

# HORTULANUS

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

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## COMING EVENTS

This is the first time since I have been editor that we have no Coming Events to report on. The current Covid restrictions mean that we cannot hold our meetings at the moment and our planned outing to gardens in the Hills District in October has had to be cancelled due to the uncertainty of the present situation. However, as soon as the restrictions are lifted and it is safe to do so, we will recommence our meetings and start planning for a new outing and also a members' garden ramble.

## MEMBER NEWS

As the activities of your Society have been significantly impacted by the lockdown restrictions, it has been decided that the fee you paid for the 2020/21 year will now cover this year (2021/22) as well. Members who have already paid for the 2021/22 year will have their membership extended to 30 June 2023 or, if they prefer, a refund will be given. If you would like a refund, please contact Robyn Brown by email ([medway2@bigpond.net.au](mailto:medway2@bigpond.net.au)) with your banking details (BSB and Account Number). Robyn can also be contacted by telephone on 9452 5493.

Some rather sad news—Hugh Myers has decided that the time has come to retire from his advice column. Hugh has been providing his excellent and well researched advice each month for nearly 30 years and the Society is indebted to him for his many years of excellent advice. We thank him most sincerely and will miss his input tremendously.

With this big gap to fill, this means that we are now looking to our members to tell us what they would like to see in their newsletter and we will endeavour to provide it. In addition, we would welcome any contributions that members might like to submit. They can be on any topic related to gardens and gardening, including gardens that they have visited either in Australia or overseas. Please email the Secretary on [khs.secretary@gmail.com](mailto:khs.secretary@gmail.com) or phone on 9449 6245 and let her know your thoughts and ideas on this.

Now for some good news—Ted and Nancy Shaw's garden will feature on the Gardening Australia program on the evening of Friday, 10 September 2021. Don't forget to watch it! Costa and his team have made two visits to their lovely garden to film and this will be a program not to be missed. There is a possibility that Costa will come to speak to us at one of our meetings, possibly as soon December this year if the Covid restrictions allow.

Garden Clubs of Australia are again offering their very attractive calendar for 2022 to members to purchase for the very reasonable sum of \$8 each with postage to your home included. This is indeed a bargain and this year they have made the purchasing of the calendar much easier. You will find the order form attached with this newsletter and all you have to do is fill in the order form and pay either by credit card or by cheque. Delivery can be expected in September which will be in plenty of time to post overseas if that is your plan.

Don't forget to have a look at our Facebook page which continues to have some interesting postings. We now have 47 contributors and it has proved very useful in answering questions such as finding out plant names and helping members with problems with their gardens. There have been some very lovely garden scenes posted which show that our members have not been idle during this lockdown period. It would appear that our gardens are getting a great deal of attention at the moment. Don't forget 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>.

## IN THE VEGIE PATCH

It is time now to start thinking about your summer vegie patch. Winter crops such as the brassicas and spinach will be finishing up or already harvested and the empty patch can now be dug over and manured with cow or chicken manure and a dusting of garden lime or dolomite. Summer is tomato time so unless you have been growing your own

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tomato seeds on the windowsill, get down to the nursery and get some tomato seedlings. Tomatoes come in all different sizes so read the labels carefully as some of the tall ones will need staking. Pick the ones that suit your needs—the cherry tomatoes are ideal for salads whereas the larger ones such as Grosse Lisse and Roma are good for cooking and making passata. There are also bush tomatoes that don't need staking. If you plant your seedlings in September you will be able to harvest tomatoes by Christmas. An added bonus of planting early is that you will miss the worst of the fruit fly which are so prevalent in the warmer months. Tomatoes need between 6 to 8 hours of sun each day and should be given

plenty of space as they not only grow up but out. Plant your seedlings about 80cm to 1m apart and put in the stake first (up to about 2m tall if you are growing the large tomatoes). Next plant the seedlings and because tomatoes will grow more roots on their stems, you can put them into the soil almost up to the first set of leaves. Put some mulch such as sugar cane around them and keep them well watered. A liquid feed every couple of weeks is advisable. The leaves at the bottom of the tomato tend to yellow and can be safely taken off. If fruit fly are a worry, it is a good idea to cover your plants with a fine woven vegetable net which can be stretched over four stakes and held down with a wire tent peg or a brick. These nets are very effective and your plants will not be troubled by these pests. Tomatoes can be successfully grown in pots if space is a problem but you will need a largish pot for each plant. Basil is a great companion plant to grow in the tomato patch but wait until late September to plant as they do not like the cold.

Later on in September when it is starting to warm up, you might like to consider other summer vegetables such as beans, eggplant and capsicum, cucurbits such as cucumbers (Crystal Apple and Lebanese are two to look out for) and pumpkin and squash. You will find all of these as seedling at your nursery and you don't need many to feed a family. Beans are best grown from seed and can either be low growing such as the bush beans or climbing beans which will need a frame to grow on. Another crop to consider is sweet corn which is best grown in a patch rather in a row as they need each other for pollination.



