



AUSTRALIAN PLANTS FOR
CONTAINERS STUDY GROUP

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SSN: 0814-1010

NEWSLETTER # 43 February 2024

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Leaders' comments

Thanks to all those who sent in material for this *Newsletter*. It is great to see your successes and hear about your failures. It certainly has been an odd year weatherwise which affects pots as well as the garden. Here in Canberra, we expected this summer to be hot and dry, instead we have been quite cool with good rain. This means we haven't had to water pots every day which we usually do in summer. Our winter also was mild with few frosts so frost sensitive plants did well. This has encouraged us to move some plants that were getting too large for their pots into the garden in protected areas. Do send us your experiences with native plants in pots so we can all learn what works and what does not.



Grevillea 'Bush Lemons' standard above and flowers to the right. We move the pot under cover for the winter.

Roger Farrow, Canberra



The Mud Mat, *Glossostigma elatinioides*, collected from Peter Chandler's dam where we were studying its ant pollination. It has been flowering continuously all summer and has now been repotted into a wider plastic pot.



Goodenia pusilla 'Bonza' bought from the 'stepables collection' at Bunnings. A native of SW WA in wet areas. Has been flowering continuously all summer and has also been repotted into something wider. I also have other mud plants namely *Isotoma fluviatilis*, *Lobelia (Pratia)sp.*, and *Viola hederacea* growing in pots. I want to try *Gratiola* and some others.



Isotoma axillaris (not a mud plant), treated as an annual in our climate. Seedlings sold as *Laurentia* from Bunnings each spring. I grow it for the blue banded bees that have a great fondness for the plant although they are nectar robbers biting a hole at the base of the floral tube to access nectar,

All my container natives are grown in self-watering pots dispelling that widespread belief that natives will only grow in fully drained pots (maybe for those from WA).

Anne Campbell – Mount Barker, SA.

Planter box - over run.

In the sharing of problems – here's one.

When my courtyard back garden bed in my retirement village villa was planted in April 2020, several additional planter boxes were incorporated.

The planter box below has *Anigozanthus flavidus* "Yellow & Red Landscape Red"; *Correa alba*, *Correa* "Dusky Bells" and *Dianella* "Little Jess".



2021: One year after planting – all 4 species alive.

2024: Only 2 species surviving; *Dianella* "Little Jess" dominant; *C. alba* (left hand end) sick

Compared with..... two *Adenanthos sericeus* planted per planter box.....



Left: 2021 about 1 year after planting

Right: 2024 4 years after planting



Another over-run:

Another pot plant *Hibbertia stellaris* was overrun by a baby magpie who took up residence in the walled courtyard for a few days. It tended to wander around but settled in the pot plant for a little while and enjoyed being fed by its parents!!

The *Hibbertia* recovered.



Sept 2023: With magpie



Feb 2024: Post magpie.

Bruce Cadoret, Ballarat, Vic



Nicotiana suaveolens (Austral tobacco)

Have only had this plant about four months. I replanted this plant from a tube and almost immediately it began to flower. Have used native potting mix and Bush Tucker slow release.



Eremophila calorhabdos - this one has been in a pot for a few years with apart from regular watering and some Bush Tucker, have done nothing else, situated against the house receiving a fair amount of sun.

(Above) ***Prostanthera nivea***. This plant has been in this pot for over two years. I don't do much, just occasional adding of Bush Tucker and regular watering in the summer months. It did almost die at about six months, so I cut it back hard and gave it water and luckily it survived and is looking very healthy. It receives mainly afternoon sun.



Below left: ***Eremophila complanata*** (according to Russell Waits book 'Growing Eremophila, is considered rare in its natural habitat).

Below right: ***Acacia aphylla*** (Leafless Rock Wattle)



Ian Cox, Kenthurst NSW

Growing *Blandfordias* (Christmas Bells) in Pots



Growing Blandfordias in pots is not difficult. They are slow-growing plants, so patience is needed. You'll be well-rewarded in summer though, with the spectacular bell-shaped flowers on 50cm stems ranging in colour from all yellow (rare) to red with yellow tips.

Possibly the biggest challenge you'll face in growing Blandfordias is obtaining them in the first place!

The *Blandfordia* most likely sold in native plant nurseries is *Blandfordia grandiflora*, and as the name implies it has the largest flowers of the four species of this genus. It is popular as a cut flower, both locally and overseas.

