



# *Rhododendrons South Australia*

**Australian Rhododendron Society Inc. South Australian Branch**

*Issue 133 – May 2020*

## **President's Message**

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Hopefully you have all been enjoying your enforced time at home and, in particular, some productive time in your gardens over the past few weeks. I have been fortunate enough to be able to continue working so haven't really been blessed with extra gardening time – a bit of a catch 22 situation!

Our previous newsletter was a great collaboration of contributions from more members than would normally be expected and I am hopeful that this extra effort will continue in this month's edition. This time in isolation has also provided the opportunity to research other sources of reading material such as the newsletters of our interstate counterparts. In particular Emu Valley and the Victorian branches can be quite interesting and informative as they both seem to have a different feature plant with each edition. On the national website you will also notice that the Emu Valley conference scheduled for November this year has been postponed to 2021.

Looking internationally, where in the northern hemisphere it is currently springtime, the RHS Facebook site can be worth exploring for the welcome opportunity to enjoy photographic stories of places like the rhododendron gardens at Wisley. That may have to go on the list of gardens to visit when international travel once again becomes a possibility! There are countless other websites and social media garden experiences to explore and enjoy.

With the latest government announcements, it would seem that we can begin to look forward to staged resumption of normal activities with the gradual lifting of restrictions, and so we can more confidently anticipate that we will be able to resume meetings once gatherings of more than 20 people are permitted.

## Coping with Covid19



Isolation at home-searching for a way out!

Renovating old, and establishing new garden beds.

A friend recently sent some photos of rhododendrons in Bhutan which got me reminiscing about our wonderful trip there 3 years ago. It also reminded me of the delightful discovery of Eden Garden in Auckland this time last year. Memories of past experiences have become very precious in this Covid-19 era.

Belinda Cullum





## In our gardens this month



Autumn Berberis



Sasanqua Camellia "Apple Blossom"



Vireya "Rosy Posy"



Nerine Bowdenii



Azalea "Variety"



Self-sown cyclamen in the path



White Lapageria





Sasanqua Camellia "Mignone"



Acer palmatum "Elegans"



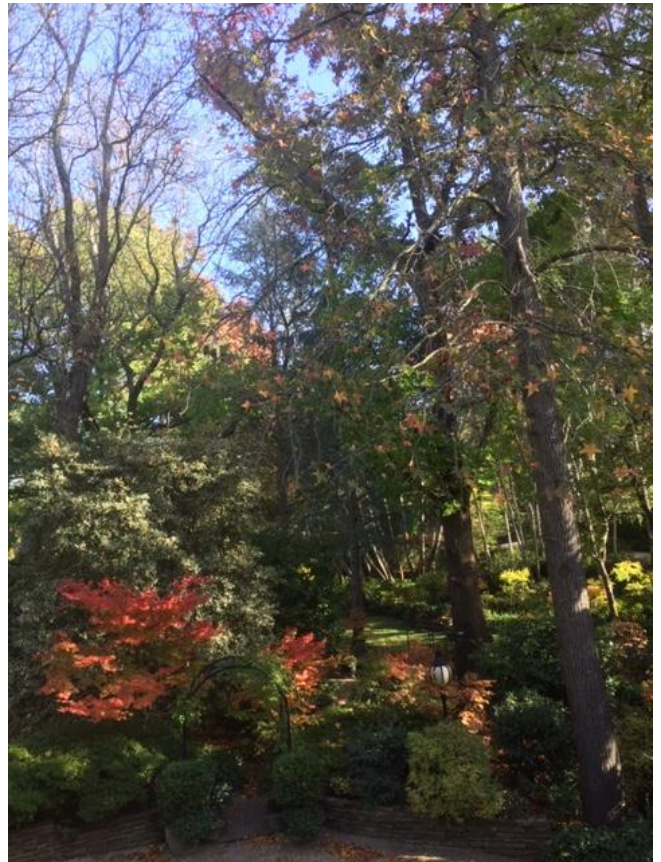
Vireya Laetum



Rhododendron Max Syc



A wonderful display of azaleas at Bob's







## Tips for Autumn Colour

Towards the end of Autumn it is sometimes difficult to have colour in the garden, especially when strong cold winds and rain have stripped the deciduous leaves from the trees. Here are a few suggestions for Autumn colour and many are illustrated in the previous photos.