Cucumbers growing on a frame

## MANDEVILLA by Maureen Smith

Spring is almost here although our relatively mild August weather could make you think it has been here for a while. However, it is time to think about what you could be planting. A favourite of mine is Mandevilla and in our garden we have used it in different ways.



We have a large flowered white variety, *Mandevilla boliviensis*, that covers an arch over a garden path. This is a very vigorous climber and every couple of years needs a fairly hard prune. We also have an unusual yellow form, *Mandevilla Citrine*, that winds along a fence. A fairly fast-growing climber with large bright yellow flowers.



A new type of Mandevilla is the mounding type, *Mandevilla Summervillea*, which we are growing in a pot on the deck. This has smaller flowers than either of the climbers. Growing in a large pot is a very pale pink, almost white vine Mandevilla. It is a climber but not very vigorous so is quite happy to scramble over a small obelisk. In magazines I have seen photos of a Mandevilla with an apricot flower but have not seen it for sale here.



Some other ways they can be used are in hanging baskets. For this choose a mounding or a not too vigorous climber. I have also seen them grown very effectively on a trellis against a wall. This is particularly attractive when a couple of varieties are planted to intertwine—red and pink or red and white perhaps. Mandevilla will twine themselves round a slender pillar or fence post but if your pillars are fatter, you can wind fishing line loosely round for them to climb on.

The variety of uses is one of the reasons I like them so much. All of them thrive in Sydney's climate and love the warmth. They flower profusely from late spring to winter and as long as they get water and an occasional light prune, are very low maintenance. Another advantage is they seem to be pest free which is always a bonus. Why not give a Mandevilla a try?

## AIRPLANTS (botanical name - Tillandsias) by Ted Shaw

Tillandsias are a genus of the bromeliad family Bromeliaceae, and the genus contains about 650 species. They are commonly known as 'airplants' because of their natural propensity to cling on wherever conditions permit – tree branches, barks, bare rocks, etc. The main difference from other bromeliad genera is that they don't rely on roots feeding from a growing media to get their moisture and nutrients; instead they obtain moisture and nutrients from the air and absorb them through the specialised cells on their leaves.

They are native to the forests, mountains and deserts of northern Mexico down to Argentina and the Caribbean. They come in many different forms, from the hanging Spanish Moss (or Old Man's Beard) through to bromeliad lookalikes.



The flowers typically involve bright, vibrant colours, with blooms or inflorescences produced on a stalk or several stalks. The flower's colour varies greatly from red, yellow, purple and pink flowers and multi-coloured flowers are also known. The bright colours are intended to attract pollinators.

These plants are very easy to grow and maintain. Most growers mount them on a piece of hardwood or a piece of barky branch, and attach them using fishing line or hot glue. Sometimes they're just pushed into a brushwood fence. They prefer part shade, not too much water and a liquid fertiliser when other plants around them are getting some. Children love them so they are ideal presents for the grandchildren. Unfortunately, they are not all that easy to come by. Look out for them at garden shows such as the Collectors' Plant Fair and at Bromeliad shows. They can occasionally be found at Bunnings and on Ebay.



*Tillandsia bergeri*



*Tillandsia ionantha*



*Tillandsia stricta*

## SEPTEMBER IN YOUR GARDEN

► This is the latest you can **successfully move perennials** such as daisies, salvias and plants that are usually dormant in winter such as roses. Once they resume active growth, you run the risk of setting them back severely if you move them in the warmer weather.

► Once the **camellias** have finished flowering, this is the time to prune them if you think they need it. They will then have plenty of time to put on new growth before the heat of summer. Other winter flowering plants such as azaleas can also be pruned now.

► As your **roses** break their dormancy and come back into leaf, give them a good feed of pelletised manure or rose food such as Richgro's Black Marvel or Neutrog's Sudden Impact for Roses. Roses will benefit from regular feeding from now on so another good feed around Christmas-time and again in early autumn should keep them healthy and growing well. Make sure to mulch them well with sugar cane or lucerne hay.

► Don't forget to **feed any bulbs** you have even if they have finished flowering as they will use the food you give them to store away for next year's flowering. Don't cut off the leaves even though they will look a bit unsightly but simply let them die down naturally—again so that they can fatten up for next season.

► This is good time to **repot any succulents** you have. Just move them up one pot size if they look crowded and use a purpose designed potting mix. You can make your own with a good brand of potting mix plus a sprinkling of blood and bone and then add some coarse sand and gravel so that you get perfect drainage. Succulents do not like to have wet feet.

