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GARDEN DESIGN STUDY GROUP

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Newsletter

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Leaders Comments

As the ANPSA 2015 Conference is just two weeks away, we are busy with final preparations and so this *Newsletter* may be a bit shorter than usual. We hope to see some of you at the Conference as there will be meetings of Study Groups on the evening of Tuesday 17 November, including ours. On Thursday morning, I will be making a 15 minute presentation to the Conference about our Study Group and we will also have a display of garden photographs in the lunch/tea area. It is excellent that the Melbourne and Canberra groups are busy visiting gardens on a regular basis and writing up reports of those visits. Those of you not in one of those groups should consider writing a short report of a garden you have seen, including your own, and sending it along with some pictures for the *Newsletter*. We all like to hear about other people's experiences and what they have achieved.

Correspondence

Suellen Harris, NSW

An interesting list of small eucalyptus for small gardens. For us on the east coast some on the list can be very challenging especially some of the South and West Australian varieties. But one that stands out for me is the Blue Mountains Mallee Ash *(E stricta*). It lives mainly on the ridges west of Sydney and down the coast around our area of Milton/Ulladulla and down to Bega. It is a mallee with white flowers in summer through to autumn with pink new stems and bright green leaves. There are several lovely stands in Eurobodalla Botanic Gardens. As our gardens are getting smaller in suburbia this is a wonderful small eucalyptus. Another for the south coast region is *E. obstans*. Regrettably, these may be hard to obtain in a general nursery or box store. Cheers, Suellen

Jill Mitchell, Vic.

I appreciate the very fine *Newsletter* and thank you and contributors for the hard work involved.

Carol Bentley, NSW

Thank you for editing the *Newsletter*. The colour makes such a difference. Regrettably I can't come to the Canberra conference but hope to hear about it in the next *Newsletter*. Regards to you both, Carol

Sheila Simpson-Lee, NSW

Thank you for all your efforts for the group. Regards, Sheila

Ron and Barbara Gornall, NSW

I would like to say to you and Rosalind how much we appreciate all the work you do to keep the group operating and the high quality and great articles in the *Newsletter*. We hope that the Sydney group can be revived again one day. Next time we visit Canberra we would also like to pay you a visit and have a look at your beautiful garden.

Ed. We too hope that the Sydney group can be revived one day. Ben and I extend an enthusiastic invitation to all GDSG members who visit Canberra to come to our garden and discuss it with us. We are always interested in other gardeners' opinions.

Eleanor Hodges, Vic

I was very impressed by the photos of your garden. Congratulations!

Contrasts of Flower and Foliage

Words Ros Walcott, Canberra
Photos Ben Walcott, Canberra

Qualup Bells must be one of our all-time favourite plants. We grow it in a pot, as our clay soil and winter frosts do not suit its requirements. With some protection this plant blooms from March until November, right through our winter. The birds love it and pay it lots of attention, bending the stems to the ground without wrecking the blooms. The contrast between the dark pink and cream of the bells and the magnificent grey-green foliage is breathtaking. Really, people gasp when they first see this plant. 'What is that?' they ask.

Pimelea physodes or Qualup Bells

Lechenaultia ‘Tropicana’ or ‘Eldorado’, sold to us as *Lechenaultia tubiflora*, is a cheerful long-flowering plant that also does better in a pot for us, for the same reasons as above. Ben did propagate a number of them for the garden this year, but very few have lasted through our frosts this year, a run of -5 degrees C. mornings only experienced once in every ten or fifteen years in Canberra. This has been followed by our hotest October ever recorded with only 20 mm of rain in the month.The pleasing contrast between the deep gold flowers and light green foliage makes this plant a winner.

Lechenaultia ‘Tropicana’

While many of the *Acacia cognata* hybrids do not thrive with us, ‘Burgundy Cascade’ Is one that is vigorous in Canberra, (photo next page). Hybrids such ‘Green Mist’, ‘Mop Top’ and ‘Limelight’ will not last through the winter in our garden, but we have been pleasantly surprised by ‘Burgundy Cascade’. It has grown quite large, 5m wide by 3m high, after only three years. The foliage in all winter months is a joy, deeply burgundy coloured at the tips. The contrast between the red tips, green foliage and yellow balls of flower is quite spectacular.

