



Association Of Societies For Growing Australian Plants  
**Banksia Study Group Newsletter**

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### **In This Issue**

Hyperpigmented *Banksia robur* – Cas Liber  
Banksias at Drouin, Vic. – Jim Pelacchi  
Growing Banksias In Northern Victoria – Paul Kennedy  
Trunk buds on *Banksia robur* – Cas Liber  
Sunshine Coast form of Wallum Banksia (*B. aemula*) – Kerry Rathie  
Banksia growing in Como (Sydney), NSW – Norpert Schaeper  
*Banksia baueri* & *blechnifolia* in Nowra, NSW – Dot Gallagher  
A Short note on Seed Viability Storage – Glenn Firth  
Seed Bank  
Membership List (as of Jan '03)  
Biennial Fred Rogers Seminar – November 2004 – Colac, Victoria

### **Hyperpigmented *Banksia robur***

About 2 years ago I noticed that among the crop of *B. robur* growing in the Banksia section, there were plants with dark brown or almost purplish leaves. The plants grew from seed provenanced from just north of Maroochydore, with the variants arising from them. The question was whether the colour was a natural reaction to the cold climate (and hence reverse in a warmer one) or was it a new variant. The colour was noted to be more intense in winter.

Thus I requested get some material and have just received some cuttings (which will hopefully strike!) of some of the hyperpigmented *Banksia robur* growing in the Australian National Botanic Gardens in Canberra. I will keep you all updated.

In the meantime the plants can be seen in the 'Gardens in the Banksia Section. I will get a photo next time I'm down.

### **Banksias at Drouin, Vic.**

Jim Pelacchi has written to me with his progress after moving a large (1/3<sup>rd</sup> hectare) block in Drouin from nearby Warragul in 1996. He writes:

“Rainfall where we are averages around 1000mm annually, with some rain coming in summer. The block is on a west facing slight slope with most banksias planted on rubble (25cm), removed for a concrete slab, over a rich acid loam – pH 5.5 – 6.5. The banksias were originally planted from nursery 6” pots. We don't generally water our plants after we had some plant deaths after watering in summer, which we suspected were due to *Phytophthora*.

- *B.* “Giant Candles” - doing fine
- *B. spinulosa collina* - doing fine
- *B. coccinea* - grew 2m. No flowers, died 1999
- *B. menziesii* - grew. Flowered twice, died 2001
- *B. baxteri* - grew. Flowered twice, died 2000
- *B. baueri* - grew. Flowered twice, died 2001

(suspect *Phytophthora*)

Following year planted:

- *B. blechnifolia* - doing very well & flowering
- *B. petiolaris* - doing very well & flowering (has set seed)
- *B. cunninghamii* - doing very well & flowering
- *B. gardneri gardneri* - was growing slowly, but did okay & flowered, until it died after an attempted transplantation.

Growing the following from seed from the Australian Plants Society seedbank:

- *B. praemorsa* (x2) - 3 years, doing well
- *B. lemniiana* - 3 years, doing well
- *B. caleyi* (x2) - 3 years, doing well
- *B. dryandroides* (x2) - 3 years, one in rockery doing very well, the other on flat ground OK
- *B. candolleana* (x2) - 3 years, doing well
- *B. praemorsa* purple - 2 years, doing OK
- *B. sphaerocarpa* - 1 year in garden, then died
- *B. burdetti* - 1 year in garden, then died
- *B. coccinea* - 1 year in garden, then died
- *B. praemorsa* purple - 1 year in garden, then died

Approximately 12 months ago I decided to try the limestone underlay method with 1 x *B. lemniiana*, 1x *B. candolleana* and a *Dryandra formosa*.”

### **Growing Banksias In Northern Victoria**

Six years ago Barbara and I sold our suburban home in Melbourne and went to live at Strathmerton. We had been growing banksias with some success in Melbourne, but the limitation of space, clay-loam soil and cooler climate made it difficult to grow the Western Australian species successfully.

