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editor's bit

Milder weather, longer days, everything growing fast. Time for repotting, feeding, some pruning and enjoying our plants and planning for some protection from those hotter months ahead for our container plants.

In these difficult days, globally and politically, it is good to get out and be doing things in the garden; some walks in the bush and planning for changes, new plants to propagate - and all in all, enjoying our interesting flora.

I am quite fascinated (sometimes horrified) by the marketing names now used on cultivars - I've just bought an *Anigozanthus* cultivar from Bush Gems, called "Bush Illusion". I took a while to decide if it was to be a container plant or to go in our small west-facing garden area (fast filling up now) - but it is in the garden now.

In this Newsletter, John shares some 'potting news' from our visit to Canberra for the ASGAP Conference. So many people happy to chat and talk about their plants in pots and containers; not so many prepared to put pen to paper for a wider sharing.

John and I are sorry that we shall miss the Australian Flora Expo focussing on the "Spirit of Gondwana" in Hobart, due to several issues, not least the demise of Ansett and the disappearance of our Frequent Flyer points. Kris Schaffer shares with us some of the planning and preparation for this show in the Newsletter. I am sure it will be great - Tasmania always put on an excellent floral expo.

Geraldton Wax, *Chamaelaucium uncinatum* - always a favourite plant. It is grown widely for the cut flower trade, being so valuable for winter and spring colour in it's various shades of pink, red and purple. I recently read of a research project which has resulted in the release of a range of grafted plants. These plants are apparently superior in reliability. One species is "Homelover's Elite Wax"; this is said to grow happily in a pot in a sunny, sheltered spot. Has anyone seen them in nurseries? Do tell us if you know more about these plants.

I was sad to read in the July 2001 issue of the Australian Daisy Study Group Newsletter of John Emm's death in March. John was an active member of the Australian Plant Society's South Gippsland Group; he belonged to several Study Groups and was a contributor to each. John loved propagating many plants which he gave away to friends and members. He had quite a few Epacris growing in containers and enjoyed growing many plants from Tasmania. I wrote to his wife extending our sympathy on behalf of the Study Group.

My best wishes to you all for Christmas and many hopes for a more peaceful 2002.

And I hope to hear from YOU too!

Pat

AUSTRALIAN FLORA EXPO

November 2-3-4

Opened by Doctor Mary White

Preparing for Gondwana, by Kris Schäffer, Neika, Tasmania

The Gondwana Expo is the big Native Plant Exhibition organised by the Tasmania Region of A.P.S. - a phenomenal exercise.

Busy, busy! For three years now my collection of *Athrotaxis selaginoides*, (King Billy pine), *A. cupressoides* (Pencil pine) and *A. laxifolia* have been potted up and coaxed along to look good for the Show. The most important factor has been to have a time-line so that plants are potted up, pruned and fertilised ready for Gondwana Day. The plants that are too big, like the lovely 28 year old *Lagarostrobos franklinii* have had to be cored (soil drilled with an

auger) and Osmocote placed down the holes. They also get Growall liquid fertiliser when I think of it. (Not written in the time-line for this lot!) This can happen any time of the year because growth actually occurs during autumn/winter/spring. I also use Wettasoil to ease the stress on those plants that have used all the available water-holding capacity of the potting mix.

Anopterus glandulosus (Tasmanian laurel) is just the greatest container plant. One of my sixty darlings has been taken down to the Salamanca Market in full bud/bloom to advertise the Gondwana Flora Expo. I have potted up about twenty plants into 40kg bags. The bags are woven plastic and have two handles so that with a second person they are easy to lift. On my own I use a trolley. These bags cost only \$2.60 and are much more stable than a pot. Most of the large display plants are 2400mm now and when it blows a gale it's like a giant game of Pick-up-sticks!

My little Neika nursery is open on Sundays now and I have just had the irrigation system completed. All the polypipe is under the gravel pathways and at six points around the house there are outlets covered by a cap that I can lift up and insert a riser with knocker sprinkler or hose. When I don't need it I just replace the cap and cover with gravel. Aesthetically pleasing! The system is run off the fire-fighting pump on the dam, but at times like last year when we were in drought I will be able to swap over to rain water so as to control the nutrient levels (eg the dam water). The *Proteaceae* and *Epacridaceae* and more sensitive plants will be placed together under one of the six sprinklers. After the Expo they will come home for good and be planted out in the garden.

