

ASGAP BRACHYCHITON & ALLIED GENERA STUDY GROUP
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Weather & plant behaviour : A cooler than usual summer for 2000, except for early January, was followed by a fairly mild winter (8 frosts), & a normal spring. The rainfall for Brisbane has however been the lowest on record, with almost no useful rain since February. Perhaps as a result this spring has seen an almost universal flowering of Brachychitons locally, with magnificent displays of lacebarks & flame trees through S-E Qld. & northern NSW. Even trees that rarely flower have been in full bloom. Merv Hodge has several shrubs of *B. bidwillii* 'Large Pink' & 'Large Red' that are around 10 years old, several years older than mine, & this year as well as an excellent flowering on twigs, there were large bunches of flowers on the main trunk(s), some only four inches from ground level.

Length of flowering : My 6-year-old tree of 'Clarabelle' started to flower in early October, & was a blaze of purply-pink flowers until December 19th. ; it was leafless until the last 10 days of that period. The Leichhardt form of *B. bidwillii* started flowering in late September, & are still going as I write this (6-1-01). 'White Star' stayed in flower nearly as long, but the northern coastal form had a good flowering that only lasted for three weeks. The hairy-leaf Maroochydore form also flowered well but only for a month, but the plants are still very young. *B. 'Griffith Pink'* (which never totally defoliated ; lost about 60% of its leaves evenly over the tree), *acerifolius* & *discolor* had good displays, but only for a month. *B. excellens* (*discolor* x *bidwillii*) flowered for 6 weeks, including four seedling trees flowering for the first time as 6-year-olds. *B. spectabilis* started flowering in late October, & still has a few flowers on. One *B. viscidulus*, 10 cm high but 6 years old, flowered well (large apricot-pink flowers similar to *spectabilis*) in late September, with a trickle of flowers ever since. Two other plants did nothing, as did the six *B. megaphyllus* (too cool?).

Sex : I've been wanting flowers of specified sex for use in hybridising, & so have noted the sex of all flowers that I can see. The large *B. 'Clarabelle'* had one early female flower, & then all (hundreds) were male. I only saw male flowers on 'Griffith Pink' & "Belladonna" & "Rosalind", & my own trees of *acerifolius* & *discolor*. The *B. bidwillii* had about 20% of female flowers overall, but produced them in groups, interspersed with all-male periods. Merv's large *B. spectabilis* had a roughly equal number of male & female flowers, both at once. His "Clarabelle" produced all male flowers.

Average flower sizes : Values marked 'Guymer' are taken from his 1988 revision of the genus, & all measurements are in cm.

SPECIES	CULTIVAR	WIDTH	LENGTH
<i>B. bidwillii</i>	(Guymer)	2 - 3	2.5 - 4.5
	Maroochydore	1.25	4
	'Large Pink' & 'Large Red'	3.25 - 4	3
	Northern Coastal	1.5	1.5
	White Star	3.5	3

2.

