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GARDEN DESIGN STUDY GROUP

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Dear Members,

Greetings again to longtime members and welcome to the new members who have joined over the last two years. A big thank you to **Diana** for stepping up to the plate and doing her usual superb job. As you can see from the header, the GDSG has a new Treasure/Membership officer N.S.W. member **Jeff Howes**.

On behalf of all members I would like to say a huge *Thank You* from the bottom of our collective hearts to **Bryan Loft**, our retiring Treasurer, who has worked tirelessly in the position for over 7 years. Bryan took over the reins from Peter Garnham in February 2001 quickly absorbing the extra work created as the Group's book "The Australian Garden", became a reality.

In 15 years the GDSG has had only 2 T/M officers, both outstanding and diligent, behind the scenes workers. Without their commitment, it's true to say, the group could not exist, let alone flourish, as the GDSG has done.

Bryan informs me that he will now have the time to redesign his whole garden - so I shall be expecting an article or two *at least* by the November 08 Newsletter!

So *many, many* thanks Bryan for all your help and a big welcome to Jeff.

Bryan has reminded me that it is **MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL TIME** already, so please, have a heart, and renew quickly so our new Treasurer's job is made as easy as possible - according to tradition, he will be in the job for the next 7 years! There will be a form attached to your Newsletter, whether you receive it electronically or in hard copy.

A final reminder will appear in the August NL to members who have not renewed.
Do please let us know if you wish to receive your NL by email and also please keep us updated on any *change of address*, postal or email.

Apologies for the lateness of the NL and thank you for your patience. Changeover of both positions at membership renewal time naturally took a little longer to bed in.

Another change that you will note in the next [August] Newsletter is a terrific new header design by Qld member Lawrie Smith – in order to mark our 15th Anniversary, Lawrie has created a new header which I am sure will meet with unanimous approval.

NSW Study Group leader

In the absence of any NSW GDSG member wanting to take over the above role – please do get in touch if you would like this rewarding job - I am happy to remain as nominal leader; however, I am afraid I am just too pressed for time now to take on the sole organization of our regular meetings and garden visits. The best way is probably to continue to do what we have done for the past few years and very successfully, whereby meetings are largely organized by one or more of our member[s] who have identified some gardens [possibly including their own] in the area in which they live. This format has proved to be outstandingly successful [South Coast, Cootamundra, Orange]with Sydney members indicating a great willingness to escape the big smoke for a country weekend.

I am more than happy to help coordinate and facilitate the exercise – I shall just need the ideas and ground work to be done by other members.

Win Main, Anne and Tom Raine, Maureen and Norm Webb, Sue Ellen and Brian Harris and Caroline and John Gunter can attest to the huge success of such weekends.

You will no doubt note that we haven't a **PLANTS** section as such in the Index of this Newsletter – please don't despair, there is *a wealth* of plant info scattered throughout the Newsletter – especially in Correspondence and the Garden write ups, make sure you check it all out.

We have heard on the grapevine that longtime member and very lovely plant person, **Molly Lau**, is making a good recovery following more surgery – that's great news Molly, all of us are thinking of you at this difficult time.

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TREASURER/MEMBERSHIP REPORT

Jeff Howes

CORRESPONDENCE

The Australian gardens at Cranbourne are fantastic - I was stunned by how good they were, especially how the clever selection of plants with grey/green/ foliage blended so well with every so subtle harmony. We did not spend long enough there for me (it was a cold dampish day) but will visit it again soon and just sit there and soak it all in, as pictures do not do it justice. The planned stage two garden looks very promising as well.

We attended the Melb flower show on Wednesday and due to those very strong winds we had to leave about 1.30pm as they closed it as it was dangerous due to falling tree limbs, flag poles and display stuff blowing around, quite dangerous. A pity, but Glen and I then went to the Melb Museum next door - very impressive.

On the way home we called into Ben and Irene Stocks native Nursery at Harden. { visited on the GDSG Cootamundra weeknd in 05} They have a great display garden and was pleased to hear that they will be opening in Oct as part of the AOGS. They have added a great new coffee lounge since I was last there - a great finish to a very enjoyable break from Sydney.

I have about 40 photos of the Orange gardens which I am placing on a CD to give to Jo H when I see her next.

Jeff Howes NSW

Very many thanks to Caroline Gunter and Shirley Pipitone for organizing a, once again, wonderful trip to view a number of gardens around this delightful area of country NSW. It was a great weekend, weatherwise, gardenwise and peoplewise. Can't wait for the next one!

Win Main NSW

I live in Heathmont, outer east of Melbourne on a suburban bush block & have a dry shady garden with clay soil. This is quite a challenge especially give our drought conditions. Fortunately, I recently retired from my full time paid work, so I now have time for the garden.

My husband Jim (manual labourer, not gardener) & I have recently returned from almost 6 weeks away. We did a 12day trip to Antarctica , scenery out of this world & abundance of fearless wildlife, but not much vegetation. I did photograph some lichen & Antarctic grass.

We also travelled from Chile to Argentina on Andean Lake Crossing & north to Iguazu Falls on border of Brazil & Argentina, again spectacular scenery. We spent 2 nights at an eco lodge (near Argentine/ Brazil border)in sub tropical rain forest. The property is staffed mainly by volunteers & finances from tourists assist with up keep & projects. They have a number of projects including plant pollination by humming birds. Parks & forest are not always easy to save in S. America & we did a bit by planting some trees.

While away we had house sitters who were not gardeners, but they watered new plants earmarked with coke bottles attached to plastic garden spikes. I also mulched well before leaving & I'm sure that this contributed to the garden's good survival.