The Expo will feature a walk through time with the more primitive plants at the front entrance. A ferns feature with 17 beauties - *Dicksonia antarctica* - two metres high, now awaiting the development of their new fronds. We have more than thirty *Dicksonia* and *Cyathea australis* in 35cm pots which will balance the design. From ferns we move on to conifers with the Tasmanian endemics and their relatives in New Zealand, WA and Qld. - *Eucryphia* and *Nothofagus*.

The finale will be the flowering plants with a fan of families ie *Proteaceae*, with sub-fans of *Hakeas*, *Grevilleas*, *Lomatias*, *Telopeas*, *Isopogons* and *Dryanrdras* etc. in containers mixed with cut flowers provided by members and commercial growers.

Water gardens will be used in my display at the Expo. Large bowls of water with *Marsilea* (small and large leaf), *Triglochin procerum*, *Villarsia reniformis*, *Baloskion tetraphyllum* syn. *Restio tetraphyllum*. (Bye, bye *Restio*, hello *Baloskion*!). All the 5 *Xyris* species that grow in Tasmania (3 endemic) and *Carex* species look great in these large bowls, but the last-minute attention on the time-line will be to dry them out to stress them just a little to promote flowering.



from Geoff Simmons, Elimbah, Queensland

Several items in the previous Newsletter are the subject of this letter.

I was interested in the topic of growing orchids in containers and as I have previously mentioned, devising a grouping of rocks on a cement base in a flat plastic saucer is a possibility. To date I have not been overly successful, especially when I shifted them into more sunlight and the orchids succumbed in the heat! I have two more that I now keep in the shadehouse.

I would agree with the statement by Don Lawie that *Spathoglottis plicata* is easy to grow; fortunately it does not spread or produce seeds that become a problem. One interesting point is that as a garden plant it soon disappeared - eaten by wallabies.

With regard to pots, I have plastic troughs containing this orchid for several years without any attention - quite remarkable hardiness. I use these cheap plastic troughs for both Australian species and exotics and hybrids. These work well but need to be filled with a potting mix to obtain reasonable depth. The prolonged production of flowers on one stem and the colors, pastel-apricot and yellows of the exotic species are very attractive.

I was also interested in the note about *Ficus congesta* in a pot - I have never pruned mine, but one thing I have noted about this plant is that it will drop its leaves very quickly. This I ascribe to lack of water although several other species growing in the garden also seem to seasonally shed leaves. With *Angiopteris evecta*, the pot I chose is one with a reservoir - self-watering so there is less likelihood that dryness will result in drooping fronds.

With regard to *Lomandra*, the two species that I have have only been in pots for about six months and should be good for at least two years more. In my view, high organic commercial potting mixes are not very good for container-grown plants unless one is prepared to replot at short intervals (or put up with the plant gradually sinking in the container as the organic material is converted to stems and leaves. (Refer to Glyn Sago's comments about replotting - page 7)

Pots in Gardens, by Geof Simmons

This heading doesn't convey the exact meaning of the subject of this item. Pots are usually thought of as free-standing, moveable objects on paving, verandahs, balconies or in shadehouses. However in the large gardens of palaces and stately homes in Europe, can be seen containers forming part of the structure of the garden; but these are definitely pots for growing plants as decorative features. They are mainly urn-shaped, plain or decorated. These are permanent fixtures.

What of this concept in Australian design, especially in small gardens in which maintenance and cost are important? The example that I have tried is the use of two elongated pots, 16cm in diameter and 18cm tall. At the

bottom of stone stairs a pot was placed on each side. They are permanent in as much that the bottoms were cemented in the ground, with the drainage holes left open. Leaves shed by surrounding trees soon covered the cement.

The next question was - what plants would be suitable? At present each has a local Hardenbergia that I hope will spill over the edges. Perhaps this is not a very good example as it has a spindly habit, but my interest in it was as a local species. There are probably more suitable plants, for instance if a small bushy plant is required, *Ziera* "Carpet Star" is a candidate.

Perhaps other members may have used or seen examples of this non-moveable container concept to enhance the attractiveness of Australian plants in a garden

editor's comment:

1. Outside the main entrance of the Cranbourne Botanic Gardens administration building are two spectacular *Tetratheca thymifolia* - they made a beautiful show on either side of the steps in 40x35cm containers when we attended a "Friends" seminar in August.
2. At the Australian National Gallery in Canberra were several large circular concrete planters with three *Xanthorrhoea australis* in each - these were most impressive structural plants.



"Greenhoods" - *Pterostylis* spp.

What magnificent container plants these are. It is always a delight finding these delicate little plants out in the bush in the winter months - a cheery sign that spring is on the way.

