

WELLINGTON

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# EPIFLORA

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Volume 6, number 2

June 1997

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## The President's Page

Dear Fellow Epiphyte Lovers

Here in Wellington we have enjoyed a glorious Autumn with many warm windless days which have provided plenty of encouragement to garden and do the necessary pre-winter work on the epiphytes. Naturally there is still plenty of pruning, re-potting and general tidying up to be done throughout the winter.


Since writing in the last *Epiflora* the Convention Committee have been very busy working on the programme for the November gathering. You will find enclosed details of the Convention. I'm sure it will be a great week-end - an opportunity to learn more about our common interest, to visit collections and catch up with "old" friends as well as make new friends. I do hope that you will consider coming.

This year it has been decided that our midwinter function on Saturday 12 July will be held at our normal venue starting at 12 noon. A pot luck lunch followed by slides of garden-related subjects is the programme. The organisation of what food to bring will be worked out at the June meeting and if you are unable to attend that meeting one of the Committee will phone you requesting an item of food. If you have any slides of flowers, gardens, etc. please bring up to ten slides to add to the programme. Do persuade your spouse, partner or friend to join us on that afternoon.

The article about the Society in the Evening Post a couple of Thursdays ago has produced a lot of phone calls asking for advice about dealing with epiphyllums and hoyas. Thanks to Morris Tarr and Roy Griffith for providing the photographs which made this such an eye-catching item.

I do hope that the winter is kind to both your plants and yourself. I guess the most useful advice at this season is if in doubt don't water until the weather warms up again. Maybe the northern hemisphere squirrels have the answer - hibernate during winter with a food supply!

Kind regards



Jane Griffith



## The Programme for 1997

*Meetings are at Johnsonville Union Church (Dr. Taylor Terrace) and start at 2.00 pm. Library books etc. are available at 1.30 pm.*

- June 14th            Panel discussion on Schlumbergeras
- July 12th            Midwinter Function
- August 9th          Visiting speaker on "Camellias"
- September 13th    Propagation by means other than seed
- October 11th.      Ailing Plants - and how to help them - panel
- November 8th.      Rhipsalidopsis
- November 14 - 16    Convention
- December 13th.    AGM and Christmas function

## News About People:

Sincere condolences to Merv Keighley: on the recent death of his mother.

Commiserations with Nola Roser: the taxi came closer to her car than she would have liked.

Pat O'Neill we are all missing you at meetings, we hope you are warm and comfortable at home.

## Items for your Diary..

Thurs 19 June RNZ Institute of Horticulture - lecture "Naturally Native" by Jack Hobbs (Curator of the Auckland Regional Botanic Garden - you will also see him on Maggie Barry's "Garden Show") at the National Library Auditorium, 7.30 pm. Tickets cost \$7, and are obtainable from leading garden centres or the Institute.

Sat 12 July Our society's "Mid-winter function"  
- come at 12.00 for a pot luck lunch  
- bring up to 10 slides, if you can, to show and talk about

Thurs 7 Aug. RNZ Institute of Horticulture - lecture "The Useful Garden" (esp herbs etc.) by Sarah Hodge (of herb growers Horrobin and Hodge) at the National Library Auditorium, 7.30 pm. Tickets cost \$7, and are obtainable from leading garden centres or the Institute.

Fri-Sat 3/4 Oct Kapiti Horticultural Society 60th Jubilee Flower Show at Paraparaumu Beach. Our society has been invited to put on a display - please tell Peter Beeston if you can assist in any way.

## Talking about Tillandsias..

*At our April meeting Andrew Flower talked from amidst a plethora of plants .. the scribe is Merv Keighley*

Andrew started his talk by stating that as it wasn't Tillandsia flowering time he couldn't show us a flower - but there was "this" photograph! A prize-winning photograph that appeared in the "Journal of the NZ Bromeliad Society" - on a blue background! Arty! The photograph won an International Photography Competition in Brazil and was taken by none other than Andrew Flower. He, of course, was very humble.

