

S.G.A.P. ACACIA STUDY GROUP
NEWSLETTER
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I offer for this month the main items from two letters written to me during last year by **Mr Scott Young**, one of our Tasmanian members. It is presented for its excellence and interest to everyone as gardeners but I trust it will convey a message too.

It epitomises something of what is required from others of the group. To prepare a Newsletter two-monthly, as I propose to do, is a somewhat formidable task with the limited time at my disposal and without similar letters describing members' own gardens or other items of horticultural interest. Do not think your garden is too small or contains too few specimens to warrant description. On the contrary the smaller the garden the more detailed can be the information given and we want information of all kinds. Here substantially are Mr Young's letters:

May 1963

The four seasons are still in a state of chaos, have been that way for three years now so that we in the pastoral industry – and amateur gardeners – are no longer amused.

Latest effort was 10° of frost on Easter Sunday. This killed 100,000 seedlings at the Forestry Commission's nursery at Perth which is about 10 miles south of Launceston. Quite a large proportion were *Pinus radiata* or *P. insignis*, the others being Tasmanian eucalypts and wattles.

Rainfall from December 31st to March or rather April 20th was 6 inches on this property but this was in four days of rain. Last year was much the same concerning rain so I watered a lot of the younger shrubs. This kept them alive and slowly growing. Frosts in late May collected a lot of these youngsters. Trees – silver wattles, *Eucalyptus ovata* and *E. camaldulensis*, up to 15 feet high, that were not watered, died from lack of water. So this year nothing was watered excepting the rainforest species, the object being to try and cut down the growth rate as much as possible so as to cut the frost risk down. In spite of this, *Eucalyptus gigantea*, *E. obliqua* and *E. amygdalina* up to 20 inches high were "killed". Yesterday whilst replacing the deaths, I noticed that about half of them had green shoots about 1/16" long at ground level or just below. So no doubt they will survive.

All the above was apropos of your remarks re the extraordinary growth of some trees – after your fire. To my mind the recovery rate of flora from fire, frost or drought is directly proportional to its root growth and indirectly proportional to its top growth. Obviously, you will say. Yet I feel that a lot of the failures experienced by members of the SGAP are due to over-stimulation of the top growth – assuming of course, that all the soil and drainage factors are correct, and the wind speed is more or less normal, not up to 120 mph as we have here.

G W Althofer recommends wind breaks in arrowhead formation more or less facing into the prevailing wind and if possible, into the direction of cold air currents as a means of decreasing frost damage. Says re frosts, that a difference of 3 or 4 degrees can be achieved, which in a lot of cases must be the difference between life and death to a lot of West Australian species grown in Eastern States.

Here we have an arrowhead windbreak more or less but it is not nearly good enough for our high speed wind so am now building reserve lines. Until they are effective, have spent my spare time, and more, on a sandstone rock garden which is meant to resemble a portion of the Central Highlands. Lakes and tarns, waterfalls, rivers and plains, cliffs and plateau. About 100 tons of stone in place so far and it took 2 years to do it. Trouble is not so much the actual work but fitting of each rock in such a way that it fits exactly the whole picture. When complete, the whole lakes and river system will be fed per pump, the water keeping the alpine bog plants happy, then watering the orchard, then the big dam and thence to the stock per pipeline.

To keep the cliffs etc in perspective, no plant should be over 6" – 9" high. However, an apparently prostrate *A. vomeriformis* and *A. verticillata* var. *ovoidea* is flourishing.

Some brief comments on wattles here now:

<i>A. sophorae</i>	Here 12 months, 2 feet	Appears to be drought or frost hardy.
<i>A. myrtifolia</i>	12-18 months, 6 inches	Appears difficult in drought, frost tender.
<i>A. podalyriifolia</i>	30 months, 5 feet	Practically killed by wind August 1968, leaves looked as though badly burnt or frosted. Now 4 feet again.
<i>A. verniciflua</i>	24 months, 12 inches	Drought resistant, slightly frost tender.
<i>A. diffusa</i>	Appears to be difficult to transplant. Have tried about 12 now with no success. May be due to seasons.	
<i>A. mucronata</i>	12 to 36 months	All rampant.
<i>A. linearis</i>	4 th year, 8 feet.	Doing well.
<i>A. calamifolia</i>	4 th year, 6 feet.	Appears to need more water than the others.
<i>A. pulchella</i>	24 months, 30 inches.	Frosted badly last year. This year's frosts, no effect, but feel it does not like its soil which is a mixture of clay mudstone and a little top soil. This is the spoil from the dam in front of house.
<i>A. drummondii</i>	3 rd year, 3 feet high.	Doing well.
<i>A. pycnantha</i>	2 nd year, 9 inches.	Badly frosted last year. Therefore ignored this year, now appears safe as not worried by this year's frosts.
<i>A. riceana</i>	18 months, 9 inches.	Slow. May be due to being too dry a position. Naturally occurs in about 75% shade and 40 inches plus rainfall.
<i>A. longifolia</i>	4 th year, 12 feet.	Doing well now, badly burnt by wind last year.

August 1963

Frankly, I am not very interested in seed propagation because I find quite enough involved in growing the seedlings here. However, I find the idea of a seed bank is a good one and shall try and collect the seeds of *A. riceana* and *A. axillaris* for you.

To my mind, the Group ought to be split into two or three sub-groups.

- No. 1 Seed propagation, with a purpose of establishing the quickest and easiest method for as many types as possible.
- No. 2 Identification and classification. Mr Croll an obvious leader of this.
- No. 3 An endeavour to establish the practical geographical limits of each species. This No. 3 is where I feel I fit into your scheme best of all.

A. pycnantha appears to be the most tender of the 30 odd species here. *A. sophorae* and *A. retinodes*, both sandy soil coastal types, are doing very well. *A. podalyriifolia* and *A. drummondii* had a rather thin time last year but have stood the winter well. So far this year our lowest temperature has been 23°F.

To my mind the growing of natives is best achieved by treating them rough assuming that drainage and sub-soil type are suitable, then the only concession to their welfare I now make is a couple of 2' 6", 5 or 6" by a half palings driven into the ground leaning away from the prevailing wind and a mulch of anything you like. Personally I feel this is fundamentally the right approach as after all, nature is not benevolent.

Have noticed over the years that when we do have to bring in stock and in such cases we always do so from areas of lower rainfall and harder conditions than our own, that always our own stock come out well in front under identical treatment. In other words, the way I run the stock here quickly eliminates the weaklings and yet, are above average in production. I feel the basic reason for lack of interest in native plants is that people treat them like the imported flora, the growth rate under those conditions is extraordinary for one or two years and the owner feels that the thing is established and concentrates on the next seedling. No. 1 of course promptly dies, hence the rumour that natives are impossible to grow is added to.