Plectranthus come in a variety of forms and colour and prove to be a valuable

addition to any garden for the Autumn. They can make useful ground covers as well as medium to large shrubs. They are also easy to propagate from stem cuttings even at this time of the year.

Sasanqua Camellias really start the Camellia season and several we can recommend are Apple Blossom and Mignone. Both of these respond well to pruning and can make wonderful espaliered specimens or prune to produce a "Moon Gate". They also provide a food resource for our delightful, small, honey loving birds.

***Wanting to buy some new Camellias? It is worth a visit to the Camellia nursery on Gum Flat Rd, Carey gully.***

Azaleas also start to bloom sporadically and will go through the winter to blossom fully in spring. Some of the early varieties are Paul Schame, Charlie, Yochelle, Variety and of course the Satsuki varieties such as Meichos.

If you want Autumn rhododendrons you cannot go past the Vireyas. They are not season dependent and flower on and off all year. They come in a good range of colours and form and the bright Oranges such as Vladimir Bukovsky, Rosy Posy, and Nuigini Firebird light up any dull day.

Autumn bulbs such as Nerines and Cyclamen can add colour to any garden, with the Nerines being sun-loving while the Cyclamen will take shade. Both are easy to propagate from seed. Propagation of Nerines from seed is dealt with in this month's propagating article.

A plant that is not commonly grown is the Lapageria. It is the National flower Of Chile and grows as a rather wiry climber that is best viewed from underneath. We grow ours through Camellias or on wooden frames that support garden gates. It requires a shaded position with richly mulched soil. The white shown in the photograph is considered to be a rarer variety than the red form.

## **Next Meeting**

There are no scheduled meetings at this stage.



## Bloom of the Month – Aromi Hybrid Azalea



The following extract is from the front page of the Mobile Botanic Gardens in Alabama and may be of interest to members, as Richard and I have been able to purchase some seed of hybrid Aromi azaleas from the American Rhododendron Society. We are hopeful that, if successful in raising them they could be available to members. It is worth noting that the contacts that made this possible were made at the International Rhododendron conference in Germany in 2018. Another great reason for attending conferences!

**DECIDUOUS AZALEAS** - *Dr. Eugene Aromi of Mobile, Alabama has hybridized deciduous azaleas since 1970 to bring heat tolerance, fragrance, and improved color to the southern palette.*

**AROMI EVERGREEN AZALEAS** - *A series of azaleas hybridized for Mid-South to Deep-South weather conditions. These beautiful plants take the best traits of our popular Southern Indicas, adding new flower forms and richer colors to that group. Hybridized by Eugene Aromi in the 1960's, they have withstood the test of time in collectors' gardens.*

*Our new Aromi Hybrid Azalea Garden was opened in April 2016. Filled with Dr Gene Aromi's Native Azalea Hybrids, along with companion planting, this new garden area is an extension to our existing Millie McConnell Rhododendron Garden.*

*The Garden was funded with private donations from a campaign spearheaded by Maarten van der Giessen, our local azalea guru, owner of van der Geissen Nursery in Semmes, AL., and Tom Johnson, Executive Director of Magnolia Gardens & Plantation of Charleston SC. Maarten inherited many of Dr Aromi's plants, and has worked with them for more than 10 years – bringing more of them into the horticulture world for us all to enjoy. He has generously donated plants for the collection.*

