

asgap

australian plants for containers

study group

29/11 Region

## NEWSLETTER

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### editor's bit

Greetings for Christmas and 1999. Lots of good growing, happy pots and contented growers. (And may the millenium bugs stay out of the garden!)

When this Newsletter arrives you will be so busy with cards and Christmas that you may need to put it away safely for a quiet moment; but do read it and send in your comments. They are both needed and appreciated.

Gardens really are an expression and extension of our personality. They are certainly a place of recreation, sometimes hard work and at times a place of rest and relaxation. Our pots and containers can be a more controlled part of the garden; they can be adapted to the mood you want to create in a small environment.

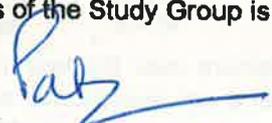
I hope someone gives you a lovely pot or container this Christmas, (but empty please would be my request), then what fun you can have choosing a new friend for the patio, decking or corner of the garden that needs a little something. In so many homes, sundecks and patios are such an important feature, often an extension of the house. My daughter has a lovely area of decking off the family room, facing north-west. Whilst she grows many Australian shrubs and trees, her pots on this decking are delightful, but exotics!

I think we do need to site pots with thought and consideration. We also need to watch our backs, lifting and moving with care - using a trolley to move larger containers. (I am told that an old skateboard is very useful). We should be careful to avoid an area becoming too crowded and dangerous if in the way of foot traffic.

What fun they are. I hope the summer isn't too onerous for watering them. I am eagerly waiting to hear what your latest delight is - or even your big disappointment. Do drop a note to me soon. Please note in your diary - 18 March 1999 is the deadline for the next Newsletter entries - an article, or even a small note or paragraph will be most welcome.

Thank you to those who have written to me - you will see some of your comments quoted in this Newsletter.

A list of current members of the Study Group is attached.  
Until next time - Cheers.



### containers in garden design

by Diana Snape, Garden Design Study Group

In the September Newsletter, Pat Webb outlined some of the reasons for growing plants in containers - their suitability close to the house, the mobility of containers, the ability to grow 'difficult' plants. The first two of these, and several others are related directly to garden design in which plants in containers can play a valuable role.

A container is often a small formal structure which can be an echo of the house (or other building) in the garden scene. There are many different types of container - barrels (or half barrels), pots of all shapes and sizes. They may be of more natural materials such as terracotta, ranging from low bowls to tall pipes, or else highly glazed pots in white, black or bright colors. Logs or old tree stumps give a quite different look, much more of the garden than of the house. Containers are likely to provide a link between the house and the garden which can be sympathetic to either but rarely to both equally.

A pot may be used to grow a single plant, highlighting its attractive form (and probably foliage), or two or three plants together to create a miniature garden. In either case design aspects such as choosing the balance of symmetry or asymmetry are important. The single plant may be pruned to a spherical or other defined shape, allowed to run riot, or somewhere in between. Choosing the plants to combine in a miniature garden is a delight, similar to designing a much larger one but very much more focussed. Proportions, size and color of foliage, relationship to the container, all register. Then the placing of the container in the garden has practical implications - mainly watering but also sunlight - as well as aesthetic. Having it close to the house (as part of the 'transition zone') or possibly close to a pool seems natural. Among smaller or more delicate plants a container will tend to be a focal point for its bulk and/or height.

If you introduce a number of containers and plants into the garden, there are new elements to consider - the inter-relationship of the containers and plants to each other as well as to their surroundings. An extremely formal example would be a row of similar pots with similar plants (nowadays often dwarf Lilly-pillies). A reduced version of this, just a pair, appeals to me more, as does repetition at focal points. At the other extreme though, a scattering of pots in the garden without any planning doesn't appeal to me either. There are so many possible combinations it is difficult to generalise. An odd number of pots? Not necessarily. With variation in size of both pots and plants, an even number of pots can look good too. Just a few examples of arrangements;- a small bank ranging from low pots in the front to tall ones at the back; a cluster of pots of similar sizes with just one very tall or large one; a group of pots here and a couple of 'outliers' over there; and so on. With variations in both pot and plant sizes, and then the number of pots, the scope for design is tremendous.

