

The SHAMBA TIMES

Journal of The Malindi, Kilifi, Watamu District, Kenya Horticultural Society



MARCH 2014

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

The Chairman's Notes

Dear members,

I write these notes - the first for 2014 - with the knowledge that they will be appearing in the first edition of our new newsletter to be called, "The Shamba Times". Have a look at it and then please do write to Chris Betts (chris7807@googlemail.com) or the editor, Deputy Chairperson, Marion or myself with any views you might like to express on how you feel it could be improved or indeed the strong and weak points of what we hope will become our standard form of newsletter. This input will then be most carefully considered and I am certain will greatly benefit future editions.

You will note that your committee is also considering a change of the name of our District to, "THE NORTH COAST DISTRICT", which we feel is a rather better description of our membership area and also overcomes the very occasional feelings amongst Watamu and Vipingo members that they are being left out! However this new name has yet to be finally decided and I will be asking everyone for their views at our AGM (which I hope you will be all attending) on THURSDAY 3rd APRIL at the Driftwood Club.

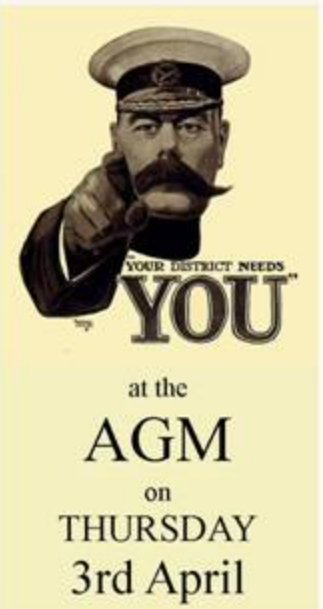
I hope you have found our recent events to your satisfaction and have thereby added to your gardening knowledge? Two events that were particularly popular were "Snakes in Yours Garden" by Royjan Taylor and the very practical, "Magic on Flowers", on flower

arranging led by Magic. Both of these we have been asked to repeat in Watamu and Malindi during the coming months. In addition you will find information in The Shamba Times on many of our forthcoming events and Courses for the coming year with some more to follow as we fix the final dates and details. I would however like to particularly draw your attention to the April Swahili Gardening-Courses which I know will greatly benefit your gardeners expertise. These Courses quickly become filled so please do let your area Committee member responsible have the names of the gardeners you would like to attend, as this gives us the opportunity to plan numbers and if necessary arrange additional courses if demand exceeds availability.

Finally let me comment on our District Rainfall for 2013. In Watamu we had 36.10", Malindi (South) 35.6", Kilifi (Bofa) 32.09", and Vipingo 34.16". All surprisingly similar though some parts of Kilifi did very much better. I am now reviewing all the figures that members have kindly sent me so as to share with you later our averages over the past ten years. However I think we can all be reasonably satisfied that 2013 was not a bad gardening rainfall year, particularly as for the most part it was reasonably spread over the year.

On that note I will leave you to continue to study our new Newsletter.

With best regards to everyone. John.



Plant of the Month

Ixora

The Ixora is a genus of the **Rubiaceae** family. It consists of tropical evergreen trees and shrubs and there are around 500 species. It has many common names including West Indian Jasmine, Jungle flame, Jungle geranium, as well as others. Related genera are the Gardenia and Penta and, whilst we tend to think in terms of an ornamental shrub, other members of the Rubiaceae family are better known for their commercial use - coffee, medicinal (Quinine and emetics), and dyes (rose madder and yellow)

For year round colour in the garden Ixora is hard to beat - varieties range from vibrant red through pink to orange, yellow, and white. To get the best showing it should be in full sun but it grows readily in heavy shade giving fewer and smaller flowers. It requires very little care and survives well when planted in the ground without any extra water. Leaves losing colour is a sign of soil deficiencies and corrective action needs to be taken or the plant will die. A short term solution is to dose with Epsom Salts diluted in water. For longer term treatment, top dress the plant with rich compost and Flowers of Sulphur. Ixora does quite well in pots but, if grown in a pot, will certainly need to be watered during the dry season. Ixora has few enemies but scale can be a problem and, if that is not treated, a secondary infection of black sooty mould will appear on the leaves.