As everything but a few ferns survived this testing time, it is hard to list only 10 reliable plants. However the indigenous lomandras, *L. Longifolia* & *L. Filiformis* stand out among the tufting/ clumping plants as well as *Orthrosanthus multiflorus*. Indigenous *Gahnia sieberiana* will survive with lots of TLC but is more brown than green at the moment. The indigenous *Goodenia ovata* too is often forgotten as it just survives.

Of all the correas, most now in flower, *C. Baeuerlenii* is outstanding. I even successfully transplanted an established one about half a metre tall to a really dry part of the garden. Other reliable plants are *Plectranthus argentata*, *Dampiera pupurea* (when established) *Epacris longifolia*, all forms of *Banksia spinulosa*, *Chrysocephalum apiculatum* & many forms of Callistemons. Last but not least are the Thomasias especially *T. Purpurea*.

I am interested in learning more about pruning especially for banksias with non terminal flowers. Should they be tipped pruned after planting out? What do you do when new growth is from the base of plant? Prune the top off?

Roger Elliot in his book "Pruning" suggests little pruning & picking flowers.

Hope some of this maybe useful for the newsletter & best wishes to you back in leadership of GDSG,

Pam Yarra Vic.

Thank you Pam for your kind words and most informative letter – can anyone help Pam out on her pruning queries?

Dear Jo,

Having made a list of the plants in my garden at Bingie on the far south coast which have been taken out by the bulldozer in preparation for building our house additions, I realised I have a list of fifteen (not ten) of my most successful plants which had been happily growing for at least 10 years. The conditions include a heavy soil with lots of granite rocks in the teeth of salty coastal winds.

They are:

Callistemon citrinus 'Endeavour', *C. pinifolius*, *C. salignus*

Personia pinifolia, *Euc. caesia* 'Silver Princess', *Melaleuca lateritia*, *Micromyrtus ciliatus*

Bauera rubioides, *Homoranthus flavescens*, *Zieria littoralis*

Grevillea poorinda Royal Mantle, *G. arenaria*, *G. curviloba*

Banksia integrifolia prostrate, *Eristemon myoporoides*

Callitris columellaris (my garden's 'exclamation point') seems to have survived, bruised but still standing. I have lots of plans for a new start when the building is finished.

I also want to thank Caroline Gunter for organising a wonderful weekend at Orange, introducing us to some absolutely spectacular gardens. I loved her directions to the various gardens on our trip and all the lovely descriptions of points of interest along the way.

Michele Pymble NSW

SNIPPETS

A wonderful piece by the irrepressible Doug Anderson in a recent Sydney Morning Herald – **comments, as always, welcome!**

“Just how awful is the Chelsea Flower Show? Untold fortunes are spent competing for honours at the world’s premier horticultural event and some of the fantasies that emerge beggar belief.

The Australian garden is generally imaginative and we have seen behind the scenes docos devoted to the effort that goes into creating the illusion of a Strine environment amidst the mud and slush of Chelsea – made all the muddier by the UEFA tears from Moscow last night.

This year’s sandstone themed landscape – a curvilinear deck with aboriginal background motifs and outback plants is explained by Jamie Durie and Graham Ross.

Can something as awful and kitsch be satisfactorily explained?”

DESIGN

Design categories of plants

Diana Snape Vic

It has always been difficult to advise gardeners from other areas on possible plants for their gardens. The only reliable advice seems to be "Look at the locals first - indigenous locals and/or plants doing well in local gardens". Plant selection is becoming even more difficult with ongoing climate change, especially in the dry (arid?) south-eastern area of Australia. In these circumstances, I think it helps to remember the design categories of plants outlined in the Garden Design Study Group's book *"The Australian Garden: designing with Australian plants"*.

By design category I don't mean a characteristic of the plant like the size, shape or colour, its foliage or floral display, but something more fundamental - the general role the plant will play in the design of the garden. These categories help us to think about what we need more broadly

before we zero in on particular species. The plants we need to take most care in choosing, the ones we should plant first and the ones we'll want to last the longest, are those in two design categories: these are the framework plants and feature (or specimen) plants. We should do our research on these as thoroughly and carefully as possible.

Framework plants usually come first of all - to outline boundaries; to edge a drive; to screen fences, sheds or whatever; to divide different sections of the garden. In a large garden they'll be trees or large shrubs; on a quarter-acre block, smaller trees and shrubs; in a courtyard garden, smaller plants again. We want to avoid mistakes with these plants.

When we planted our framework here over 30 years ago, we didn't know the term 'garden design' (though we tried to do it). The three different melaleuca and four different callistemon species we planted down our side fences in the back garden are now way too big - but we're reluctant to change them. They are still performing a valuable role and would take a long time to replace. We could try pruning them very heavily but, with lack of water, can we trust them to recover and regrow quickly? If we were starting again now, with the much greater range of plants available today (including indigenous plants), we'd try to make a better selection for the long term. (On the other hand, with single storey houses being replaced by 2-storey houses, perhaps we'll need those tall melaleucas and callistemons after all.)

Feature plants are normally used in much smaller numbers than framework plants. However they are placed in the most significant spots in the garden, focal points where we want to focus attention - beside a doorway, or at the end of a vista, or in the centre of a circular bed. These are the plants we hope will look good all year round, not just when they're in flower (and they need not flower). They'll have pleasing form and foliage throughout the year, with any flowers coming as a bonus, not the main attraction. Again, the size of a feature plant needs to be in reasonable proportion to the overall size of its garden.

