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Rhodo News

Newsletter 419



Official Newsletter of the

Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden Inc

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Patrons: (International) Kenneth Cox, (Tasmania) Her Excellency the Governor of Tasmania, Kate Warner



Our Board of Directors

From the left — John Englund, Ant Dry, Juanita Wood, Steve Green and Graeme McShane.

It may look like a rogues gallery, but it is far from it!! Amongst a Board's major responsibilities are Legal and Financial Accountability, Strategic Vision and Objectives, Fundraising and Advocacy. Our team does much more than that. Emu Valley Garden is very fortunate to have a 'hands on' team. Juanita (Neet) is not just the Horticultural Manager. She is actively involved in many aspects of the garden — and made a great Easter Bunny! John, like many of us is passionate about ensuring the future, has been a member for many years and puts his hand to anything asked of him. Ant, Graeme and Steve have been Directors since the Board was established. Be it assisting with traffic control, driving a shuttle bus on Cherry Blossom Day, or working in the Plant Sales Area, they are always willing to help out.

Calendar

Sunday 16th June
Social Meeting
EVRG 2pm

Thursday 4th July
THANK YOU to AUDREY
REPLACES JULY MEETING: EVRG 1.30pm

Monday 5th August
Tea Room Reopens

See us at: emuvalleyrhodo.com

General Manager's Report



MARK THE DATE — Thursday 4 July – 1.30 p.m

Come along and say thankyou to Audrey Weeks for the many years that she has managed the Tea Room roster. So often I have seen her sitting in the corner working on the rosters, attending our social meetings and asking for people to fill gaps and on many occasions coming in at short notice to fill a vacancy herself. Then there have been the many hours spent at home on the phone sorting things out.

This celebration will take the place of the July social meeting.

Members are asked to bring a plate, no doubt enjoy some reminiscing and thank Audrey.

As we head into the two months of what is the 'slow period' for Emu Valley, it makes me wonder what lies ahead. I know this does not sit well with everyone but if we are truly going to be 'a garden for all seasons' then we should be open all year. The Tea Room closes for June and July and again at Christmas until after the new year. During these times visitors can look through our wonderful garden and place their entry money in what is basically an honesty box. There are marketing campaigns taking place to entice visitors to Tasmania during winter and to get Tasmanians to also see their state during this time. Would not it be great if we could, for example, offer a discounted entry and a hot drink?

I completely understand the need for our volunteers to have a break and I do not have an answer. It is just something to ponder for the future.

Legends of the Garden

Chairperson Ant Dry is working on a series of legends of Emu Valley whereby he will be conducting a series of interviews which will be printed in the newsletter. The first of these is on Hilary O'Rourke, and is included herein. Due to Ant sunning himself up north there will not be one in July but all going well on a monthly basis thereafter. Whilst on the subject of our Chairperson here is a photo of all of our directors on the front page. As with the management team if there are any matters or suggestions members wish to raise with Board please do not hesitate to do so. Cheers, Geoff geoffreywood@me.com 0427 722060

Social Meeting May 19th

Following some matters spoken about by our manager Geoff, we had a guest speaker present a very relevant topic to many of our members. Illustrating her presentation with some display on the screen, a representative from Australian Hearing, Rheanna Lee, gave us some up to date & interesting information about hearing loss & the technology available to alleviate the damage. Far advanced from some of the very early hearing aids, today's equipment is very small, lightweight, & much more readily adjusted to individual needs.

With Frank Medwin carrying home the raffle prize. then the flower voting selecting a R. Tuba from Melvie Moore, followed closely by a selection of vireya blooms entered by Deann, it was a successful day for that trio. Well done, & thanks to others who added to the flowers on display. *Pete.*

Entertainment Book

Don't forget your Entertainment Book!!! Order on line now for any area in Australia - and the Garden gets a cut! They have a cool app - easy & very handy!!! <https://www.entertainmentbook.com.au/orderbooks/960q910> It can be ordered on line at this link, and your friends and family can order theirs where ever they live as well. Also available at the Garden.

Welcome

A warm winter welcome to new members Clifton & Juanita Smith, and Amrit Jeevan & Manjari Bhuwan.

Vale

Sadly, we have to say goodbye to folks who have had influence on our lives at EVRG.

First there was Simon Begg a keen member of the Aus. Rhodo Society in Victoria with a passion for rhodos, particularly vireyas, with occasional visits to EVRG as a delegate to conferences held here.

Then there was George Argent of Scotland's R.B.G – a world authority on vireyas – another who has visited here at EVRG sharing his wealth of knowledge. Both of these gentlemen were closely associated with Ian and Jenny Chalk and Ian's quest to bringing Australia's own vireya rhodos to the fore.