Ixora



Combretum Indicum (Quisqualis)

Quisqualis is a woody climber of the **Combretaceae** family that comes from India, Malaysia, and here in East Africa. It's got cool common names like Rangoon Creeper and Drunken Sailor. It's also commonly referred to as Chinese Honeysuckle. It is an easy to grow vigorous twining climber, which blooms profusely but does not require special soil or heavy fertilizing and neither does it demand a huge amount of water. In fact it is one of the easiest and showiest plants for the garden. The flowers start white, the following day they turn pink, and then a rich red. It certainly needs space but it can be pruned to a shape or trained up a trellis. The maddening mealy bug, whitefly or other sucking insects don't bother this plant too much. It also can be grown quite close to the sea front where it continues to flower abundantly though the leaves get a little burnt by strong breezes. It grows easily from cuttings and also sends out suckers, which can be potted up and planted elsewhere. Like so many African plants, Quisqualis is known for its many herbal medicine properties.

Chelsea 2013

'BELLE NANTON VISITS CHELSEA



Helen Mirren examines a hardy specimen of the 'Common Pressman (Reporta Vulgaris)', indigenous to most parts of the world

On Thursday February 6, about 30 Kilifi, Watamu and Malindi Members gathered at Marion Langham's home to hear Rupert Partridge's sister 'Belle Nanton talk about the 2013 Chelsea Flower Show, which she attended on Press Preview Day. It being the Centennial of the Flower Show, gnomes were allowed but Belle was more interested in the flowers and chatting with designers who were doing last minute "fluffing" of their gardens in preparation for the judging.

Highlights included the crisp, modern, Brewin Dolphin gold-medal winner designed by Robert Myers who relied mostly on British native plants. Another standout was Chris Beardshaw's garden for the British Arthritis Research Society: this showcased a loquat hedge, inspired by the Vatican gardens, and was planted with species used in arthritis treatment, including *Rosa rubiflora* (high in Vitamin C), Borage flowers (used for their oil), and extracts of oak pine and birch. One of the smaller "Fresh Gardens" was concealed by interlocking white

panels, electronically opened by the power of "tweeting" to reveal the garden!

Inside the Great Pavilion, Kirstenbosch, Thailand and Barbados showed off the plants of their country, including

cycads and protea from South Africa. Belle also spotlighted this year's "Plants du jour" - *Sarracenia* (Pitcher Plants) and Bromeliads. Seed growers were on hand to talk about their products. Did you know that "good seed floats?" Hostas, cactii, sweetpeas, hydrangeas, lillies, allium, irises and roses were among the highlighted blossoms. Sadly time precluded 'Belle sharing insight from an *Alstroemeria* exhibitor from



A cluster of pitchers

Leicestershire who mentioned that "plant-stealing"

from UK nurseries is now a major challenge for growers. After the theft of 300 of his precious species from his rented greenhouses, he had to take his best specimens to his home "for safety."



A prickly beauty



Bromeliads galore

Where does it all begin?



My first experience of gardens that I remember was at Arusha on the slopes of Mount Meru. I lived with my parents at the New Arusha Hotel where there was a huge garden filled with Cannas, all sorts of Ginger, Irises and Golden Shower climbing up anything that would support it. Roses and ferns grew everywhere.

When I was seven, the family moved to the West Kilimanjaro/Sanya Juu area. Our new house, which had been a German guest house, was vast with an even larger garden and a river flowing down from Kilimanjaro with crystal clear freezing water all the year round. On the banks of the river Maiden Hair fern grew wild, gently fluttering with the current of air from the torrent of water.

When we first arrived - whilst the land was being cleared to plant coffee and wheat - flower seeds were grown as a quick cash crop and exported to Holland. Beside the house there were fields full of Cosmos, African Marigold, Larkspur, Antirrhinum, Zinnias and so on. The scent from the flowers in the fields still lingers in my memory. Meanwhile, in our garden anything and everything grew from Roses to Gerbera (Barberton Daisies). Tomatoes grew like weeds and the strawberries were to die for, whilst Irises never stopped flowering and the evening was filled with the scent of Gardenia. It was all taken for granted.

Eventually I married and moved to Northern Ireland - what a difference. My garden was the size of a postage stamp. It was winter and there was nothing in the garden, which was surrounded with leafless trees and frozen water. Then slowly the sun became warmer. Snowdrops and daffodils emerged followed by Aubrietia and yellow Alyssum, followed by such a profusion of scented flowers, particularly the roses that clambered all over the house. It was so exciting and somehow Africa and its abundance faded from my memory whilst I became immersed in my new challenge.

And a challenge it certainly was because my in-laws had the most renowned gardeners in the County - over 11 acre with five full time gardeners. Theirs was a mature garden which had been in the family for generations. The great oak and beech trees acted as a background to the garden tapestry. Their garden came to life early in the year with the yellow 'stink lilies' *Lysichiton americanus* followed by the *Iris unguicularis*, Snowdrops, Azalea, Magnolias and huge pink and red Rhododendrons reflecting in the lake as the sun slowly sank in the late evening. What made the garden so amazing was how carefully tended it was, with well manicured lawns and wide paths along which, in past years, the 'ladies' of the house would wander with their parasols, whilst the gardeners discretely hid out of sight in the bushes.