Blandfordias can also be grown from seed. They will usually start to flower in the third or fourth year after germination.

Blandfordias are deep-rooted plants, so choose a pot that is at least twice as deep as it is wide. When they have outgrown their pots every two years or so, replot into a larger and deeper pot, in early Autumn.

A potting mix I've used with good results is 50% coco peat and 50% coarse river sand. In the wild, Blandfordias usually grow near swamps and other places with a high water table. Because of this liking for water, the pots shouldn't be allowed to dry out, especially during hot weather. Reduce watering in winter.

Blandfordias need feeding, so give them slow-release fertiliser. They also like liquid fertiliser in spring to prepare them for flowering. A good liquid fertiliser is the liquid from a worm farm, heavily diluted to the colour of weak tea.

Place the pot in a sheltered place that receives morning sun. A north-easterly aspect is ideal. When the flower spikes appear and buds form, usually in November or December, the pot can be moved out of the hot sun into a shadier place where the flowers will last longer, and where they can be admired. When flowering is finished, return the pot to its usual position.



Growing ferns in pots

Over the last year or so I've tried growing ferns in large pots.

I'm satisfied with the results so far.



Above left: *Todea barbara*. It is well-suited to growing in a pot. It's extremely fast growing, and as you can see the pot is now almost hidden. It looks majestic, graceful, imposing, and elegant. I suppose that's why its common name is King Fern.

Above right: *Adiantum formosum*, in the pot to the left, and *Microsorium punctatum* plus a young tree fern in the one on the right.

Right: *Blechnum cartilagineum* is doing well in a large pot.

I feed these ferns with liquid fertilizer such as diluted worm farm liquid about once a month, but not in winter.

The potting mix is nothing special - just my normal sandy soil mixed with compost - and with woodchip mulch on top.

Ferns around the house give you a sense of peace and tranquillity, and on a hot day you feel a bit cooler when you see them.



Jeff Howes, Sydney



I am a new member to this Study Group. I have been a member of APS (NSW) since 1977 and during that time I have dabbled in growing Australian plants in containers, with varying success, in my Sydney garden in the Hornsby Shire.

I thought I would start off my membership, with a success. I have been growing **Rhodendron lochiaie** (photo above) in a large pot for about 3 years. I am surprised with the rapid growth and health of the plant compared to attempts at growing one in my garden.. My only problem with the pot is the soil level dropped about 3 cm since repotting. I used Martins native plant potting mix and suspect I did not firm the potting mix down enough. Any suggestion from members why this happens??

I also have a request for advice, as new members are allowed to do I hope.

I have a large concrete pot with an internal diameter of 430 mm and an internal height of 350 mm and I am thinking of buying a grass tree (*Xanthorrhoea johnsonni*) and placing in the pot. As they are very expensive, can members answer my questions and share their experiences they have had before I take the plunge and purchase one (maybe).

Q1 Should I use only Martins Native Plant potting mix?

Q2 Should I add a percentage, say 50% of washed Sydney River sand to the mix for added drainage?

Q3 The pot will be in a north facing position receiving about 4 hours mid-day sun and dappled light the rest of the time. Is this OK?

Q4 How much watered does the plant need till it is 'established' I do not want to overwater it.

Anyway I await members advice.

Editor's advice: Yes we only use Martins Native plant mix and would add about 1/3 washed river sand. Light conditions sound fine. Watering ???????

Other members please feel free to email us their thoughts for the next Newsletter

Words Ros Walcott, Canberra

Photos Ben Walcott

***Correa* 'Canberra Bells'**

When the Centenary of Canberra rolled around in 2013, it was suggested that there be a centenary plant named to celebrate the occasion. The powers-that-be decided on a yellow rose that was undergoing trials at the time. Ian Warden, a long time Canberra Times columnist and native plant lover, was not amused. He demanded that at least one of the centenary plants be native – references to the Bush Capital, Australian heritage and our unique flora were made. Ben and I latched on to this idea and booked a visit to the ACT Legislative Assembly to discuss the centenary plant. The Assembly representative was quite enthused by the notion, but had no idea how to implement it – where would he get such a plant? We suggested that Peter Ollerenshaw of Bywong Nursery always had a series of plants in development and we should look there. About half a dozen Assembly representatives, Ian Warden, and Ben and I went out to Bywong Nursery to view the candidates. Peter had about 20 different beautiful *correas* on display and we all agreed on the final choice. The Assembly named the *correa* 'Canberra Bells' and I am sneakily pleased to tell you that the yellow rose trials all failed. So our native *correa* became the one and only official Centenary Plant.