Closer to home we mourn the loss of Lesley Gillanders. She was the wife of Ken Gillanders for 68 years and they had a wonderful life together traveling to all corners of the world on plant hunting expeditions, bringing back rare and unusual plants to propagate and share with other eager collectors. I remember the wonderful times we spent at Woodbank Nursery at Longley and their own garden drooling over their wonderful collection of plants. Then there was Lesley's talent as an artist, and who can forget their wonderful hospitality – second to none. What a loss to the Southern Branch, being an inaugural member and with such botanical knowledge she willingly shared. For those privileged to read her notes in their newsletter will, forever, appreciate her skill and enthusiasm. *Pam Kupsch*

Jenny & Ian Chalk met Dr George Argent at the Royal Botanical Gardens of Edinburgh. (RBGE)

Can you imagine that the largest collection of vireya rhododendrons in the world is at the Royal Botanical Gardens of Edinburgh. Why, you might ask?

1. Because the cloud cover during the summer enables the glass houses at Edinburgh to be maintained at an acceptable temperature, and
2. Because of Dr. George Argent.

Whilst still working part time, Dr Argent recently retired as Senior Tropical Botanist with the RBGE. George was acknowledged as the world's foremost authority on vireya rhododendrons. He first became interested in this group of plants in 1977 and since that time undertook numerous field trips to South East Asia. From that region he introduced many vireya species currently in cultivation as part of the superb Living Collection at the RBGE.

How fortunate we were to meet with George over a meal and then to inspect the collection. George visited EVRG some years ago and with fond memories, remained another of our great supporters. Guess what George looked forward to growing in his garden in retirement. Vegetables!

Whilst at RBGE we were also able to meet with Curator of the Living Collection, David Knott. David expressed a desire to assist EVRG in any way he can and he is now receiving the EVRG newsletter.

We continue to enjoy a wonderful and productive association with the RBGE and wish them well. They and we will sorely miss George Argent.



LEDGENS OF THE GARDEN—HILARY O'ROURKE

The land on which the Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden now sits was once part of a productive dairy farm belonging to rhododendron hybridiser Hilary O'Rourke. Ant Dry talks to Hilary's daughter Kate to find out how a dairy metamorphosed into an internationally-renowned rhododendron garden.

ANT: Where do the O'Rourke's come from?

KATE: Mum and Dad were both southerners, from Cygnet down below Hobart. Their parents were small orcharders. They lived on either side of the bay but knew each other their entire lives, went to the same Primary school. At 18, Dad joined the army, just after the end of the Second World War. Afterwards he came back home to run his own father's orchard but his father died in 1950 from a massive heart attack. The property wasn't big enough to divide among seven sons and money was an issue. So Dad went off to Dookie agricultural college in Victoria with the intention of running his own farm. As an AIF soldier he was eligible for a soldier settlement, and eventually selected this property at Romaine.

He married my Mum in 1955 and they set up a dairy farm. It was pretty modern for the day—they had electricity and a concrete floor!! They started off with a herd of about 30 or 40 cattle and built up over the years. In the late 1960s Dad got a job down at APPM, or the Pulp as everyone called it.

ANT: Why would a dairy farmer need a job?

KATE: By that time there were ten kids in the family (they went on to have 13 in all) and he was putting the kids through school. The farm was just on the edge of profitability.

ANT: What did he do at the Pulp?

KATE: He worked on the filtration pumps. He told us it was due to his great mechanic skills, but we were witness to these skills and we thought perhaps he was employed for some other reason. In 1976 Dad had his first major heart attack. He was 49. Two years later he had another one. It was a big wake up call. Something significant had to change. He was retired from the Pulp and told to find a less stressful life.

ANT: So is that when he took up with Rhodos?

KATE: Yes, but, we have to go back a bit. From a very early age, Dad was very inter-

ested in race horses and their breeding. It fascinated him as a young lad of 12 or 13. He wasn't interested in how the horse performed on the track, only on what makes a good race horse.

ANT: Did you have horses?

KATE: No, we never did, but his Mum was a great horse woman, so perhaps his love of horses came from his mother.

ANT: What's this got to do with Rhodos?

KATE: His first hobby here on the farm after retiring was to grow Australian natives. As with the horses, it was the genealogy of the plants that interested him. Most of the eucalypts on this farm were planted by Dad in the 1980s. We have gum trees from all around Australia. Not long after that, he met Noel Sullivan and his interest moved to Rhododendrons and specifically the breeding and genealogy of the species.

ANT: How did he meet Noel?

KATE: Noel was the dentist at the Pulp, so probably they knew each other from work. I always remember them as very close friends. Noel introduced Dad to the nurserymen around the place—Bob Malone, Ron Radford. They were all members of the North West Rhododendron Society and would spend their evenings and weekends chatting all things Rhododendron. Dad's knowledge grew quickly, he was a voracious reader. One evening they got to talking about having a permanent place to meet, and wouldn't it be great if was had a garden to go with that. Then Dad piped up, "it just so happens, I've got a spot for the garden, so let's do it." So they did and the garden was born.

ANY: How much of his time did Hilary spend at the Garden?

KATE: All day. Every day. He'd sold all farming operations by about '81 or '82. He'd also subdivided and sold most of the farm over the years. He and Noel were growing and hybridising rhododendrons. The pig sty and then the dairy became the nursery. Every nurseryman's dream. Concrete floors, under cover, hot and cold running water and electricity! There were Rhodos all over the place planted in rows like a crop of potatoes.