Our land at Strathmerton consists of two 18 acre blocks and it is the rear block that has the sand hills which are so important to growing the Western Australian species successfully. In between is a clay pan laid down in a subsequent geological period. There are also some loamy soils between the sand and clay layer. The average rainfall is 450 mm, but for the past six years the rainfall has been well below average.

The sand hills are 20m deep and were laid down millions of years ago when the Murray River entered the sea at this location. The sand is a light -brown in color but is very pervious. In places there is some wind blown sand which can be impervious when dry. The pH is slightly acid being 5.5- 6.5. What we did not know was that even in the hottest of summers there is a moist layer of sand 1.5m below the surface. We have watched Eucalypts grow slowly for the first three years and then grow rapidly once the roots have reached this moist layer. Humidity is low in summer which western banksias are used to.

Growing banksias on the sand hill initially was a challenge as we had to overcome the hot dry summers and deal with the lack of moisture which is never assured apart from the months of August and September. The first step was to study where each species of banksia came from and its climate and soil type. To grow Australian plants successfully the first rule is to grow them in soil as near as possible to the soil type to where they occur naturally. The second problem was how to water them without killing them. The answer to this lay in observing the local cut flower growers who only watered at night after the sun had gone down. During the summer the banksias get about a third of a bucket of water from the hose once per week on dusk. I doubt whether it gives the larger ones much benefit as their roots are probably already down into the moist sand layer. I heard recently that some Banksias can put roots down to eight metres in depth. With the house constructed, the plantings began in earnest in 1996.

To date some 74 species and subspecies have been introduced into the garden. Most flower at about three years of age which is earlier than specified in the Banksia book. The other interesting note is that nearly all flowering specimens have set seed, which is great for future collection of

seed. I do not intend to list what we are growing, but rather at the end to list the 20 that we are chasing to complete the collection. Unlike the *Hakea* genera there is no specific grouping, so I will look at some of the individual species and comment on our experiences selecting species from different zones around Australia.

### The Eastern Species

Not many of these are sand loving, but prefer to grow in heavier soils. Initial trials with the *spinulosa* group growing on sand was not successful as they turned yellow with stunted growth due to the lack of sufficient minerals in the sand. However on clay-loam soils they grow quite well and need summer watering in this climate to keep them alive. The coastal forms of *Banksia integrifolia*, *serrata* and *aemula* all grow well on the deep sand averaging 1 m of growth per year. *Banksia ornata* is very specific about soil type and will only grow on deep sand.

*Banksia marginata*, *saxicola*, *canei* and *oblongifolia* grow well in clay-loam soils and prefer some shade as our summers are very hot.

*Banksia robur* and *paludosa* prefer to grow in wetter soils, however once established are quite tolerant of dry periods.

### The Western Australian Species

Generally they can be looked at under six zones marked by climatic differences and in some cases soil differences as well. I'll elaborate on some from each zone that I have growing in the garden.

#### Perth and northern sand plains.

About 19 species are found here on deep sands, sandy loams and lateritic soils.

*Banksia leptophylla* var. *leptophylla*. A plant six years old in sandy loam has grown to 1.5m by 2.4m and flowers profusely for ten months of the year. It has grown so large that from now on many of the flowers will have to be removed to keep the plant healthy and not become leggy.

*Banksia candolleana*. The deep serrated leaves are a feature of this plant as well as its rounded shape. The bright yellow flowers in July are on stalks about 150mm long. Planted in deep sand it took three years to grow to 1.0 m by 1.5m and flower.

*Banksia telmatiaea*. Another that is being grown on deep sand. At four years old it has grown to 1.3m by 2m and continues to flourish. The flowers are hidden inside the bush but are quite pretty to look at. Flowers for a long period from May through to November.

*Banksia laricina*. This species has lovely dainty lime yellow flowers hidden in the bush. The foliage is also quite appealing in that it has light green terete leaves and is very dense. Flowers in winter on deep sand. The plant is three years old and 1 m by 1 m in size.

