Region

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A.S.G.A.P.

Australian Plants for Containers Study Group.

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Hello everyone, Hope you had a lovely Xmas break and didn't overdo things. As I don't have holidays over Xmas, not even the public ones, apart from work I have been busy caring for my container plants, as Leader I feel I should try and lead by example. Therefore since September my pot plants haven't had a chance to work out what hit them, they've been pruned, fertilised, repotted,and watered, to within an inch of their lives. In the main they have responded well to this unexpected dose of T.L.C. but unfortunately the humidity and above average rainfall for January and February have claimed a few casualities. My Acacia glaucoptera, Banksia occidentalis, Banksia menziesii, Grevillea levis, and Boronia ledifolia have succumbed. My collection of local species is proceeding, and our "Flora Festival" committee has decided that it is a good project and have therefore bought and distributed to members of Central Coast S.G.A.P., some popular local species for members to grow on for the festival display.

I have started to keep track of how much water different plants use, I'm only doing the "waterwell" plants, and it has been quite interesting so far even though the rain we've had since the end of January has spoilt things a bit. The plants you think would use a lot of water,don't, and the plants that I thought would hardly use any often suck it up. Chamelaucium "Purple Pride",Actinotus helianthi, Adenathos detmoldii, Bansksia grandis, Petrophile biloba, (all ungrafted) need their wells filled every 2 - 3 days. Whereas,many of the rainforest plants don't use much at all,and easily last 7 days before a refill is needed.

During the wet weather, I empty all the wells to allow the excess water in the soil to drain properly and wait until the wells are empty before refilling them. This seems to increase survival rates of any tricky plants. I currently have 66 plants in "waterwells", plus others that are in the more usual containers. Following Ian Slade's article in the last newsletter, I've also repotted my orchids and they are looking much happier. Now if I can just get up some enthusiasm to get stuck into the back yard !

This edition of the newsletter will mainly come from me, Colleen Keena (Q'land) has sent an article on Malvaceae, thanks Colleen. Rhys has contributed an article on a couple of our pots. I've also included a couple of book reviews. Please help make your newsletter interesting and contribute some articles. Snippets about what, and how things are growing for you; new products, books, everything will be gratefully received.

Something unrelated to container plants,but as lovers of Australian plants that may interest you, is the collection of porcelain mugs with designs by Phillipa Nikulinsky of threatened species. I bought mine from Mt Annan and the Geographic Shop. There is also a state floral emblem series, consisting of a mug and small plate, I received 2 of them for my birthday. Apparently these are available from David Jones.

ASGAP Conference: 29.9.97 to 3.10.97 Adelaide.

I have been asked, as have the other Study Group leaders,to mount a display / presentation for the duration of the conference, Monday - Friday, and the Trade night on the Tuesday . These do not have to be manned except for the Tuesday night, this I am happy to do. What I am asking (Begging!) members for is, ideas for a display / presentation at the conference. I tthought some photos of container plants,of differing types,aspects,and containers to illustrate what can be grown in containers,and also how. If anyone has any photos of their container plants /collection that they could lend me I can get them copied and sent back to you, plus any other ideas, I would be eternally in your debt. As a rule I'm not very creative, my talents are of a more practical nature. I have to reply by the 30.4.97 so you early response would be appreciated If you haven't been to a Biennial conference before, I can recommend them. We have been to 3 now ,they are great fun and informative at the same time; the Pre & Post conference tours are good value as well.

COLOURFUL FOLIAGE PLANTS

Most of the really attractive and colourful foliage plants belong to the "rainforest" group. Some of them are too big for containers, though you can grow them for a few years ,and then if you have room you can transplant them into your garden, or give them to a friend. Quite a lot of them don't grow as large or as fast out of their natural habitat,and often turn into lovely smaller,denser versions in open positions without competition for light and nutrients. Some which I grow in pots are Syzigium erthrocalyx, S. wilsonni, S. wilsonni ssp crytophlebium, Lepiderema pulchella, Agapetes meiniana, Acmena normanbyii (Syn: Acmena East Normanby River), Syzigium canocortex. I also have some of these in the ground as well as Grevillea baileyana, Opisthiolepsis heterophylla, Davidsonia pruriens, & var.jerseyana, Neolitsea dealbata, and probably some others that I'll remember next time in down the back yard. I will be discussing a couple of special favourites: Lepiderema pulchella, Syzgium wilsonni ssp crytophlebium, and Acmena normanbyii.

