

NEWSLETTER

September – October 2019



President's Notes

Friends, Romans, countrymen, having enjoyed a month away in historic England, Belgium and France I am now back to the new world. As previously noted, this is an Australian Championship year in WA and so, of course, you are all wildly excited and vowing to re-double your efforts to produce five untainted, scintillating, astounding blooms of bewildering enormity.¹ In case you think that is too hard an ask then just throw out the thesaurus and put an entry in the Hawaiian Forresterfield Championship² instead. Better still, why not enter in both, as well as the two State Championships, the Wallace Brook, Anzac, Jack Eastlake, Pockett, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, et al?³



Be that as it may, in September we have the Annual General Meeting and the Garden Clubs' Fair. As there is no fairer club than the Western Australian Chrysanthemum Society Inc. it is anticipated that management positions will be keenly contested at the AGM. In the case of multiple nominations the successful candidate will be decided by a show of hands. As the Society strives to be

welcoming and inclusive there are almost as many positions available as classes in the Show Schedule. No less than six committee positions are on offer in addition to the big kahunas. Any shy and retiring types need not be deterred as sharing and caring are the bywords of our society, and there is little that cannot be resolved over a nice cup of tea.⁴



The Garden Clubs' Fair is another pleasant opportunity for citizens to meet each other and anyone who cannot wait for Distribution Day in October is welcome to purchase, at the Fair, rooted cuttings at triple the D-Day price. Still good value for money though and a further reminder of the terrific value to be had at Distribution Day and more generally the significant advantages that are to be had in membership of the Society.

¹ untarnished, refulgent, extraordinary blooms of staggering immensity

² five clean, fresh, meritorious blooms of good size for the cultivar (also quite acceptable in the Australian Championship and not unlikely to be successful)

³ Flower shows fulfil a doubly useful and agreeable purpose. They stimulate competition and afford a feast for the eye which almost everybody must delight in, and they afford, too, pleasant opportunity for citizens to meet each other.

⁴ A Bex and a lie down works well for the rest.

But wait, there's more. You also get a free cuppa and smorgasbord! This is an offer so good that some of you who receive this newsletter electronically will be thinking that this must be some type of internet scam. OK, what's the catch? Well, there is an expectation that you will bring along some superfluous rooted cuttings and some tasty morsels to share. *From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs* is the general theme of the day. So even if you have none of one or the other then please still come and enjoy the fellowship. Pay particular attention to the spiv's hot tips for the Australian Championship from the last newsletter and if you have some stools of them make sure that you take plenty of cuttings, as almost everybody will delight in them.

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Cultural Matters

September is the month when propagation is at the forefront of our minds. In many other parts of the world they start earlier in the year, especially with the big flowered cultivars, where July and August are key months. Members growing cuttings for the Garden Clubs' Fair will have taken their cuttings in late July or early August to have them ready for sale in early September. I have not noticed that blooms produced from these earlier cuttings have given better flowers than cuttings taken at the beginning of September, but they are not any worse either. Our WACS cultural booklet, written by Ted Elms and published in 1985, states that *cuttings can be successfully struck from July to late October but the exhibitor should commence striking at a convenient time as close to 1st September as possible.*

At whatever time you do decide to take your cuttings it is important that they are showing signs of good growth, or else they may develop into weak plants or fail to root at all. Sometimes a cultivar may be slow in producing suitable cutting material and if so there is no alternative but to take cuttings into October. In the case of later October cuttings, it may be best to grow them with one stop only. (Stopping will be discussed in the November – December newsletter.) One of our longstanding members has had good success growing by this late strike, one stop method. So do not despair if your plants are slow to wake from their winter slumber, or you are. As far as the plants are concerned, move any Snow Whites and Sleeping Beauties to a warm sunny spot and give them a few doses of liquid fertiliser and a kiss to wake them up.

An attack of aphids or mildew can seriously impair successful propagation so spray all your stools with a combination of insecticide and fungicide (eg. Yates' Rose Shield) a few days before taking the cuttings or give them a bath in a bucket of the same prior to planting, or both.

There are two types of propagating methods; stool (rooted) cuttings and tip cuttings.