Years passed and I returned to Kenya, memories of our farm flooding into my mind. Maybe they were distorted but, as I remembered it, anything grew and there was no winter to put a stop to this cornucopia of fruitful growth. How wrong I was. I arrived with seeds that had grown so easily in Ireland or others that I remembered from my early days, like Sweet Pea, Red Hot Poker, Agapanthus, Calendula, Mesembryanthemum and more. In great anticipation I planted my seeds cared for them and waited - nothing happened. I tried more seeds and different varieties but again nothing happened. I looked for a garden centre where I hoped I could buy more seeds, flower pots, compost, and fertilizer but, to my amazement, there was no B & Q or other Garden Centre where I could wallow in my two favourite pastimes - garden plants and spending money! Instead I have discovered that Coastal Gardening is a whole new ball game and so the steep curve of learning began all over again and I have spent the last seven years playing catch up - and Bridge!

How does one become A Gardener?

MARION LANGHAM
EXPLAINS



Aunt Maude - Our Gardening Expert

Q I have rather an untidy Desert Rose and would like to prune it so that the shape is more attractive. When is the best time to prune?

Most Adenium (Desert Roses) don't require much in the way of pruning. If you feel you need to get a better shape, this is the time to prune, just before the rains. When pruning make sure your secateurs are sharp and clean. Always cut just above a bud and at a slant.

Q The leaves on some of my Hibiscus seem to be turning a pale or yellow colour. Can you please tell me how I can put this right?

The Hibiscus sounds as though it is suffering from Chlorosis.

- * If the plant is in a pot, it could be waterlogged. Stop watering for at least a week and then water sparingly. In bad cases prune heavily and re-pot the plant into fresh soil with a bit of good compost and some bonemeal. Make sure the pot has proper drainage.
- * The pH is too high (too much alkaline): top dress with a generous amount of compost and add a small amount of Epsom Salts into the top dressing.
- * Iron deficiency: Feed the plant with well rotted manure, compost with some Epsom Salts and bone meal added to the soil mixture.

Bug Story



A nasty attack



The culprit

The Mealy Bug is one of the most destructive of bugs, especially at the Coast. They particularly play havoc with Hibiscus but can be found on almost any plant growing in the garden.

The mealy bug is an unarmoured scale insect, forming the family Pseudococcidae of which there are well over 300 individual species. Here at the coast you are most likely to meet *Maconellicoccus hirsutus* the Hibiscus mealy bug who lives under a fluffy white and powdery waxy coat. Males are pink, have a pair of wings, two long waxy tails and are capable of flight. The female is wingless and lays up to 600 eggs at any one time in the same white waxy covering. From egg to adult can take as little as three weeks. They are mobile and live on the plant or on the roots, sucking out the sap and injecting a toxic saliva that results in malformed leaf and shoot growth. A heavy, black, sooty mould may develop on an infested plant's leaves and stems as a result of the mealy bug's heavy honey-dew secretions. These creatures not only disfigure the plant but can kill it if left un-treated

The most important rule in the fight against Mealy Bug is be vigilant and inspect, or teach your gardener to inspect the plants frequently so as to catch the bugs early. It is easier to kill one or two colonies than to eradicate a wide-spread infection. Look for:-

- **Ants.** Ants protect and farm the mealy bug, feeding on their honeydew excreta. If you notice ants on your plants you can be sure there are some sap sucking bugs attacking the plant. Find the culprits and treat.
- **Black sooty Mould.** A black sooty mould can form from the honeydew secretion causing further damage to the plant.
- **Malformation.** Hibiscus buds are distorted by the feeding of the bug and this is easily recognisable.

NON CHEMICAL CONTROL

- Be watchful and treat any outbreak immediately.
- If the infestation is not too bad, pick off the mealy bug by hand. A small cheap paint brush does an excellent job. Remember to check back frequently to make sure all the culprits are all destroyed.
- Prune off hibiscus buds if they are distorted as you will never get rid of the mealy bug any other way. Also prune away any heavily infested parts of the plant.
- **TRY:** Mixing four table spoons of dishwashing liquid into a cup of vegetable oil (the soap helps disperse the oil). Mix 1 part of this to 20 parts of water and spray the plants. The mealy bug will suffocate under the oil.

CHEMICAL CONTROL

If all fails and you decide to use a chemical product.