Thinking about our feature plants (not really planned as such), we have a Tree-fern dominating our side fern garden (all looking very thirsty at the moment). In the front, a macrozamia (not looking thirsty) is a wonderful, shapely green form at the end of a short path. In the back garden, *Leptospermum polygalifolium* has over the years grown to become a feature plant in a central position overhanging a pool, while several different eucalypts each command their own special place nearer the edges of the garden.

Most trees will be either feature or framework plants and they'll take a long while to grow to their mature size. As with framework plants, the loss of a feature plant will leave a significant gap that

detracts from the garden's design and will be relatively slow to fill. With both these categories, the use of indigenous plants (if an appropriate one is available) helps give a garden a "sense of place". Indigenous plants may grow particularly well but, sadly, depending on how much the local surroundings have changed, this may not be the case. After all this serious thought and consideration in selecting framework and feature plants for the long term, we can start to relax a bit with the remaining two design categories. These usually involve smaller plants and more repetition.

The **ornamental plants** come next, often the bulk of plants in a garden. These include most flowering shrubs and creepers, many groundcovers, strap-leaved and tufted plants, from grevilleas and eremophilas to dianellas and lomandras. Though still very important in a garden's design, of course, they need not be quite as long-lived as the first two categories. They grow to their full size more quickly. If one dies, it does not leave a huge gap in the garden and can be more quickly replaced. So we can be a little more experimental in our planting here, without any dire consequences.

The last design category is that of **infill plants** (or fillers) which I think of as "easy come, easy go". Generally fast-growing, most are small plants though there are notable exceptions such as some wattles. Acacias can be helpful in a new garden. They can quickly give a screen or provide shade or height in a garden; they can act as 'nurse plants', while slower-growing but more long-lived trees or shrubs become established. When the permanent tree or shrub is tall enough, the wattle is no longer needed. (Of course many wattles are long-lived - these ones are not infill plants.)

Fillers include a variety of small plants, often available from nurseries in tubes. Groundcovers such as daisies, scaevolias and myoporums can easily be grown from cuttings so can readily be used to fill small gaps. Some last for years, some for just one or two, but replacement is quick and simple. I remember Barbara Buchanan advocating the use of daisies in a new garden so new plantings are kept as far apart as they're supposed to be, without looking too lonely. I also remember Jeff Howes using *Brachyscome multifida* as a repeated groundcover for continuity in a small garden. Daisies have many uses!

Grasses can also provide wonderful infill, especially when they self-sow, as our Kangaroo Grass and Wallaby Grass plants do. Pea-plants are legumes and nitrogen-fixers, pioneer plants in the bush and possible infill plants in the garden. Any plant that self sows in your garden can be used

as infill, for a massed effect. Some lucky people have Flannel Flowers self sowing - croweas, correas and grevilleas also may, among other shrubs. A final type of infill plant is the beautiful 'Joey Paw' we bought last spring, knowing full well it would only last for a few months (still, longer than a bunch of flowers). The enjoyment was worth it.

So although selection of certain design categories of plants for our gardens is a challenge that requires effort on our part (still enjoyable!), I think we can be a lot more relaxed about others. We probably instinctively take more care with bigger plants, which ties in with the above recommendations. With smaller plants, we can have more fun.

A Design Project

Chris Larkin Vic

The Melbourne Branch of the GDSG was contacted by David Ralph, a horticultural teacher who recently became a member of APS Victoria. He teaches students enrolled in a Certificate in Horticulture for Vocational Education and Training (VET) and wanted some help in establishing a large garden of Australian plants in the grounds of a hospital.

The garden we were asked to design has a northerly aspect with several mature *Eucalyptus spathulata* at the southern end. The terrain is flat and apart from these trees quite open. On the western side it abuts a broad concrete walkway that dissects a large quadrangle. Exotic plants have been tried in this area and have not succeeded. The brief we were given was to create a low, sustainable garden that would be hardy and look good. Additionally we were asked to use plants that students could easily propagate, if at all possible.

The process of designing started with a visit to the site. Diana and Brian Snape and myself met with David and another teacher to find out what we could about the use of the site and what it was they hoped to achieve with this garden. We took measurements, Diana drew up a plan and we used the last meeting of the Melbourne Branch to brainstorm what possible plants we could use in the space. Diana provided Colin Turner, Pam Yong and myself with the plant list, which formed the basis of the planting design shown.

Fortunately in this design no hard landscaping is necessary and the existing form of the garden with its curved gravel paths is pleasing. To the east of the garden is an open grassed area. Soil preparation before planting would be beneficial but cost may be a concern. Some features of the design are:

- repetition of plants for a massed effect in a large garden;
- * use of low plants throughout but particularly beneath the eucalypt canopies so as not to detract from the beautiful trunks;
- * use of plants with interesting foliage and also contrasting green and blue-grey foliage colours;

- drought-tolerant plants were favoured as watering is possible but cannot be relied on.

We hope that planting can be carried out in autumn now that we have (at last) had some rain.

Our Eco-House and Garden

Gordon and Marie Rowland

In 2002, we sold our Sydney house of nineteen years, and bought 10 hectares of partly cleared wet-sclerophyll forest on the edge of Wallingat National Park on the mid-north coast of New South Wales. It was one step closer to the vision we shared: an eco-friendly house and garden of understated beauty, inspired by the natural environment.

Our immediate priority was to upgrade the forest track to a driveway, and then to create a lagoon/wetlands from the wide, intermittent swamp/slow-moving creek crossing the property. We decided on varying water depths, from 200 mm (for wading birds) to 6 metres (for diving birds and as a retreat for native fish during periods of high temperatures and low water levels).

