

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

As six new members have joined us over the past few months, I believe the Group will be best served by giving these a brief account of the section's recent and present activities, together with the general set-up.

The SGAP agreed to the formation of an Acacia Group in 1961 with myself as temporary leader. I am not a botanist and had hoped someone with botanical qualifications would relieve me. This has not eventuated, nor has it in fact been really necessary since my job is to organize research projects under the guidance of three of our members who are first class botanists. These are Mr R D Croll of Melbourne, who is known both here and abroad as a leading authority on the genus Acacia, and who has recently compiled what he believes to be the most complete list of Acacia species in Australia (indeed the world) that has ever been compiled. Our next expert is Mr Ivan Holliday from South Australia, co-author with Noel Lothian of the recently published "Growing Australian Plants" (which I highly recommend). The third is of course Mr W H Payne, well known to all. My contribution lies in my experience over the past fifteen years on the horticultural side. I am fortunate enough to have acquired ten acres of ground on the lower slopes of the Dandenong Ranges where I can plant and observe an unlimited number of specimens. In January 1962 my ten year old collection of five hundred specimens was destroyed by bush fire. The present collection of seven hundred specimens, including one hundred and sixty different varieties, gives me ample scope for observation, experiment and report to members.

Our objectives are broadly these:-

1. To draw attention to the attractiveness of many specimens of the genus, the majority of which are completely unknown to growers. (There are over 400 different wattles in Australia alone and over 600 in the world). The average person believes that the Cootamundra is the only wattle growing in Victoria, whereas, there are 50 to 60 indigenous to this State alone.
2. To select the types most suitable for planting in garden plots both small and large.
3. To ascertain the conditions necessary for the better growing of Acacias under cultivation.
4. And most importantly, to attempt to overcome the current "set" against wattles by the majority of people, gardeners and otherwise. This genus is widely believed to be:-
 - a) Short-lived: Some are of course as happens with any family, but many live 20, 30, 40 and even 50 years. (G W Althofer)
 - b) Attractive only when in flower: A knowledge of the subject will convince anyone that the majority are worth growing for their foliage alone.
 - c) Prone to disease: Of course they are like every other body of plants, but who would condemn say Rhododendrons for this reason. Rather, Rhododendron lovers would seek a cure for or prevention of the disease and this is exactly what we are attempting to do.
 - d) Unlucky: Believe it or not!
 - e) To cause hay fever, and this is the most devastating superstition of all. If you suggest growing an Acacia in the garden almost everyone will fall over themselves to tell you that they or theirs get hay fever from such a plant. This is complete nonsense for as it happens this type of pollen is a very rare cause of the disease. Thistle Harris, known Australia wide as an authority on Natives, writes in the March 1965 issue of "Your

Garden”, a Melbourne publication. “There is no truth in the old legend that wattle pollen is the cause of hay fever. Wattle pollen is very heavy and so not air-borne for long distances, nor does it stay suspended for long after a high wind has dispersed some of it.” This is conclusive reasoning and I trust you will quote it when faced with the above belief which is preventing so many people from growing and improving one of Australia’s largest botanical families and to many, its most beautiful.

What has been done so far?

Apparently not a great deal, but considering there is little published work on Acacias (Authority for this statement is the Professor of Botany in the Melbourne University), we have made a reasonable beginning. A seed bank, which already has 100 varieties has been established. The name and address of the curator is – Miss M Pearce, “Dunolly”, Warne Street, Katoomba, NSW. For a list of seeds and any requirements, send her a stamped addressed envelope. Between us, we have actually growing some 180 varieties of wattle. This does not mean that all of these will be successfully grown in their present environment, many are purely experimental. Through Mr Croll as mentioned previously, we will shortly have a list of all Acacias in Australia. We have gone into the question of the best methods of germinating Acacia seed and this work is still in progress, as up to date our efforts have been rather short of successful. We are experimenting with cultivation methods for our plants with special reference to the use of fertilisers. Attempts are being made to find out if wattles grow better when left to fend for themselves or if given some attention. Diseases have been studied and preventive measures indicated. Your views on the above and any other matters relevant are both solicited and expected.

One recently joined member, Mr M O’Donnell of Greensborough, Victoria, has written me a long letter asking a number of questions re our activities. Here they are with my comments.

Q. Is there a monthly Newsletter?

A. A Newsletter is sent to members twice monthly.

Q. Who produces this? Presumably you and the Acacia Study Group?

A. I prepare it as Group Leader. The Study Group plays some, but not a sufficient part in its production. In short we have a number of what may be called “poor correspondents” and it is becoming increasingly difficult to find matter for the letter. In view of this I suggest a report from each member every six months. Material from these reports to be incorporated in the two monthly screed where possible. I hope that I will not be deemed unnecessarily demanding, if I insist that the twice monthly communication be a condition of your membership. Any information will be welcomed: observations, suggestions for new work, questions, criticism etc.

Q. How is it decided who grows what?

A. To date I have asked all to carry out the same experiments as we have only a small scattered group.

Q. Have you any members in the vicinity of Greensborough and district?

A. No, the Group is a national one, members come from different states of Australia and one resides in the south of France, Victoria has seven members, New South Wales – five, Tasmania – two, South Australia – one, Western Australia – one, Australian Capital Territory – one, and France – one. Only three members live in Melbourne and we meet occasionally at general gardening outings.

Q. How often and where does your Group meet? Are trips or inspections arranged?

A. No, for the above reason. Still it is a thought for the future if we get enough members in or about any particular area.

- Q. Could you recommend some standard text on Acacias? I have
- a) W R Guilfoyle "Australian Plants"
 - b) Lothian & Holliday "Growing Australian Plants"
 - c) A E Brooks "Australian Plants for Home Gardeners"
- A. As I mentioned, Professor Turner told me that only short references were made to Acacias in the standard works such as that by Ewart and some others. The works you mention have only short lists of wattles. The greatest number (about 60) is described in E E Lord's "Trees and Shrubs for Australian gardeners". But this work is a gardener's Bible and costs £8.8.0 so for the present we will have to compile our own lists and descriptions.

In conclusion I want to stress that this group is for the average gardener with a small garden; the person who has 3, 4 or ½ dozen or so wattles, but is interested enough to watch them, try to improve them carry out a little experimental work and send reports from time to time I look forward to your cooperation.