

Uki Garden Club



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PRESIDENT'S PIECE

One minute it's cold and stormy, the next its blisteringly hot as the spring sunshine makes its strength felt on dry days. What is a poor gardener to do? If you've got an undercover area now is the ideal time to propagate.



Seeds can be sown in punnets and put in a protected area away from heat and heavy rain to germinate. There are several reasons why seeds fail: they get eaten; they need specific temperature and moisture conditions and most seeds have a limited life expectancy – over time, the viability of all seeds will diminish. Use fresh, fat seed whenever possible.



Cuttings can be taken and grown on – up to 20 small cuttings can be jammed into a 200mm pot and then transplanted into individual pots once they have rooted. Larger cuttings such as cordyline, dracaena, bromeliad pups and frangipani can be planted straight into a 200mm pot and set aside for a few months to take root. Always keep seeds and cuttings moist but not wet. Some plants, such as coleus can be struck in a jar of water on the kitchen window sill. Who doesn't love free plants?

As we hurtle towards the end of the year I would like you all to think about next year's activities. Can you host a meeting? If so please contact Jenny Clark for the garden gatherings calendar and Marie Luxford for the food group calendar bookings. I would also like to hear some suggestions for guest speakers, workshops and outings. Let's share our brilliant ideas and explore other avenues of gardening.

Julia

SEPTEMBER GARDEN GATHERING

Despite turbulent weather leading up to the event, we were all relieved that 24 September dawned fine and developed into a perfect spring day. Jackie and Michael Balk welcomed us graciously to their garden where it was soon evident that they had been very busy since our last visit. The Balks moved onto their 1.25-acre property almost seven years ago from

Sydney. Accompanying them were two cars and a caravan full of plants. They have spent their time there since concentrating on the garden, but have recently turned their labour towards updating the house. Jackie explained “we had no plan – the theme is subtropical and we’ve made it low-maintenance so we can still go on holiday”. In a recent storm they lost a big limb off their Moreton Bay fig so the tree had to be removed – a process which took from February to September due to inclement weather. They also decided they had too many palms so chopped most of them down, letting in lots more light beneath. They have an impressive orchard featuring unusual fruit trees including mammy sapote, dragonfruit, grumichama (both black and red), jaboticaba, figs (five varieties) and pineapples.



Left: Two of Michael’s girls outside his magnificent chook palace.

They’ve recently expanded their vegie patch, upcycling their original vegie boxes into flower beds. The chooks provide plenty of nitrogen-rich poo which is no doubt one reason the vegies thrive. The Balks take surplus produce to Wedgetail and swap with neighbours.



The property also incorporates a dam, three quarters of which is theirs and which Michael has been restoring. First job? To rid the dam of lotus which was choking out the wildlife. He hand-weeded most of them but when the drought hit, the water level dropped enough to enable him to grub out the remaining plants. Ducks and waterlilies are now thriving there. The Balks are still opening up new areas of interest and are clearly very passionate about gardening. Read below what the group talked about.

Tales of woe

Sue H. potted up masses of seeds in jiffy pots but forgot to put them undercover. Subsequent heavy rain washed them all away. Julia made the mistake of putting some punnets of seeds on the ground, only to discover cane toads had squatted in them and displaced all the soil and seeds. Both ladies have had to start again.

Success at last



Don’s bat plant has set seed for the first time and he’s looking forward to having lots of baby bats in the not-too-distant future.

Interestingly, the bat plant (*Tacca chantrieri*) is from the yam family. It can be tricky to grow, demanding rich, free-draining soil in dappled sun or full shade. Water in well in summer, but back off a lot in winter. Use a quality organic fertiliser regularly to produce strong growth.

Question time

Q: Gillian has been given some terracotta hanging baskets (to be in a mostly shady patio area) and wanted to know what she could grow in them.



Dichondra 'Silver Falls'

A: The rhipsalis family is an interesting group of plants that produces small (usually white) puffy flowers on long trailing stems. Hoya is a shade-loving flowering plant that loves being crammed into a smallish pot and isn't too thirsty. Ferns such as the native davallia will do well with sufficient water. It's 'hare's feet' will escape the container and climb down the outside of the pot after a year or so. Candelabra bromeliads will fill out the pot and cascade over the sides. *Dichondra* 'Silver Falls' will hang down in a curtain once established. Check out the columnea family. Seasonal flowering annuals such as pansies, bacopa, and lobelia may also flourish.



