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BANKSIA SCEPTRUM

SOME CULTIVATED BANKSIAS—Article commencing page 202, quote . . .

"*Banksia sceptrum*, although this specie can grow into a small tree it does not appear to be doing so in cultivation. It has an upright habit with short blunt leaves and terminal yellow flowers to 6" in the summer. It could be a useful shrub for hot conditions and rainfall of 15" but is also doing well in sandy soil with 30" rainfall."

GROWING WILDFLOWERS IN CLAY AREAS—A complete article.

TASMANIAN WILDFLOWERS—Gems for horticulture.

AUSTRALIAN ORCHIDS—Their cultivation.

PROSTRATE BANKSIA

by Alf Gray

Of all the 50 odd species in the genus, the four western prostrate banksias are probably the most intriguing to botanists and growers alike.

Banksia goodii of the Albany area has been cause for some concern because of threatened extinction, but it is so similar to *Banksia petiolaris* that the differences could be distributed to climatic influences. *B. goodii* was described by Robert Brown presumably when he and Peter Good, then foreman at Kew Gardens, were collecting at King George's Sound in 1830. It had not been recognised again for many years until the writer located it on the King River at Albany in January 1956. Except for greater development of spike and leaf plus a tendency to abandon the prostrate and to assume a more erect habit, in what was formerly densely wooded country, there is great similarity to the form of *B. Petiolaris* of the Stirling Range, 40 miles to the north. This is not to suggest that *B. goodii* should not be accepted as a distinct species. After all it commemorates Peter Good, by all accounts a very earnest and dedicated young man who did not survive long after reaching Botany Bay. See page 200 for colour plate.

Banksia petiolaris was named by von Mueller in 1864 from the Israelite Bay form which persists westwards nearly to Ravensthorpe and then occurs in a similar form westwards again to the Stirlings. It is confusing as to what is the species and what erect forms. It is not found beyond the foothills a few miles north of the Range but is quite common on the coastal plain to the east where the flower spikes are larger and the styles coarser than in the Stirlings form, and the leaves are covered densely with tomentum.

Banksia prostrata and *B. repens* have a wide range of distribution, growing in company with *B. goodii* in the King George's Sound area and also with *B. petiolaris* on the sand plains immediately surrounding the Sterlings and eastwards to Cape Arid if not Israelite Bay itself. They are also found west of the Stirlings, north to the Hill River and inland over the greater part of the South-west Province. The species show change in form, particularly of the flower spikes. The foliage tends to become hoary and tougher in the eastern forms due to the greater exposure of the plains. Even the flower colour changes from warm brown to rose red on the case of *B. repens* and to yellow in both *B. prostrata* and *B. petiolaris*. These species differ from other *Banksia* not only in habit but also in the follicles (spikes) except for *B. solandri* which significantly occurs on or near the summits of the Stirling Ranges.

As to what prostrate banksias may have in the way of appeal to the grower, the question would be best answered by observing a healthy specimen in full flower. They are attractive and unique, even when not in flower.

The group is easier to propagate and establish than the general run of banksia remembering that like the others they revel in light sandy soils and exposure to the sun. Each plant may require several feet of space when mature but since they will grow under shrubs or trees, prostrate banksia are easy to accommodate in almost any garden.

(For other articles on *Banksia*, see page no. 200)

WILDFLOWERS IN CLAY AREAS

AUSTRALIAN PLANTS ON THE KEILOR PLAINS

By C. L. WHELLER, Tullamarine Plant Farm, in conjunction with Mrs. R. Raid of Pascoe Vale, and Mr. C. Thomas, Thomas' Garden Constructions, Glenroy

Climatic & Soil Conditions

The modern traveller, motoring along the highways and other roads that traverse the 900 or more square miles of basalt plains to the north and west of Melbourne, usually referred to as the Keilor or Werribee Plains, might well be pardoned for believing that the possibility of discovering anything interesting in the way of animal, vegetable or mineral in the area would be extremely remote. Roughly defined as the area within a radius of approximately 30 miles from Melbourne from Pt. Wilson in the south-west through the eastern side of the You Yangs to Parwan, along Djerriwarrh Creek through Gisborne, Bolinda to Pretty Sally's Hill (about 1200 ft. above sea level), thence south through Wallan, Yan Yean and Morang to the Yarra River with outcrops of granite north of Broadmeadows and other rocky outcrops intruding from the north-west, the Keilor (or Werribee) plains have until the last 10-20 years been largely neglected by land developers despite their relative nearness to Melbourne.

Formed some 10,000 years ago by volcanic lava emanating from hills and fissures to the north and west obliterating most of the existing landscape, the otherwise featureless terrain is nevertheless intersected here and there by deep river gorges and studded with low hills along its north and west perimeters. Seen in the early sunlight of a calm winter morning with its course defined by ribbons of fog and its steep banks picked out in light and shade touched here and there by patches of frost, the Maribyrnong River at Keilor is a typical example of the beauty that can exist in even the most unlikely places if the eye and mind are receptive. A rock formation known as the "Organ Pipes" on the banks of Jackson's Creek is of wide geological interest and several homes of historic interest still exist in the area.

With a 20 inch rainfall most of which falls between winter and late spring, the heavy grey-brown clay tends to become waterlogged in low-lying areas during winter and spring and interlaced with deep cracks caused by shrinkage as the soil dries out in summer effectively discouraging the natural spread of deep rooting plants which cannot survive these conditions. Subjected to scorching northerly winds in summer, icy blasts from the same direction in winter, hot summer sun and an occasional devastating frost every few years, which often causes the loss of well developed plants that have stood several normally cold winters, most gardens on the Keilor Plains eventually would become like the rest of the general landscape where only the most rugged survive were it not for the incurable optimism of residents who manage to retain enough enthusiasm to replace lost plants.

Never floristically rich especially in woody species, and subject to continuous grazing by sheep and cattle over most of the last century, the fact that some 444 land species were recorded for the plains by Dr. Charles Sutton in 1916 will surprise many people familiar with the area.

