

Uki Garden Club Inc.

NEWSLETTER

Volume 11

Number 3

March 2010

President's report

Hello Everybody

Mycorrhizal fungi

What are mycorrhizal fungi? They're difficult to spell, but essential to healthy soil life. These thread-like organisms form an intimate association with the roots of many plants, greatly increasing the roots' ability to obtain nutrients from the soil. This is called a symbiotic relationship and as such greatly improves the plants drought and disease resistance.

Growing garlic

Garlic is great for every aspect of human health. It needs two months of cold to encourage buds to emerge from the cloves so start planning your garlic bed now. Obtain some organic bulbs from good health food shops. Never buy the cheap, white bleached stuff from supermarkets. Prepare soil by digging in some well-rotted manure or compost. Break bulbs into cloves. Plant each clove just below the soil surface with the pointy end upwards, 15cm apart. Water and cover with a light mulch.

Pansy power

I love pansies, always have done. But sometimes I have a little trouble getting them going, particularly when the weather is humid. I've learnt not to buy the first ones that start appearing in the nurseries. Often they damp off as it's still too early to grow them successfully here. Wait a while and look for plants that are well rooted in individual cell-packs. Shallow rooted plants won't survive being transplanted. If in doubt, grow them on for a week or so in a tray, watering them with a very weak solution of seaweed solution to stimulate root growth. It's very hard to grow pansies from seed unless you've got sophisticated greenhouse equipment, so purchasing them in punnets from a nursery make sense. Avoid buying plants that have little black spots on the leaves, or yellowing foliage, as this invariably means they've been infected with fungal spores, which are almost impossible to get rid of once they've appeared. As a general rule of pansy housekeeping, avoid planting them in the same patch of soil twice, to minimise the risk of soil-borne fungal infection. They grow really well in pots and planters and if you always use new potting mix you'll have no problem. Deadheading them religiously will prolong their flowering life for many weeks.

Julia Hancock

March jobfile

- Prune conifers before winter.
- Sow sweet peas on 17 March.
- Sow broad beans as a green manure.
- Tidy up dead foliage and runners in the strawberry bed.
- Cut back and dispose of any plants that are affected by powdery mildew.
- Tidy up hanging baskets.
- Plant out winter vegies such as chard, silverbeet, Asian vegies, English spinach, lettuce, radish, turnips (including Daikon), parsnip, fennel, kohlrabi, kale, rocket, onions, leeks, cabbage,

cauliflower and broccoli. Plant lots of French marigolds and nasturtiums between the vegies to deter pests and brighten up the vegie patch.

- Rehabilitate bare, unproductive earth by sowing a green manure crop of broad beans.
- Enjoy beautiful sasanqua camellias as they come into full bloom. Pick some in the early morning for a float bowl indoors.

Plant extinction

When does a plant officially become extinct? According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, the world authority on plant and animal populations, extinction can be said to have occurred when there is no reasonable doubt that the last individual has died and exhaustive surveys of the habitat at appropriate times have failed to record single individual.

Extracted from *The Garden*, December 2009

Garden chemicals withdrawn in UK

Mancozeb, a popular fungicide used by many gardeners in Australia, has been withdrawn from sale in the UK. Pesticides containing the synthetic pyrethroid bifenthrin are also to be withdrawn this year.

Extracted from *The Garden*, December 2009

Pots in the border

March is the time to plant spring bulbs but you don't have to plant them in the soil in garden beds. If you're short of space it's better to grow them in a pot and remove them at the end of their season. Allow the spent plants to dry out naturally so all the goodness in the leaves is drawn back into the bulb. Replace the spring flowering plants with a selection of potted up summer annuals to fill the gaps. You can do the same thing with herbs – they make useful companion plants for just about everything else in the garden. And growing invasive herbs such as mint and Vietnamese mint checks their growth and enables micro-watering (mint needs lots of water).

Respect rue

Rue is a perennial herb that's sometimes planted in garden beds to deter cats. No wonder it works! Cats have learned that it contains chemical toxins that contain severe skin irritants and cause burning and itching when the skin is subsequently exposed to direct sunlight. Gardeners should always wear gloves, long sleeves and trousers when working around rue plants. They are attractive in cottage beds and borders as their blueish-grey filigreed foliage and cheerful yellow flowers contrast nicely with other herbs and perennial flowering plants.