I haven't said anything about using pots for those 'difficult to grow' plants - probably not really the subject of design but sheer indulgence! (I'm joking - I know this is important for research purposes). Their inclusion reminds me of the versatility of containers, which can be moved to try different conditions, brought out to a conspicuous position when a plant is blooming, or replaced in time of disaster. Designing with containers enables this to be done with 'difficult to grow' plants as well as the more reliable ones which can occupy more permanent positions.

*My appreciation and thanks to Diana for contributing to our Newsletter and for the publicity she gave the Australian Plants for Containers Study Group in the Garden Design Study Group newsletter.*

**DO YOU KNOW any other SGAP or APS member who might be interested in joining the Study Group? Please pass on membership information to them. FEES for the Australian Plants in Containers Study Group are \$8 per annum (\$10 overseas). CLOSING DATE for letters/articles for the next Newsletter is 18 March 1999**



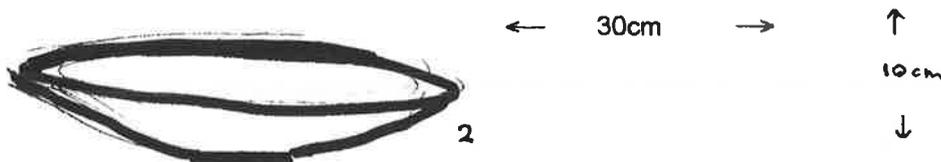
HUON  
PINE

### **plants for shallow containers**

Two plants which I have grown successfully in shallow containers over the last three years are *Nablonium calyceroides* and *Mazos pumilo*. The former is an unusual and not spectacular daisy, and the latter found widely in the wild and around my pond. *Mazos pumilo* is easy to propagate by division of its creeping rhizomes. The blue flowers lasted all summer near my back door (south facing). As the plants like moisture, I have left the container sitting in a dish of water in the summer. Or a self-watering pot would be ideal.

*Nablonium calyceroides* (Asteraceae) is endemic to Tasmania and the Bass Strait islands, and was given to me some years ago by a member of the Daisy Study Group. It was such a small plant that I thought I'd lose it in my rather wild garden so I kept it in a container. Each year it forms quite a colony and needs repotting. It is a small perennial herb with a stoloniferous root system, so is easy to divide. The flowers are interesting but quite insignificant, mine flowering from November to January. The flowerheads are ½-1cm across, solitary and daisy-like, surrounded by sharp greenish bracts - a talking point and interesting rather than a showpiece. Again, it likes moist conditions but well drained and mine grows well in dappled sunlight.

I divide and repot both plants each year in August/September; they are easy to grow and mix well with the other larger containers.



Another very small tufting herb I have near the pond is *Goodenia humilis* (swamp Goodenia) - I think I'll try this plant in a container this year. This little plant grows from a suckering, slender branched rhizome. The flowers are yellow, 1-1.5cm and flowers profusely from December to the end of February. It would look good with the *Mazos pumilo*. *Goodenia humilis* is a widespread plant in Victoria, NSW, Tasmania and South Australia - growing in a variety of habitats in heathlands and swamps. Mine spreads very well across the gravel with which we have replaced the front lawn around the pond.

All three plants discussed are only 0.05 to 0.1m in height.



## **around and about**

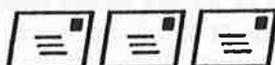
In the June 1994, Volume 17, No. 139 of *Australian Plants* is an article "Pimelia as Flowering Pot plants" by **A.T.Slater** of the Institute of Plant Sciences, Knoxfield, Victoria - most interesting and with two excellent color photographs of *Pimelia ciliata* and *P.rosea* growing in containers.

I quote: "Flowering pot plant growers in America are finding that pot plants are more profitable to produce than cut flower crops. The market in America is reflecting this trend, with consumers preferring pot plants as the flowers last longer, they remain a living plant (with care & luck!), the plant can be reused the following year or alternatively used as a landscape plant after the current flowering has finished".

**Jean Gallioft** of Heathmont, (a member of the Maroondah Group of Australian Plants Society) wrote the following letter to Cherree in the September 1998 Newsletter of VicSGAP.

"Dear Cherree - Must tell you of a lovely thing in my garden. Am boasting really, but don't we all? 18 months ago I purchased a grafted *Pimelia physodes* and planted it in a very large concrete tub (facing NW) with *Dampiera sp* and *Stylidium bulbiferum*. What a show I have had! Something like 100 lovely bells of green and reddish/purple bracts hide an intricate arrangement of quite hairy flowers. It has caught the attention of the neighbours who are mostly ignorant of our 'lovelies'. Flora Anderson took a flower to sketch and showed me the flower under a microscope - so intricate and beautiful. Cheers."