► **September is feeding time.** Once your acid loving plants such as camellias, daphne and azaleas have finished flowering, give them a specially formulated fertiliser for the plant type. Citrus should also be fed with a specialised fertiliser. Your summer flowering plants and lawns would also benefit from an all purpose fertiliser. Just remember to water any fertiliser in well. Some of our members order in a trailer load of well composted cow manure and put that around their garden at this time of the year. It may smell a bit for a day or so but their garden benefits enormously from its application.



Beautiful display of daffodils and primulas in a member's Turramurra garden

► September can be a busy month in the garden. A number of plants such as hibiscus, camellias and plumbago will **need pruning** to keep them bushy and shapely. Fuchsias should be pruned quite hard now if you have not already done so and both they and geraniums will benefit from tip pruning. Just look around and anything that is getting a bit straggly could probably benefit from your secateurs.

► Now is the time to plant for summer colour. Seedlings of **petunias, zinnias, celosia and antirrhinum** together with marigolds will all be at your local garden centre. Every year the plant hybridisers come up with new and better varieties. The seeds of some summer flowering plants can be sown directly into the garden—clear a space and scatter the seeds, keep moist and thin out if necessary as they come up. Plants such as **Californian Poppies, Cosmos, Nasturtiums, Cornflowers** and **Calendulas** will make a lovely display in the garden during the warm summer months.

## SOME GARDEN PROBLEMS AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT THEM

Over the past few months, some of our members have posted their gardening problems on the Society's Facebook page and fellow members have offered solutions. We will continue to do this on this back page so don't hesitate to ask for help, either using Facebook or emailing your question directly to the Society (khs.secretary@gmail.com). Below are a few of the problems that have been tackled recently which we hope will be of help to any other of our members who may have the same or a similar problem.

**Problem 1 (from Cassandra):** *What to do with a very old rose? I'm looking for pruning advice for this very old rose please. Should I try to cut down the thick woody trunks and let the newer shoots take over or take out the newer shoots? I was planning to reduce height by about 50%. I can't tell whether this has been grafted or not, and I expect it could have been here since our house was built in 60's.*



**Answer (from Christine):** Hard to give advice without seeing it. However, it would seem to be in need of a hard prune. What I would do is to prune right back to the first newish shoot on each of the thick old branches. You will need a pruning saw for this. Then cut this newish branch back to about six nodes. If this worries you, you could do the hard prune on just one of these thick old branches and then do another one next year. Just don't leave it any longer as it is long overdue.

*(Well done, Cassandra, let's hope that it shoots away nicely for you now. Christine)*



After pruning

**Problem 2 (from Fiona):** *Needing some help, please. Does anyone know what might be attacking my rhododendron and viburnum? The leaves have a silvery look. Is there any treatment for it?*



**Answer (from Christine):** Unfortunately, the damage (which is from either lace bug or thrips or both) that you see now will not go away, no matter what you do. The main treatment now is prevention for the new leaves as they develop. First, clean up all dead leaves and debris under the rhodo as this is where the pests can over-winter. Then give your plant a feed and mulch with a nice fresh mulch (sugar cane, pea straw, lucerne etc.) Establish a routine (say once a month) of spraying both the top and under the leaves with horticultural oil (Eco Oil is the one I use), especially as the weather warms up. If the infestation is bad, you could try Yates Rose Gun which is safe to use on rhodos and contains an insecticide. You won't be able to see the thrips but lace bugs are usually visible if you look hard on



the underside of the leaf.

**Problem 3 (from Tony):** *I am having a very large problem of invasive weed overtaking my lawn. How do I get rid of it safely without doing heavy weeding which I tried and did not work?*



**Answer (from Christine):** The first thing is to work out what type of grass you are growing. At the moment you certainly do have a problem with creeping oxalis. If it is Buffalo grass, you are restricted in what you can use as some weed removal products will kill this type of grass stone dead. You need to check the weed killer to see if it has Dicamba in it and if it does, please do not use that one. If it contains MCPA or Bromoxynil, it is safe to use on Buffalo. If you have couch or kikuyu you can use any broad-leafed weedicide. You can get some that will fit onto your hose to spray onto your lawn (Amgrow have a good one – Amgrow Bin Die 2lt hose-on or Amgrow Buffalo Lawn Weeder which you mix up and water on,

both at \$22 if ordered online). If you go on line, you will find others. This is a good time to get onto this job as it will only get worse as the weather warms up. Your grass should start to grow again once the night temperatures are above 10 degrees. Once the grass is actively growing and you have managed to get rid of the oxalis, give your lawn a good feed with any of the good fertilisers—both Scotts and Munns have excellent products.

*(Tony replied: Most of the weed is growing on couch grass so this is very good news. Thank you for letting me know what to use. I really appreciate this.)*

We hope you will enjoy this page in your newsletter—please let us have your comments (good or bad!). We want to bring you what you want to see in your newsletter so your feedback will be very helpful.