

GARDEN DESIGN STUDY GROUP**Newsletter No. 61****February 2008****Study Group Leader/Editor: Diana Snape**Email: dsnape@pacific.net.au**Treasurer/Membership: Bryan Loft**Email: bryanloft@bigpond.com

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Dear Members,

This year is the 15th anniversary of the Garden Design Study Group, so it is good to have two combined meetings between Branches being planned. One is the proposed trip by the Sydney and Canberra Branches to the Orange area in late March, the other a joint meeting of the Melbourne and North-East Vic Branches in the Wangaratta-Benalla area in October. Any member who can arrange to join in at either weekend meeting would be made very welcome.

The NE Vic Branch has been involved in assisting with the design of many gardens. Their involvement in that of Freida Andrews and John Lloyd was made much easier by the extent of the owners' preparation. They have thought deeply about their prospective garden and clarified their 'Vision' in impressive detail - a good example to us all! Glenda Datson has been very helpful with her suggestions for this project, as have other members of the NE Vic Branch. It will be a garden to watch with interest.

[Sue Turner and Don Wild tell about an inspiring development in Castlemaine](#), involving well designed, environmentally friendly, energy-efficient houses in an equally well designed, largely indigenous garden setting. It is the sort of development we would all like to see in place of those McMansions that are going up nowadays, totally oblivious to their environment and with no room for a real garden.

Margaret Lee was able to obtain a copy of Dr Greg Moore's address about urban trees from Treenet proceedings and I thought it was well worth including some of the address, including the statistics, in this NL. It is easy to forget or disregard the importance of trees in our own gardens as well as in the general environment and also, to a lesser extent, smaller plants. I think it's useful having some figures that have been worked out to backup what one already knows instinctively.

Chris Larkin and I have both been thinking about pruning, which we regard as an essential part of both maintenance and ongoing garden design. I'd be interested in members' comments on this subject. It's good to receive your lists of 10 reliable plants - please keep them coming in. The next step is to think of plant combinations that really work well, an important part of garden design. I picture combinations of about 3 plants but it could easily be more (or even just two that you think are particularly good together).

Please note Bryan Loft's change of email address.

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NEXT MEETINGS

Please see details of meetings and contacts on pages 17 to 20

MELBOURNE: Sunday February 10 2pm at Chris Larkin's

SYDNEY & CANBERRA: March 28, 29, 30 central west high country

around Blayney, Orange, Milthorpe and Molong

CANBERRA: please contact Shirley Pipitone

NE VIC: please contact Barbara Buchanan

Visiting members from other areas are very welcome at meetings!

CORRESPONDENCE

Trees, hedges and nest boxes

Many thanks for the newsletter once again. There is always something interesting or thought provoking. I strongly support your call for more appreciation of trees in the urban landscape. I think carbon credits may be beneficial here. If local councils can see the economic benefit they will be more appreciative. I was particularly interested in your mention of Greg Moore's topic "New design parameters for a changing climate" at the Landscape Conference. I was unable to go this year as there is just so much to do in spring. However your quote of his statistics for the carbon sequestration value of tree prunings may be very useful. I am on the PLEC (Power Line Environment Committee), which sets the priorities for power line undergrounding in SA and we encourage councils to undertake streetscaping in conjunction with undergrounding projects. Statistics like these are very valuable to us. If you have a copy of the papers, could I ask you to photocopy his article and send it to me? I would gladly reimburse the costs incurred.

(There were no papers published this year, so I suggested Margaret contact Greg Moore directly. She did and was able to obtain a copy of his paper . DS)

To add to the hedge info. - I like saltbush. I planted a saltbush hedge in Brighton on clay pH 8.5 several years ago. It has never been watered even in this drought and makes a great hedge. I'm trying to persuade my daughter just north of Sunbury to plant it around her house garden on the farm, with sheep fencing so that the sheep can keep one side trimmed and enjoy the benefits of the "bush pick" as well. Please let me know if there are any garden visits in early April this year, as I hope to visit her then. I usually come over for the MF& GS (Melbourne Flower and Garden Show).

I've been fascinated this year to have a pair of Eastern Rosellas nest in the box in the lemon scented gum just outside the kitchen window. Watching the young chick teetering on the edge - shall I? shan't I? for about a week was fascinating. It also drove home the advantage of hollows cooled by the transpiration of the tree over nest boxes, which can get very hot at this time of year and may be another reason it was half in and half out of the box so often. Kind regards, **Margaret Lee** SA

John Hoile - so hard for landscape designers - everyone wants a beautiful garden that requires no work - low maintenance in the general public's eyes means none. Also, nothing should die, grow too tall or too wide [an inherently subjective appraisal!], be not quite the same colour as it is in the book/on the label/in the garden next door or whatever.... . It's a relief John you haven't succeeded in bullet proofing a design, it means you have a flexible approach, open to new plants and possibilities, experimentation and a continued learning curve.

Maree McCarthy - well said and well done - you were the right person for the job. I guess that whilst the Mayor was happy to go public with his/her preference for petunias over the Aussie plants, at least the Council gave you the opportunity to create the bed and show fellow Novocastrians just how well these plants can perform and how great they can look, especially when planted according to a well thought out design. One can only imagine, in these times of low rainfall and the importance placed on sustainability by the community, how the Mayor would have defended the use of the extra water and labour costs if exotic annuals had been used. **Jo Hambrett** NSW

I saw on p3 of the Newsletter that John Hoile referred to my moan about understorey planting and mulch - it was in the context of things shading our smaller plants. He said that after 10 years he might have to replant with shade tolerant plants and thin out the overstorey. What we have finally done - after 9 years - is

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just that and so far it's OK, if slow. We also - or I did - took a deep breath and removed several wattles (dwarf *A. fimbriata* - "2 metres", they said, but nobody told the wattles) and 3 *Melaleuca* 'Revolution Green' (ditto "3 metres" - try 5 or 6!).

So a lot more sun and light gets in one side of the garden and we are going to be strict about growing bigger things - there are several trees that we'll work around. In the meantime, I've put in a new Blueberry Ash - so far so good - and the correas for shade are doing OK, if not fabulously - *C. reflexa*, *C. alba*, and one other I've got a blank about.