Puya - pineapple shape- Bromeliads evolved in South America and are only found in that continent. Flowering plants evolved about 100 million years ago and Bromeliads somewhere between 30 and 40 million years ago. The first Bromeliads to evolve were all terrestrial - some quite succulent, and some with quite interesting forms. The second

group are aerial and have parachute seeds. The third group have berries - and are the most recently evolved.

Once a plant flowers it puts out offshoots and dies. The very silvery type have scales (trichomes) which are used to filter out nutrients thus obviating roots. Some grow on rocks, some just lie on the sand in deserts and some grow on trees.

Tillandsias started by colonising the lower branches of trees and some advanced to higher levels. Some types of tillandsias must grow epiphytically, some may grow epiphytically but can survive in soil and others only grow in soil.

Age is difficult to identify in Tillandsias.

Although it is not the flowering season, some of Andrew's plants are actually flowering in their new environment at Pukerua Bay. This could be put down to the longer hours of daylight and the warmer temperatures there compared with his previous home in Northland.

Andrew then gave an advertisement for the Bromeliad Society of NZ - being a member entitles one to go along to the Wellington Tillandsia Study Group - should one wish to (*for further information on this group, contact Andrew Flower*)! He also showed and talked about the plant shown in the winning photograph.

Tillandsias don't like being wet and cold. In any open shade house watering should finish about April in the Wellington region. Start watering at the earliest in October - but only in warm weather. Watering should be done once a day in the hot weather. Growers can be categorised as "sprayers" or "dunkers". Andrew is a "sprayer". Tillandsias breathe at night, therefore they shouldn't be watered then - they 'drown'. They manufacture food at night when it is cool.

Andrew as always is a very informed speaker as well as being entertaining. His presentation (with the bootload of plants) was well received by everyone. Thank you "petal".

## Max Falconer

We regret to report that Max died suddenly in March. His quiet, gentle humour and practical wisdom will be greatly missed. We extend our sincere good wishes to Ngaire and other members of their family.

## Importation of Epiphyllum Hybrids

*Yvonne Brunton describes their experiences... clearly things have changed greatly since the days Merv describes in this instalment of his saga later in this issue ...*

During the winter of 1995, we imported Epiphyllum hybrid cuttings from the USA. Here is an account of our experiences.

After contact was made with the local MAF office with regard to all the specifications required for import licences and quarantine facilities, work began on our quarantine building. Regulations demand that these premises be insect-proof and double-doored. Once our premises were approved, a permit (at a cost of \$90) was applied for. We had to send a copy of the permit to the nursery in California with our order.

The consignment consisted of raw cuttings about six to ten inches in length. The consignment was air-freighted to Auckland and inspected by MAF Importation centre staff. All cuttings were unpacked, inspected, dipped and then repacked to be sent to us. We had to present the original copy of our permit document and the NZ customs clearance certificate to gain possession of the plants.

Once we had received the consignment we put the cuttings into the quarantine area. After the raw cuts were dipped in a fungicide powder all the cuttings were placed in lots of 30-40 in trays. Each tray was filled with a mix of potting mix and sand which was slightly damp. The cuttings were spray-misted daily with tepid water and the temperature kept constant between 50 and 60 degrees Fahrenheit.

During the four months of quarantine regular inspections were made by a MAF inspector (at our expense!). Once the cuttings were formally "cleared" the big job of potting up the plants began. Many of the cuttings had established themselves well with extensive root structures.

At present these cuttings are something over eighteen months old and several have flowered. With this consignment doing so well - with so few problems, we were encouraged to repeat the venture and in July 1996 imported another smaller consignment. These cuttings left quarantine in December 1996. The second consignment arrived in excellent condition and did not take so long to be released by MAF and NZ customs. We dealt directly with both authorities before the consignment left California. Once in NZ we received the cuttings nearly a week quicker than previously as we avoided any delay between MAF and Customs inspections.

