

# 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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No. 9

## BONSAI IN THE WEST

The bi-annual meeting of our parent organisation was held in Perth in October this year. For the third time our Study Group was able to



participate, thanks to the generous hard work of local members. Many thanks to Dianne Boekhout and her many supportive colleagues. Diane has provided the following report on the exhibition presented on the Study Group day at the conference.

In the evening of October 4<sup>th</sup> 2005 members of the Bonsai Society of Western Australia and Bonsai Workshop set up an excellent showcase of Australian Natives growing as bonsai.

They had been invited to provide a display for the after dinner session at Association of Societies for Growing Australian Plants National Seminar held at Hale School, Wembley Downs, Perth.



*Melaleuca preissii*;  
*Melaleuca 'Golden gem'*;  
*Banksia* varieties  
including *praemorsa*,  
flowering splendidly  
for first time (see  
above);

From the fine specimens available as bonsai in Western Australia it was decided to provide a range of the species grown. These included:  
*Ficus rubiginosa*;  
*Melaleuca raphiophylla*;

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*Leptospermum laevigatum*, a coastal tea-tree group inviting you to take a walk amidst *Casuarina cunninghamiana*. This species has become popular in WA since USA demonstrator Ernie Kuo demonstrated its benefits



and training techniques at the Australian Association of Bonsai Clubs national seminar held in Fremantle, May 2001; *Corymbia citriodora* (lemon scented gum); Callistemons including a "Captain Cook", a yamadori from a house garden. Unfortunately it



was only fully in bud but a month too early to bloom for the show. There was also *Baeckea* sp., as well as *Laxmannia minor* as a companion plant.

Most are grown following guidelines for Japanese styles and started as yamadori (that is collected from the ground, as in the wild or in a garden, rather than from a nursery).

It was a pleasure to be able to provide such a wonderful display to a very interested and knowledgeable audience from all over Australia and New Zealand showing them another

perspective of enjoying their interest in native trees and plants. Dianne Boekhout

## ***Callitris* as Bonsai**

By happy coincidence, several items relating to *Callitris*, native cypress pines, have become available in the past six months. They make for an interesting and useful set of observations that should lead to some great and exciting bonsai in a few years.

### **1. *Callitris glaucophylla* White cypress pine by Grant Bowie**

At the A.A.B.C. convention in Wagga Wagga a few years ago, we were given a talk about *Callitris* by one of the locals and my only memory of the talk was how difficult they seemed to be as a bonsai if you wanted to dig one up from the wild. At the following dig I decided to dig up very young seedlings instead of older trees as I thought they would have a better chance of survival.

Most of the seedlings I dug up that day survived and have easily been moved to bigger pots and matured very nicely. I have also collected some seed from both green (*Callitris verrusosa*, Murray pine) and blue callitris (*Callitris glaucophylla*, white cypress pine) on the highway between Wagga Wagga and Hay. Although I only got a low germination from both types, I at least got some to play with in the future.

I recently set out to start training one of the Wagga Wagga seedlings that had a nicely exposed root system and a lovely, old-looking bark. The foliage was an even blue colour and it had not been trimmed much during its life. The growth on the lower branches has elongated and does not seem to bud back very easily and maybe not at all. These lower branches were not necessary for my design so I cut them off and left them as *jins*. Before cutting them off, I tested them for

flexibility for wiring and I found them to be very stiff and snappy. I therefore taped-up with grafting tape the first 5cm or so of any branch that was over say 5mm in thickness, and then proceeded to wire and bend these branches without too much drama. The thinner branches were extremely flexible and could be put in any position.

In the wild I had observed that, with age, the branches of the old *Callitris* hang almost vertically and so I will try to imitate this habit in my first *Callitris* bonsai. I bent the branches down as far as I could at the first attempt and will apply more pressure in another week. After about three weeks the new growth looks healthy and is growing in its new direction. No problem with the growth growing almost straight down but, as I had observed this in nature, I didn't think there would be.

I root pruned and potted the tree for the first time in late September with no noticeable problems or set-back. This tree had been potted up each year or two and was finally in a 300 mm (12 inch) pot. The roots had been lightly trimmed each time and they were very evenly distributed throughout the pot; just like any other conifer.