Re John's comment on legumes for understorey / mulch, sounds good but *Hardenbergia violacea* will of course climb and even one white form, *H. violacea* "Flat White", which is not supposed to, does. Maybe position makes the difference. The Tongs' at Foxground 10 minutes from us was in full sun where I last saw it and quite vigorous. Not at my place - shade and a bit slow to get going. I don't know *H.* 'Mini-haha' but I think the white one's worth trying as John suggested. **Gillian Morris NSW**

We've also recently removed our (second) dwarf A. fimbriata, for the same reason. We grew it the second time because we thought we could keep it pruned to size but we failed. However I've seen them kept pruned (continually) at the Australian Garden at Cranbourne and they look fantastic. H. 'Mini-haha' has done very well for us in a pot, though we did lose one planted in a bed. DS

DESIGN

Our "Vision"

Freida Andrews and John Lloyd Vic

John and I have spent many long hours discussing what we could do with the space around our house that would both "settle" the house into its environment and provide an opportunity for us to enjoy a native/indigenous garden. Over the years we have been planning and building the house, we found that a good way to bring all the ideas together (and we have plenty of them!) is to do a brief which sets them out on paper but does not in any way prescribe how they might all come together. So here we go with our garden brief.

The Big Picture

John has started to revegetate the areas away from the house with indigenous plants, the driveway in particular. His plan is to recreate a natural roadside. He has gone to the trouble of sourcing seed from local plants and then asking Park Lane Nursery to propagate them. The seedlings have been planted in areas all over the 5 acres but predominately away from the house. John's ideas are starting to take shape. We can now see that plants are starting to grow. If we could work out how to negotiate some sort of truce with the wallabies we think we have probably made a good beginning. Additional ideas will always be welcome.

Several years ago we spent a morning with Jenny Indian who gave us some big picture ideas. Although they lacked detail they do seem to have influenced our thinking.

- o We have tried to plant clumps in the driveway to frame the view and provide some interest.
- o We still like the idea of a path up to our rock.
- o The pond (our air conditioner) needs to go ahead and we have firmed up some ideas about that.
- o Have started to plant our wind break to the south west.
- o We would still like to use grasses and sedges.
- o We like the idea of a 'grevillea bed' between the northern end of the 'tennis court' and the driveway.
- o We wonder if there might be opportunities for other 'beds' - banksia etc.

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Guiding principles include

- o Indigenous away from the house, blending with native plants closer to it.
- o The house is passive solar design, need to be sure that the winter sun can come in.

Our “Vision”

- o Green outside the main windows - it is so hot in summer.
- o Need to plant something between the house and the shed which will tone down the clothes line. We do have some ideas about putting a wall there.
- o Would really like something to shade the front door in summer. Facing the west it gets all the sun.
- o We see the courtyard outside the study as bit of feature - how can we tie it in with entrance etc? May need to soften the walls.
- o Would really like an interesting (curved) path up to the front door.
- o Zones of the garden i.e. maybe the main native garden area is below the house with paths that meander through plantings.
- o Could we do something creative with native plants in the area between us and the blocks below (overlooking the lake)?
- o What could we do in terms of planting around the car park/back of the shed? An additional windbreak would be useful.
- o Would like a couple of paved outside areas that relate to the house but have their own sense of placement. Have 3 areas in mind at the moment - always subject to change.
- o Have ideas about placing garden benches strategically through the garden in places that maximise the views and provide quiet places to watch the birds - there are many.
- o The tennis court/walled garden. Sections of the wall at different spaces filled with native plants. Need to remember this will be the first thing you see when you come up the driveway.
- o Any other ideas?

A garden at Chesneyvale - some suggestions for the vision (above)

Glenda Datson Vic

The NE Vic Garden Design Study Group was asked to provide some ideas for a site in the Warby Ranges where the owners have recently built a straw-bale eco home which has won the 2007 Victorian Design Award in its class. The home sits atop the southern toe of the range with wonderful views to the High Country across Lake Mokoan. The soil is skeletal, basically various stages of decomposed and hard granitic rock (my apologies to geologists). Remnants of Grassy Dry Forest are scattered across and adjoin the site. Lovely old Stringybarks, Red Gums and Drooping She-oaks frame the home, whilst Calytrix, Stypantra, Rock Isotome, native grasses and forbs during this drought provide fodder for rabbits and kangaroos, some of whom browse a little more vigourously than others!

John and Freida's vision is: for green outside the main windows because it is so hot in summer; that the shed and clothes line be screened from view; that the front door is shaded in summer; that the proposed courtyard becomes a feature; that a windbreak be provided for the carpark; that the blocks below and the telephone pole disappear whilst the view is retained; that the area which was originally proposed as a tennis court becomes a walled garden which will provide picking plants and vegetables; and that quiet places be provided to watch the birds. They would also like a creative entrance path for visitors. They have started a windbreak and entrance roadside plantings and are keen to use indigenous as well as other native plants.

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Our group advised that: blocks of micromyrtus, the local *Hibbertia obtusifolia*, *Pimelia linifolia*, *Grevillea alpina* and clumps of local lilies, eg. *thelionema*, be used on the slopes down to the house, with existing stypantra and Rock Isotome encouraged; alternating drifts of *Lomandra* 'Seascape' (weeping blue-grey) and *Lomandra* 'Tanika' (more upright bright green) be planted closer to the retaining wall at the clothes line, with perhaps some low clipped dark green *Bursaria spinosa*; that Red-anthered Wallaby Grass be clump planted on the northern side just off the paving, and some taller tufties (maybe the local Dense Spear-grass, which can be cut back periodically to remove dead foliage) be planted into the rock scree mounds nearby; that the view over the water feature also contain clumps of Red-anthered Wallaby Grass, with 1 x *Xanthorrhoea glauca* and 2 or 3 *Xanthorrhoea quadrangulata* strategically placed there to distract from the clothesline; that drifts of Clustered Everlasting, Sticky Everlastings and *Dianella revoluta* and/or *D. tarda* be planted into the proposed rock slope area in front of the house (facing west), plus a white daisy e.g. *Brachyscome basaltica*.

The path to the front door could again be planted with *Lomandra* varieties. Pretties could be placed into pots around the verandah (number of pots depending on water availability) and, later, a structural plant as a feature, with softer foliated plants to complement inside the proposed wall in front of the house. The blocks below could be screened with Drooping She Oak and a mix of wattles (eg Red-stem wattle (*A. rubida*), Box-leaf Wattle (*A. buxifolia*), which cope with rocky soils and *Pittosporum angustifolium* or *Eremophila longifolium*.

