

APAB—N

the Newsletter of the Australian
Plants as Bonsai



Study Group

**A Study Group of the
Association of Societies for
Growing Australian Plants**

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Cinderella **By Lee Wright**

I have a lot of trees that develop slowly and gradually become bonsai. But occasionally I get a tree that rebounds from an ugly step daughter to Cinderella in a relatively short space of time, exhibiting a dramatic change.

The tree that is currently showing the most Cinderella potential is a *Melaleuca irbyana* that I got at a rural nursery. It was a mass of fine foliage (promising), lying in a black pot on its side because a large-carrot root was protruding 15 cm from a drainage hole. It was one of a number of neglected trees in a neglected section of the

nursery and the white paperbark trunk with a sinuous curve caught my eye. At \$12.50, how could I not take a chance?

At home an immediate repot was required and

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I was horrified to find another carrot-root in the pot, leaving only room for a few feeder roots. It



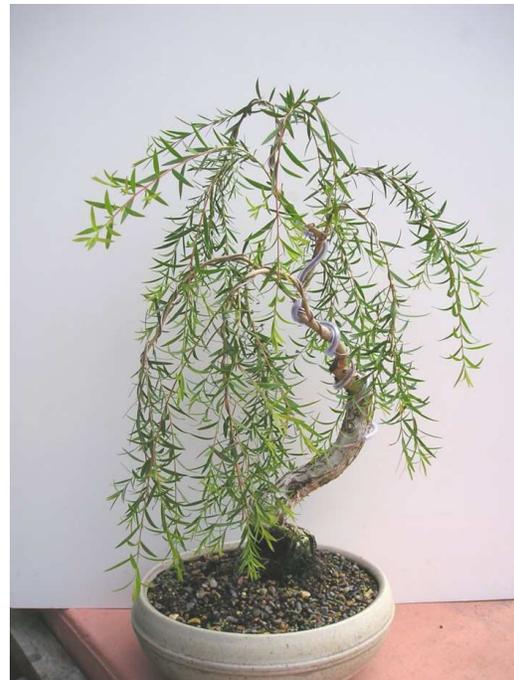
underwent a massive top and bottom prune in late April 2004 and was potted in a training pot and set in a water tray. For months I watched; nothing happen. Spring came and nothing happened. There was still a bit of green but no growth. Then, about late October, a bud appeared.



Within weeks the tree was shooting all over the trunk. It went to a workshop and the leader was drastically shortened and one of the new shoots selected to be the new leader.

The melaleuca powered on and in an incredibly short time had arching branches, lots of branchlets and was developing well. A trip to Mirkwood Bonsai Pottery and the perfect soft-oval, off-white pot was there. Only one – talk about luck. Then I had doubts as to the size/shape of the pot for the tree. I conferred with two experts and we all decided the soft-oval was the way to go. Mind you, had I checked my reference book, 'Bonsai Styles of the World', by Charles S Ceronio, I would not have worried. He shows several weeping styles and all the uprights are in shallow pots.

The melaleuca was repotted, in full growth mode. It was almost a year since the first repot and there were no carrot roots. It had not produced a huge mass of roots but had developed more than



enough fine feeder roots. It went back in the water tray and never turned a leaf after the repot. It is still powering on and continuing its transition from 'the unloved' to a bonsai.

Another bonus—the scent of the foliage!

MY ACCIDENTAL BONSAI - *Ceratopetalum gummiferum* “ALBERYS RED” By Pam Valentine

I am still very much a novice bonsai gardener, however my favourite among my small collection at the moment is my Christmas Bush.

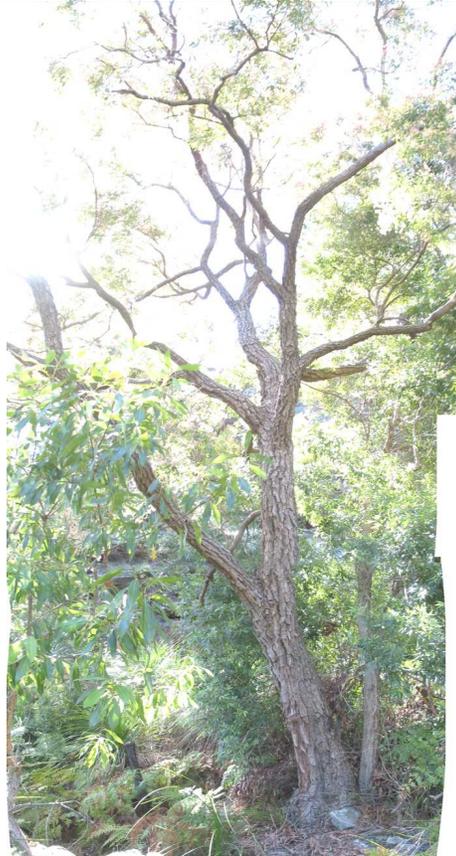
It didn't start out as a bonsai, in fact it was a birthday gift from my twin sister, I think in 2000.