With some other natives, I am experimenting with timing of trimming and repotting; but with the *Callitris*, I will stick to treating it as I would any of the northern hemisphere conifers. Its seeming inability to bud back on old wood will mean I will have to keep it under control and frequently lightly prune it.

In the final analysis the *Callitris* is a good tree for bonsai but the difficulty of digging it up and keeping the foliage compact may mean that most specimens will be grown from seedling or nursery stock. I will continue to look into these trees over the next few years and report back when I have more experience with them.

#### POSTSCRIPT

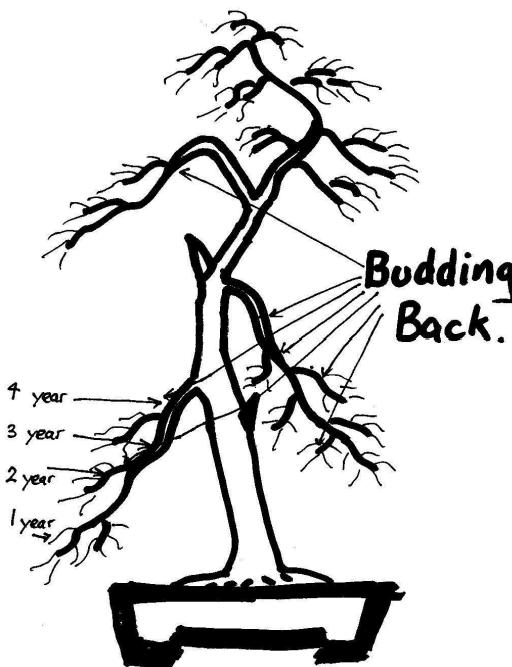
That should have been the end of the article at this point and I had in fact submitted it to the editor but the unthinkable happened (see image to the right).--It started to bud back.!!

It is budding back on just matured one year old wood amongst the existing foliage, it is budding back on two year wood at the base of branches and it is even budding back on three and four year old wood from bare wood. Some buds are forming where side branches had been removed or died

off; some are breaking where there is no obvious sign of previous growth and some from the node between two successive years growth. Leaves on *Callitris* are in whorls of three, thus some buds are popping nearly opposite existing growth as well.

So far, by late November, only a few buds have started to elongate and no buds have emerged on the trunk or older wood. Most of the buds have emerged on the branches that were bent down strongly and are now exposed to more sun. None have broken out yet in the apex region where no branches were bent down.

What caused the tree to bud back? Was it the hard root prune; was it the fertilising regime; was it the bending down; was it the exposure to sun; was it the trimming back of existing foliage ; or was it a combination of two or more of these factors? Was it even the time of year when any or all of the procedures were carried out?



We would really like to hear your experiences and feedback on this phenomenon. I will continue to experiment and monitor the tree and report back over the next issues of the newsletter.

If the *Callitris* continues to bud back, elongate and behave satisfactorily I think it will make great material for bonsai; so please give them a go and let us know how you go. Also try the other types of *Callitris* and experiment on them.

## ***Callitris* as mature trees: images by Peter Hanrahan**

Peter has provided images of mature trees that come from his family property out West Wyalong way.



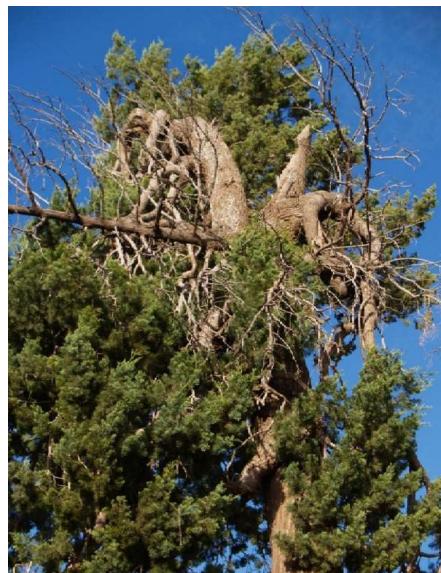
Mature, undamaged tree.

This specimen (above and below) shows a fairly typical crown of open grown *Callitris* in central western NSW. Note the irregular shape of the crown overall, as well as the vertically descending branches.