These are deciduous terrestrial orchids with a basal rosette of leaves. *Pterostylis nutans* (Nodding Greenhood) is found in many areas in the eastern states and Tasmania. For many of us, these are the most successful orchids to cultivate in containers. They do need protection from slugs and snails. Another fairly common species is *P. curta* (Blunt Greenhood) which seems to favour drier woodland areas. These orchids are some of the hardiest for a beginner to grow. They multiply vegetatively to fill the pot and should grow well in a sheltered position. I recently saw several magnificent specimens in containers, grown by Alex Smart (a Friend of Cranbourne Botanic Gardens). He had generously given several containers for the speakers at a recent seminar, for the raffle and for the 'catering volunteer ladies'. These were *P. baptistii* a large flower on a tall stem. (It seemed amazing that such a big flower could be supported on such a fine stem, at least 25cm high.

I spoke to Alex at lunch and he told me he started growing *Pterostylis* five years ago, dividing them each year and loves to be able to give some away. "I like the look of delight on the recipients faces" he says. Living in southern Victoria, he repots his plants in mid to late December. "Its a good job for Boxing Day!". He finds it good to keep half the potting mix (to retain mycorrhiza fungi) and adds Debco Green Wizard mix. A container of *Pterostylis* species is a "must have" for me next year, especially as my microclimate is not friendly to my *Dendrobiums*.

(References; "Native Plants", Wrigley & Fagg, 4th edition; "Australian Plants for Small Gardens and Containers", Gwen Elliot; "Orchids of Tasmania", Plant identikit, SGAP Tasmania



CACTUS MIX (for those West Australian special plants)

In August I had a conversation with Ian Hamilton, from Ringwood, Victoria, who has, over the past twelve months had great success using Cactus Mix for some of his container plants, especially West Australian plants which really do like a freely draining mix.

Ian has been growing Australian plants for 40 years, both in his garden and in containers. About 12 to 18 months ago he saw Neville Passmore, West Australian presenter of the ABC *Gardening Australia* TV, mention the value of Cactus Mix for people in eastern Australia wanting to grow plants from WA. Ian buys his mix from Propine Wholesale Nursery Supplies, Colchester Road, Kilsyth, Victoria. (Melway reference 51 E9), but he feels any cactus mix would be suitable.

I asked Ian if he would write something for the Newsletter, but he feels that after only one year it may be premature for him to do so. I am planning to visit him before too long to see some of his successes.

He has a *Lechenaultia formosa* which has flowered continuously for 12 months in a 30cm pot and this plant is now a metre across! Other plants doing well are *Pimelia spectabilis*, *P. phyllicoides*, *Grevillea flexuosa*, and *Banksia menziesii*. So far, Ian has not added any fertiliser but plans in Spring to use a small amount of Kuranga "Two-in-One" native plant food. (I expect a light application of *Osmocote Slow Release* native plant food would be OK too). Spurred on by his success over the past year, Ian is planning to use his cactus mix for seed raising.

Ian suggests that many of us do water our container plants too much and suggests using a "Water-moisture measurer". Bunnings apparently have one for around \$10, K-Mart have one for \$7. (Over-watering *Pimelias* can be fatal).

Thanks to Gwen Elliot who passed Ian's name to me. She and Rodger have known Ian for many years. I am now using cactus mix on a trial basis for cuttings; so far I have been successful with some *Chrysocephalum apiculatum*,

Brachyscome multifida and am also growing some small plants of *Brachyscome tenuiscarpa* in this medium. I will tell you more in Newsletter #29. Unfortunately, the packet I got from Propine does not state the ingredients. Do any of our Members use this kind of very open mix? Do tell!



from around the country

I had some interesting correspondence from Tam Kendall (Mitcham, Victoria) in July.

Tam writes: "I'm interested in multiple plantings in one container and would like to hear of people's favourite combinations. I have planted *Acacia aculeatissima* (Snake Wattle prostrate) in the same terracotta pot with an *Isopogon formosus*. It will be interesting to see how they get on together if they survive.

I am wanting to find a creeper that will grow in a pot in full shade but creep up a trellis into full sun for part of the day. I already grow three *Billardiera* species and a *Hoya australis*."

The following paragraph arises from Geoff Simmons letter "Pots with Aussie Themes" from Newsletter #27, page 6.

Tammy writes "The kitsch factor is always a problem with Australian icons as ornaments. The kangaroo with a pouch as a planter, Echidna, Platypus etc with a pot hole in its back. But I suppose they appeal to some people and have to confess my hypocrisy as I have a Bilby planter on the balcony. (We collect everything Bilby-related). It has clumping grass in its pot (alongside the Bilby, not in it!)

