

HORTULANUS

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



AUGUST 2021

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COMING EVENTS

3 Aug KHS Meeting

7 Sept KHS Meeting

18/19 Sept Plant Lovers Fair, Kariong. Sat. 8am-4pm Sun. 9am-3pm. Enquiries: www.plantloversfair.com.au

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Notice is hereby given that our Annual General Meeting will be held on Tuesday, 7 September 2021

The purpose of the meeting is:

- * To confirm the minutes of the last Annual General Meeting (2019)*
- * To receive the President's Reports for 2020 and 2021.*
- * To receive and consider the accounts for the years ended 30 June 2020 and 2021*
- * To elect office bearers and committee members.*

All existing officers and committee members will stand down. Nominations would be welcomed.

If you wish to offer yourself for nomination or would like more information, please phone Ted Shaw on 0400 274 503.

At the time of writing, it does not look as though we will be able to have our August meeting on 3 August. We will let you know by email at the end of next week (31 July) what the final decision will be. The good news is that when we do recommence our meetings, we will be in the St Ives Community Hall again. I think you will all be quite impressed with the improvements that have been made. Your committee has been working hard to line up interesting speakers for our future meetings —all that is needed now is the ability to hold them.

MEMBER NEWS

Membership renewals are now due - \$25 for a single and \$35 for a double. Thank you to all of you who have already sent in your subscription. For the rest of you, please fill in the subscription form which is included with this newsletter, making sure that you include your email address. Your subscription can be handed in at a meeting or mailed to Helen Gilkes, 20A Normurra Avenue, North Turramurra 2074. Payment may be by direct debit, cash or cheque and please remember to include your completed subscription form. This is important as it is needed to check that we have your details recorded correctly. We hope that you will continue to give our Society your support during these difficult times.

Don't forget to have a look at our Facebook page which continues to have some interesting postings. We now have 46 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. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2273344029640713>.

OUTINGS

There will be a one-day outing to three lovely private gardens in the Hills District on Thursday, 14 October 2021. These are large and beautifully landscaped gardens, full of interesting plants and features. If time allows, we will stop at Swanes Nursery on the return journey. The cost will be \$70 and this will include all garden entries, morning tea and a picnic lunch. Because of the present uncertainties, we will hold off sending you the booking form until the end of August when we will include it with the September Hortulanus. However, we hope you will put this date in your diary.

IN THE VEGIE PATCH

Even if you have not paid much attention to your vegie patch this winter, it is not too late to put in some crops that will grow quickly and be ready for harvesting in 6-8 weeks. In Sydney, winter is the best time for growing many types of leafy vegetables as the hot weather of summer causes them to mature and go to seed too quickly. First you will need to prepare a part of your garden bed which will get full winter/early spring sun. Dig in plenty of your home-made compost or good quality cow manure along with a handful or two of garden lime. It is probably too late to sow seeds so get yourself some good quality seedlings from your local nursery. Quick growers include lettuce (the cut-and-come-again type like Oakleaf lettuce are probably the best and provide a longer harvesting time), rocket, Asian greens, silverbeet and English spinach. It is too late for broccoli and cauliflowers but you could try some radish from seed as they are incredibly quick-growing. Sow a short row of these and then two weeks later sow another row so that you get continual cropping.

Don't forget to plant some herbs—again seedlings are usually more successful in late winter. Herbs that grow well now include parsley (curly or Italian flat-leaf), chives, oregano and thyme. It is too early to put in basil so wait a couple of months for this as they like the warm weather. One herb that grows much better in winter is coriander which, unlike the others, is best grown from seed. In the warmer months it goes to seed very quickly (but of course you can harvest the seed also to use in cooking).

If you haven't got a dedicated vegie garden, many gardeners have great success by just popping their vegies in spaces in their flower garden. This works particularly well as the critters that also like a feed on your vegies often don't find them hidden among the flowers. By the way, parsley looks particularly attractive as an edging as does thyme.

If you like to grow your own tomatoes, you can now plant seeds in punnets, using good quality seed-raising mix, and put these in a sunny and warm spot on a window sill. With luck, they will be ready to plant out by mid-September and you will have saved yourself quite a bit of cash as seedlings are not cheap to buy in the nursery.

EARNEST HENRY WILSON, PLANT HUNTER by Hugh Myers



It took a single dried specimen of the Handkerchief Tree (*Davidia involuocrata*) to steer 23-year-old Ernest Henry Wilson away from a career of teaching Botany to a life of plant hunting. The sample had been sent by Doctor Augustine Henry, an Irish doctor working in China to Kew Gardens in 1891. After the seeds that had been sent by Henry failed to germinate, he urged Kew to send a collector to gather samples. James Veitch, the proprietor of Veitch Nurseries, felt the plant would be popular with the emerging breed of suburban gardeners and decided to sponsor a collector. At the suggestion of Kew's Director, William Thistleton Dyer, Veitch selected Wilson. He gave him a three-year contract to seek out and bring back *Davidia involuocrata* and instructed him "not to dissipate time, money or energy on any other plants."