Mature, storm damaged tree.

The tree shown above and below was storm damaged a long time ago. Note the steeply plunging branches. Some bent branches come from the damaged top; some appear to be from before the damage. The picture below shows the area of bending at the top. While too complex for bonsai, the key elements can be seen and can be duplicated (see next article on *Callitris*).



Strong bending in storm-damaged apex.



Detail of vertically descending branch on right.

[Many thanks Peter for these superb examples of mature *Callitris*. Many people like the dark, rough bark and blue-green and bright-green of the foliage of different species, but don't know how to style them. These photos give some guidance. Roger]

### 3. Notes on *Callitris* by Roger Hnatiuk

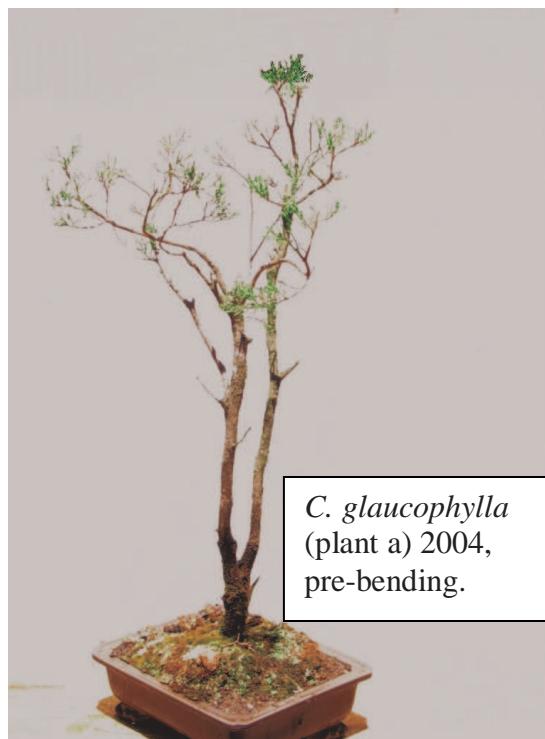
Quite independently of the above two articles, I too have been collecting information on *Callitris*. The following images are of the black cypress pine *C. endlicheri* and *C. glaucocephala*, white cypress pine, which grow in SE Australia. The two overlap and hybridise in an area north of Canberra.

From my experience, both these cypress pines require the same horticultural treatments for bonsai, and Grant's article above is pretty close to my experience. To recap, they readily produce fine to medium diameter feeding roots that take well to root pruning every 2-4(5) years. They are not necessarily vigorous rooting, so you don't need to rush into repotting panic mode with them.



*Callitris glaucocephala* (plant a)  
showing severe-bending

They will shoot back on wood that is up to about 4 years old fairly readily, though not predictably. This means you can prune back hard



*C. glaucocephala*  
(plant a) 2004,  
pre-bending.

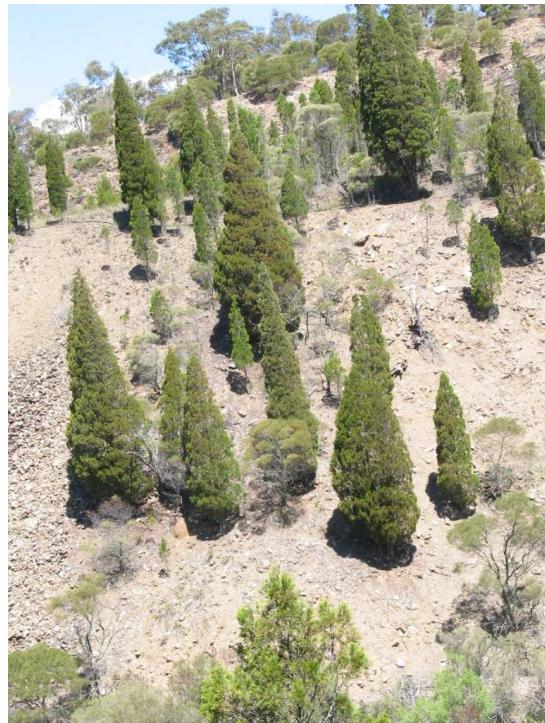
anywhere you leave 'green' stem/leaves, and with a bit of caution when going back onto wood 3-4 years old that does not have any green on it: you might get budding back or you might get a dead branch. You will occasionally get good budding from around the base of branches on wood older



*Callitris glauophylla* (plant b). From near Young, 1994. Bending winter 2005.

than 4 years. It's fantastic when it happens, but it doesn't readily happen and I don't know the conditions that produce it. It may be genetically controlled, in which case we should vegetatively propagate from such plants and build up a population of source material that has strong back-budding qualities for use in bonsai.