ANT: What was he planning to do with them all?

KATE: Breed Australian rhododendrons for Australians.

ANT: Did he ever "retire" from the garden?

KATE: He stepped back by about age 75, and allowed others to take over. His old



mates had gone by then, and he'd had about 5 heart attacks, so it was time.

ANT: Where does the name "Hilary" come from?

KATE: It's an old Cygnet name. It's common in the area. There was a priest in the area with that name. Fr Hilary. And his own Father's name was Hilary as well.

ANT: What was he like as a Dad?

KATE: He was a beautiful man. He was very even tempered. It would take a lot for him to get upset. He was keenly interested in what we were doing as individuals and what we were interested in. He followed our sporting lives, would take us to various sporting events. He even came along and watched us girls play every now and again. He never pushed us, we were free to choose what we wanted to do in life. While we were away from home studying or working he would write us long letters about what was going on around the place, what our mother and the cousins were doing, that he missed us but was proud of what we were doing. Wonderfully warm. The relationship he and Mum had as a married couple was a real wonderful model. They parented together in partnership. There was no playing one off against the other. They were stable, loving, kind and generous.

ANT: What do you think was his philosophy of life?

KATE: First and foremost to get along with people. To be generous, to be looking for what you can do to help someone else. Interestingly, we found out much later in life, that the motto of the O'Rourke family is "to serve". We don't think Dad was aware of that, but it did sum up his life.

Around the Garden

It feels like snow is just up the road from us here at EVRG. Brrrr. Time to bring out those winter woollies and make the most of the sun once it finally arrives for the day.

We're still ticking away with jobs around the place, which includes continual rock edging of paths and roadways, mulching, raking of autumn leaves now that the colours have faded, adding more to the tyre wall around the middle road, and have spent several days on purely targeting blackberry removal. The automated Irrigation system for the top section of the garden is almost finished and we are looking at having it completed by the end of June this year. Maurie and Trevor have been busy planting out and have finished with a grand total of 360 plants to add to our collection. Mulching these newbies have begun but plenty more to continue on with. This is the kind of job that you follow the sun as it gets pretty icy up there on the hill in the shade!

Things to do in the garden during winter:

- Now is the time to be planting bare-root plants and is also a little kinder to those who are watching their spending, as nurseries are usually asking reasonable prices and there is often a wider selection at this time of the year, including an assortment of fruit trees, roses, raspberries and deciduous tree and shrub varieties. The idea behind planting them now in winter when the plants are dormant is that it gives them sufficient time to establish well below the ground with plenty of winter watering and ease into the months of spring when weather starts to warm up the soil slowly.
- Beating fungal disease on your fruit trees, particularly stone fruit trees, now rather than waiting for tell-tale signs is always best practice. To beat leaf curl and the like, you can use a lime sulphur mix (there are other products) a few times during the course of winter until the buds start to swell come spring.
- To add winter colour to your garden, it's worth having a look for some of these: Chinese winter sweet (*chimonanthus praecox*—pretty to look at and adds a sweet fragrant aroma in the air). Still keeping with the fragrant theme, daphne varieties and also luculia will be also worth adding to your collection. Luculia flowers right through to the middle of winter but it must be kept free from frosty areas or it just simply wont survive.
- The sasanqua camellia adds colour (pink, white and cerise) to any garden towards the end of autumn and follows into early winter. It copes with direct sun, shade and can handle light frosts. They are fast growing therefore making it an ideal, must have colourful specimen in any garden. And then of course you cant go past hel-lebores—winter rose. They come in so many different colours and are known for happy go lucky care free nature and their long blooming winter colour. They look fantastic mass planted and do well in shady parts of the garden, now we all have those hard to fill spaces don't we!

I had better get back to pruning the hydrangeas down in the wisteria carpark as there is plenty more to do and I'm on a roll! Happy Gardening, *Neet*



Camellia Sasanqua flowering now at the Garden.



Red capped toadstool overlooking Lake Grebe in North America.



Rhododendron glaucophyllum

Rhododendron glaucophyllum was discovered by J D Hooker in May 1849 in Sikkim, later to be found by other collectors in Nepal, Bhutan and again in Sikkim growing on ridges with other rhododendrons near pine forests.

A year later he introduced it to western gardens and now there are numerous distinct forms in cultivation some low growing while others form are taller, but they all have one distinguishing feature, the under side of the leaves are very white (glaucous) and the scales are very obvious.

Other interesting features are a campanulate flower, sometimes with a short, stout sharply bent style and the leaves are very pungent when crushed. Numerous colour forms are available ranging from rose- pink, purple-pink or reddish-purple; there is even a variety with white flowers.

At Emu Valley our easiest to find plants are growing in Sikkim and can be seen on the left of the Noel Sullivan Walk just after entering Sikkim growing in association with *R. lindleyi* and *R. dalhousiae*. *Maurie*

The Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden is proudly sponsored by:



Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden Inc.
PO Box U33 Upper Burnie, Tasmania 7320