***Correa* 'Canberra Bells'**

So our native *correa* became the one and only official Centenary Plant. Here is Ian Warden waxing lyrical about our choice:

'One looks forward to the image of our gorgeous red and cream official native centenary flower the *Correa* "Canberra Bells" appearing on all manner of things. One hopes for Canberra Bells T-shirts at the very least and those of us who truly love our city begin to dream of wearing Canberra Bells nighties, pyjamas and boxer shorts. And is a Canberra Bells snowdome too much to hope for?' CT, July 24, 2012.

In support of our beloved Canberra we planted 7 of these small rounded shrubs, growing to 1m x 1m, with red and cream bell flowers from 2012-2014. The label advice is 'prefers to grow in light shade or full sun and the flowers are attractive to birds'. Two died in 2014-15 and the rest were flattened by the fall of a giant *Pinus radiata* in July 2016. Rather than testing our luck again we planted one in a pot in March 2017 and this has proved to be the golden decision. This plant can have as many as 100 blooms and is a magnet for birds and insects.

Jannie and Geoff Lay, Mount Albert, Vic

I'm sending you some photos of successes in the last year or two. Some pots have excelled during Covid and others have turned up their toes or slowed down. I believe the weather has a lot to do with it, as even us humans can't always keep up with the ups and downs of the weather.



Eremaea beaufortiodes



Eremaea hadra

The orange and the purple *Eremaea* have done well in the last few months and looked quite spectacular. The baskets receive the morning sun only and shade in the afternoon.



Dampiera diversifolia



Verticordia grandis

Our *Dampiera* looked quite spectacular 12 months ago but has not regained its vigor.

The *Verticordia grandis* has been building itself up since 2020 and each year there have been more flowers coming out, with the last 6 months it bloomed to its full potential. We trimmed some of the dead leggy branches off and it seemed to have spurred on new growth from the bottom. It takes a long time for the buds to grow and open to its full potential. Well worth the wait.



Epacris gunnii 2019

We also have an arrangement of Tasmanian plants in pots of which very few flower. The *Epacris gunnii* flowered profusely in 2020 but since died. All very erratic. Even tried coaxing the plants with ice cubes pretending it is snowing. To no avail.

Maureen Mallard, Canberra

Overcoming root invasion in pots in an established garden

A 40 year old garden has its challenges. With many large trees it has become very difficult to establish new plants in those parts of the garden under or near these trees. As the trees are now very large their roots extend a great distance from the trunk. Anything planted will probably live with some extra attention but will fail to thrive. My solution is to fill in gaps and create interest in the garden by growing a variety of native plants in pots of various sizes. The added bonus is that this also provides good drainage which isn't always possible in my clay soil. However having pots sitting in a garden bed creates another problem over time. Roots from the nearby trees and larger shrubs find their way into the pots. The solution is to raise the pots off the ground at a reasonable height using thick paving stones or bricks and in some case I've used roof tiles, making sure that the drainage holes aren't blocked. Mulch and ground covers hide the bricks. Over time some of the plants I've chosen spill over the edges of the pot and look like they are being grown in the ground which is a nice bonus. An example of this is *Correa alba* 'Silver Star'(see photo). Some potted plants are sitting on top of upturned pots to give some height and allow them to drape over the pots even more. Not all my potted plants sit in garden beds but are located in the courtyards or under the eaves where I can grow plants more touchy in the Canberra frosts.



Adenanthos x cunninghamii



Hardenbergia 'Mini Ha Ha'

Plants which have done well in pots over several years include various *Anigozanthus*, *Crowea exalata* 'Ginninderra Falls' (re-potted a couple of years ago into a very large pot), *Adenanthos x cunninghamii*, *Patersonia occidentalis*, *Olearia microphylla*, *Prostanthera aspalathoides*, *Libertia pedunculata* (in a particularly shady wet spot but flowers well).

Also happy and flowering very well are *Eremophila* 'Carmine Star' and *E. decipiens* subsp. *decipiens* on a north facing wall under eaves. *Prostanthera magnifica* flowers well although needs heavy pruning to try and maintain a good shape. *Correa* 'Ice Maiden', *Correa alba* 'Silver Star' and *Correa pulchella* (Kellidie Bay) also continue to flower well after several years in pots.