Lepiderema pulchella

If I had room for only one plant that can grow into a small tree,then this would probably be it. Pulchella means beautiful and this plant lives up to its name. We purchased our first one in 1988 and it is currently about 4m high.It gets very little care as such ie fertilizer,and the Brush turkeys remove any mulch that we may put down. It never disappoints having continuous flushes of new growth all year, especially after rain - we don't do any additional watering in our garden once plants establish.

Jones(1)describes Lepiderema pulchella as a tree to 8m,with pinnate leaves to 10cm, with each having 2-4 pairs of fairly narrow leaflets. These leaflets are bright,shiny green on the upper surface and taper towards the end. It has small yellow-orange flowers carried in densely flowered panicles during September - October. Ours hasn't flowered as yet that we know of, maybe it's not warm enough. The species is endemic to the Border ranges of N.S.W. and Queensland. Jones writes that this a beautiful species worthy of wider cultivation. Plants are spindly for the first few years,eventually becoming rounded and densely bushy. The foliage is an attractive light,shiny green and the flushes of new growth are pinkish-white to lime green and contrast well with the mature foliage. He has a good photo of this on page 156.

Nicholson(2)write that seed germinates quickly, and cuttings are slow to strike, but successful, and produce thicker early growth.

Syzygium wilsonnii ssp cryptophlebium

This is also a beautiful shrub, taller than its relative, S. wilsonii though its requirements are similar. Ihave only grown this one in the ground but I'm sure it would be amenable to pot culture. Our oldest specimen is 9 years old, it has beautiful flushes of hot pink new growth that hang down and stand out like a beacon, the flowers are cream and hang from branchlets
Purple fruit appear after flowering.

Nicholson(2) notes that peeled seed germinates in 1-3 months, but can be erratic. Cuttings strike fairly easily They have a nice photo of the plant on page 60, though ours has hot pink new growth rather than the more reddish tone seen here.

Acmena normanbyii
syn: Acmena sp East Normanby River

This lovely plant we've had for 3 years. We purchased it from Bryant's Nursery at Lismore where we always call in on our way north. Kay recommended it to us and we've never been disappointed. It has beautiful flushes of bright red new growth for long periods that fade to maroon & its usual green. This one we grow in a 200mm waterwell type pot, and I've noticed it uses a reasonable amount of water, and depletes its reservoir every 2-3 days. Pruning encourages the new growth. It hasn't flowered as yet. Apparently it has small white flowers.

Radke and Sankowsky (3) have the only descriptor of this plant that I have found, probably because one of them discovered it.
They write that it is a rare plant from a small area in a World Heritage area near Cooktown, its scientific classification has proved elusive,and whilst presently called Acmena, it doesn't accurately fit this genus and may be a new one. Due to its limited time in cultivation, there are no mature specimens, though they predict that it will grow to 3-4 m high. Ours is about 1m and very bushy. It will grow in a protected sunny spot or semi-shade.
There are so many lovely colourful foliage plants, maybe some members would like to write in about their favourites.

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SMALL HIBISCUS AND HIBISCUS-LIKE PLANTS IN POTS

Colleen Keena

(Adapted from two articles written for other study groups)