- Remember, as well as these bad creatures, there could be good ones on the plant too so if you see them try to remove them or wait until later in the evening before spraying.
- Read the instructions carefully. Wear proper protection and wash your hands - chemicals can kill you as well as the mealy bug.

Making a silk purse out of a sow's ear

Greta Davey kindly agreed to undertake the marathon task of giving three lectures/demonstrations on 'permaculture', over as many days. Beginning on the 22nd of January 2014, Greta gave practical talks in Kiswahili to gardeners and school children in Kilifi and Watamu and ended with a talk in English for some 40 Members and their gardeners at Liz Gregory's house in Malindi. Every location had a capacity audience of keen and eager people wanting to learn. In all about 150 people attended these lectures and we hope that some of her "seeds of knowledge" have fallen on fertile ground!

At the start of each lecture Greta gave a short talk on nutrition. She said that it was important to eat 5 different vegetables every day but that it was not necessary to go and buy them as they could easily be grown in a 4 x 4 metre area in the garden, especially as there are a lot of indigenous edible plants that are not only delicious but very healthy. She then went on to demonstrate to everyone how they could do this and so eat better.

She had all sorts of tips for creating a vegetable garden in an inhospitable climate, including showing people how to make a variety of watering devices from old plastic bottles and containers. She advised using grey water from washing clothes, treated by sprinkling it with ash from a jiko and leaving it for 24 hours to allow the fats and chemicals to sink to the bottom. The resulting water would then be usable on the garden.

"Insects" said Greta, "are a sign of weak vegetables. Use more compost to make them stronger. If they persist, make a strong spray of a solution made of chillies". The important message was NOT to use any artificial fertiliser or chemicals. She then gave a detailed demonstration of how to construct and maintain a compost heap. "Good soil takes time," she said cautioning that compost should never be left in the sun.

Ann Robertson's gardener William Kitsao brought along a variety of pots of indigenous vegetables from the Malindi area, including one of the nine species of Mchicha whose gorgeous ornamental leaves sport a purple centre. These plants complemented Greta's chart on the nutritional value of native vegetables compared with other veg. Her FAO chart indicated that one helping of say Terere (*Amaranthus*) contains 50 times more Vitamin A than cabbage.

A final non-gardening tip she shared:- put a bowl of ash in an airing cupboard and it will take away the smell of mould!

View a full report on the KHS Website—www.khsyaks.com

SELF SUFFICIENCY IN A 10 X 10 PLOT

Greta Davey
encourages
permaculture



A Water Feature

A POND IN YOUR GARDEN?

My answer to that query is a very definite yes - although maybe I have rather over done things with nine ponds in my garden. Ranging from a small 12 sq ft pond holding about 180 gallons, my most recent and largest 180 sq ft pond of around 3,000 gallons is designed for koi. However, although I do not regret having them, I do wish I had built, say, just three much larger ones as fish become a real feature if there are sufficient to shoal. Of course there is much dispute on the number of fish an average pond will accommodate and provide space for growth but if one works on say 3" of fish - excluding tail - for about 2 sq. ft of surface one will not be far out!

Typical answers I receive when I encourage gardeners to build a pond are "but they are so much work to maintain", "they are dangerous to young children", "they waste valuable water", and "they encourage mosquitoes and other undesirable forms of life". What a lot of nonsense! A balanced pond, containing a wide spread of easy to grow plants, lead by that wondrous garden plant the water lily, and corner bog gardens full of

flowering cannas and other similar very rewarding plants makes an easy to maintain feature - indeed much easier in my view than a lawn - and a centre of colour throughout the worst of the near annual drought! Put in some fish for extra colour and activity, including some guppies to deal with the mosquito larvae, and you have a soothing and peaceful place to sit and let your troubles fade away.

Of course small children can be a problem and some form of protection is needed. One solution is to cover the pond with a strong net (which also guards against kingfishers and herons) but that can be unsightly so it might be better to have a very shallow pond filled with attractive rocks and pebbles and with a pleasant sounding fountain circulating the water. Another alternative could be to create a bog garden with some stout plastic as a liner buried say 3' down. This can be an everlasting patch of colour in your garden.

Back to the traditional pond, do make it as large as you can afford and do incorporate into its design a water feature, maybe a waterfall or a fountain, as this creates some delightful sounds in your garden and aerates the pond to the bene-

fit of your fish, particularly in hot weather. Don't get concerned about your water bill. Of course the filling of a pond is best done at a time when water is easily available, during the rains or when the local mains water supplier has had a spurt of generosity and there is actually some water flowing through your pipes but, once filled, water replenishment is not excessive. In fact for a normal say 90sq ft pool, say 3' deep with an internally circulating waterfall or fountain you will probably only lose between a quarter to half an inch of water a day. Or, to put it another way, you will probably lose between



about 10 and 15 gallons of water a day in the dry weather. I reduce this water loss further by having the edging or indeed sitting areas around my pond gently sloping inwards so as to harvest as much rainfall as possible.