Generally this has been an interesting venture and we have gained a lot of information and experience. It has been a costly exercise when freight, customs duties and permit costs are included, but the plus side is that many new varieties are now in NZ. These include some of the new multi-petalled varieties and some more small-flowering plants. We are very excited to have some of the new Japanese hybrids which are

just coming onto the American market. We hope that we will have many of these new imports ready for sale early in 1998.

## Care of Epiphytes

Phyllis Purdie reports on the "hands-on" workshop that formed the programme for the May meeting. The workshop was run by Jane Griffith and Merv Keighley.

A species epiphyllum (*Anguliger*) was used as a demonstration plant. This is an easy to flower plant, producing creamy white, highly scented flowers at night. Unlike hybrids which flower once from each areole, *Anguliger* will flower again the next season from the same areole as last year's bloom. Therefore excessive pruning was not advocated; a small trimming of tatty growth was made before the plant was repotted.

The Griffith's potting mix is:

- 3 parts - potting mix
- 3 parts - orchid bark
- 2 parts - sand
- 4 parts - "Zoodoo"<sup>1</sup>

The Keighley mix is:

- 3 parts - Palmers potting mix
- 1 part - Dalton's sand

The holes in the base of the pot were covered with bark to prevent the potting mix escaping; other possibilities include: charcoal, gauze, paper towel, tissues, newspaper or dried teabags. A sprinkle of Diazanone was used to deter root mealy bug. This must not be used near roots, as it will travel up cut or damaged roots and kill the plant.

Labels were dated, and good cuttings named. Recommended for writing on labels were pencils and "Uni" pens from Whitcoulls; while Steven's "Vivid" pen is good for writing on leaves.

Deformed leaves were removed. Also taken off were leaves which were weak and of poor substance or showing signs of die-back. Care was taken not to remove leaves for this season's flowering. All cuts were dusted with sulphur. Only strong, healthy cuttings were kept.

After potting it was not recommended that plants be watered in very cold districts. A small paintbrush was used to clean dirt from the leaves. The cutting secateurs were wiped clean with a cloth soaked in meths between dealing with each plant to stop the spread of diseases.

<sup>1</sup> A Compost/manure mix produced by the Wellington Zoo.

## Hoya Pauciflora.

Morris Tarr writes about one of his plants.....

This most unusual hoya comes from South West India and the neighbouring island of Sri Lanka.

In nature it is found matted over boulders in moist forest regions, or scrambling on tree trunks in low, mountainous areas.

Pauciflora means "few flowers". They are produced sometimes in pairs, but mainly singly. It is reported that plants from Sri Lanka are good bloomers so it would seem that some specimens actually do contradict their name.

The plant has narrow leaves 0.25" (9mm) wide by about 2.5" (60mm) long. The flowers are pure white, 1.25" (30mm) across with a bright red corona. The perfume is absolutely magnificent.

I have found with my plant that once it started flowering (and this was not until the plant was over four years old) that it has never seemed to stop. My plant flowered in May and June, which in NZ is in the middle of winter. It started flowering again in November of the same year and has flowered continuously ever since. There are always two or three flowers out at a time and at one stage there were fifteen. As I write this we are now well into April and there are six flowers open, I can see more tiny buds appearing so when it will stop I have no idea. Each flower remains open for three to four weeks.

I grow this plant in a 4" (10cm) square plastic pot; the plant itself is contained in a wire frame 24" (60cm) high. I manufacture these frames myself. The plant is in a small glasshouse which is covered both on the roof and on the side facing the setting sun with 50% shade cloth. It gets very hot in the late afternoon but at night remains quite cool. I feed the plant now and again with Phostrogen liquid fertiliser.

## Recent Additions to the Library...

### What's That Pest?

Rob Lucas has produced this fascinating book that is intended to help us identify and control NZ garden pests and diseases. Rob gave a memorable talk to us last year - the photos he showed were breathtaking, and there are about 300 photos in this book. In the book, as when he spoke to us, he talks about control measures - and in particular non-chemical techniques.