Acacia cognata ‘Burgundy Cascade’

Hakea nitida is one prickly customer – if you accidentally brush up against it, you will suffer. However, it atones by providing fluffy white flowers, leathery, smooth green leaves and pink stems for a month in spring. Other hakeas that provide interesting contrasts in flower and foliage are *Hakeas bucculenta, cinerea, corymbosa, laurina, leucoptera, microcarpa, purpurea,* and *sericea.*

Hakea nitida

Acacia acinacea or Gold Dust Wattle is an overachiever in the garden. It doesn't just flower, it smothers itself in bloom, making it hard to see the attractive contrast between the bright gold ball flowers and the green foliage. The best attribute of *Acacia acinacea* foliage is the circular 'watch springs' of seed heads that appear right after flowering. These are a valuable feature of the plant in their own right.

Epacris purpurascens ia another plant that we grow in a pot. It can survive in the ground, but does not really thrive. Even at the Australian National Botanic Gardens, an area of Canberra which is considerably warmer than our garden, and where plants bloom at least two weeks earlier than ours, their *Epacris purpurascens* suffer. The contrast between soft pink blooms with darker centres and spring green foliage is a familiar and loved combination.

Acacia acinacea or Gold Dust Wattle (top)

Epacris purpurascens (right)

It is hard to ignore the stunning contrast between the bright gold tails of the Sandpaper Wattle and its green, veined, scratchy foliage. It does not stay in bloom for much more than a month, but what a show. The flowers look edible, (Cheese Twisties spring to mind), and the foliage is amazing. When we show off this plant to visitors they often struggle to absorb its individuality, especially it they have never seen a plant like this before.

Acacia denticulosa

Pandorea ‘Snow Bells’ demonstrates the great attraction of green and white. Wherever green and white occur in the garden, people feel calm and peaceful. In fact there are whole gardens devoted to green and white to achieve just that result. The fresh green of the Wonga Vine leaves and the thick, creamy substance of the bells form a marvellous contrast while the plant is in bloom – never for long enough. Plant breeders take note – we need Pandoreas that bloom over a longer period. ‘Lemon Bells’, ‘Ruby Belle’, ‘Golden Showers’ are other Pandoreas that give a great show in the garden.

Pandorea ‘Snow Bells’

South and east Australia: be ‘Godzilla’ El Niño ready!

Catherine Stewart **August 23, 2015**

It’s official – weather agencies on both sides of the Pacific agree that a new El Niño weather event is forming**. And it looks like it could be as bad as 1997, with NASA climate scientist Bill Patzert dubbing it a “Godzilla’ El Niño”. For those of us in south-eastern Australia, that means a long, hot, dry-as-chips summer. Although we’ve had several summers in Sydney that have been cooler than normal, we always knew that the next El Niño was lurking out in the Pacific somewhere – a bit like the proverbial Kraken coming to wreak havoc on our gardens.

Of course, one side’s of the Pacific’s drought is another’s wet weather, and Californians will be greatly relieved to know that after several years of parching drought, their rains are likely to return next winter, at the end of 2015. However, Patzert says be careful what you wish for as those rains could well be like a “fire hose” coming at you, with floods and mudslides and hurricanes, just like in 1997.

In eastern Australia, it seems like it’s dried up overnight. July had less than half our regular rainfall, and there’s been almost no rain in August at all. And the daytime temperatures are creeping up and up. In eastern Queensland its even worse, with no rain for many months, and many gardeners without town water already despairing of keeping their garden alive.

Tiny daisy gives Western Australia its 10,000 native plant species

GardenDrum **September 7, 2015**

Angianthus globuliformis Photo Florabase, DPAW

This tiny daisy, *Angianthus globuliformis*, in Western Australia makes the 10,000th native plant species identified in this world hot-spot of plant biodiversity.