In February 1900 Wilson arrived at Yichang, the port on the Yangzi River that was to be his headquarters for the next two years. Dr Augustine Henry had agreed to help him hunt and locate the *Davidia* but his directions amounted to little more than a cross on a hand drawn map covering 50,000 square kilometres. Undaunted, Wilson gathered together a team of men to carry his equipment and set off into the interior. When they eventually arrived in the area where the tree was located, a local guide agreed to take them to the exact spot. On arrival, instead of seeing a beautiful tree, they found a stump and a newly built wooden house that had been fashioned from it. Fortunately, Wilson found another of the trees while collecting south-west of Yichang. He noted that the white flowers were akin to huge butterflies or small doves amongst the trees. When Wilson returned to England, Veitch was very pleased with him and his work. Not only had he brought back seeds of the *Davidia* but he had collected many other seeds and bulbs as well. He also compiled an Herbarium of over 2,600 records.



Davidia involuocrata

By January 1903, newly married Wilson was China-bound again on Veitch's behalf. This time to gather *Meconopsis integrifolia* from the highlands of Tibet. Despite almost having his boat ripped apart on jagged rocks amid the Yehtan rapids Wilson made it into Tibet and found the desired golden fields of *Meconopsis*. During two forays into the mountains, he collected seeds of this and *M punicia* plus many specimens of other plants.



Meconopsis integrifolia

He wrote to Thistleton Dyer at Kew "on these two trips I have collected some 900 species of plants, a complete set of which will eventually find a home in the Kew Herbarium".

Once he was back home, Harvard University persuaded Wilson to make a third trip to China on their behalf. This time he was to increase the knowledge of the woody plants of the Chinese Empire and to introduce into cultivation as many as possible. Despite contracting malaria, Wilson managed to gather *Acer wilsonii*, *Clematis tangutica obtusius* and *Rhododendron moupinense*. Wilson had a soft spot for rhododendrons later writing "to traverse the mountains of Western China in the rhododendron season is to enjoy a feast of beauty not excelled the world over". Once the trip was over, Wilson brought his wife and daughter to Boston and took up a temporary position at the Arnold Arboretum supervising the organising of his herbarium collection. However, it was not long before he was off again. This time it was to collect bulbs of the Regal Lily (*Lilium regale*) that he had encountered on an earlier trip. Eventually he made it



Lilium regale

to the remote Min Valley where “in the summer the heat is terrific and in the winter the cold is intense and in all seasons these valleys are subject to sudden and violent windstorms against which man or beast cannot make any head way.” After marking the position of some 6000 bulbs that were to be lifted in October, Wilson was being carried along a remote mountain track in a sedan chair when he was struck by a landslide. He was injured in one leg that left him with a permanent limp that he called his ‘lily limp’.

Wilson made two more trips during which he explored Japan, Korea and Taiwan. These trips were made with his wife and daughter. In Japan he visited the city of Kurume on Kyushu Island where he saw a century-old collection of 250 named azaleas. He brought a selection of them back to North America saying “proud am I of being the one to introduce these exquisite damsels to the gardens of Eastern North America. The collection became known as ‘The Wilson 50’ though in fact there were 51.



Wilson returned to work at the Arnold Arboretum but he unfortunately died prematurely in a car crash in 1930. In his lifetime he had introduced over 1000 species to Western gardens, mostly from China. In his book ‘*Plant Hunting*’ he wrote “to no part of the world do gardens owe more than China, the kingdom of flowers.

(Plant names are made up of a genus name and an epithet and are in Latin. If you come across a plant name with the epithet *veitchii* or *wilsonii* it will be because they were named after the first person who collected and/or described this plant which in this case would be the Veitch’s nursery or Ernest Henry Wilson. Examples include *Paeonia veitchii* and *Primula wilsonii*. Ed.)



► Winter is a great time to do some maintenance on some of your garden fixtures and fittings. The leaves are off many of your shrubs and trees and this will let you see what is going on behind them. This is a good time to check your fences. Go round and give them a shake to see if any of the posts have rotted since you last checked them. If they have,

you can make some temporary repairs by driving a star picket into the ground alongside the rotted post and screwing it to the post. This will hold it until you have time do a more permanent repair.

► Another job that can be done at this time is to check your stone or concrete paths for a build-up of the nasty green slime that is very slippery. A water blaster is the quickest way to remove this but wait for a nice warm day before tackling this job.

► Before new leaves appear on your deciduous plants, go round and pick up all the old leaves that have accumulated under your plants. This will help to keep the area clean and cut down on the leaves harbouring any pests. The old leaves can then be safely composted. While you are there, check for dead branches and cut them out. This will allow more light and air into your plant.

► Hold off watering your cacti and succulents at this time of the year as they will not be actively growing just yet. When the warmer weather comes, then is the time to start watering again. However, this is a good time to repot any that might need it. Use a potting mix especially formulated for cacti. It will have extra sand and gravel in it that will provide the good drainage that these plants need.