We also wanted to expand the treed knoll to create an island retreat for birds, about 600 mm above water level to prevent flooding; and we needed to adjust entry from the creek upstream to prevent runoff and siltation and to excavate a safe spillway downstream. After interviewing seven earthmoving contractors, we chose local expert Fred Atkins. Fred came highly recommended and had built the road past our property between the main road and the national park. He directed us to a nearby lagoon he'd built, that showed us he knew the difference between a hole in the ground with excavate piled around the edge, and the naturalistic water feature that we had in mind.

We then browsed the Royal Australian Institute of Architects website www.architecture.com.au. After speaking with several architects, we commissioned Sydney architect Kevin Snell, whose designs and eco credentials stood out above the others. To our pleasant surprise, Kevin told us that he and his wife had been regular visitors to this area for over thirty years, and they'd recently bought 10 hectares around the corner from us!

We discussed the house we had in mind:

- It is modern, unpretentious, low-profile, functional, energy-efficient.
- Bushfire safety features are integral to the design
- It does not follow the dictates of fashion nor the architecture of bygone eras and other cultures.
- It relates to the surrounding land and landscape.
- It is built of earthen/mud brick walls and weatherboard, with a zincalume roof to reflect heat, and plantation or recycled timber doors and windows.

- The centrally located open-plan kitchen/dining/living area, opens onto a wide verandah with overhang to screen summer sun and admit winter sun.
- For maximum solar gain, orientation is between 30° east and 15° west of true north, depending on land contours.
- The house makes use of passive solar design and through-flow ventilation, to control temperature and reduce the need for active heating and cooling.
- It includes a slow combustion heater, underground rainwater tank and reed-bed waste-water system.

After completion of the lagoon and driveway in December 2003, we were lucky to find an eco-aware local builder, the Sugar Creek Building Company's Bruce Brown. Bruce and his team laid the foundations in July 2004 and completed the house in March 2005.

We have since revegetated with around two thousand local native trees, mainly scattered along previously cleared sections of the north and south boundaries. These provide wildlife corridors into Wallingat National Park and privacy from neighbouring properties.

In 2006, we turned our attention to the gardens, starting with the south-facing front entrance garden. After deep ripping the clay base, compacted during construction, we mixed the stockpiled clay-loam topsoil with grit, horse- and chicken-manure and worm castings, and then re-laid it. To screen the visitors car parking area and provide a sense of enclosure, we next installed a timber fence and lined it with Natureed®. As you may be aware, Natureed® is a natural, fire resistant cladding product supplied by the House of Bamboo (www.houseofbamboo.com.au). Incidentally, the House of Bamboo installed, at no cost to myself or the Australian Plants Society, the pergola and the Natureed® fence surrounding the 2001 'Sydney Wildflower Garden' I designed for the Society at Gardening Australia Live.

During the laying of the house foundations, a buried pipe and electric wiring were installed, running from the lagoon, to beneath the house, the pipe emerging in the front garden. After moving in, we dug a dry creek bed from here. The creek weaves through the garden to the far end and around the house to the lagoon. It always looks attractive and serves as an effective means of above-ground drainage during periods of high rainfall.

With the lagoon end of the pipe attached to a waterside pump, the flick of a kitchen switch brings water splashing into the creek bed from a hidden 'spring'. From here, the water meanders through the garden before returning to the lagoon. It's a favourite with visitors, particularly small children like grandson Ben. It also cools the air, brings dragonflies and frogs – including tiny green frogs – and other wildlife, and it's an easy way to water nearby plants during establishment and prolonged dry periods.

After we'd spread a coarse mulch layer and lined the creek with crushed rock and gravel, we installed our first garden plant *Cyathea cooperi* next to the creek. Since then, we've installed many more plants, with more to come during the next few years.

To release the *genius loci* of this place, to achieve a *sense of unity* and for ecological integrity, we have opted mainly for local native species. (A planting list can be found on our website www.ilda.com.au)

We envisage a cool retreat from summer heat beneath a canopy of slender trees, palms and tree ferns; a garden of shrubs, tufty plants, ferns and orchids amidst a carpet of groundcover plants to give a sense of space; species repetition to provide continuity and pattern; colour subordinate to form.

Our objective is to inspire a wider, deeper appreciation of local and regional natural heritage, and to leave a legacy of enduring beauty for our children, our children's children and future generations of Australians.

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in seeing with new eyes. Marcel Proust

A Marriage of Aesthetics and Ecology

A talk given at the ASGAP Biennial National Conference, Newcastle NSW October 2007

Gordon Rowland

I'm a landscape designer with a passion for designing eco-friendly gardens in visual harmony with the natural landscape. I was born in England and during my early years, my twin passions were art and nature: drawing and painting landscapes and period houses, and visiting galleries; climbing trees, fossicking in ponds and paying more attention to my plants, menagerie and aquariums than to my despairing teachers.

After my release from school and following a variety of jobs, I graduated as an osteopath, opened a practice in Sussex and married an Aussie girl. We eventually settled in Australia with our three children, and I qualified, in 1991, in landscape design.

In a few moments I'm going to talk about five problems facing gardeners and growers today, and the multiple benefits that flow from using selected indigenous species to solve them. Before I do though, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of this part of Australia, the Awabakal and Worimi peoples.

The **first** problem is bushfire. Of course, bushfire has always been a huge problem, and global warming is likely to make it even more so. How many people here live in a bushfire area? . . . Are you familiar with plants that spread fire and those that retard fire? . . . Do you know how best to use them?

