



# BRAIDWOOD GARDEN CLUB NEWSLETTER MAY 2020

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We may soon be able to resume our Garden Club Meetings and are tentatively planning a meeting on Thursday July 9<sup>th</sup>, of course with physical distancing. Look out for further information in the next newsletter. Keep washing those hands & stay well everyone.

## Building and Installing Nest Boxes for Birds and Mammals around Braidwood

For those of you who you were unable to join the Upper Shoalhaven Landcare free webinar for landholders on constructing and installing nest boxes for selected local hollow-nesting mammals and birds, please note that a booklet on hollow-dwelling species native to the Braidwood area at the following link:

<https://nestboxtales.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/NestBoxPack-UpperShoalhavenLandcare.pdf>.

This was prepared by ecologist and nest box guru Alice McGlashan who led the webinar.

## Bargain Soil Testers by John Tuckwell

You may have seen on-line bargain soil testers which test for moisture, pH, light and sometimes temperature. 'Too good to be true at prices quoted, they must be rubbish'.

Well I decided to try a couple of them out and bought a [3 in 1 tester](#) for under \$11 delivered and a better quality [4 in 1 tester](#) for \$33 delivered (both now slightly more expensive) and I have to say that I am very pleased with them so far.

The moisture testing facility is very useful for avoiding overwatering. Not only do you save on precious water but more plants (particularly indoor plants) are killed by over than under watering.

I usually use the 3 in 1 tester for indoor plants which has a dial display and operates with two prongs and needs no battery. The 4 in 1 tester needs a 9V battery and is generally used outdoors and indicates whether the soil is dry, normal or wet. The pH tester on the 4 in 1 has been checked against the traditional CSRIO test kit of powder and liquid and gave the same result (while the 3 in 1 measures ~0.5 higher on the scale), but is so much easier to use – just switch to pH testing mode, insert in the ground and wait a few seconds and up comes the pH reading.

No doubt they are not entirely accurate, and some may be duds at these prices, but I am certainly pleased I made the investment.

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## More YouTube Gardening Channels

Further suggestions of YouTube gardening channels to inform and entertain you, include:

**Dr Kirsty Owen** a crop health researcher at the University of Southern Queensland (daughter of Cathie and Phillip Owen) gives her tips and advice for planting up at home while isolating in the COVID-19 pandemic: <https://youtu.be/iIDMaJq2Xqk>

**Middle Sized Garden.** Alexandra, an English journalist and author, has a [website](#) and YouTube channel giving tips on saving time, money or effort in all aspects of your garden: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9I0mKCZRMJCZ-UFwDgrUjw/featured>. She not only gives her ideas, but researches topics and uses other experts on her videos, such as the one on how to [weed your garden](#).

**Plant Abundance.** For an American view on growing a garden, organic gardening techniques, establishing a backyard food forest, companion planting, edible and medicinal plants, raising backyard chickens join Dan and Alice from Northern California: <https://www.youtube.com/user/plantabundance>.

[2https://braidwoodgardenclub.wordpress.com](https://braidwoodgardenclub.wordpress.com)





## Walking Around Braidwood Gardens by Margaret Tuckwell

Gardens are often described as colourful, beautiful, picturesque, charming and cheerful, tidy, formal, scented, botanical, well designed etc., so when asked which were my favourite gardens that I photographed during this autumn, well the truth is I enjoyed them all and for many different reasons. There were some full of varied plants and colour and yet others had one specific plant or section which really caught my eye.

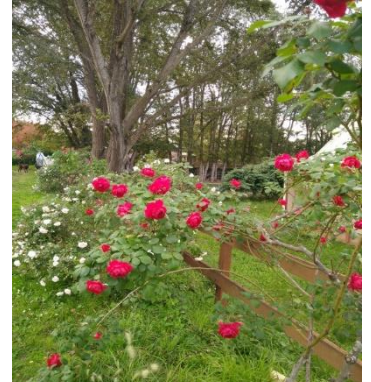
During the restricted timeframe due to COVID-19, two bouncing Labradors still require a walk each day & it's usually a stride with just the odd stop for a sniff of something on the ground but for these walks around our town, it was me who stopped most of the time, trying to take different photos. Some gardens needed a lot of photos. Trying to hold two leads in one hand and a phone in the other and then take a snap with either dog wanting to move, was not always easy.