I had plants of *C. glauophylla* grown in the garden from seed collected near the Flinders Ranges. Although I had pruned them back occasionally, while waiting for their trunks to thicken, I missed the pruning for a while and they lost their living branches below about 50 cm from the ground. This produced a real challenge for styling, once they were lifted and put into pots. I was getting no back-budding on the old wood, and the greenery was all high up on the plants.



*Callitris endlicheri*. Molonglo Gorge, ACT. Trees about 70(?) years old.

Regular moderate to heavy pruning once or twice a year over 5 years or so kept the crowns to their size when lifted out of the ground, but no new low branches appeared. When I couldn't get anyone else to take on the challenge, I decided to experiment (see plant a on previous page). I had little to lose.

First I cut back hard into old wood on some of the major branches. These all died back without even trying to back-bud. Then I decided to do some severe bending to see if it was possible. I used the method Grant Bowie demonstrated on pines: wrapping the stem in layers of wet raffia and longitudinally placed wires. The bending was very easy on stems up to 15mm diameter: no cracking and the living bits continued to grow vigorously, back-budding on 2-3 year old wood as well. I haven't unwrapped the severe bends yet, so can't report on how well they took. I wanted to get at least one year's woody growth completed, so will unwrap in autumn.

What surprised and delighted me was to get Peter H.'s photos showing a tree that could have served as a model for the bending I undertook. Mine was purely experimental, but now I may get a tree that repeats what nature did. A happy coincidence indeed!



*Callitris endlicheri*. Note shape of lowest branches.

My photos show some of the stages of the bending process, which I've used on several plants. Others show the rather different crown shapes in the black cypress pine (*C. endlicheri*) compared to the white cypress pine. Note the outward then almost vertically upward sweep of the lowest branches. There is no hint of vertically descending branches in these mature black cypresses. Thus different species of the same genus can have quite different characteristic shapes. For bonsai, this broadens the palette of styles. It is not necessary to use only these variations, but rather, seeing these differences teaches one to appreciate the richness of our biological diversity. This can then lead to a greatly enriched styling and pleasure in our bonsai based on these species.



*Callitris endlicheri*. Profile. Molonglo Gorge.

## 3<sup>rd</sup> National Exhibition of Australian Plants as Bonsai

The 3<sup>rd</sup> National Exhibition of Australian Plants as Bonsai was held 18-20 Nov. 2005 at the Australian National Botanic Gardens, Canberra. The new venue within the Gardens, the Crosbie Morrison Building, provided a much improved location for the display, and the use of the Gardens Theatrette, for the four demonstrations of 'how to' with native plants, was also a great improvement on previous years.

This year 30 plants were displayed. Grant Bowie and Lee Wright's assistance with transport doubled the number of plants displayed from the Sydney region. Of special note was the Huon pine that Diana Jones personally delivered from Hobart, just for the exhibition. There were many fine plants from Canberra. The diversity of styles and species was greatly enjoyed by over 800 visitors. Comments from visitors were all

strongly positive, expressing surprise and delight at seeing native species used this way, being impressed by the quality of work, and asking for more, both in numbers on display and for future shows. I think the show will remain the same size, but it is steadily becoming the place for fine native bonsai to be displayed.

Photographs of the bonsai were taken by Murray Fagg, the well known plant photographer. The entire set of plants, with catalogue notes, can be seen by going to: [www.anbg.gov.au/bonsai/](http://www.anbg.gov.au/bonsai/). Remember that the images are all covered by copyright, and permission must be obtained from the Gardens before they can be reprinted. A subset of images are included in this newsletter as 'Gallery 4'.