The picking garden could be walled from the south and west with Old Man Saltbush (*Atriplex nummularia*) and *Myoporum montanum* to contrast, as fire retardants, and when Freida provides us with a list of genera which she would like to use as cut flowers/foliage we will then come up with recommendations based on site conditions.

Re Barb Buchanans article "Utility and beauty in design"

Jo Hambrett NSW

Such an interesting article, reminding us to think about our exterior three dimensional space [the immediate outside/ the garden] as we would a chair or a house - a 3D object that we not only use, as we do a stereo or a fridge, but are IN, our bodies [and minds] encircled by its boundaries.

A fridge that doesn't keep things cold is a failure [no matter how good it looks] because it fails to provide the service, FUNCTION, for which it was bought.

A work of art, 2 or 3 dimensional, is [subjectively] unsuccessful if it fails to engage the viewer in an intellectual and emotional dialogue, of which aesthetics, FORM, may or may not be a part.

If an exterior space [garden] is to be successful - or WELL DESIGNED - comfort and aesthetics or FORM, as well as practicalities [clothes lines, drainage, irrigation, play areas, dog pens, swimming pools and such like] - or FUNCTION - need to be resolved together, harmoniously. If practical needs are not met, [whether by inexpert placement and/or poor construction etc.], then the space will not work satisfactorily; FUNCTION, as a service, will not have been provided.

Barbara's statement, "to me, design is the successful and beautiful resolution of a problem" is, I think, not only in agreement with the Modernist C20th maxim "form follows function" but also [in that she refers to beauty as a part of a successful resolution] with American architect Herbert Bangs who, in his book "The Return of Sacred Architecture" states "As for the slogan, form follows function, if the supreme function of architecture and all the other arts is that of opening the mind to higher levels of understanding and awareness, the aphorism is valid only in a limited sense. It is valid in that the material functionsare the

parameters within which an architect must search intuitively for the expressive power, the beauty and the deeper significance of the architectural form."

In this post post-modern world I would add SUSTAINABILITY, what the thing is made of, to the judging criteria for success or not of an object.

Green roofs and walls from *'Australian Horticulture'* November issue

Diana Snape Vic

As global temperatures rise, I wonder how long it will be before use of green roofs and walls will be seen as an essential method of improving our buildings, domestic as well as commercial and public. Two articles in the November issue of *'Australian Horticulture'* gave me a little hope.

An underlying problem is that "All large cities have an urban heat island effect. The temperature difference between urban areas and their rural surroundings is on average 5 degrees Celsius." Green roofs provide the following valuable services, especially important in urban areas. They:-

- release oxygen and absorb carbon dioxide;
- reduce water run-off, absorbing 99% of a 25mm downpour;
- evaporate water, acting as a cooling system and significantly lowering the internal temperature of buildings, thus
- reduce air conditioning and heating demands and so save (electrical) energy; and
- provide habitat for insects and birds, especially when indigenous native vegetation is used.

A product called LiveRoof is a "modular system of green roofing designed by horticulturists and architects and prevegetated at a nursery over a 12-week period". This replaces a normal roof and can be used on a slope of up to 15%. Each module is molded from recycled polypropylene and filled with 93% inorganic media (rock) with a guaranteed lifespan of 50 years; it is drained and as the plants mature will eventually be filled with roots. This forms a real 'green roof' - an excellent solution.

Fytogreen Australia is a Victoria-based company which is producing a medium to enable plants to be grown in both elevated situations such as roof gardens and vertical situations like walls. The medium is a resin foam said to be "environmentally safe, biodegradable, sterile, inert and water-based" as well as non-hydrophobic. The company is now entering its fifth year of business and illustrations show the use of its product. To quote:- "The automated irrigation and feeding system is both rain- and greywater-compatible and uses 50% less water than standard gardens."

I think these are both exciting new developments taking place within Australia and even an issue of *'New Scientist'* magazine last year had an article on this topic in a wider context.

PLANTS

Tree Management for Carbon, Energy and Drought Efficiency

Dr Greg M Moore

Associate School of Resource Management and Burnley Campus, University of Melbourne

The following are extracts from a paper by Dr Greg Moore taken from Treenet proceedings.

The attitude of many Australian citizens to urban trees still seems to be that they are decorative items which are optional in the urban environment. This completely underestimates the many functional roles that mature trees play in created and natural landscapes. These functional roles have been underestimated in the past to the social, environmental and economic peril of those societies which failed to appreciate that the trees are assets performing important functional roles, often over very long periods of time. The costs associated with

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trees in urban landscapes are often well known but their real direct and indirect benefits are rarely fully valued. Economists, driven by the huge real costs of damage to the environment, and the costs of attempting environmental amelioration and rehabilitation, are only now starting to redress this problem and put balance back into the economic models. The impact of trees on the urban microclimate and city infrastructure are being recognized (Table 1).

The Kyoto Protocol has altered the political environment surrounding urban vegetation and should see the value of urban vegetation increase. Mature trees are significant assets to our environment and our society regardless of where they occur or whether they are native or exotic. A great deal of effort has gone into managing, conserving and preserving the trees.

Table 1: **Climate and environmental values associated with mature trees** (After Grey and Deneke, 1978; Anon, 1989; Harris, 1992; Finnigan, 1994; Moore, 1997)

Climate related values:	Environmental values:
• Shade	• Production of oxygen
• Shelter from the wind	• Fixing of carbon dioxide
• Thermal insulation	• Reduced soil erosion
• Temperature modification	• Improved edaphic (soil) environment
• Reduction in glare	• Protecting watersheds
• Interception of rainfall	• Ameliorating windflow
• Humidification of the air	• Improved air quality
• Filtration of polluted air	• Altering ambient temperature
• Reduced water runoff	• Noise abatement
• Reduced stream turbidity	• Wildlife habitat
• Altered effective precipitation	• Create ecosystems

Trees and carbon balance

Mature trees are significant sinks of carbon and sequester atmospheric carbon dioxide for very long periods of time. Should the trees die, the carbon which is the major element of their structure would be released to the atmosphere making matters significantly worse (Table 2).