*H. pauciflora*

photo by Morris Tarr

## The Road to Epi .....

Merv Keighley provides the second instalment of the history of his horticultural habits .. this week "The Parcel"

As discussed in part one of the saga, Mr McQuown was written to, care of his publisher, Colledge. Mr McQuown was the breeder of the "London" series of epiphyllums. He also bred carnations and pinks.

The nursery that he referred me to was Abbey Gardens. I wrote to them and eventually received a catalogue of epiphyllums. Hours were spent pouring over the names and descriptions. "I'll have that one - no, this one!"

A selection was chosen and many visits were made to the Post Office to buy British Postal Orders. This was the only way open at that time (1960's) to obtain overseas funds. Anyone who was anyone was roped in to buy Postal Orders. The order was eventually sent off, with the appropriate value of BPO's, to Abbey Gardens and the eternal wait was commenced.

Some time later - many weeks - (packets came by surface mail - were there aeroplanes then?) - a packet arrived by mail. It had a green customs declaration sticker on it stating "botanical samples". Also on it was a certificate of health from the British Ministry of Agriculture. The packet hadn't been opened.

Joy!! Excitement!!

The packet was opened and the cuttings checked. Yes, all I had ordered were there.

Of course, because of the length of time taken in transit, the cuttings needed no drying. Each one was carefully potted up. One or two even had roots appearing. Each was labelled and then placed where they could have optimum conditions. Again the waiting. This time though there was something to watch. How long does it take for new growth to appear? A long time when cuttings are inspected each day.

The plants grew, time went on and eventually - Hey, look there are buds. Yes!



... to be continued...

But I only need to  
buy one more  
Postal Order .....



## Winter Care of Hoyas ...

*Winter is the time when we are most likely to lose (kill actually) our most treasured plants. Von Cross writes about the care she gives her plants at this time - to help them survive.*

Almost all the casualties among our hoyas occur over our long winter months. Many of these can be averted with a little extra care.

Firstly, check carefully for any signs of mealy bug. Pay particular attention to crossed branches, ties, pot rims and remove dead leaves etc. If possible, choose a warm day and spray liberally with an insecticide such as "Attack" or "Target", allowing the excess to run into the container to combat any root mealy infestation.

Hoyas should not be repotted or fertilised as winter approaches. The Golden Rule is water only when dry. This means checking each plant individually. The small leafed species, eg *H. bella*, *H. lanceolata*, *H. linearis* and thin leafed species eg *H. multiflora* do not like to be completely dried out. The larger succulent-leaf types eg *H. carnosa*, *H. kerrii* are equipped to withstand dry spells.

Never let your hoya sit in a saucer containing water. If you need to use a saucer to protect furnishing etc. be sure to empty it a few minutes after watering. Sometimes a hoya plant will appear to survive the worst winter weather, only to show signs of distress about August or September. If leaves begin to look dull and lifeless, carefully examine the plant at soil level. If a gentle scrape of the stem with the finger nail reveals flaking bark covering a soft brown core no amount of Tender Loving Care will revive it, drastic measures are needed. The only option is to sever the plant a few centimetres above the soft area and either re-root it as is or use it for new cuttings. On the other hand, if, on examination, the main stem is still green at soil level your plant may be sulking until the weather warms up. *H. incrassata* has played this trick on me several times.

Fertilising is best left till signs of active growth appear in spring but a dressing of lime (I prefer Dolomite) should be given about the end of August. Approximately one rounded teaspoonful should be used for a 17 to 20 cm container - and, of course, proportionately less for smaller ones. Sprinkle the lime over the surface and water in.

Repotting (and only if absolutely necessary) can be undertaken when cold weather has passed. Use a bark-based mix if possible as peat-based mixes tend to compact with continuing watering and eventually deprive the roots of the air which is vital. The addition of coarse pumice sand to any mix is beneficial.

It is worth remembering that all epiphytes normally perch on tree trunks, crotches of trees, rocks or boulders or leaf litter on the forest floor. Only we humans cram them into pots in a totally alien environment.

