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# Rhodo News

Newsletter 429



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](mailto: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

## *Memories of long ago...*



### *Our last social meeting in March 2020.*

*It seems so long ago now—but it was only March 9th that we had our social meeting at Steamfest in Sheffield. We took so much for granted!! We were lucky to squeeze in the beautiful harp concert two days later, before everything was shut down. Who'd have thought that six weeks ago would be the good old days?!*

#### Calendar

**REGRETFULLY, ALL EVENTS CANCELLED AND THE GARDEN HAS BEEN CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE—no social meetings either, sadly.**

See us at: [emuvalleyrhodo.com](http://emuvalleyrhodo.com)

## General Manager's Report

Who would have ever imagined that the world would look like it is today!

I want to personally assure you that the decision was not taken lightly to shut down our magnificent garden and especially as autumn is so important to our financial situation and so beautiful. The North West of Tasmania is seriously affected by Coronavirus and the health of our members and volunteers is paramount as is the hundreds of people who would have visited. As I have been doing I will continue to be in contact with the experts from the Tasmanian Government Hotline and take their advice when making a call on what can and cannot happen at Emu Valley. Naturally I discuss my thoughts with others prior to me making 'a call'. If anyone has thoughts or suggestions please contact me.

Neet and Sophie are posting some great shots on Facebook and Instagram but here is one from the other side of the world! It is National Gardening Week in the UK and the picture is of Blenheim Palace's Head Gardener Hilary



Wood (might be related!) and some of her Springtime Tips (reading it might keep you warm).

### **Caring for your plants**

*Ideally, I find it best to plant in the Autumn time, mid-October through until November. That being said, there's still time to lift and divide your small flowering perennials - these are your plants that flower in Spring and Summer and live for over two years. Once divided and moved, give a good water and add an organic fertiliser to all of your plants, shrubs and trees. You can either use a well-rotted farmyard manure (it must be well*

*rotted as fresh will burn your plants - find a farm local to you and ask if they have any you can use) chicken pellets are another good fertiliser to use. Once added, dig your fertiliser into the ground around your plants. Next, add a good layer of mulch across all your borders, this will not only retain water but help immensely with keeping the weeds at bay. If you have recently planted any new shrubs or trees, keep an eye on them for watering, this wind and sun will soon start to dry the soil out and you may need to water more often than you think.*

### **Caring for roses**

*Rose care should have already started, and the final spring prune will have been carried out. The roses here at Blenheim have all had a good rose fertiliser added and all beds have been mulched. Although it's early in the season, Aphids are around and are a danger to your roses. An organic way of treating this problem is to either give your plant - mainly the tips - a good blast of cold water from your hose pipe, or use a little hand spray bottle full of a washing up liquid and water mix. Either process will need to be repeated every couple of days, then keep a close eye out.*

### **Vegetable seeds**

*Towards the end of April, vegetable seeds can be sown directly into the ground. If you have a more sheltered position, the ground may be warm enough already to start sowing. Peas, beetroot, carrots and salad crops amongst others can all be planted, and there's nothing more rewarding than growing your own food!*

### **Caring for your lawn**

*We are all envious of our neighbour's lawns looking so good - well, the work needs to begin now! Rake out all the moss that has formed over the Autumn and Winter months. Don't worry, there will be a lot as I can testify - the lawns at Blenheim are full of moss this year. This job can either be carried out by hand using a springbok rake or perhaps a neighbour may have a scarifier you could borrow (this makes the job a lot easier). The first cut of the year on your grass needs to be on a high setting; the grass will be thick and lush, so start on a high setting and very gradually drop this down. Any bare patches of your lawns can have a sowing of grass seed applied now. A Spring fertiliser that's high in nitrogen can also be added after the above jobs have been carried out. Then, don't cut your lawn for a couple of weeks, otherwise you will suck all the fertiliser up into your lawnmower. Geoff [geoffreywood@me.com](mailto:geoffreywood@me.com) 0427 722060*

## Around the Garden

So many fantastic colours as soon as you drive through the top gates, a true picture, a photographers delight! I must sound like I'm being horrible and teasing at the moment as we aren't open to anyone here, not even our local members but I am just trying to paint a picture for you all so you aren't missing out all together. They say 'a picture is worth a thousand words' so please enjoy these photos as no words are needed.



It's an overwhelming feeling when a situation such as this coronavirus pandemic hits home and effects so many lives and businesses that you just don't know what to do or where to start. That's how I am feeling here at the moment as we now don't have our 'miracle workers' here plodding along with daily gardening activities to keep EVRG looking fab, instead it's just me outside doing the absolute essentials to keep things ticking along. With it being Autumn, as much as the garden is full of life and colour, so too are the drains and ditches from fallen leaves and debris. This is top priority followed by pruning and taking cuttings to fill the remainder of the hotbed. Plenty of jobs here for those on returning to the garden when safe to do so and I will be very excited to have you all back here again just like the good old days.