*Callitris glauophylla* (white cypress pine)

The public voted on their favourite trees. Votes were spread widely across the trees, indicating strength in the artistic merit and that the styles used appealed to a diversity of tastes. I get a little worried when most of the votes go to only one or two trees. The top 5 trees in the public voting were: *Eucalyptus nicholii*, *Elaeocarpus reticulatus*, *Acacia longifolia*, *Melaleuca irbyana*, and *Callitris glauophylla*.

Those organising the show are grateful for the strong support given by the two local clubs: Canberra Bonsai Society and the Weston Creek Bonsai Group. The tremendous support of all the out of town people was especially appreciated, as it not only broadened the range of species and artistic approaches, but helped make the exhibition truly 'national'.

## Study Group News

Our financial books have been audited, thanks to Joe Mifsud. The next two boxes are his report.

### Auditors Report of the Australian Plants As Bonsai Accounts for as at 30/06/2005

I, Joe Mifsud, have reviewed and audited the Australian Plants As Bonsai group accounts and found these accounts to be kept in good order. All income and expenditure agree with the deposits and expenses as detailed in the bank statements.

Joe Mifsud  
28 September 2005

### APAB Financial Summary for 2004 – 2005.

	Income	Expenditure	
	\$	\$	\$
Opening Balance			1661.02
Subscriptions paid	844		2505.02
Donations received	391.6		2896.62
Debts Paid		-675.5	2221.12
Bank Interest	4.84		2225.96
Bank charges		-7.3	2218.66
Sales received	21.75		2240.41
Miscellaneous	0		2240.41
Subtotals	1262.19	-682.8	2240.41
Closing Bank Balance			2251.41

As of 1 July this year, membership fees changed. Previously membership only just covered the costs of newsletters (production and posting) and small stationery costs. A small increase in the base fee was necessary to allow for increases in printing costs in the coming year.

I noted in the December 2004 newsletter that very few members were contributing to the aims of the

Study Group, which is to gather, share and promulgate information on what and how to grow native species as bonsai. Although membership was approaching over 100, less than 10% were contributing information of any kind to the Study Group. This placed a large burden on the work of running the Group, which was not compensated by a reasonable inflow of support. A second level fee was introduced to allow those who were not contributing information to also contribute to the aims of the Group by paying a small amount that goes into a publication fund to help defray the costs of publishing the information in due course. One of our goals is to publish a book with our findings.

In the first 5 months of the financial year, the impact of the change in fees was that contributions of information increased eight fold! Thank you very much to all who have responded so strongly. It also saw the publication fund grow by \$232. Thank you to those who have shown faith in the goals of the Group. We have seen only a slight drop in the total number of members from 110 to 97 (only 15 had renewed at this time last year!). I'll be sorry to see people leave, but I know that there is a large unmet demand for the information we are gathering, so I expect these

### **WHAT IS ESPECIALLY NEEDED NOW ARE YOUR RECORDS OF THE TIMES**

**YOU PRUNE AND REPOT.** THIS IS NEEDED FOR ANY SPECIES YOU ARE GROWING. BOTH SUCCESSES AND FAILURES ARE IMPORTANT TO REPORT. DIFFERENCES FOR DIFFERENT CLIMATIC ZONES ARE IMPORTANT, SO EVERYONE'S EXPERIENCES ARE Equally VALUABLE.

YOU DON'T NEED TO REPORT FOR ALL YOUR SPECIES AT THE ONE TIME. FOR MANY PEOPLE THAT IS SO LARGE A TASK, SO NOTHING IS REPORTED. JUST AIM FOR A FEW OF YOUR FAVOURITE PLANTS. Your record need only say: 'pruned Port Jackson figs in December and January'; or 'repotted and root-pruned Melaleuca 'Snow in Summer' in October'. That's less than a dozen words, yet it will add hugely to our knowledge at this time.

**SO JUST DO IT!!!**

**☺ Now!! ☺ ... PLEASE**

people and many more will welcome our publication in due course.

## **Most Frequent Australian Species Being Grown as Bonsai**

The APAB data base now contains 469 different species/subspecies/varieties/cultivar names. The range is huge, even if the information on how to grow them is not so impressive.

