



Rhododendrons South Australia

Australian Rhododendron Society Inc. South Australian Branch

Issue 114-April 2018

President's Message

It's now April and although temperatures have veered into the autumnal range we are all waiting with baited breath for decent rainfall. Watering pot plants and more sensitive garden areas has become almost a reflexive action and I'm constantly topping up rainwater tanks with mains water as the tanks are what our irrigation system runs off.

The rhododendron casualty list is not too bad but I still have a number of potted plants waiting for the right time to go into the garden so it's been relatively easy to keep these ones alive. I have, however, lost another "Florence Mann", "Ring of Fire" didn't survive either, but "Australian Sunset" which is planted in the ground is hanging in there. Not so "President Roosevelt" which finally dropped its last leaf. I tried to tidy up a lanky "Wedding Gown" which has since turned up its toes but both "Spinuliferum" and "Johnstoneanum" (my custodial plant which I'm trying again to grow viable cuttings from after the last attempt failed) are doing well in pots. "Jeanette Clarke" seems to be enjoying her spot in the garden so, in summary, I guess you could say I've had mixed success. Like others from our group (I assume) I am developing a more pragmatic learning approach to Rhododendron cultivation, trying not to be too disappointed with failures whilst also embracing the lessons learned from these.

Being a member of our Society affords opportunities to purchase rare and more unusual varieties from the Rhododendron group, and this coupled with advice and expertise from our more experienced and knowledgeable members, allows us all to become better, more successful and more learned Rhododendron growers! Now for the next project... and some rain.

March meeting



New Year –New Venue- New day

The Stirling RSL Hall proved a successful venue for the March meeting.



Sue Beckoff – a happy raffle winner



*Rob Hatcher presenting information about propagating azaleas
and Rick Illman talking about other plants suitable for propagation at this time of the year.*

Next Meeting

This will be held at the RSL Hall Stirling on Tuesday, April 17th at 8pm. Our guest speaker will be Lucy Sutherland, Director of the Mt Lofty Botanic Gardens. Lucy will speak about future directions for the gardens.

*Please remember to bring a plate for supper and something for the “pot
Luck*

Stall”. Friends and new members are always welcome.

Bloom of the Month – Holy Moses



This is one of the Rhododendrons from the **Red Dragon** nursery in Tasmania.

Holy Moses is a cross between “The King of Shrubs” (Fortuneii X Fabia) and Souvenir of Anthony Waterer.



From the Propagating bench *by Richard Illman*

The extended warm to hot period that we are currently experiencing has its upside in the fact that we can still take cuttings of rhododendrons and azaleas. For those members interested in the seedling magnolias shown at the last meeting, they are easily propagated by collecting the seed pod, removing the bright red fruit and extracting the black seed from within. (as shown in the diagram). The seeds can then be mixed with a little damp peat moss, put in a small zip-lock bag and left in the crisper of the refrigerator until spring. They can then be removed and sown in a pot of seed raising mix where they should germinate in about 6 weeks. The trees can be grown on and will possibly flower in 6-8 years or used as root stock on which to graft desirable hybrids.



Similarly, around this time clematis seed heads are maturing, and can be removed from the plants, broken up and the individual seeds sown on the surface of a pot of seed raising mix and covered with fine gravel.

Seedlings should emerge in the spring and you should have your own hybrids flowering in about three years.





This Season by Bill Voigt

Although we have yet to experience heavy, soaking rains, Autumn weather (milder days, dewy nights and calmer conditions) is upon us. That means there is opportunity to work in the garden. Things that can be done now include-

1. Trimming back the foliage on *Iris unguicularis*, also known as *stylosis*, to enable the flowers to be seen and to discourage slugs and snails.
2. Removing old foliage and spent flower stems from clumps of bearded iris that have not recently been divided.
3. Gathering up fallen leaves from both deciduous and evergreen trees for the compost heap. Spreading the leaves on the lawn and running over them with the mower breaks them into finer pieces which decay more rapidly.
4. Planting seedlings for winter and spring colour. Pansies, violas, dianthus, foxgloves, nemesia, polyanthus, primula malacoides, cinerarias (in frost free areas) and antirrhinums- there are both dwarf and tall varieties. Dwarf cyclamen for shaded or semi-shaded spots, Linarias and calendulas.

This is also the time to plant bulbs and the garden centres and hardware shops have a wide range, including various daffodils, anemones, ranunculus, babiana, Sparaxis, crocus, tulips, scillas and hyacinths.

Bergenias produce very welcome flowers in winter. The old clumps can be divided now and planted in semi-shaded positions.



The first of the autumn coloured leaves are appearing on trees and shrubs.