As for Australian motifs, I am hard pressed to think of any design that is specifically Australian in nature! There are physical design elements that could be drawn from architecture and fashion - specifically Sydney Opera House, Akubra hats, the flared shape of the shoulder flap of Driza-a-Bone coats, and numerous other Aussie artefacts, but they would all be kitsch without drastic alteration.

What about a specifically Australian material used for making pots - is there a substance that is better suited to Australian climates than others? And texture - rough and flaked like bark, knobbly like sheep's wool or pitted like the footprints of insects and lizards in dry sand. Maybe the Aboriginal people have themes, shapes and materials that could be adapted for making pots.

PS. I saw a painted concrete container the other day with emu footprints imprinted into the concrete. This could have been quite effective if it had been planted well -ed.

Hibiscus - Tam Kendall

Recently I went Hibiscus mad, having previously ignored the *Malvaceae* family thinking they would not grow well in Melbourne's climate. And of course, I was wrong - there are quite a few Victorian *Malvaceae* family members. Aside from the beautiful assortment of exotic hybrids, I have a collection of "Australian Rosellas" *Hibiscus* 'Apricot Myst' (a *divaricatus/heterophyllus* cross, I think; 'Pink Haze' *H. heterophyllus* (prominent pink veins over white); 'Gold Haze' - *H. divaricatus* (yellow flower) and 'Ice Haze' - *H. heterophyllus*. All have edible petals that can be used in salads or as a preserve for sauces or marinade and they can also be used as a cold or hot tea.

I am extremely happy with the way they have settled in and they are taking the cold winter weather in their stride. The majority of the plants are in pots on the balcony with a hastily constructed shelter of polyvinyl over a wire frame to protect them from the wind and the worst of the cold. They seem to be fast-growing, hardy and healthy specimens that can be grown in pots or in the ground as long as some protection is provided.

They came from *Keena & Hibiscus World* in Queensland. (<http://www.hibiscus.org/intro.html>)

Acacia - Tam Kendall

Earlier this year I bought a prostrate *Acacia iteaphylla* which I planted in the yard (clay soil) shortly before we had heavy rain. I knew that it was going to be in trouble because of the wet conditions but I was too busy/lazy to do anything about it for a couple of weeks and then it was nearly suffocated. I lifted it out of the ground and planted it in a pot with well draining soil. I am still waiting to see if it is definitely dead, like the *Acacia cardiophylla* "Gold Lace" that I planted at the same time. If the *A. iteaphylla* pulls through I will keep it in a pot because it's beautiful grass-like foliage has an elegant appeal that deserves to be displayed prominently.

Ozothamnus

Tammy has germinated a lot of *Ozothamnus multiflorus* which she plans to plant on the nature strip, but has decided to keep some in pots. I think these will be most effective -ed.

Also from Tammie - something a little different - "Crying Log"

My partner and I made a water feature out of a half circle fibreglass insert for a pond. We placed the upturned lower part of an *Acacia* stump (with roots cut off but base still intact) in it and ran irrigation tubing up the back of it and added a water pump so that water in the pond is pumped to the top of the log and trickles down the front and over the bole. We call it the "Crying Log". Tiny little plants migrated to the pond without asking and have slowly covered the surface. (I scoop a percentage out every now and again and add them to the compost pile. Also a moss is forming over the trunk and the whole thing is looking very groovy. Around the base of the 'pond' I've placed largish volcanic-type rocks and one day I may plant some alpine type plants or maybe orchid types in between the rocks.

Part of the initial idea was that the log would slowly disintegrate and in doing so, be a reminder of the transience of nature and not to cling to material possessions....but we regret this now as we have become attached to it ☺ and although it hasn't deteriorated much over two years it's time is limited, and if we make another one to replace it I would probably varnish/seal it with some kind of marine varnish.

On either side of the water feature are large green plastic pots with *Archontophoenix alexandrae* (Alexandra Palms) - their fronds meet over the top of the log and help disguise the water pipes. I have found the Alexandra Palms to be very hardy here in a fairly enclosed backyard in Melbourne. Behind the Crying Log is a trellis up which I am trying to grow a climber but so far haven't had much success because of inappropriate plantings. I want a creeper that is fairly quick growing, has largish leaves but it can be sparse foliage, will grow in a pot in full shade but creep up the outside of the trellis which is subject to full sun for part of the day. Any suggestions?
PS I hope we do not have severe frosts as I understand *Archontophoenix alexandrae* are frost sensitive when young.
Good luck Tammie with your "Crying Log"! - ed.