The stool cutting is a complete shoot taken from the stool, consisting of a small piece of the stool (a.k.a. rhizome, sucker) with some roots and all of the shoot coming away from it. As it already has some roots it is almost certain to survive. For best results make sure that the shoot is just starting to spring into life (vigorous but still short) and that all existing roots are shortened to encourage new roots to form.

The ideal tip cutting is taken from a young shoot. The cutting should be about 5cm in length and of medium stem thickness. It can usually be snapped off easily as the stem should be soft skinned and turgid. Thick cuttings are often slow to root and while thin cuttings will generally root easily they are starting out at a disadvantage.

Conventional wisdom is that plants propagated from tip cuttings produce finer blooms. That is also my experience. However I have found that tip cuttings of some cultivars are very difficult to root and the resultant plants lack vigour in the early stages. As a result, this year I am going to try some of those as stool cuttings to see if the results are better.

The ideal propagating soil retains moisture but is also well aerated. Commercial soil based propagating mixes are available from garden centres and many growers have also had success using a 50/50 mix of washed sand and peat or 70/30 mix of coco-peat and perlite. It is important not to firm the mix around the cutting as this compacts it and reduces the aeration. A gentle shake of the pot before watering in is sufficient.

Some growers like to put their cuttings into individual small pots (68mm square tubes will be available for purchase at the AGM) whereas others prefer to multi-plant a larger pot (eg. 4-5 cuttings in a 100mm pot).

Once potted it is important to keep up humidity to stop the cuttings from wilting. One method is to spray them several times a day with water from an atomiser or pressure tank (as used for spraying pesticides). Another method is to put the pots into a mini plastic greenhouse or terrarium. The trick with either method is to make sure that the leaves are dry overnight or you risk having the centres of the cuttings rot away. If you are using a mini greenhouse then open the door at dusk. We can get some warm sunny days through September so it is necessary to have the cuttings in a shaded spot, especially in the afternoon, or else cover them with some shade cloth. The pots may need to be watered once or twice but they should not be persistently wet.

Once roots have formed you will see the top of the cutting open out and start to grow away.

If multi-planting your cuttings then it is wise to replot them to 100mm pots once they are rooted, or else the roots become tangled and the plants will grow tall and spindly. Any spare cuttings can be potted to 68mm, or similar, pots for the Distribution Day. With the individual pot method you have a lot more time to wait, but do not allow the plants to become root bound or spindly growth will also occur. Additionally, carefully watch those plants in small pots as they quickly go from wet to dry and soon run out of nutrients. These should be potted on to 125-150mm pots when well rooted.

Good luck with your cuttings. Sometimes you are lucky and sometimes you are not. As a result, do not dispose of your stools until the cuttings are obviously doing well as it is always possible to take some late cuttings for a second go.

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Editor's Notes

You can tell that the President is retired with time on his hands when he rather optimistically Googles "Karl Marx chrysanthemum" and then suggests that the Editor shares some of the interesting (?) hits with the membership. Oh well, he is the boss, at least until the AGM.

Well, as it turns out, Google must have been devised by a descendant of Wilkins Micawber because, without fail, *something will turn up*. One of the hits is a reference to a 1909 short story by D.H. Lawrence entitled "Odour of Chrysanthemums".



I quote from the reviewer –

- *“Odour of Chrysanthemums” can initially be analysed from a Marxist point of view. In the story, industrial corruption along with poverty, alienation and disturbance of natural order, victimization of the working-class people and the disintegration of family caused by industrialism are in essence criticized through details, symbols, imagery and metaphors.*
- *chrysanthemums are metaphorically used and have different meanings. Basically, “chrysanthemums are used repeatedly to symbolize ‘the cycle of birth, marriage, defeat and drunkenness, and death’s associated with the marriage of Walter and Elizabeth Bates*

The full text is freely available on the internet at

<http://fullreads.com/literature/odour-of-chrysanthemums/>

Sounds like a great read but, as growers will be aware, while chrysanthemums have a not unpleasant aroma from the leaves, the flowers do not have perfume and so Lawrence’s use of the term “odour” is unfortunately a portent for what one reviewer cautions –

Consider yourself warned: D. H. Lawrence's short story goes straight from zero to super depressing at lightning speed.

