



Spring is almost over and it has been a very rewarding time, both with container plants and also in the garden.

A problem I always experience is keeping my container plants in good condition so I was pleased to receive Bill Watkins' letter recently in which he included hints which he has found helpful in container cultivation and also hints from a professional nurseryman who spoke at a meeting of the Castle Hill S.G.A.P.

To ensure that container plants are well watered, Bill has found that it is beneficial to leave a space of 2.5 - 3 cm between the top of the soil and the rim of the pot. Fill this space with water several times, allowing it to soak in. A topping of metal screenings or coarse gravel keeps the soil from drying out quickly and keeps weeds to a minimum.

Do not assume that a pot has been well watered by a good rainfall. Often the plant is so bushy that the rain is deflected over the side and the soil misses out.

When growing *Anigozanthos* sp. Bill recommends that white stones be used as a mulch as they reflect more heat up to the plant. Also, do not water after 3 p.m., particularly in humid weather.

Graeme agrees with these suggestions - more details of his findings will be given below.

Hints from a nurseryman on how to keep container plants in top shape:-

1. Regular feeding.
2. Ruthless pruning at frequent intervals. This is done by running both hands up the outside of the plant and when the hands come level to where the taller shoots start to branch out, all these shoots are pruned off and this leaves a nicely rounded bush. Cuttings can be taken when the plant starts to shoot after this treatment.

Bill reports on his success with *Cymbidium suave*, an orchid which is usually considered difficult to grow but which he has had in a terracotta pipe end for 20 years. Recently he obtained further plants of this species and has planted them in a length of stringy bark taken off a log. The ends were blocked off and it was placed in a horizontal position under a maple tree. Now it is growing very successfully and seems to be better than any seen in the bush and far better than the ones Bill has in vertical containers.

His other successes (he has over '76 container plants) include *Correas* and *Melaleuca fulgens* (3 colours - red, salmon and purple) and these seem to be very successful.

Difficulties have been experienced with the length of time *Crowea* and *Boronia megastigma* will live in a pot although a "Heaven Scent" hybrid of *B. megastigma* has survived 1½ years. (I have also had this particular hybrid and it has survived for over 14 months, despite considerable neglect and extremely harsh weather both winter and summer.)

After flowering well *Hibbertia obtusifolia* and *Pultenea cunninghamii* died. I would be pleased to hear from any members who have had experience with these plants.

Graeme Mee answered several questions (as mentioned above) regarding watering of his *Anigozanthos* species. He agrees with Bill about watering during the morning so as to avoid moisture on the leaves for over 12 hours. He tries to avoid wetting the leaves as one of his big problems

is crown and stem rot which kills off individual rhizomes in some species mainly *A. flavidus* forms. He removes the rotting rhizome before it spreads to the rest of the plant and finds that part of the problem is that the new rhizomes come from below ground level and the damp soil causes rotting of stem and crown.

Tissue culture and propagation and breeding of new forms is increasing the availability of plants which in the past have been in short supply because they have been difficult to propagate. Early this year, Graeme managed to obtain a Black Kangaroo Paw which has grown well and has flowered magnificently, with no sign of disease.

At the end of September, Graeme took a number of plants to the Hunter Valley Branch of S.G.A.P. and gave a talk which proved very successful. (I hope all members of our Container Group will avail themselves of any opportunity to talk to groups and so gain valuable publicity for successful container gardening with Australian plants.

Recently George (my husband) and I attended a function at Tumbarumba (about 130 kms. from Wagga Wagga) to mark the official opening of the first section of the Hume and Hovell Walking Track which is the N.S.W. Department of Lands' principal contribution to the 1988 Bicentennial Celebrations.

Members of our Wagga Wagga S.G.A.P. Group had earlier been asked to identify Australian flora and birds on this 13 km. section of the track which will ultimately stretch from Gunning to Albury and follow in the steps of our famous explorers (a distance in all of 450. kms) so it was as representatives of our society that we attended this historic occasion.

The concept of this track and others already opened by the Department is a farseeing one which will enable all members of the community to enjoy outdoor recreation such as swimming, camping, nature study, fishing, wildlife observation and historical appreciation.

We must remember, however, as we go towards our Bicentenary that there is a price to pay for opening up our countryside in this way and that it is up to us all who are members of S.G.A.P. to do our best to ensure that our native flora and fauna are preserved for future generations.

The problem is not restricted to Australia - in the United Kingdom a speaker on T.V. was heard to encourage people to grow in their own garden native flora to offset the despoilment caused by bulldozing, ploughing etc.

Also an extract from "Wild Flowers of Greece" by George Sfikas:- "Greece has no laws protecting their rare plants from despoilation. Excessive sheep grazing in summer, the construction of roads on almost every mountain, and the sometimes indiscriminate collecting of rare plants by foreign scientists are endangering the future of the rare wild flowers of Greece".

Now that the mail is moving again in N.S.W. I am hoping to hear from you all with full details of both your successes and failures.

Best wishes for successful container gardening,

*Margaret Barbour*

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