

Western Australian Chrysanthemum Society Incorporated



Newsletter

January – February 2022

President's Notes

Welcome to the new year. I hope that you and your plants will have a good one. There are a couple of open house social days coming up in March and April. I fear that they may not go ahead due to Covid. Similarly with the Annual Show. Oh well, "It's only a hobby" and hopefully having a few cheery blooms about should give us a bit of joy if it turns into a season of discontent.

The photograph above is one of Ron Seaton's new introductions, Kellies Comet. Ron has been attempting to breed large Singles with contrasting lines of colour for a few years now and this is the first with sufficient size to be useful as a show bloom. He has others with stronger colours but smaller size. In a few years he will probably have them up to a good size and I look forward to seeing other show style cultivars in the years to come.

As I write this it is Christmas Eve and the temperature outside is nearing the forecast maximum of 39 degrees. As a result I am inside and so is the dog. Christmas and Boxing Day are forecast to be 43 and 44 degrees. On a happy note, Santa should be safe because nobody will be lighting a fire. I brought all the plants under cover and gave them a good watering early this morning, so hopefully they will be OK. I also threw the ball around for the dog to fetch and now he is lying in the hallway cooling off. I sometimes wonder why the dog is so keen on chasing a ball but as I have always enjoyed playing sports perhaps he is not so daft, or maybe he is.

On the subject of motivating forces, the Editor seems to have gotten over his existential crisis and has finally given up on his Notes. My urgings and feedback from members probably had little effect on his decision. Quite possibly he

will now turn his attention to making further progress with his doomsday prepping. I am informed that while Hobart property prices are comparable to Perth there are many other pleasant regions in Tasmania where the prices are very attractive. The weather is conducive to growing chrysanthemums to the peak of their perfection and once global warming takes further effect the climate may actually be quite pleasant. The roaring forties should keep the air largely free of the worst effects of the upcoming nuclear winter and nobody in their right mind would be bothered to waste a nuke on Launceston or Burnie when there are a multitude of far more worthwhile alternatives in other parts of the world. Who wants a luxury penthouse apartment with million dollar views to look down on those less fortunate when you can escape to the country with a few acres of land and be completely self-sufficient? In addition, you do not need to share a lift with casual contacts of Covid and social distancing is not a problem out in the paddock. Anyway, that is the new 'meaning of life as we know it' scenario according to our editorial friend. Whatever floats your boat I suppose and if he takes the car he will be needing one to get over there.

Cultural Notes

In the wise words of a longstanding member "the growing starts now". The first part of the season is mostly about producing a strong root system. From now on it is about producing robust top growth. That requires a steady supply of water and fertiliser and keeping pests under control. You can use liquid or solid fertiliser at your pleasure but there needs to be a continuous supply of nutrients. Most commercial complete fertilisers will give good results. In respect of pests, spider mites and aphids are the most obvious problems but something that covers thrips is also worthwhile, to reduce their numbers leading up to flowering time.

Confidor is good for aphids and thrips and is available from agricultural supply firms such as Elders. I purchased a litre container for around \$80 and at 5ml/10 litres it will last a long time. A friend prefers the slow release granules that can be applied to the soil. My local hardware sells it and as it is also used to control lawn beetle you may find it in products for that.

Spider mites require something different. The best products are not sold outside of the agricultural suppliers and come at a significant price. One website states that: *spider mites form part of the arachnid family, but, despite that fact and their name, they are not exactly spiders. They are tiny sap-sucking insects that get great joy from destroying the plants in your garden. They have a ferocious appetite that could quite literally wipe out entire crops in a very short time span.* All of the quote is correct except that spider mites are not insects. They are one of the non-spider arachnids in the same way that a scorpion is. Apart from an entomologist who cares? The answer to that is an arachnologist, as entomologists study insects and an arachnid is not one of them. Who, apart from an entomologist or an Arachnologist, cares? The point is, many, if not most, insecticides do not kill arachnids. In fact insecticides often make spider mite infestations worse by interfering with their natural insect predators. Perth is 'blessed' with hot dry summers, which is ideal for spider mites (but not humans and golden retrievers). My friend runs misters in the heat of the day on a timer which keeps the humidity up and the mites down as well as keeping the leaf temperature down which promotes better growth on hot days. According to the University of California, mites can be treated with pest oils and horticultural soaps. These need to be applied to the underside of the leaves where the mites are most abundant. Do not spray on hot days or when the plants are dry as the leaves may burn. There is no mention of any of the "noxious chemical" type pesticides that can be used. I succumbed to the allure of the total control approach and coughed up the cash for some abamectin, which is one of the cheaper options.