The geographical isolation of Western Australia (WA) means that it has a unique range of native flora – if it were a country, it would rank 20th in the world for its number of plant species. Many of these plants are found either in the Kimberley region in the northern part of the state, or in the south-west, where this tiny daisy lives on the edge of a salt lake near Lake Grace in WA's Wheatbelt.
An incredible 50 new species are discovered, named and described by the WA Herbarium at the Department of Parks and Wildlife every year, showing that there are many plants still unknown.
For fans of spider orchids, WA has also just named another 17 new species, making 158 species of spider orchids found in the state.

Are we afraid of our own landscapes?

GardenDrum August 27, 2015
Are we afraid of our landscapes, particularly in Australia? Designer Jeremy Saunders poses this most interesting question in his new post *A Landscape of Fear* , on The Territories website. A designer of movie posters for many years, Saunders looks at the presentation of our natural landscapes through his medium, and finds that although our coastal landscapes are nearly always benign – sand, sun and sea with nary a shark or stinger in sight – our bush and outback are routinely presented as scary, dangerous places. If people venture out there, they are terrorised or murdered, snake bitten, fall down cliffs, or routinely get lost.
These persistent negative stereotypes both reflect and affect our relationships with our natural landscape, making it a place of fear to be avoided rather than embraced and explored.

Report of Melbourne garden visit August 16

Diana Snape, Vic

We had a fine, sunny day when we visited a group of small gardens in Stage 2 of The Australian Garden, Cranbourne. We assessed them for their overall design, on the basis of the names they had been given. It really concentrates the mind to try to do this! We took into account plant selection and placement plus hard landscape.

Attractive plantings - Backyard Garden Photo by Margaret James

1. **Backyard Garden** (Photo previous page)
Our group was very critical of aspects of this garden and we gave it our lowest score. We thought the use of space was poor, with too much hard landscape and little room for children (or adults) to move around. The edges of a raised area covered with timber provided seating but the remainder was really just waste space. (There was no indication of many practical things one might want in an actual back garden!)
We know there have been problems with finding suitable grasses for lawn areas but we would have liked more lawn. We wondered why the tree was not planted directly in the one small grassed area. We liked the metal edging of beds and thought the planting along one side of the garden was attractive.
The laser-cut corten steel screens between the first three gardens are very beautiful.

Patio, Lifestyle Garden Photo by Diana Snape

2. **LIfestyle Garden**
We imagined this garden had been designed for one of the new McMansions, with its hard landscape and rectangular shapes. (One member said "I hate straight lines".) However, we tried to assess it objectively and it scored just slightly higher than the first garden. We thought the stonework was beautiful and the curved structure over the patio for shelter is most impressive. However the long flight of steps to the area under this shelter has no handrail.
Raised beds and repetition of plants are effective. Some species are doing well but some plant selection was disappointing, with species that prefer a little shade situated in the open. Plants are generally low and of similar height, without the interest of layering. We missed taller plants along one side.

Hibbertia and daisies in Lifestyle Garden Photo by Margaret James

3. **Greening Cities Garden**

We again scored this garden slightly higher than the previous one. It is innovative, showing what can be done with more vertical gardens, on rooftops or in confined spaces. There are some beautiful arrangements of pots and potplants. A high, narrow bed at the back has healthy plants, including *Hibbertia serrata*. Standard grevilleas are doing well in hanging pots.

Some of us approved of the experimental attempt to espalier an arc of *Eucalyptus gregsoniana* (Mallee Snow Gum), while others thought the trees looked tortured (photo below). Some plants in this garden are affected by drainage problems. Creepers in cylinders of wire (an appealing idea) should do well but the normally vigorous *Aphanopetalum resinosum* (Gum Vine) is struggling.

Espaliered Eucalypts in the Greening Cities Garden Photo by Margaret James

4. **Seaside Garden**

Most of us breathed a sigh of relief at our first naturalistic garden. Not surprisingly, it scored well, significantly above the first three. On one side it is bounded by a most beautifully hand-crafted stone wall. On the other, for safety reasons, there is a protective barrier of posts between the garden and the water, made interesting by their irregular height and placement.

