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ASSOCIATION OF SOCIETIES FOR GROWING
AUSTRALIAN PLANTS
BRACHYCHITON AND ALLIED GENERA
STUDY GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO 7

MARCH 1991

Greetings from Newcastle. I hope this newsletter finds you all well with prospering gardens. We have had a steady flow of new members, nothing overwhelming but some of them are certainly interested and should be of value. I was very pleased to receive two articles from members. I don't know how Jan Sked gets time to write but she does. Thank you for the article Jan. It is interesting that many of the allied genera are west of your area, they seem to prefer the poorer soils. The Sterculiaceae have evolved to occupy all sites from rainforest to arid lands, but very rarely as a dominant plant.

Protective Custody

The National Botanic Gardens organised a four day conference on conserving endangered plants by cultivation. I attended as a representative of this study group and found the conference very interesting. Overall the conclusion and results of the conference were:

- Probably not all plants can be saved. We have a lot

of endangered plants and some of the rarest are extremely difficult to maintain in cultivation. We must be careful not to give too much money and time to one species as our resources are limited.

- We must look at saving a genetic pool. If we only grow one species of a rare species and propagate it from cuttings to share around, we still only have one tree (growing in a number of places). We should try and grow a genetic pool to reduce possible inbreeding. This is an important point because even though we may have a rare species growing in 2 or 3 big botanic gardens in Australia, small regional Botanic Gardens are of value if they grow the species as long as their plants are of known wild source and genetically different to the plants in the other botanic gardens.
- It has been decided to establish a body in Australia to monitor rare and endangered plants with particular reference to specimens in cultivation.

On a more personal level, I was very pleased with Peter Olde's talk (as leader of the Grevillea Study Group). The Grevillea Study Group's work (and Peter Oldes' in particular) has been outstanding in the area of conserving rare and endangered species by cultivation. The professional botanists and horticulturalists should have been embarrassed by comparison. After Peter Oldes' lecture (supported later by some professional conservation people) Tucker (from Townsville Botanic Gardens) got up and criticised "bungling amateurs" in this field of work. If he was

referring to Peter Olde and others (and I thought he was) he is a real idiot. With no more qualification than Peter Olde, but much more in the way of resources, he has achieved a lot less. He is the sort of person that gives the public service a bad name. Anyway that was the only bad part of the conference. Otherwise everyone got on very well.

I finally met Gordon Guymer at the conference. Gordon revised the genus *Brachychiton* in 1989, naming many new species. Of particular interest was that Gordon feels some of the best forms of *B. bidwillii* grow around Rockhampton, however all areas have good forms. He also said we should try growing the flame tree (*B. acerifolius*) from plants from the Proserpine or Claudie River areas as these trees are often smaller and flower regularly (often every year). As a group we should try to get these forms into cultivation.

Well thats all for my 'intro'. Here are two very interesting letters I have received.

The first one is from Reff's Nursery in Israel. You'll remember in Newsletter No 5 we had photographs of bonsai *Brachychiton*, they were courtesy of Israel Reff. I plan to type it as is so I dont misinterrupt anything.

Brachychitons as Bonsai Subjects

"..... If you like to have an interesting Bonsai from *Brachychiton*, you should start with seedlings. After the germination you pull out the seedling very gently and cut the root as close as it is possible to the connection between the root and the stem, so you will have division

branching of the roots. Afterwards you have to plant the plant in a 7-8 cm pot (it is better a square pot and not a round pot, so you will have interesting shapes in the roots) The root will go down in the pot and twist. In a round pot the shape will be of a spring, which is not so interesting.

After few month, when you can see on the bottom of the pot that the root got thicker, you transfer the plant to a bigger pot (9-10 cm and it is better to have a square pot) put a little soil in the new pot and transfer the plant. The root will again do goun to the bottom of the pot, and twist. You should repeat this transfers few times and then plant the plant in a big pot and give a lot of water and fertalization, so the plant will grow to be big.

When the root is thick you pull the root out, wash it from the soil, cut the stem where you like (not less than 2-3 cm from the connection point) and plant the plant in a Bonsai pot, which is short and most of the roots of the plant is outside. After two to three weeks the leaves will come out. In this stage it is important not to water a lot. The aim is to have compact leaves in proportion to the root, and it will look like a bonsai. In this stage you can keep the plant at home. It is very important that when there is low amount of light in the house, it is necessary to water less every 3-4 weeks."

