

March 2020

Rhodo News

Newsletter 427



Official Newsletter of the

Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden Inc

Postal Address: PO Box U33 Upper Burnie Tasmania 7320 Phone: 6433 1805

enquiries@evrg.com.au Office Hours: Mon-Fri 10am-2pm

General Manager: Geoff Wood Newsletter Editor: Nigel Burch

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



Guess who came calling over Christmas—Better Homes and Gardens magazine! Their March 5th issue will have a feature on our Garden AND there will be a story about us on their Channel 7 show as well—we believe on March 20th.

Calendar

Thursday 5th March
Better Homes & Gardens
goes on sale

Monday 9th March
Social Meeting at STEAMFEST
Leave From EVRG 930am

Wed 11th March
Harp Concert
At EVRG at 2pm

See us at: emuvalleyrhodo.com

General Manager's Report

I knew many of our volunteers were multi skilled and this certainly proved true. On Monday 24 February I drove into the garden at just on 8.30 and there was a big passenger bus parked in front of the Plant Sales area. I think my heart missed a beat as I tried to get my brain working as to what was going on. It turned out that this was a group from NSW due much later in the morning but because of their itinerary being messed up decided to head to us early.

As I got out of my car I realised that there was no need for panic — the visitors had been welcomed, shown onto the balcony, the tea room opened up and then it was off for guided tours or a sit down and a drink for others. All this happened because our people simply jumped into action — they saw there was a need and “just did it”.

The Cruise Ship season has been extended with five additional ships so far coming into Burnie. There is now even one in May. While this might sound good, we cannot just rely on the revenue the ships bring in, nor should we think that other sources of income will be ongoing.

I was talking to one of our interstate members recently who had an idea for a function but because he lives interstate thought that he should not have mentioned it. Please, all suggestions are very much appreciated and will always be passed on to our events/fund raising and publicity teams.

2020 Australian Rhododendron Society Conference November 5/6/7

If you have not received notification about the conference or have any questions about registration etc. please advise either Administration Officer Sophie or myself. The guest speakers are awesome!!!

SHEFFIELD STEAM FEST TRIP —MONDAY 9 MARCH

Don't forget the usual March social meeting is being replaced with a trip planned to the Sheffield Steam Fest on Monday 9 March. As per last month's newsletter — *We will be running our bus and ask for a gold coin donation to cover fuel. The idea is to leave the garden at 9.30 on the Monday with the bus and some members will have their cars available also. To ascertain numbers in order to arrange transport please either text or call Marilyn 0439 386 009 or Pete on 0428 103 520*

Harp Concert EVRG March 11th

Internationally acclaimed Singaporean Harpist Katryna Tan will be performing at Emu Valley Garden on Wednesday 11 March starting at 2 pm. Members \$25 & Non Members \$30. Ways to book your ticket are:

1. Direct Deposit — Commonwealth Bank

Account Name - Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden BSB — 067 400

Account Number — 28047242

Please, as the reference put Harp Concert (or HC) and your name

2. Coming into the garden and paying by credit card, cash or cheque — Tea Room volunteers will record your payment

3. Posting a cheque to Emu Valley — PO Box U33, Upper Burnie 7320

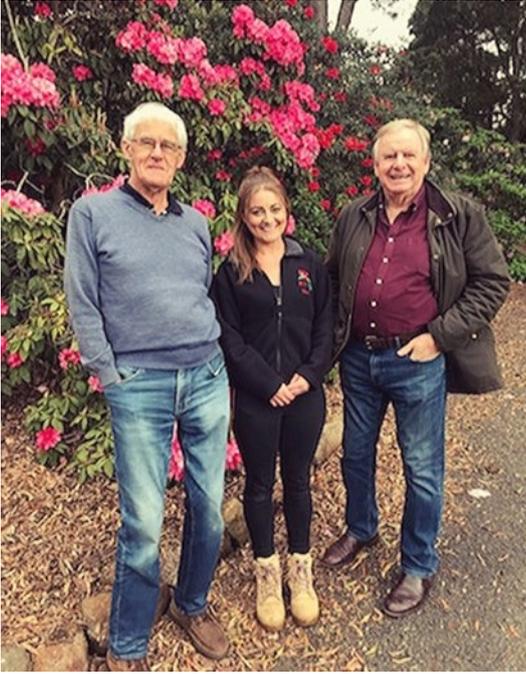
You will not require a ticket as on the day there will be a station at the entry to have your name ticked off.