Table 2: **Carbon fixed in urban trees in inner Melbourne**

Estimated number of trees in private and public open space in inner Melbourne	100,000
Average weight of whole tree, including above and below ground components	100 tonnes
Water content of tree (approximation)	80%
Dry matter mass of trees (varies so conservative estimate)	20%
Carbon content of dry matter (varies so conservative estimate)	50%
Amount of carbon sequestered in each tree	10 tonnes
Total carbon sequestered in urban trees of inner Melbourne	1,000,000 tonnes

If we take these calculations further, it can be calculated what effect pruning such mature trees might have in terms of carbon (Table 3). Data for 30% canopy reduction are shown.

Table 3: **Carbon lost in pruning mature urban trees canopies**

Average weight of whole tree, including above and below ground components	100 tonnes
Amount of carbon sequestered in each tree	10 tonnes
Amount of carbon sequestered in the canopy of each tree	5 tonnes
Amount of carbon lost if 30% of canopy pruned from each tree	1.5 tonnes

Given that pruning contracts and operations managed by local governments usually involve hundreds or perhaps even thousands of trees, it is worth estimating overall carbon losses for 100 trees (Table 4). Furthermore, if you **value carbon at AUD\$10.00 per tonne**, the significance of the losses becomes clearer. When these values are considered it becomes apparent that they could affect the economic value of pruning as a management tool, and could see the rapid move to underground services. This is especially so when costs for 3 and 5 year pruning cycles are calculated.

Table 4: **Carbon lost and its value for pruning 100 mature urban trees canopies**

Percentage of canopy pruned	30%
Amount of carbon lost from 100 trees	150 tonnes
Value of carbon pruned from 100 trees	\$1500.00

There is also growing evidence that there has been a general and significant undervaluation of carbon fixed below ground by mycorrhizae and the other microbes associated with plant root systems.

Drought and changed weather patterns

The current drought that has affected the south eastern part of Australia is unprecedented over the period for which we have data. It has been a chronic drought with below average rainfall month after month, and year after year. It is not known whether this drought is a part of a regular natural pattern that occurs over a longer period of time, as current meteorological data are too recent to reveal such patterns. There has been huge public interest in efficient and effective water use and conservation. Restrictions to water use have been applied to urban gardens, parks and streetscapes and these have placed the vegetation under considerable stress. There have been debates about whether trees – native or exotic - should be irrigated over the summer, and suggestions that perhaps the drought should take its course and consequently trees could be left to die. This is neither asset nor environmental management! Our knowledge of trees and particularly their root biology can be applied to effective and efficient management practices (Table 5).

Table 5: **Tree management imperatives at times of drought and climate change**

- Since absorbing roots are near the soil surface, use this in management
 - Plant trees in large mulched beds
 - Mulch of any type is beneficial, but organic mulches have much to offer
 - Large old trees must use significant amounts of water
 - A few irrigations over summer will see trees through the driest periods of the year
 - Focus on younger trees so that there are new generations of trees for the future
 - Select trees wisely for the particular landscape role that is intended
 - Consider water efficiency as part of any urban tree management program
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Mature trees will have a significant place in urban landscapes of the future and they must be managed to ensure that they remain healthy and fulfil the full potential of their lifespans. Through recognizing tree structure, appropriate space must be provided for their canopies and root systems. This will reduce human interference with root systems in particular, leading to healthier, longer lived trees and lowered maintenance costs. Larger spaces to accommodate trees must be a part of sustainable urban design. Use of mulch must be an integral part of proper design.

As climate changes, the impact of vegetation on stormwater runoff could save billions of dollars in infrastructure costs to Australia's cities. Trees not only hold rainwater on their canopies but, through transpiration, reduce significantly the volume of water entering drains. Estimates suggest that trees may hold up to 40% of the rain water that impacts on them and that as little as 40% of water striking trees may enter drains.

Reliable plants

10 indigenous plants to trust [ie: will I still love them in the morning?]

Jo Hambrett NSW

1. Blueberry Ash
2. Aracaurias [*A. bidwillii* and *A. cunninghamia*]
3. *Lomandara longifolia*
4. Dianellas
5. Pomaderris
6. Lomatia
7. Phebaliums, phebaliums, phebaliums
8. Prostanthera [like a bit of a drink, a good flag plant - lets you know when the soil is drying out]
9. *Backhousia myrtifolia* - very beautiful in November
10. Kangaroo Grass and poas.

The article 'Save those trees' (NL60p8) was incredibly informative and made me feel glad I have planted so many and made me love them all the more - despite the small fortune spent in pruning, lopping etc and the hours spent picking up sticks and bark and raking leaves!!

Article on 'Hedging and coppicing' (NL60p11) - As you said Diana, great to see research being carried out on Australian plants in these two areas; but, whatever happened to: Lillypillies [*Acmena* and *Syzygium* sp.], *Callitris* sp., *Melaleuca* sp., Blueberry Ash [*Elaeocarpus reticulatus*], grevilleas, Chefs Cap *Correa* and phebaliums - I can vouch for the absolute robustness and hedgeworthiness of them all.

I think he was experimenting with less tried and true plants. DS

10 reliable plants

Suellen & Brian Harris NSW

We garden under gum trees (a topic already discussed) but we have no option so all plants are shrubs except one.

Acmena smithii minor

Prostanthera ovalifolia

Prostanthera incisa

Correa glabra (yellow)

Correa 'Marions Marvel'
Syzygium 'Pink Cascade'
Westringia fruticosa 'Sea Mist', 'Wynyabbie Gem'
Grevillea 'Pink Lady' (low growing)
Grevillea 'Honey Gem' (don't let it get tall and leggy)
Grevillea 'Pink Pixie'
Myoporum parvifolium
Brachyscome spp
Scaevola aemula (it suckers beautifully)

All these plants are performing well in most soil conditions (soil is variable but mostly sandy with improvements) but we all have deaths from time to time. Sorry, but there's more than 10!

On another topic, I'd like to say a few words to Maree McCarthy for persevering with the Newcastle Town Hall gardens. They looked a treat and should be even better now. Keep plugging away as change is not always bad but different. Some people can't see beyond their noses.

(For a change from shrubs, there are a number of beautiful and tough strap-leaved and tufted plants that grow very well under gum trees, including dianellas, lomandras and decorative grasses. DS)

10 reliable plants

Margaret James Vic

Here is a list of plants I have found reliable in my Rosanna garden – selected from plants I've put in more than once the last two or three years, so I know they can cope with clay soil and the low rainfall of recent years. My usual practice is to give new plants about half a bucket of water twice a week through the summer for the first year. After that I expect them to manage with the water that falls from the sky.