The ratio of plants and open space (sand or small pebbles) is appropriate and the variety of plant types - from prostrate to trees (melaleucas) - very pleasing. The *Disphyma crassifolium* (Round-leaved Pigface), with its coloured foliage and bright flowers, was particularly beautiful (photo below), but not in flower. Of course all these gardens are still young and will mature over time.

Disphyma crassifolium in Seaside Garden Photo by Diana Snape

5. **Weird and Wonderful Garden**

The name leaves this garden free to have fun and nearly all of us loved it. We scored it just slightly higher than the Seaside Garden. Again we thought there was a good ratio of open space to planting. Everyone admired the remarkable and iconic Bottle Trees (*Brachychiton rupestris*) (photo next page), repeated here and there, and the very interesting variety of plants. There is a striking contrast between the foliage textures, some delicate, and the hardness of the rocks.

The slate used throughout is a wonderful natural material. Most of us liked the rocks that protrude at an unexpected angle (though someone thought of tombstones). The range of niches created among the rocks provide opportunities for successful experimental planting.

If you haven't visited Stage 2 yet, we recommend you do!

Bottle Tree in the Weird and Wonderful Garden Photo by Margaret James

Visit to Janet and Andy Russell's Garden in Aranda, ACT

18 August

A group of 26 members of GDSG Canberra and ANPS Canberra members gathered to farewell the Russell garden in Aranda, a garden that we have visited and loved over the 15 years of its development. Janet and Andy have done a sterling job designing and planting this garden and introduced us to many interesting and unusual plants.

Janet's valedictory essay is below. We will miss this garden and hope that the new owners will appreciate it and keep it viable into the future.

The approach of El Niño – a good time to take our leave?

Janet Russell, Canberra

> The present changes the past. Looking back, you do not find what you left behind.
> Kiran Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*

We will be moving from our home and garden early next year. We have stopped planting and we have been rationalising our pots deciding what plants to take with us. I was asked recently how I felt about the house being sold and the fate of the garden being in the hands of new owners. As I feel I have no control over what eventually happens I have decided not to worry about it. We can only take our memories with us. While I know this there are times when the light falls a certain way perhaps in the morning or late afternoon and I have pangs of nostalgia for a way of life we have already begun to leave behind. I know that we will not be here this time next year.

Looking back

We decided from the start that our garden would consist only of Australian natives and we remained true to that resolve. For fifteen years our garden has been our main hobby. We have spent days planning, landscaping, pruning, digging and planting. As the record keeper I have kept lists of the plants in each section of the garden and in a desultory fashion I have also kept lists of failed plants (so many). I did not use this list as a resource but they were interesting to look back on. This was because we came to realise that it was worth trying plants in different places in the garden and there are a number of reasons why plants fail. We also changed practices like including digging in more organic matter into what we had discovered was extremely poor soil.

Russell garden courtyard Photo by Ben Walcott

During the fifteen years we have been here we have noticed more invasions of weeds and garden escapes in the area and we have had recently had African Daisy, *Osteospermum ecklonis* and the Lavender *Lavandula stoechas* come in to our garden. This is in addition to the usual suspects like Privet and Cotoneaster. We had difficulties with our neighbours' potato vine and honeysuckle climbing over our wooden fence so we extended the fence upwards and it gave us a living green wall. It also gave us the benefit of extra privacy. We just have to watch out for stolons ranging into the garden.

I have included photos of of different views of the garden as well as as a photo of our courtyard which has been a source of great pleasure for us. It is a very private space with a view to west of the Brindabella Ranges. In the gardens that face the street our challenge has been to give enough structure so that when the small (and sometimes not so small) plants self-sow in the garden so it still looks like a horticultural endeavour and not a piece of bushland. We are acutely aware that the public generally wants 'tidiness' in the garden and we have developed the garden with the people who use the street in mind.

Russell back garden

Garden Grassland Photos by Janet Russell

Now that is time to leave, I do think about what I would do differently if I were just starting out with the benefit of that wonderful commodity, hind sight. We did not plan – we wanted to try many different plants and probably lacked discipline and put plants in the wrong places. We also decided to change the kind of garden we wanted after we had planted inappropriate plants for the garden we were looking to create. We liked the hard design of the garden behind the gate and we only tinkered with it. In our defence I would say though experience is a wonderful teacher and I would think more about the nature of the garden beds created as a result of that design including the size and position of them.