*Dr. Eugene (Gene) Aromi was an Education Professor at the University of South Alabama, and an ardent azalea hybridizer for over 30 years. In addition to producing evergreen azalea hybrids, he aimed to breed a better deciduous azalea. Crossing American native deciduous azaleas with Exbury varieties, he made over 1000 crosses, and described over 50,000 seedlings – over 100 have been named.*

*Bred for heat tolerance, disease resistance and fragrance, the Aromi hybrids have big flower trusses and vivid colors. The native azaleas he started with include*

- *the Florida azalea (Rhododendron austrinum) with its yellow to golden orange blooms appearing just as the leaves begin to emerge*
- *the Coastal azalea (Rhododendron atlanticum) with fragrant pink blooms and a low-growing habit*
- *the Flame azalea (Rhododendron calendulaceum) with highly variable bloom in yellow, red, pink or orange in late spring*
- *the Piedmont azalea (Rhododendron canescens) with pink and white sweetly fragrant flowers, that grows to a tall shrub*

*Dr. Aromi's work is nationally known with collections established in Texas, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, and the National Arboretum in Washington. And now we are proud to recognize and preserve his work in Mobile.*

Thank you to Maarten van der Giessen for the use of his photos.







## **From the Propagating bench** *by Richard Illman*

### **Help stock our Pot Luck Stall**

We are entering a period of the year when it is possible to propagate many plants that have performed well in our gardens. It would be very helpful if members could consider propagating plants for donating to the pot luck stall when we return to normal meetings.

Below are some suggestions for plants that could be propagated.

#### **Hard wood cuttings taken in winter:**

Hydrangeas, Fuschias, Philadelphus, Berberis, Flowering currant, Wigelia, Viburnum, Rose and apple root stock.

Don't forget the possibility of seed propagation (see recommended seed suppliers in Noticeboard section).

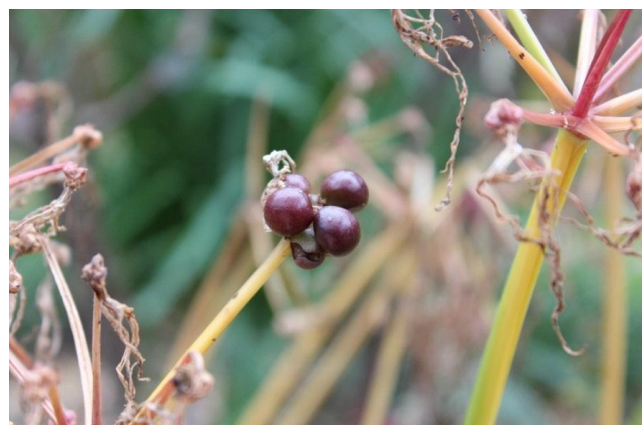
### **Success with seeds**

Thank you to those members who attended the workshop on raising cyclamen from seed and who informed us that the seed has germinated. May they continue to have future success and be able to have drifts of spectacular autumn cyclamen in their gardens in a few years.



### **Propagating Nerine seeds**

Nerines are making a wonderful show at this time of the year and many are beginning to set their seeds. These appear as small round structures covered with a white papery shell. When the casing falls off, the seeds can be gently removed and stored in damp peat. They will begin to shoot in the spring and can then be planted in pots. Be aware that when the new foliage emerges on Nerines they are a favourite food for possums and need to be covered with wire until the foliage matures.





## Hot box experiment update

Time has flown since the last newsletter and I'm pleased to report on the results of my hot box experiment. The vireyas have gone nuts! They put on massive roots and had to be repotted into the blueberry mix from the cutting mix. The plant growth exceeded my expectations too (although I did jokingly say that I would have to extend a penthouse storey on the polystyrene box) and I will now start to harden them off out of their luxury apartments. I didn't include them on the growth chart in the previous newsletter but hopefully you can see the new growth in this photo. You will have to believe me when I say that they started off the height of the labels.