Correa 'Silver Star'



Eremophila 'Carmine Star'

Newer plantings doing OK so far are *Orthrosanthus polystachyus*, *Hardenbergia* 'Mini Ha Ha', *Prostanthera cuneata* and *Billardiera macrantha* (already climbing up the sides of a trellis and onto the top of a pergola in a very short time).

I thought it might be of interest to mention the sudden death of long established plants which had been doing well. I suspect our very wet weather may have had a lot to do with this. Losses include *Epacris longiflora* (it may also have resented being pruned), *Banksia blechnifolia*, *Grevillea callichlaena*, *Ozothamnus hookeri* (flowered beautifully then immediately died), and a very new *Isopogon* 'Little Drumsticks' which survived the winter in the open but not the wet.



Epacris longiflora - now dead

Eds note: we haven't tried pruning our potted *Epacris longiflora* and it now getting rather large. Perhaps we will just let it go.



Eremophila decipiens subsp. *decipiens*

Ralph Cartwright, Sutherland NSW

About 3 years ago, I collected some free tube stock from the local council nursery with a voucher from my rates notice. One of them was a *Billardiera scandens*, common name Apple Berry.

As the name suggests, it is a climber/scrambler. Because we were about to demolish the existing house and re-build, I didn't want to plant it out as the builders were more than likely to ruin it, especially if small, so I planted it and a couple of others out in this big pot.

I then hid it away at the back of the garden under some trees where it got very little attention over the next 2 years whilst the build proceeded, basically no pruning and no extra watering other than rain. Needless to say, most of the plants had died by the time we moved back in, but this one had survived.



I gave it a bit of a haircut, added some more soil and removed the rest of the dead material and weeds from the pot. I then re-positioned the pot against the west facing back fence with about 25% shade from an overhanging tree, but in summer it gets full sun for around half the day.

I started to train a couple of the tendrils up the adjoining trellis and then just let it do its own things. I do water it weekly or so now and as you can see, has a very healthy looking crop of edible fruit.

Ros Walcott (words) and Ben Walcott (photos), Canberra

Three Ferns



Blechnum nudum
– Fishbone Water
Fern

Blechnum nudum – Fishbone Water Fern (photo previous page)

We have planted more than 60 *Blechnum nudum* in our garden, where they thrive in many different environments and aspects. We have pulled out dozens of these ferns only to find that they regrow with extra vigour – they are tough customers, common in southeastern Australia. When I had three troughs to plant in a shady area with no direct sun, I decided that one of the troughs would be planted with *Blechnum nudum*, as they would be sure to prosper. If you need a fern for a pot in a difficult area my recommendation would be, choose *Blechnum nudum*.



Blechnum penna-marina



Blechnum wattsii x minus

Blechnum penna-marina – Alpine Water Fern

We planted five of these hardy groundcover ferns, 15-30cm high, with attractive fronds that are copper-coloured when new, in a trough in November 2020. These ferns are best grown in moist shaded area in humus-rich well-draining soil. They struggled for some months, then filled (overfilled) the trough by July 2021. We halved the number of ferns in the trough, but they had again filled the trough by February 2022. These ferns are widespread in Chile, Argentina, NZ, some Pacific islands and Australia.

Blechnum wattsii x minus

We planted three of these lovely ferns with deep green fronds forming thick clumps with bronze new growth, in October 2017. These ferns perform best in full to part shade in a sheltered position with moist free draining soil. Do not allow to dry out. These had grown extremely well by February 2022, then were frosted off over winter 2022, but have regenerated well.

Brendon Stahl, Victoria

I have grown flannel flowers from seed for several years now and usually plant them in the garden, and they do not live for very long. One plant that I had for several years in a pot has survived, so with the last lot of seedlings that I propagated, I decided to plant them in reasonable size pots with great success. If you have gravel as a mulch sometimes the flannel flowers will self-seed.



Ros Walcott (words) and Ben Walcott (photos), Canberra

Moving from Pot to Garden

Recently I decided to move some very large plants from their pots into the garden. These plants had grown so large that they were unable to be moved around easily and were hard to water efficiently. I have almost certainly moved them at the wrong time, but I cling to the advice of the very great gardener of Great Dixter, Sussex, Christopher Lloyd. He advised to make changes in the garden when you think of them, otherwise you will forget them altogether. So far all three plants look well and do not appear to have suffered from their move. The test will come in winter. Can these somewhat tender plants survive the Canberra winter without protection? Stay tuned for a report after (let us hope a mild) winter 2024.