I would put more structure into some of the garden in front of the house. Large plants can create structure but grassland plants need to have the structure created for them. If you allow them to naturally increase, which is what we did, I think the garden needs to be separated into smaller spaces with some flexibility built in.

One of the primary reasons for a native garden was to bring in the birds and we have been very happy with the result. They have been a continuing source of interest and delight. We also have two resident blue tongue lizards who use the rocks and ground-covers like *Hardenbergia violacea* for shelter. There have been two young born in the past couple of years. We have had numerous bees, butterflies, caterpillars, spiders and other insects that have fascinated me. It led me to

registering as a member of the Atlas of Living Australia (ALA) to record what I found and photographed. We have also participated in collecting data for the local ornithological group about what birds come into and around our garden.
After we began to grow more local local grassy woodland plants to create our grassland garden I began a series of articles in 2008 for one of the local conservation groups on my observations of these plants in a horticultural environment. I will be writing my last article in December.

Three Eucalypts in the roadside garden

Looking forward

Since starting to use the ALA, the Canberra Nature Map (CNM) database has been developed for recording of plants, fungi and butterflies with a view to including further categories in the future. This is another source to record what is happening in the local natural environment. I have also begun to contribute to this. This allows me to see check out what is growing in my local area as well as getting some exercise.
We have a quite substantial area of balcony and we expect to continue to grow native plants albeit on a much smaller scale. Andy has been working with the Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park (STEP) for some years and this is his main interest. He has a role in the management of the large native garden located in National Arboretum Canberra which is being developed as a regional botanic garden.
I know that when we look back on the garden in the future it is not only different perceptions of the past that may be invoked it may also involve visions of excavators.

Janet Russell

Visit to the Garden of Janine Hunstone, Duffy, ACT

Tuesday 13 October

Janine Hunstone is the owner of Understorey Design. She has been designing gardens for Canberrans for over 16 years. Approximately 20 GDSG and ANPS Canberra members gathered on a cool day to walk around her garden. Janine's story and photos follow.

The garden in 2002. Just getting started

We bought the house in 2000, and inherited a pretty bare garden. Nothing but conifers in the front garden, and out the back, two ornamental plums. That was it. We didn't waste any time getting started on creating an upper storey. The house faces west, and the heat inside the house was incredible. We planted a variety of Eucalypts, and Acacias, in order to create a speedy canopy to establish the rest of the garden under.

2005. Trees are growing quickly, and are underplanted with grasses and grassland

A few of the numerous pots of mixed plantings around the garden

As the upper storey gained momentum, I ended up with quite a lot of shade. I started removing some of the small eucalypts and Acacias, and planting more shade tolerant species. Grasses were slowly removed, as the garden no longer had the sun required to keep the grassland looking its best.

These days the garden is a shady paradise. Somewhere to hangout without getting sunburned! There are many spaces to sit, which all serve their purpose throughout the seasons.

I am an avid plant collector, which is probably obvious given the lack of mass planting. Space is precious to a plant collector, so often I will only have 1 or 2 of a species. I use other elements to tie the garden together: The old Canberra red bricks in the front garden provide interest, continuity, and a bit of local history. They give structure to a rambling, bitsy garden. Small areas of lawn give us somewhere to sit….. a small patch of lawn is rather lovely, just to enjoy bare feet on.

River pebble is used front and back. It creates a low cost, permeable surface for the network of paths throughout the garden, and is really easy to look after. I've used this surface more through the really shady parts of the garden, as it is a nice light surface in dark spots.

The back garden in 2015 Photo by Ben Walcott

The Hunstone Garden - a plantsperson's garden

Thank **you to all those who have renewed their membership in the Study Group**

Treasurer's Report:

I**Accounts:**

Cheque Account: $ 8,501.59

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Total: $ 33,579.21

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Russell Garden backyard Photo by Ben Walcott

Cranbourne, Stage 2 2012 Photo by Ben Walcott