

The Mosman Garden Club –A Potted History

The Mosman Garden Club, originally the Mosman Agricultural Society, was formed in 1943 to grow vegetables during wartime shortages. At war's end leader Frank Douglas found the members a new focus, home gardening. In gardening terms the group was grafted onto the sturdy stock of the well-established Orchid Growers Society and this became the Mosman Home Gardeners and Orchid Society. In 1948 the 'new' Society members held the first Spring Show in the Mosman Town Hall, their efforts supported by the orchid growing cohort's exhibits and experience and expertise. NSW Orchid Society judges ensured the standards and reputation of the Mosman Society and at first orchids inevitably predominated - in 1951 the 'Lithgow flash' Marjorie Jackson decorated the Orchid Princess with a lei of orchids at the Spring Show. An initiative in 1952 introduced floral art at the monthly meetings and this paved the way for a wide range of flower and vegetable displays together with professional judging standards for a variety of plants. 1954 saw the flourishing Society invited to decorate the entrance to the Naval Depot at Middle Head for the Queen's visit and one hundred members wired flowers to the arch and spread its carpet of flowers.

The Spring Show now attracted sponsors and offered stalls, music, competitions and made donations to charities. The Society also contributed an impressive exhibit to the NSW Orchid Society's annual display in the Sydney Town Hall but by 1955 the orchid growers started to drift to the more specialised NSW Orchid Society. In recognition of their contribution to the early days of the Society a section at the Spring Show and the meetings was kept for orchid growers. The Society, omitted 'and Orchid Society' from its title in the 1970s, and ensured its less dependent future with a coloured TV raffle to bolster its resources and a point score competition at monthly meetings. Annual dinners and coach trips gave the Society a social dimension and from the 1960s the Society ran the Mosman Gardening Competition until 1981.

Nurseryman and long time member Bill Englert started writing notes in 1965 for the Society's 'Bulletin' and these were so sought after that membership burgeoned to some 900 members as the Society thrived. It invited legendary experts such as Allen Seale and Valerie Swane and garden loving household names such as James Dibble and Bob Rogers to open the Spring Show or address the meetings. Members brought plants for the sale table and competed with their displays. They opened their gardens and the Society affiliated with the Royal Horticultural Society of London. This let the Society apply to award the prestigious Banksian medal and a Bronze medal for floral art. Several members met the rigorous standards and the 40th Anniversary Spring Show was a magnificent display.

In 1986 the Society was incorporated as The Mosman Home Gardeners Society Inc, Anne Sanders of 2GB opened the Spring Show and when Bill Englert retired well-known horticulturists Ross Bond and Don Burke wrote notes for 'The Bulletin'. Don Burke opened the 1986 Spring Show at a temporary venue and by 1988 the Bicentennial Spring Show was happily back in the rebuilt Mosman Town Hall.

The next decade saw the Society's 1943 Golden Anniversary and Kerry Chikarovski opened the 'Happy Springtime in Mosman' show. While the Show continued successfully for many years the ok redevelopment of the Town Hall meant a change of venue. The Christian Science Church could lend its 'lovely hall' in 1995 and Dame Joan Sutherland opened the exhibition. Nevertheless, difficulties finding another suitable and affordable space meant the last consecutive Spring Show was held in 1997, opened by Elwyn Swane. The Society moved

on to successful 'celebrity' guest evenings at meetings, garden excursions and displays, high judging standards and enthusiastic competition at monthly meetings. The Spring Show theme served as the centrepiece of the Society's weekend of 70th Anniversary celebrations in 2013.

While horticulture is the club's focus there is a longstanding sense of community in and beyond Mosman. Over the years members have replanted civic gardens such as the Joan Sutherland walk at Balmoral and the garden near the police station. The Society has contributed to projects such as replanting school gardens destroyed in bushfires and supported refugees learning gardeners' skills.

The monthly meetings are sociable, informative and entertaining as members hear guest speakers, share their love of gardening, form friendships over supper and gather cuttings and varieties from the 'gold coin' plant table supplied from members' gardens. The club also produces a lively and garden-wise newsletter, organises day tours of notable gardens beyond Sydney, plans 'rambles' around Mosman's horticultural streetscape and supports gardening projects with volunteer work and donations.

Members hail from many areas of Sydney as well as Mosman and there have always been some country members. The gardens furnishing the display tables range from extensive areas lovingly planted and nurtured over decades to Body Corporate layouts to tiny plots and balconies.