Ever heard of biochar?

“a form of charcoal that is produced by exposing organic waste matter (such as wood chips, crop residue, or manure) to heat in a low-oxygen environment and that is used especially as a soil amendment.” I pinched this from the Merriam-Webster dictionary. Very soon due to a wonderful donation we will have our own biochar burner! Instead of putting a photo of one in this newsletter we will wait until next month with the real McCoy.

Cheers, Geoff geoffreywood@me.com 0427 722060





Around the Garden

So much to do with so little time. We have the Australian Rhododendron Conference for 2020 being held here at EVRG in November so we have a small dedicated team going above and beyond in preparation. We need the garden looking its very best. We want to blow the socks off the rhodo enthusiasts that will be visiting and I have no doubt in my mind that we will achieve this but we need more help. Does wandering paths, raking tracks, weeding, plodding along checking sprinkler heads, mulching and singing as you go sound like you? Please get in touch with me if this is something you would like to do.

The hot bed in the nursery is one third full and it is something I am very conscious of and am aware that this sits high on my list of priorities. Having this full of rhododendron cuttings will hopefully give us the reinforcement that we need of rare species, and some that are under threat of extinction. Also, if and when the need to help out other botanical gardens that have been destroyed by bush fires and the likes, we need to be able to have resources at the ready to help where possible. It is a necessity to have stock here available in the plant sales area, rare and unique plants, which in turn provides cash

that goes back into the garden. Every sale helps!

Bale carting has begun, and we have had 2 days with several trips out to Doctors Rocks to load up 872 with more to collect. Aiming for around 1000 bales this year but will be happy to take what we can get. We really need to focus on the areas that are a little cringe worthy as far as steepness and the wear and tear on backs and knees are concerned, but if we just chip away at it, it will be a job done that we shouldn't have to worry about for another few years, fingers crossed. By mulching these areas, it will keep the weeds at a controllable level, keep plant roots damp and healthy, and also look pleasing to the eye of our visitors. Always keeping in mind, not to mulch too close to the trunk of the plants, keep a hand width clear of this which will then avoid issues like collar rot etc , while allowing us to feed, fertilise and water more efficiently.

We have had a number of sightings of healthy tiger snakes around the garden this year. People need to remember that we aren't exactly in the middle of a paved city, we do have the surroundings of thick scrub and bush so snakes are going to slither onto our property, it's just part of it. Chances are you have walked right beside one or more and you haven't even noticed so whilst it's important to be mindful of these creatures, they aren't going to hurt you, take a pic or just keep on walking.

Remember to have your popcorn at the ready for the viewing of Better Homes and Gardens on March 20 which EVRG will have time to shine and also in their magazine which hits the stands on March 5th!

Happy gardening everyone! Neet 😊

Take a bow, all our volunteers!

-----Original Message-----
 From: S Curotto <smc03washington@gmail.com>
 Sent: Monday, February 24, 2020 5:52 AM
 To: Emu Valley Garden <enquiries@evrg.com.au>

Dear All

I had a wonderful time visiting EVRG on 17th January during our cruise on the Sun Princess.

All the staff were so helpful and I particularly enjoyed the cream scone and tea to get me going around the gardens, the sun was out, the gardens fabulous, what more can one say, except I wish I could of stayed longer.

From a wet Nottingham in the UK, thank you once more.

