



# CHS NEWS

OCTOBER 2015

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## END-OF-YEAR MEMBERS' GET-TOGETHER

**Mon, 7 December 2015 at 19:00** at The Athenaeum, Newlands.

Don't miss this year's amazing CHS Christmas Party! Do hope that you all have it diarised?

Please confirm with me how many will be coming, and what you'd like to bring – we always have the most splendid range of food and I know that we are good at getting our taste buds into gear for another delicious spread!

Please let me know what you'd like to bring – there's a choice of starters, pate, bread, salads, vegetables, chicken, beef or fish dishes, desserts – whatever you enjoy making. If you're not sure what to choose, give me a ring or send an e-mail and we can chat about it.



Do phone as soon as possible so that things can be organised in good time... look forward to seeing you all at the Athenaeum on the 7<sup>th</sup> at 7!! All the best,

*Melanie*

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The nominal charge of **R10 per person**, as was done last year, will go towards purchasing compost etc for a vegetable growing project in the Lavender Hill and Vrygrond areas.

In addition, bring extra money, as we will be raffling this gorgeous Echeveria for just R5 a ticket (a larger pot than the one at our last meeting).

## NEXT MEETING

At our first meeting of 2016 – 1 February – a Special General Meeting, at the beginning of the evening, will be held should the committee decide to increase the annual subscription. Members *will* be advised that an additional charge (still to be determined) will be levied on those members who opt to receive newsletters via post instead of by email. The cost, per year, of a posted newsletter is approx. R72 and this is subsidised by members receiving newsletters by email. Full details will be in the January CHS News.

This will be followed by Rosalind Spears who will tell us about her garden in Devon (close to Heligan) which she has been cultivating for the past 18 years.

## REPORT BACK

### Soils and Composts:

Here is a synopsis of Morné Faulhamer's talk at our October meeting:

Important points relating to soil:

- Air filled porosity (air in compact soil)
- Wettability (how quickly is water absorbed)
- Water holding capacity

Loam is-	10-30% clay	Sandy soil is-	0-10% clay
	30-50% silt		0-10% silt
	25-50% sand		80-100% sand

Sandy soils are usually alkaline.

Jar test to determine soil type:

Ingredients:

- 3 cups water (distilled)
- 1 cup soil
- Shake

Method:

Let it settle. Once settled you will have stones at the bottom; then coarse sand, followed by clay with humus or organic matter on top. You can determine what type your soil sample is (using table above) and this will assist you in trying to improve it.

**President:** Anne Bean, **Chairman:** Michael Tuffin, **Hon Treasurer:** Henry Diesveld, **Hon Secretary:** Glenda Thorpe

**Sands:**

Malmesbury sand is very alkaline;

Philippi sand is used for horticulture. It should be sifted to use the coarser material not the very fine stuff;

River sand.

**Fertilizers:**

Fertilizer is not nutrition.

pH must be right – 7 is neutral and anywhere between 6.5 to 7.5 is where most elements are available. As you get more acid or more alkaline various elements become “locked up”.

Do not use bone meal in pots – it changes the pH to alkaline

N:P:K on your fertilizer bags means:

N(itrogen) for leaf growth (lack of it causes yellowing)

P(hosphate) for root growth (unavailable at pH below 6)

K (Potassium) for flower formation (lack of it causes brown edges, brown spots)

The numbers show the ratio of each element eg. 2:3:2

The number behind, in brackets, means the percentage of actual plant food in the mix.

**Composts:**

When buying compost look for the “seal of approval” from the Department of Agriculture. The manufacturer is registered under a Fertilizer Group in accordance with Act 36 of 1947. This ensures that you’re getting a genuine product. Most brands have this registration, but you’ll be surprised which ones do not. The choice is yours.

*Organic compost* must list a table of contents of nutrients.

*Lawn Dressing* and *Potting Soil* are not covered by the Act so no standards apply.

*Mushroom Compost* is usually pH 6.4

*Chicken manure* will vary according to whether it comes from Broilers or egg laying hens, as the feed is different!

*Worm farms*: Do not over-feed your worms; remember one worm can only eat 1gm of food per day!

*Trelmix* is a mixture of trace elements necessary to plants, but in very small amounts. It is good to use occasionally as a plant tonic.

**Testing the pH of your soil:**

Mix your soil with distilled water and test the water with a pool kit instead of spending money on lab testing.

**November Plant Table:**

Jenny reported on the flowers brought in by members.

**Indigenous:**

(Far left) *Anisodonteia* “Classic Cerise” (could be mistaken for a *Lavatera*): loved by birds and bees; long flowering season

(Centre) *Calodendrum capense* (Cape Chestnut)

(Left) *Psychotria capensis* (Black Bird-berry) – member of the Rubiaceae genus: grows in forest margins from Knysna, through Eastern Cape, Gauteng, Swaziland and southern Mozambique.

Small tree or shrub up to 7 metres tall. Used medicinally for gastric complaints; quick and easy to grow from seed – remove the flesh from around the stone of ripe fruits and sow in spring.