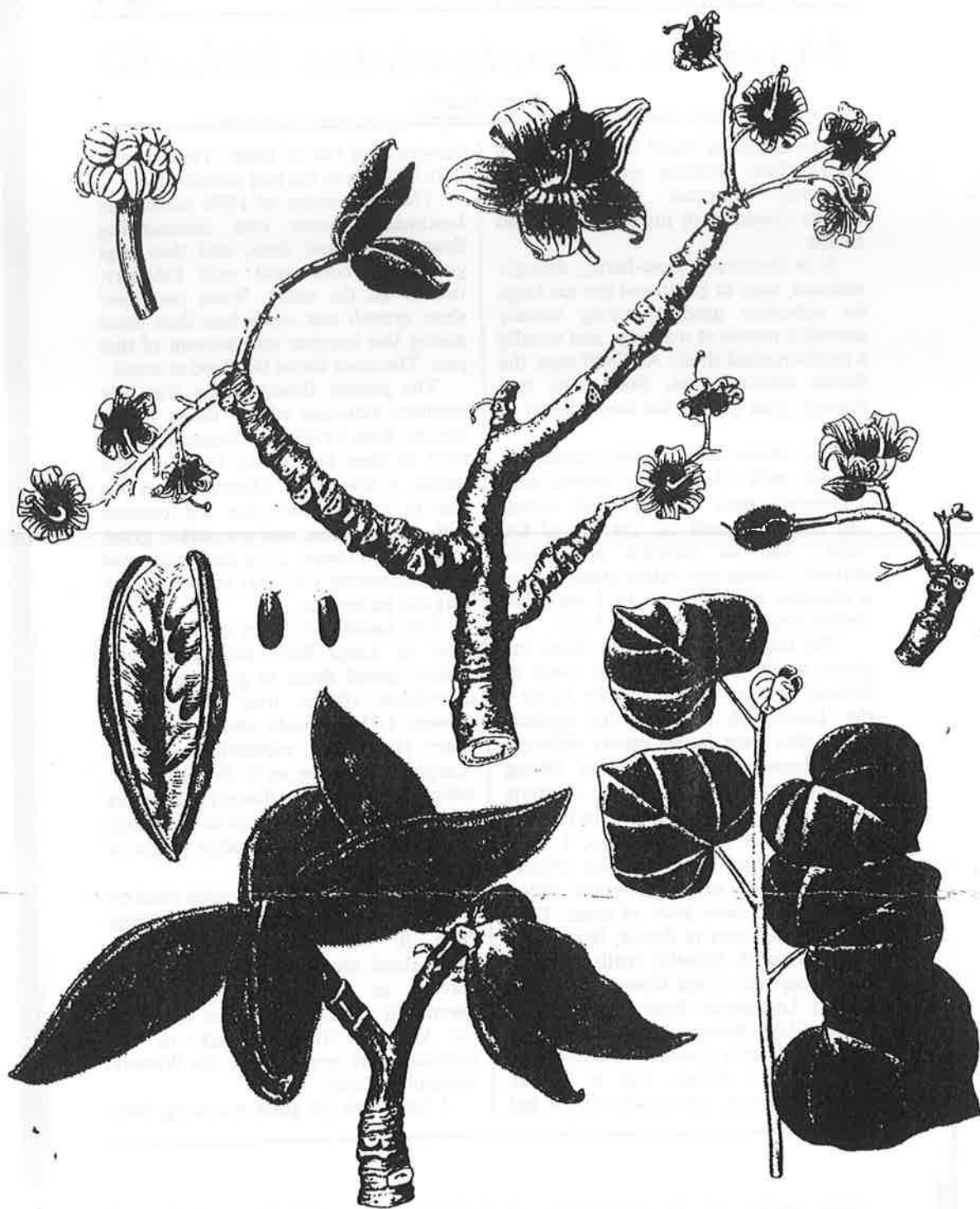
B. discolor	(Guymer)	5 - 6	3.5 - 5.5
	mine	6	4
B. vinicolor	'Clarabelle'	5	3
B. incarnatus	'Griffith Pink'	3	2
B. excellens	'K1', 'K2'	5.8	4
B. spectabilis	(Guymer)	4.5 - 6	4 - 5.5
	mine	6	4

Paintings : Our member, Mrs. Jean Dennis of Benalla, was invited to display some paintings at the (UK) Royal Horticultural Society Show, & gained a silver/gilt medal for her 15 *Brachychiton* paintings, each displayed with an accompanying distribution map on an outline of Australia. Well done ! She plans to try & paint the rest of the genus. (And cultivars, Jean?). Jean also sent me a photocopy of the drawing of *Sterculia africana*, from a botanical book about Oman in the Middle East.

New plants : Accidental crosses in a garden west of Ipswich have produced a number of discolor x bidwillii crosses (B.-x excellens). They were known to be six years old, as that is when the parental (sole) discolor tree last flowered before a magnificent flowering this year. Two of the four seem to me to be at least as good as 'Rosalind', & I have called them 'K1' & 'K2' for the time being. 'K1' is red (or red-pink), & 'K2' is a mid-pink, similar to Rosalind. The bidwillii parent is a local form, so even better cultivars of excellens should be able to be bred using the larger-flowered Leichhardt form, & I am attempting this.

Self-plagiarising : I also enclose an article on *B. bidwillii* that I wrote for the December 2000 issue of the (SGAP Qld.) Bulletin.