When I spoke to Jean on the phone she tells me she is now wondering if the *Dampiera linearis* is 'taking over'. It is suckering freely. The container is a large 75 x 60cm concrete tub. She has pruned the *Pimelea physodes* and it is shooting well. Jean feeds the plants with Kuranga Nursery's "Two-in-one" fertiliser (ie N : P : K ratio of 22.5 : 0 : 5.4 Note NO phosphorus at all.)



## **members say:**

**Linda Pariane writes:** "Living in Coburg with the heavy clay, I am limited in what will grow here - so pots are my way of having a few of those special 'fussy' things".

**From the West, we welcome Peta Ireland.** She writes "I am presently studying horticulture and have a love of Australian plants. I am interested in exploring the potential of 'Australian Potted Color', well presented, for more formal gardens, and would be very appreciative of any guidance from the Study Group to get me started."

Could any member with some information which could be of value, please contact Peta (A list of all members of this Study Group is enclosed).

"Australian Potted Color" sounds a good name for an article for our newsletter. Anyone keen to write one?

## **from the Netherlands**

I am sure you will enjoy this letter I received in September from **Liesbeth Uijtewaal-de Vries**

"In the September issue of the Vic.SGAP newsletter I saw that you are looking for new members of the "Australian Plants for Containers Study Group". As a matter of fact I am growing quite a few Australian plants, and I simply have to grow them in containers because, as you will know, winters can be pretty cold down here. So, we have to transfer the plants to a frost free greenhouse during that period. And that's difficult if they grow

in the garden. To exchange information (and plant material!) I am a member of the Dutch Container Plant Society. There are quite a few active members in this region, so there are apparently more people mad enough to go into a lot of trouble to be able to grow subtropical plants in this drizzly climate!

For some reason I am crazy about Australian plant species and try to get hold of any species and information I can. But I don't know if its any use becoming a member of your group? Potting soil types will differ, and the climate is different for sure. I'm in doubt, but I thought I might react anyway. What do you reckon? (Of course I have written to Liesbeth saying we'd love a European correspondent - so do hope she joins the Study Group).

My main interest lies in the *Myrtaceae* and *Proteaceae*. Apart from that I've got different species from other plant families. Of course they have to be able to withstand long wet periods. This summer has been especially wet with weeks and weeks of rain and little sunshine. Awful. Next summer will be better I hope!

At the moment I am trying to grow *Banksia* from seed. Not with great success up till now, and I'm trying out some different soil mixtures with more and more sand in it. I hope I'll be getting there some time! The wet and cloudy summer didn't help much either of course, although I did keep them inside."  
(Liesbeth enclosed a photograph of a lovely *Grevillea* (?*thelemannia*), ?*G. fililoba* or *G. preissei*).

Liesbeth wrote back at the end of September and joined the Study Group. I share some of her most interesting letter with you.....

"As to your questions: - 'How do I get plants and seeds?'

**Plants** It's not too difficult to obtain a *Callistemon* in a garden centre. *Leptospermum scoparium* is quite common (relatively) too. For other species one has to look around quite a bit, but there are specialised nurseries that grow some Australian plants. So, with some effort, quite a nice collection can be obtained. Besides several (University) Botanic Gardens may have Australian plants, and being friends with the gardeners helps a lot in extending one's own collection!

Cuttings can be obtained too through members of our Container Plant Society. Some years ago I discovered my first *Melaleuca* when visiting one of the members. He thought he had quite a nice *Callistemon*, but at a closer look I found it was a *Melaleuca* instead. That was my first member of this genus! It appeared to be *M. hypericifolia*, a weed to you perhaps, but we love it down here. Easy growing, easy flowering. We need that sort of thing!

In the Mediterranean area there are quite a few nurseries that grow plants, including Aussies, for the Mediterranean market. I bought some beautiful *Grevilleas*, including the one in the photo, from an Israeli nursery that was represented at an exhibition in Germany.

**Seeds** : in the beginning, some four years ago, I ordered some seeds via a small seed company in Holland. There are two companies in England that sell a huge range of seeds including many Aussie species, but I haven't tried them out. Oh yes, I ordered seeds of some *Banksia* species in America last year.