My “Alberys Red” commenced its life with me in a medium sized pot, being part of a container only garden in the semi-shady backyard of my town house. After twelve months, it died back, probably as the result of not enough water during my absence on holiday.

I cut it back quite hard and was lucky enough to get some new growth. In April 2003 I put in it a 200mm oval ceramic bonsai pot, did some shaping, fed it with Osmocote and moved it to the north facing front garden under the filtered canopy of a *Leptospermum*.

During October/November 2003 it flowered. In February 2004, the front branch was pruned, large leaves trimmed and one side branch wired down. August 2004 saw buds form and flowering during October/November.

It does receive some liquid fertiliser when I am doing a general feed, supposedly fortnightly, but I am easily distracted from this commitment with other things, so more honest to say spasmodically. I give it a trim every now and then to cut back large leaves



Trunk and branch profile of mature *Ceratophyllum gummiferum* (photo RH).

and promote more dense growth, but not after spring.

I had plans to photograph the bush in flower last year, but as we moved and renovated during November, this plan was not carried out. Hopefully it will be fulfilled this November. (Picture on page 4)



Profile of crown of mature *C. gummiferum*
(photo RH)

APAB INFORMATION

BASE GROWS

It was great to receive information on species names and their horticulture. Several members have responded with details of pruning and repotting. One wonderful member even responded with information on Melaleucas, which is what I requested as a focus for this year! Thank you very much Lee. There must be a few others out there who grow them? There are 445 unique names (species, subspecies, varieties and cultivars) in the data base. There is repotting data for 53 and pruning data for 36. This is a significant improvement on a year ago, so many thanks to all who have taken a few moments to let us know a bit of what you know.

Graptophyllum excelsum

Native fuchsia

By Elizabeth Pacey

I have a *Graptophyllum excelsum* (Scarlet fuchsia) which has been in my possession since 1999. I live in north coastal NSW. I have repotted it in August with no ill effects. The roots are like crisp spaghetti. They don't seem, at least to me, to be fibrous at all. I plant in a very free mix with a lot of scoria. It is extremely brittle and if it is wired then much care should be exercised when removing the wire. It flowers, or mine does, from October through to December, usually with two sets of flowers. It also sets

seeds but I have not tried to grow them. This year I will send some to Ray Nesci to see what he can do with them. It is March now and they are still not mature.

I hope this information is of some assistance to other Scarlet fuchsia growers.

Defining, Dissecting & Disseminating Bonsai. Pt 2

By Dorothy Koreshoff

[Part 1 of this article was published in APAB-N No. 7.]

There can be another angle to native bonsai for consideration. Are we to use the species

only or should we consider hybrids & cultivars only originating in Australia, or conversely, developed overseas? Suggestions like these will influence the

rules for the future where native classes are concerned. But there is more.

What interpretation do we place on plant material?

- a. Is it to recreate the role-model that is the essence of each species, including Australian? or
- b. Is the plant your medium, as clay, wood or stone are, to enable you to develop a particular cultural form irrespective of species authenticity, e.g. using a Chinese elm to form a eucalypt-like tree.

In other words, a definition of native bonsai has to be made. If the above alternatives are wrong, think about a native plant as bonsai would look like if it conformed more to some accepted Asian tree-profiles as well as their structural make-up.