For native plant growers like ourselves, the good news is that many Australian species that are in other ways worthy of garden cultivation, also have fire retardant properties. These species therefore have a significant role to play in combating this dreadful problem. There's a lot more information about bushfires and fire-retardant plants you need to know, that I haven't got time to cover today. This includes a list of fire retardant species indigenous to the greater Sydney region; that you can find on my web site: www.ilda.com.au. On the main menu, click on 'Plants', and on the sub-menu, click on 'Fire retardant'.

Wherever you live in Australia, there is sure to be an abundance of fire retardant species that occur naturally in your locality or bioregion. If you live beyond the Sydney region and haven't yet discovered them, you may need to do some research, because it could save the lives of your loved ones . . . and your property . . . and yourself.

The **second** problem I want to talk about, is drought. As the world's driest continent, Australia is unsurprisingly home to an abundance of drought tolerant species. The good news is that these include many species of strong architectural form and high aesthetic value, plants that are well suited to garden cultivation. I have identified over 260 of these desirable species that occur naturally in the greater Sydney region – between Newcastle and Nowra, east of the Great Dividing Range – and that meet these criteria. Once established, they should all survive without additional watering, assuming there is some soil moisture at the beginning of summer, plus a mulch layer and protection from excess exposure to sun and wind. The full list of 260 species, appears on my website. Go to 'Plants' and click on 'Drought tolerant'.

As you may be aware, drought stimulates seed formation and therefore the invasive weed risks of drought tolerant exotics. This represents a further benefit of drought tolerant natives, and a good reason for us all to congratulate ourselves as ASGAP members, for being so far ahead of the others.

The **third** problem concerns ecology. Since the indigenous garden fosters biodiversity and guarantees ecological integrity, it naturally attracts a spectrum of desirable native songbirds and other wildlife. Depending on your location and vegetation, these may include bandicoots, bilbies, gliders and koalas, and small endangered birds such as the Eastern Spinebill, Fairy Wren and Regent Honeyeater, among many others.

By providing protective nesting habitat and an endless supply of natural food sources, the indigenous garden helps save these little creatures from possible extinction. An extra benefit is that the indigenous garden also attracts fewer sedentary, territorial birds such as the Pied Currawong, Noisy Miner, Wattlebird and others that monopolise artificial hybrids with enlarged flowers and extended flowering, and drive out these small endangered birds.

Indigenous plants also eliminate the risks of exotics and artificial hybrids that provide a haphazard mix of nutrients; plants that may invade the natural environment, pollute the local gene pool or contribute to the spread of the deadly *Phytophthora* fungus and other plant diseases.

The **fourth** problem is about sustainability. I doubt it will come as a surprise to most of you, that flat manicured lawns, and gardens filled with exotics, bedding plants and artificial hybrids are unsustainable. Most need excessive water, fertiliser high in phosphorus and an assortment of chemical fungicides, herbicides and insecticides to keep them happy. Aside from their ongoing costs, these products collectively contribute to the decline in wildlife numbers. They may also contaminate the soil, facilitate the spread of environmental weeds and promote excessive algal growth in natural waterways.

Conversely, the majority of carefully selected and practically situated Australian plants thrive without these nasties. They're also adapted to infertile, low-phosphorus soils, and respond well to small applications of low-phosphorus fertiliser or none at all. The well designed garden is thus a sustainable garden that looks after itself with minimal maintenance. Resurgent insectivorous birds such as the Rufous fantail, Scarlet Robin and Spotted Pardalote work ceaselessly to their and our mutual advantage, keeping insect pests at bay and eliminating the costs and hazards of toxic insecticides.

The **fifth** problem, if it is a problem, concerns the aesthetics of garden design.

Perhaps the greatest principle, and the one most lacking in the garden today, is a sense of unity. It is a quality found in all great landscapes. When we say that a landscape has been spoilt, we mean that it has lost this unity. Sylvia Crowe "Garden Design"

A predominance of indigenous plants in a garden will work their magic and help achieve a sense of unity.

So, as night follows day, the benefits of selected indigenous plants, as fire retarders, drought survivors, restorers of ecological balance, sustainability and aesthetics are clearly overwhelming.

BOOK REVIEW

"Good Gardens with Less Water" by Kevin Handreck

Diana Snape

How many of us (including me!) hope our soil is adequate but don't really know? Also do we rely on our drip watering system (when and where allowed) without really knowing if it is giving our plants just the amount of water they require but no more? These things are remarkably complex and it's easy to sit back and hope for the best without checking the facts. Kevin Handreck's most recent book is an excellent resource for any one interested in their soil and in water use in the garden. Published by CSIRO, where Kevin worked for many years, it is the first in a new gardening series. The book is 166 pages long, well illustrated in colour and full of facts and figures. There is an excellent index and an appendix with sources of additional information.

There's practical advice to help in all aspects of monitoring water use in the garden. The book provides information on topics such as different climate zones, the roles of different elements in the soil, increasing the organic matter in your soil (the importance of this for all soils comes through loud and clear), how to water-proof gardens, different types of mulch and the practicalities of irrigations systems. A lot of information is given in point form with numerical data in tables for easier reading. Scientific terms and concepts are explained clearly and simply, for example three types of photosynthesis (this was new to me) and mycorrhizal fungi.

I think to design a garden well in these times of climate change it is essential to have a better understanding of the soil and water that are the basis of good gardening. This book certainly enables the reader to do this. Now, will I follow it through?

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

SYDNEY Branch Meetings and Garden Visits

Our **Next Meeting** will be at Marie and Gordon Rowland's property {see the two articles above} on **Sunday 5th October 2008**, from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm. If you wish to attend, please confirm with the Rowlands by email, info@ilda.com.au (The 4th happens to be the Feast of Francesco Bernardone, better known as Francis of Assisi, Patron Saint of Ecology.) Also let Jo Hambrett know as well.