My main source of seeds at the moment however is SGAP! It's a delight to be able to obtain seeds of so many species. And even a greater delight to grow them. I'm a member since 1997 and the kitchen, garden and small greenhouse is full of seedlings already. I'll have to try out which species do well in our climate and what species hate it down here. So far, the *Banksias* don't like it too much overseas. It's a nuisance that I don't know anyone that grows them in Holland. In Düsseldorf (Germany), in the University gardens, there are a few beautiful *Banksias*, *Hakeas* and *Grevilleas* thriving in the greenhouse. Some in containers, some in the soil. But these circumstances are hard to compare with mine. I still find it hard to see if the plants want watering or not, and what the potting soil should look like. When I started it was too peaty, I think. Now it's getting very sandy, with too little nutrients??? Keep trying! Maybe *Banksia occidentalis* will grow well, since it loves a lot of water so that I needn't be afraid of overwatering. I hope it will appear soon in the SGAP seedlist.

Of course I prefer cuttings from flowering plants to seedlings, because they flower sooner. But seeds are easier to obtain!

What other plants to I grow?

Plants that have survived at least one year are:

*Acacia alata*, *A. baileyana*?, *A. cyanophylla*, *A. longifolia*, *A. retinodes*, *A. verticillata* and three species that I don't know the name of.

*Allocasuarina verticillata*; *Alyogyne hakeifolia*, *A. huegelii*; *Anigozanthus flavidus*; *Baeckea virgata*; *Boronia heterophylla*; *Callistemon citrinus* (I suppose), 'Hannah Ray', *C. montanus*, *C. pallidus*, *C. rigidus*, "Rose Opal", *C. salignus*, *C. speciosus*, *C. violaceus* and some five other species I don't know. *Chamelaucium unciatum*, - a white/pink form and a messier pink/purple form (cuttings from cut flowers from the flower shop!); *Correa backhousiana*, and a red and pink flowering species. *Eucalyptus cinerea*, *E. ficifolia*, and an unknown species from Crete; *Grevillea juniperina*, *G. robusta*, *G. semperflorens*, *G. thelemanniana*; *Hibiscus geranioides*, *H. trionum*; *Kennedia rubicundra*; *Kunzea baxteri*; *Lagunaria patersonii*; *Leptospermum humifusum*, *L. laevigatum*, *L. rotundifolium* and another species for which I do not know the name. *Melaleuca decussata*, *M. ericifolia*, *M. hypericifolia*, *M. linariifolia*, *M. nesophila* and some other species. *Pittosporum* - two species; *Sollya heterophylla*; *Viola hederacea*.

Can I get a slow release fertiliser with low phosphorus content?

Not really. We can get Osmocote or something like it, but its all high in phosphorus. I did find a sort of Bio-feed however which is suppose to work slowly. There is only N and K in it; it is said that by the enhanced microbiological action in the soil caused by the substances (a sort of yeast extract), phosphorus is released from the soil? I give the plants a half strength solution twice this year and they are still looking healthy, the *Grevilleas* too.

How efficient, there's the answer to your last question too! As you see, I hardly feed the plants in the containers: they get a larger pot (or should I say container?) in Spring and that should just about do for them. Poor things. But they do nicely, for Dutch standards.

Nevertheless, Osmocote for natives would be excellent for them and easy to apply for me. Since more and more plants have ended up in quite large containers now and I think they should be satisfied with them, they'll need some extra feeding from now on instead of extra soil.

Maybe my husband can buy some for me; he's got a new job and might have to go to Australia next year! I'll provide him with a shopping list when he goes."

*I hope you enjoyed the news from Liesbeth - I did, and hope she'll keep us 'posted'. Liesbeth enclosed pictures of *Acacia verticillata*, *Grevillea juniperina* and a *Callistemon salignus* taken at a 'show garden'/nursery which has many Aussie pots.*

from **Geoff Simmons**, Eimbah, Queensland.

Geoff writes "re bonsai - although i have books that go into detail on bonsai growing and have tried it a few times, the results have never been very satisfactory. I have come to the conclusion that without requisite eye for form, success is not likely. At present I have several *Brachychitons* in bonsai pots - dwarfed plants as I have not done much manipulation of them.