INTRODUCTION

Although new species of hibiscus and hibiscus-like plants are still being found and recorded [1], the beauty of at least one species was recognised as long ago as 1828. The Colonial Botanist of New South Wales, Charles Fraser described *Hibiscus splendens* as the King of all the Australian plants he had seen. He described the flowers as being the most delicate pink and crimson and literally covering the plant. *Hibiscus splendens* is just one member of the Hibiscus family. Australian representatives vary in size from a ground cover, *Abelmoschus moschatus*, to small plants such as *Hibiscus trionum* and *H. geranioides* (0.5 m) , to medium shrubs such as *Alyogyne huegelii* (1-2.5m) and tall trees such as *Lagunaria patersonii* (to 13 m). Not only is there a range of sizes but members of this family can be found growing in tropical areas, *Abelmoschus manihot*, in swamps and crater lakes, *Hibiscus diversifolius*, along the beach, *H. tiliaceus*, in inland Australia, *Gossypium sturtianum*, *Alyogyne hakeifolia*, in fissures in sandstone in open forest or along rainforest margins, *H. splendens* and along the margins of light rain forests on soils ranging from loam to granitic or poor and gravelly, *H. heterophyllus*. While most species occur in subtropical and tropical regions, some species can be grown in temperate climates, e.g. *Hibiscus splendens* [2] and *H. diversifolius* if kept well watered [3]. Other species can be grown in warm temperate zones, e.g. *Alyogyne hakeifolia*, *A. huegelii*, *Hibiscus heterophyllus* and *H. tiliaceus* [2]. Hibiscus plants grow even under tough conditions, e.g. remnant stands of *Hibiscus heterophyllus* growing on hillsides near Brisbane showed no adverse effects from the recent prolonged drought and in the Wide Bay district, roadside plants of *H. divaricatus* re-grew after being burnt. One species, *Alyogyne huegelii*, has been described as thriving in the most desolate of places [4].

Depending on the species, flowers may be white, various shades of yellow, pink, purple, or red. Flowering times vary according to the species but in a subtropical climate such as Brisbane, by planting a range of species, it is possible to have plants flowering throughout the year. This prolonged flowering and the production of nectar contributes to the value that Hibiscus species have for "faunascaping" [5]. Not only will blooms which produce nectar feed nectar-eating birds and predators but they will also attract insects for insect eaters, provided there are protected water sources and nesting places for birds. In addition, the seed capsules of species such as *H. heterophyllus* can provide for seed-eaters. Thus, apart from any aesthetic appeal of birds and insects, plants such as hibiscus species which attract birds and predators encourage natural pest control as the insects use the plant as a food source and are themselves controlled by a wide range of predators [6]. Honeyeaters take advantage of the large nectar-rich flowers of species such as *Alyogyne huegelii*, *Hibiscus diversifolius*, *H. heterophyllus* [7] and *H. splendens* [8]. Birds such as lorikeets are attracted to species like *H. heterophyllus* [7] and the sight and sound of a *Hibiscus heterophyllus* literally covered with lorikeets bowing down the branches as they feast upon the seed capsules more than compensates for any damage sustained. Insects seek out the flowers of *H. diversifolius*, *H. heterophyllus*, *H. splendens* and *H. tiliaceus* [5] and *H. tiliaceus* is a butterfly food source [9]. It could then be argued that any list of plants suitable for pots would be incomplete without representatives of the Malvaceae family.

SPECIES SUITABLE FOR POT CULTURE

The first plants which will be described as suitable for pot culture are lemon or yellow. *Hibiscus panduriformis** can be either a shrub or prostrate plant. Seed of the procumbent form was obtained from W.A. and the plants have performed well in pots. The flower is bright yellow and the first buds appear at the end of winter. *Hibiscus trionum** is an annual, flowering in the warmer months and growing well in pots. A form called "*Sunnyday*" is recommended as the flowers are longer lasting and brighter yellow than the flowers of the species which occurs on the outskirts of Brisbane. *Hibiscus diversifolius** also occurs in S.E. Qld and northern N.S.W. Plants observed growing in swamps were close to two metres in height but cuttings of these flowered at less than one metre when grown in pots.

Of the pink flowering small hibiscus, *Hibiscus geranioides** is probably the most readily available, although it may be an introduced species. It has pink tubular flowers throughout the warmer months. There is a form of *Hibiscus diversifolius* with maroon-purple flowers. This form which is around one metre flowers throughout the year and grows well in a pot. Another pink hibiscus which grows well in a pot is *Pavonia hastata**. This may also be an introduced species. Plants are cut back hard at the end of winter and flower prolifically from December to May. Seedlings do come up in nearby cultivated beds but none have ever grown in the bush section of our block.