## Hoya Habitats.

*Globe-trotting Von Cross continues her series on the places where hoyas come from. This time she goes to the Philippines.*

The main Philippines group of islands extends from latitude 6 degrees north to 19 degrees north of the Equator approximately and includes mountain ranges rising to about 9800 ft. (3000 m). It is not surprising, therefore, that a real treasure trove of hoyas has been (and still is being) discovered there. As long ago as 1990, Dale Kloppenburg of California published a book called "Philippine Hoya Species" in which he described thirty seven species. He has published details of more species since.

However, as I mentioned at the beginning of this series of articles, very few of these species are available commercially in New Zealand. Those that are include:

*H. bilobata*

*H. bordenii* though I believe the species sold in NZ under this name is, in fact, *H. incrassata*)

*H. camphorifolia*

*H. cumingiana* this species is often found on limestone cliffs or boulders in open spaces; from sea level to 5000 ft. (1600 m). You should give this one plenty of light to encourage flowering.

*H. diversifolia*

*H. imperialis*

*H. incrassata*

*H. kentiana*

*H. multiflora*

*H. obscura*

*H. odorata*

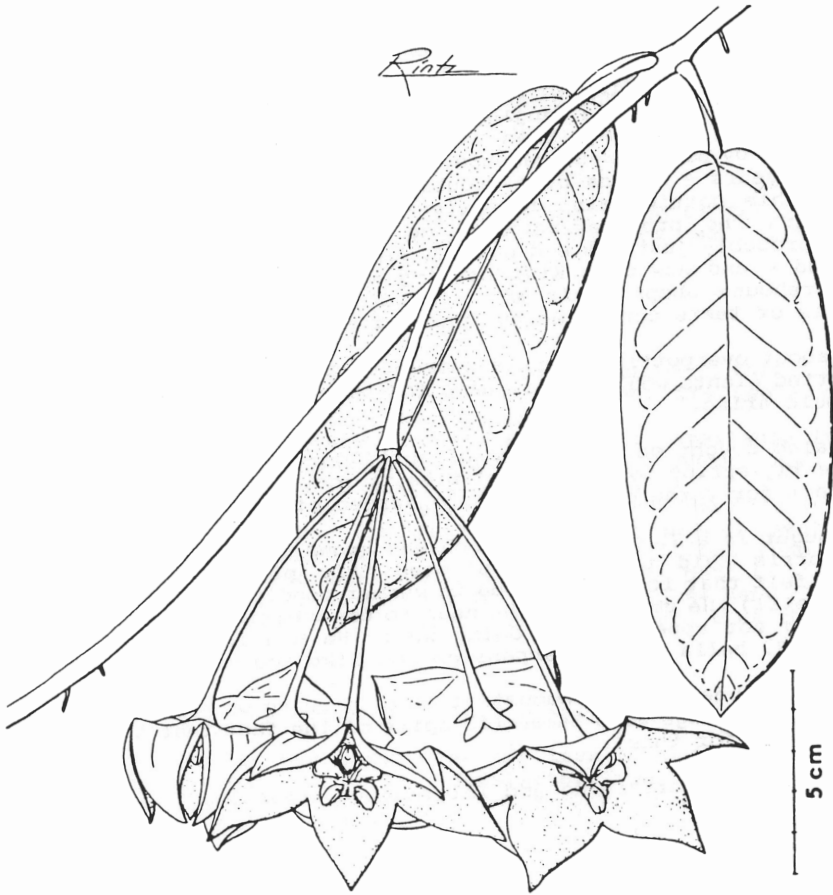
*H. pentaphlebia*

*H. pubicalyx*

*H. pubifera* (no 81084)

*H. tsangii*

Most of these species appear to be fairly widespread in the Philippines and some are common to other Pacific Islands.