Allied to this, I enclose 3 photos of *Borya septentrionalis*. This is not a bonsai but a plant that has the size and look of one. The photos were taken some years ago but will give a good idea of the plant and it's flower. Growing in the open garden it is quite hardy but the leaves are rather stiff and spiky; but in the shadehouse it keeps much softer and does not turn orange as it does under dry conditions. In the north I have heard it referred to as the Resurrection Plant as it turns from dead-looking to green in the wet season. Perhaps you could try the Victorian *Borya nitida* as a container plant.

re *Hibiscus trionum* - Reading your paragraph I can't help thinking that there must be much variation in this species. Seed obtained from WA germinated and produced a spindly plant with small rather dull flowers. They self-seeded but the next generation gave the same result.

Arranging Containers An article that I wrote for the Garden Design Study Group, August 1997, was about plants in pots. One of the points I tried to bring out in that item was the possibility of displaying groups of pots rather than individual pots. Three bird's nest ferns (*Asplenium australasicum*) in three pots on iron stands are shaping quite well and it is an attempt to mimic in some respect these ferns growing suspended in trees.

Has the Study Group ever listed the categories of plants in containers - such as miniature plants, bonsai, patio, indoor, outdoor, palms, annuals etc.?

***(Perhaps this is an area we could undertake as a Group, suggesting plants suitable for each category. What do you think?)***

again from **Geoff Simmons**

#### Matching type of container to plant characteristics

Two aspects that come to mind when considering the matching of container and plant are:

1. Shape and color of the plant
2. Habit of the plant

The first factor is largely dependent on the skill of the gardener to produce a pleasing result, especially with the wide range of materials and colors available in containers.

The second factor, viz. habit, needs to be considered also as it puts greater constraints on the choice of a container. For instance, quite a number of articles have been written on the desirability to plant Sturt's desert pea in a tall container, even suggesting plastic or ceramic pipes for this purpose.

Australian bulbous species offer a contrast in this regard. *Crinum pedunculatum* has a bulb that grows above ground to a major extent. Hence depth of pot is not so critical although a large pot should be combined with such a large sized plant. On the other hand, *Crinum flaccidum* tends to pull its bulbs deep into the earth. A tall container may be more appropriate for this species as the bulbs have been reported 30-75 cm deep in the ground in nature.

Another group of plants in which the habit decides to some extent the shape and size of the container are the ferns. While upright, short rhizome ferns such as *Chrystella* and *Adiantum* can be matched with a variety of pots, creeping ferns such as *Colysis* require something different. Another case is the large growing, highly water-dependent fern such as *Angiopteris evecta*. A large, self-watering container looks a possible solution for this fern.

**Cam Crofts** writes from Bondi Junction: "I desperately need help with some of my container plants - particularly *Grevillea* and *Banksia* species, their leaves are going a strong yellow color - are they lacking something?"

*I have referred Cam to Elliot and Jones' Encyclopaedia of Australian Plants, volume 1, and Gwen Elliot's Australian Plants for small Gardens and Containers. If anyone else has any helpful ideas for Cam, please write him a note. (All members addresses are on page 8 of this Newsletter).*

## **TASMANIA TRIP**

At the end of September, John and I visited Hobart. We had a delightful visit to the "Plants of Tasmania Nursery and Garden" in Ridgeway, just ten minutes from the city. This is a most interesting nursery, about which Will Fletcher (the proprietor) says "This nursery was built to help Tasmanian gardeners meet Tasmanian plants. We can show you a plant in a pot and we can also show you how it settles into the garden."

There is a lovely display garden showing the plants growing naturally. John and I had last visited here in the early 1990's, soon after it opened in 1990 - and how everything has grown. "Many Tasmanian plants are ideal for containers, even bonsai" says Will. He has a most exciting display of bonsai for sale. One of the bonsai containers which pleased me was a shallow oval dish, (50 x 30 cm), with five *Hakea sericea*, small rocks, mosses and little 'tufties'. Another bonsai Will was growing was the Pencil Pine, *Athrotaxis cupressioides* and the South Esk pine, *Callitris oblonga*, a slow-growing dense shrub or small tree with bluish-green foliage. This plant is rare in the wild.

There are no permits required for taking plants from Tasmania to the Eastern states, and Will will pack and post them to your door! I came home with a plant pushed under my seat on the flight home, an *Allocasuarina crassa*, an unusual and rare Tasmanian endemic. It is looking happy and healthy in a pot next to my Huon Pine, a Tassie neighbour. (Don't try taking plants in the opposite direction though; importing plants to Tasmania is illegal, and they have sniffer dogs at airports and ferry terminals to catch you).

