

HORTULANUS

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

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MARCH 2023

COMING EVENTS

- Mar. 4/5** Hartley Valley Garden Festival (4 gardens open) Entry: \$15 per garden
For more information Ph. 0419 133 154
- Mar. 7** KHS March Meeting - Chris Smallbone, President of WildThings
Apr. 15/16 Collectors Plant Fair, Hawkesbury Racecourse, Clarendon

MEMBER NEWS

The February meeting was well attended with 64 members and 9 visitors. We started the meeting by welcoming our newest member, Ann Case, and hope she enjoys her time with the Society. This was followed by the presentation of their prizes to the winners of the 2022 Show Bench competition. Many congratulations to them all and to all those who benched their exhibits last year. The Show Bench is a highlight of our Society and we are one of the few societies who still have an active and indeed flourishing show bench.

On a very sad note, we have to report the passing of Michael Brown, husband of Robyn Brown, our Treasurer. Michael was a great photographer and was responsible for many of our lovely Show Bench photos. We have sent Robyn our heartfelt condolences and sympathy on behalf of the committee and all our members.

90th Anniversary: This year, on Tuesday 2nd May, we will celebrate the 90th anniversary of the founding of our Society. Plans are well advanced for this special meeting and we are asking members for their support and contributions. In place of our usual Show Bench we will have a number of table-top displays and we are asking for members' help. It is suggested that members get together to organise and set up a display table. At our 85th Anniversary we had a number of our members' displays and these were both creative and beautiful. So we are throwing down the challenge again and hope our members will respond. Please let the Secretary know if you would like to participate. In addition we have a wonderful guest speaker, Professor Michelle Leishman, who is a Distinguished Professor in the School of Natural Sciences, at Macquarie University. Prof. Leishman appeared recently on Gardening Australia, in a segment on Gardening Responsibly. It will be most interesting to find out how we can do our bit to help preserve our natural environment. We will finish the evening with a catered supper and an anniversary cake.

OUTINGS

The first outing of the year will be to Daffodils at Rydal on Saturday, 9th September. The Society has visited Rydal before but not for quite some years. Those who went on our previous excursion were very impressed with the wonderful displays of daffodils and other early spring flowering plants such as Forsythia. We will follow this a month later with an outing to Wollongong and Berry on the 12th/13th October. We suggest that you put these dates in your diary right away. Further details will be available closer to the two respective dates.

SHOW BENCH

At the February meeting the winners of the 2022 Show Bench competition received their prizes.



1. Aubrey Knowles (second left), 2. Sue Ballinger 3. Ted and Nancy Shaw, 4. Brenda Zimmerman, 5. Evelyn Mason



6. Len Riordan, 7. Bob Ballinger, 8. David Stewart, 9. Margaret Hamilton, 10. Jill and Peter Whitney

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There were some lovely exhibits on the Show Bench this month with Roses, Fuchsias, Dahlias, Hydrangeas, Cacti and Succulents all excelling. Some interesting and beautiful orchids were also exhibited. The Decorative Classes were well supported.

GARDEN TABLE

The Garden Table was doing very good business at the February meeting with some interesting and unusual plants offered for sale. Thank you to all those who brought in some plants. Of special interest were several pots of Zanzibar Gem, a much sought-after indoor plant that sells for a high price in garden centres. There were indeed some wonderful bargains to be had this month. Next month there will not be a Garden Table as it will give way to the Members' Trading Table.

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 good condition, pots should be clean with no soil, roots or stains.
- * 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. In addition, a paddle pop stick showing the owner's initials, the plant number and the price required 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 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. You will be handed back the first half of the form 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. **Remember - this is a cash only sale and you will need to bring your own bags or boxes for your purchases.**

MAIN SPEAKER FEBRUARY:



Robyn Kennedy's life as an artist began in the 1990's when she came across some interior textile sample books that were headed for landfill and decided to recycle them into some form of visual art. The initial works were small and intricately embellished, and were perfect for the handmade card market where she was able to sell her works through specialty shops and galleries. She then went on to develop larger works on watercolour paper and canvas, often using flowers and foliage as her theme. She then discovered antique and vintage textiles which she collected from India, Turkey and Uzbekistan and was able to incorporate these into her designs. Robyn brought a selection of her artwork to show us and her intricate works were greatly admired. She regularly displays her works in group and solo exhibitions in NSW and Victoria.



Main Speaker March: This will be Chris Smallbone, President of WildThings, who will speak to us on how we can promote, protect and enhance native wildlife in our local Ku-ring-gai area.

MEMBER SPEAKER FEBRUARY:

Ted Shaw gave a very interesting talk on the floral emblems of each of our States and Territories which he illustrated with pictures of each. He also gave us some of the history of how each State chose its floral emblem and showed us the timeline of how this came about.

