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ASSOCIATION OF SOCIETIES FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS

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Autumn arrived on time on the 1st March with a sharp drop in temperatures and some very welcome rain - much appreciated after a very dry summer which proved disastrous for some of my container plants. However, a fortnight later we are back to temperatures in the low 30's and anxiously waiting for some follow up rain.

We had our usual stay at beautiful Mollymook on the N.S.W. South Coast in December and were able to visit two wildflower reserves - The Ulladulla Wildflower Reserve (best for a springtime visit) and a very new development, the South Pacific Heathland Reserve which was a delight to see and has great potential. If any of you are travelling along the Pacific Highway a short detour at the southern end of the town of Ulladulla will be very rewarding.

Many thanks again to Bill Watkins for his detailed reports on his container plants. Bill is still having great success with his grafted *Prostantheras* particularly *P. x "Ballerina"*, & *P. baxterii* var *sericea*. This genus does not do well in Sydney because of high humidity so perhaps any of you living in high humidity areas might like to try your hand at grafting them onto *Westringia fruticosa* stocks.

Bill also reports success with *Lechenaultia* sp. After little long term success he decided to try once again and purchased a yellow *L. formosa* and a *L. biloba* which he double potted by planting them in 6" pots. These were then placed in 8" pots and the space filled with soil. Both plants have bloomed well (the *L. formosa* over a period of 5 months) and look very healthy. The containers have been placed in a situation where they get full afternoon sun so the double pot could be one way to keep the root system cool. It will be interesting to hear how these plants have responded to the very trying summer Sydney has had.

My thanks, too, to Pat Shaw of Macgregor, Queensland for her long report and letters. Pat's container plants are all grown in plastic pots placed inside clay or glazed pots (so they can be easily moved) and are all growing on patios either at the front or back of the house. The flowering plants are on the front edge of a long patio which receives sun all day in the winter and morning sun in the summer. Pots are watered according to the weather - in the winter once or twice a week and in the summer every two to three days.

I was interested to note in Pat's letter that *Crowea saligna* was pruned back to half size and is bushing up nicely but *Crowea exalta* was lost when given the same treatment. I also lost a *Crowea exalta* after pruning heavily - this plant, which had bloomed beautifully for months was pruned during the late spring. It deteriorated steadily during our long hot summer and finally succumbed to our usual plague of hungry, marauding insects.

Pat also reports on her grafted plants and the difficulty of obtaining a suitable rootstock for *Boronia rosmarinifolia* which is native to the area. Unfortunately, it no longer grows there because of locked in phosphorus used for years as a farm fertilizer. At the time of writing, her husband, Harvey (who does all the grafting had wedge grafted *B. rosmarinifolia* onto *Euodia elleryana* and after five weeks the graft was still looking good.

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The potting mix used has been a combination of pulverized hoop pine bark and sand at a ratio of bark 7, sand 3, with added nutrients or a peat/sand/fertilizer mix. However, recently the pine bark mix has caused some problems and appears to be toxic to some Proteaceae species so slash pine bark will now be substituted.

Lechenaultia formosa, Scaevola stricta, Tetratheca thymifolia and Damperia diversifolia have been repotted into a mixture of 2:1 sand peatmoss with Nutricote added to the mixture and a little extra on top. These plants are responding to the change and looking much healthier.

The Queensland Region and Branches will be staging a landscape design feature using a large number of plants in containers for its display at their September Show. Pat is busy preparing for this event. I will be looking forward to hearing from her and also anyone who participates in the display (even if you are not members of the study group) - a letter telling of your success (or problems with growing on plants in containers) would be of interest and very much appreciated.

My own container plants have been somewhat neglected recently as we became grandparents six weeks ago for the first time. If it had not been for George's efforts every evening on the watering front I fear all would have been lost but life is returning to normal, the weather is much cooler and gardening activities are very enjoyable instead of the chore they become towards the end of a long, hot, and dry summer.

At the beginning of the summer I repotted two Bird's Nest ferns (*Asplenium australasicum*) and a Hare's foot fern (*Davillia pyxidata*) into Decor Waterwell pots using a commercial potting mix sold by a local fern nursery. The Bird's Nests have performed well over a very hot summer but the *Davillia pyxidata* is still rather disappointing - it was a beautiful specimen, brought back from Sydney (where it thrives) at the end of May, placed in my shade house and then brought inside in July when we were away and the house was very cold. I am now waiting to see what effects the winter will have on all three ferns.

It is quite some time since I have heard from some of our active members and I would like to remind you all that the newsletter is only as good as the information I receive. No matter how insignificant you may feel your contribution is, it might be the clue some one else needs, so please put pen to paper.

Best wishes for successful container gardening,

Margaret Barbour

MARGARET BARBOUR.