Even the larger hibiscus such as *Hibiscus heterophyllus**, *H. splendens* and *H. divaricatus* and hybrids between these species can be grown in pots. If a seedling is grown, not only might the flowers be a long time coming, but it will be difficult to maintain the plant in a pot. If cuttings are taken, instead of the tap root system of a seedling, the plant has fibrous roots and is then much more amenable to being contained in a pot, particularly if the plant is tip-pruned from the earliest stages. The result is a bushy plant that flowers freely and much earlier than it would as a seedling [10]. The cutting-grown plant usually flowers within approximately six months, often while still in 9 cm pots. While not from the Australian mainland, and not small, *Hibiscus insularis* must be mentioned. Again, cutting-grown plants as opposed to seedlings, perform well in pots, flowering freely while small. The delicate flowers are initially lemon but turn mauve as they age. Pruning is important for all large species and regular tip-pruning is preferred as plants that have to be cut back to wood may not survive. The size of the pot governs the size of the plants and so size can be easily restricted by limiting pot size. I find the larger species a bit like goldfish - give them a big container and they will become very large. I can manage these species indefinitely in shade house conditions in 9 cm pots. However, as soon as the larger species of hibiscus are planted into even 15 cm pots they start to shoot up and out and constant tip-pruning is necessary. Plants can be potted on until the desired size is reached and then maintained at that size by pruning. My stock plants have been allowed to reach 1.5-2m as this size provides plenty of cutting material. The largest size of pot that I use is 40 cm.

Other members of the Malvaceae family are ideal for pot culture. *Abelmoschus moschatus* "Mischief" performs extremely well in a pot. This form bears bright-red flowers with white centres throughout the warmer months, particularly at Christmas. *Abelmoschus manihot** grows from 1 to 4 metres, however in a pot it can be kept around the 1 metre size. It has large lemon flowers in autumn and is probably best treated as an annual/biennial. *Abutilum* deserves to be more widely grown. So far I have only grown *Abutilon auretum** and A. sp. *Chillagoe**. *A. auretum* is showy with almost continuous buttercup yellow flowers and attractive seed pods. A. sp. *Chillagoe** is more subtle in colouring. Both perform well in pots. *Abutilon* sp. *Walshs Pyramid* has 10 cm white flowers with maroon centres and grows to around 1.5 m. but cutting-grown plants in pots flower when very small.

Alyogyne huegelii and *A. hakeifolia* have been grown from seed from W.A. and have flowered while still in pots. Both these species are available in shades of mauve or in white. *Alyogyne huegelii* has been successfully grafted onto plants of a small growing *Hibiscus heterophyllus x splendens* hybrid as I have previously lost *A. huegelii* in humid conditions. *Alyogyne huegelii* grows larger than 1 metre but cutting grown plants flower profusely in pots while well under a metre and these plants also appear to be superior to plants grown as seedlings. These flowers last for several days whereas all other local species mentioned last only one day. *Gossypium australe**, *G. sturtianum** and *G. robinsonii*, with mauve flowers, have also been grown from seed and have flowered in pots from seedlings. They may perform even better if grown from cuttings or grafted.

All plants mentioned have grown well in pots in S.E. Qld. This is only some indication of Malvaceae suitable for pots. There is still much to be learnt and many plants are still elusive, either because they are difficult to obtain, e.g. *Hibiscus sturtii* or because they succomb during our wet summers, e.g. *Radyera farragei*.

CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH HIBISCUS

Although Hibiscus can enhance the garden, Hibiscus species are not without problems. Susceptibility to frosts has to be considered, although most are hardy plants in areas where only light frosts are experienced [11]. Species such as *Gossypium australe* and *G. sturtianum* are frost resistant [12] but species such as *Hibiscus heterophyllus* and *H. splendens* will need extra protection in frost-prone areas [9] but do grow well in frost prone areas against a wall or fence [13]. It appears to be possible to overcome frost susceptibility by careful selection of hybrids, for example several of a number of hybrids between *H. heterophyllus* and *H. splendens* have recently survived -6 degrees even though the naturally occurring species growing on the same site were either damaged or destroyed. Another difficulty is that in some species such as *Hibiscus diversifolius*, *H. heterophyllus* and *H. splendens* and *Abelmoschus manihot*, the seed pod is covered in hairs that may cause severe skin irritation. Sticky tape stuck onto the skin and then pulled off appears to be the easiest and most effective way to remove these irritant hairs as well as using tweezers when extracting seed. Then there are a variety of sucking or chewing creatures that enjoy the flavour of both buds and leaves, although well grown plants are less likely to be attacked by either pests or diseases [10] and control is usually not warranted, especially if it is appreciated that many pests represent an important food for birds and predators and if the garden already has birds and other predators present to clean up most pests [14]. Hibiscus beetles mostly feed on the pollen of the hibiscus flower and may chew holes in the petals [15] but there is no need to kill them [14]. Even though Harlequin bugs depend on the sap they suck from species such as hibiscus, the damage is rarely serious [15] and their colours are so spectacular that they can even be considered desirable [16]. Scale insects can become a problem but can be easily managed either by removing by hand or even by cutting off affected parts. Any other damage that may occur can also be pruned off. Regrowth is so fast after pruning the plant may actually be improved. Pruning to maintain a desired size or shape may be seen as a chore, however the plant repays the effort as the result is a more compact plant with a much greater number of flowers.

