

# NEWSLETTER

Registered Address: P.O. Box 1004, Preston, 3072.

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PRESIDENT:  
BILL SAUNDERS

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Information:  
Phone: (03) 9467-3078

E-mail:  
prestongardenclub@hotmail.com

Web Address:  
www.prestongardenclub.org.au

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Friends,  
Oh, the roses!!!! – What happened to the summer dead heading, pruning and feeding?

Armed to the hilt with the weapons of gardening, I moved to the front for what turned out to be a two day battle. I raked, weeded and watered, which made the hydrangeas smile again. Then it was in with the heavy machinery – the mighty Victa 4 stroke! That certainly razed the grass to an acceptable level.

Then, it was time! Time for the "War of the Roses." I drew my secateurs.

By now you will probably have guessed that roses and I don't always get along. They seem to have it in for me, and I was expecting that they would be especially vicious as pay back for the neglect. I scouted around the Rhodesian Ridgeback of my pack, the climbing "Altissimo", as it always attacks me with its talons even at the best of times, and headed to the less deadly bush roses. First rose, first cut, low in the bush, to remove a dead cane, and bang. It got me! With blood dripping from my arm I withdrew. What's pretty about roses? This one was named "Peace".

I am considering growing pansies next year. They don't have thorns, do they?

Despite the many challenges, we will soon be staging our Autumn Show. I hope that you have been better than I with tendering your plants and spoil them to championship condition for the show-bench. You will receive your show schedule at the February meeting, read it, understand it, and start to consider your entries. Good luck.

Cheers, Bill.

## POLLINATING PUMPKINS

Pumpkins and other cucurbits can sometimes be tricky things to grow. But when conditions are perfect and the plants are happy, their productivity can overwhelm. My neighbours are not yet sick of my zucchini donations, but I'm sure the time will come when they'll hide behind the door rather than say yes to another one. With pumpkins, zucchini, marrows and cucumbers, hundreds of kilos can be harvested from a relatively small area over the course of a season, but for that to happen, everything needs to be right. And one of those is pollination.

These vegetables need bees to pollinate their flowers before the fruit will set and start to grow.

These plants all have male and female flowers, and the bees need to fly into the male flowers, collect the pollen while feeding on nectar and then carry the pollen to the female flower. If this doesn't happen then the little pumpkin (or zucchini or cucumber or marrow) that has started forming at the base of the female flower will yellow and fall off.

Also in very hot weather you may only get male flowers. This will mean that no fruit will form during this time. There's not much you can do about prolonged hot weather, but if your pumpkins are not forming because of a lack of bees then there is an easy solution.

Take things into your own hands (literally) and do the pollinating. But how do you tell the male and female flowers apart? The male flower has a long stem, while the female flower has a small fruit forming at the base. Pick a male flower. Break off the petals so that the central stamens are exposed, these are covered in pollen. Poke this into the female flower so that the stamen touches the central stigma and the pollen is transferred. One male flower can be used to pollinate several female flowers. If you don't want to break off a male flower, then use a paintbrush to collect pollen from the stamens in the male flower, and transfer this pollen by touching the

brush onto the stigma in the female flower, easy. Pollination is best done in the early morning as the female flowers close up in the afternoon.

While it's hot and dry, your cucurbits will remain healthy – as long as they get regular water, preferably in the morning. Try not to hose the leaves. Later in the season you may see the beginnings of powdery mildew forming on the leaves. This is part of natural senescence and will eventually kill the plant but you can slow it down by removing the worst affected leaves (throw them in the bin) and spraying milk onto the remaining leaves. Mix it with water at the rate of 1 part milk to 9 parts water, and spray once a week in the morning.



Female (left) and Male (right) flowers of pumpkin.

### **BEE FRIENDLY PLANTING**

Insects are responsible for about three quarters of all pollination of our main crop species, and honey bees are the most important and most efficient of these pollinating insects. Without bees our food sources would reduce to some grains, a few fruit species and fish. Because many of our grazing animals rely on clover and other bee pollinated pastures.

Bees are also impacted on by pesticides, especially the systemic neonicotinimides that are used extensively in agriculture. They remain in the soil for long periods and even if they don't kill bees, can affect their development and ability to find nectar.

When confronted with changing climate and pesticide use its easy to feel a sense of despair. But gardeners can help. Just being an organic gardener is a starting point; at least organic gardeners are not making things any worse. But we can also plant species that will provide nectar for bees all year round.

Bees travel up to 5 km from their hives, actively collecting nectar and moving pollen from one flower to another. A garden of any size can contain flowering plants, and if bees range over a variety of different flowering plants then they are stronger and healthier. And the benefit to you is that the more bees you entice into your garden, the bigger your harvest will be because so many vegies and fruits require bees for pollination and fruit set.