The lazy rhodos that were on the growth chart in my previous article are also starting to make progress. Their roots filled the cutting mix in their cups and had to be repotted in the blueberry mix. As you can see from the photo below, they are now making new leaf growth.



Unfortunately, the two Rhodo examples on the growth chart have not exhibited the impressive progress of the others in the box.

It has been exciting to observe their development and I hope other members have enjoyed watching their own successes in their gardens.

I must stress that the hot box exercise only worked on cuttings with roots.

P.S. For those members who are too young to know about Imperial measurement, I have included Metric scale in this photo.

*Barb Mynhart*





## Librarian's Report *by Ann & David Matison*

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Welcome, fellow hermits. I think David and I have concentrated more reading in this short respite from the norm than since our University days.

It has been a good time to reduce the size of the book pile next to our beds, probably a bigger pile we've ever had since University. The latest we chose was *The Hidden Life of Trees* by Peter Wohlleben; it being the most fascinating read we've experienced in a long time.

Peter Wohlleben, a forest manager in Germany, writes with a very engaging style, permitting entrance to a secret world depicted with almost anthropomorphic descriptions of the forest and its interaction with animals, insects, bacteria, fungi and the weather. He started as a lumberjack, choosing trees to be cut down. But as his knowledge for the forest developed he became the community manager of the forest, banning machinery and selling burial plots with trees as living grave stones.

He first became aware of communication between trees when he happened to stumble upon what he thought was a semi underground boulder, only to discover that it was the stump of a tree that had been cut down many years before and finding that it was still living. How could that be? It had no leaves to provide it with food. In fact, the surrounding trees had been nurturing the old stump to keep it alive.

Who would have known that acacias in Africa can let their neighbours know when a hungry giraffe is eating its leaves? Through the *woodwide web* the first tree sends a message and the neighbours start producing a toxin that the giraffes dislike.

What is this woodwide web? As Wohlleben tells us "trees message their distress through electrical signals via their roots and across fungal networks ('like our nervous system') to others nearby when they are under attack. By the same means, they feed stricken trees, nurture some saplings (their 'most beloved child') and restrict others to keep the community strong".

Chapters describing the tree's intricate communal life; methods they use with which to communicate, arm themselves chemically against animal and insect threats and help weakened individuals survive are almost unbelievable. Likewise, with the dispersal of seeds. Each species has its own characteristics. Oaks and Beeches last for thousands of years, because they grow in tight knit forests supporting each other, whereas willows and poplars cast their seed afar and only live to the tender young age of around a hundred years.

Relative age is eye-opening--childhoods spanning 200 years, a 9000 year old spruce and so on.

As for street trees, they are the tree orphans. Cast out on their own without family support to nurture them, they do die at a younger age. He would probably consider our garden trees orphans as well.

