

NEWSLETTER OF THE "AUSTRALIAN PLANTS FOR CONTAINERS" STUDY GROUP.

A "Happy New Year" to you all - I hope 1985 will be a year of achievement in the sphere of container gardening using Australian plants.

Since the last newsletter, we, in the Riverina, have experienced very trying spring weather following our wet winter. The winds which have dried out our countryside were also pollen laden, causing much discomfort to a large proportion of the population in this area. It was a relief to journey to the South Coast for a week of perfect weather at beautiful Mollismook. Back home for Christmas Day, when the Wagga Wagga district experienced its worst bush fires for over 30 years, with much damage to stock and crops but fortunately no loss of life. Boxing Day brought more fires, this time to Mount Galore which I mentioned in Newsletter No. 1. At this stage I have no knowledge of the extent of the damage.

POTTING MIX AND FERTILIZER FOR POTTED PLANTS.

Notes from Sankowsky's Zodiac Nursery, Tolga, Nth. Queensland.

Reprinted from S.G.A.P. Queensland Region Bulletin No. 23, No.3, December, 1984 and also from the Tablelands Branch Newsletter, April, 1984.

A number of people have asked us about suitable fertilizer and potting mix for our plants. A lot of rubbish has been written about fertilizing native plants. I have even seen it written that "Native plants should not be fertilized." Putting a plant in a pot without nutrients is a bit like putting a cow in a yard for 6 months without feed. In a pot the roots occupy only a fraction of the area that they would in a natural situation; so, unless nutrients are added, the plants cannot grow at a normal rate.

The most convenient and efficient method of providing the N.P.K. nutrients is with long-life, slow-release fertilizer. If you live north of say Bundaberg, then there is only one worth using and that is NUTRICOTE. It requires a much higher temperature to release than OSMOCOTE, and if the latter is used, roots may be burnt by excess release in hot weather. Recent tests carried out at D.P.I Mareeba confirm that Nutricote is by far the best for the tropics and that the powdered brands are completely useless, as they release all their nutrients in 2-3 weeks.

The pH level is important, as in a too acid mix the nutrients are not available to the plant. Dolomite is used to set the level. A pH tester is essential. The "CSIRO soil pH testkit" can be purchased for about \$12.00

In our mix we use no soil. It is quite a cheap mix, as we use locally mined 'peat'. The one we use at present is "Tableland Peat". It bears no resemblance to peat moss, but seems to do the job O.K. A much better one (more like peat moss) is "Tropical Peat", but this is also more expensive. Even the dearer one is still about 30% of the price of imported peat.

Our mix is as follows: 50% peat + 50% sand (not too fine)

To 2 cubic feet of mix add:-

9-10 month Nutricote	300 grms.
Dolomite	450 grms.
Trace elements	4 grms.
Iron chelates	1 grm.

If you use soil, loam or whatever, check the pH and add dolomite until it is about 6, then all you need to add is the Nutricote. The pH of the sand will vary and the amount of dolomite must be adjusted to suit - this can change by as much as 50%.

If the low phosphorus Nutricote is used, all types of plants can be potted

in the mix. Rainforest plants do NOT require low phosphorus, even the Proteaceae family. Only the dry land and heath-type Proteacea (Banksias etc.) are phosphorus sensitive.

For top dressing on existing potted plants use 9-10 month Nutricote at the following rate: 1 heaped teaspoon for 150 mm pot, 1 level teaspoon for 125 mm and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon for 100 mm pot.

Annette Hallpike reported in October on her progress with Banksia sp.:

NO.	SPECIES	DEATHS SO FAR	PRESENT HEALTH
10	canei		V. good
10	spinulosa cunninghamii		V. good
5	marginata		V. good
2	petiolaris	1	V. good
2	candolleana		Good
2	ashbyi	2	
2	menziesii		O.K
5	blechnifolia		V. good

In October these plants were 12 months old and were potted into 6" pots using a Proteacea mix (lower in phosphorus). They are soon to be repotted into a modified Proteacea mix and I hope to give you full details in a later newsletter.

Bill Watkins reports that many experienced Sydney growers are using a pine bark mix put out by Blue Metal Industries which is sold as Azalea mix. Coarse river gravel is added to it and whilst plants grow well, losses would be high without an automatic watering system.

Bill has a large number of plants which he has had in containers for varying periods - he states that his early mistakes were not to tip prune early enough or to use fertilizer.

Graeme Mee of Singleton N.S.W. is specialising in Anigozanthos sp. Full details in the next newsletter.

NAMES AND ADDRESSES OF ACTIVE MEMBERS OF OUR GROUP:

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We have a number of passive members and I thank them for their interest and financial support.

Best wishes for successful container gardening,

Margaret Barbour
 MARGARET BARBOUR
 STUDY LEADER.

