

Australian Plants

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Colour Photography by Frank Hurley

Block by courtesy John Sands Ltd.

THE COOKTOWN ORCHID

Dendrobium bigibbum Lindl.—the Floral Emblem of Queensland

QUEENSLAND WILDFLOWERS

The wildflowers of Queensland are unique, spectacular, beautiful and ideal garden subjects. We have heard these phrases used for wildflowers of other states but rarely for Queensland. Why? Because we know so little about them! Because they do not occur in widespread areas or spectacular vistas! Because they are becoming extinct. Because the people of Queensland are indifferent to them! Because the Government of the State is indifferent to their national heritage being so pre-occupied in making a thin budget stretch over the many urgent projects crying out to be done in such a vast underdeveloped State! Alas! All these tragedies are to a degree true.

Where are the Queenslanders sensitive to the natural beauty of their State? Every resident of our northern State who answers this cry, regardless of circumstances or experience can assist in a significant way. This issue contains articles from Queenslanders who do care and are doing their best but need assistance. The short article "Eucalypts In Queensland" follows the last issue of "Australian Plants" which dealt with the beauties of the dwarf coloured flowering eucalypts of West and South Australia. Very few people know that Queensland has trees that will rival these but we cannot even get seed to grow them. We need seed of such species as *E. miniata*, *E. phoenicea*, *E. setosa* and the beautiful crimson flowered *E. ptychocarpa*

AN AWAKENING! BUT WILL THE POLITICIANS RALLY

"An arboretum covering an area of at least 50 acres, shaded by gracious trees and bright with wildflowers; nourished by a generous natural water supply, and attended by a full-time resident ranger who would protect the native fauna that enjoy security there . . ." This is the objective of the Toowoomba Field Naturalist Club. One member with considerable experience and ability has offered the gift of 20 acres of land near Oakey. Firm and practical plans have been placed before the Government of Queensland through the Minister for Lands for such an arboretum. I have personally met the committee members appointed to prepare these plans and negotiate with the Minister and I am convinced not only of their competence and enthusiasm but also of their sound practical ability and tenacity and if the Government of Queensland should pass this opportunity, it is never likely again to get the same opportunity to preserve its native heritage, the Flora of Queensland.

See Editor's Notes throughout the issue.

COLOUR PHOTOGRAPHERS

Where are the colour photographers in Queensland? We need good colour slides of all Queensland wildflowers. Issue No. 12 gives details of our photographic section and of a photographic competition.

WILDFLOWER SHOWS

There are many beautiful wildflower shows throughout Australia. If the organisers of shows that will be predominately for wildflowers will advise the editor before August of the date and details of their shows, they will be publicised free of charge in the September issue.

Organisers please note. This society is devoted to the preservation of wildflowers and their cultivation in home gardens. Any flowers you request from us must come from members' gardens which will also have to supply flowers for the show by their own local society. Requests for flowers other than for the main shows are often an embarrassment.

How To Grow

THE COOKTOWN ORCHID

By Dr. H. E. YOUNG—Queensland Orchid Society

With the adoption of the plant as Queensland's floral emblem, many people unfamiliar with the growing of the plant will be wondering how to handle it and a suggested course of action which could be followed by those in doubt is provided below. The Cooktown Orchid is an epiphyte, i.e., it is adapted to growing on trees or rocks but not in the soil. If put in the latter it will not grow satisfactorily or for very long. Similarly a medium consisting of a close textured compost such as leaf mould is unsatisfactory. The plant needs very good drainage and aeration around the roots so that the root system is not kept in a continuously sodden state.

A satisfactory medium is provided by growing the plants on the bark of a suitable tree as is the case in the wild state. Trees with deciduous bark, such as gum trees are unsatisfactory because when the tree sheds its bark it is also likely to shed the orchid. Trees with persistent bark such as the frangipanni, citrus, umbrella tree, wheel of fire, croton, etc., are suitable if situated in a suitable position.