IN THE VEGIE PATCH IN MARCH by Christine Rethers

This month is all about getting ready for your autumn/winter vegetable garden while your summer vegetables are gradually finishing off their growing season. By this time of the year, tomatoes and cucurbits are now looking a bit sad with yellowing leaves that may be suffering from downy mildew but you can keep them going a bit longer while they are still producing a crop. Beans will hang on a bit longer but lettuce will probably start going to seed. So as each of your summer crops finish their growing season, pull them out and refresh the soil by digging in some pelleted fertiliser and cow manure. If you didn't put dolomite lime on your soil back in spring, do it now, just a light dusting. So, on to the preparation for your winter crops. Now is the time to sow the seeds of your brassicas—Broccoli,

Broccolini, Cabbage (my preference is Savoy Cabbage), Cauliflower and Kale. Seeds sown now will be ready for planting out in April/early May. Why not try some of the more exotic varieties? Purple Sprouting Broccoli 'Bonarda' and a Romanesco Cauliflower 'Puntoverde' seeds are available from Lambleys Nursery. The Romanesco



Cauliflower has light green, amazingly beautiful and intricately spiralled heads. Likewise, Kale has some different and interesting varieties you might like to try such as Kale 'Red Russian' or Kale 'Black Magic'. Make sure with these brassicas that you do not plant them too close together as they will need room to grow to their full size.

Your winter vegie garden doesn't end there as there are many other types of winter vegetables you can think about growing. Ones that come to mind include Peas—both the lower growing shelling peas and the climbing Snow peas and Sugar Snap peas (both of which need a trellis to grow on). Carrots and Beetroot do well in winter as do the quick maturing Radish which can be sown every two to three weeks to keep up a ready supply. Beans in Sydney are a summer crop but Broad Beans can be sown. However, wait until later in the season, say around June and July, as they are a spring to early summer crop. Seeds of Spinach and Silverbeet can be sown now for transplanting in April or May. What is known as Spinach is English Spinach which is a low-growing plant that is usually harvested as a complete plant rather than have its leaves picked off a few at a time. The packets of spinach leaves that you buy in the supermarket is this type of spinach. Silverbeet, on the other hand, is left to grow right over winter and only the outside leaves are picked consecutively.

Obviously, we can't cover all possible types of winter vegetable in this short report so if you have any questions on vegetables, don't hesitate to ask either by phone or email.

MY LOVE AFFAIR WITH DAHLIAS by Evelyn Mason

I recently read the novel, *The Plant Hunter* by Thomas Mogford. It was a riveting read and I had two sleepless nights reading till well after 2am. I then started Googling for information about Dahlia Hunters. That wasn't anywhere near as exciting – well may be it was for the men back in the 16th century but not for me on my computer. Historic records are quite dry in comparison to the novel I had just read. I remember reading a comic strip in the Sunday Herald when I was a teenager. It was about a red-haired journalist. Her beau was an orchid hunter and he was hunting the elusive Black Orchid. She was my teenage role model and ever since I have wondered about plant hunters. Well, what I have found about the dahlia plant hunters isn't anything as exciting as my novel but the facts are still very interesting. For those of you who love dahlias here I go...

In 1570, King Phillip II of Spain, the same king who sent the Spanish Amanda to England in an attempt to replace



Dried stem of the Tree Dahlia

Queen Elizabeth in 1588, sent Francisco Hernandez to Mexico to study the natural resources of the country. He described plants that resemble dahlia species under the names Acocotli and Cocoxochitl. These botanists discovered the Tree Dahlia (*D. imperialis*) which has hollow stems that were often used for transporting water. The Aztec name for this dahlia was Acocotli or 'water cane'. Dahlia tubers were grown for food by the Aztecs but this use largely died out after the Spanish Conquest. Some cultivation in gardens was observed but they seem to have remained wildflowers for the most part.

Dahlias do not appear again in historical records until 1789 when the director of the Botanical Garden at Mexico City sent seeds to Abbe Antonio Jose Cavanilles who worked at the Royal Gardens of Madrid. From these he grew three forms, *Dahlia pinnata*, *D. rosea*, and *D. coccinea*. Abbe Cavanilles named the genus after Anders Dahl, a Swedish botanist. New species and hybrids were sent from Mexico to Europe over time.

Dahlias did not spread quickly, perhaps because they were initially considered mainly as a potential food crop. The first dahlias from Madrid only circulated slowly to other places in Europe. The flowers were not particularly admired although the capacity to hybridise into new forms began to be noted. In the early 19th century the first double forms arrived in Europe. Once breeders discovered the astonishing range of forms that could be produced, the flower became very popular. Through the 1800s and 1900s, thousands of new forms were developed, with 14,000 cultivars recognized by 1936. Seeds and tubers were introduced from Europe to the UK in the early 1800s by Lady Holland and others. But it took several attempts to introduce them into the UK before they became popular.



