

# Kenya horticultural society – Mombasa district newsletter

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## Orchids craze- August meeting

There is a lot to be said about orchids/bonsai and a lot to learn from experienced gardeners. A special thank to our host Hamuda, for hosting the group, also an appreciation to our speakers Mumtaz who covered bonsai and Vishal Khosla for the informative talk on orchids for beginners. Most members have reported healthy flowering orchids and for some it's a first! I will not go into details of what was said but just in bullet notes;



1. Water sparingly and in case the water goes into the leaves wipe off the water to prevent leaf rot and fungus. Check your orchids every few days to see how quickly the compost is drying out.
2. Feed the orchids with a weak solution of a balanced fertilizer
3. Regularly clean dust off the leaves to prevent disease
4. It would help if you learn more about the orchid, its name, growing patterns, needs, this will help you notice any abnormal changes. Some are shade loving while others like light
5. Ventilation is important, which also control temperatures and humidity levels
6. Bark based compost is usually the most suitable because it's free draining, repot when the roots become a mass around the pot and use the correct pot. Mount on the bark for those orchids which need to be mounted



## Bonsai for beginners talk by Mumtaz



“For me bonsai is recreating spirit of nature “appreciate the beauty of nature and have funny while doing it. Bonsai is classified according to size, attitude and number of trunks growing from a single root, number of trees in a group planting and the kind of base the plant has. There are five basic bonsai styles; cascade, formal upright, semi cascade, informal upright, and slanting.

All parts of a bonsai parts have to be critically checked out; meaning roots, trunk, branches of the plant, and foliage must be in harmony with each other, to work together to create or achieve a unique and unified effect. The position of branches, size of the leaves and the effect that you want to create must have a balanced and proportions.

Balance doesn't by all means, mean symmetrical, you will rarely find symmetry in bonsai world, look at nature and you will have the best examples. Don't forget to take a closer look at the container, because its part of element of the plant. Depth of the pot should equal width of the trunk.

Begin with a common plant, and look for plants with small leaves which will be easier to prune. Water your potted plant well before you start removing it from the container, reduce the root ball slowly (to avoid shocking the plant to death!) not at once unless it's a plant that has rapid growth.

## September meeting



A garden is much more than the sum of plants, it first complements the architecture, topography and then creates a story for the visitors; we had lovely garden stories of Jasmi's garden and a surprise bonus garden in the same vicinity of one of our member. Thank you ladies for allowing us into your lovely gardens, both gardens are well laid out to march the personality of the owners. The key ingredient in each garden was, place the plant at the right place and everything falls into place.

### Tropical gardening

Tropical gardening is not much different than any other type of gardening. Plants need the same basic needs: -healthy soils, water and proper fertilization, with all that mentioned a proper balance in plants. In the warm climate there is a growth response in plants than in cooler temperatures; faster growth, extended growing season, more tender and sappy growth. The warm climate encourages more pest and disease problems, while humidity also promotes fungal diseases. Note that due to excessive growth plants become weed-like and invasive.

### Solutions

1. Spacing is very important for the plants in warm climates, while in cool climate the plants appreciate close spacing to create a humid micro-climate. In humid conditions space is bigger to remove excess humid trapped between the plants and to prevent disease and death due to lack of ventilation. Plants crowded together too closely compete for sunlight, water and nutrients which lead to slowing down the plant growth and its overall health. When planting consider the eventual natural spread and height of the plant.
2. Mulches; mulching will keep the roots cooler during the hot season. It will also slow down the growth of weeds and holds moisture in the soil. It will stop the ground from getting muddy therefore minimizing the soil compaction in the process. When the mulch decomposes the nutrients are added to the soil, which will improve the soil fertility and structure. There are 2 types of mulches; can be **organic** like wood( chippings, shavings, sawdust, bark), sugar cane waste, hay, pea straw, peat moss, leaf litter, coconut fibers/husk, rice hull, paper

**NOTE:** - most timber/wood products will rob the soil of nitrogen in the first few months of application; It is therefore advisable to apply nitrogenous fertilizer to the mulch.

**Inorganic:** -they don't provide any nutrients to the soil but provide water conserving attributes, examples like rocks, gravel, stone chips, sand plastic corks.

When choosing mulch for your gardens there are points to consider: -

- A. Weight of the mulch, in windy areas the mulch will be blown away or washed away during rains every now and then making replacing it a frequent exercise.
  - B. Sloping grounds, hills will have the light weight type of mulch washed away during rains or watering.
  - C. Availability, this will affect the costs factor and replacing.
  - D. Longevity, replacement or refill becomes easier
  - E. Does it encourage pest and diseases?
3. Improve drainage in the soil; many warm areas tend also to have high rainfall, depending on which plants you wish to grow, drainage may sometimes be a problem. The availability of nutrients maybe impaired or changed for example phosphorus may become less available in wet soils while manganese becomes more readily available and in high amounts. Oxygen levels are reduced in wet soils, due to the high levels in humidity soil temperatures fluctuates and slowing roots of plants can't sustain, leading to root rot.

It's important to note that this should not be seen as a disadvantage of being in a warm climate; plants have adapted to the climate for centuries, damage to plants is either resisted or overcome by abundant growth or tolerated by most plants if they are healthy. In effect it's the plant that is not suited to the climate or site, that become most affected by the pests/diseases.



## News



For many gardeners' big scale and small scale alike all have come across roundup weed killer. Let us learn more about this weed killer that we handle every now and then without a second thought; Monsanto invented an herbicide glyphosate and brought it to the market under the trade name roundup in 1974(chemist John E. Franz discovered it while working for Monsanto). Glyphosate is a broad spectrum systemic herbicide and a crop desiccant(drying out), it is used to kill weeds and grasses that compete with crops. It's absorbed through the foliage and little through the roots;it's transported to the growing points of the plant and inhibits a plant's enzyme involved in the synthesis of the 3 aromatic amino acids therefore rendering the plant incapacitated and sudden death. The selling points for the herbicide were

- Crops thrived while weeds around them were wiped out by roundup
- Introduction of new GE (genetically engineered) seeds/crops that could tolerate high doses of Roundup.
- Eager to have more sales Roundup was encouraged as a desiccant(to dry out) to crops which were ready for harvesting , this made harvesting crops like soya, grain like crop to be harvested easier and faster.
- It was easy to dose huge chunks of land and wipe out the weeds

### Now the not so rosy side of using Roundup: -

- Any weeds that could survive gained an enormous competitive advantage and spread its seeds, because farmers used it more regularly and during the cropping season instead of just before or after harvesting giving rise to super weed.

- b. The exposure to glyphosate is common with other pesticides impairs the bee's ability to find its way back to their hive (bees unable to find its way home ends up dead). The honey will also have traces of glyphosate.
- c. Following health problems may be attributed to exposure to roundup and/or glyphosate:-
  1. Disrupts thyroid hormone functions
  2. Alzheimer's disease; roundup causes the same type of oxidative stress and neural cell death observed in Alzheimer disease
  3. Birth defects
  4. Autism
  5. Breast cancer
  6. Celiac and gluten intolerance
  7. Kidney disorders
  8. Depression
  9. Pregnancy problems (infertility, miscarriages, still births)
  10. Respiratory illness

The risks are increasing due to the use of roundup especially where GMO plants are planted, in public parks, school playgrounds, road sides, the list grows longer each day and the roundup is routinely sprayed.

(Courtesy of Eco watch)

## Next meetings

### October

Flower show to be held in Kilifi, details already in the emails for those who want to take part in the show or visit please let us know early enough to plan effectively. More details will follow via e-mail and WhatsApp.