Kind Regards, Sherri Curotto

Legends of the Garden—Fairie Nielsen



Fairie Nielsen was a true legend of the garden. She was famous for clambering down inaccessible slopes to weed or to clear up or to plant, while tied by a rope to a tree to keep her from falling. She was still volunteering at the garden when she died aged 83. Katie O'Rourke recalls that Fairie Nielsen was the hardest working woman she ever knew. Courageous, forthright and always with something good to say about others. A true legend. Ant Dry spoke to Fairie's daughter Katrina, usually known as Kate.

ANT: Was Fairie a real name?

KATE: Yes, she was born Mary Fairie Busby. The name Fairie is of Scottish origin.

ANT: Where was she born?

KATE: New South Wales, in 1926. She was one of 5 siblings. Her family moved to Tasmania when my grandfather became the general manager of VDL Company [Van Diemen's Land farming corporation running

250,000 acres in NW Tasmania]. They also leased Hunters Island and lived there. My grandfather bought the family property, "Woodburn" at Doctors Rocks, where Mum's brother still runs the farm. Mum went to boarding school in Launceston and she and her siblings spent a lot of time growing up away from home.

My father [Danny Nielsen] was a family friend. He was about 15 years older than Mum. He was Danish and he came out in the 1940s with his first wife who sadly passed away. He was an engineer and was friends with my grandfather, through the Burnie Port Authority and the VDL Company. They were married in the mid-1950s. My father was then the Engineering Superintendent at the APPM [Australian Pulp and Paper Mills] in Burnie. They lived in South Burnie. Dad bought the land at Pigeon Hill near the Rhodo Garden – about 380 acres. Everyone told him he was mad. They began to clear the property. They only had one car, so Mum used to walk from South Burnie, up the EBR railway line to Pigeon Hill, which is at least 6 or 7 kms, do a day's work, clearing blackberries and ferns and Dad would arrive after work and help her. Only 180 acres was cleared, the rest remained as bush.

They gradually built a house. It took about three years to build. Dad did a lot of overseas travel with work and being an engineer and perfectionist wouldn't allow any building to go on while he was away. We used to tease Mum that the farm would get smaller and the garden would get bigger every year. We would literally move the boundary fence around the house further out every year. It used to drive my brother nuts, because he would do that sort of work. My father died in 1973, and his best friend, Uncle Harry, who had emigrated from Denmark with him, became quite a father figure to us. He was a horticulturalist and also worked at the mill.

It was a big thing when Dad died. Mum was only mid-40s, with a farm and two young kids. People asked if she would sell the farm and she said, "Oh no, I think I'll have a go myself". She had lots of farming knowledge, having grown up on one, but back then not too many widowed ladies would take on a farm. Prior to Dad passing away, he'd say to her, "You can have the gully down there, 'cause it's no good to me". Those were like the Rhodo Garden, as steep as possible, and covered horizontally across with blackberries, bracken fern, you name it, every weed known to man. Mum would gradually clear it, bit by bit. We'd get home from school and she'd be "down the gully" and you'd go out there and yell and yell and yell until she could hear you. That went on for years, and gradually you saw it being finished. She'd put in paths – that was a lot of our jobs growing up. That and rock walling. Mind you ours wasn't very good. Finally, she'd plant and a lot of it was rhododendrons and azaleas.

ANT: How did you mother get involved in the Rhodo Garden?

KATE: It was another challenge to her. She absolutely loved gardening. Our place was almost... well a garden is never "finished" I suppose. She knew Hilary O'Rourke quite well. We grew up with his kids on the school bus. She also knew Maurie and Pam [Kupsch]. She saw the site, and it was so similar to what she'd done at Pigeon Hill. Most people thought "you can't be serious!!", but they were!

She had fantastic vision for those sorts of things. So she just started all over again, clearing and so on. She used to do a lot of what she used to call "the boring stuff", getting down into the gullies and spraying the blackberries and bracken ferns. She would tie herself to a tree and go down on her bottom, and do an area, and then she'd had the

rope to be able to pull herself back up. To her that was quite normal. I'm sure her parents did it on their own farm when they were clearing.