Another great advantage of having a worthwhile pond is the encouragement of wildlife in your garden - birds, butterflies, wondrous dragonflies, the smaller mammals such as Suni etc. and now suddenly for me an extra bonus for the first time. Three Nile Monitor lizards come here regularly and bathe in one of my ponds. Whilst I do suspect that they also eat some fish on each visit, so far they seem to have disliked the thought of eating goldfish and concentrate of the tilapia which in fact delights me as I have far too many in my ponds and they tend to be destructive of one's plants. Indeed I wish I had never introduced them and would warn others not to do so.

Finally I believe there is, and I am studying, an unexpected advantage of pond development in that I feel that the plants within say 50 yds or so seem to be benefiting from what is clearly the creation of a minor eco system with a slightly cooler temperature and much more damp feeling

JOHN GOLDS IS AN ENTHUSIASTIC PROTAGONIST

Three Nile Monitor lizards come here regularly and bathe in one of my ponds'

in the air. Certainly the flower beds within this range look better and healthier in our dry season.

So, do not be put off by those that tell you having a pond is not worth the expense and effort. Quite the contrary. They are an attractive and interesting feature that will benefit you garden wildlife and create a great deal of interest. Clearly these few words only touch the wider spectrum of pond ownership but, if any of our KHS members are interested and want to learn further about ponds, do come to have a look at mine.

JMG.



For your Diary

April

Thursday 3rd April—Malindi, Kilifi, Watamu District AGM

This year's AGM will be held at the Driftwood Beach Club, Malindi, commencing at 10.00 AM. Our guest speaker will be Anne Powys, who is to give an illustrated talk on "People and Plants". Anne is well known for her knowledge of indigenous plants and their uses. This will be followed by a 3 course lunch at the Club at a cost of 1000/= per person.

7th, 8th & 9th April—Gardening Courses

Marion Langham will be running a further series of courses in Swahili for members gardeners to extend the knowledge they gained in courses 1, 2, and 3 last year. Full details on Notice Board below.

Friday 11th April—KHS Council meeting in Nairobi.

Saturday 12th April—KHS AGM at Sue Deverells house Limuru.

June

Thursday 26th June—Mike Norton Griffiths on Land Use in Kenya.

Mike will be at the Turtle Bay Beach Club at 10.00 AM to talk about "Land Use and Land Change over the past 30 years in Agricultural areas of Kenya". Members may wish to stay on for a light lunch at the restaurant afterwards.

Notice Board

Sokoke Forest

Have you visited the Sokoke Forest? A dawn safari under the tutelage of David Ngala is well worth the effort. Call 0734 652610

Elfried Hoogeweegen still has stocks of KHS Calenders for sale.

Also Bone meal, Planting bags of all sizes, Oasis, Orchid baskets, Bridge score pads, and Tide tables

Visit our website for full details
www.kenyahs.com

Call her on 0744 654321

Gardening Courses 2014

As before, the cost will be 1000/= per head and any gardener of a Member may attend. It is expected that the following courses will be run:-

Monday 7th April at Marion Langham's house, Kilifi commencing 9.00AM.

Tuesday 8th April at Malindi Golf Club commencing 9.30AM.

Wednesday 9th April at John Gold's house, Watamu commencing 9.00 AM

Vipingo (Depending on interest) details to be advised

Whilst researching an article, we came across this site. www.plantprovocateur.com

Try it out. A bit hippy and 'way out' but an enthusiast and wonderful photographs. You may be amused.

FIND US ON THE WEB

WWW.KENYAHS.COM

The Shamba Times is published quarterly for the benefit of its Members by the Malindi, Kilifi, Watamu District of The Kenya Horticultural Society. Articles for publication are welcome and should be addressed to the Editorial Office, as should any comments, suggestions, or corrections.

The Kenya Horticultural Society was established in 1923 for the purpose of stimulating and increasing interest and knowledge of gardens and plants in Kenya. The Malindi, Kilifi, District extends from Vipingo in the South to Malindi in the North. Annual membership is Ksh 800 per person (Ksh 1000 per couple). Corporate Membership is offered at Ksh 1500. Members gardeners are accepted for limited membership at a fee of Ksh 400 per annum.

M-Pesa payments can be made on 0702 767177

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