



Rhododendrons South Australia

Australian Rhododendron Society Inc. South Australian Branch

Issue 112-November 2017

President's Message

Springtime for rhododendron enthusiasts represents the highlight of the year when opportunities abound to indulge our passion! Apart from glorifying in our own gardening pursuits the October and November meetings allow members to share their special cultivation achievements with the group, something we all enjoy and find inspirational for future gardening endeavours.

Inspiration and wonder was also to be gained from a visit to Lianne Healey's amazing garden on Sunday, October 22nd, which is a true testament to sheer dedication, determination, vision and hard work. Lianne is absolutely the right person to be current custodian of this enchanting oasis which provides an idyllic setting for many beautiful rhododendrons and azaleas, and we are indeed lucky that she is such a willing and welcoming hostess.

Another garden which is freely accessible to visit and explore is the Mount Lofty Botanical Gardens which always offers new discoveries every time you care to venture there. Recently it celebrated its 40 year anniversary with a special day of activities, entertainment, food and drink stalls, accompanied by gardening groups with relevance to the different areas of the Gardens, which of course included our Society. For those members who volunteered their time it was great to have your support but was also fun to be involved and mingle with other devotees to our local botanical garden.

This is the final newsletter for the year but the executive committee will continue to beaver away in preparation for next year, finalising the speakers' program for meetings, planning the next propagation event early in the year, and working on other activities to involve and benefit members during 2018. The end of year lunch to be held at the Antel's beautiful garden in Aldgate, will round off this year's events and based on past experience will be a wonderful occasion for enjoying each other's company and celebrating another great year for SA ARS!

Lianne's Garden





Jeff's special Loderi King George

New member, Stephen, drawing the winning ticket



Raffle winner Rick Illman with a beautiful specimen of Bruce Brechtbill



Next Meeting

This will be held at the Petanque Club rooms on Stonehenge Avenue, Stirling on Tuesday, November 21st at 8pm. It will be our second "Blooms night". *Please note that this change of venue is a trial to assess the clubrooms as a new location for our meetings.*

Please remember to bring a plate for supper and something for the "pot Luck Stall". Friends and new members are always welcome.

Tasmania in the Spring - by "The Illmans & The Walls"

October is a prime month to travel to the "Apple isle" even though the weather for the crossing of Bass Strait can be a bit unpredictable. The rhododendron gardens at Emu Valley were at their peak and we enjoyed several hours wandering amongst spectacular blooms. Similarly the bulb display at Van Diemens on Table Cape was outstanding and many varieties were ordered for the 2018 season.

We were pleased to find that Red Dragon nursery outside Launceston was still operating and we were able to purchase some bargains. The owner, Andrew Lockett, was most generous with his time and may be a potential guest speaker in the future.



Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden



Flowering Cherry trees at Emu valley



Rhododendron Kallista at Red Dragon Nursery



Tulip display at Van Diemen

Late Spring Blooms



Mrs E C Stirling



Yaku Sunrise



Van Nes Sensation



Fastuosum Flore Pleno



Cream Delight



Jean Marie De Montague

Bloom of the Month - Rhododendron Success

This is an Australian hybrid bred by Karel Van der Ven, a now retired nurseryman in the Dandenongs, Victoria. Van der Ven was famous for producing a new hybrid to flower in the week of the Melbourne Cup. Other hybrids he produced were Cup Day(1964), Midnight(1978), Australian Sunset (1985), Apricot Gold(1961 Tortoiseshell wonder X Cup Day) , Empire Rose and Freckle Pink."



Bird of the Month *by Chris Thomas*

Hooded Robin *Melanodryas cucullata*



A third larger than the "usual" red robins. Covers most of Australia in the drier and arid regions.

Behaviour is similar to the red robins, perching on dead branches and flying down to take insects on the ground. Can be seen at Monarto CP and at Sandy Creek CP – just North of Gawler.

Breeds: July-Dec. Communally: three or more may attend nest.



From the Propagating bench by *Richard Illman*

November is the time to consider taking softwood Clematis cuttings. Softwood cuttings are pieces of the current season's growth that are hard enough to push into a propagating mix of 2/3rd sand and 1/3rd peatmoss. You can also use the propagating mix used for rhododendron cuttings. Make sure that the pieces of clematis you use are not bent or broken. Those Clematis that have flowered can be used for cuttings. Take a good stem of the current year's growth, cut off the flowers and use the lower stem to make several cuttings. Make nodal cuttings with a pair of healthy axil growth buds above the node and leave one leaf on the top to help the cutting survive until rooting has taken place. Cut the other leaf off to prevent unnecessary water loss. Using a sharp knife, wound the bottom of the cutting making a cut of 1cm and just scraping off the outer layer. Dip the cutting into rooting hormone. Fill a 4-5cm pot with cutting mix and push the cutting in. It is useful to place a cut-off plastic drink bottle over the cutting to reduce evaporation. Place them in good light but not direct and spray them with a fungicide, such as Fongarid. Keep the cuttings moist by spraying with a mist on a regular basis. The cuttings are ready to pot on when the roots come out the bottom. This occurs usually within 6-8 weeks.