When we got home from school, we knew that, if she wasn't down the gully at home, she'd be down the gully at the Rhodo Garden.

She was always busy. She had the house to run, she had the farm, she had her garden, she used to volunteer at Red Cross about two days a week, she was on all the school committees, she was in the gardening club, the historical garden society, and she used to travel a lot – mostly with her cousins, and generally on garden tours and to Western Australia to see her sister. Most nights she'd be out at a meeting for something.

ANT: What sort of a mum was she?

KATE: She was a great mum. Good fun too. We grew up kind of self-sufficient, but Mum was always there encouraging us. She had been brought up in quite a “proper” family, so if you were a bit lackadaisical in your speech, she'd pull you up on it.

ANT: She never remarried?

KATE: Too independent. Too busy. She died about 10 years ago, aged 83. In her late 60s she had her knees done. They had been bad for some 15 years or so, before eventually she had them done. She refused to do them one by one. They had to be done together, because “she didn't have the time”. Then, when she was about 73, she broke a leg at the Rhodo Garden. Her leg slipped and went the wrong way underneath her. They suggested she go to the doctor and she said, “oh no, it'll be alright”. A day or two later, when it was still painful, she decided to go. She had to wear a leg brace for a couple of months. She was still regularly working at the garden when she died.

ANT: What did she get from working at the garden?

KATE: She loved gardening, but it was friendship. She had lots and lots of friends down there. She would come home and tell us the most hilarious stories about what they talked about, who was doing what. She'd have tears running down her cheeks from the laughter. The fun they used to have! They all got on so well. They had the same sense of purpose and the love of gardening. They'd finish an area and they'd have a great sense of accomplishment. Gardening was her joy. At one point her accountant suggested she'd “have a lovely life if she sold the farm”, and her response was “why would I do that? I have a lovely life already!”

ANT: Did your mum have a philosophy of life?

KATE: She was very pragmatic. Very accepting of everyone. Her upbringing was hardworking but quite well-to-do, but Mum could talk to anyone. She'd say something like “onwards and upwards”. Life goes on. Get on with it. Move on. She was straight down the line.

From our Chairperson—Use of legacies

In our November newsletter, we asked members for suggestions as to how best we could use funds we have been gifted.

We thank those members who corresponded with Geoff by email and by telephone.

There were a number of suggestions made, but the overwhelming majority of responses were of the opinion that there were two major areas of concern:-

- 1 - further work was needed on the irrigation system, to ensure that it covers the whole garden.
- 2 - extending/renovating the tea-room.

In line with these suggestions, as well as our Strategic Plan laid out last year the Board are exploring the following:-

Water security

We shall extend the irrigation idea to encompass water security generally. With climate change, water will become more and more of a problem, so we shall not only extend the irrigation system, but we shall also be looking at other alternatives to ensure that we have access to water at all times.

Data base

We have done a great deal of work on the Plant data base and some additional funding will be required to complete this.

Tea-room

The Tea-Room will require much planning and member input, so please continue to read the newsletter as we gather ideas on how best to do this.



Schima wallichii

Now for a change from Rhododendrons, we wander into the Camellia family.

Schima wallichii is a member of a small genus of uncommon evergreen shrubs and small trees native to Sikkim, Nepal, Assam, Burma, W China and Taiwan. With such a wide distribution it is indeed understandable that variations should occur, and perhaps only one species will emerge with a number of variables.

Schima wallichii grows into a small tree, clothed with elliptic-oblong dark green leaves and the new leaves a pale mahogany. The flower buds appear early February on long stalks and mature to the size of red and white marbles before opening into beautiful fragrant white flowers 4-5 cm in diameter with a large central cluster of bright orange stamens. These flowers do not appear all at once so it extends the interest factor.

At Emu Valley we have flowering plants growing in Arunachal Pradesh, Sichuan and Burma with a plant in Sikkim yet to show signs of flowering. This is an unusual plant and worth a walk to check them out for yourself. *Maurie*

The Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden is proudly sponsored by:



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