#### The southern forests.

The soils here can vary from sandy loams to clays and there is a much higher rainfall

*Banksia cuneata*. One of my favorites, although in some ways it looks more like a dryandra than a banksia. I have two plants growing on deep sand and one is now 3.6m high in four years. Flowering now for the second time its open foliage allows the flowers to be easily seen. As it is endangered in the wild we should endeavour to grow as many as we can of this species.

*Banksia occidentalis*. This species needs to be near moisture to survive. When I was visiting Cape Arid NP recently, I saw this species growing near wet depressions with populations kilometres apart. The two plants here are on deep sand but are also close to the fernery which has a watering system, so there is moisture available both artificially and naturally at depth to keep them going. Now 2.1 m high after four years, they flower in summer-autumn with red flowers.

*Banksia quervifolia*. I have included this species because its flowers are a bit different to many of the other banksias. The cylindrical brown flowers grow along the stem and look quite attractive against the bright green foliage. Planted on deep sand it flowers in the winter here. Would probably grow well in loam soils provided moisture is available. Comes from forest areas.

I also have *Banksia seminuda* and *littoralis* growing in deep loam soil and they are growing at 1 m per year at present. Located near the shaded house, they receive some moisture at depth from the watering of seedlings.

#### The Stirlings - Albany zone.

About eleven species can be found here on soils varying from shaly hill sides to grey sandy soils

of the flatter areas.

*Banksia coccinea*. Everyone wants to grow this one, however it generally is difficult to keep going. My observations in the wild have been that it tends to grow on shaly slopes where moisture is moving down the slope underground. I have planted two near the fernery in dappled shade and one is about to flower. It has taken me thirty years of trying to reach this stage.

*Banksia aculeata*. This species has dark green serrated leaves and dark red pendant flowers hidden in the bush. It has fascinating seed capsules the size of a football in some cases. Grows only in the Stirling Ranges on sandy loams. Here it is on similar soil and tends to grow into a low bush rather than the tall forms you see in the Stirlings. Has flowered once in 1999 at the age of three years.

#### Geraldton - Kalbarri zone.

There are five species in this zone all of which grow on deep sand.

*Banksia victoriae*. Very striking when in flower as the pink- white flower is held on long stems. Planted in deep sand our specimen has grown to 1m by 1m in three years and flowered in January of this year. I'm looking forward to when it is a large plant with perhaps fifty or more flowers.

#### The dry inland zone.

I have listed seven species under this category. They grow on deep sand to stony soils where rainfall can be very low and unpredictable.

*Banksia ashbyi*. A very attractive species with bright orange flowers held high on long stems. Loves to grow on deep sand and does not like our cool winters. Nevertheless our specimen has reached 1.2m in height and flowered this winter. Frosts tend to burn off flower buds or deform them.

*Banksia benthamiana*. The Perth members of the Society find it difficult to grow this species. It comes from the Meekatharra area where it grows in soils of clay and stone. I have 5 specimens growing and three are in clay loam soils and the other two in deep sand. The former have been outstanding growing quickly to 1.5m and flowering from the age of two years. The yellow -brown flowers are quite attractive and appear from December through to February. The plants have never been watered artificially as they seem to prefer dry conditions. The two on sand have grown much more slowly and have flowered also. However I think the right soil type has a lot to do with successful growing of this species.

*Banksia laevigata ssp fuscolutea*. Another very interesting plant in flower. Grows naturally north and east of Lake King on loamy soils over laterite. Planted in loam here it has grown to 1 m by 1 m in three years and flowered profusely in the past two years. Does not prefer to be artificially watered. The striking aspect of this banksia is the tennis ball shaped flowers which commence as woolly brown flowers and change to deep yellow with age. Flowers in autumn.

#### The Southern sand plains

As the title suggests it includes the coastal areas from east of Albany to east of Esperance. I have listed about seventeen species from this area, most of which grow on sandy soils although some are to be found on the stony soils of the Barrens. Also the ironstone/laterite soils on the Ravensthorpe range.