*H. imperialis*

## How to look after Hoyas..

*And continuing the hoya theme - Alison Beeston reports on the workshop on Hoyas led by Morris Tarr that was the programme item at our March meeting.*

Before commenting on the plants brought in for discussion and treatment, Morris outlined recent changes in his thinking on the care of these plants. This reminds us that, no matter how experienced we may be, there is always something to learn. Where once he had rejected the use of saucers underneath his hanging basket plants - he now uses them in summer. Another change has been the replacement of bark as a base material in pots by polystyrene peanuts. Finally over the last eighteen months to two years - he has been troubled by the appearance of root mealy bug in his potting mix; investigation convinced him that the cause lay with the propagating sand he was using as one of the components (probably just one bad batch). As a result Morris has given up using sand - and now uses Kiwi potting mix which can be obtained from The Warehouse shops. This mix, incidentally scored well in a recent series of tests conducted by Consumer magazine.

When asked about overpotting, Morris commented that there was a danger that overpotted plants would remain damp for too long - and as a result problems would arise.

Advice was also sought on the taking of cuttings: Morris said that he considered early spring to be the best time to root new cuttings; these should be left for three or four days to harden off before planting.

Jane had brought in a *H. globulosa* which was grown outside and had not flowered. Morris said that he considered this plant to be a shy flowerer and felt that it needed to be in warmer conditions (and needed trimming as well!). He emphasised the need to experiment with positions when plants do not appear to be doing well. He had found that some plants - like *H. bella* and *H. serpens* do not like too much sun.

The workshop concluded with a demonstration of pruning on some members' plants and some cuttings were taken (in spite of the fact that this was not the best time for this).

As usual it was an entertaining and informative afternoon.

## "Odd Cuttings and Seeds ...".

### A new Hoya magazine

Many of you will be familiar with "Fraterna" a magnificent publication produced by the International Hoya Association. Now we have heard of another. "The Hoyan" is published four times a year by the society of the same name. Several colour photos are included with each issue.

Contact: The Hoyan Society, c/o Christine M. Burton, P O Box 1043, Porterdale, GA 30270. USA. First year subscription is \$US20.

### New Items in stock

The society has added two items to the range of fertilisers and pots that are purchased in bulk. You can now get 1 litre square pots and 14 cm plastic labels.

### Peat in Potting Mix

I have seen quite a bit of discussion recently on this topic; the general tenor being that one should eschew its use - but some interesting points have been made:

- the usual variety (and the one usually available in NZ) is light brown fibrous sphagnum peat, it breaks down after a few years and is mealy bug heaven
- there is another variety which is black and more soil like. This is sedge (ie tall grass like plant) peat, it is generally laid down in less acid conditions than sphagnum peat. One correspondent noted that sedge peat is widely used among commercial growers in Holland because many plants grow very easily in it - but the root structure that they develop is poor.

### A new editor for the Auckland Society Newsletter

Yvonne Brunton has taken over the task of editing the Auckland Epiphyllum and Hoya Society Newsletter from Betty Gross. We send our best wishes to Betty (and also to David - who Betty admits did quite a bit of the work).

### Adding zest to your cooking

.. and one tale from the "take note and beware file" concerns a gentleman who was tidying his home when an *Opuntia microdasys* var. *rufida* fell over onto his kitchen bench. He carefully put it back in place (being careful of the glochids) and carried on with his housework.

A little later he got hungry and, being in a hurry, decided to fix himself a few hotdogs. In doing this, he put the buns on the bench while heating the sausages. Two hours later he created a new category in the emergency reception in the local hospital: 'Cactus spines in tongue' ....

He reported afterwards that the hotdogs were a little sharper on the tongue than usual, but he'd put that down to the new brand of mustard that he'd tried .... he no longer has an Opuntia ..

### Future Publication Dates ..

*EPIFLORA is published quarterly by the Wellington Epiphyllum and Hoya Society.*

*Comments and contributions are most welcome.  
Please address correspondence to:*

*82 Kinghorne Street,  
Strathmore Park,  
WELLINGTON 3. NZ.*

*Closing dates for contributions:*

*Spring 1997 Edition - 9th August  
Summer 1997 Edition - 8th November*

### **Subscriptions:**

subscriptions are due on the 1st of January and are:

Members -	\$12.00
(overseas members	\$NZ16.00 or \$US12.00)
Additional Associate Members	-\$4.00



