

# FRIENDS OF THE MCKAY GARDENS

NEWSLETTER

JULY 2008.

## Reclaiming the Gardens

Work has commenced on the re-institution of the old Bowling Green site into the Garden design. The new lay-out will acknowledge the long association of the bowling club, by maintaining an open, flat, grassed area where the bowling green once was. New garden beds are being developed on three sides and seats placed. Unfortunately, the proposed design has been



**Design for redevelopment of Bowling Greens**

modified by council as the result of concerns regarding safety and a shortage of funds. The current development will not have a hedge along Anderson Road and the proposed curved path and garden bed in the north west corner are also not proceeding at this stage. This provides the Friends with an opportunity to lobby for a stage two!

The good news is that an irrigation system has been installed within the garden beds of the new development. Hopefully, this will allow council to keep these beds alive and thriving. People using the gardens discourages vandals so we encourage everyone to visit the new development and to send us your feedback. We look forward to seeing the new landscape in Spring.



**View of new development in progress**

## Upcoming Events

Meetings of the Friends are in Winter recess and will commence again in September. But there are a number of things happening between now and then.

- The Friends will meet with council officers in the gardens on July 23rd . 1.30-2.30 pm Friends are welcome.
- We are meeting with the Sunshine Historical Society on August 7<sup>th</sup> to arrange a joint activity. Anyone interested should come to the Historical Society meeting at the Hunt Club. Check Society website.
- Saturday watering of the 'straight six' restorations continues. Anyone interested should contact us.
- We will hold a street stall at the Thursday market in September, so we are asking people to grow or collect material to sell. Plants and seedlings particularly welcome but anything saleable will be appreciated.

## Notable Plants in the Gardens.

### Strelitzia:

This genus is named for the wife of King George III, Charlotte Sophia of the family Mecklen-Strelitz, a patron of botany. Sources cite five species in total. Some sources give it its own plant family of *Strelitziaceae*. Spring flowering *Strelitzia* has only two or three species that are regularly grown in Australia: *S. nicolai*, *S. alba* and *S. reginae*, variation *parvifolia*.



*Strelitzia alba*

*Strelitzias* are closely related to the banana. *Strelitzias* are subtropical plants and originate in Natal and South Africa, but are grown all over the world. Their flower stems make wonderful tall flower arrangements since blooms are exotic; the spathe protrudes to a point below the flower petals reminiscent of a birds beak and head. Subsequently they are known by the common name of crane flower, birds tongue flower, and bird of paradise; particularly the orange flowered *S. reginae* var. *parvifolia*, the most commonly cultivated.

The differences between the species are these: firstly, the **foliage** of *S. nicolai* has broad, sometimes cut sectioned leaves – its daintier cousin *S. reginae* var. *parvifolia* has almost paddle-shaped leaves atop tall rush-like stems. *S. nicolai* is often mistaken for a banana plant when not in bloom. It has oblong leaf blades, round or heart shaped at the base. *S. alba* is the tallest, its leaf stalks are 1.8 metres.

Secondly, the less colourful *S. nicolai* bears 15cm, predominantly white and blue-purple

*flowers* atop banana like leaves, whilst *S. reginae* var. *parvifolia* has orange flowers with a touch of deep blue, borne on independent stems.

Thirdly, the **height** of an established clump of *S. nicolai* will be about 2 to 3 metres at full growth, and you look up to flower stems at the top of the tall plants. In contrast *S. reginae* var. *parvifolia* will grow to only about 1 to 1.5 metres high and flower stems emanate from the centre of the plant whilst the leaves form a wonderfully rounded clump that is as wide as it is high after about 10 to 15 years in the same position. They all like good, rich soil and have strong root masses making them difficult to divide. All *Strelitzia* are drought tolerant and prefer a warm, open situation in the garden.



You can find two wonderful examples of *Strelitzias* in the H.V. McKay Memorial Gardens, both in the southern section, on the railway side, growing about 10 meters apart.

Contributed by Helen Reid.

#### References:

- Brickell, Christopher. 1996. The RHS A-Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants: London.
- Harrison, Richmond. E. 1953 Handbook of Bulbs and Perennials for the Southern Hemisphere. Keeling Mundy: Palmerson North, New Zealand.
- Macoboy, Sterling. 1969. What flower is that? Paul Hamlyn: Dee Why West.

## WORKING BEES

The Friends have held a number of working bees this season, restoring part of the garden bed along the 'straight six'. Weeding and removal of excessive layers of mulch revealed a host of Iris coming up and a surprising number of plants surviving despite an almost complete lack of water.



We were also able to remove a number of palm seedlings coming up in the bed – a constant problem - as well as relocate some chivas inappropriately located in full sun. In addition we were able to plant out a large number of plants to fill some of the gaps in the garden bed. This included some examples of a lovely shrub *Streptosolen jamesonii*, otherwise known as the marmalade plant. Many thanks goes to Bill for sourcing these plants from the Friends of the Botanic Gardens. And thanks to everyone who came to assist.



Unfortunately, due to on-going problems with the irrigation system it has been necessary to water our new plantings by hand. Many thanks for the monumental efforts of Helen and Bill in the watering.

Most plants are growing and we have, so far, no significant losses. All in all an excellent result.

Anyone interested in watering duty early Saturday mornings should contact us for further information. Plants without water don't grow.

### THINGS TO LOOK FOR

Birds of prey nesting in trees in the gardens.

### CELEBRATE THE CENTENARY OF THE MCKAY MEMORIAL GARDENS 2009

2009 will be the centenary of the McKay Memorial Gardens. We want to celebrate this historic moment in appropriate fashion. Plans are already in development to join forces with the Sunshine Gardening Group and the Sunshine Historical Society to devise joint activities. However, we need the involvement of more people and more ideas. If you would like to become involved contact us through our website or send the form below.

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**Become a member** of the Friends of the McKay Memorial Gardens.

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