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ASSOCIATION OF SOCIETIES FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS
Brachychiton & Allied Genera Study Group Newsletter no. 4

Welcome to newsletter no. 4. It's certainly been a while since the last one. I haven't answered many (or any) letters in that time either. The reason is basically that my wife passed away at the start of the year. I now have two sons (& myself) to look after and I just don't get the time for native plants. I also found native plants were a refuge during my wife's illness. Now I have lost my interest in the plants and I feel a break of a year or two will do me good. Of course I'll keep my garden going (albeit full of weeds). I'll also keep interesting plants growing (given to me now that I no longer propagate them) so please call in if anyone is passing through.

I will keep the study group going, however I am running out of material. I am trying to cover the Rulingeas and Thomasias. This will take a while. I am collecting material and information at present (thanks mainly to Gwenda McDonald and Dennis Margan).

I have had visits by Dennis Margan, Bruce and Thelma Wallace and Ian Evans. Dennis seems to regularly travel up and down the coast. I'm not sure if he's looking for Goodenias or it's actually part of his work. (Dennis probably doesn't know the difference). Bruce and Thelma called in after a visit to Burrendong Arboretum. I took them into the bush near here (the Watagan State Forest), we all had a good day despite not seeing many Sterculiaceae (only Commersonia fraseri and the flame tree). I took them through a rainforest gully area. Ian Evans arrived midweek and by the time got home it was a spotlight job if we were to see any plants. Fortunately my spotlight is so big it's spelt with a capital "S". I managed to show Ian most of the garden. I also found that turning the spotlight off prevented him taking cuttings. Of course I kept pretending it was accidental.

I've had a few trips myself. At Easter I took my boys to Fiji. Travelling around the main island I saw a familiar plant flowering. It turned out to be Commersonia bartramia which is reported as being common there but I only saw one stand. Heritiera littoralis, is a very rare and endangered sterculiaceae in Australia, is common in Fiji. I collected a range of ferns and orchids from Fiji for Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney. They are presently quarantining them.

CORRESPONDENCE

Geoff Simmons (Qld) sent an interesting extract from an American journal. It covers Guichenotia macrantha which appears to be a popular horticultural specimen over there. It lists the features of G. macrantha as flowering in mid-winter, attractive flowers and foliage and being drought and frost tolerant. That's a fairly good summation.

Geoff has grown his plants from seed (obtained from Nindethara). They germinated after 35 days, nil treatment. Geoff has also germinated *Lasiopetalum indutum*, *Thomasia angustifolia*, *T. glutinosa* and *T. quercifolia*. He is doubtful (with good reason) if the plants will like his wet summers.

Mrs. Hopwood (NSW) reports that they use kurrajongs as windbreaks on their property. They grow them in their vegetable patch until about two metres high. They then transplant them into a post hole 18" deep with a large rock at the bottom.

Roger Elliot is after details on *Keraudrenia*'s for the Encyclopedia of Australian Plants. Any information can be forwarded to him direct to me and I will pass it on.

The Reff's (from Israel) are after information on vegetative propagation of *Brachychitons*. They have two variegated species, plus a number of other interesting forms. I have made enquiries regarding tissue culture (their main interest) but it will take years to see if it is possible. I had not considered tissue culture previously. It would be the ideal way to propagate the new *Brachychiton* hybrids I have.

Jan Sked germinated seed of *Keraudrenia Killii*. She found germination to be sparse. The seed was soaked in hot water (from her hot tap) and then left to stand for 24 hours in water. Germination started after 1 week but was mostly in 2-3 weeks. I had no results from my seed. My seed was collected from the plant in my garden and therefore was self pollinated. This may reduce fertility. Jan also germinated *Brachychiton paradoxus* (she didn't say where from. I expect it is the new species *B macrophyllum*, the floral emblem of Darwin). Her plants are yellow which she attributes to her winters. My plants (seedlings still at 4 years old), die back to the rootstock each year. Jan's *B. bidwillii* flowers poorly and is never deciduous. It is also 1.5 metres tall. I have found that this species only grows tall as a response to shade. It normally will not lose its leaves unless it receives full sun and it won't flower unless it loses its leaves. Therefore Jan's problem is the shade (she suspected it was).

The Pine Rivers SGAP Society is developing a forest park. Part of this work involves collecting seed from trees naturally there, propagating them and releasing the seedlings when large enough. They collected seed off *Sterculia quadrifida* and planted it in December. It germinated in 2 weeks and the seedlings were released in May back into the rainforest that naturally occurs in the park. I'll have to make a point of visiting the park next time I'm up that way.