Directions: from Sydney, follow the Pacific Highway to Bulahdelah. 4 K beyond Bulahdelah, turn right to The Lakes Way for about 25 K. Continue for 3 K beyond the Sugar Creek Road turnoff [Sugar Creek Toymakers sign is on the corner], then turn left

www.takeabreak.com.au includes a good selection of accommodation near here. Select "NSW North Coast", plus Blueys Beach, Boomerang Beach, Elizabeth Beach, Pacific Palms, Seal Rocks or Smiths Lake, for the nearest.

Please, members, put this in your diaries now, it will be another marvellous country weekend away, in the tradition of our GDSG meetings.

Orange & District Meeting March 08

Speaking of marvellous weekends away; GDSG member, Caroline Gunter, her husband John and daughter Zoe, with help from Canberra branch leader Shirley Pipitone, organized a veritable feast of native garden visits in the Orange Blayney area of NSW on a clear autumnal weekend in March.

As Michelle Pymble mentioned in her article, Caroline did the most wonderful job of preparation for the weekend – her notes on the gardens, her painstaking research on the history and geography of the area and directions to the various gardens were beautifully written up – it was a joy just to read about where we were going – let alone when we got there! The number of gardens we were invited to look at meant that we were unable to discuss them at length after each visit, please feel free to use this newsletter to discuss the various gardens we saw – even if you weren't able to come, possibly the write ups of the gardens could stimulate thoughts and opinions for future discussion

Thank you to Caroline and Win Main for writing up some of these lovely gardens; the order we saw them was as follows: and, please note, I take full responsibility for incorrect spelling of the plants' scientific names – please don't hesitate to correct me – in the name of science and verimisimilitude!

CLOUDY HILL Blayney

Here we view a garden which is not yet a garden. Owner Fiona Johnson has engaged Shirley Pipitone to help complete the vision splendid to surround their new house and embrace the view, major factor as the view of the Three Brothers Mountain has family significance. Shirley has spent time on the site establishing the things that are important to the owners, the trees, birdlife, lie of the land, their love of the open space and the sky overhead. She has incorporated this into her plans with low plantings along the contours; she mentioned *Pennisetum alopecuroides* and *Swainsonia galegifolia* { the Darling pea in russet form } as two particular favourites.

It will be a thrill to go back and see developments in a couple of years.

Caroline Gunter

The HOUSE ON THE HILL Millthorpe

The original owners Peter Brody and his wife were happy to talk us through the garden despite it having been sold recently to new owners, Damien and Michelle Smythe. The rocky hilltop had been selected as the site for their new house and garden. They bulldozed out massive quartz boulders in order to make a level house site and then made use of the excavated rock to form gardens to wrap around the house. Various eucalypts and fast growing conifers were put in as windbreaks to protect them from the ferocious south westerlies. C.G.

DUCKPOND Orange

Duckpond the home of Lindy and Dennis Croucher on the outskirts of Orange is a gem. Ranging in height from 920 metres to 950 metres and with a view to Mount Canoblas this garden can experience a 6 degree temperature difference (in winter) from the creek area further down the hill to the top of the 2.2 hectare property. If you want to get away from frost aim for the hilltops, it works.

This garden is a young garden, the oldest plantings are 7 years old, some are newly planted and some are still under construction and in November 2006 it was open for Australia's Open Garden Scheme, as it will be again in January 2009.

Planting began in a wet winter and spring in 2000. Tubestock was used and the plants heavily mulched. Plantings are helped through the first summer with water, after that they are on their own. This area should receive 34 inches of rain, some of that being summer rain. The last 7 years has seen periods of drought, even so plants have survived and grown particularly well.

Up the slope from the courtyard were fine examples of the red flowering *Grev. rhyolitita* *Correas pulchella, reflexa* "Firebird" and "Candy pink" were all putting on a show. Callistemons, *Mel. incana* and the very beautiful *Grev. magnifica* will make a wonderful display in the springtime in this area.

The house looks over a dam which has various plants growing around the water thus creating excellent habitats for wildlife. Plants include *Carex appressa, Phragmites australis* and *Juncus* species.

An old *Euc. melliodora* nearby is the largest tree in the garden and an excellent specimen.

Local trees from around the Central West have been planted on the 'old' settlers hut area of the garden. These include *Eucalypts stellata, cremulata and bicostata.*

Casuarina cunninghamiana and *Leptospermum lanigerum* are also in this area.

An exposed area not far from the dam has been planted with *Eremophila* species. These include Kalbarri carpet and Maculata "mini pink".

Up from this area are more local trees and a number of Mallee species. These include *Euc. rhodantha, woodwardii, criessiana, lehmannii and lansdowneana.*

Recent plantings include *Crowea exalata*, all flowering well in another part of the garden. The beautiful Eastern Spinebill was enjoying the nectar as we walked amongst the plants. Thank you Lindy and Dennis. I am sure all of us would like to return to your garden again in the future.

Win Main Cootamundra NSW.

The ROBINSONS Orange

The marvelously excited and enthusiastic Sandra is true proof that one has to meet the owner/gardener! She has only just come to understanding native plants when she boldly began her small backyard four years ago. She has planted with a good eye to leaf texture and form and remains enthusiastic with their performance despite severe frosts and drought. She wades through this abundant display to find her treasures and has kept photos of the full flush of her flowering favourites. Her husband Owen is a bonsai and orchid specialist and as Sandra is a prize winning jam and jelly maker I sent her recipes to make use of Owen's rose petals out the front!