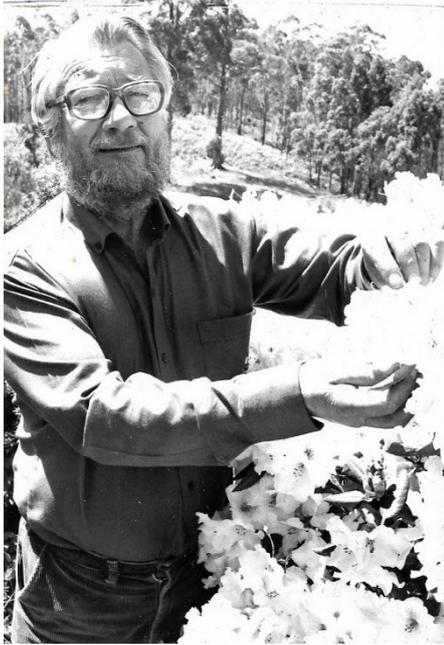
There has been a lot of thought around how to retain the hills from fretting and slipping away and with wet weather upon us, now is the time to trial some of these investigations and try and be on the front foot with this situation before it becomes out of hand.

In the most known areas for slips and fretting zones, we are using white clover. It is a 'living mulch'. As a legume it takes atmospheric nitrogen and allows uptake by roots in soil which has been a limiting factor of other mulches. Also by replacing vegetation other than erosion prevention, it's a step in rebuilding a much depleted biosphere in some of our soils which are a result of unforeseen mistakes of the past. The aim is for it to be low growing, no maintenance as far as mowing or brush cutting is required.

Better get back to cleaning drains!

Happy gardening everyone. Neet 😊





## *Legends of the Garden—Dr Noel Sullivan*

HILARY O’ROURKE: (from his eulogy to Noel, 2000): *Noel’s interest in rhododendrons led to the development of three branches of the Australian Rhododendron Society in Tasmania. Noel exerted a strong, but benign, influence on the North West Branch’s affairs serving several terms as president or secretary.*

*The decision of the NW branch to establish the Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden gladdened Noel’s heart. The Garden owes much to his vision, and the influence this had on others. As the original Curator, he created, with an endless stream of equally dedicated enthusiasts, a unique showcase in which to display a treasure trove of rhododendrons.*

*Such was Dr Sullivan’s knowledge and reputation in the field of hybridising and propagation that he was often commissioned to write articles for specialist journals nationally and internationally. He also became a noted speaker on hybridisation on an international level. Noel was honoured with Life Membership of both the Australian Rhododendron Society and the Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden.*

Ant Dry tracked down Noel’s daughter Karenne Griffin, now resident in Wales.

ANT: Tell us about Noel’s early life.

KARENNE: Dad was born in Sydney in 1921. He lived in Roseville, one of the North Shore suburbs, but I don’t know where he went to school. His two sisters are also gone so I can’t ask them. Prior to WWII I believe he started a degree in Electrical Engineering, then after the war decided to become a dentist as they were in short supply.

ANT: What about your mum? Do you have any siblings?

KARENNE: My mother was a young lady he met playing tennis as a teenager. I was an only child until my father married Anne Skinner and I acquired two stepsisters and a stepbrother. They are in Australia, but we keep in regular contact.

After graduating he heard of an opportunity to join a practice with an older dentist who was planning to retire soon. The only thing was the dental practice was in Tasmania. So, the young couple moved to Tasmania. Dad liked the idea of a more rural location. My mother, Valda, however was a city girl who had worked for 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox as a secretary and dabbled in modelling. They separated and Dad remarried. He was very happy with Anne, who was very supportive of the work he did with EVRG.

ANT: How did he become interested in rhododendrons?

KARENNE: After a couple of years living in Burnie, Dad bought a partly built house on a steep block of land in Burnie. I think it was the challenge of this stubborn grassy slope with just one tree (a Robinia) that fired his interest in gardening. It took him several years to terrace the slope and fill the quarter acre garden with plants and trees. After our regular visits to the garden centre there was hardly enough space for me on the back seat of the car. Like all new gardeners he learned by trial and error. The bamboo at the edge of the lower lawn was a mistake as it soon got out of hand, sprouting through the grass. He even constructed three fishponds; the top two fed into the lower one by means of a buried hosepipe.

I remember a lot of talk about rhododendrons when I was a child. He was determined to cultivate them from seed. Some seeds would only germinate having survived a harsh winter, so he put them in ice cube trays in the freezer for months on end. These were not the ones to put in your glass of orange squash!

When I was a teenager, he bought 28 acres of land up behind Round Hill, and after a few years moved up there. He bought three little Hydro houses that were redundant after one of the hydroelectric dam building projects had been completed. In the early years the Hydro houses were still on wooden stilts. There was a hole in the bathroom floor and the cold wind whistled up through it. Also, my Dad had relocated the door into the bathroom, but he’d only cut it about 4ft high, so you had to duck your head to get into the bathroom. The three houses were eventually joined together. When the building work was completed, and the central courtyard garden was finished, the house was miles





## Rhododendron kesangiae

Perched mid-way up the escarpment to the northwest of the Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden grows a fine collection of 15 plants of *R. kesangiae*. This area of Emu Valley has been set aside for rhododendrons from Bhutan, it takes up an area from the Bob Malone drive up the hill to the boundary fence at the top. These plants have all grown well and most have flowered with a colour ranging from deep pink through to white with the one pictured somewhere in between.

For many years it was identified as a hybrid between *R. hodgsonii* and *R. falconeri* - both are to be found in Bhutan. However in 1967 *R. kesangiae* was recognized as a species in its own right and placed in subsection *Grandia*.

*R. kesangiae* has large elliptic to obovate leaves, the upper surface glabrous while the lower surface is covered with a woolly indumentum. In their native habitat they grow from 8-12m high but here we will wait and see.

It is quite a hike to where they live at Emu Valley but well worth the effort. *Maurie*

*The Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden is proudly sponsored by:*



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