Jan Sked also reports that she has a *B. rupestris* 13 years old that has developed a trunk circumference of 1.5 metres. Roy Hands (from Pine Rivers SGAP) has about 400 *B. rupestris* and *B. populneus* on his property "Riverside"

(near Chinchilla). He lops these trees for stock feed during drought. Other farmers have the appalling habit of splitting bottle tree trunks lengthwise to allow cattle to feed on the pithy centre. This works well but it kills the trees. Roy is able to lop his trees indefinitely.

I received a letter from Fritz Dederer, presently in Philadelphia (USA) but moving to Puerto Rico. He wants to grow a range of Brachychitons. I've suggested the seedbank. Alternatively, if anyone wants to send him seed, they might get free accomodation next time they visit Puerto Rico.

David Long (Rockhampton) has also found his Brachychiton (B. populneus) flowers well but won't set seed (an occasional pod only). He found pollinated female flowers with male flowers from the same tree with no success. He then obtained male flowers from elsewhere and obtained a 90% seed set. This shows that there is a definite self incompatibility. David had also collected seed from the "floaters" which are reputed to be non viable. He planted them and they germinated. Therefore kurrajong "floaters" are still good. I have also heard of the story of "floaters" but I believe it is only true with Araucaria bidwilli. It probably is incorrect to believe that this characteristic carries over to other species.

David also reports that the aboriginals in his area made cake and damper from pulped kurrajong seeds. He sent me some seeds but I will try and grow them.

Peter Lang (Mildura Grp. SGAP) is quite interested in Thomasias. He has a native plant nursery. He wishes to know more about T. undulata. I can't find a reference to it. Can anyone help?

SEEDBANK

Don't forget Bruce Wallace, 20 Pearce Street, Eaglehawk VIC. 3556 has a seedbank. I'm not sure ^{what} it has? B. acerifolius, B. populneus, Sterculia quadrifida, a few Lassiopetalums and others.

PLANT DISPLAY

Dennis Margan and myself put on quite a good display at the Sydney SGAP wildflower show. I have left all of my plants at Dennis's place for their use this September. We are in the process of having display boards made up. If you visit the show look at our display and say hello to Dennis or myself.

RECENT AQUISITIONS

I have obtained a few interesting plants off Radke's nursery in North Queensland. They include Sterculia laurifolia and two very attractive Argyrodendron sp's. One Argyrodendron is silver underneath the leaf, the other is a deep coppery color. These will be very attractive foliage plants. The growth rates of all of these plants is good in Newcastle.

REPORT FROM MY GARDEN

As I said earlier, not a lot of action. I now have a good bottle tree growing. It was a tree I planted in 'my parents' garden about ten years ago. It was four metres tall. My father didn't like it as the trunk was bulging and breaking the concrete border to his garden. I explained that the trunk would keep expanding and the only thing to do was to transplant it to my place. He agreed so we wrapped a chain around its base and pulled it out of the ground. There was no other preparation, however the ground was soft. About 30 cms of root came with the trunk. I put it in my trailer and brought it home (no protection from wind), dug a hole and buried it. The tree went deciduous (it was in winter) but in spring the leaves came and it is now very healthy. From this experience I can see great potential in growing bottle trees until they were this height, then selling them as landscaping plants. Although they may take up to ten years to get to a marketable size, they can be planted very close and the resulting plant must sell for \$100 or more. That's not bad for a crop that needs no care whatsoever.

Elsewhere I have Guichenotia macrantha flowering. This is a very attractive plant and as stated earlier, is valuable as it flowers when there is little else. My Thomasias are all in bud and it should be a good year for them (again). One plant I find interesting is Lysiosepalum involucreatum. This is a plant that has been sold under many names, never (to my knowledge) as a Lysiosepalum. It is similar in appearance to some Thomasias (I purchased one plant as a form of T. petalocalyx). The genus Lysiosepalum is very easily differentiated from all of the Thomasias as the calyx (ie. flowers) are densely hairy on the outside. Look for this feature, you may find you are growing this species. L. involucreatum strikes easy from cutting and grows readily. My plants are in bud now.

HYBRIDS

Still nothing on hybrids. I have applied to register two hybrids of B. discolor x B. bidwillii (naming one after my wife). I received a reply saying my suggested names weren't commercially suitable and therefore probably would later be substituted by nurseryman. The registration authority suggested I change the names slightly, which I may do. I'm thinking it over for the present. It will be 6 months or more before I can complete the registrations.

Well that's about it. I think that enough for one newsletter. I'll get my secretary to type it up (I disliked having to type it myself) and I'll see how many pages we have.

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