Brachychiton bidwillii – Little Kurrajong (photos above)

We planted our Little Kurrajong in February 2013 as a small plant in a large pot. This plant is native from southeastern Queensland north to Bowen, in scrub, dry rainforest and inside the edge of open forest, but always in situations with high light levels. The label advice was 'it is a variable species, mostly an open shrub of about two metres tall, but may sometimes develop as a small tree on a single stem reaching to four metres.' I was definitely thinking 2m not 4m, but I was wrong – when we moved our plant it was almost 5m high. Like most brachychitons the foliage is a feature – this plant has five-lobed felty leaves reminiscent of the form of a human hand. The label advice continues 'most forms of *B. bidwillii* drop their leaves immediately before flowering which enhances the spectacular floral display. Bell shaped flowers up to 30mm long and 15mm wide, vary from orange-red to salmon pink and are held in clusters. As the plants age, flower production increases, and after eight years or so they may produce spectacular massed displays of hundreds of flowers almost covering the trunk, adding to the usual display clustered along twigs and branches. Plants are frost and drought resistant and need very good drainage.' Are these plants really frost resistant in Canberra?

Despite some usual travails, leaf miner April 2013, an ants' nest in the base of the pot March 2014. yellow and mottled leaves, treated with tonic, with new leaves emerging dark green June 2015, green leaves January 2016, but no flowers, the plant persisted. Our first flowers appeared in January 2017. I note that the tree was a bit frosted off winter 2018 – lost its leaves, but came back in November 2018. We repotted this plant and moved it to a different position under the eaves in February 2019. We were rewarded with lots of blooms in January 2021, 2022 and 2023. We then moved this plant from a pot into a warm protected spot in the garden in January 2024.



Hibiscus 'Ian's Gold'

We planted this hybrid hibiscus, dedicated to the memory of Ian Waldron, in October 2021. This hibiscus is a bushy shrub, predicted to be 2m high x 1.5m wide, with large single gold flowers during the warmer months. According to the label this plant needs a sunny well drained position and tolerates only light frosts. Our plant is flowering well January 2022 and 2023 but is well over 2m, probably 3.5m high. We moved 'Ian's Gold' into a warm protected spot in the garden in January 2024.



Telopea 'Shady Lady White'

T. speciosissima x oreades. We planted this telopea in September 2015 in a large ceramic pot. Our first flowers were in October 2016 and it has bloomed prolifically ever since. The label advice says this plant needs full sun or part shade, in a moist spot and grows to a height 3m, width 2m. When our plant reached that size, with 50 blooms each year, we moved it to the garden in January 2024 under protection from the harsh western sun, but with good morning light.

Gail Ritchie-Knight, Canberra

I have *Xerochrysum bracteatum* 'Silvery Rose' growing in a pot. Initially I had it in a self-watering hanging basket but it soon outgrew that (initially I didn't read the label which stated a height of 0.8m (!), so I transferred it to a much larger self-watering pot on the ground. I also have a *Bracteantha bracteata* 'Mohave Purple Red' in a hanging basket (height 20–35cm). Both are doing very well. But I've noticed that even though both of them are in self-watering pots, they are incredibly thirsty. Mind you, they are in an exposed position in full sun. However I have 2 other plants in hanging self-watering pots, *Chrysocephalum* 'Desert Orange' and *Leucochrysum sp* and they are no where near as thirsty. Lesson 1: read the label before planting; Lesson 2: maintain a frequent watering regime every 2 to 3 days during hot summers. But a more sensible option would be to plant them in the ground, which I will do when they stop flowering.



Another interesting feature is that masses of the glorious Forester Moth *Pollanisia sp* has been visiting the white flowered *Xerochrysum bracteatum* while completely ignoring the other plants. This has been going on for some weeks. It seems like white bracts with golden yellow discs are what attracts the moth.

On a Happy Note:

Life Membership Award

Ros and Ben Walcott have been awarded Life Membership of the Australian Native Plants Society Canberra Region



Photo by Gail Ritchie-Knight

Please send us your thoughts comments and ideas and when we get enough, we will produce another Newsletter.

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