

ASSOCIATION of SOCIETIES for GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS

CALOTHAMNUS STUDY GROUP NEWSLETTER

Number Seven

October, 1986.

A little bit of housekeeping first. Our fees of \$2- are now due on June 30th, so what we will do is ignore the fees which would have been due this coming January to make the due date June 30th 1987.

I recently had a very interesting letter from Rhoda Jeavons, giving a report on her *Calothamnus asper* & *C. quadrifidus*. As Rhoda lives on the east coast near Gosford it is good to know what species do well in her climate.

She writes:-

As we sit at table I am reminded that I should write & tell you that the *Calothamnus quadrifidus* growing just outside the window is a delight to both us & the four varieties of honey eaters that spend their days in it. It's magnificent & has been in bloom for 6 weeks & there is more to come. *C. asper* likewise has been (& is) spectacular.

The *C. quadrifidus* mentioned above is quite lush & another, growing under much tougher conditions is sparse, but has had, if anything more flowers.

I also have a report on a *Calothamnus ruprestis* from G. Eastwood.
Age of Plant. :- 9-10 years. Height:- 2 metres
Soil:- light to darkish grey clay for a few centimetres with impervious white clay below.

Apart from its planting I have never watered it. It remained unaffected by the 1982-83 drought. but it did become leggy with thousands of seed pods showing. So two years ago I took half the verticals & laterals out & trimmed back the rest of the branches by lopping the tops off. By now new growth has developed & matured with lots of flower buds showing for spring & summer, when it comes.

While it is not a profuse flowering plant it makes up for it by having flowers coming & going for four months of the year. It acts as a wind break, although it was not planted for that purpose.

Flower buds show up as grey woolly balls before & during winter, growing to a size of 1 centimetre. In fact when they first appear in several places on the plant one could easily think the buds are aphids. (I have had remarks like this from others, some even rubbing them off.) The plant is not straggly & keeps a uniform shape.

Its physique is structured by the start of a short trunk with branches coming out nearly at the same level. Seed pods remain on the plant for years.

I was very pleased to receive this report as *C. rupestris* is on the rare & endangered plants list. Mr. Eastwood also sent some seed pods so as soon as they shed their seeds they will be in the seed bank.

By the way our seed bank contains:-

Calothamnus

chrysantherus

torulosus

homalophyllus

torulosus var. *leptophila*

pinifolius

validis

quadrifidus

villosus

Just send a stamped addressed envelope with any requests.

I thought it would be a good idea to start a descriptive list with identification points & remarks from some of our members. In this newsletter I will begin by quoting some information received from the Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens.

Calothamnus from the Greek *calos*, beautiful; *thamnos*, bush or shrub. Small to large shrubs; bark often papery; leaves scattered, narrow, rigid, terete or flat, 1 nerve or nerveless, glabrous or hairy, crowded; flowers showy, bright to deep red (occasionally yellow), in spikes or clusters which are usually one sided, produced on mature wood; petals small, 4-5; stamens much longer than petals, united in 4-5 flattened bundles opposite petals; fruit a capsule, 3-4 valved, retained indefinitely.

An endemic genus of about 25 species, confined to W.A. The main distribution is in the South West Province. They occur in most variable habitats. Some species, eg *C. gilesii*, grow in low rainfall areas, often in rocky situations, whilst others, eg *C. villosus*, can be found growing on the coast, withstanding salt-laden winds. In most cases they grow in well drained soils.

Calothamnus is a genus with excellent horticultural potential. Most species are very decorative with narrow foliage, and flowers being borne on the previous years growth. They have proved to be very adaptable to a wide range of soils & climatic conditions. Many species are reasonably frost tolerant, and will also withstand waterlogging or drought. They have a wide application for cultivation because of their hardiness, being suitable not only for private gardens, but also public gardens, roadsides, farms, for windbreaks or soil erosion. They can be grown also as container plants. Although the flowers are mainly red, they are in many shades, and there is usually the added yellow or gold of the anthers. The common name of onesided bottlebrush is sometimes used, relating to

the flower formation, with the other common name of net bush referring to the fine foliage. A very pleasing aspect is that native nectar-eating birds are attracted to the plants when in flower.

Calothamnus do not suffer greatly from disease or pest attack. The most common problem is scale, which is controlled by white oil. Mildew can occur on some species, if plants are not situated in a warm sunny position. This can be controlled by a suitable fungicide. Regular applications of fertilizer are not recommended, as this usually promotes leaf growth at the expense of flower. *Calothamnus* respond well to pruning. In some cases they become leggy, but the best method of preventing this is to regularly tip prune throughout the year, or prune lightly after flowering. If hard pruning is needed, this will usually mean loss of flowers for a couple of years, as flowers are produced on the older wood.

Propagation. Plants are readily grown from seed or cuttings. Seed can be collected from well developed, mature capsules, which need to be at least one year old. Branches will have to be removed if capsules are embedded in the stem. This applies to *C. affinis*, *C. bibbosus*, *C. gracilis*, *C. lehmannii*, *C. longissimus* & *C. planifolius*. Place capsules in a dry but not airtight container and seed will be dispelled as capsules dry. Seed is placed on the surface of a well drained medium, and barely covered. The bog method can also be used. Germination should occur within 20-50 days at 20-25°C. Cuttings need to be of firm young growth & roots will form readily.

In the next newsletter I will begin the species descriptions.

At last we have a Queensland member, Heather Robb, so I look forward to learning something about *Calothamnus* habits in the more humid regions.

Thanks to all those who sent in reports, photos & specimens. Keep them coming, especially those suitable for inclusion in the newsletter.

All the best

Barb