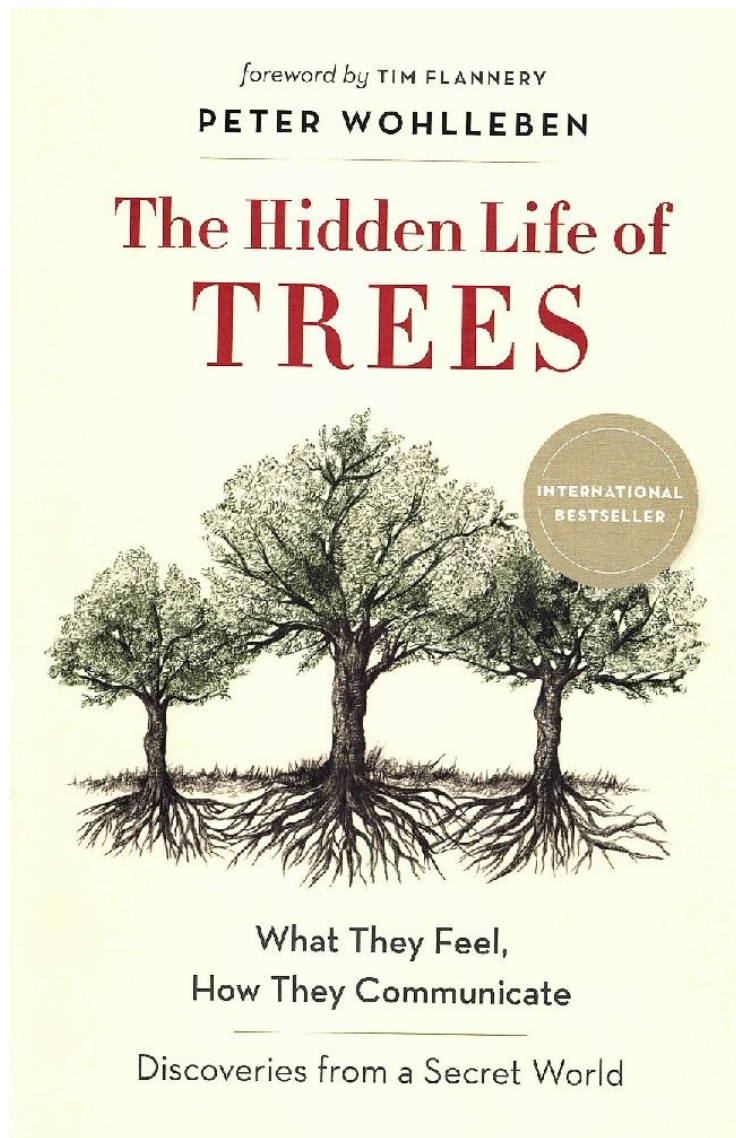
We're left with a feeling of such extraordinary empathy. In spite of it being largely based in the deciduous forests of central Europe and America, it's also valuable for us. There are a few references to Australian researchers and the forward was written by Tim Flannery. Those of us who



have heard Dr Uwe Stroeher, the microbiologist from Neutrog may find some of his research into underground fungi and microbes familiar.