*Ochna serrulata*: birds like the berries

*Mackaya bella* – likes shade

(Far left) *Gasteria* – rare because of single colour flower (tips of flowers are usually another colour).

*Dais cotinifolia* (pompon tree): semi-deciduous tree; lovely fragrance, especially at dusk.

(Left) *Pelargonium zonale* – grows into a bush about 1m x 1m.

## Exotic:

(Right) *Melaleuca alternifolia* – true tea tree from eastern Australia.

(Below right) *Rosa Roxburghii* – Chinese origin: resistant to rust, black spot and mildew; edible fruits rich in antioxidants; anti-mutagenic; fruit and roots used medicinally.

*Rosa mutabilis* (Specie rose), form of *Chinensis*: can take hot, dry conditions; prune as you would a shrub.

*Hippeastrum* – white; when leaves start growing, feed like crazy; the more you feed the leaves, when they die back and you dry them off, all the goodness goes into the bulb and you get better flowers next year.

(Below, left) *Kalanchoe tomentosa*

*Tradescantia virginiana*

*Begonia* – likes a shady spot

(Below, centre) *Amorphophallus vulgaris*



(Left) *Euphorbia xanthii* – from California: grows long and lanky in Cape Town but quite differently in Graaff-Reinet (see page 6)



(Ed: Photos of plants not shown here can be found on our Facebook page)

## JOURNAL OF A HAPHAZARD GARDENER – OCTOBER/NOVEMBER

Pravin Gordhan, the Minister of Cooperative Governance, has suggested to local businesses that they find creative ways to save water during the current drought in South Africa. He also suggested that firms encourage their workforce to make suggestions and to award those who come up with the best suggestions. None of my attempts in my garden are going to win any prizes but this is what's happening. Mulch, mulch and more mulch has been spread in every part of the garden. I particularly like to use the rooibos mulch in my pots as, initially at least, it adds a bit of colour. The garden at the moment seems to be coping with a deep soak with the hose every five days. The programme **Pippa's Garden** on Cape Talk on Fridays at 2 o'clock has provided various ideas. Kay Montgomery, in her gardening section of the Weekend Argus suggested that one place some shade cloth, held up by some sticks at each corner, over the vegetable garden. Another idea was to create a water feature in the garden. This was good psychologically as it gave off a feeling of cool. She also emphasized how important it is to mulch with every available substance that comes to hand.

This is the time of year when many of my favourite plants make an appearance in the garden. Three of them have white flowers. The first to appear were the St. Joseph's lilies (*Lilium longiflorum* *Harrisi* – right, above). This year the first flowerings weren't attacked and eaten by bugs and so the trumpet-flowers of pure white spread their fragrance in the garden. They are very also easy to grow. Another has been *Knowltonia vericatoria* which, for the first time, has produced a mass of white flowers. This is a wonderful fynbos plant for a shady area which has been growing under a tree in the garden for years. I have seen them in the Spes Bona forest above Kalk Bay. It does like a bit of extra water in summer. The third is a shrub, *Mackaya bella* (right, centre). Forest bell bush is a very suitable common name: the soft, shiny foxglove-like flowers with their purplish lines add charm to the garden. It likes to grow well in the semi-shade as it grows in forest areas.

After being devastated last year the dwarf agapanthus (*Agapanthus praerox* subsp. *Minimus* – right, below) have recovered well. There is a good clump of pale blue flowers. The name derives from the Greek *agape*, love, and *anthos*, flower: a most suitable name. It is good to think that this plant grows naturally only in the Western Cape. It's amazing how popular it has become. I once saw a display of hybrids of shades from palest white to deepest blue. There were also many stem sizes and leaf types.



The Stodel's website for this month suggests that you 'feed agapanthus with 3:1:5 to encourage them to flower prolifically'. The Stark Ayres flyer 'What to do in October' is liberal with advice on which chemicals to use – Koinor, a systematic insecticide, Talborne Chemical 2:3:2. Too much fertilization I think. My agapanthus plants seem fine without any additional food source. Starke Ayres do, however, suggest that one uses organic fertilizers as they offer a 'slow release resulting in fertilizing less frequently'.

Some follow-ups from previous journals: in June I mentioned that I had potted some lavender plants for the plant sale. They are a plant easy to propagate. I tore a section off the plant, put the end in some hormone growth medium and popped them into a pot. Within a few weeks they had turned into healthy plants ready for the sale. The MGI group in France commented on the allotments. \*Many ethnic minorities to England use these allotments to cultivate exotic vegetables from self-saved seed, such as gourds, maize, okra and chillies from their home countries that are not available in British supermarkets. This is one advantage of global warming.

Yesterday evening on a stroll in our neighbourhood we noticed how pretty the Fiddlewood trees (*Citharexylum quadrangulare* – right) were looking. They stood out markedly with their golden orange leaves in contrast to the trees nearby. Can anyone explain why the leaves are a glossy green in winter and a golden orange colour in summer?