What we do know from the strong set of records now available to us is which species seem to be the most commonly grown. This information is particularly useful for beginners as well as for teachers and clubs that want to recommend to members interested in 'natives', where to start.

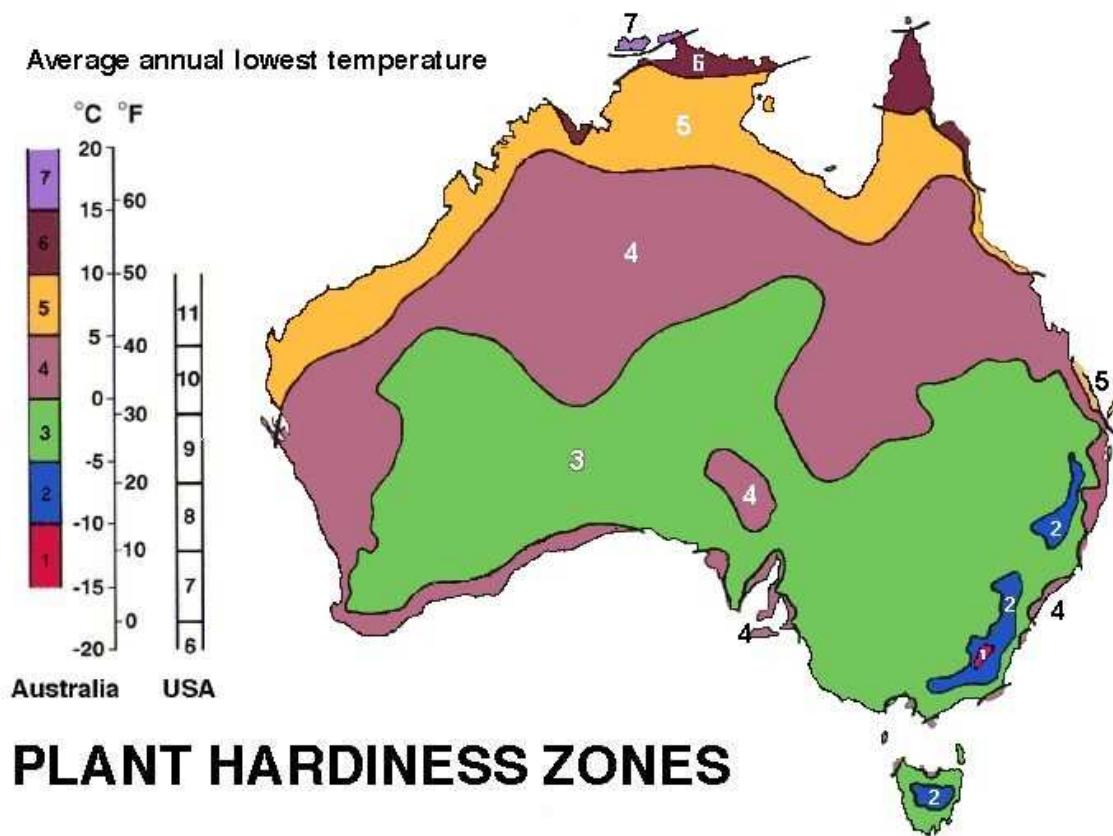
The following table gives the top 21 in this list. Let us know what you think. Is the list reasonable? Now that the number of records is getting large, the frequencies are changing less with each new set of records. However, I still expect significant changes as the number of growers' records broadens.