Caroline Gunter NSW

TORMALINE PARK Orange

To visit Ross and Pam Montgomery's beautiful garden we travelled through vineyards and orchards in the shadow of the ancient volcano, Mt Canobolas, which at 1395 m. is the highest peak between the Blue Mountains and the Indian Ocean. Often snow topped in winter, it supports snowline vegetation at its peak and heath and fern communities below the snowline. Ross and Pam have a business called Native Garden Solutions and Pam co wrote "Growing Plants for the Orange region".

They live on 17 acres, 3 acres of which is gardened. They came in 1974 to a bare block bar 2 beautiful yellowbox eucalypts. They started gardening 20 years ago, planting box elders and plane trees around the house. Subsequently about 90% of their exotic planting has been removed and replaced with natives – many indigenous and propagated by Ross and Pam and friends. The remaining ornamental [Golden elm, Chinese elm and Chestnut] trees scattered throughout the garden provide shade and form and are not watered. The soil is clay based and so raised beds were dug. There is a 90,000 gall storage tank, plus a bore pumping into the tank – the water is used for vegetables, stock and nursery plants. A beautifully clipped pittosporum hedge, well over head height, hides the tank superbly. The house was moved up from Wagga and is a most apt colour – the green-blue of nearby dianellas in the garden and also blending seamlessly with the distant hills. The pale presence of the grey [juvenile] foliaged, silver trunked, indigenous and endangered, *Euc nortonii* adds elegance throughout the garden - Pam has collected and sown 300 of its seeds. Also of interest throughout the garden were, the wild, Mt Canobolas pea, *Mirbelia oxylaboide*, as well as *Bulbine bulbosa*, *Hakea sericea*, ajuga, *Grev ramossissima* [for cuttings], *acacia uncinata* and *scutelerae*, a grass of the Lamaceae family which grows on Mt Canobolas

The numerous garden paths are edged with poa and correas and there are many vantage points at which to sit and enjoy the view and bounteous plantings.

Standard weeping casuarinas [as well as std banksias and weeping callistemon] flanking wide stairs which link the various pathways add their formality and a novel interest to the largely traditional bush garden layout.

One of the joys of garden visits is listening to the comments made by our members; Brian Snape regarding this robust and obviously happy place said how well a garden responds to pure air, good soil and plenty of sunlight – the comment struck me as a good one – especially the sunlight part – as a “shade” gardener by necessity and one that doesn’t used the raised bed technique, it is much more difficult to get such robust and bug free growth.. This garden did look so very “fit,” its beds spilling over onto its paths ...revelling in its space and sun!

This is a garden created by not only keen designers but committed plants people – it was too good an opportunity to miss! In an attempt to gain a little of their knowledge, to pass onto members, I scratched out a list of plants that Pam and I spoke about on our wander through the garden – I felt it would be of great interest to members with gardens in similar climates or who live nearby. As I noted previously, apologies for spelling errors and typos in advance! Certainly contact me so I can correct them in the next NL.

The running water feature, tumbling down to end in a second smaller pond and the large raised bed wrapped around it, is very successful , appearing both natural and attractive – not always an easy combination to achieve. Of course, in nature, it is an effortless accomplishment. I picked this bed to do an in depth plant analysis on – it is such a large and well stocked garden, containing so many unusual and indigenous plants that it could fill a whole Newsletter!!

The following plants were in the bed around the pond and rills .Unfortunately I haven’t the names of the very small bronze waterlillies that floated in the ponds – they were exquisite their size and colour both unusual and a feature in themselves.

Wahlenbergias, swainsonias, phebaliums, chrysocephallum, scaevola, hybrid Grevilleas “Ember glow” “Gold fever” “Bedsread” “Canterbury Gold” and “Wee jasper” as well as *Grevilleas jephcottii*, *alpina* { an orange and yellow spectacular}and *diminuta*.

Kunzea ericofolia cv “Snowman”, *Adenanthos cerisia*, *Persoonia occycoides*, a groundcover with magenta tipped leaves, *Sollya heterophylla* {white form}, *Eriostemon decumbens*, *Correa decumbens*, *Melaleuca decussata*, *Micromyrtus allinta*, *Eremophila racemose*, *Banksia robur*, *Thryptomene*, *Philothea salsolifolia*, *Viola betonicifolia* {the indigenous violet of Mt Canobolas}*Dryandra* “Honeypot”, *Darwinia nivea*, *Myoporum parvifolium*, Nardoo or “yellow buttons”, *Eucalyptus pauciflora* “Edna Wallings”, *Pia labilliardieri*, *Acacia acumentata* “raspberry jam wattle” and sterile *Penisetum alpeurioides* .

JH

MURRUMBEENA Molong

The houses and garden of Murrumbeena, on 30 acres, were originally created by two highly skilled artists – the husband and wife team of Marianne Courtney, [works on paper] and Robert Crombie, [woodcrafts]. John and Caroline Gunter attended their wedding at Murrumbeena and have many happy memories of the garden. Caroline says Marianne had “innate landscaping skills” so often the case with creative individuals. Linda and Tony Seymour have owned Murrumbeena for 7 years. It was a fortunate day for the property when they bought it. The 4 residences on the property [one the original artists studio and before that a shearing shed, another the original mud brick home edged with pergolas interlaced with grape vines] have been lovingly restored and sensitively added to – taking them to another level of elegance whilst retaining their simplicity and appropriateness.