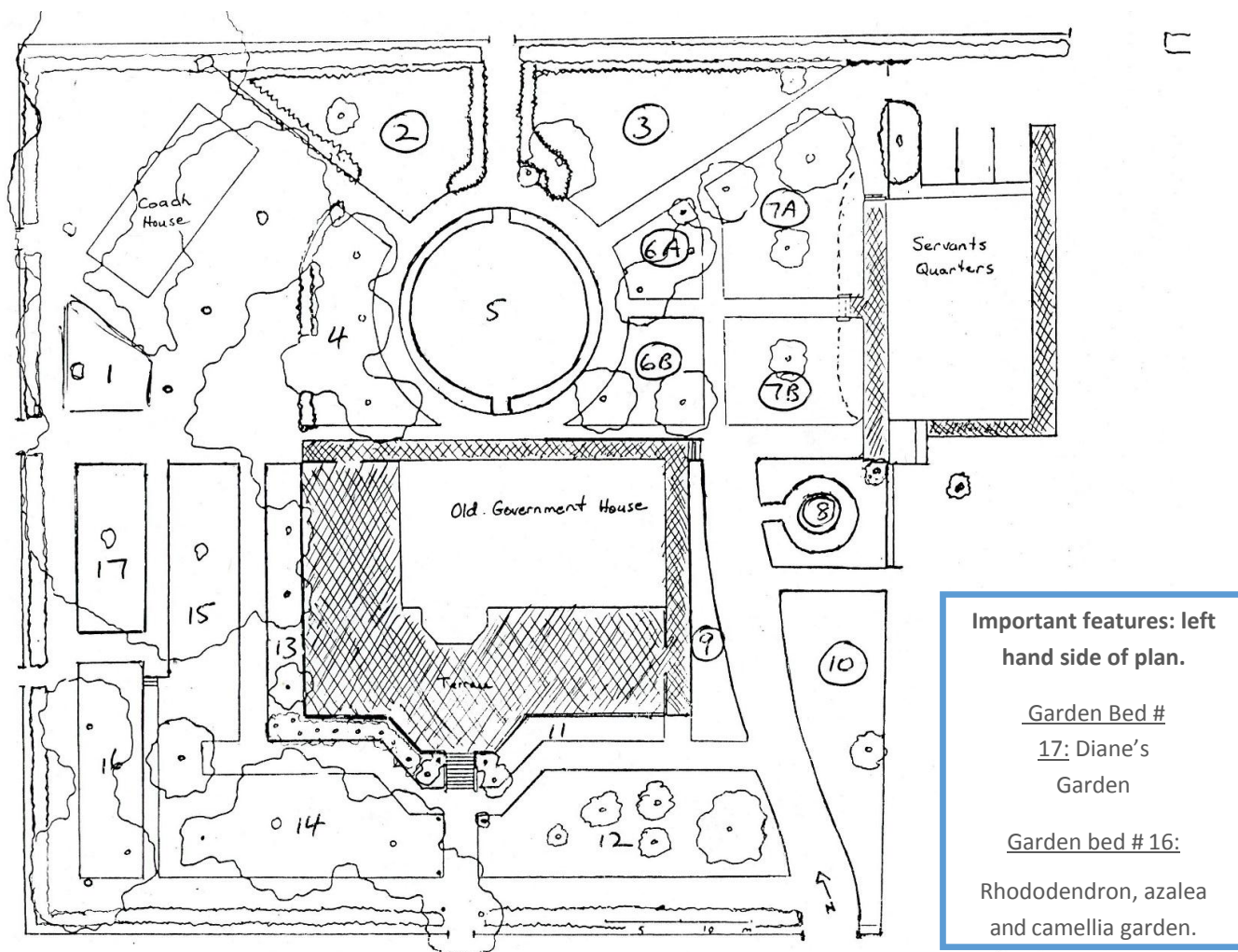
This book is not in the Library, but as you might have gathered it is a book that we recommend.

Thank you to Janie Smylie for her donation of books for the Library. We will go through them over the next month. Some will go into the Library when it opens again, but those we cannot use will appear on the Pot Luck stall. More about one of Janie's books that we particularly liked in next month's Newsletter.





## OLD GOVERNMENT HOUSE—GARDEN REDEVELOPMENT



*In the days of the Governors, the garden was said to be a simple bush garden, with a post and rail fence. Then the Governors moved up to Marble Hill and the Curators of the Woods and Forest Dept. moved in and stayed for more than 70 years. It was during this period that the garden was developed as a beautiful hills garden of camellias, azaleas and rhododendrons. The garden was totally redesigned in the 1980's as an Anglo/Italianate garden, with an emphasis on heritage roses. In the past 25 years the trees have grown, enormously, and shade and light are different to the 1980's. The western side of the garden gets most of the sun, and the eastern side is heavily shaded.*

*When we took over as volunteers the garden had been badly neglected for quite some time. It was overrun with weeds— seaside daisy, bamboo, weed trees and worst of all, periwinkle. The western side of the garden was tackled first. And then we set our sights on beds 16 and 17. This is the side of the garden first seen by visitors when they enter.*

*Bed 17 was developed as Diane's Garden—we had intended to grow roses, but the site is too shaded so we are reassessing what we can actually grow there.*



A little over a year ago, Old Government House was very fortunate to attract a Federal Government grant of \$100,000. A large proportion of that was to redevelop and enlarge the Coach House, with \$20,000 set aside to restore parts of the garden.

And so it was decided to seriously look at Bed 16. It was badly overrun with periwinkle, (see right) and was overgrown with weed trees—a massive ash in particular. Very early on we started to spray the periwinkle—there was little point in other work until this had been tackled.



It has been sprayed twice and is mostly dead, but we are very aware that it will spring to life once more unless it is removed entirely.