Shrubs for Autumn colour include *Viburnum opulus*- the Gilder rose, *Vaccinium*- the blueberry, *Cotoneaster bullatus* and most deciduous azaleas. Golden and Claret ash, Japanese and Canadian maples, Liquidambers, *Cornus florida*, *Pistachia chinensis*, Mountain Ash (*Sorbus*), Pin and Scarlet Oaks, and *Nyssa sylvatica* are some of the trees providing brilliant Autumn colour.

Rhodos and Camellias can be fed with slow release fertiliser now. Cuttings taken from carnations will strike readily.



It is too late to plant Sweet Pea seeds now, but seedlings are available and will establish quickly whilst the soil is still relatively warm. Tall chrysanthemums will probably need staking now as the flowers become large and heavy. Until really soaking rains come larger Rhodos will need a deep watering.

A choice little plant for the rock garden is Pulsatilla, now often named as an anemone. They like humus rich soil. Lavender blue flowers usually, although there are Burgundy flowered plants available occasionally. If you are considering planting new rhodies, prepare the site now by breaking up the soil and incorporating well matured compost into the site. Ensure that the site is well drained. Once trees and large

shrubs have lost their leaves, it is easy to see which lower limbs should be removed to allow more light to reach any Rhodos, azaleas or shade loving plants beneath.



Pulsatilla

Tales from Forest Lodge *by Milton Bowman*



Life here has been busy and there are a number of projects underway in the garden. However the most pressing need is watering to keep plants alive whilst we wait for rain. There are many rhododendrons and azaleas that are looking very stressed and it is a matter of subsistence until the season breaks. This is confirming our view that we

must reorganise plantings so that watering is confined to relatively small areas where things can be watered well and economically, and actually thrive. We have found that in the new cottage garden where watering and fertilising is regular and adequate, that rhododendrons are flourishing and are looking very healthy. I have included a photo of Max Sye which is flowering out of season at the moment and at the same time is putting on new growth at a rapid rate.

Rhododendrons and azaleas will survive relatively dry conditions, but they do much better and cope with sun exposure if they are in damp, well drained, and fertile soil with plenty of organic material such as pine needles and oak leaves mixed in.

We are starting the process of renewing the soil in the long beds in preparation for planting several dozen nursery rhododendrons as well as some camellias once the rains come. The plan is to develop a long mass planting that should be easy to care for and should look spectacular in a few years time. The only problem is that the labels on the plants have faded or disintegrated, or have been moved by dogs and birds and so the colour scheme will be a bit random.



We did think that we had cleared out the new cottage garden before we replanted, but 4 different dahlias have appeared, including a very beautiful pink one that never flowered in the old garden and must be a relic of previous owners' plantings.

Re the weather, 13mm of rain in March, lots of blue sky, and warm days. We have not had the heating on yet, which is most unusual for early April.

Keep on watering and pray for rain.

Milton Bowman



Musk Lorikeet

Glossopsitta concinna



The musk lorikeet is 22 centimetres (8.7 in) long. It is mainly green, and it is identified by its red forehead, blue crown and a distinctive yellow band on its wing. Both upper and lower mandibles of the beak are red at the tip and darker near its base. The blue area on the crown of the female is smaller and paler than seen on the male.

Musk lorikeets are one of the few animals with the plasticity to survive and thrive in rapid urbanization. Over the past 30 years, flocks of musk lorikeets have been adopting Australia's cities, such as Melbourne and Sydney and Adelaide.

The partial reason for musk lorikeets' move to, and success in, urban areas is the planting of various nectar-producing plants throughout the city. They have evolved to consume nectar as a part of their major food source and can be found foraging in the blooming canopies of eucalyptus forests.

Unlike their natural habitat, the city plants are regularly maintained and so they have become a more reliable food source. Because the nectar plants tend to be most dense in the outer urban areas, most of the population prefers the outer urban areas, which allows for more feeding and roosting opportunities, rather than the inner ones. Although, there have been sightings of these lorikeets in the inner-city regions but in reduced numbers; most likely from reduced vegetation.

Librarian's Report *by Ann & David Matison*

Because of the change of venue there has been no news from the Library since the start of the year. There has however been activity by your Librarians. We have negotiated with the RSL to have a space in which we can store our Library – and it does not have to be on wheels. We have chosen a new cupboard to replace the one that we had difficulty locking and a few kind volunteers have offered to help us move when we have the cupboard ready.

Firstly we have to buy the new cupboard. As it is from Ikea we have to assemble it. With my practical expertise that is probably the hardest part. Then we have to move everything to the RSL. Our thanks go to John, the property manager at the RSL who has been very helpful and cooperative. Hopefully we will once again have an active Library soon and our members will be encouraged to use it.

Notice Board

Update from Red Dragon Nursery

Andrew Lockett has indicated that he has the majority of plants requested but some are small plants being struck cuttings from 2017. These will need to remain in their pots for a few months before planting out. He is currently exploring transport options and will keep us informed of the costs.

Neutrog orders

The order has been sent to Neutrog and members will be notified when to collect their order from MLBG.

