



## "Yanderra" News

### Jo Hambrett

*From the May 2005 issue of the Study Group Newsletter.*

Emboldened by our first really good summer rains in three years I decided to do some summer planting and not, as usual leave it to the cooler autumn months. It would be interesting to see if I could get some extra growth by earlier planting with the back up of summer storms. It was in the May 03 newsletter that I wrote about our loss of the garden next door and what we had to do in our garden to try and diminish that loss. Well, of course, all the planting was carried out during the drought -so progress was initially slow. Especially the lilly pillies, *Syzygium australe* - who were in charge of shielding us from the very worst excesses over the fence! I was almost ready to ditch them - they had not even achieved fence height in two years - and replace them with the easy going and very pretty blueberry ash when it began to rain. They are much happier now and, I think, may have won themselves a reprieve! The *Melaleuca styphilioides* along the same boundary have done well but have lately enjoyed the attention of the dreaded webbing caterpillar, so vigilance is needed there. Growth in the other beds along the boundary has been slow also, but very few deaths and the wattles are really looking good now. By the time they have done their best the rest should have grown a lot more. Happily the *Persoonia* has seeded. It is one of my favourite indigenous plants and has proved tricky to grow when bought from the nursery. I hope this Spring will see planting expectations realized!. An interesting by- product of the drought was the huge reduction in canopy cover as the trees shed their leaves. Gazing upwards, as large sunny patches sprawled across the previously shady fern glade, I was amazed at how many large chunks of sky could be seen. The turpentines and grey gums had dropped a huge amount of leaf [not to mention never ending sticks] and this of course was totally changing the microenvironment of the understorey.. I planted the fast growing indigenous *Acacia decurrens* and slower red cedars in an attempt to create a tall shrub size middle storey and protect the ferns and other shade lovers growing there. Fortunately the rains came and the trees obligingly re leafed before quick growth on their part was needed!

The trunk garden, mentioned in the same newsletter, is coming along well. No deaths to report. I have added two more eucalypts [demonstrating a complete lack of the discipline, so important in good design] *Eucalyptus gregsoniana* the mallee Snow Gum, and *E.Jeucoxylon rosa*, both trees remind me of places I like [Mt. Wilson and Melbourne] and, more importantly, have good trunks too! I now must pinch out the tops and if I am really brave I'll cut some off at ground level to get the multi trunk and mallee effect. They have been underplanted with *Poa labillarderi* and the spectacular barbed wire grass, *Cymbopogon refractus*, its weeping habit, striking seed heads [just like barbed wire] and red stalks make it a real eye catcher, I adore it. Next to the trunk garden, [and now part of it, in what was previously an unsuccessfully resolved, grassed open space] are plantings of poa and cymbopogon curving sinuously across the newly created bed.

### New Plantings

Inspired by Gordon Ford's writings on the natural garden and asymmetrical design, I placed a bird bath in the middle of the bed [the previously unsuccessfully resolved one mentioned above], approached by a straight path, but on the diagonal. Planted around its base are *Pennisetum alopecuroides* in a square pattern. Backlit by the afternoon sun, their fluffy seed heads are a happy contrast to the angularity of the cymbopogon and themeda seed heads. It's an experiment but it looks right [occult balance], allowing me to introduce formal concepts without making the formality itself the feature. The straight lines of the path, the square planting at the base and the lower half of the birdbath are hidden by the curving sweeps of grass. The pathway is discovered almost as you are past it. The formality is secondary to the sweeping lines of the natural garden. The backdrop is a newly planted, informal hedge of *Callistemon citrinus* 'Endeavour' which runs along the front fence and down the side until it meets an old planting of *C.viminalis*. Again a formal concept in an informal setting. An added bonus - the blue/purple of the nearby jacarandas and the red of the bottlebrush perfectly match the Crimson rosellas, our the most frequent visitors to the birdbath!

Still at the front but on the other side of the driveway, the last of the struggling pepper trees has bitten the dust and some of the silky oaks should be feeling a tad edgy! Here, in the newly extended bed, I have put in more lomatas, correas, *Phebalium squamulosum* and a couple of *Calytrix tetragona* "rich pink." I also succumbed, predictably, to the "temptation to buy waratahs" virus, closely related to the "temptation to buy West Australian species and *Boronia*" virus and have popped in two *Telopea* 'Shady Ladies', one white and one red. I told them I loved them and that they were planted somewhere in the Blue Mountains, OK the last one is a lie!

