. This involves the deployment of cardboard structures for native animals and insects to use as shelters after a bushfire has stripped away all the native vegetation and these animals and insects are left with nowhere to hide. Alex said that the design of these shelters was a case of trial and error until they found the right design that suited the majority of those critters in urgent need of shelter. With the help of an industrial designer, these biodegradable cardboard wildlife habitat units were designed to withstand weather extremes and animal interference and their function is derived from careful choices of shape, form, and materials. The geometry of triangles lends strength that allows the pods to remain standing, even when fully saturated.



Dr Carthey stressed that this project was still evolving. There were expressions of interest from different parts of the world and the same idea could also be applied to newly planted trees and shrubs to protect them while the burnt areas were regrowing. There are a number of National Parks here in Australia where they have been used to great effect, especially in Victoria.

The cardboard is completely biodegradable but sturdy enough to last a number of years. This could do away with the use of plastic plant protectors which litter many refurbished areas and do not break down. What an interesting and worthwhile project to be working on! Members asked if these structures could be purchased which they can but Dr Carthey and her team are working on bringing down the cost of the individual items before they make them widely available.

Main Speaker May: This will be Ian Thompson whose talk is entitled: 'Garden Insects – Friend or Foe?' It will be interesting to find out just how many beneficial insects there are in our gardens and what we need to do to foster them.

MEMBER SPEAKER APRIL

Julie Iyengar showed us some of the very interesting places she and her husband visited on their recent trip to Japan which included Osaka, Kyoto, Hiroshima and Fukuoka.



A Zen Garden in Kyoto



A Reclining Buddha and a beautiful garden in Fukuoka



Julie and her husband were in Japan during the winter months which gives a different perspective altogether. During their stay in Japan, they visited many different places of cultural significance including the Ryōan-ji garden in Kyoto. This is considered to be one of the finest surviving examples of *kare-sansui* (dry landscape), a refined type of Japanese Zen temple garden design. It features distinctive larger rock formations arranged amidst a sweep of smooth pebbles raked into linear patterns that facilitate meditation. They had a wonderful time and we enjoyed their photos which showed a different face to Japan than the one we usually see in spring, summer and autumn.

Member speaker May: Christine Erratt will talk to us about the fascinating Leafcutter bee. We often see the results of these bees' handiwork but very rarely see the perpetrator. It will be most interesting to find out more about this local native bee.

IN THE VEGIE PATCH IN MAY by Christine Rethers

It is time to get to your favourite garden centre and choose your winter vegetable seedlings. Don't wait any longer as now is the time to get them into your vegie garden. Vegie seedlings that grow well in Sydney include spinach and silver beet, cauliflower, cabbage, kale, broccoli and broccolini. However, there are some vegetables that must be grown from seed straight into your vegie bed as they do not transplant well. These include carrots, beetroot (soak the seed over night before planting as they have a hard, corky coating), rocket and coriander. These should all be thinned out once they are around 5cm tall. Peas, snow peas and sugar snap peas can also be sown straight into your garden bed but I usually sow them in seed raising trays first and let them get to about 5-8cm before putting them into their permanent position. This is because pea seeds sown straight into the garden bed are prone to rotting or the emerging tender shoot gets eaten by slugs or snails.

Don't forget to have your supporting trellis set up and ready for the new seedlings. There is debate as to when to sow broad bean seeds, whether in autumn or in winter. They will not produce beans until they have flowered and been pollinated and that usually happens in early spring. They are very prone to an infestation of the black aphid and last winter I ended up pulling them all out as I did not want to use chemicals to control them on a food crop (they were particularly bad, probably because we had a relatively dry winter). Once your vegie seedlings are on their way, make sure you keep up a good fertilising regime - a dose of a liquid fertiliser once a fortnight is the way to go. Also, it is important to provide some protection from slugs and snails (use a 'safe' snail bait that doesn't contain metaldehyde which can harm pets). A light mulch with sugar cane or lucerne hay is also beneficial.