► Keep on top of the winter grass that will be appearing in your lawns. It is easy to pull out by hand so if you have a big lawn, just do a small patch each day and before you know it, the job will be done. If you leave it, the grass will produce seeds and you will have the same or an even bigger problem next year. It is really worthwhile trying to get rid of it in one go if you can.

► By now, some of your early-flowering bulbs will have finished flowering. It is important to give your bulbs some food whilst they still have some green leaves as this will help to produce the flowers for next year. A good liquid fertiliser will do the job nicely. Once the leaves start to dry off, you can stop fertilising. It is important not to cut off this foliage as until it dies down completely, it is helping to feed the bulb ready for next year’s growth.

► Now is a good time to give your begonias a bit of attention. Most of them will be dormant so it is time to give them a tidy-up. Cut out any old growths and clean up any old and torn leaves. With your cane begonias, take out at ground level any canes that have been there for a number of years as they will have lost their vigour. These will be the thickest canes and the darkest in colour. This will encourage new growths which will emerge once the weather starts to warm up again.

► By now you should have cut back most of your salvias. The only ones not to cut back yet are those special winter-flowering varieties such as *Salvia involucrata* and *Salvia karwinskii*. Most salvias can be cut to within 25cm of the ground. However, some like *Salvia leucantha* and *Salvia madrensis* will have their next years’ new growths emerging already so with these, take out all the old growths at ground level.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



Question? I want to plant two potted aloes at my front door, one on either side. I know there are many different kinds so could you suggest a variety that would be suitable, not too big.

Answer: Aloe erinacea is a good one. It grows to about 25cm high and about the same in width. It has bright yellow

flowers that turn red after opening. Its thick fleshy leaves are armed with spines so make sure you wear gloves when handling it. The plant flowers in both spring and again in summer and it grows best in a sunny position. Ease off the watering in winter and take care not to over-water the rest of the year as the plant will rot if the crown stays too wet.

Question? Are peanuts hard to grow? I would like to grow some to amuse the children.

Answer: No, peanuts are easy to grow but they do have an odd way of growing that seems to fascinate children. Try growing a few at first. Most nurseries should be able to get you some "green peanuts". You can also get them from any pet shop that sells parrot seed. They must raw, not cooked. Plant them in well composted soil. First they will shoot up to about 12cm then they will branch sideways and go out about 4-5cm. Then they will go back down into the soil and it is then that the nuts will form. They can be harvested when they are big enough.

Question? I wish to plant some azaleas and thought I would give the mollis variety a go. I have seen some very nice ones on sale. Is there anything I should know about this variety of azalea?

Answer: Unlike other varieties of azaleas, mollis azaleas are deciduous and grow best in cooler areas of our state. They grow to about 2m and their flowers come in bright colours of yellow, orange, red, cream and salmon. They flower in spring before the leaves appear. Keep them well watered at all times through the warmer months.

Question? I would like to grow some boronia, in particular the brown boronia from West Australia. Are they hard to grow and how long do they live?

Answer: Most of the boronia species are grown for their perfume. The brown variety is the best and its perfume can be smelled 5-6m away. Unfortunately this one is short-lived, 2-3 years is usually their lifespan. Even so, they are worth growing. They need morning sun and afternoon shade or dappled light through the day. They need to be in a sheltered place away from the wind. Do not let the soil dry out and a mulching around the plant with pebbles can be useful. Boronias need regular watering during the summer months but don't tolerate excess water. Let the soil dry out during winter but not bone dry. A light dusting of blood and bone in spring would be appreciated.

Question? I would like to grow a pink-flowered tea tree. How long will I have to wait until it flowers?

Answer: These evergreen shrubs (*Melaleuca alternifolia*) grow from 1m to 3m, depending on the variety. Some varieties have pink, white or even deep crimson flowers. Tea trees can be short-lived unless the conditions are ideal and the shrub is kept pruned. They take 2-3 years to mature but most will flower early in their life. Tea trees will tolerate a range of temperature from warm to cool and even a light frost. They need full sun ideally and good air circulation. The soil should be well-drained and mulching with old compost or leaf litter will help. When planted they need regular watering to get established. Then a good deep watering every two weeks or so in the dry weather is sufficient. Tea trees can be susceptible to root rot in very heavy soils so try to prepare your soil well before planting. The other main problem is the webbing caterpillars. They clump the foliage together with a tight web as they munch on the leaves. Sprays are not very effective against these caterpillars as they are very hard to reach. The best way is to get in and cut or pull off any parts that have been affected by these caterpillars.

*Regards
Hugh*



When Isaac Newton stayed at home to avoid the 1665 Plague, he discovered the Laws of Gravity, Optics, and he invented Calculus.

While I stayed home during Covid I discovered Chunky Monkey Ice Cream, spicy Cheetos, and Carol Baskin.

Life in a Covid world!

The world has turned upside down. Old folks are sneaking out of the house and their kids are yelling at them to stay indoors!

This morning I saw a neighbour talking to her cat. It was obvious she thought her cat understood her. I came to my house and told my dog.... We had a good laugh.

I need to practice social-distancing from the refrigerator!

Never in a million years could I have imagined I would go in a bank with a mask on and ask for money.