*Banksia speciosa*. This species loves our climate and sand hill. In three years it has reached 2.4m in height and flowered in its second year. Its roots have probably already reached the moist layer in the sand and from now on the battle will be to keep in some reasonable size and shape. The flowers are on long stalks and make good cut flower specimens for indoors.

*Banksia epica*. One of the rarer species which grows in sand on the edge of the Great Australian Bight. Few people have seen this one because of its remoteness. I have four plants growing here and they appear to have settled in. The flower is similar to *Banksia media*.

*Banksia blechnifolia*. A prostrate species that has spread rapidly over the ground. Each year the number of flowers produced increases and this year I can count about fifty orange- brown spikes. The deeply lobed bright green foliage is also quite attractive. I like to mix taller and prostrate Banksias together if they are growing in a garden bed.

Well that is the end of the species that I'd like to comment about. Now for the list of banksias that I need seed or seedlings of. I hope some of the Banksia Study Group members can help so

that the banksia collection can be established here.

*Banksia conferta* ssp *penicillata*, *lindleyana*, *elegans*, *goodii*, *leptophylla* var. *melletica*, *verticillata*, *meisneri* ssp *ascendens*, *paludosa* ssp *astrolux*, *pulchella*, *nutans* var. *cernuella*, *oligantha*.

I hope the above notes are of some help to you in growing banksias. Please call in if you are up this way. The sharing of information is vital if we are to move forward in the successful growing of this wonderful genus.

### **Trunk Buds On *B. robur***



This has been an interesting development over summer. I had never seen this previously myself and asked Trevor Blake & Alex George about it.

Trevor replied that this was quite common for *B. robur* and had also been seen with *B. spinulosa collina*, *B. paludosa*, *B. marginata* and even *B. ericifolia*.

Alex added:

“I've seen this a number of times in cultivation (e.g. Australian National Botanic Gardens, Canberra) but never in the wild. If I remember rightly the Canberra plants were propagated from seeds collected in Queensland.

*Banksia oblongifolia* does the same sometimes, and I've seen multiple inflorescences on *B. integrifolia* but not at the base of the trunk. I think some of Kevin Collins' plants at the Banksia Farm have done this.”

### **Form Of Wallum Banksia (*B. aemula*) from the Sunshine Coast**



Kerry Rathie reports:

“ This form of *Banksia aemula* grows to 1 m and has terminal flowers on straight stems as shown, which would make it idea for cut flowers.

This plant came from an area of bushland 2 beaches south of Noosa which has subsequently been cleared and is thus extinct in the wild.

(photo: Kerry Rathie)

## Banksia growing in Como (Sydney), NSW

Norpert Shaeper writes:

“We moved in during Spring 1994. The block is sloping (west to east), so generally well drained. The soil is a silty sand with a fair bit of rubble & areas of fill. There is some sandstone at and below the surface. Some areas are very dry & other areas have fairly persistent moisture not too far beneath the surface.

“In the summer of 1998-9 I built a treated pine retaining wall in front of an existing stone retaining wall (facing north) and backfilled it with Nepean river sand. The WA banksias have been planed into this bed.

“I don't water regularly, but will occasionally when something is new or looking particularly dry.