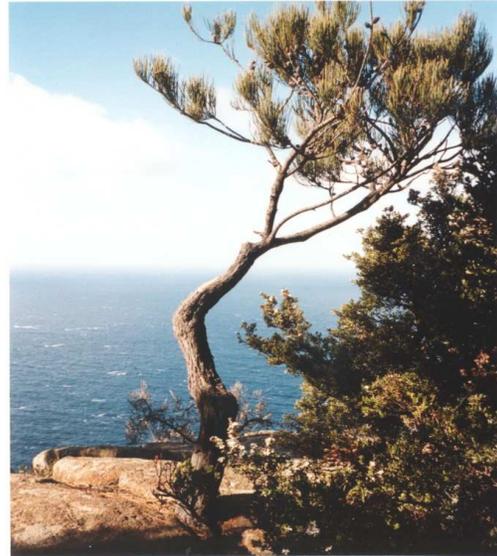
I envisage a great deal of new thoughts, rethinking and do not leave out criticism. It's over to you.

Role Models for some Aussie plants



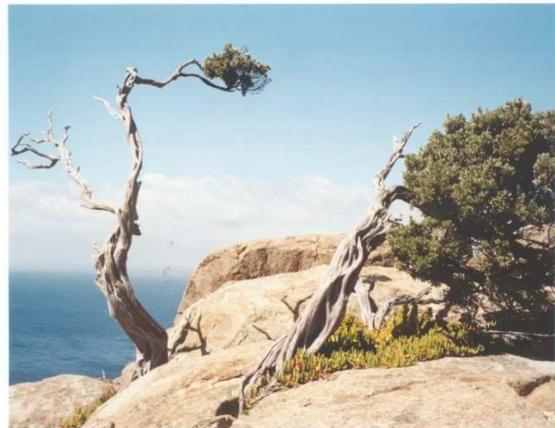
Here is a wondrous base of a *Eucalyptus rossii*,

photographed on Black Mtn, Canberra by an ANPS, but not Study Group member, Julie Lindner and kindly offered to us. It would take a



Allocasuarina monilifera

few years to develop a base to a bonsai like this. From my experience it can be done and is one goal for those 'ugly duckling' lignotubers



Leptospermum glaucescens

seen in young plants. Nurture for 5-10 years and see what beauties you will get. No one said exciting bonsai forms were always going to be quick!

Will Fletcher, one of our indefatigable Tasmanian members, took advantage of his 'door step' so to speak, and went on one of his ever so desirable bush walks with friends earlier this year. He sent us some photos of plants in the wild that will provide many of you with excellent role models for your Australian native

species as bonsai. Some of you might try to



Leptospermum glaucescens var. *eximium*

copy the shapes as is, while others may use them as spring boards of inspiration to capture what you see as the essence of these forms. In either case, if you produce bonsai that evokes these forms you may also see and feel the wild, powerful landscapes in which such plants thrive. Don't forget to share your work by sending in photos of what you produce!

The casuarina and leptospermum are excellent candidates for something like a literati subject with Aussie plants. The long thin trunks with a brush of branchlets and leaves at the end are so characteristic of coastal and inland cliff-top trees and shrubs. Their roots either spread across forbidding stone or directly plunge into crevices where soil and water can be found. One can't but admire the tenacity for life and survival that these plants exemplify.

The 'hurricane heath' as Will calls it, is characteristic of cliff edges exposed to strong

winds. Those who prowl around these dangerous places will have seen these dwarfed and fascinatingly twisted and curved trunks and branches. The dense mass of leaves and branchlets, all carefully trimmed by the wind, form pillows of elongated green aligned with the prevailing wind. On the windward edges, where disturbance has occurred, the wind exposes, abrades and polishes the gnarled woodwork. As wind-swept forms, these are completely different from the classic 'windswept' styles of traditional Japanese bonsai. If you created one in a bonsai pot, it might be rooted at one end of an elongated pot, with a little of the trunk and branches exposed at the side, while the rest was taken up with the dense pillows of wind-controlled greenery. These branches are not tossed by the storms. They are washed over by the turbulent wind. Quite a different concept. More like stationary, living-ripples under the flow of fluid air.

Take a close look at the second of the hurricane heath



Hurricane heath

images. Just look at the intricacy of the trunk's shape. It isn't knotted, in some wild variety of Chinese penjing; rather it is folded and curved into a tight shape that demands contemplation and respect. Could you make something like this a feature of your hurricane-heath bonsai? (Compiled by R. Hnatiuk)

Callistemon Story

By Bob Nieass

Obtained : 1996

Height : 25 cm

My little Bottle Brush was purchased from the local Newcastle Aussie native nursery and came as semi advanced tube stock, one or two sizes up from the smallest tube. For its initial training it was ignored completely for the next 3 years while I was coming to grips with the southern climate nuances, having emigrated from Darwin in June '94. The first major work on it was to repot it in December 2001 into a larger diameter black plastic pot that had had its sides cut down to make it fairly shallow. One third of the root mass was removed from the bottom before nestling it in a commercial brand bonsai potting mix.

