

ANPSA BRACHYCHITON & ALLIED GENERA STUDY GROUP

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Flowering patterns for 2017- 2018 : I shall spare people my usual descriptions of weather conditions through the year, as the N Qld floods & massive cattle losses were on TV screens across the nation, & likewise with the widespread drought conditions all year in most of western Qld & NSW. Only in recent days have Victoria, Tasmania, & parts of SA had good rain. Over 60 % of Qld is still in severe drought, & here in Toowoomba much is still bone dry, with a 'green drought' elsewhere. The floods & much of the drought are due to long periods of blocking patterns in the weather, with probably only a slight contribution from global warming. Despite commentators with poor memories, horrendous droughts are nothing new for Australia or North America. The local alternations here between warmer than usual & cooler than usual weather has kept many plants blooming erratically or not at all.

Most forms of *B. bidwillii* flowered later than their usual start in early September, & poorly when they did flower. Exceptions were Robin, a small-flowered clone I call A3 (& have kept only because it is also small in stature, one metre tall after ten years, & possibly useful in breeding dwarf hybrids), clone A2, a vigorous dark red seedling of 'Red Baron', & 'Cormy'. The earliest flowers were on shrubs with northern Australian ancestry, BV1 & Argyle Pearl, both of which had their first flowers for the season on September the 1st of 2018, & their last in mid-March of 2019. These two were the last to flower of all my brachys, but differed greatly in their number of flowers, as BV1 flowered heavily almost throughout, & Argyle Pearl, which may be pure *B. viridiflorus*, mostly just had a steady trickle of flowers, which became steadily smaller after Christmas. BV1 is half *bidwillii*. In late September Rosalind, Will Scarlet & Coen Pink began to flower, & were joined in early October by *muellerianus* & by BR5 (details later), & in mid- October by 'Jasper Lode' & *bidwillii* 'A2'. BR5 flowered profusely to December 18th, & A2 until late February. In early November the Jasper Belles (JB1 & JB2), Robin & Big Pink began to flower, but on the 18th of December a violent storm struck, & blew flowers off almost all brachys, & stopped all flowering for a week, or for the season for Cania Gorge & Big Pink. Dark Knight resumed flowering, as did JB1 & JB2, but only briefly & less heavily than usual. *B. vellutinosus* & *B. grandiflorus* never flowered this season, & B. Mt White only had a few late flowers. Around Toowoomba, mature flame trees, *B. roseus* & *bidwillii* 'Beau Belle' flowered well if later than usual.

New hybrids :



Above, my new BR (Big Red) hybrid BR5, the first to flower of 15 or so. Parents, Big Pink by x-*excellens* Merv's Flat Red, 2 of the 3 brachys with the biggest flowers. All are likely to be this colour, & some should be bigger flowers. These ones are 6 cm X 5 cm, while both parents, particularly Big Pink, regularly produce 8 cm flowers, as large as any brachychiton. I expect some of the 15 will equal this. BR5 is currently a little over 2 m in height, taller than most of its siblings (many still under 70 cm), & flowered for 3 months with flowers at the density shown above. Big Pink's pale colouration has been swamped by the *bidwillii* red from the *excellens* (*discolor* x *bidwillii*) parent, but the next generation should have near-whites & apricots as well. I recently crossed BR5 to several *bidwillii* clones, with very high resultant rates of pod setting, & to 40 of its own female flowers, none of whom took. So it is almost certainly female-sterile, which is an advantage as far as all councils & most gardeners are concerned, as they don't have to clean up the fallen pods, or be annoyed by Harlequin beetles attacking green pods & provoking rushes of sap secretions.



This shot of *Brachychiton* Tangerine Belle, grafted on to Qld bottle tree (*rupestris*), was taken about a month ago on my friend Brent Vieritz's property at Beachmere on the Sunshine Coast. The *rupestris* rootstock standards were 1.8 m tall when grafted, & *bidwillii* plants of the same age can be seen to each side of the central tree, whose trunk is now 50 cm thick at ground level. The (very) sandy loam soil is infertile. All the trees so grafted have trunks tapered to the same extent, while Tangerine Belle trees on their own roots grow thick trunks but with columnar un-tapered shapes. Other bottle tree x flame tree hybrids such as Gabby Bells may be able to have similar effects, & I am testing this out on young *rupestris*. I have seen no clones of these various flame tree x *rupestris* hybrids older than about 30 years of age, so they may develop the central bulge typical of older *rupestris* at some stage. Grafts of *bidwillii* & its hybrids on to *rupestris* result in columnar trunks that thicken with age, but the scions don't seem to have enough 'oomph' to give the central bulge, although again this may eventually occur. Some *Grevillea* rootstocks have major effects on their scions, usually but not always via vigour. Merv Hodge is a great advocate of using rootstocks other than *robusta*, despite the hardness of silky oak, partly because it tends to sucker when stressed (even if no leaf axils can be seen), & partly because its vigour or other properties alter the growth habit of some scions. An example is *G. dielsiana*, where the lanky forms on *robusta* often are low & dense on some other rootstocks such as Tawera. And putting *G. flexuosa* on *robusta* transforms that species from a 1.5 m lanky shrub to a giant leafy shrub some 10 m wide, if you allow it plenty of water & nitrogen.