From the other half now....Who can now grow the best bonsai? If anyone needs more information please write and we will hopefully get you the answers.

This next letter is from Jan Sked who is the ASGAP Study Group Coordinator.

Allied Genera from Southern Queensland

".....Just a note to tell you about a plant I have. I received the seed from the Queensland Region Seed Bank in June last year. It was old seed - November 1985 - and the only indication of its origin was a name pencilled on the packet, "Helensvale". The seed was marked *Rulingia hermanniifolia*. The only Helensvale I know is a suburb of the Gold Coast City. There is a Helensvale up near Cooktown. I planted the seed at the end of June and two seedlings germinated in October. These two seedlings are growing well in the seed box. (Mix is 3 parts sand to 1 part peatmoss.) However, as they develop they become less and less like the *R. hermanniifolia* that I know. I have looked the species up in the Flora of South-Eastern Queensland and the description of an unnamed species from the Darling Downs and Mt French matches my plants much better. I hope I can keep them growing and get an identification from the Herbarium when they are big enough to take specimens. They look like they could make an attractive ground cover.

There is a very attractive *Rulingia* here in the Pine Rivers area it is *R. dasyphylla*, but I have been unable so far to obtain any plants. It's grown in the open forest areas of the Mt Mee State Forest.

Back in 1985, you asked me about the distribution of *Brachychiton bidwillii* in our area. I had not come across

it in my vegetation surveys. However, recently one of our members brought me a badly dehydrated specimen of a flower and leaf that could have been it. It was certainly a *Brachychiton*, but it could have been *B. discolor*. She could not give me a description of the plant it came from, as it had been given to her by a friend who had found it on a property in the foothills of the D'Aguiar Range in the western part of our Shire. Until I can get to see the plant, I shall not know. However, the specimen was taken during the period when my own *B. bidwillii* was flowering.

- Argyrodendron actinophyllum* - large rainforest tree
- " *trifoliolatum* - large rainforest tree
- Commersonia bartramia* - small tree or shrub
- " *fraseri* - tall shrub
- " *sp.1.* - small to tall shrub
- " *sp.2.* - small shrub near Chinchilla
- Hannafordia shanesii* - small shrub from Darling Downs & Burnett

- Keraudrenia collina* - small shrub from Darling Downs
- " *corollata* - small shrub
- " *hillii* - small shrub usually in mountainous areas
- Laslopetalum ferrugineum* - small shrub usually in mountainous areas
- " *macrophyllum* - small shrub from Proston
- Melhanianthus oblongifolia* - small shrub in drier areas
- Melochia pyramidata* - weedy herb from Gayndah area
- Rulingia dasyphylla* - low shrub
- " *hermanniifolia* - very low shrub from Granite Belt
- " *salviifolia* - small shrub from Border Ranges
- " *sp.1.* - prostrate shrub from Darling Downs, etc.
- Seringia arborescens* - tall shrub
- Sterculia quadrifida* - medium rainforest tree

Most of the shrubby species grow in rocky, mountainous areas or drier areas west of the coastal ranges; so I have found them difficult to grow here on the humid coastal fringe in not-very-well-drained soil. Some I have not been able to obtain at all.

I think *Commersonia bartramia* is a good tree for horticulture. It is not too big for a suburban garden. It

is very quick growing, has attractive foliage and is covered in creamy flowers just around Christmas time. It is subject to insect attack, but I don't think this detracts too much from its appearance. I have been promoting it quite a bit recently in my work. In fact, I have just ordered a whole lot to be planted in a satellite city being developed just south of Brisbane."

From the other half again, thank you to both the Reff's and Jan for allowing me to be able to read what you wrote. Don't forget if anyone else has anything else they would like to share, my fingers are ready willing and sometimes able. Until next time take care and be happy.

Back to me, I would like to thank Israel Reff very much for his article. Israels plants look spectacular, he is even growing variegated Brachychitons over there. Israel has a commercial nursery in Isreal, he grows and breeds Portulacarias and is interested in supplying nurseries in Australia. If anyone is interested contact me and I will give you his contact.

As at 4 Apr 91 we have 38 members and we post out on average 45 newsletters each issue. Our financial standing is currently:

Balance at 1 Jul 90 = \$75.24

Deposits from 1 Jul 90 to date = \$118.82
(including interest)

Expenses for postage and printing of newsletters for
Issues Nov90 = \$43.05
and Apr 91 = \$61.94

Total: = \$104.99

Balance as at 4 Apr 91 = \$13.83