Non-Indigenous

Acacia flexuosa 'Scarlet Blaze'
Acacia pravissima
Acacia glaucoptera
Grevillea olivacea
Correa alba var *pannosa* (pink correa)

Indigenous

Acacia acinacea
Olearia lirata (Snowy Daisy Bush)
Rhagodia parabolica (Fragrant Saltbush)
Atriplex semibaccata (hardy groundcover, never watered)
Einadia nutans (grows best in the shade)

Many of the indigenous plants for this area are marked on the list as growing near watercourses - which would explain why they did not like the dry conditions of a suburban garden. But I've found this group do well, even in my exposed front garden (which has neither fence nor footpath).

After reading the article in last Saturday's Age by a frantic gardener struggling to keep exotics alive, I'm feeling very smug about having a garden which requires so little effort and anxiety and gives so much pleasure. Today a pair of tawny frogmouths have decided to roost in one of my large gums, but I can't tell if they're the parents who nested in the next court, or their young.

Ten years ago, I would have chosen my 10 reliable plants for Melbourne with great confidence. It's not quite the same now. Climate change is affecting different parts of the globe in different ways and that also applies to different parts of Australia, with recent widespread flooding in Queensland for example. In climate terms, Melbourne seems to have moved many kilometres to the dry north-east and some plants that used to do well are now suffering from lack of rain. So, bearing that in mind, here are ten plants that we grow and which I hope will continue to prove reliable in future years in a semi-shaded garden such as ours. A few are indigenous.

As Rosalind Walcott said, it's difficult to choose only 10 plants, so I've selected them in categories to get some sort of balance. (I've cheated just a little by including various forms of some!)

1 eucalypt - *Eucalyptus behriana* (the mallee that occurs naturally closest to Melbourne)

1 acacia - *Acacia cognata* (various forms)

1 banksia - *Banksia spinulosa* (various forms)

1 large shrub - *Bursaria spinosa*

1 medium shrub - *Dodonea sinuolata*

1 small shrub - *Correa reflexa* (various forms)

2 groundcovers - *Chrysocephalum (apiculatum ssp.) ramosissimum*, *Myoporum parvifolium* forms

1 tufted plant - *Lomandra confertifolia* (various forms)

1 climber - *Athanopetalum resinsum* (Gum Vine)

Some runners-up

Eucalyptus leucoxylon

Acacia cultriformis

medium shrubs - *Correa baeuerlenii*, *Phebalium squamulosum ssp. argenteum*

small shrub - *Correa pulchella*

groundcovers - *Brachyscome multifida* (some forms, not all), *Scaevola aemula*

tufted plants - Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda triandra*) (various forms), *Dianella caerulea* (forms)

climbers - billardieras, *Hardenbergia comptoniana*

Some omissions

- grevilleas, because some old favourites are struggling with the water shortage and we haven't yet discovered the replacements for them.
- eremophilas, because we haven't yet sorted out the best one or two out of a number of equal favourites among these relative 'newies' to the garden.
- callistemons or melaleucas - in general, lack of water doesn't suit them.
- grafted plants, much as I love some of them.

I've got that . . . feeling

Chris Larkin Vic

It starts with a kind of itch in my right hand and soon turns into an overwhelming compulsion to get snipping. It can strike at any time but this year I found the disease particularly bad (or is that good?) around late spring - and I wasn't going to be put off by a plant in flower or about flower. When I talked to a friend about cutting back a pot plant with bursting buds they suggested I wait until after flowering. To which I said losing a few flowers didn't worry me; to which they replied 'you are cruel and unnatural'. This condition affects my eyes too because if the eyes didn't see in their critical and judgemental way that this and that plant would have an

improved shape, or be invigorated or sit proportionally better if reduced in size, then the hands might stay their business.

Pruning is certainly a reasonable response to drought conditions. Reaching forward and clicking his secateurs in a mock threatening manner one nurseryman told me 'this is the way I water my plants'. At one of the last Maroondah Group (Vic) meetings of 2007 Elspeth Jacobs was encouraging everyone to prune back their plants, if they hadn't already, to get the garden ready for summer. It all makes perfectly good sense. If there is less foliage mass to keep alive then the water available to a plant will go further to help its survival - and it will be ready to put on new growth when the rains arrive.

If my own experience is anything to go by, pruning is something you learn as you go along - doing is the best way to learn and to grow in confidence. Part of it is learning that most plants will respond very positively to pruning. The immediate effect may be a bit harsh, even unpleasant to some degree to the eye, but as with other aspects concerned with garden design you must work towards a vision of what you want to achieve in health, vigour, size and shape. I have just hedge-pruned the wonderful soft mop top shape of a dwarf *Kunzea ambigua*. The immediate effect has produced a rather formal roundish shrub. This appearance may be what some people would like to have all the time; if so then regular hedge pruning is necessary. What I'm looking for however is the reappearance of a soft edged plant and I know this will happen in time - in the meantime the look is not unpleasant but a little less in keeping with other aspects of the garden; never-the-less an interesting contrast in the short term.

For other plants with less naturally formal shapes than the kunzea mentioned, where and what to prune should always be guided by some clear ideas of balance and shape with regard to that plant - and that plant in relation to the plants around it. It is possible to prune to allow plants their own space to show off their singular beauty; it is also possible to prune a few plants growing closely together in such a way that parts of each are sufficiently revealed to enjoy the different foliage variations within what could be considered a total foliage mass.

Pruning plants to reveal their structures - their trunks or branches - is also enormously rewarding. We must never forget the beauty of seeing the bare under-structure of many plants revealed by the removal of lower, often as not dead, side branches. Cleaning up an old melaleuca years ago was like seeing the proverbial ugly duckling turn into a beautiful swan.

In making some decisions with regards to pruning it is like wild risk-taking or taking a leap of faith into the unknown. I remember many years ago now when Diana Snape cut a dwarf *Baeckea virgata* down to a multi-branching stump. Luckily it responded very well and in time became once again the model small plant she wanted - a plant the appropriate size to scale in with the surrounding garden. If the experiment hadn't paid off then Diana figured little was to be lost as she had already decided this particular plant was too large. The alternative to this drastic action would have been even more drastic still - the complete removal of the plant.

