

S.G.A.P. ACACIA STUDY GROUP
NEWSLETTER
OCTOBER 1963

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This letter is a month earlier than due. The reason is to remind you that now is the time to experiment with “marcotting”, as described by Mr Croll in a previous communication. When the hot weather comes it may be too late and I hope you will give it a go before the middle of November if possible. Here, to remind you, are Mr Croll’s instructions:-

“In essence the procedure followed is to remove the bark from a branchlet. The bark should be removed for about 1 inch about 12 to 18 inches back from the end of the branchlet. The region of bark removed is wrapped in damp moss first, and is then enclosed in a polythene wrapping and tied top and bottom (on each side of the wound area) in order to prevent loss of moisture from the moss. After 4 to 6 weeks quite a copious root growth results from the cut edge of the bark. The branch may then be cut off just below the root development and planted as a cutting. The moss is well penetrated by roots, and if the roots are allowed to grow too long it may not be readily removed to give the roots good contact with soil. The roots should not be allowed to grow too long anyway because their points of attachment are brittle and hard to plant without damage unless short.”

Be sure if the weather is at all hot, to keep the moss damp.

The cultivation of Wattles with special reference to pruning

They require attention particularly in their first two years when it is often difficult to give certain varieties a good start. Some claim that short stumpy plants – two to three inches – do best. It is said they catch up with and even pass older or better grown specimens in a year or so. This is quite possible but there is a big if – if they survive their first year. My experience is that the smaller plants are a gamble and I usually lose about 25%. With better grown specimens, 5 to 9 inches, I have had more satisfactory results. We could, in this regard, take a deal of notice of the Government Nurseries. If you purchase from one of these you will note most are 5 inches or higher; rarely is anything under 5 inches sold and these experts must have their very good reasons for this. I therefore, recommend the purchase of plants at least 5 inches high, longer if possible.

When to plant? Most recommend Autumn. This could be so for light soils but in heavy wet soils one finds the Spring much better, provided water is available during the coming summer. Autumn planting if followed by heavy rains often results in the plants being swamped.

Apropos of “attention”, I am aware there are two schools of thought in this regard. Some say treat them rough as in the bush; others suggest care in their early days. We can only find out by trying both methods. Either way our objective is to improve the bush type specimens to fit into average gardens both large and small. For apart from the comparatively few nursery specimens, wattles are known only as plants growing in the bush, long and stringy, reaching for the sky where is the light and heat essential for their survival. Beautiful for a brief few weeks each year and afterwards dull and often times disease ridden, not worthy of even a passing interest. To complete the picture, if near a road, where most see them, covered with dust. It is natural that

little or no interest is taken by gardeners (many good gardeners) in the second largest and most attractive family of native trees.

Gardeners object that acacias are short lived and therefore, not worth the trouble, and this indeed, seems to be the main reason for their lack of popularity. But note this applies to a number of members of most genera. I agree it applies to some of the very rapid acacia growers. It is nature's method to have slow growers live a long time and vice versa. But many wattles do live a long time, some a very long time indeed. I quote G W Althofer of Nindethana Nurseries, NSW. "It is a mistake to consider all wattles as short livers. A great number have a life span of 30 to 40 and more years if given a little attention". Note the last three words. And in the September issue of "Your Garden" a prominent Victorian publication, Mr Alf Gray now of WA but known formerly as a famous director of the Government Nursery at Wail, Vic, writes:-

"It is said wattles do not live long. An acacia which refutes the idea is the Myall which includes *A. pendula*, *A. sowdenii* and *A. cyclopsii*. These often live to 50 years or more."

And this means, in the open, without any care.

Whichever school of thought you belong to it seems reasonable to believe that bush plants must, for garden use, firstly be made shapely. Secondly, they must be treated to flower to their fullest extent. Thirdly, they must be made to set seed in quantity and finally, they should be able to withstand weather conditions such as wind, frost and excessive moisture. The first three conditions can be largely fulfilled by suitable pruning. The common *Acacia baileyana* is an outstanding example of what can be achieved by this type of attention. Those seen in the open country are long and streaky, usually with no branches for the first 6 to 8 feet, the top only has reasonable foliage, and it is not worthwhile except when in flower. Try cutting according to a system and you have a shapely specimen covered in foliage almost to the ground and eyetaking even in the non flowering time. In short, a small tree barely resembling the well known open type. Almost, in fact, a new type of Cootamundra. On a par with this one, given the same treatment, is *A. pycnantha* (Golden Wattle) which, covered with branches and leaves to near ground level is, in appearance, only a relation of the usually seen type.

Such results can be achieved in the above examples by commencing pruning after the first year's growth. They will be about 2 to 3 feet high and the top 6 to 8 inches of the main branch should be nipped off. Next year they will be 6 to 8 feet high and at least 2 feet of the main branch should be removed and the laterals shortened to shape. At the end of the third season a good specimen will be 15 feet high and at least 4 feet of the main branches should be lopped, and you can cut even harder in specimens of this type which thrive on hard pruning. After this they require no further attention as they are shapely trees and only occasional removal of unsightly trailers is necessary. Most of the tree varieties (15 feet and over) of acacia, can be hard pruned as above. Examples are *A. melanoxylon*, *A. pruinosa*, *A. pravissima*, *A. dealbata*, *A. mearnsii* (formerly *A. mollissima*), *A. terminalis* (formerly *A. elata*), *A. implexa*, *A. prominens* and *A. normalis*. Watch this latter one and keep it cut back even until it has finished its fourth year. This is a lovely specimen and often disappoints by blowing over when just reaching its prime. It is a surface rooter and stands wind badly. From early days it should be staked to a long piece of iron piping. Wooden stakes are useless when the tree grows to any size.

The pruning of the larger wattles is comparatively easy. The rest, from the smallest through to the shrub and small tree type, present certain difficulties, the description of which I shall have to hold over until the next letter.

As no one has objected to the forming of a seed bank, I presume such should be born. Would somebody volunteer for the position of curator?

A C Keane