Probably the major obstacle to incorporating Hibiscus and Hibiscus-like plants is availability of plants. Few nurseries regularly carry Australian species. Currently, seed of some species can be obtained either through the SGAP seed bank or through commercial suppliers of wildflower seeds. Although it is over 150 years since Charles Fraser described their beauty and despite their adaptability and ready flowering, this same plant and many of its close relations are not yet readily available in nurseries or if available may be incorrectly or inadequately identified. The difficulty with obtaining plants is likely to continue until the potential of this long ignored family of plants finally begins to be recognised. Hopefully, not only can members of the Australian Plants for Containers Study Group increase the number of Malvaceae species available for cultivation and enhance our knowledge about the cultivation of Malvaceae, but the pot culture of hibiscus and hibiscus-like flowers will increasingly enhance the gardens of group members.

** Available from SGAP Qld. Region Seed Bank, June 1996*

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"PRETTY IN PINK"

The flora of Australia is universally recognised for its diversity, and the flora of Western Australia for its uniqueness. Separation by climate and distance has allowed the evolution of a related, but differing flora from that of eastern Australia. W.A. friends would suggest that this evolutionary divergence occurred with the eastern Australian flora.

Although, not represented by rainforest trees, the members of the Grevillea genus have achieved their greatest diversity in Western Australia. It is members of these western grevillea species that have become the basis of the McGregor Grevillea pot collection. Eastern species readily find a garden location.

Four of the favourite Grevillea species in the collection are: G. leptobotrys; G. paradoxa; G. petrophiliodes and G. teretifolia.

All four species are grown on a G.robusta grafted rootstock, and have been potted into water-well type containers. The potting media is a standard commercial mix: Yates Premium Blend and Osmocote for Natives is the slow release fertiliser used. This is applied during autumn and spring. A quantity of slow release fertiliser is also mixed into the potting mix when potting is done. Potting -on is usually accomplished when the root mass starts to protrude into the water reservoir. The only interference with natural cycles is to empty the reservoirs during or after heavy rainfall to allow the wet soil mix to drain freely. My four "Pretties in Pink" vary greatly in form and habit.

Grevillea leptobotrys.

The "tangled Grevillea", so named because of the tangled form of the foliage is a low clumping or prostrate shrub which can grow to 0.5m high by 3m. There are four distinct types of this shrub - defined by foliage type. this is a prostrate shrub, with greatly divided leaves. The terminal leaves are very prickly. Bright pink flowers are borne on slender stalks which form drooping racemes. This plant has been in continual flowering since purchased, with a peak in autumn / spring. It has been repotted once and currently resides in a 250mm water-well pot. It has been a rapid grower. In order to maximise its spreading habit the pot has been placed upon a stump, approximately 35cm high.

This is a stunning Grevillea, both for its bright pink flowers and the grey-green foliage.It is found growing in places with hot, dry summers and winter rainfall. It therefore requires a grafted rootstock in eastern Australia.

Grevillea paradoxa. "Bottlebrush Grev".

This is one of those plants which defied classification by early botanists as it closely resembles a Hakea, and its specific name: *paradoxa* reflects this confusion.

G. paradoxa has been slow growing in cultivation. It is a medium-sized rigid shrub to 2m tall form around the stem. The flowers are pinkish-red (sometimes reddy-purple) and borne in dense cylindrical racemes at the ends of the branches, from spring. These upright racemes give the appearance of an upright prickly bottlebrush rising over the bluish-green foliage.