A happy New Year to you all : & may it rain on all the areas that need it.



Sterculia africana: a botanical illustration by Susanna Stuart-Smith from *The Plants of Dhofar, an Ethnobotanical Study of Southern Oman*.

More on *Brachychiton bidwillii*

Kerry Rathie

The article by Geoff Simmons in the March 2000 Bulletin on this species (relatively unknown in horticulture outside Queensland) inspired me to add a little.

It is floriferous, frost-hardy, drought resistant, easy to grow, and not too large for suburban gardens, being usually around 4 metres at maturity, and usually a multi-trunked shrub. As Geoff says, the flower colour varies, from dark red, through pink (by far the commonest) to white.

The above refers to the corolla in general; each colour can be teamed with a greenish, pure white or pink throat, and the petal ends (at the top of the 'tube') can be rounded or sharply pointed. Flower size varies greatly, from a diameter of over 3 cm to 1 cm, with corolla lengths of 2.5 cm to 4.5 cm.

The largest flowers come from the plants at the northern inland (west of Bowen) extreme of the species' range - the 'Leichhardt Form' of the species. These also have leaves utterly different from those elsewhere, lacking lobing entirely or almost so; there is some within-plant variation in this. In full sun or in filtered light situations, I have found this form to be a totally reliable spring and early summer flowerer. Never misses, and I have 200+ of these. They take 4 or so years to flower, from seed. All forms of *B. bidwillii* (with one pale pink exception, which flowers all year - it is a Leichhardt form from Bill & Eunice Clark) flower while leafless.

The northern coastal form has very heavily lobed leaves, and a shorter flowering period, but usually bright red

flowers, and lots of them. Their size is only half that of the best inland ones.

The mild winter of 1998 tricked my Leichhardt Forms into commencing flowering in mid June, and they kept going full bore until mid February, leafless all the while. Worn out, their shoot growth was much less than usual during late summer and autumn of that year. The other forms flowered as usual.

The poorest flowerers are from the southern extremes of the range of the species, from Brisbane to Boonah. All or most of these have fairly heavily lobed leaves. A form from Maroochydore has heavily lobed leaves that are covered with velvety hairs, and are darker green than usual. Flowers are a dark pink, and small (diameter 1.25 cm) but longish (4 cm) and numerous.

Two Leichhardt Form clones, 'Large Pink' & 'Large Red', have been quite widely spread about as grafts on to *B. acerifolius* (flame tree). Both have flowers 3.75 cm wide and 3 cm long. Merv Hodge has successfully crossed 'Large Pink' pollen on to *B. spectabilis*, which has mid-pink flowers which are the largest in the genus (up to 6 cm wide by 5.5 cm long), and an adult height of about 7 metres.

A year later I did the reverse cross on to 'Large Red', and also have seedlings from *B. chillagoensis* (from North Queensland; orangy flowers, large floppy leaves) as the pollen parent. *B. spectabilis* comes from Jasper Gorge in the Gregory National Park in the Northern Territory, towards the Western Australian border.

I have also got pods maturing from

using pollen of *B. acerifolius*, *B. discolor*, *B. viscidulus* (from the Kimberleys) and *B. vinicolor* 'Clarabelle' on 'Large Red' and/or 'Large Pink'. 'Clarabelle' is a more-purple-than-pink hybrid of the Flame Tree by *B. discolor*, with discolor-size flowers (5 cm wide by 3 cm long). Merv has 70 or so seedlings from 'Large Pink' pollinated by Flame Tree, which have leaves more like the Flame Tree parent. They also have phanerocotylar germination like *B. acerifolius*, so this gene must be dominant over the cryptocotylar (hidden cotyledons) germination which marks section

Brachychiton (which includes *B. bidwillii* and most of the genus) from the other three sections recognised by Guymer in his 1988 revision of the genus.

Some of the above pollen sources have recently also been used on the Maroochydore form and the northern coastal form. This season I hope to make crosses using *B. grandiflorus* and *B. muellerianus*, both from North Queensland. A 6-year-old hybrid between *B. bidwillii* (a good southern form) and *B. discolor* (the Lacebark) is in flower bud for the first time, and about 4 metres tall.