Effective pruning will improve the overall appearance of a garden giving it that well managed look. It will give plants greater definition and in doing so is likely to increase the overall sense of size of the garden, by giving a greater feeling of depth - so long as the garden already has a good balance of large trees, shrubs of varying sizes, ground-covers and accent plants.

In normal circumstances pruning is not a substitute for choosing the right shape and size plant for use in a

particular spot in the garden. For the most part it is not a means of keeping a large plant small. The real beauty of many plants is only finally revealed as they reach some sort of maturity; therefore to cut these plants is to butcher them leaving them looking sad and deformed.

Anyone who is already sold on the idea that pruning is an essential skill in maintaining a well-designed garden will tell you that this is probably the single largest job you will have after establishing the garden. It isn't a corollary to the well-designed garden, it is integral and ongoing. I use secateurs the majority of the time but pruning saws and large lopping tools are also essential tools. Hedge clippers too enable some jobs to be done, not just quickly and efficiently but 'correctly' in a way I've not found possible with secateurs.

This season I have been a prune demon, a pruning tragic and the garden has already rewarded me enormously for my attention to detail. As I have a very large garden the story goes on as there is still plenty to do with no end in sight. This is what I like about gardening - the ongoing engagement of different sorts with my surrounding environment, including the critters that visit or call it home, which I'm constantly striving to enhance and beautify.

Pruning Australian plants

Diana Snape Vic

(This article first appeared in 'The Age' on 24/11/07.)

Deciding whether a certain Australian plant needs pruning can cause misgivings; even when you have decided 'yes', two more questions arise - 'when?' and 'how much?'. There are some general rules that can be helpful in answering all these questions. In some cases the initial answer is quite obvious - if the plant is getting too big for the available space, if it's overgrowing other plants that are more important, or if it's becoming sparse and unattractive itself - in cases like these, it has to be pruned.

The 'when?' is probably straight away. This is often the answer, because once you have noticed a plant needs pruning, the time of year can seem almost irrelevant. It's probably better to do it then and there rather than risk leaving it and maybe forgetting or being unable to do it at a better time. 'After flowering' is an accepted rule but, even if you miss one year's flowering, no lasting harm is done. Times to hesitate might be either just before the winter's cold in a frost-prone area, or before the hottest days of summer. Tender new growth is vulnerable and you might want to avoid any setback, though reducing the mass of foliage before summer can reduce heat stress.

'How much' has various answers. Some genera such as callistemons and melaleucas can tolerate severe pruning, back into old wood. Others such as grevilleas often can't, though there are exceptions. In general for any species it's safer to look for small green shoots, or at least green leaves at axils, to cut back to. Shape the bush at the same time, pruning to where the shoot will grow outwards or in a direction which will improve the shape of the bush. If you want a formal look, cut back evenly to a formal shape. If you prefer a more natural appearance, cut some branches back lightly, some more heavily.

If an old plant looks miserable and must be pruned, I would follow the good advice (and attitude) a friend gave me many years ago: prune it severely, even into hard wood. If it recovers, excellent. If it dies, put in a lovely new plant - the old one is no loss.

Not all mature plants need pruning - if size, shape and density are pleasing from year to year, spare the

(sharp) secateurs. In addition, pruning may not help a plant achieve a more compact form if it's growing in shade when it really prefers full sun. Beautiful young plants pose a challenge to the would-be pruner too. However early pruning can be important in determining the plant's structure in later life, helping keep its major branches relatively close together rather than widely spaced. So tip pruning is recommended for this purpose, pinching out the leading shoot (or shoots) from an early age, even straight after planting.

Fast-growing plants such as acacias will respond well to pruning each year, following the formula one third (of the branches) by one third (of their length). Some eucalypts and banksias can even be 'pruned' or coppiced back to ground level because they have structures called lignotubers from which new branches will grow. In the natural environment, fire, storms, wind, drought, frost, insects and marsupials do the pruning, so our plants are accustomed to it. To maintain healthy, attractive Australian plants, we also need to prune!

GARDENS

The Munro Court story from Castlemaine

Sue Turner and Don Wild Vic

(This article was first published in 'Growing Australian', the APS Victoria Newsletter, December 2007.)

In September this year a large group of the participants at the quarterly meeting of the Australian Plant Society visited our housing development in Castlemaine. As a result of their enthusiasm for what they saw Philip Robinson asked me to write down the story of how this came to be - a cluster of new houses with a difference.

For many years we have been appalled by the housing developments that have sprung up all over Victoria - the design of the houses and the contents of the gardens show very little regard for the climate of this state or the diminishing supply of water. We were keen to show that new houses can be built to make the most of the free energy from the sun to heat them and to be surrounded by gardens that need very little water.

In 2001 we purchased 7 freehold titles that had been created from an old Vic Roads depot in Castlemaine. They were arranged in a formal court layout with a conventional T- shaped roadway - very suburban looking. All services were underground and there were a few mature native trees on the perimeter.

We employed Sam Cox who had trained with the renowned Gordon Ford of Eltham, to develop the landscape plan of the whole area as one garden. We wanted the houses, when they were completed, to be immersed into their surroundings with minimal impact.

To start, Sam moved in soil to create mounds between the house sites that were then heavily mulched and planted with indigenous species sourced from the Goldfields area. We did not limit ourselves strictly to the Castlemaine flora but, with the help of Marilyn Sprague of the Goldfields Regeneration Nursery, used plants suitable for the severe frosts in this low lying area and the long hot dry summers of Central Victoria. It was also important not to block sun out on the north of the houses and to choose plants that would form dense blocks of greenery to give privacy around each house.

At this stage we were very fortunate to find Robyn Gibson and Paul Hassall, young building designers who had recently set up their business 'Lifehouse Design' in Castlemaine. They specialise in designing environmentally responsible buildings and seek to promote the environmental, social and cost benefits of energy efficient passive solar design. We commissioned them to develop a concept for the houses that was

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simple, subtle and timeless in style. They really understood the vision we had and the importance of the landscaping component of the overall plan.

All houses were to incorporate passive solar design principles and active environmentally responsible elements such as solar hot water, water tanks, water recycling and grid interactive generation of power. We also wanted these houses to have minimal impact on the environment - they are small by today's norm, filled with light and cleverly designed so there is no wasted space which is expensive to heat and they all have huge amounts of built in storage. We also aimed to use materials with low embodied energy, low toxicity and designed them to be suitable for residents gradually losing agility and ability - ie no steps, wide doors for future trolleys or wheelchairs, easy access to showers etc. There is a minimum of external hard-paved areas at doorways and all paths and driveways are permeable gravel, not concrete, so that all rain that does fall soaks into the earth for the plants instead of running off-site into storm water drains.