Walking along the grass (due to lack of footpaths in our town) and stopping at each gate or driveway, taking in the layout of the garden within was not only interesting but peaceful. As we know there are still many older houses and cottages within our town and many have well established gardens.

The extra welcome rain in February certainly served us all well. I found plants abandoned in some places which bloomed in March. These were mainly roses and dahlias and I am sure others found plants they did not know they had, or thought they were no longer alive.

I discovered many gardens which members of the Braidwood Garden Club would enjoy and some of these may not have been visited by the club. Whilst working at the Visitors Information Centre, if people ask where they can walk other than follow the heritage town map and main street, my immediate reaction is to advise them to walk down Duncan and Ryrie Streets towards the club. There are so many gardens in this area with magnificent roses all very colourful and a wide variety of roses as well.

In total I completed 19 walks and the pictures of those below I found particularly interesting (all the walks and photos are on various Braidwood Facebook pages).







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## Gardening With Raised Beds by Jennie Marston

Last month I talked about how I have renovated my vegetable garden by creating raised beds with edging. It appears that many Garden Club members are using this method in their gardens for a variety of reasons including to improve the quality of the soil, the quality and quantity of produce and to help the gardener themselves (maintenance, accessibility, and aesthetics).

Raised beds can be created by just heaping the soil into beds however most have barriers to contain the garden soil. They do not have a bottom but are open to the ground below allowing plants to grow down and obtain any nutrients there. On the other hand garden planters are usually elevated and have a bottom that allows drainage.

Research shows the following benefits of raised beds.

1. **The Soil** The first area that raised beds assist with is the soil as they:
  - are great for people with poor or contaminated soil and give the gardener opportunities to experiment with and control soil conditions (texture and ingredients) for optimal growing;
  - promote a 'no dig' approach with no tilling required and less maintenance. Compost, fertilisers, manures, and mulches can all be added to the top making work much easier. Worms then can do all the tilling required and build up the organic component of the soil thus aiding plant growth;
  - prevent soil compaction from treading on the beds thus improving air circulation which enhances root health and spread, and
  - provide good drainage even in heavy rain.
2. **Produce** The benefits of improved soil in the raised bed can allow:
  - for closer planting and more produce, and
  - increased soil temperature because of better drainage. This may mean you can plant seeds or transplant earlier and extend your season.
3. **Garden Maintenance** Raised beds assist the maintenance by:
  - reducing weeds. Weeds do not spread as easily into the raised bed from paths and if they are not tilled or 'no dig', seeds are not turned back into the bed. Also when preparing the bed if a weed barrier is laid and care with the added soil is taken, weeds are not common. Use of mulch not only benefits soil quality but also reduces weeds and loose soil too makes it easy to remove any weeds that do appear;
  - preventing sides of beds washing away and eroding during rain, and
  - deterring pests. If beds are high enough they can deter slugs or snails from climbing in. Apparently snails won't walk over copper flashing on the top of the edge, and installing chicken wire around the base will stop rabbits burrowing in.
4. **The Gardener** Depending on the height of the sides of the garden edges, raised beds can:
  - allow those with physical disability or mobility issues to enjoy gardening;
  - reduce back strain from bending;
  - allow the gardener to sit on the edge of the bed while weeding, and
  - give a quicker sense of achievement as each bed is a garden in itself, so small amounts of work can accomplish a lot.



Jane's raised beds



Fran's raised bed

My beds are only 200mm high at the moment, but they can be made higher should I need it.

Raised beds can be built in any shape and with a great variety of materials, anywhere in the garden even on concrete, pavers or gravel. Some people may believe they look neater and more attractive, especially if you wish or need to plant vegetables in a front garden. They are also great for renters who can dismantle the beds apart and take them with them; just spread some seeds on the bare spot as you leave. Finally all these benefits make them ideal for the beginner gardener.