<b>Date Planted</b>	<b>Species</b>	<b>Size, Jan 2003</b>	<b>First Flowered</b>
Aug-1999	<i>aculeata</i>	70cm	no
Dec-2000	<i>aemula</i>	died	no
Dec-2000	<i>oblongifolia</i>	died	no
Mar-2001	<i>attenuata</i> (slender)	80cm	no
Aug-1999	<i>baxteri</i> (Bird's Nest)	died	no
Dec-2000	<i>blechnifolia</i>	died	no
Nov-1996	<i>caleyi</i>	died	no
Aug-1999	<i>coccinea</i>	1.2m	no
Aug-1999	<i>dryandroides</i>	50cm	Nov-2001
Nov-1994	<i>ericifolia</i>	5m	Dec-1996
Jul-1996	<i>ericifolia</i>	1.2m	no
Dec-2001	<i>ericifolia</i> - dwarf form	50cm	no
May-1996	<i>ericifolia</i> x <i>collina</i> (“Giant Candles”)	2m	Dec-1997
Dec-2000	<i>ericifolia</i> x <i>collina</i> (“Giant Candles”)	70cm	no
Dec-2001	<i>spinulosa</i> ‘honey pots’	50cm	no
Jan-1996	<i>integrifolia</i> (coastal)	10m	May-1999
May-1996	<i>integrifolia</i> (coastal)	died	May-1999
Sep-2002	<i>integrifolia</i> (coastal) x 4	7-12cm	no
Mar-1995	<i>integrifolia</i> var??	70cm	no
Nov-1996	<i>lemanniana</i>	70cm	no
Jan-1997	<i>marginata</i> (silver)	3m	Sep-1999
Nov-1996	<i>marginata</i> x <i>integrifolia</i> (silver)	2m	no
Aug-1999	<i>menziesii</i> - dwarf form (firewood)	1.6m	Dec-2001
Apr-1999	<i>oblongifolia</i>	50cm	no
Dec-2000	<i>occidentalis</i> (red swamp)	1.1m	no
Jul-1999	<i>paludosa</i>	70cm	no
Nov-1996	<i>quercifolia</i>	died	no
Aug-1999	<i>repens</i> (creeping)	died	no
Nov-1996	<i>robur</i>	1.8m	Sep-1999
Dec-2000	<i>robur</i>	50cm	no
Mar-1997	<i>serrata</i>	died	no
Sep-1997	<i>serrata</i>	3m	no
Jul-2002	<i>serrata</i>	10cm	no
Nov-1996	<i>speciosa</i>	died	no
Nov-1994	<i>spinulosa</i>	3m	Mar-1996
Jan-1996	<i>spinulosa collina</i>	1.5m	Feb-2001
Oct-1996	<i>spinulosa collina</i>	died	no
Apr-1999	<i>victoriae</i>	1.6m	Dec-2003

### **Banksia baueri & blechnifolia in Nowra, NSW**

Dot Gallagher writes:

“Regarding Your article in Native Plants about W.A. banksias, I'd like to tell you about my "possum".

I moved to this roughly quarter acre in 1997, the block almost all kikuyu lawn, with a couple of small beds of uninteresting shrubs (all but one shrub removed!). It was attractive because I wanted to create one more garden before death/retirement village arrived. The house had no back verandah, just two flights of 3-steps. I had a verandah put on, and the rubble from the steps and the clods of impenetrable clay that were dug out for the verandah I had the builders pile up in one spot. I covered this mound with bought in low-Ph soil. With sinkage into the loose mound there is probably not a lot of the soil left at the top. The mound is nearly 2m long and about 1.2m wide.

At one end of the mound I planted a small *Banksia baueri*, probably bought at the 1998 Mt. Annan plant sale, and it struggled along, its leaves never looking that healthy, but last year it had its first "possum". I wore it out looking at it and admiring it! It was really big, as such "possums" should be. This year, with the plant now about 80 cm high and wide. it has 3 flowers. Everything has had smaller than usual flowers this year because of the drought and extreme heat, so I'm not expecting miracles with the banksia flowers (1 already have the miracle of its growing here).

We have terrible winter gales here but the banksia is slightly protected by a persoonia and *B. spinulosa* (1 m.), however with heavy rain yesterday and today, and gusts of very strong n. winds, I've been running around with the hammer and stakes trying to secure things I've kept alive with hand hosing. They have been shocked by all this moisture on their foliage. I'm just hoping that banksia stays put.

At the other end of the mound I planted a *Xanthorrhoea* seedling. about 1" across and 15" high (back to Imperial) and it is now a ball of about 1m. radius. I don't care about its lack of a trunk - it is SO attractive. There are a few other things on or near the mound making a lovely island in the lawn. By the way, there's not much lawn left. No poisons. just the mattock. There is also a *B. blechnifolia* at the base of the mound which is sometimes good, sometimes not, gets lovely flowers. I had an even better one in a bed but it was a case of those native overnight deaths. I've got about 18 banksias.

