

ASSOCIATION OF SOCIETIES FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS

BRACHYCHITON AND ALLIED GENERA STUDY GROUP

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MEMBERSHIP MATTERS: Welcome to new member Daniel Cole (Sydney). Also to Henry Stewart-Koster (Moggill, Qld). Due to starting up a new business ----turning a hobby into "Rathie's Rare Plants"---- & other distractions, this newsletter is severely overdue. But noone was charged for last year. However, I will now put out regular newsletters & all input would be most welcome. Subs of \$5 were due in June, & an x between the asterisks below means your sub is due.

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DISPLAY: A dozen 8".10" enlarged laminated prints have been taken off slides to form a display for the ASGAP Conference in Adelaide in late September. Species featured include flame tree, 2 clones of *B. bidwillii*, *Thomasia pygmaea*, *Lasiopetalum purpurea*, *B. acuminatus*, *B.-x vinicolor* 'Clarabelle', *B.-x roseus* 'Prima Donna', *B. viscidulus* & the silvery leaves of *B. tuberculatus*.

PROPAGATION: The *Brachychiton* spp. collected in October 1995 have had mixed fates. Some seedlings of *B. megaphyllus*, *B. sp. aff. megaphyllus*, *B. viscidulus*, *B. spectabilis* & *B. diversifolius* have survived their second Brisbane winter, but many of all these spp. have succumbed. Several seedlings of *B. tuberculatus* germinated from old seed, but all damped off while young, or were eaten by grasshoppers, & none survived. Grafted *B. spectabilis* (all grafts are on to *B. acerifolius* unless mentioned otherwise) have done well, but *B. viscidulus* grafts die over winter. None flowered last summer except a precocious *B. megaphyllus* seedling only 2 inches tall. All *B. spectabilis* & *viscidulus* defoliated completely at my place, but some kept in pots against a brick wall at Merv Hodge's place kept their leaves through winter in some cases.

Now to plants collected during '96-'97. Seeds of *B. acuminatus* from the Burrup Peninsula in the iron ore N-W of W.A. germinated well, but many damped off. Some survivors have just made it through their first winter. This species

grows on very well-drained stony slopes, & is the most conspicuous tree on the peninsula.

B. chillagoensis from N. Qld. has successfully grafted on to *B. bidwillii* & *B. discolor*, as well as *B. acerifolius*. *B. compactus* from N. Qld., near Proserpine, has grafted successfully.

Merv has grafted some large-flowered *B. bidwillii* clones onto *B. rupestris* for an ethnic Chinese client. Chinese culture apparently values the bulbous look.

SALE PLANTS AVAILABLE: Grafted plants are readily available in Brisbane (\$5 to \$8) of *B.x roseus* "Prima Donna" & 'Jerilderie red', *B.-x incarnatus* 'Griffith Pink', *B.-x vinicolor* 'Clarabelle', *B. compactus*, red or pink clones of *B. bicwillii*, & *B. acerifolius* (adult onto juvenile). Seedlings of *B. acerifolius*, *B. discolor*, *B. diversifolius*, *B. rupestris* & *B. australis* are readily available, & *B. bidwillii* & *B. sp. Ormeau* are sparsely available.

BRACHYCHITON SPECIES ORMEAU: This species, not known when Guymer's monograph on the genus was published in 1988, is almost certainly a true species & not a recent hybrid, as the many seedlings raised in recent years have been uniform. Ormeau is on the Qld. Gold Coast area S of Brisbane. Some SGAP members had parked their cars on several occasions under what they thought was the shade of a large mango tree, while visiting a patch of remnant rainforest, until one day it revealed itself by dropping a seed pod. Careful search has revealed another 12 or so trees. Adult leaves are simple & entire, but juveniles produce a parade of shapes, somewhat akin to *B. rupestris*, but the palmate leaves have a solid centre, unlike *B. rupestris*. Flowers are a greenish-white, similar to *B. rupestris* & *B. populneus*. Juvenile growth is rapid. It is frost tolerant.

SOME MUSINGS ON FLAME TREES: Most complaints about *B. acerifolius* relate to their flowering. In suburban situations many are partly shaded by trees or buildings, & this leads to a tree which only defoliates (& flowers) on part of the tree. Most trees in full-sun situations flower totally with reasonable regularity.

Tardy flowering of seedlings is another common problem, easily solved by grafting on mature wood from a good-flowering tree. I have several seedling flame trees at least 10 years old, & none have yet flowered. A much younger batch of seedlings were mostly used as grafting rootstocks, but I gave 8 or so to my neighbour Les. One flowered as a 1 metre high 2-year-old, & is in full flower now as a 3-year-old. I'll definitely be using this plant as a scion when it is a little older.

Most *Brachychiton* spp. (perhaps all) are periodically unwilling hosts to the green caterpillars of the "leaf-tie-up" moth *Sylepta clytusalis*, which is yellow-orange with a few deep purple marks. The caterpillars

reduce each 'tied-up' parcel of leaves to skeletal remains. Another 'tie-up' caterpillar is more of a generalist than *S. clytusalis*, seeming to be fond of rainforest leaves in general.

