

Rhododendrons South Australia

Australian Rhododendron Society Inc. South Australian Branch

Issue 79 – May 2014

Coming Events

Next Meeting, 21st May 7:45pm

The next meeting will feature two presenters. Steven Hailstone of [Hailstone Garden Design](#) will be presenting the topic “Sustainable gardening - are we kidding ourselves?”.



David Gilbert will also give a short promotional address for the MLBG Support Group.

**Please ‘bring a friend’, a plate,
and an item for the Trading Table.**

Society Outing

Anlaby Station, Kapunda Sat 31st of May

Members interested in this outing should pay Peter \$35pp ASAP so that arrangements can be confirmed.



www.anlaby.com.au

Grant Memorial Lecture

Don't forget that Stephen Ryan of Dicksonia Rare Plants will be delivering our lecture this year. Make sure you keep the evening of Friday 15th August free.

Stephen should prove to be a very entertaining and informative speaker. Please advertise this opportunity amongst your family and gardening friends.

<http://stephenryan.com.au/>

Tree Peonies

I must declare from the start that I have been singularly unsuccessful at getting herbaceous peonies to flower but tree peonies are much easier and just as spectacular.

The native habitat of the tree peony is confined to a comparatively small area in eastern Szechuan and Shensi in western China. The tree peony of China was known as "The King of Flowers". Most scholars believed that they have been grown for about 1500 years in China, but the new research indicates that Chinese practiced the medical use of tree peonies in the Huang Emperor Period (5000 years ago). For many centuries the rulers of China decreed that such regal flowers could be grown only in the gardens of the imperial palaces. During Tang dynasty (AD. 618-906), tree peonies were very fashionable and good ones fetched very high prices. It is recorded that the variety Bai-Liang-Jin (Hundred-Liang-Gold) was actually sold for about 3.5



Pink Tree Peony



Yellow Tree Peony

Kilograms of gold. To the great artists it has always been a favourite subject whether in paintings, poetry, ceramics or jade carvings. They are particularly long lived as indicated by the picture below of a 400 year old peony in a Chinese Garden



400 year old Peony

Bearing stronger stems and often larger flowers than their herbaceous cousins, tree peonies look like royalty in the flower world. Most varieties are hard, reach 2 metres tall and wide (or so), and grow best in full sun, and moist, well-drained soil rich in organic matter. They can take some shade but the more shade, the less flowers you will get, they don't typically require pruning, but if it becomes necessary to control their size, the best time to do it is spring, right after they finish flowering.

The secret to planting a tree peony is lime and plenty of it. Agricultural lime is much stronger so only use half as much than if you use dolomite, use twice as much. Just add chicken manure pellets to the same hole. Don't tease the roots out because they are fleshy and it's important not to damage them, so just plant them straight in. Simply backfill and water.



Kamata-nishi Peony



Red Tree Peony



Orange Tree Peony

Tree peonies grow anywhere here you have a decent winter chill of three to five degrees. The best time to plant tree peonies is in autumn from April onwards. Because the root system isn't active in summer, they need little water but shouldn't be allowed to get too wet in winter. They prefer an open situation as air movement around the plant helps keep them healthy. However, avoid a completely exposed position where flower petals could blow away quickly.



Peonies in garden bed



Red Tree Peony



Purple Tree Peony

I have bought most of my tree peonies from *Cleveland Nursery* but recently I discovered the *Peony Garden* in Melbourne. This nursery has a magnificent range and have just obtained two lovely bare rooted plants by mail.

<http://www.peonygarden.com.au>

Article by Bill Giles

April Meeting

There was a very strong turnout of members and guests, obviously members had taken to heart our President's call to engage in recruitment.

The guest speaker Dr. Robert Stone gave an extremely informative and enjoyable presentation on the "Great Mansions of Adelaide and their garden rooms." This was an abbreviated lecture from his thesis on the subject. All present thoroughly enjoyed this presentation.

Robert Hatcher brought the raffle prize (he kindly looks after our plant stocks for the raffle) and departed with it under his arm as his wife's Jackie's raffle ticket was the winner on the night.



Dr. Robert Stone



Members and visitors at the April meeting



Bird of the Month

Grey Fantail

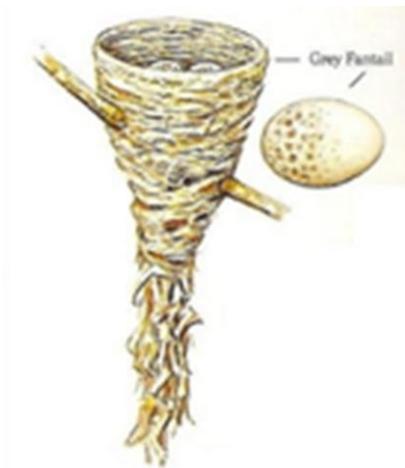


Rhipidura fuliginosa

The twisting, turning acrobatics make this one of our best known birds in our hills gardens. An extremely inquisitive little bird, and if you make a "squeaking" noise with your lips the bird may come quite close to you.

A juvenile has a soft mottled brown colour. Some migrate north, returning south for breeding. They are now re-showing up in our gardens.

The nest is wineglass shaped and usually bound and matted with spider's webs. A lovely nest to find, usually under 2 metres from the ground



Chris Thomas

An Abundant Trading Table

From the start of our Rhododendron Society meetings of 2014 our trading table has been getting more and more stock on it. April's trading table was the best yet with takings reaching a stellar \$120 ! Thank you to members for their contributions. Let's keep up the good work, our treasurer is rubbing his hands with glee.