Kris Schäffer (a member of our Study Group) is on the staff of this nursery and has a passion for Tasmanian plants. She is Conservation Officer for SGAP Tasmania. Kris also is a landscape designer and has a Garden Design consultancy. She grows the most beautiful alpine plants grouped in large pots up to 60 cm wide. Some are for sale at the Nursery, but on her 8 acres in the foothills of Mount Wellington she has many more. With Melva Truchanas, John and I visited Kris' property for a picnic in the garden. Only two weeks before we were there, all her pots were under snow. Sitting in the sun, we found it hard to believe.

The Button Grass, *Gymnoschoenus sphaerocephalus*, in large pots (and smaller ones) were beautiful with their arching flower spikes, (always a joy when walking in the Tasmanian high country). Kris used these pots among the trees around her garden and on the decking of her house.

A special 'thank you' and my appreciation for the time we had in your garden, Kris.

## **pat's pots**

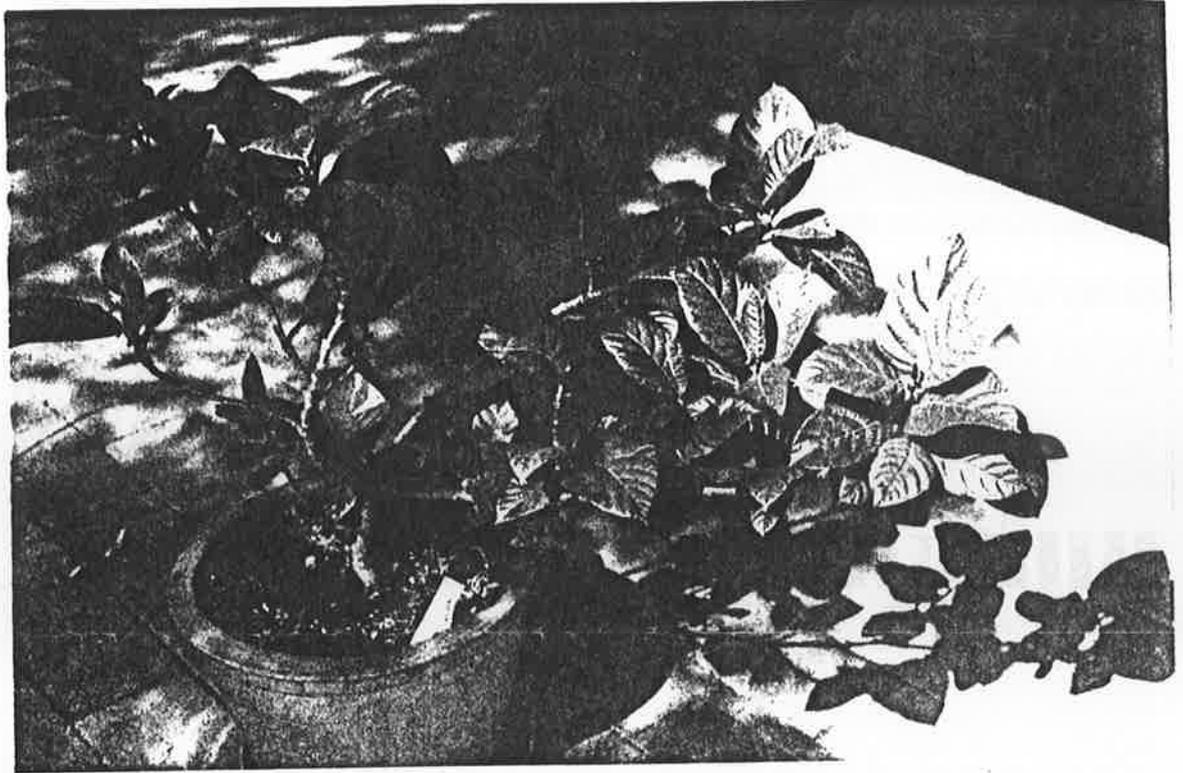
My *Lagarostrobos franklinii* (see sketch) was repotted this year - I pruned the roots and top by about a third; its looking good and we continue to enjoy this plant - (now ten years old).