Seedling Clematis –propagated in 2013



Clematis Louise Rowe



Reminder about Rhododendron Cuttings 2017

The warmer weather means that the cuttings must be kept moist, regularly, but lightly fertilised and kept out of direct sunlight.

Notice to members – Preparation for cutting day 2018

It is time to begin preparation for our annual cutting day. This will be held in late February/ early March. New members will be provided with all the materials they require. Members who have propagating boxes are requested to notify Richard if they require a new box as we know that they do suffer from exposure to UV light. Richard also needs to know if members require propagating mix and how much they will need. Please note that a box requires 20 litres of media.

Please notify Richard at Richwyn@optusnet.com.au ASAP as it takes time to purchase the peat, perlite and to make the mix.



The Month Ahead *by Bill Voigt*

Here in the hills, October and November put on a great burst of colour with Rhodos, azaleas, camellias, flowering cherries and crab apples. There are additional shrubs that make a wonderful display at this time too, and two of these are Kolkwitzia, also known as the Chinese Beauty bush, and Weigela.

Weigelas come in white, pink, red and even variegated leaf forms. They need to be pruned once flowering has finished and as they grow older some of the old canes should be removed. They strike very readily from cuttings taken in the winter when they are leafless.

Kolkwitzia



Weigela.



Some people are surprised when red blooms appear among their white, pink or yellow roses. This appearance is due to the stock on which the rose has been budded growing from the base of the plant. It should be removed as it can eventually become more vigorous than the rose budded on it.

Older established Rhodos were often grafted onto Ponticum stock which can send up suckers that will greatly affect the growth of the rhodo above. These Ponticum growths are easily identified by the flowers they produce. Dead heading of Rhodos is a useful exercise as it prevents the plant from wasting energy producing seed. Smaller plants can be easily dead headed by hand, but the spent flower head should be carefully removed so as not to damage the new shoots which are just beneath the flower spike.

Deciduous azaleas make a spectacular show at this time and a thoughtful arrangement of the varieties will provide pleasing effects. Yellows and Oranges group well together, while the harsher reds are better left on their own or grouped with white or very pale varieties. The native American azalea Occidentale and its hybrids are very perfumed azaleas with white or pale pink blooms with an orange blotch. If not affected by mildew, the autumn foliage is striking. A carpet of blue ajuga, lobelia or polyanthus look very beautiful under the yellow and orange deciduous azaleas.

With evergreen azaleas a great display can be made by planting red and white varieties together. White varieties - Dogwood White, White Lace and Madonna. Red varieties- Elsa Karga, Goyet and Red Wings. There are lots to choose from.



Deciduous Azaleas



Tasks for the garden in late spring include:

- ✓ Use a systemic spray on flowering cherries, Amelanchiers, and weeping pears to prevent damage by the pear and cherry slug.
- ✓ Provide stakes for Dahlias.
- ✓ Spray liquid fertiliser on Vireyas- early morning or evening
- ✓ Low hanging foliage on deciduous trees needs to be trimmed to allow light to reach Rhodos beneath.
- ✓ Remove spent flower spikes from Bergénias
- ✓ Pull out the spent stems of Alstromerias
- ✓ Consider planting Zinnias, Cosmos and bedding Begonias

For a more exposed position there are some sun tolerant varieties of Evergreen azaleas that are worth trying including- Alphonse Anderson, Phoenicium, White Lace, Pink Lace, Alba Magna, Christmas Cheer, Duc de Rohan, Violacea, and Splendens.

As longer hours of sunlight will be with us for some months watering becomes important. Be sure to check all the outlets on watering systems as a blocked vent can cause the loss of plants on hot, dry days.

Don't miss the Rhodos at MLBG at this time.

Librarian's Report – Ann & David Matison

Since the last Newsletter I have been reading our newest Library book, first published this year. It is *Rhododendron* by Richard Milne. The author is Senior lecturer in Biology at the University of Edinburgh. He is a keen field botanist with an interest in creative writing.

I found this book extremely readable; dispersed among the very well researched facts are many fascinating anecdotes, particularly relating to the lives and explorations of the plant hunters and their sponsors. One of the many stories is the opening paragraph of chapter two-The Fall and Rise of the Azalea . Many of us have been involved in boundary disputes. This one involved a neighbour who wished to bulldoze a line of shrubs that divided their properties. The other cited a stipulation that the line of shrubs being rhododendrons, could not be removed. The first correctly stated that they were not Rhododendrons, but Azaleas. From this spat, I now know the difference: Most Azaleas have 5 or 6 stamens, while most Rhododendron have 10 stamens. I have not yet gone out into my garden to check this.

There are ten chapters in the book covering just about everything there is to know about this wonderful plant. Did you know for example that the Rhododendron predates the birth of the Himalayan Mountains, home to most Rhododendron species? However it was not until the late nineteenth century before the Asiatic plants reached Europe.