The first house was started late in 2002. We had many well attended open days to show the concept and to sell the first house - back then we were considered a bit odd as the mainstream press was not talking about sustainability and climate change, and the gardens were just a sea of 1500 tiny tube stock plants in blue and white milk cartons as tree guards. It was hard for most people to see the finished project. Robyn and Paul, the designers of the houses, endorsed our project by deciding to move into the second house and then put Munro Court "on the map" by winning Best Sustainable House in Victoria in that year's Master Builders Awards.

Houses three, four and five were built "off the plan" for Melbourne people aged from 50 to 80+ moving into the town. We now live in house six and there are two more to build, hopefully in 2008, to finish the project. The gardens are now maturing and our privacy is increasing every year - we only have fences at the sides or rear for those with dogs and the massed plantings now act as green fences between the homes.

The last major task is the restoration of a creek area that runs alongside the original land. We purchased this patch of wasteland and did a complicated subdivision - a "cut and paste" - that added a bit of extra land to three of the blocks on the east side and created an eighth house site. There is a watercourse running through this area that we are gradually ridding of blackberry, gorse, hawthorn, willows and phalaris, after first removing lots of hard rubbish including old wheel barrows and a washing machine. We have set up a communal vegetable patch there and created some more mounds with native plants to block out the view of the neighbouring houses.

Regeneration of the river red gums has already started and gradually we are planting the creek banks with native species and battling with the grasses that are thriving now that the thick blackberry blanket is much diminished. We are now visited by ducks and frogs when it does occasionally rain - hopefully in years to come when the thirsty willows have all gone, the creek may hold permanent water again and more native birds will make this semi rural corner of Castlemaine their home.

BOOKS

Only one book was mentioned in this Newsletter:

"The Return of Sacred Architecture" by Herbert Bangs

Is this another sign of our busy and stressed lives? Have you read a (garden and/or design) book lately?

SNIPPETS

'*Australian Horticulture*' November issue

Once again there are a number of articles of interest. See '**Green roofs and walls**' page 7.

- **Desert Park at Alice Springs**

One article describes the wonderful Desert Park at Alice Springs. If you have already visited it, you will know just how beautiful, educational and inspirational it is. If not, and you visit Alice Springs, make sure it is near the top of your to-do list.

- **Plants with green to creamy-green flowers**

Gwen Elliot's article is on plants with green to creamy-green flowers, attractive to nectar-feeding birds. These include examples from among correas (5 species), grevilleas (also 5 species), boronias and anigozanthos. Inconspicuous to humans and so sometimes neglected in gardens, they are magnets for honeyeaters.

- **Provenance of propagation material**

Many of us have probably thought about this important topic. This article discusses in some detail the significance of the provenance of propagation material when natural areas are being revegetated.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

MEETINGS

Melbourne Branch meetings

Chris Larkin Vic

Next meeting - Sunday Feb 10

Meet at my place at 2pm. Entry is via Provence Drive, Lysterfield, which is a new road only to be located on the last couple of editions of Melway - ref 82 H2. If you do not have a recent copy of the Melway then simply enter Major Crescent off Kelletts Road closest to Wellington Road.

The business of the meeting will be twofold: to look at recent changes to the garden as the end of the structural work involving the bobcat is now complete; and to discuss plans and plants for the garden at the Thomas Embling Hospital at Fairfield. Please bring an umbrella to protect yourself from the sun, or if we are really lucky the rain.

Please phone me _____ to let me know you are coming and if necessary we can discuss directions and parking inside the property. It would be good to see a big turn up for the first meeting for the year.

Proposed dates and activities for the year

May 4 or 25 - Visit to Glaxo, Bayswater (We unfortunately had to cancel this visit last year. I did however have a private tour of the garden and it was looking very impressive indeed with its great use of complementary groundcovers and careful plant selection.)

Spring meeting probably **October 18 & 19**, Wangaratta to celebrate with our country cousins the 15th birthday of the Garden Design Study Group.

Nov/Dec - Xmas break-up at the George Pentland Gardens, Frankston

Report of last Melbourne meeting - Nov 25, 2007

We met for lunch at Karwarra Garden only to find it does not open on Sundays until 1pm. No big deal, as they say, we took folding chairs out of our cars and set up a friendship circle under some large trees in the neighbouring parkland. We had lunch followed by a meeting where ideas for the next year's meetings were

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discussed. Diana had been approached (via Paul Kennedy) for the Group to lend a hand in designing a section of garden at the Thomas Embling Hospital, Fairfield. A few of us will visit there in January and discussion on this matter will occur at our first meeting. Nicky Zarer - always one for dates and anniversaries - is back after years living in the UK - welcome home. She brought our attention to the fact that it will be the Group's 15th anniversary this year. We have proposed going up to Wangaratta to have a joint celebration with North-East Vic Group. If agreeable it would be good for us to see some of their gardens at their very best in Spring. Other meeting suggestions for the year can be found in the proposed dates above.

We once again touched on the topic of a possible future publication. This should give focus and meaning to future meetings and newsletter articles. Thoughts are still around small gardens using pictures to discuss what kind of elements might contribute to making a successful small garden. Members are encouraged to start taking appropriate pictures of their gardens or any others for that matter. Also we would like members to consider effective plant combinations and record them for future newsletters.

After the meeting we visited the Gardens. I think it would be fair to say that they are not so much under new management as in a management limbo without, so far, the appointment of a permanent ongoing care-taker to the best of my knowledge. These are large gardens and they need some serious renewal with plans and vision that makes the best use of many wonderful mature plants. Weeds too are a noticeable problem. Funding had become an issue so in an attempt to raise money a much improved and well maintained plant sales area has been developed behind the lovely gatehouse. I do hope the will and a way is found to return these gardens to their former glory.

North East Vic Branch meetings

Barbara Buchanan Vic

Next meeting: please contact Barbara for details

Report of meeting held Saturday November 3

A very lively meeting was held at **Glenda and Bernie Datson's** house with a good roll call. We decided to try a new system of meetings next year, concentrating on visiting gardens of design interest, whether pure Australian or mixed. We would have perhaps three trips a year, travelling by bus if qualified drivers can be found. My neighbour and Wangaratta APS member is happy to be one, but feels he should have a co-driver on such a long trip as we mooted for this autumn to Cranbourne. April was the suggested date with further trips in June and Sept./Oct. If we have any calls for help in designing I will try and gather an expert crew as required.