Max Syc flowering early at the Crafers Church of the Epiphany, features on the front page heading of this Newsletter.

2014 Rhodo Orders

A reminder to all members that orders from the Boulters and / or Toolangi catalogues can be placed with Bronwyn. Please e-mail Bronwyn with your orders at richwyn@optusnet.com.au.



Culture Notes

"What you should be doing with your rhodies and garden this May"

By Bill Voigt

Evergreen azaleas will begin to flower now, and continue spasmodically through until spring. "Agnes Neale" has large mauve, frilled flowers, and is reasonably sun hardy. "Addy Wery" is a semi-deciduous kurume that displays fine autumn foliage and has deep vermilion red flowers, blooms mid-season.

"Balsaminaeflora" is an azalea which is low growing and is well suited for rockeries. The flowers are small, double and well formed, they are like tiny rosebuds.

Well suited to a shady spot is "Ruth Kirk" large single blooms of pink, with a white throat. An early flowering variety.

A very beautiful, heavy flowering pink rhododendron is "Kimberly" the purple buds are very attractive too.

Older rhododendrons that have become tall and leggy can be cut back fairly severely. The general rule is to avoid cutting those varieties with smooth trunks as they usually do not respond, while those with rough bark are safe to cut. "Alice" does not like to be cut back severely.

The winter flowering iris *Unguicularis*, previously known as *Stylosa* is beginning to flower now. It is not too late to shorten the foliage so that the flowers can be seen, and protected from slugs and snails.

The common flag iris, *Germanica* has lots of dry and decaying foliage attached at this time. All this foliage can be easily pulled away leaving the rhizomes open to sunlight which is required to promote spring flowering.

Two annuals that provide colour for winter are *nemesia* and *schizanthus*. They are suitable for planting in containers, or around the base of standard shrubs and trees. *Schizanthus* is slightly frost tender so needs a more protected situation.



Addy Wery



Balsaminaeflora



Kimberly



Ceratostigma Willmottianum



Berberis foliage

As well as trees for autumn colour, there are small shrubs that have brilliant autumn foliage e.g. "Vaccinium Corybosum (highbush blueberry), Ceratostigma Willmottianum, Berberis (various forms), Cottoneaster Horizontalis, and Spiraea Thunbergia.

Remember that vireyas are frost tender so ensure any plants are in frost free situations during the next few months.

Most Hills nurseries have stocks of rhododendrons and azaleas in now. Sifting through the plants on offer can reveal some hidden gems. Evergreen azaleas grow quite quickly, so don't be discouraged from selecting smaller, cheaper plants.

Autumn Arrangement

Flowers and foliage are from the beautiful garden of Philip Samson and this is one of his stunning arrangements.



Enfield Garden Show

This is an example of the types of plants that were for sale at the Enfield show as mentioned in previous Newsletters, a stunning Begonia.



Librarian's Report



Milton Bowman

April has been a relatively cool month but it was only at the end of the month that we received some heavy rain. The fact that we had 57mm disguises the reality that 40mm fell in the last days of the month and most of us had to continue watering until very recently. May usually breaks the situation and we are all hoping for a consistent and good soaking.

There are no new books this month but there are plenty of gems waiting your perusal. The cold evenings are a wonderful excuse to find a warm place and get into a tale or two of courage and adventure. We have a considerable collection of 'Plant Hunter' books and some of the expeditions described border on the fantastic. Perhaps foolhardy would be a better description of quite a few of the trips, as a number of plant hunters paid with their lives when their luck ran out.

The thing that always strikes me is the toughness, the resilience, and the sheer determination that all of the pioneering plant hunters had. THEIR 'day in the office' was a whole lot harder than mine, and yet I still had the temerity to complain about the occasional tough day.

The legacy of the plant hunters is huge and their names live on in many plant names. Reading about them fleshes out the names, and I think helps us to learn more about the people and the plants that they discovered.

Borrow a book and have an adventure.

Brunsvigia

Maybe never again in my lifetime?

This Brunsvigia was planted by my father in the late 70's, after receiving the bulb as a gift from David Thompson, a local nurseryman. It has flowered twice in the last thirty five years. We believe the rains in February stimulated it to flower for the first time in nine years.

Bronwyn



From the Propagating Bench



Germinating Box

As winter draws near members may be interested in a method that will enable them to successfully germinate and grow seedlings for the cooler season.

The cost is inexpensive and consists of a foam box + lid (obtained from veg. shops) with an 8W fluorescent tube (Bunnings) attached to the lid. A digital thermometer allows the temperature to be monitored and will record a fairly constant 23 degrees under normal conditions. Lettuce seed planted in punnets germinated in four days!

Richard

A feast for the eyes

Members may recall that in a recent newsletter we mentioned the wonderful photos and blog on the net belonging to Ian Young from The Scottish Rock Garden Society.

His most recent presentation is well worth a look. He has put together an extensive collection of his Erythroniums (Dog Tooth Violets) and his advice on why keen gardeners should grow from seed is timely.

www.srgc.org.uk/bulblog/300403/log.html

www.srgc.org.uk/journal/young/bulbsfromseed.html

Bronwyn



Erythronium elegans



Autumn in the MLBG

A couple of photographs taken by Richard of the Autumn display in the Mount Lofty Botanic Gardens. An ideal time to visit and view the stunning autumn colour.



Bloom of the month



Bloom of the month, Vireya – Tuba