January is the right time in Perth to 'stop' your plants if you want big blooms on long stems. Stopping involves removing the ends of each stem. Some growers remove a little and others remove a lot. There are pros and cons. If you stop the stems too early you will get early buds, which in our climate will become heat affected and produce poor quality blooms. If you stop too late the blooms will be borne on short stems and will probably be smaller than their potential. The very best time to stop each cultivar can only be determined by each grower in his/her own garden, as there are many factors that play a role. One of the factors is weather conditions and unfortunately that is a bit variable from year to year ("the best laid plans of mice and men"). However, as a guide, Large and Medium Exhibitions (Sections 1 & 2) are mostly stopped in the first week of January, Decoratives (Sections 3, 4 & 5) in the third week and the other single bloom types (sections 6, 7, 8 & 10) in the fourth week. The Sprays are often stopped towards the end of the month but those that tend to have long pedicels may be better stopped early in February as

that seems to keep the pedicels shorter. Some cultivars require different dates. Princess Anne and its sports are best stopped at the end of January as otherwise the buds will always be early. As they have short stems which initially grow out laterally they are best stopped hard just past an upward facing node so that there will be the maximum length of straight stem produced.

It is important to keep an eye on your plants and have some idea of what you want them to look like when they are in bloom. Do you want your blooms on straight stems? Then put in a stake for each stem. How many blooms should you grow on each plant? You will commonly notice that some stems are weaker than others. The plant is telling you how many good blooms it can carry so remove all the weak stems. If you want the largest possible blooms then the less the plant carries the larger they will be. Clearly the blooms will be at a maximum size when the plant only carries one bloom. However, there is a limit to size potential and few people are happy with one 15cm bloom when they could have had four 14cm blooms instead. Most growers aim for two blooms on their Exhibition cultivars, four on their Decoratives and Fantasies (Section 10 Spiders & Quills) and six to eight on their Anemones (Section 6), Singles (Section 7) and Pompones (Section 8). As some cultivars are normally stronger or weaker than others the numbers can be adjusted with experience. Sometimes, such as for an Australian Championship entry, you do sometimes want that one monster bloom and so the number of blooms should then be reduced. If you want some nice bunches of flowers on Mothers' Day for your mother or friends then you should grow more blooms per plant.

Charms and Cascades are different. Some of the best Charms naturally branch out frequently. Other cultivars need regular stopping. Most Cascades need their side branches to be regularly stopped as their tendency is to grow long stems and, of course, that is what you are wanting the main stem to do. Regular stopping of the side branches creates many stems in the final plant and as each stem will have a terminal bud cluster you will be rewarded for your efforts with many blooms. Mothers' Day comes early this year so finish (stop?) stopping at the end of April or the plants will flower too late.

You may care to re-read the late Frank Blackwell's Cultural Notes from the January-February 2021 Newsletter as they are full of valuable advice that is easy to digest.

Editor's Notes



Musical Suggestion

*You know how to whistle, don't you, Steve?
You just put your lips together and blow.*

Mentors

Ian Blackwell – Kelmscott 0424 432 608
Ralph Coombes – Maida Vale 9454 3373
Michael Drake-Brockman – Pickering Brook 9293 7650
Carl Slusarczyk – Mount Lawley 9272 1356
Richard Williams – Inglewood 0439 103 500

Chrysanthemum Culture in Western Australia

... a booklet written by Ted Elms. (do not overlook mature advice)

<https://www.chrysanthemumwa.com/chrysanthemum-culture-wa.html>

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Forthcoming Events

Saturday 5th February 2022 - **W.A. Opens Up**
Northern Territory and South Australian borders

Tuesday 8th February 2022 - **General Meeting**
12 noon John McGrath Pavilion, Hensman Rd, South Perth

Sunday 20th March 2022 - **Social Day**
1.30 pm Carl and Lina Slusarczyk's home
6 Regent St, West Mount Lawley

Sunday 10th April 2022 - **Social Day**
1.30 pm Michael and Judy Drake-Brockman's home
136 Merrivale Rd, Pickering Brook

Tuesday 12th April 2022 - **General Meeting**
12 noon John McGrath Pavilion, Hensman Rd, South Perth

Website

www.chrysanthemumwa.com

Facebook Page

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/chrysanthem>