### **A Short note on seed viability storage**

Glenn Firth writes:

'Good storage procedures equals longer term seed viability (provided that the seed embryo is viable in the first place). I can attest to Banksia seed maintaining viability for seven years kept in storage with relatively small loss in yield ratios.

Species tested were:

*B. cuneata*  
*B. serrata*  
*B. integrifolia* ssp *integrifolia*  
*B. laricina*  
*B. prionotes*  
*B. solandri*  
*B. saxicola*  
*B. occidentalis*  
*B. ornata*  
*B. coccinea*  
*B. ericifolia*  
*B. baxteri*

*B. speciosa*  
*B. ashbyi*  
*B. spinulosa*

Maximum yield reduction of seed viability after storage of seven years was around 10%, however *Banksia menziesii*, *B. marginata* and *B. victoriae* yielded lower results.

Provenance & population size from where seed was collected, often affects seed viability and quality.

Good basic sanitation practices (listed below) all have a definite bearing on seed germination yields. (the golden rules)

- Clean growing media,
- Clean plant material
- Clean hands, containers, tools and propagation area

Good Seed storage has attributed to success of above plant list, from :

- Constant low room temperature (minimal temperature fluctuations)
- Minimal moisture (cool dry area such as the linen cupboard)
- Naphthalene for insect / mite control (stored inside container)
- Darkness
- Paper seed envelopes (Gas Permeable)
- Clean, pathogen free, seed stock

I do not use plastic or foil unless the seed can be absolutely dried and bagged under low humidity conditions.

I kept my Banksia seed in a particleboard box just in case of rodents. While the polystyrene esky is cheap and easy to use it doesn't provide much of a physical barrier to marauding mice.

I found it important to store seed immediately after release from follicles.

I prefer to burn the woody Banksia fruits with a propane torch to extract the seed as the oven methodology was too messy, yielded inconsistent results and quite often failed to eradicate all pathogens (a torch is great for sterilising the woody fruit). I have also had much better germination results with the usage of a (soft flame) propane torch as a seed extraction method.

Finally, I used smoke vermiculite as a top dressing on the Banksia seed growing media to yield these results. Another benefit was anti-fungal properties that lasted consistently for three weeks.

### **Seed Bank**

- Nindethana Seeds (08) 9844 3533
  - Banksia Farm (08) 9851 1770 phone/fax
- or check with your Regional Seedbank.

Given that seeds stay freshest in their pods (well, of those species that hold onto them anyway), I have a living seed bank near me; there are numerous examples *Banksia ericifolia* *ericifolia* and *B. serrata* used as street and amenity plants near me (with loads of seed pods) and I am happy to pick them for members. *B. oblongifolia* and *B. robur* are around and with a bit of looking I could find some with pods too. If other members can oblige with this please let me know and I can get a database going.

If you have a large excess of seeds, consider donating some to your local seedbank (or even another state!) as banksias are popular and the regional seedbanks rely on donations.



### **Membership List**

Here is a complete list of individual members to Jan 2003. If anyone is interested in coordinating events where there is a collection of members, such as Victoria or Canberra, please feel free to contact me. The activity of the group is up to you as members, so let me know how you feel.

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### **Biennial Fred Rogers Seminar – November 2004 – Colac, Victoria**

This seminar next year will be on Banksias & Dryandras. More info as it comes to hand.

#### **References**

The Banksia Book (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.), AS George, 1996  
 Australian Flora & Fauna Series No. 8: The Banksia Atlas, SD Hopper & A Taylor, 1988  
 Flora of Australia 17B. Melbourne, CSIRO Australia, 1999

#### **Postscript**

Finally, hope you are all enjoying the newsletters. The next will shift to a more scientific focus with an article on the new species, *Banksia rosserae*, and one research project into the chromosome ploidy status of *Banksia serrata* "Superman", among other things. Please keep sending me info on what you're growing and how you're growing it.