Having obtained a Cooktown Orchid in one of its various varieties it should be tied on a branch or the trunk with twine, wire (preferably copper) or plastic string or strip so that the root and base of the plant are held firmly on to the bark. The plant should preferably be fixed on the east or north side of the tree if on the trunk and similarly on a branch except that it may be fixed to the top of a lateral branch. It is wise also to study the position of the plant with a view to assuring that it is placed so that rain water running down the tree will flow over the roots of the plant instead of putting it in a place which is habitually dry.

In starting the plant off it is an advantage to cover the roots with a thin sheet of elkhorn fibre or a single thickness of hessian or plastic sheet which may be tied on when attaching the plant. This helps to ensure that the roots, which in moving the plant have been deprived of intimate contact with the bark, are kept reasonably moist until new growth develops and the plant can fend for itself.

POT OR BASKET CULTURE

If the plant is required to grow in a window box, under the front steps or in a bushhouse, so that it may be moved about, it is best to establish it in a pot or wooden basket. Incidentally, better growth is usually obtained by this method as the plants are more easily manured and they can be moved about to find the best growing situations.

The plants should never be overpotted, i.e., a small pot or basket consistent with the size of the plant gives best results. An ordinary flower pot of the four-inch size accommodates the usual size of plant quite well.

The pot should be filled a quarter to a third of its capacity with broken crocks (pieces of broken flower pot, pieces of broken brick, pumice stone from the beach or charcoal). The pieces used should be about half to three-quarters of an inch in diameter.

On top of this a thin layer of coarse elkhorn or other suitable fibre such as tree fern roots, or osmunda fibre should be placed. This fibre should be washed and teased or chopped into small pieces about one to one and a half inches long. The plant is then introduced to the pot and held so that

the base of the plant is about half an inch below the top of the pot and more fibre is then packed firmly but gently around the roots up to but not covering the base of the plant.

The plant should be so placed that the leading shoot is towards the centre of the pot with the back of the plant against the side of the container. This ensures that there is room for continued forward growth of the plant. Sometimes plants received from dealers have few roots. In this case it is necessary to support the plant by tying it to a small wooden stake placed in the pot which will keep the orchid upright until it forms a new root system and is able to support itself. A bamboo butchers' skewer forms a stake of satisfactory size and performance.

It is a good idea to distribute some bone dust or broken bones in the compost when potting. Other readily obtainable composts are often used with equally good results. Such materials as she oak (*Casuarina*) bark, and iron bark bark are used successfully. The dead outer bark is obtained from the trees without injuring the tree. It is preferably chopped into a quarter to half-inch pieces and packed in as in the case of other composts. Some growers use only pumice stone collected from the beach and depend on manures for feeding the plants.

WATERING

The Cooktown Orchid makes its new growth in summer and is dormant during the winter months of June, July and August. It therefore requires watering whilst new growth is being produced in the summer. A watering should therefore be given every day during summer growth if possible and if best results are to be achieved. If the compost remains moist, watering need only be carried out when the compost tends to become dry. Plants growing on trees of course, receive a certain amount of moisture and food from the bark of the tree and does not require such frequent attention but should be given a watering when hosing the garden and more frequently when the atmosphere is very dry. It must be remembered that these plants are natives of humid conditions.

Watering should preferably be carried out with a falling temperature, i.e., in the afternoon, except in winter. For winter watering only enough moisture should be given to prevent the plants from shrivelling. They are not making growth at this stage and do not need the water. If kept too wet while dormant the roots in the compost are liable to decay and leaf drop to occur.

MANURING

The plants respond very well in the growing season to the application of organic and artificial manures. An occasional light dressing of dried blood, blood and bone or bone dust or a very light dressing with fowl manure usually gives good results. Application of weak liquid manure also gives satisfactory results. Artificial manures such as the soluble products now sold under various trade names are also very good and have the advantage that they are not so liable to clog up and decompose the compost so much as the bulkier long lasting organic products. No manuring should be carried out during the period the plants are dormant and when green root tips are absent.

It should be understood that weak dosages are important and desirable. Applications of concentrated manures are liable to harm the root system