The image at left shows the space where the ash tree was removed, and the mostly dead periwinkle.



And of course, as part of our continuing education and research, we joined the Rhododendron Society. This was possibly the best decision we could have made, and has been a marvellous experience.

We came along to a propagation session and now have three boxes of Rhododendron cuttings which we hope will be the start of something spectacular.

Then the coronavirus pandemic hit, and our band of volunteers was told to stay away, which with heavy hearts we did. But that didn't stop us getting in contractors to remove the Ash tree. I'm happy to say that work has now been done and the stump ground out. The last vestiges of the periwinkle can be removed, and essential soil preparation started. There's no point in getting massive planting underway, until we are absolutely sure the soil is right.

I have also asked our Project Manager to start work on getting quotes for the soft landscaping—we plan a path winding through the garden bed. We need a path for a couple of reasons—firstly it makes it easier to get in and weed, and second, the planting design will be easier, with garden visitors more able to see our beautiful new plants.

Tina Gallasch

## Notice Board

### Flower garden

It is wonderful to look at images of this beautiful [Flower Garden](#) and reminds those of us who went to the German conference in 2018 of our visit to Koekenhoff, but without any people!

## Neutrog orders

A very big thankyou to all those involved with the successful delivery of the Autumn Neutrog orders. To Andrew and Olivera Waterman for their generosity in offering their home for the delivery and to Andrew, Vlad Popov, Carl Greenstreet and Kevin Trenouth for sorting and loading member's orders. Lisa Greenstreet also deserves our thanks for arranging a very successful and efficient process.



## Prepare for Spring

Now that many of us have time to plan for a colourful display in our gardens in Spring and Summer it is well worth looking at online seed suppliers and placing orders. If you have built a hot box you are well set up for raising seed very successfully. Many of the companies Richard and I use are Lambleys, Swallowtail seeds, BT World seeds and many others. Many have good vegetable seed as well as annuals and perennials. All you need to do is "Google".

## Lunar Calendar for Gardeners – 15-31 May 2020 ([view full calendar](#))

15 Fr



16 Sa



17 Su



18 Mo



19 Tu



20 We





21 Th



22 Fr



23 Sa



24 Su



25 Mo



26 Tu



27 We



28 Th



29 Fr



30 Sa



31 Su



## LEGEND



Watering and irrigation - this includes in particular to houseplants



The most favourable time to fertilize plants with chemical and natural fertilizers



A good time for sowing and planting of root vegetables



A good time for sowing and planting leafy vegetables



A good time for sowing and planting of fruit plants



A good time for sowing and planting of flowers and flowering herbs



Destroy weeds - the most favourable time for weeds removal



Favourable time for collecting and preserving fruits



Favourable time for collecting and preserving root vegetables



Not the best day for preserving fruits.



Favourable time for harvesting and freezing fruits



The preferred time for the harvesting and storing fruits





Particularly preferred time for harvesting and storing fruits



Not the best season for harvest - fruits for harvested during this time won't last long



It is recommended to refrain from watering plants - on plants which were watered in those days may appear pests.



Do not use chemical fertilizers – there is a risk of drying and destroying your plants



Good day for mowing the lawn



Particularly good day for lawn mowing



Generally a good time for performing most garden related work connected with sowing, transplanting and planting

## **A new look for the April newsletter**

Members may have noticed that our previous edition had a slightly different appearance, and this is due mainly to the many contributions of photos and articles supplied by our members. Thanks go to Rob & Jacquie Hatcher, Barb Mynhart, Kristina Bowman, and Daphne Chandler for their interesting articles and photos. It would be wonderful if other members who have photos and or articles would send them to the newsletter editors for inclusion in next month's edition. The greater the involvement of members means more interesting and relevant newsletters.

In this edition we have contributions from Tina and Wayne Gallasch, Barb Mynhart and photos from Robyn & Ian Wall and Bob & Lynn Graham. Thank you to these members for their involvement.