The bed at the top end was also enlarged and part of a beautiful rock exposed. A much prettier picture. I have tried to make this planting restrained and a feature. Again a more formal design concept within a natural garden setting. Previously I have always

deliberately chosen plants, native and exotic, whose shape and foliage were sympathetic to the indigenous bushland; endeavouring to create an overall effect that is harmonious and peaceful. I was aware however that this front area was uninspiring. It lacked the grace of untouched bush and the beds of small to medium shrubs sloped too quietly into the natural bushland behind. All was too subtle, some tension was needed to appreciate the peace! It was a picture that could be improved upon. I was also conscious of the need to draw people to this side of the garden away from the top boundary where the Bruce Mckenzie garden had been. The focus had to shift. The plants were chosen for their form and colour, definite specimen plants. *Banksia serrata*, two *Corymbia eximia*, [small, attractive shape, full canopied, grey pendulous foliage, soft, yellow flaky trunks and heads of cream summer blossoms], an *Angophora costata* and *Eucalyptus cinerea*. I aim to keep the latter cut back to a shrub of round tinkling silver leaves. There are three species of grevilleas, *G.miqueliana* -soft green elliptical leaves, *G.victoriae*, oval leaf form, and the grey toned, very attractive *G.arenaria* - these three blend well with the correas, phebaliums and eriostemons in a nearby bed and provide relief amongst the predominantly silver foliage. The rest of the planting is silver and grey, Federation Stars "Starbright" flannel flowers, *Senna artemisioides*, *Leucophyta brownii* nana and *Prostanthera sericea*

The grey plantings catch the cars headlights as we come up the drive at night and are quite luminous, even by starlight. By day, from both inside and outside the house, this garden draws one physically and visually closer. It makes an area that was never noticed before, just extra scenery if you like, a feature garden which also highlights the bushland backdrop. The front rainforest bed opposite this new planting was also slightly enlarged in the interest of balance [not the bank balance Bruce would hasten to add!] Here I seized the opportunity to add more of the indigenous *Backhousia myrtifolia*, lovely, lovely things that they are, with creamy flowers, residual pale green star shaped calyx and an attractive horizontal habit. Also, *Graptophyllum ilicifolium* the holly fuchsia, a bold little rainforest shrub with stiffly serrated leaves, like holly but much more of a tree frog green with bold crimson fuchsia flowers in late spring - apparently beloved by honeyeaters - a beauty! Plus of course, dear old dianella as the hardy, indigenous and attractive infiller.

The drought has taken its toll of some of our older trees and shrubs, or possibly just hastened their demise. One of our big *Banksias serrata* in the front lawn - part of the original planting nearly twenty years ago suddenly and unceremoniously died. An unexpected plus though has been an greatly improved vista from one of our windows which takes in a large part of the entire front garden area with a focus on, the previously obscured, variegated *Lophostemon conferta*. A real specimen tree and now properly highlighted. A large, prolific purple flowering *Alyogyne huegii* has also shuffled off, a pity as it looked great flowering at the same time as the *Prostanthera ovalifolia* in the same bed - often referred to as the "suffragette garden" due to its deep purpleness! I have replaced it with lower growing birds' nest ferns and midjin berry, *Austromyrtus dulcis*, enabling one to appreciate the gentle slope of the garden bed, which the very large *Alyogyne* didn't, and view the, now mature and attractive, trunks of the Bangalow palms behind. This successful change gave me heart to get stuck into the nearby *Hibiscus splendens* which had got a little too territorial for my liking. Reducing their numbers, size and shape also allowed for unexpected, pleasing glimpses of the glade behind. As Diana wrote in her "Change in the Garden" article (Feb 2005 Newsletter), "*the death of any plant is sad but the chance to do a little redesigning is not. ....Designing continues throughout the life of a garden and gets more and more interesting as the years go by.*"

Some of the elderly members of the *Allocasuarina torulosa* glade, having grown here forever, look tired of life. I don't feel they'll make another summer. It is one of my favourite areas in the garden and, fortunately, we have been adding to it over the years but the size and shape of the old timers is irreplaceable.

I must make mention of the veritable snowstorm of grey gum, *Eucalyptus punctata*, blossom that covered the garden in the second half of February. Unbelievable. The trees were alive with birds, mainly raucous rainbow lorikeets, which I could hear rather than see. The air was so full of tiny blossom filaments that I was shaking them off the dry washing, the joints in between the verandah pavers were packed tight and the leaves of garden plants were covered for weeks in a heavy dusting of fragmented blooms.