A few days after the garden gathering Gillian sent me a photo of one of her terracotta baskets that she'd planted up, using a piece of Jackie's walking iris from the swap table. Not bad eh! [Ed].

Q: Jenny wanted to know why her zucchini seeds aren't germinating.

A: Our soils haven't warmed up sufficiently to stimulate germination. Get a head-start by buying a punnet of seedlings, then succession-plant once your own seeds have germinated.

Q: Sue H. has a 'lawn' full of bindii instead of grass. What to do? Lawns have suffered greatly in the recent wet conditions. It may be time to think about replacing traditional turfs with lawn substitutes such as ribbon grass, *Dichondra repens* (be warned – it can spread), dwarf mondo grass and native violets. Native wandering Jew (commelinia) is sometimes used because of its pretty blue flowers but in our area it can become an invasive weed.

Don's show and tell

Don delighted us all with an extraordinary pitcher plant (*Sarracena alata*) that he'd grown on



from a piece originally given to him by fellow member Jude Locke. Commonly called the yellow trumpet, this carnivorous plant hails from North America. Don grows it in a water-filled container in a position where it gets full sun until midday. The flowers come first, followed by the 'pitchers'. The plant dies back over winter. Use a liquid feed or slow-release fertiliser, and of course insects fall down the pitchers and also add to the nutrient supply. It can be attacked by grasshoppers, but is otherwise fairly easy to grow.

Dot's show and tell



Dot Francis submitted this photo to the newsletter of a beautiful clivea growing at her place. Of the species, *Clivia miniata* is the most widely cultivated with flowers ranging from deep red-orange to pale yellow being bred by growers. Yellow plants can belong to one of two different groups which breed true for colour, producing seedlings with unpigmented stems and all yellow flowers when mature. They are still hard to find in nurseries and expensive to buy.

Tweed eco festival

Sunday 13 November, Knox Park, Murwillumbah, 9am-2pm
Workshops | Food | Kids' Activities Music | Entertainment |
Be climate ready

SOME HORRIFYING STATISTICS

At a time when an estimated one billion people around the world are starving it's shocking to read the following, published by OzHarvest, food rescuers and redistributors.

- Australians waste an average of 3 million tonnes of food per year.
- One in five shopping bags of food goes to waste.
- Around 20 to 40 per cent of fruit and vegetables produced are rejected before they even reach the shops – mostly because they do not meet supermarkets' strict cosmetic standards.
- Dumping 1kg of beef wastes 50,000 litres of water used to produce it.



Friends of
Tweed Regional
Botanic Garden

I'm delighted to report that Don and Sandra Capner's open garden on 17 and 18 September was a phenomenal success. Don had worked like a navvy in the weeks leading up to it, and Sandra was her customary indispensable self.



It's my opinion that their garden has never looked better. We were blessed with superb spring weather, which was a miracle as it had been raining the day before and on the morning of the opening.

Left: *Dendrobium speciosum*

Thanks so much to Uki Garden Club members who helped out, including Jenny Wein, Sue and Hartmut Holtzknecht, and Trish Berry.

Julia Hancock

DID YOU KNOW?

Wheelbarrows first appeared in Europe in medieval times – about a thousand years after they were invented in China.



COMPOST ACCELERATORS

- ❖ Urine is a great compost stimulator as it contains both nitrogen, uric acid (urea) and moisture. Uric acid levels are said to be the highest in the morning, so that's the best time to visit the compost pile. And it costs nothing!
- ❖ Leafy greens have a high nitrogen value and are 'easy' for the composting microbes to breakdown. Natural activators include comfrey, clover, grass clippings and nettles. N.B. waste like grass clippings and shredded paper compost faster than wood because wood is high in lignin.
- ❖ Heat up your pile. Position it in the sun. Chicken or horse manure and coffee grounds are great accelerators because they contain high levels of nitrogen to heat things up.
- ❖ Human input can speed things up. Cut up your waste; add old compost when starting a new heap to introduce microbes; keep your pile big and turn it often; keep it moist but not wet.
- ❖ Add ready-made accelerators from garden centres.

TRISH AND AL BERRY'S SWEET CHILLI SAUCE

We normally use bell capsicums (also known as bishop's crown chillies) as they are not too hot, but we've also made this recipe using hot chillies and it was also very, very good. Perfect with avocado on toast with a squeeze of lemon or lime. Add a tablespoon or two to pasta sauce or stir fries; dollop on bacon & eggs; mix with olive oil, soy sauce, herbs & lime for a great marinade. We've also made one batch with lemongrass and another with coriander, added at the end – it was lovely. It's very versatile! ENJOY!



