

S.G.A.P. ACACIA STUDY GROUP
NEWSLETTER
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A C Keane
544 Brunswick St
North Fitzroy

Retrospect (continued)

Only a few have sent lists of growing Acacias. Could the rest of the members send theirs before the end of March? Then I will forward each a list of the wattles we have under cultivation and from these will be selected those suitable for growing in containers.

Going back, I believe our first effort was to find conditions suitable for growing *Acacia drummondii*, following my report that I could not grow it successfully in the Lower Dandenongs. My experience since then has been along the same lines. I have lost 5 out of 7 seedlings over the past few years. They failed to thrive, turned a yellowish colour and faded away in a few weeks or months. Of the survivors one, treated in the same way as the others, for some reason has done well in the open and is now 3 years old, 3 ft high and bloomed luxuriantly last spring. The other is in a smallish concrete tub and associated with special soil, drainage and watering. It, too, is 3 years old and doing well. Still 2 survivors out of 7 indicates that this wattle is not easily grown without help. The only report I received on this project was from Brigadier Officer whose property is near the top of the Dandenongs (2,000 ft) covered with rich soil and with a heavy yearly rainfall – almost 50 inches I believe. He said that under these conditions *A. drummondii* grew easily and profusely. It appears, therefore, that this type requires good soil, good drainage, and plenty of moisture. As its mature height is only 4-5 feet, for the average garden it would best be grown in a large tub.

Early in the piece too I sent some of you a few seeds of an *Acacia subulata*, which flowered twice in one year, for trial and report. I realize that I had very few for each and knowing how hard it is to “spring” hard coated seeds, it is possible none came to fruition. If anybody has a report it would be interesting. I managed to get one started, but although it struggled on for a year it came to nothing.

Marcotting suggested by Mr Croll was next on our list but I have not received any word of success. My two efforts were failures but, as I have previously said, the experiment was commenced too late in the season when the weather was hot and as Mr Croll points out continuous watering is necessary. It is, of course, too late to do anything this season, but I would like the method given a trial next mid-spring (October) as it appears to be an interesting and efficient method of propagating the species.

More recently, we took over the matter of the best method of germinating the hard coated seeds of the genus. In our first series I think you will agree the results were disappointing with all 4 methods used. Following this we had encouraging reports from 2 members of the uses of vermiculite as a medium for seed germination and I trust many of you tried this. If so, as soon as you have any observations, let me know and we will attempt to sum up. I think that this experiment is fundamental, for, as you will not be able to grow many of the lesser known species, except from seed, it is necessary if possible to devise a method whereby we can get a reasonable percentage on most occasions. The average of 40% we got with the two best known treatments did not mean, of course, even a reasonable germination in every case, and I had quite a few where no seed germinated; that is using 10 seeds. You would undoubtedly do better if you took 20 or 30, but seeds are hard to get and dear to buy. In this year's trials I have had a surprising number of complete failures using 10 seeds which is usually all I could afford.

A brief time ago I suggested growing seedlings in pots under tough conditions preparatory to planting out in the native state, to find out if such will thrive without any attention. This is a good one to try and involves little trouble. So put in even a few next season if you have not yet done so and see how you fare.

At present I feel our attempt to find out which wattles are suitable for growing in containers could be of far reaching value as it will really give us a chance of demonstrating to the public the beauty of the small types of wattles, mainly when in bloom but also often purely from the viewpoint of attractive foliage. If you have not planted any to date and you have some seedlings, do so now; provided they get plenty of moisture they will grow well for the next two months. I hope to issue later in the year a full list of plants suitable and we will see what seed is available and what can be provided elsewhere.

I would be prepared to admit to any critics that this is not a tale of great achievement but I do not think that it is a bad start. We are after all amateurs, using mainly our powers of observation and hence groping, but I know several expert gardeners who admit that they too are groping when it comes to a study of native plants. So perhaps our efforts may yet be of help to lovers of the Australian species.

Addendum

A letter has just arrived from Mr W H Payne in which he comments on the growing of *Acacia drummondii* as follows:

“After many unsuccessful attempts at *Acacia drummondii* I have at last established a number of plants that are proving hardy. The seed was labelled “Variety Major”. I do not know where this variety name came in and I do not think it is official. The shrubs are similar with the possible exception that the leaves are a little coarser. Quite a hardy plant compared with others I have tried.”

Can anybody help with information on this variety? I am sure Mr Croll will be able to advise.

When available a few seeds would be very welcome Mr Payne.