Back to the tried and true training regime - ignore it except for the occasional tip pruning. The second potting was done early spring 2003. This time another 1/3 was cut from the bottom of the root mass with the roots around the circumference of the remaining root pad combed/teased out a little with a "root rake/hook".

The bottle brush began to flower regularly in late October. I was rapt. A year and a half ago, I attacked the root mass again and potted the bottle brush into a bonsai pot which is its current home. The potting mix used this time was one of my own recipe, just over half premium camellia and azalea mix with the balance of 2mm to 3mm gravel that I'd sourced from a local gravel purveyor. Since repotting I've paid more attention to tip pinching in an effort to get more ramification but this, alas, is taking some time.

My future plans for this little tree are simple: repot more regularly say at 2 or 3 year

intervals and to continue efforts in building up ramification.

This Callistemon has a growth spurt in spring that sets the flower-bearing branches for the late October bloom. To identify these branches, let them extend by about 3 to 4 nodes. The flower bearing nodes are thicker than plain branches, with the baby flower buds being fairly easy to see. I now continue to pinch back the non-flowering shoots, maintaining the fight for branch ramification. Currently the overall canopy exhibits, more or less, the "desirable triangle". This is purely accidental, as no thoughts have been given to the traditional rules at this early stage in the tree's development, unless of course it has been done subconsciously.

This of course could open the debate on styles for Australian plants as bonsai. My view on this topic is that callistemons lend themselves well to Broom style and, of course, a more laissez-faire style imitating an old tree of this type in its natural habitat, the Aussie bush.

The tree used to sit on the patio edge in reduced sunlight all year round except for a few hours in the late afternoon. In summer the patio was shaded by a grape vine on the pergola and in winter the sun was blocked for most of the day by the house. Now that it is in the recently completed 'Bonsai Lockup', it receives a minimum of 3 hours sun in the middle of the day with heaps of bright reflected afternoon light from the wall of the neighbour's two level house.

An Historical Perspective on cultivation of Australian species as bonsai

By Barry Nash

Way back in 1968, the late Max Leversha published a small bonsai book, now long out of print and hard to find. He included a chapter with cryptic horticultural notes on growing Australian species as bonsai. It is quite likely that the techniques for the treatment of some species may well have changed since the time of publication. [Study Group members are encouraged to compare their experiences with those of Max and report back to the Group. Much of what Max reported is still applicable, but we would want to elaborate on individual species; in many cases as there is significant variation there that makes the generic advice too broad to be useful, for example in *Acacia*, *Eucalyptus*, *Grevillea* amongst others. The Study Group's goal is to ferret out these details, so let's hear from you so we can build on Max's great start. Thanks Barry for reminding us of our 'roots'. Roger H.]

Acacia—Root-prune late winter; head-prune spring and summer. Sandy soil, good drainage. Full sunny position.

Acmena/ Syzygium—Root-prune winter or early spring; Head-prune spring and summer (by pinching). Open position. Frost-tender while young. Watch for scale insects.

Agonis—Root-prune early spring; head-prune spring and summer. Sandy soil, good drainage. Sunny warm position. Protect from frost while young.

Albizzia—Root-prune early spring; head-prune spring and summer (by pinching). Sandy soil, good drainage. Warm sunny position; protect in winter.

Angophora—Root-prune early spring; head-prune spring and summer. Open sandy soil (half drainage material); keep slightly on dry side. Sunny warm position.

Banksia—Root-prune winter or early spring; head-prune according to species. Open sunny position.

Brachychiton—Root-prune early spring; head-prune spring and summer. Deep pot; open sandy soil; good drainage.

Callistemon—Root-prune early spring; head-prune after flowering. Medium soil; good drainage. Open sunny position.

Casuarina—Root-prune late winter; head-prune spring (by cutting) and summer (by pinching). Deep pot; some species sandy soil, some species heavy soil. Open sunny position.

Toona—Root-prune winter; head-prune late spring and summer. Medium soil; good drainage. Open sunny position.