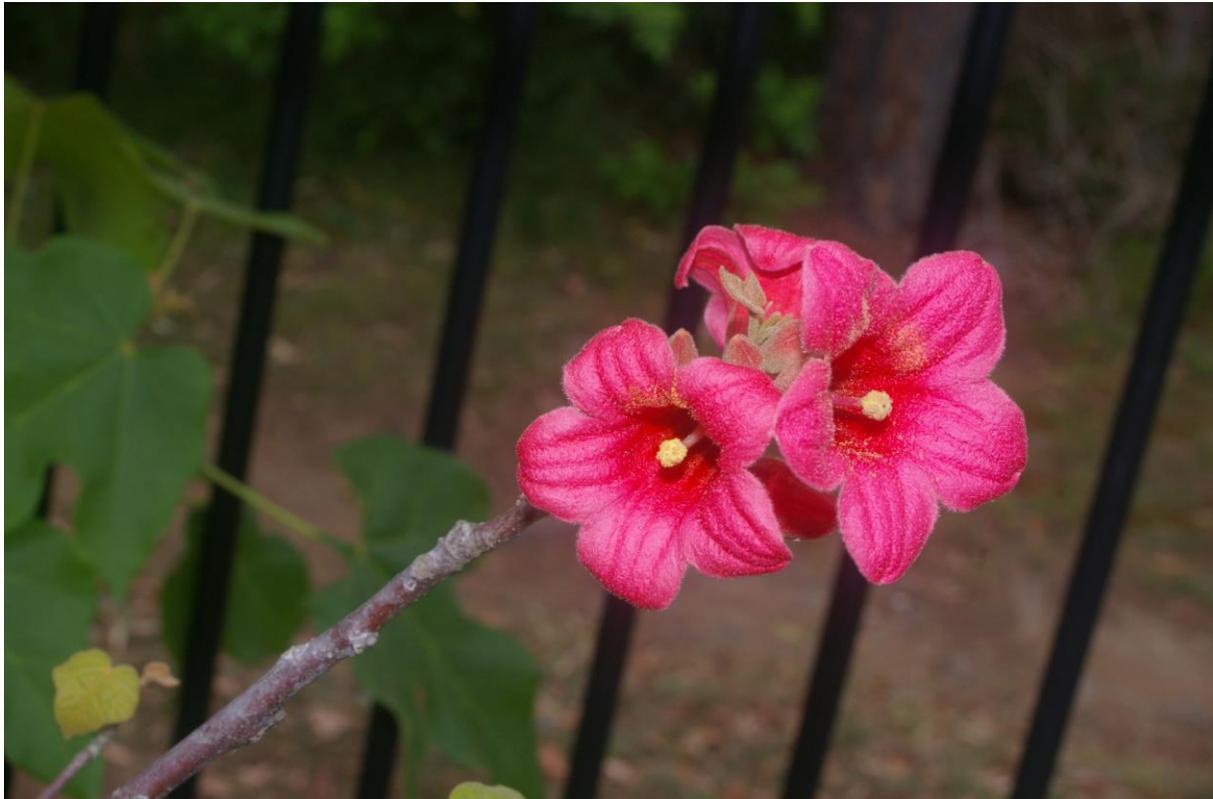
New Hybrids :



Above is an image of Argyle Baron ; (= Argyle Pearl x Red Baron). All the clones are shades of pink, but when crossed to other Argyle Baron plants, or to Argyle Pearl, some progeny will be white & probably some will be apricot or various other sunset shades.



Above is an image of a drought-stricken Big Pink x Rosalind flower, also from Brent Vieritz' place. Some are red, some pink, like this one. It was in autumn & after months of dry weather on infertile sand, so all flowers were small despite their parents being large-flowered. It will be interesting to see how the grafts that Annabel & I took compare next summer at Toowoomba. I selected one or two plants each from the two colours.



The photo above is of male flowers of Clarabelle x Beau Belle, at Turtle Point (my late brother's place at Lake Kurwongbah). The tree is flowering for the first time, quite well, at a height of about 7 m, but I did not bother to take grafting material as the flowers are a little smaller than on Clarabelle or Jasper Belle, both of which were nearby, & as Clarabelle ends up a very large & vigorous tree. I shall wait & see how this hybrid turns out, in a normal year.

Best wishes to all, & happy gardening.

Kerry.