As this is the last journal of the year I thought we could finish with some humour. The British magazine, the New Statesman, runs a weekly literary competition. In the edition of 11 – 17 September they challenged the readers to do the following: a local nursery chain had announced that they would be introducing 'plant whisperers' on a trial basis 'to provide customers with cared-for and nurtured plants' and the task was 'to imagine the kinds of conversations that such whisperers would be having'. Here are some extracts from the winning entries:

### Final warning

You can't say I didn't warn you. I've done my best. I've fed you, watered you and sprayed you with all kinds of lovely stuff to keep you healthy and bug-free. What do you mean, you can't stand the smell? It's Monsanto's finest! Got a problem with chemicals? What are you, a bunch of tree-hugging Greens? OK. I grant you, ivies do tend to cling to trees... But that's no reason to wilt on me. You're an ivy, not some bloody wallflower or shrinking violet...

*Brian Allgar*

### The end is nigh

They think I'm mad, of course, but I'm *not* mad. I am the only sane one. They are the mad ones, you know – they are *insane* with jealousy, cannot *tolerate* the beauty of what we have together, the tenderness of our union, the meeting of vegetable minds in the greenhouse, the glory in the flower, the passion in the petal, the kiss of the leaf...

*Josh Ekroy*

### Pain or gain

Oh dear. Drooping leaves, falling petals – past neglect. Please accept our heartfelt apologies. You mean nobody ever whispered to you before? [He suggests ways the rose's life might be improved].

Better already? And it's only day one of recovery week. Now perk up and blossom day by day. On Friday, there's celebrity inspection – and what could be better than a sniff from Monty Don?

Otherwise see these secateurs? My credibility is also on the line, so it's either [*loud whisper*] ROSE BUSH BLOOM OR PAINFUL EARLY PRUNE!

*Peter Regan*

Until next year – best wishes.

\* subject of an article in "The Organic Way", the magazine of Garden Organic in the UK.

## MORE TRAVELS IN THE KAROO

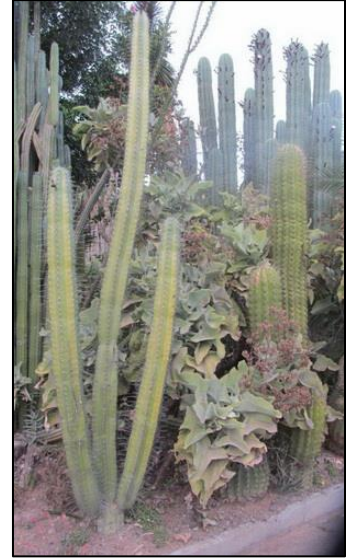
How many of you have whizzed through Graaff-Reinet on your way somewhere else? I often have, but this time stopped over. On finding the B & B we very searching for, we came across this absolutely jaw dropping sight! All along the pavement opposite the Obesa Guesthouse (the name must subconsciously have guided my choice of B & B) for about 2 or 300 metres – or was it 500? – was a densely packed bed of cacti and succulents (right). And behind this “hedge”, a **very** large park-like garden of densely planted ones.

Over the past 35 years the owner of the guesthouse’s ex-husband had grown all these magnificent plants from seed as a hobby and found every nook and cranny in the street to plant out his treasures (obsession?). He still runs the Obesa Nursery part time.

Note the height of some of the plants compared to the light post in one picture (below, left) and note the bush of pink froth (below, centre) – a *Euphorbia xanthii*, which Michael Tuffin and I grow in pathetic little containers and brought to the plant table at this month’s meeting. And don’t you just love the tall fluffy mops reaching heavenward (below, right)? In all, an unforgettable sight!

Finally, don’t miss the Valley of Desolation just outside the town and Helen Martin’s fascinating Camel yard at the Owl House at Nieu Bethesda, about 20 minutes on the way to Middleburg.

Wilma Tindall



## ITEMS OF INTEREST

- **Mediterranean Gardening France:** If you would like to see what outings the French organise, have a look at <http://www.mediterraneangardeningfrance.org/infNEWS.htm>
- **Mediterranean Plants and Gardens:** If you’re travelling overseas at any time in the first half of next year, you may want to join the UK group on some of the following events:

### Saturday 23 January 2016

Winter meeting and lunch at the Chelsea Physic Garden with guest speaker Oron Peri, specialist in Mediterranean bulbs

### 10 - 18 March 2016

Gardens of southern Morocco - Taroudant, the High Atlas, Marrakech

### 5 - 12 April 2016

Visit to Crete to see wild flowers, led by John Fielding, co-author *Flowers of Crete*

### 19 - 25 April 2016

Sintra and the western Algarve - International conference with guided wildflower walks, private gardens, lectures; keynote speaker Olivier Filippi

### Friday 20 May 2016

Garden visits led by the head gardeners - Inner Temple and Middle Temple, London

### Sunday 10 - Wednesday 13 or Thursday 14 July

Garden tour in Norfolk, including the 2016 AGM

(Photos: Rod Stewart, Andrew Thorpe, Peter Henshall, Wilma Tindall, Glenda Thorpe)