Eucalyptus/ Corymbia—Cut back early spring. Soils according to species; drainage according to species. Sunny position. Some species (such as *C. citriodora*) protect in winter.

Ficus—Root-prune early spring; paint roots after pruning with lime-sulphur; head-prune spring and summer, cover cuts with grafting mastic. Heavy soil. Open sunny position.

Grevillea—Root-prune early spring; head-prune after flowering, according to species. Good drainage. Open position.

Melaleuca—Root-prune late winter; head-prune spring; "pinch" summer. Soil according to species. Open position.

Nothofagus—Root-prune early spring; head-prune (cut, and pinch) in spring. Rich mountain soil with compost. Keep moist at all times; protect from hot winds and sun.

Pittosporum—Root-prune early spring; head-prune spring and summer. Medium rich soil; good drainage. Open sunny position.

Stenocarpus—Root-prune late winter; head-prune spring. Rich sandy soil. Warm position; protect in winter.

(Note: "pinching" is the removal of growing tip only, from young shoots).

Reference

Leversha, Max (1968). Chapter Thirteen: Some Australian Natives and Their Treatment as Bonsai", pp. 33-34.. *An Introduction to the Art of Bonsai in Australia*, Lothian, Melbourne.

Members Mini-Gallery #2

Steven McIntosh sent in these pictures of his eucalypts, one potted and the others still very young and in early training.



Eucalyptus camaldulensis River Red Gum

The river red gum is an a lovely example of a eucalypt bonsai.



Eucalyptus crenulate Buxton's Gum

If you have sent in images and I have failed to publish at least one of them of them, please don't hesitate to remind me. I have been known to experience those 'senior movements', more precisely known as I've forgotten! I don't mind being reminded. (SG Leader)

Lost Members

Can anyone help find two new members for whom I have subscriptions, but no contact details? Their names are Gwen Davies and Jenny Starkey. If you know them, could you let them know to contact me so that I can send them their newsletters? (SG Leader)

3rd National Exhibition

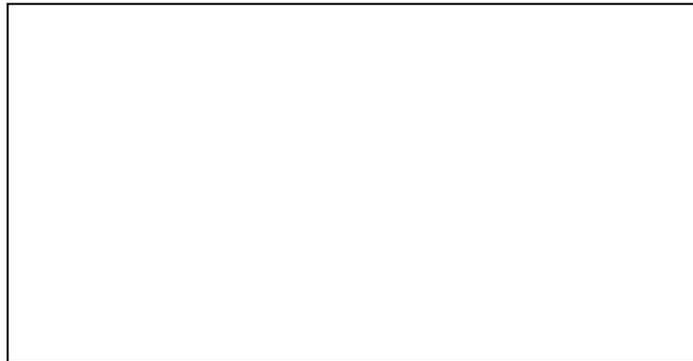
The 3rd National Exhibition of Australian Plants as Bonsai is being held 18-20 November 2005 at the Australian National Botanic Gardens in Canberra. There will be exquisite mature bonsai in many different styles plus a gallery of photographs of plants that could not be delivered for display.

You are all invited to put a plant or photograph on display. Please let me know either by email or post, by 30 Sept. if you intend to display and I will send you the registration forms. We have had many beautiful live plants from Canberra, Sydney, the NSW South Coast and other regional areas. Photos have come from as far as WA, and Qld. Photos of displayed plants may be incorporated into the Australian Plant Image Index – a fine permanent record of our art and craft. (R. Hnatiuk)



Australian Plants as Bonsai

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Study Group Information

The Australian Plants as Bonsai Study Group was formed in mid 2001. Its aims are:

- to determine which species of native Australian plants are grown as bonsai;
- to determine the horticultural characteristics and requirements of each species;
- to determine the artistic and aesthetic qualities of species; and
- to publish information to help people grow and enjoy Australian plants as bonsai.

To become a member, please send a cheque for \$13 (Aus.\$19 overseas) or postal money order to: 'Australian Plants as Bonsai', PO Box 450, Jamison Post Office, Macquarie ACT 2614, Australia. Direct credit transfers can be made to CPS Credit Union BSB 801003 acct no. 332798 S-70.

The current Study Group Leader is Roger Hnatiuk. Contact him at the above postal address or via email: hnatiuk1@cyberone.com.au.