INGREDIENTS:

Chillies 500 GM 750 GM 1 KG 1.5 KG 2 KG 2.5 KG

White sugar 1.5 KG 2.25 KG 3 KG 4.5 KG 6 KG 7.5 KG

White vinegar 1.5 LTR 2.25 LTR 3 LTR 4.5 LTR 6 LTR 7.5 LTS

Sultanas 700 GM 1 KG 1.4 KG 2.1 KG 2.8 KG 3.5 KG

Garlic cloves, chopped 6 9 12 18 24 30

Ginger, chopped 2 ½ TBS 3 TBS + 1 tsp 5 TBS 6 TBS 8 TBS 10 TBS

METHOD:

- Chop chillies - can be blitzed in a food processor, but not too small – WEAR GLOVES!! If the chillies are SUPER HOT, deseed them, or most of them, depending on how much heat you can stand.
- Place chillies and all other ingredients in a large stockpot and stir over medium heat until sugar is dissolved.
- Bring to the boil.
- Lower heat – simmer until soft (about 45-60 minutes), stirring frequently. (If it becomes too hard or thick, add vinegar to thin.)
- If you want a smooth finish, cool the mix and blend in a food processor or with a stick blender.

- Bring to the boil again. It can be bottled at this point, for a thin sauce, but if you want a thick sauce, simmer again for an hour or two.
- Cool slightly, then bottle in warm, sterilised jars.
- Leave to cool, and store in a cool, dark place. Ideally, use within one year, but we've eaten chilli sauce that is four years old with no ill effect!

TO STERILISE JARS:

- Wash jars in warm, soapy water, rinse well.
- Place in oven at 150 degrees centigrade for 30 minutes.
- Cool slightly before filling (and wear oven mitts!)
- Also sterilise your utensils in boiling water for at least 30 seconds.
- 1 kg uses approx. 18 bottles (4 tall jars, 9 medium + 5 small).



TITBITS FROM THE FOOD GROUP



We enjoyed a small and relaxed Food Group meeting at Aura Garden Centre on 11 October. Co-owner Mark had twelve years' experience in a garden centre in Brisbane before he and his partner opened the Murwillumbah business in September 2020. They were both familiar with the Tweed Valley and have now created one of the most beautiful nurseries in the area. Gazing in from the street, it looks like fairyland with all the colours of the rainbow reflected in the plants on display inside. Needless to say, members took the opportunity to do a bit of shopping whilst they were there! We also had the usual chat about what is happening

in our gardens.

- Health issues have prevented Peter and Patricia from attending meetings for a long time, so it was good to see them back. Their pawpaw trees suffered from root rot during the big wet, but their sapotes have loved it.
- Heather pruned her lychee tree heavily three years ago and it has been slow to recover but is now showing signs of life.
- Helen was told by one of her well-informed neighbours that the word on the grapevine is we should all have six months' supply of food in our gardens and pantries.
- Trish is getting ready for new plantings, sowing seeds and getting lots of fruit from her potted cape gooseberries.
- Jenny has lots of buds on her globe artichokes and wonders what to do now. Keep some blooms and consult the internet on how to prepare the chokes for cooking.
- Judi has big plans for her garden and has started by culling two of her four citrus to allow the best ones to flourish. She has promised to take before and after photos of the work she is doing. Meanwhile she's harvesting zucchini, squash, beans and a host of green leafies.
- Martin planted lots of lettuce when the price was high and now has a glut. He's been growing on three potted avocados which have put on lots of new growth. When to plant them into the ground? Autumn.
- Tess is recovering from surgery so hasn't been able to do much outside, but her asparagus is thriving.
- Diana has been growing vegies in Murwillumbah for 20 years but this is the best year she's ever had. She's growing them in raised beds, supplementing the soil with coffee grounds and ash from her pot belly stove. She also has an abundance of cape gooseberries.