<b>Plant Name</b>	<b>Freq</b>
<i>Ficus rubiginosa</i> (Pt Jackson fig)	37
<i>Banksia serrata</i> (saw banksia)	22
<i>Banksia integrifolia</i> (coast banksia)	17
<i>Ficus macrophylla</i> (Moreton Bay fig)	14
<i>Banksia marginata</i> (silver banksia)	13
<i>Grevillea robusta</i> (silky oak)	11
<i>Allocasuarina torulosa</i> (forest oak)	11
<i>Acmena smithii</i> (lilli pilli)	10
<i>Leptospermum laevigatum</i> (tea tree)	10
<i>Callistemon viminalis</i> (bottle brush)	10
<i>Elaeocarpus reticulatus</i> (blueberry ash)	10
<i>Ficus rubiginosa</i> 'Little Ruby'	9
<i>Nothofagus cunninghamii</i> (myrtle)	9
<i>Syzygium</i> sp. (lilli pilli)	9
<i>Allocasuarina littoralis</i> (black she oak)	9
<i>Brachychiton populneus</i> (kurrajong)	9
<i>Tristaniopsis laurina</i> (water gum)	9
<i>Callistemon</i> sp. (bottle brush)	8
<i>Ficus benjamina</i> (weeping fig)	7
<i>Callistemon viminalis</i> 'Captain Cook'	7
<i>Eucalyptus camaldulensis</i> (river red gum)	7

## Plant Hardiness Zones

I've reprinted the 'plant hardiness zones' for Australia, produced by Iain Dawson while he worked at the Australian National Botanic Gardens (see the full article at:

<http://www.anbg.gov.au/hort.research/zones.htm>). I'd like to know whether Study Group members find these useful or not. It provides a simple method to categorise the climatic zones of the continent. It doesn't take account of rainfall differences, but for bonsai growers this is of lesser importance. Iain's article indicates that the zones refer to locations in the open and receiving adequate watering, ie horticultural situations, which is what we have. Each zone is bounded by the line of average lowest temperatures. He shows the corresponding zones from the USA.



## Some Images for Bonsaiists

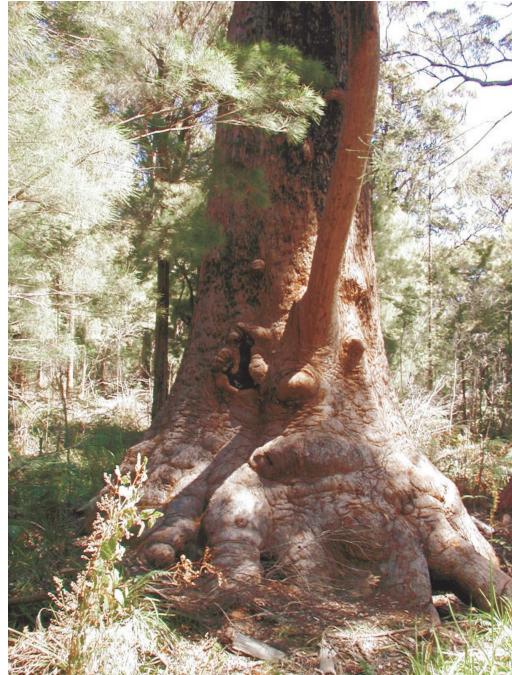


This image of *Callistemon* was left out of APAB-N No 8. It belongs with the article by Bob Nieass. Sorry Bob, but thanks for letting me know. Roger.

The following are some images from Cas Liber, who always has his camera with him and spots great bonsai ideas. Thanks Cas.



*Banksia integrifolia* Hyam's Beach, NSW



*Eucalyptus jacksonii* (Red Tingle tree) WA; nebari, the eucalypt way from lignotuber and roots

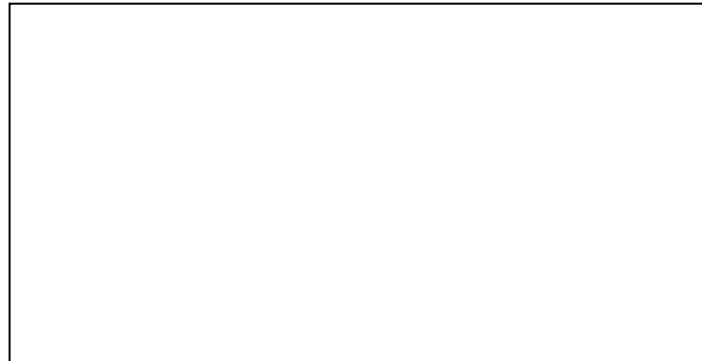


Gum literati, Greenfields Beach, NSW. Some interesting ideas for translating this fascinating, but difficult, style using a very Australian coastal scene. What would make an appropriate pot?



# 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](mailto:hnatiuk1@cyberone.com.au).