### **The disadvantages**

There are some "cons" for creating raised beds. Gardeners will need to gauge whether their bed needs more or less water than conventional gardens; it all depends on the soil composition. Additionally, because the beds are warmer and if metal sides are used plants may burn, so

additional water may be needed. Finally, the initial cost of establishing the beds can be quite high unless suitable recycled materials are available.

### Building your beds

Raised beds can be built with a variety of materials e.g., timber, metal, wicker. Sophie from Gardening Australia shows how to use an intermediate bulk container (IBC) to make two beds. She makes them as wicking beds that only need weekly watering

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=obNWr8MD0uU>). If you use timber be sure it is not treated and as mentioned above, metal containers may get hot. Make beds no wider than two arm's length so you can reach the middle but if against a wall, only one arm's length. Leave enough space between beds to allow a wheelbarrow when weeding or adding mulch or a lawnmower if needed. Finally fill your beds with the best soil you can afford, compost, manures, and top with mulch.



John's raised beds



Amanda's raised beds

Sources:

[https://birdiesgardenproducts.com.au/benefits-raised-garden-](https://birdiesgardenproducts.com.au/benefits-raised-garden-bed/)

[bed/https://www.theseedcollection.com.au/blog/the-pros-and-cons-of-a-raised-garden-bed/](https://www.theseedcollection.com.au/blog/the-pros-and-cons-of-a-raised-garden-bed/)

<https://learn.eartheasy.com/guides/raised-garden-beds/>

### **QPRC preparing to increase Resilience to Climate Change** by John Tuckwell

Queanbeyan and Palerang Regional Council (QPRC) is forward thinking and looking to prepare to adapt to the impacts of climate change. In this respect QPRC has been successful in obtaining a grant from the NSW Government under the Increasing Resilience to Climate Change Program to undertake the project “*Keeping it Cool - Vegetation and Heat Adaptation Strategy*”. Including QPRC’s contributions, this project has a budget of \$50,000, not including QPRC in-kind contributions, over 2 years to undertake the following:

- Develop heat maps of the QPRC region, including detailed mapping of the three major urban centres (Braidwood, Bungendore and Queanbeyan). This will include an assessment of heat islands and 'high priority' areas as well as determining the role natural characteristics, particularly urban forests, have in influencing patterns of high land surface temperature.
- Undertake an assessment of the climate vulnerability of current urban (native and exotic) trees, including the development of a list of region-specific future climate-ready trees.
- Develop a QPRC Urban Forest Strategy.
- Undertake experimental planting of future climate-ready trees in identified 'high priority' areas.
- Develop and implement community and council vegetation and heat adaptation education/engagement strategies from key project findings.

Most of the project will be undertaken by QPRC staff and by consultants engaged for specific tasks. The project is being guided by a project steering group established consisting of key QPRC staff and community members. The Braidwood community is being represented by John Tuckwell in his role as President of the Braidwood Garden Club and a committee member of the Braidwood Community Association.

Further updates will be provided as the project progresses.

### Reminder:

Nirvalley Homestead Nursery still exists and is still open (despite suffering through the drought, bushfire road closures and of course this shutdown due to Covid -19 restrictions), and Peter and Caroline Campbell would love to see you. They have a comprehensive range of trees and plants proven suitable for our climate and will endeavour to fulfil your needs. New stock of bare-rooted trees arrive shortly including fruit trees, all in time to acclimatise through the winter months before bursting to life in Spring. Nirvalley Nursery very kindly gives members of our Garden Club a 10 % discount on purchases, just remind them that you are part of the Club. They are at : 629 Cullulla Road, Tarago, on the road to Nerriga and Nowra. (Turn east at Tarago)  
Ph: 02 48494481. They are happy to email their plant list which has pot sizes and notes on cultivation.  
Email : [nirvalley@optusnet.com.au](mailto:nirvalley@optusnet.com.au)



## **Another of my Favourite Plants: by Bronwyn Johnson**

### **Neomarica northiana (Walking Iris, Apostle Plant)**

Although I don't remember it, I must have first seen Walking Iris as a small child; they had been growing for many years in my grandparents' lattice-covered "fernery" at the back of their house in Five Dock. The cool shady fernery was always a favourite place to play in a steamy Sydney summer.