- Marie is potting up plants for the Mt St Pats plant stall on 26 November and is asking members to donate any plants they can spare.
- Hartmut has been resuscitating his drowned vegie garden but elsewhere they are picking cabbages, tomatoes and assorted greens. They have been given free red onions which have sprouted and are therefore unable to sell, but Hartmut has replanted them in the hope that they will produce seed which he can share.
- Sue is planning to plant up the shady area next to their new shed with tropical foliage plants.
- Nellmary's large avocado tree curled up its toes in the wet but she has pruned it back hard in the hope that it might survive. On the plus side she's got a beautiful jaboticaba that's feeding her and the birds, as well as strawberries, blueberries, lettuce, kale and tomatoes.
- Julia has decided to age-proof her front garden by swapping the seasonal annuals for perennials in the same bee-friendly colour scheme. And in the vegie patch at the rear of the property, winter vegies are coming out and summer seedlings are going in, taking advantage of the nice cool, moist weather we're currently enjoying.

SPRING LAWN CARE

Follow these six simple steps for a superb sward.

1. Clean up your lawn

During winter not only do weeds litter your lawn but thatch starts to build up. Thatch is a layer of dead and living grass shoots, stems and roots that shows up between the soil and the grass blades in your lawn. Dethatch by raking vigorously. A wire or metal rake is more effective than a plastic one.

2. Aerate your lawn

Lawn compaction occurs during the year, especially in high traffic areas. It is also a result of a wet winter where the ground has been moist, and the soil has compacted. You can either aerate your lawn manually with a fork, aeration shoes or hire a lawn core machine at your local garden centre. It's a boring job that rarely gets done but adds so much benefit.

3. Fertilise your lawn

Spring fertilising jumps-starts your lawn for the rest of the growing season and aids its growth progress following the effects of winter, such as browning and thinning. It is also great for keeping your soil nice and healthy – healthy soil means healthy lawn! When choosing a fertiliser, first make sure it is suitable for your lawn variety. There are a number of different types of fertilisers:

Liquid fertilisers contain the active ingredients which push your lawn to its fullest growing potential in the quickest time. As liquid fertiliser is a quick fix and ignites growth and greening-up of your lawn, it needs to be applied more frequently. It is easily applied through your hose or a spray applicator.

Granular slow-release fertiliser is often better value for money if you are looking for a slow-release feed and growth for your lawn over an entire season (three months). Slow release granular fertiliser is easily applied through a hand or push spreader.

Traditional fertilisers are often the cheapest granular fertilisers that cause a quick spike in the growth and greening-up of your lawn.

Organic fertiliser is the most natural and environmentally-friendly fertiliser product available. True organic fertilisers are made up of either animal or vegetable matter and contain no artificial or synthetic materials. Application can be through a spreader or by hand depending on what product you purchase.

4. Water your lawn as required

Most of our lawns are still soggy from the effects of La Niña. To check if your lawn requires

water, burrow your finger into the lawn and if it is damp don't water. Moving into summer when watering may be an issue, use water wisely. Water early in the morning for about 15 minutes so the lawn can absorb the moisture more effectively.

5. **Weed your lawn**

Springtime is also about removing weeds from your lawn. Depending on whether the weed is an annual or perennial will determine which pre-emergent or post-emergent herbicide you use.

Pre-emergence herbicides, as the name suggests, addresses weed control before their seedlings can emerge.

Post-emergent herbicides are used on perennial weeds, such as dandelions. You can first try removing these perennials by hand, ensuring you remove the whole weed and its roots.

Alternately you can purchase a post-emergent herbicide from your local garden centre.

Please read the label on any herbicide you may purchase as some are not suitable for buffalo grasses.

6. **Mow your lawn**

Springtime gives you the perfect opportunity to not only revitalise your lawn but also your lawn mower. Be sure to check the blades, as sharp blades are the key to healthy lawn mowing. Either replace the blades or grind them back yourself or seek the services of your local mower shop. When mowing, raise the blades because if you scalp your lawn it will die.



Buffalo 'Sir Walter'



Kikuyu



Couch

NEXT MEETINGS

The next meeting of the Uki Garden Club's **Garden Gathering** will be held on **Saturday 29 October** at Tess and Tony Thompson's garden, 20 Blackwoods Road, Nobby's Creek. Please bring a hat, a chair, something for the swap table and a nibble to share at afternoon tea.

The **November Food Group meeting** – our last for 2022 – will be held in Budd Park, Alma Street, Murwillumbah at 9.30am on **November 8th**. There is no electricity to boil the urn so please bring your own drinks, hats and chairs. But there are couple of picnic tables there so we can do a plant swap and shared food. As it's our last meeting of the year we will be having a game and a giveaway!

And thanks, as always, to our printer – Sandra Guthrie at Poster Paradise, Murwillumbah