The same can be said of the garden. Linda said it took her a long time to “take ownership” of it and feel she could “chop things out” that had reached their use by date or grown out of control. Judicious pruning has now exposed wonderful westerly views across rolling hills and paddocks. Near the main house, a rill, edged in rocks, sedges and pebbles tumbles down the slope into a swimming pool which looks just like a small billabong, complete with bulrushes and resident frogs – a graceful Chinese elm, arching over it seeds too freely and Linda feels that sadly, its days are numbered.

PRINTHIE WINERY Molong

Our last stop was the Printhie winery owned by Marianne Courtney’s sister and brother in law. Marianne’s artwork is used on the labels of Printhie wine to outstanding effect. Once again we found ourselves in a totally appropriate space – the outbuildings and the tasting shed are made of tin, wood and glass – with a true picture window cut out of the wall one faces whilst tasting – one realizes slowly that what looks like a huge painting of grapes planted as far as the eye can see, turning their autumnal gold, is in fact the real thing.

The garden leading to the tasting room is cottagey but bold – the plants used [most not native] echo in form, texture and colour, the landscape and the cloud forms of the big sky.

I can heartily recommend Printhie’s produce, suddenly I was sorry to be leaving for home that day – a long tasting amongst friends whilst surveying the view seemed the obvious choice.

NEXT MELBOURNE MEETING – SUNDAY MAY 25th

WHERE: Glaxo Smith Kline, Mountain Hwy, Bayswater (Mel 65 C3). You will be stopped by security at the gates and directed where to park.

WHEN: 1.45-2pm. Please arrive no later than 2pm as we must proceed as a group for security reasons.

Unfortunately our tour of these gardens scheduled for spring last year was cancelled but I was lucky enough to have a private tour with Colin Turner who has been working there on part-time basis now for around 6 years. I have visited the gardens many times over a 15 year period and I have never seen them looking better. These very large corporate gardens are now approximately 30 years old and many people connected with the Australian Plant Society have had an input into their design and maintenance. People such as Merv Turner and David Davie initiated the project. Paul Thompson's design vision is still probably the major influence on the garden although Roger Stone was also involved in design and maintenance. Compromises to Thompson's dominant vision have occurred in more recent years when other notable designers have imposed their ideas in some parts of the garden. Fortunately the maintenance personal, which includes Colin and Monika Hermann, have been able to redesign areas, develop others and generally work towards achieving a healthy and unified whole garden feeling despite the discrete challenges of different parts of the site. Indeed it is this kind of intimate knowledge of a site that is built up over years that allows sensitive gardeners to develop a garden to its full potential.

Please be aware that this garden is very large but it is a flat site. There is easy car access to different parts of the garden so that anyone who needs to can be driven here and there.

I hope that all Melbourne members will take advantage of this opportunity to see one our finest Australian plant gardens – an opportunity that is not available to the general public for obvious reasons.

NORTH EAST VIC. BRANCH

Report of meeting on April 19th 2008, in Benalla.

This lively meeting began with discussion of the programme for the rest of the year. The next event is the bus trip to Cranbourne on May 24th. This is now being organized by Wangaratta APS in conjunction with Shepparton and Albury-Wodonga and you will all have had the details through these groups.

October 18-19th is the weekend of the visit from the Melbourne group. The tentative timetable is for them to arrive on Friday 17th evening to fit in visits to 3-4 northerly gardens on Sat. and 3 more in Wang and Benalla on Sun. This should enable those who need to to head home Sun. afternoon. We hope to have sufficient offers of billets to accommodate our visitors, but this does mean they will be widespread. We need to arrange an evening meal and discussion time on Sat. evening.

I have been in touch with John Facey re a possible visit to the Bendigo area. This has been even harder hit by the drought than we have, but he found a few members brave enough to welcome us. Currently we are thinking of Nov. in the hope that they (and us) will have had winter/spring rains.

There does not seem to be the time for another theory and talk meeting this year. I have had a request from Mary Anderson for a follow up visit. She has built her house, but not quite to the original plan. With key members on the move in winter/early spring, the Eremophila visit and seminar, it will probably be only a small group which could visit Mary, but I will contact you later.

This lack of face-to-face meeting does not mean we should forget all about using our plants to best advantage. We should be on the alert for material for a book/DVD, as suitable relevant photos are never available when you want them. Our first aim is 'picture-making', or pairs or groups of plants that go well together, but here is another topic to consider, have clipped plants a place in Native gardens?

The discussion of space did revolve around my new garden. I described my original ideas and their gradual development from a very open cottage garden to something more shaded and enclosed. It depends a little on the time of year as to whether more shade or more sun is desired. I also ran through the various inevitable constraints, such as the sewerage easements, that have guided development to date. Then I asked if anyone saw any other possibilities and as a result the front area could be much modified. We then called on Glen Wilson whose garden has had a major effect on my thinking. Time had run out. I had intended to call for a rounding up of ideas by running through the general principles which had been/ should be involved in deciding the manner of using

available space. What principles do you invoke in the development of a design to use garden space?

Scribble down, or tap out, your ideas on this and the topics above while they are fresh and save them for a later meeting.

Barbara Buchanan Vic.

TREASURER- MEMBERSHIP NEWS

I have taken over the role of Treasurer from Bryan Loft and hope to maintain the same high standard for our 192 members of the GDSG. Hopefully there will be no problems as I settle into the role. If there are, please feel free to contact me –my details are on the RHS at the top of the title page.

If you are receiving the NL in paper format and would prefer to receive it by e-mail then let me know. Sending the NL by email saves time and money and an added bonus is that you can see the photos in colour!#

Jeff Howes

when your editor wraps her head around the technology that is!!