Half a lifetime later, I learnt more about the Walking Iris through visiting my aunt, who had pots of thriving plants on her sunny balcony near Newport Beach. After retiring and selling the old family home, she took the plants with her. Any admiring visitor would be sent home with a plant or two. In fact, 20 years after my aunt's death, a number of family members and friends still grow at least one Walking Iris from that source.

Despite a long family history with this particular plant, nobody could tell me its botanical name or more about its origin. My aunt recalled that a Newcastle relative gave one to my grandmother in the 1930s/40s, telling her it was an Australian native. My own doubts about this origin prompted me in 1994 to send a specimen to the NSW National Herbarium in Sydney. The report noted: *Your specimen matches very well with Neomarica northiana, a member of the Iris family. It originates from Nicaragua to Peru to Brazil. We have an old specimen that was cultivated in Dulwich Hill. It is definitely not commonly cultivated here but probably more so in the Northern Hemisphere.*

While it appears this plant has been grown by Australian gardeners for quite a long time, few people seem to have heard of it.

#### **Description:**

Walking Iris has long ribbed leaves arising from a basal rhizome in fan formation to a length of about 60 cm. There are usually 12 leaves in each fan, which explains the name 'Apostle Plant'. The stems bear scented multi-coloured blooms with three outer petals in creamy white and three small inner petals in indigo blue/white, both with a marbled maroon/yellow throat. Each short-lived bloom lasts only a day.

In the Braidwood climate a mature plant will flower for several weeks in early summer, some years more profusely than others. (A Sydney friend once counted more than 50 blooms on her plant over an exceptional flowering season, but don't expect such results here!). After flowering, plantlets start developing at the end of the flowering stems. As the plantlets grow, their weight causes the stalk to dip to the ground where they take root, thus the name 'Walking Iris'.

#### **Cultivation:**

Whether indoors or outside, with appropriate care these attractive plants are easily grown and reasonably hardy. Walking Iris are frost tender, yet will tolerate our climate in a shadehouse or on a sheltered verandah. Mine is in a large pot on an open, east-facing, roofed verandah. Any frost-burnt or blotchy leaves are easily trimmed off when vigorous new growth appears in spring.



Plant them in well-drained, humus-rich soil. Water well in summer, less during winter but making sure the soil does not dry out completely. If grown in pots, regular removal and division will be needed every few years when the expanding clump outgrows the pot. Propagate by division of the rhizomes, or by transplanting the plantlets which develop at the end of the flowering stems. Once a viable size, plantlets may be snipped off (leaving a few centimetres of stem). Sit the plantlet in a jar of water – when white roots have appeared, it is ready to be planted in soil.



# THE PLANT OF THE MONTH

By Kate Chinnick



## **Iris unguicularis (Winter Iris)**

- Native of Northern Africa
- Evergreen beardless iris
- Reaches a height of 30cm
- Flowers are white, blue, mauve and dark blue and primrose scented
- Flowers from Autumn to Spring
- Flowers appear low down in the foliage
- Cut back leaves in early winter to show flowers
- Prefers slightly alkaline soil in a sheltered position
- Propagate from division in late summer

### **What to do in the garden for June**

- Camelias are blooming so buy new plants now
- Older Hydrangeas may be pruned now - remove older grey wood and reduce younger canes to a good pair of buds
- Plant new deciduous trees, shrubs, roses and vines
- Lift Dahlia tubers, divide and store in sawdust in dark dry area
- Houseplants should be moved away from heaters
- Do not allow vegetable plants to dry out
- Prune Pome fruits (Apple, Pear, Quinces etc.)
- A winter spray of pest oil or copper spray will clean up fruit trees
- Shred prunings and add to compost or mulch
- Remove any broken or crossed branches from trees or shrubs
- Rake fallen leaves onto beds or compost - don't burn