For those of you living in an apartment, growing lovely fresh vegetables is not difficult. You will however need to find your sunniest position and some Styrofoam boxes. I suggest these as using concrete or terracotta pots might prove too heavy for the balcony. You will also need the best potting mix you can find as using anything else is a waste of time and energy (and money). If you want to grow root vegetables (carrots or parsnips) make sure your container is deep enough.

HOW TO HAVE A PEST AND DISEASE-FREE GARDEN by Virginia Fischer

Did you know it is possible to significantly reduce pests and diseases in your garden? For a pest or disease to spread, each of the following must be present:

1. A susceptible plant.
2. A suitable environment; and
3. A pest or disease.

If we can modify our garden situation, we can increase our chances of having pest and disease-free plants. How can we do this? Firstly, we can choose to plant pest-free plants or disease resistant plant varieties. We can also choose plants that attract insect-eating birds to the garden. We must also grow our plants in a location that is suited to their individual requirements.

Secondly, we can create an unfavourable environment for pests and diseases. We can do this by using good gardening practices such as:

- Removing weeds (which often harbour pests)
- Creating good airflow around plants to reduce humidity which fosters fungal disease
- Watering early in the morning to reduce evaporation from the soil
- Improving drainage
- Fertilising to keep plants healthy and strong
- Disinfecting secateurs between plants when pruning – most important!
- Using companion planting
- Controlling ants (which often farm pests for their own benefit)++
- Mulching to retain moisture in the soil
- Using clean tools when propagating to prevent the spread of disease
- Pruning plants correctly - aim to increase sunlight
- Watering at the roots to avoid getting the leaves wet.

Finally, if we do have pests or a disease, there are a range of measures we can use. It is best to start with physical removal, then perhaps combine it with one of the other methods:

1. **Physical removal.** This involves removing the pest by hand or by pruning off affected leaves and branches. We need to pick up infested plant material from the ground and place it in the garbage not in the compost. We can also build barriers around plants and use traps and lures.
2. **Biological control.** This involves allowing other animals to control pests – such as birds or beneficial insects (including predatory or parasitic wasps) and parasitic mites (which are sold commercially).
3. **Chemicals.** As a last resort, we can use garden chemicals, bearing in mind that all insecticides kill beneficial insects too. If possible, we should consider using environmentally friendly oils or soapy water rather than toxic chemicals. Chemicals however are useful to control a large infestation quickly.

If we choose the right plants, use good gardening practices and follow the suggested control measures if needed, we can greatly reduce the incidence of pests and diseases in our gardens.

YOUR MAY GARDEN by Christine Rethers

There's no doubt winter is on its way; the days are shortening and there is a chill in the air at night. Time for the extra blanket for you and your plants, so check the mulch to make sure it retains moisture and insulates the ground.

Although its cooler, autumn is still a great time for planting. It is not too late for some bulbs to give your garden a winter lift. To ensure your bulbs have the desired impact, a good rule of thumb, is to plant them in groups of 8-10 rather than scattering them around the garden. The choice of bulb very much depends on the colour palette you want to achieve. Jonquils and daffodils provide the creams and yellows, the blues and pinks are provided by hyacinths and muscari (Grape hyacinths) and reds, oranges and yellows by the anemones and ranunculus. Tulips are best planted in nice deep pots which can be positioned on a sunny patio or positioned in the garden itself. Once the bulbs are up and growing well, it is a good idea to water them every couple of weeks with a liquid fertiliser.

There are also plenty of flowering annuals that can be planted now. Pansies and violas, primulas, snapdragons and calendulas all come to mind. These will look good both in the garden as well as in containers.

Sasanqua camellias and gordonias have started flowering and also dropping their petals so watch out for slippery paths. Make sure you sweep these up. If you have deciduous trees, you can collect up the falling autumn leaves which can be composted or bagged. In about 6-12 months you will have a beautiful organic mulch to feed your soil.

Look out for hellebores and cyclamen which are beginning to appear. These and your flowering annuals will benefit from a gentle liquid feed every month or so.

Now is a good time to prune your lavender ready for a spring flowering. Be careful not to cut back into the brown hardwood and always make sure you leave some leaf growth on the plant.

A final chore for this time of year is to clean up debris and dead plants to keep pests and diseases at bay.