Since then the Melbourne group have realized that 2008 is our 15th year and felt some sort of activity to mark this milestone is appropriate and what better than a joint meeting in the North-east? This has been informally tossed around among such of us who have happened to meet, no-one wants to be showcasing their gardens in Autumn so Spring seems to be it. Jan and Helen are planning long trips, lucky dogs, and will not be available until October which is reduced to the **weekend of October 18 and 19** by other commitments. Everything is still fluid, if you have any bright ideas, let me know. Also I would like to hear of other qualified bus drivers and other gardens of interest. I will notify local members of our next meeting.

Our new format will reduce problem solving and theoretical discussion time but we should not neglect this aspect entirely. We have a project somewhat in abeyance for collecting ideas and photos of successful plant

groupings - picture making with plants. As we do not rely heavily on built structures and hard material, plants are our principal tools. Given formal treatment, i.e. clipped to shape, they can be effective substitutes for sculptures and urns, but mostly we use plant groups to build our gardens. With the advent of digital photos we should be gathering records - it is one thing to think of what could be interesting combinations and another to know how they actually work in the ground. The combinations could be based on interesting foliage contrasts and plant form, on a seasonal colour highpoint, or a succession of flowers to provide a point of interest throughout the year. There is still so much to learn about the performance of a species, or special forms thereof, in specific locations with all the possible variations of soil, aspect and climate. The Study Group has a potential future publication for small gardens, and our collection could be a useful base. We have actually talked about such a project ourselves.

Our booklet "It's Only Natural", produced in co-operation with the Wang. Council has become highly sought after and the council is looking for funding for a reprint which gives us the opportunity to correct some of the glaring errors that slipped through.

Discussion then turned to the Andrews-Lloyd garden. There was unanimous advice to leave certain areas as natural as possible with only indigenous plants added, which indeed was the owners' full intention. The courtyard (to be constructed) close to the house and the 'tennis court' area could be used to grow a wider range of colourful plants. I have a list of prostrate plants which I think was intended to create patterns in the flat area, or maybe generally, close to the house to keep the views clear. Inclusion of fire retardant shrubs in the windbreaks was also recommended. As the various areas are released for garden we will be happy to help work out details and suggest plants which will sit well with the landscape.

Seeing the progress the Datsons have made was a real treat. The whole aspect has been transformed. I wonder why anyone with a suburban size block has a lawn anymore. The sweeps and curves of the broad path are very satisfying and the placement of the modern stylish tall rectangular pots for treasures quite inspired. With her wide horticultural experience and contacts, Glenda has selected her plants carefully, been prepared to chase the chosen cultivars and used them in effective groups. It was a bit distracting for those of us who cannot ignore the collecting urge, but also a lesson in how to make best use of the trophies. There are some areas still 'work in progress' and Glenda did call for suggestions, I am not too sure we had much to offer. I look forward to following the growth of this garden into realising its full potential. A must for the October joint meeting.

Sydney Branch meetings

Sydney / Canberra Branch meeting March 28, 29, 30

Caroline Gunter NSW

A weekend away is arranged to visit the Orange Blaney Molong districts. This is a high altitude area of the Central West with attractive undulating scenery, home to pastoral, orchard and wine-growing pursuits. A range of motels and cabins in Orange are all in easy reach of dinner bookings for both Friday and Saturday.

We plan to start on Friday 28th about 1.30pm at a very new garden designed by Shirley Pipitone on the Bathurst side of Blaney. Afternoon tea will be in the quaint village of Milthorpe, possibly followed by a nursery visit en route to Orange.

On Saturday we view two extensive and different gardens out of town and one triumph of a small garden in a very traditionally planted area of suburban Orange. Saturday dinner is at a winery restaurant where tastings and sales are available.

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On Sunday we drive towards Molong to a charming family estate with extensive bush plantings. In the afternoon, should members not need to depart early for home, we have a chance to visit a nearby working winery, Printhe, as they bring in the vintage.

Anyone wishing to join all or part of this tour should contact **Jo Hambrett** as soon as possible or <tudortalisman@optusnet.com.au> so we can secure accommodation preferences and dinner bookings. Addresses and maps will be available when needed.

Oct - Nov 08

We are also looking at a weekend trip to **Gordon Rowland's** property on the North Coast.

Canberra Branch meetings

Shirley Pipitone ACT

February meeting Please ring Shirley for details

On **March 28, 29, 30** we will join the Sydney Branch for a tour of the Orange/Blayney district.

Our next meeting after that will be in **May**.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Bryan Loft Vic

New members

A warm welcome to the following new members of the Study Group. We hope you enjoy your membership and look forward to sharing ideas with you.

Esther Brueggemeier

Nicholas Bryant

Carol Guard

Jan Tibbotts

Pam Yong

Esther Brueggemeier is Leader of the Acacia Study Group. Nicholas Bryant is qualified in Horticulture and is also a professional gardener.

Renewals

Welcome back to all renewing members.

Kerry Artis, Carol Hogg, Colleen & Geoff Keena (4 years), Gillian Morris, Kris Schaffer, Joy Stacey, Jennifer Towell, Els Wynen, Alik Zouliou; NSW APS.

This is my last Newsletter before handing back the leadership of the Garden Design Study Group to Jo Hambrett. In 2006, I was happy to resume the reins for a short time when Jo found she had too many other heavy commitments to do justice to the task. I have enjoyed the last two years very much and feel quite reluctant to step down, as I did after my initial spell of 10 years. However I think it is important in any organization to have new leadership and new ideas and I know Jo will, with your support, resume doing a fantastic job for the Study Group.

I think there is still much to be done to encourage and assist good design in gardens of Australian plants. There is such a long way to go before well designed 'Australian' gardens are as abundant in our country as well designed but inappropriate 'English' ones. For this reason I would like to urge more members to take a really active role in the work of the Study Group. Each one of you can contribute something worthwhile - notes about your own garden, an idea about plants or design, a report of a garden visit, a photograph. Every contribution counts - thank you to all of those who have done this so well in the past.

My very best wishes to all members. I'll still be enjoying my membership too!

Diana Snape