

Australian Plants

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Colour Photography By Frank Hurley

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THE STURT DESERT PEA

READ HOW TO GROW THIS BEAUTIFUL PLANT IN YOUR GARDEN

CARE OF NATIVE PLANTS

Most native plants form some feeder roots near the soil surface and as it is in this region that most of the readily available plant foods are located some endeavour should be made to ensure a favourable environment for the roots either by mulching or shading of the surface. Conservation of soil moisture reduces the need for watering and consequently decreases the leaching out of nutrients. Weeding is minimised and tilling of the surface avoided.

COVER PLANTS from D. R. Ali, Klemzig, South Australia.

I consider cover plants to be very useful as:—

1. They take the "bare" look away from the garden between shrubs.
2. They serve as a useful mulch and control most weeds.
3. They provide a "bonus", flowering in poor or waste areas.

I have grown many of the plants recommended in the articles on Cover Plants on pages 13, 14, 15 and 16 and in addition recommend *Acacia aculeatissima*, *Hibbertia* species and *Isotoma axillaris*. *Isotoma* is semi-prostrate; 6" high. The flowering period is nine months, starting in early spring. The longer the season extended, the deeper the blue of the flowers became. This plant seems happy with a minimum of sun.

For Ground Covers For Coastal Planting, E. M. M. Boddy recommends the plants described by R. Hill on page 15 and describes plants very suitable for your garden on page 13. For areas where it is desired to keep weeds in check and yet allow reasonably light traffic in these areas. "*Lippia*, *Pultenaea*, *peduncularis*, *Pratia* white and blue forms, *Scaevola macrocarpa* and *Haloragis micranthia* could be used for this purpose. Where it is just desired to eliminate weed growth, close planting will give the desired effect. I call to mind one small area in a raised rockery 5' x 2' x 18" high—*Grev. alpina* 2'-3', *Grev. "stieglitziana"* semi prostrate, two *Grevillea* hybrids, *Grev. parviflora* 2', *Darwinia micropetala* 1', *Thomasia grandiflora* var., *Angustissima* 18", *Chorizema cordatum* 18" and *Epacris longiflora* 18"-2"—eleven plants in an area 5' x 2' intermingling and the healthiest spot in the nursery and no weeds."

SURFACE MULCHING—An introduction by E. M. M. Boddy.

Surface mulching is a practice that is neglected in too many gardens, private and municipal. Too much energy is expended in continual digging of the soil. Root systems suffer. The earthworm and natural soil bacteria are unduly disturbed and gardens often suffer as the result of too much zeal. Obtain the English publication "Gardening without Digging".

The surface of our garden was mulched with 6" of tan bark nine years ago and the soil has not been disturbed since. These garden beds were formed by encroaching on the original lawn. I must make special mention that no digging was performed prior to planting the native shrubs in the area that was previously lawn. An inch of soil was stripped off in order to remove the lawn grass, the surface was mulched with ordinary garden compost and light loam to a depth of 2in. After planting, the surface was mulched with tan bark in order to correct the high degree of alkalinity of the sub-soils.

Leaves and lawn grass cuttings are helpful but not permanent as a surface mulch. Articles on pages 18, 19, and 20 deal adequately with the use of gravel, stones, sawdust and shavings. Blue metal screening ½-¾" although alkaline, appear to possess properties that are beneficial to plant life and may be used to a depth of 2". Red Scoria, which is also volcanic, could have a better appearance if not too fine.

STURT PEAS—A Dramatic Native Flower For Your Garden

By FRANK BRIDGEMAN, B.Sc. (Agric.)—W.A. Tree Society

One of the most striking and brilliant of native flowers—indeed comparing favourably with the most beautiful flowers of the world—the Sturt Pea can be cultivated without any great trouble. Note the words, "without any great trouble". It is, indeed, one of the best natives for a novice to start with—nearly as easy as zinnias—as it blooms within several months of sowing and results which your neighbours will envy can soon be seen.

I have cultivated Sturt Peas almost every year since 1943, first in the gravelly sandy loams of the Hills, then in the clay loams near Maddington; the rich loams of Harvey and on the contrasting poor Banksia sands of Perth suburbs. For every year of those 15 years, in one or other of the situations mentioned, I have secured flowering plants, usually many and excellent.

NAMES AND LEGENDS OF THE STURT PEA. The accepted correct botanical name of the Sturt Pea is *Clianthus formosus*—a name which can be freely translated as "Glorious flower of beautiful form", appropriate and more descriptive of this truly glorious flower than its common name. The Sturt Pea has also been called botanically *C. speciosus* and *C. dampierii*.

Sturt Peas were one of the first Australian plants collected from these shores, taken to England and brought to the notice of the Western World; the voyager William Dampier noticing and collecting it from the north west coast of Western Australia in 1699. Dampier, pirate though he was, appreciated the distinction and beauty of our native plants, remarking favourably upon them in his journals, though he did not appreciate our country otherwise as seen by him from the north west coast.

It was much later that the inland explorer, Charles Sturt, brought the plant to the notice of the eastern states whence it was called the Sturt Desert Pea, Sturt discovering it near Cooper's Creek in 1844—some 145 years after Dampier's discovery.

Sturt Desert Pea is not really a particularly appropriate name because this "glorious flower of beautiful form" could, on its history and beauty, have a more romantic common name. Perhaps its relative in New Zealand, *Clianthus puniceus*—commonly called the Glory Pea—could indicate a better common name for our plant. Be that as it may, the New Zealand plant may be useful in future hybridization with the Sturt Pea to produce greater perenniality and versatility.

Aboriginal names of the Sturt Pea vary with the tribe and dialect, but in the Jigalong area in Western Australia, the name used was "Malukura". There is believed to be some interesting aboriginal legends about the Sturt Peas, but I have not been able to trace authentic details of these from the W.A. University nor the W.A. Museum. Perhaps some reader could help in this direction.

TREATING STURT PEAS AS AN ANNUAL—The Key to Easy Cultivation:

The Sturt Pea occurs naturally after infrequent rains over a wide area of arid and semi-arid Australia—from the north west coast of Western Australia to the western plains of N.S.W.

Within this very wide area, there can be expected to be a wide variation in plant habit and other characteristics. In botanical records, Sturt Pea is usually described as a perennial, though this has been disputed by some observers; maybe it is a perennial in certain areas and an annual in others. Whatever its natural variation, I have found that most of the plants I have cultivated behaved as annuals, and as it flowers a few months after sowing the plant is best treated as such for garden purposes in wet climates, just as many exotics, e.g., violas, really perennials, are treated as annuals in our