By planting a variety of flowering plants you can feed bees all year round and help these essential insects to survive. The list below is by no means exhaustive, but contains some plants for bees. Remember that plants with simple flowers are the easiest for bees to collect nectar and pollen from, so avoid the modern hybrids with many petalled, dense flowers in favour of the old-fashioned open simple flowers. Also, try to have something in flower all year round, it's not only good for bees, but good for your spirits too.

Herbs: Anise hyssop, basil, borage, catmint, chives, comfrey, coriander, fennel, hyssop, lavender, lemon balm, marjoram, mint, mustard, oregano, parsley, rocket, rosemary, sage, savory and thyme

Fruit: Apple, apricot, blackberry, black and red currants, blueberry, lemons, lime, mandarin, passionfruit, persimmon, plum, strawberries.

Vegies: Capsicum, chilli, cucumbers, leeks and onions (if left to go to seed), pumpkins, squash.

Flowers: Alyssum, cornflower, cosmos, echinacea, echium, forget-me-not, foxglove, geranium, marigold, roses, sunflowers, zinnia

Others: Banksia, Callistemon, Eucalyptus, Grevilleas, Leptospermum, Melaleuca.

### **MY WIFE THE GARDENER**

~ Peter (poem in old magazine)

She dug the plot on Monday – the soil was rich and fine. She forgot to thaw out dinner – so we went out to dine...

She planted roses Tuesday – she says they are a must. They really are quite lovely but she quite forgot to dust.

On Wednesday it was daisies – they opened up with sun. All whites and pinks and yellows – but the laundry wasn't done...

The poppies came on Thursday – a bright and cherry red. I guess she really was engrossed – she never made the bed...

It was violets on Friday – in colours she adores. It never bothered her at all – all crumbs upon the floors

I hired a maid on Saturday – my week is now complete. My wife can garden all she wants – the house will still be neat!

It's nearly lunchtime Sunday – and I cannot find the maid. Oh no! I don't believe it! She's out there **WITH THE SPADE!**



### THE PROGRESS OF WADE WARNER

Our Seeing Eye Puppy is now just over 6 months old. Wade has just completed his 6 months assessment and passed with a gold star!

He is growing at a rapid rate and is quite strong so he is winning at tug of war against us both. He has stopped beheading our marigolds and also attacking my patio roses, regardless of thorns.

He has a wonderful disposition and loves visitors. He also enjoys the Committee meetings and saying hello to everyone. When someone comes to the front door e.g. Postman, Wade already has a toy in his mouth wanting him to play with him.

He has visited many medical appointments as well as shopping centres and loves Bunnings.



Gavin & Cheryl Warner

### MEMBERS NEWS

Welcome to our new member Cheryl Power who recently joined.



**Happy birthday to you!  
Happy birthday to you!**

Daksha Singh

We hope you enjoy your special day.

### COMING EVENTS

Saturday 25th February 10am-4pm  
Sunday 26th February 10am-3pm.  
Melbourne Begonia Society Show 2017. Moorabin Senior Citizens Hall. 964 Nepean Hwy, Moorabin (MW 77D6). Display & Sales of all types of Begonias. Devonshire Teas & Sausage Sizzle. Entry: Free  
Enquiries: Janeen 9579 1697

Saturday 25th February 12.30pm-5pm. Sunday 26th February 10am-3.30pm. Dahlia Society of Victoria - 2017 State Dahlia Show. Mount Waverley Community Centre. 47 Miller Crescent, Mount Waverley. Entry: Adults \$4, Pensioners \$1. Display of everything Dahlia.  
Enquiries: Dwight 0419 221 200

Saturday & Sunday March 4th & 5th 9am - 4pm. Australian Native Bonsai Club Exhibition 2017 being held in conjunction with the 6th Symposium on Australian Plants as Bonsai. Domain House, Dallas Brooks Drive. Royal Melbourne Botanical Gardens. Entry: Adults \$5, Children U15 Free. Enquiries: secnativeclub@gmail.com.

Saturday March 25th 2.00pm-6pm. Preston Garden Club Autumn Show. Preston City Hall, Cnr

Gower Street & High Street, Preston. Entry: Free.

Enquiries: Bill Saunders 9478 0269  
March 29th - April 2nd, 2017  
Melbourne International Flower & Garden Show - Great Hanging Basket Competition 2017. Royal Exhibition Buildings and Carlton Gardens. 9 Nicholson Street Carlton. Enquiries: RHSV Secretary. Jennifer Rickerby 03 5367 6363.

### LEAFLETS

At the February meeting we will have some leaflets advertising our forthcoming Autumn Show.

If you can take some, they can be placed on notice boards at the local library, sports clubs etc. You may even take an evening stroll and drop a few in letterboxes in your area. It has been shown in the past that the leaflets are our best form of advertising. Help us to get the word out.

### MONTHLY COMPETITION

March 22nd: One Pot/Container Succulent/s One variety.

### MONTHLY MEETING

March 22nd: Show Bench Preparation - Noelene Park.