“The Chrysanthemums” by John Steinbeck (1937) is another short story classic which, from the reviews, is only slightly less depressing. I must confess that I have not read either of these stories and neither has the President.

It seems that all is not lost for our favourite flower however, as modern culture has seemingly turned things around. I quote a passage from an internet page extolling the Chrysanthemum’s many virtues.

If you have been thinking of getting a flower tattooed on your body, why not go for a chrysanthemum. As it is, flower tattoos are popular with young girls. So you could set a style statement by getting a chrysanth tattoo. This tattoo will go well with your happy-go-lucky image.

The same page states that the Chrysanthemum flower is also known as football mum⁵, pompon and spider daisy. This presumably relates to the Japanese terms ‘atsumono’, kogiku and ‘kudamono’.

In reference to Japanese culture, I doubt if Lawrence or Steinbeck would ever have written their stories if they were Japanese, as Chrysanthemums, being one of the “Four Gentlemen” or “Noble Ones”, are held in high esteem in that part of the world.

In respect of Japanese literary culture it is of interest that an international haiku journal, written in German and English, is entitled “Chrysanthemum”. Prospective quiz champions are advised that a haiku is a Japanese poem containing seventeen syllables in three lines⁶. Being so short, even those who do not have time to read short stories, or play Lotto, can still enjoy them.

⁵ not to be confused with ‘soccer mom’.

⁶ Traditional haiku often consist of 17 on (also known as morae though often loosely translated as "syllables"), in three phrases of 5, 7, and 5 on, respectively.

The most famous haiku master is Matsuo Basho (1644 – 1694) who established his fame with the following poem.

*Even a thatched hut
May change with a new owner
Into a doll's house.*

However his best known poem in the West is

*The old pond,
A frog jumps in:
Plop!*

He also wrote this one, referring to chrysanthemums.

*When the winter chrysanthemums go,
there's nothing to write about
but radishes.*



Portrait of Bashō by Hokusai

Another haiku master, Yosa Buson (1716 – 1784), also mused about chrysanthemums –

*Before the white chrysanthemum
the scissors hesitate
a moment*

In case you think this is easy, take note of another of his works.

*The year's first poem done,
with smug self confidence
a haiku poet.*

I include all of these literary references because I know how fascinated you all are with history and culture, which is why you grow chrysanthemums and why we have a Pockett Championship.

At this point I am guided by the following from Oshima Ryota (1718-87)

*they spoke no words
the visitor, the host
and the white chrysanthemum*

So I end with this smug self confidence. (Editor 1958 -)

*Silence is golden,
As is the gentlemanly
Chrysanthemum bloom.*



Mentors

Ian Blackwell – Kelmscott 9390 2608

Ralph Coombes – Maida Vale 9454 3373

Michael Drake-Brockman – Pickering Brook 9293 7650

Ralph Foster – Armadale 9497 2420

Carl Slusarczyk – Mount Lawley 9272 1356

Richard Williams – Inglewood 9272 6120

Contacts

Treasurer – Colleen Ryall 9291 9257 (H) 0400 089 223 (M) colleenryall@westnet.com.au

Secretary – Michael Drake-Brockman 9293 7650 (H) michaeldb@inet.net.au

Newsletter Editor – Carl Slusarczyk 9272 1356 (H) carl.lina.slu@gmail.com

Forthcoming Events

WACS Annual General Meeting – Tuesday 10th September 2019, John McGrath Pavilion at 12 noon. Entry from Hensman Rd, South Perth (**A reminder that fees are due prior to this event**)

Garden Clubs and Societies Fair – 14th – 15th September 2019 at South Perth Civic Centre, Corner South Tce and Sandgate St, South Perth

Distribution Day - Sunday 27th October 2019 at John McGrath Pavilion at 1:30pm
Entry from Hensman Rd, South Perth

Facebook Page

Western Australian Chrysanthemum Society

www.facebook.com/groups/chrysanthemumwa/

Website

www.chrysanthemumwa.com