Unlike many of the books about Rhododendron in our library this book does not spend much time on the growing and maintenance of the plants in our gardens. Instead, it explores in depth the science, history, culture and traditions around the plant and concentrates a lot on hybridisation, particularly of the early plants sent to Europe. Azaleas and Vireyas each have a chapter of their own, as does Rhododendron Ponticum.

The book is illustrated with beautiful pictures, an interesting time line, and comprehensive references and index.

Those who have read *Tales of the Rose Tree*, by Jane Brown will find some similarities. I enjoyed both, but, as a lover of Rhododendrons, rather than an expert, I found *Rhododendron* an easier book to read. In fact I found it hard to put down.

Rhododendron is one of a Botanical series of books published by Reaktion Books. If the others are as well written and interesting as *Rhododendron* I would be happy to read them all.

Tales from Forest Lodge by Milton Bowman



I will deal with the weather first.

Rainfall has been light with only 44mm for the month and most of that fell on the 11th when we recorded 32mm.

The consequence of this is that the garden is starting to dry out and some areas are needing watering as plants start to look stressed.

There have been the occasional spring storm which has brought a few more branches down but we did miss the hail that did a lot of damage to the blooms in many member's gardens.

The rhododendrons have been looking fantastic over the last month and we still have the old, late blooming ones to go.

Cynthia has put on a real show in the rose garden and this can be seen from Pine Street and I have included a photo of this. It is a mix of Cynthia, White Pearl, Cunningham's White and Ponticum, which look great all crowded together. There is a lot of new growth providing plenty of cutting material for 2018.

The new garden area continues to develop and I am amazed at the variety of Hydrangeas that are available and how well they respond to a bit of care. We have decided to set up another area for rhododendrons and densely planted 6 pots of maturing cuttings from the nursery. We have an instant garden of plants ranging from 30cm to 2m high. This particular area gets a fair bit of sun and it will be interesting to see how the plants adapt to this during summer.

All in all, it has been a busy and productive time.
Milton Bowman



Notice Board

Next meeting - notice to members bringing blooms to show.

Please consider whether or not the blooms you bring to show would be available for propagation next year. If so, please label the flowers with their name and owner. This will facilitate the making of a list of potential plants for propagation.

End of Year Function

Our Christmas party will be held at the home of Sue and Bill Antel on Sunday, December 3rd. Caterers will supply the main course and dessert. Members will need to bring their own drinks and chairs. An e-mail detailing the arrangements for parking and the maps will be sent separately to members.

ARS trip to SABA in May 2018

Information about this exciting expedition can be obtained from the National website.

An Interesting Item!

Hills botanic garden turns 40 by Elisa Rose

When Rob Hatcher started holiday work at the Mt Lofty Botanic Garden shortly after it opened in 1977, the 97ha property was a far cry from the spectacular display of native and exotic species it is today. But spending time in the developing cool climate garden was enough to redirect the former agricultural science student's career path into horticulture, and this year he is celebrating the garden's 40th anniversary as one of its horticultural supervisors. The Mt Lofty Botanic Garden was officially opened to the public on November 5, 1977, more than 65 years after former Botanic Gardens director Maurice Holtze first suggested a cool climate arboretum in the Hills. It wasn't until 40 years after Mr Holtze's suggestion that a cool climate garden was approved for the region, followed by the purchase of 40ha of land in 1952, and the first plantings and establishment of the first nursery in 1959.

Expansion Since then, the garden has expanded to include a woodland garden, magnolia gully, fern gully, rhododendron gully, two Asian gullies, South American gully and the dwarf Conifer lawn. The garden has not been free of setbacks, however, with the Ash Wednesday fires sweeping through the region in 1983. But Mr Hatcher said the disaster had given fresh life to the garden. "That meant that they went back to the drawing board, they looked at the master plan and they decided to really take that a lot more literally," he said. "They developed the magnolia collection, they developed South American Gully, the fern collection - all of those developments have really added to the diversity of this garden and really set it up for the future."

Highlights There have also been several highlights along the way, Mr Hatcher said, including the flowering of the smelly corpse flower and the establishment of a glade of Wollemi pines, which were once thought extinct but were discovered in NSW in the 1990s, with the Mt Lofty garden receiving one of the first two in cultivation. In recent years, social media has played a huge role in the garden's growing popularity, with photographs of its colourful autumn display attracting thousands of people to bask in its glory. "We've had hundreds of thousands of people come through the gardens, literally over the past two years - it's been incredible," Mr Hatcher said. He is hoping to draw more crowds this Sunday, at the garden's official 40th birthday party. The celebrations will include live music, nature play activities, garden tours, food trucks, local wines and ciders and plant sales, and a free shuttle bus will run between the garden's lower car park and the Crafrers Park 'n' Ride. The free event will be held near the lower car park at the garden's picnic area, between 10am-3pm on Sunday, November 5.