At the end of October after many creamy/white flowers on the *Dendrobium delicatum* (for two months), I decided to repot the largest container - John took an axe to it to split the roots. They were then pruned and new orchid potting mix with slow-release fertilizer added. Now all *Dendrobium* pots are in their summer home under a *Cythea australis* fern on the south side of the house. They will stay here until April, when they will be taken around to get the winter sun at the front of the house. The container we repotted had not been done for 3-4 years and had become awkward to move.

*What about some discussion in the next Newsletter about the potting media we use and our fertilizer schedule? Mine has been a bit haphazard - I must try to be more methodical!*

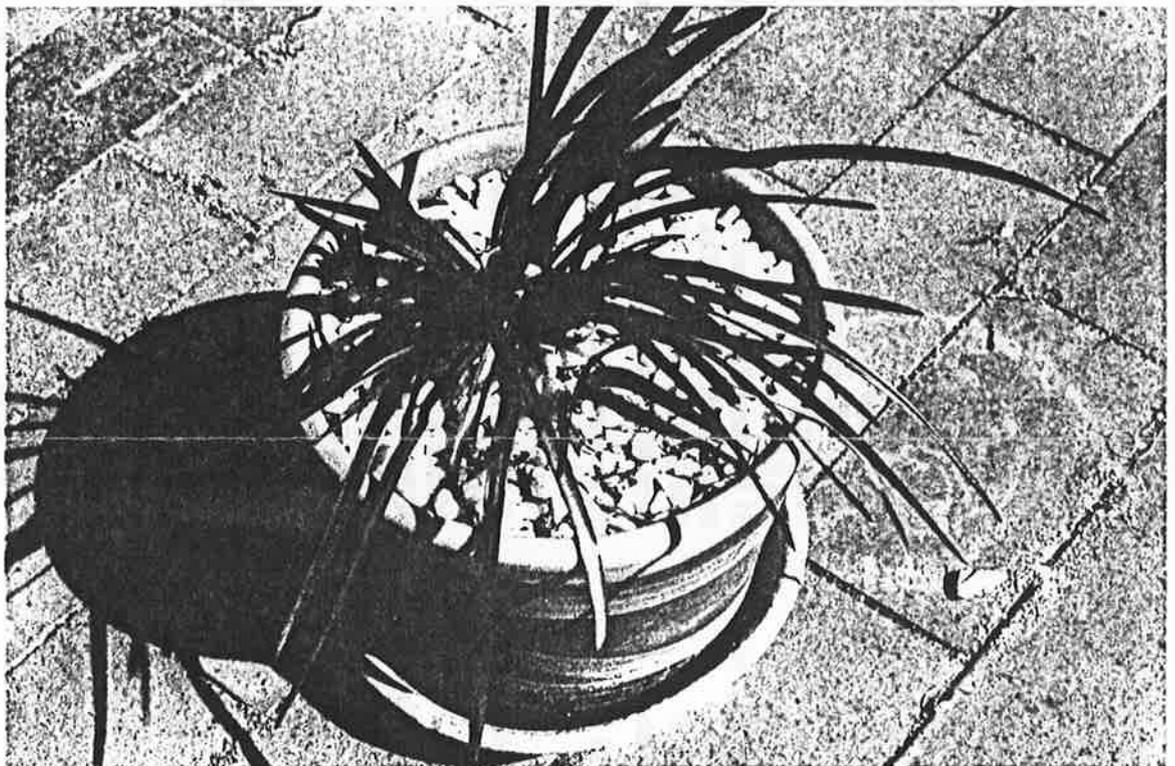
## **looking ahead**

I plan to produce a poster with information about the Group, some reproductions of photographs and hopefully a drawing or two. This could be useful to show at seminars, meetings, workshops etc. I would love some more photos to choose from. I shall keep any photos in a Study Group album as a record. Until next time.....



A

(A) *Ficus congesta*. Geoff writes "This small fig from Northern Australia has bronze coloured new leaves and small figs". Elliot & Jones note that the tree grows to 6-12m. They say "could make an interesting bonsai". It requires regular watering.



B

(B) *Calostemma purpurea* (Garland Lily) is a white variety. This is supposed to be very hardy but intolerant of the cold. It flowers best after dry periods. The bulbs multiply vegetatively, and become clumps.

(ref Elliot & Jones' *Encyclopaedia of Australian Plants*).

Two of the photographs sent to me by Geoff Simmons of Elimbah, Queensland