During periods of sustained wet rainfall or high humidity there can be a browning of the leaves and foliage die back, but quick pruning of the affected foliage alleviates any plant death. (So far.) G. paradoxa requires a sunny to hot site to achieve best flowering and growth.

Grevillea petrophiliodes.

Like, Grevillea paradoxa, G. petrophiliodes defied the best efforts of early botanists to adequately describe this species. It shares characteristics of the related genera: Hakea, Grevillea, and Petrophile. This is one of my favourite Grevillea species,mainly due to the long bright pink (bottlebrush type) flower racemes.

Grevillea petrophiliodes is a medium sized shrub to 1.5m high, with leafless stems rising 30-70cm above the foliage. It is upon these leafless stems that the flower racemes are borne. The erect leaves are divided into terete segments up to 50cm in length upon mature shrubs.The flowers are borne in dense, cylindrical racemes. the perianth is reddish-pink with a greenish limb and a pink style with a white tip.

G. petrophiliodes is a spectacular spring/summer flowering shrub which has grown well in cultivation. Pruning of the flowering stems will encourage branching of the plant. It must be planted into a well draining soil mix, and is tolerant of long dry conditions. An annual application of slow release fertiliser will improve plant vigour.

Grevillea teretifolia.

Grevillea teretifolia is named because of the fine light green terete and prickly foliage. It is a low spreading shrub to 1m high by 2m wide. The flowering branches arch downwards. The pink toothbrush type flowers are borne on short lateral branches during spring. The flowers are quite fragrant. This has been a fast growing species at Terrigal, and hard pruning has created a bushy small shrub.

G. teretifolia has only recently become available through the nursery trade but is well worth seeking, because it is one of the most attractive, perfumed small shrubs for the garden or for a container.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Elliot,G. (1996) The new Australian Plants for small gardens and containers (2nd edition) Hyland House, Melbourne. *ISBN 0 947062 25 4.*

The new Australian Plants for small gardens and containers by Gwen Elliot is a very relevant book for study group members. If you don't already own a copy, then I suggest you buy yourself a present. Prepare yourself for an informative, instructive, read. It is well set out and has an easy to read format, the text is well supported by line drawings and photos of various plants,containers, and techniques. The book is divided into 4 parts.

Part one covers small gardens; including planning, design,construction,preparation, structures, surface treatments plant selection,maintenance,and diseases.

Part two deals specifically with aspects of container plants; design and construction,types,soils and potting mixes, maintenance,and specialised containers eg water gardens, window boxes etc.

Part three consists of 50 quick reference charts of plants for particular purposes; this includes soils, aspects, size,growth habits, flowers,fragrance,foliage,fruit,colours,flowering times,specialised container cultivation eg hanging baskets, bird & butterfly attracting.

Part four contains plant descriptions.

Handreck,K. (1993) Gardening Down-Under CSIRO publications, Melbourne. *ISBN 0 643 05511 8.*

This book is essential reading for every gardener.It is well set out and full of practical information that helps you understand what is happening "Down-Under" in the soil, whether in your garden beds, lawns (heaven forbid), or containers. I wish this book was around 10 years ago, but it is available now, and you can certainly benefit from the information regardless of how long you've been gardening.
Kevin has taken some very dry and scientific information and not only made it understandable, but interesting, and "user friendly". My high school chemistry lessons finally make sense. Chapters 11-13 are specifically about container plants.

Chapter 11 " Growing plants in pots", discusses choosing containers, potting up and repotting, watering, overwatering, air filled porosity, temperature, wetting agents, potting mixes, propagation.

Chapter 12 "Fertilisers for plants in pots", contains recipes for fertiliser use, types of fertilisers and N:P:K ratios, how much to use and how often, nitrogen, phosphorus and trace elements, salinity problems.

Chapter 13 " Gardening in pots: some practicalities" discusses pH measurement and adjustment, measuring salinity, and air filled porosity, potting mix wettability, making your own potting mix.

These two books that I've reviewed, contain everything you always wanted to know about growing plants in containers and then some. If you don't have them, I recommend to buy or borrow them, if you do, then don't forget to put their excellent information to good use.