Tree Dahlia

One very interesting fact I discovered was that before insulin was discovered in 1923, diabetics and consumptives in Europe and America were often given a substance called Atlantic starch or diabetic sugar derived from inulin, a fruit sugar extracted from dahlia tubers. Dahlias flowers have also been used for dyeing. The dahlia was declared the national flower of Mexico in 1963. It is the official flower of San Francisco and of Seattle in the United States' North-East where there are large communities of dahlia enthusiasts.

The botany of dahlias is still an active area of research. Exploration in Central America continues in search of new species and natural hybrids. Many varieties once considered to be species have been reclassified as hybrids. There are generally thought to be 42 known species and over 50,000 cultivars to which hundreds are added each year.

I know what I have written is quite factual but sometimes it's just important to know some of the facts.

In my garden I have about 20 different varieties. Unfortunately, this year a mite has attacked my dahlias and I have had to spray them for the first time ever. I'm not sure if the dahlias will recover. I can only watch and hope.

BRONZE ORANGE BUGS (*Musgraveia sulciventris*) by Ted Shaw

These smelly and ugly bugs, commonly called stink bugs, can cause serious damage to citrus trees (including native citrus) by sucking the goodness from stems which then causes new shoots to wilt and fruit and flowers to drop off prematurely. They prefer vigorous, heavily-foliaged trees.

Eggs are laid mid-summer to autumn, on the underside of leaves. In winter, early stages of nymphs are found under the leaves and are green, oval, extremely flat, and can be easily overlooked except for their foul smell. As they develop they change colour from green, grey-green, orange, orangy-pink, and then as 25mm adults they become brown and eventually black.

So how do you get rid of them? There are several options:

PLEASE NOTE: You need to be careful of the foul liquid they eject as their defence mechanism. This liquid will burn skin and eyes on contact. Wear a long-sleeved top and gloves and protect your eyes with sunglasses.

Some people use a vacuum cleaner to suck them up but make sure it's an old one because you won't be able to remove the smell.

You can use tongs to knock them into a bucket of soapy water where they'll drown.

On hot days bronze orange bugs will withdraw from the foliage and will congregate on the lower trunk of the tree where it is cooler. This is the perfect opportunity to squash them with a stick or collect them via the above methods.

Pyrethrum sprays will kill these bugs but there are two things to be mindful of here. Pyrethrum is non-selective, so it will kill pretty much any insect it touches including all the good insects like bees and ladybeetles. Virtually all the pyrethrum products for sale to home gardeners are not allowed in organic farming because they usually contain another ingredient called piperonyl butoxide which is banned, so read the label carefully to check it doesn't contain piperonyl butoxide.

Gardeners who spray Eco-oil during winter and early spring (to control other pests like scale) have reported a significant drop in bronze orange bug numbers later in the season. It seems that the Eco-oil is destroying eggs and smothering the very young nymphs at the same time as the scale. Later in the year the oil is unable to kill them because they're too large.

If infestation has already taken hold, spraying with an insecticide is probably unavoidable. Use a naturally based insecticide such as Yates "Nature's Way Citrus & Ornamental Spray", and use as a contact spray to knock them down. Fortnightly spraying may be necessary.

(Ed. I have found that a quick spray with Mortein works well also!)



Three stages of the Bronze Orange Bug

YOUR MARCH GARDEN by Maureen Smith

▶ Your first job this month (if you haven't already done it) is to take off the seed heads of any Agapanthus you may have in your garden. The last thing we want is for these to escape into the bush where unfortunately they do well and are very hard to eradicate.

▶ March, warm ground and we hope cooler temperatures, is the perfect time for planting. Traditionally Sweet Pea seeds were sown on the 17th March, St. Patrick's Day, but any time in March or April would be fine. Just give them a sunny spot with support that the delicate tendrils can cling to. Chicken wire or twiggy branches will do. Before long you will be rewarded with profuse and fragrant flowers. They are great as cut flowers and deadheading will ensure repeat flowering.

▶ March is also a great time to start off a new climber. However, if you are not able to supply the right support, *Trachelospermum jasminoides* (Star Jasmine) will scramble over itself and form an attractive and sweet-smelling ground cover. Just give it sufficient sun.

▶ March is also time for a little tonic for your plants especially after all the rain we have had. Give them a boost with a feed of seaweed tea using a diluted seaweed product like Seasol or Eco-Seaweed.

▶ If you have mainly a container garden, seedlings of *Kalanchoe* come in a wonderful range of colours and will flower for many months. They are water-wise so therefore good in pots. Other good pot growers are *Lobelias* and *Alyssum*. They can look great together, spilling over the edge. *Primula* and *Aster* seedlings should also be available at your garden centre now and can provide great splashes of colour.



Left: Star Jasmin (*Trachelospermum jasminoides*)

Right: a pot full of Lobelia