KURRAJONGS
(BRACHYCHITONS)

The seed endosperm of *B. populneus* & *B. acerifolius* is 17% protein by weight, about double that of typical *Acacia* seeds. Several *Acacia* seeds are starting to be used as commercial bush foods (mainly as flour). Some have potential as vegetables also (immature pods). Several bush-food people have told me they consider *Brachychiton* flour tastier than *Acacia* flour (itself usually used as a blend to add flavour to cereal flour). So I asked Wendy Phelps of Longreach Bush Tucker, an attendee at the May '96 Bushfood Conference in Brisbane, Why *Brachys* didn't gain a mention at this conference. She replied : 'there are two reasons for it's lack of use. Firstly, the difficulty in cleaning the seed. There are also very few collecting *Brachychiton* as there is little demand for it. The second reason is it's similarity in use to wattleseed. *Brachychiton* is usually roasted, ground, & used as a coffee or flour, as is wattleseed....As for *Brachychiton*, I believe it has a unique flavour & has a place in the industry.'

A friend has a redder-than-usual looking flame tree when in flower. On inspection, the twigs are reddish instead of the usual brown-grey, so this imparts more colour when the leaves are shed prior to flowering. Merv & I are multiplying this form. Some trees also have orange flowers rather than red; this is more common in N Qld.

I see some purity fanatics in some Sydney councils have flame trees on their "environmental weed" lists. I'm prepared to concede it appears not to be native to Sydney, although it occurs to the near N & near S of it. However, how any large tree with large seeds (loved by countless predators), which is slow growing, late maturing & requires good moisture & fertility conditions to survive, can be seriously regarded as a potential threat surprises me. Better they concentrate on the small-seeded hardy pests like lantana, groundsel, bitou bush & camphor laurel. Even camphor laurel could only be a serious pest in an affluent country, with it's superb cabinet timber & leaves beloved of livestock.

LYSIOSEPALUM: See the accompanying article. Still the best small member of the southern "allied genera" for Brisbane. Mine are in full flower, as they are for most of the year.

Would the real *Lysiosepalum involucratum* please stand up

Julie Currey

With its mass of small mauve pendant flowers from hairy, rust-coloured bracteoles, the beautiful *Lysiosepalum involucratum* deserves instant recognition, yet for years it has suffered an identity crisis. Often sold as *Guichenotia angustifolia* or *Thomasia angustifolia*, *Lysiosepalum* differs from these closely related genera in its distinct bracteoles and its calyx that is divided to the base.

From the family Sterculiaceae, *Lysiosepalum involucratum* is a dwarf to small shrub endemic to south-western Western Australia. It shares its genus with only one other species, *L. rugosum*, which despite having less showy flowers, is also worthy of cultivation.

The name *Lysiosepalum* comes from the Greek *lysi-*, meaning 'loosening', and the Latin *sepalum*, meaning 'sepal' in reference to the separate sepals.

The oblong-linear leaves are about 2.5 centimetres in length, and are greyish-green and densely hairy. The delicate flowers, to about 1.5cm in length, are present in varying abundance nearly all the year round.

Under-utilised in cultivation, *L. involucratum* has enormous potential for wider use, particularly in cottage

gardens where its soft textures provide the effect characteristic of this popular garden style. It would also be a valuable member of any native garden or rockery and makes an excellent con-



Decorative mauve flowers burst open from felt-like rust buds almost all year round. Flowers are attractive in floral arrangements.



Lysiosepalum involucratum has enormous potential as a landscape and container plant.

tainer plant as a result of its compact form and profusion of flowers.

Growing from 60cm to about 1.3 metres in height, and to about 1.5 metres in width, *L. involucratum* contradicts the reputation of native plants as being straggly and 'leggy'. It is densely foliated and responds very well to regular pruning to maintain its mounded shape; pruning is perhaps best achieved by harvesting the

flowering stems for use in cut-flower arrangements.

In its native habitat it grows in sandy and gravelly soils, although it shows great adaptability by flourishing in heavier, less well-drained soils. In the wild it grows in open or lightly forested areas, so this wonderful shrub is equally happy in sun or semi-shaded positions.

An undemanding member of the garden *L. involucratum*, like so many other native plants, has low fertiliser requirements, and importantly, is a good water-conserving, requiring little irrigation except over prolonged periods of drought and during establishment.

Tolerant of most frosts, *L. involucratum* again proves it is a tough customer, despite its delicate appearance.

Another desirable feature of the plant is the ease with which it can be propagated. Seed does not require pre-sowing treatment, but is presently difficult to obtain, being only rarely offered by commercial suppliers.

Propagation is more common by cuttings taken from strong, new season's growth.

With the flowers, bracteoles and foliage providing a lovely palette of mauve, rust and grey, and with its dense habit, its hardiness and adaptability, *L. involucratum* has a winning combination of beauty and strength and deserves greater recognition as a valuable ornamental plant.

Lysiosepalum involucratum is available from Kurunga Native Nursery P/L, phone: (03) 879 4076.

References

Elliot, W.R., and Jones, D.L., (1990), *Encyclopaedia of Australian Plants*. Volume 5. Lothian Publishing Company Pty Ltd., Melbourne, Sydney, Auckland. 512pp.

Contributions

Hort Notes is a regular feature in Australian Horticulture.

We are interested in contributed articles. If you have any ideas, ring (03) 287 0900 to discuss them with the editor or send stories with photographs to PO Box 160, Port Melbourne, Victoria, 3207.

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