Australian Plants on the Net - Tam Kendall

Did you know that there are forums and discussion groups on the internet? Gardenweb hosts a forum site on <http://www.au.gardenweb.com/forums/oznative/>

And Yahoo.com has a variety of sites for specific genera such as Banksia, Isopogon, Grevillea, Rutaceae family. Even I moderate a discussion group for Australian plants in general - called Plants of Australia. It is a discussion group for the enthusiast who is interested in all things to do with Australian plants. One of the criteria for joining the group is that you must contribute in a friendly manner if you want to be a member. It is a small group compared to some of the others because I urge people to unsubscribe if they are unwilling to participate. You can do a search for Australian plant groups from here: <http://groups.yahoo.com/>



Welcome to new Member, Gill Muller from Blackwood, South Australia

Gill has been librarian of the South Australian Australian Plant Society for 18 years. She has been growing plants in containers for the past 25 years. In the last few years her collection has increased to over 600 pots - quite a family!

She writes "My husband and I ran a small business for a couple of years (very much a sideline) called "Potted Australis". We sold Australian plants in terracotta and other containers, but it wasn't big enough to be viable. I have also worked in an Australian plant nursery for the last four and a half years".

Some of the genera Gill grows are *Correa*, *Adenanthos*, *Persoonia*, small *Melaleuca*, *Eremaea*, *Beaufortia*, *Regelia* and has recently started collecting dwarf Lilly Pilly such as "Hunchy".

We look forward to hearing much more about Gill's experiences growing Australian flora in containers.



"Promoting Growth", by Jan Simpson, Canberra

Jan Simpson from Canberra Region of SGAP is writing a series of articles in the Region Journal (March and June 2001, and more to come in September). An excellent, clear series on "Promoting Growth" - of course, the focus is on the Canberra climate. I have selected a small segment or two which are particularly applicable to container plants - with Jan's kind permission.

"Canberra (and many other cool and temperate areas) has two main growing periods - spring & early summer (roughly October to December) and autumn (March and April). In a 'waterwise' garden, garden plants close down for the two hottest months of January and February as they do in nature, so it is a waste to use fertiliser when the plants won't be metabolising it. All you do is enrich ground-water and feed blue/green algae down river.

Fertilising in March gives plants time to put on some new growth after the worst of the heat; but do not fertilise after March as the new soft growth will not have time to harden off before the frosts come, and will be severely burnt."

• Do you fertilise at planting?

The answer to this frequently-asked question is 'sometimes'.

Does the new plant have a lot of new growth on top? This means it has already been fertilised, and turned into new growth so doesn't need any more. Trim 1-2cm off the tips of this new growth to reduce the transpiration rate. The newly planted roots can't absorb water from the soil as quickly as the new leaves lose it to the atmosphere.

Are there lots of round yellowy-orange granules mixed through the soil? These are fertiliser granules, so the plant does not need more. (Do not confuse with a clump of clear-white, almost jelly-like spheres 3mm in diameter at about 8cm down from the surface. These are snail eggs and should be destroyed).

Soak the new plant in a bucket of water for an hour before planting, to thoroughly wet the root-ball, as the roots will not be able to seek water from the mix until they establish new root hairs.

Water the newly planted plant with very weak (one-third of the strength recommended on the container) seaweed/fish emulsion to help it settle in.

• Foliar feeding

In foliar feeding, the fertiliser mixture is watered all over the foliage. Crystals are good for houseplants and potted plants but are too expensive to be used on general garden plants, perhaps with the exception of ferns, where

'green is good', (and better, and best!). SGAP Canberra rotates the use of *Thrive*, *Aquasol* and *Zest* at the rate of one flat dessertspoon per 10 litre watering can - (i.e. half the recommended dose) on the plants in the shade houses, every fortnight. We rotate products as each brand has slightly different amounts of each element. SGAP Canberra uses seaweed/fish emulsion, watered down to pale tea color, as a supplement in it's shade houses once or twice a season and just before a sale. This would be good for ferns, plants in massed baskets and tubbed plants; and to give plants a pick-me-up after winter or after flowering. According to *The Organic Gardener - Summer 2000*, these sea-based products are the easiest way to provide selenium to plants in non-toxic doses.

Urine is a ready source of free nitrogen: use it half & half with water as a foliar feed.

Cuttings from Canberra, October 2001, by John Webb

The ASGAP Conference in Canberra this year was - as usual - a busy time for the organisers and participants. General information about the program will be published elsewhere, so I shall give a "potted" version of events.

The Australian Plants for Containers Study Group had a display stand - the plants kindly supplied by Canberra Group members. They included *Phebalium stenophyllum*, *Verticordia mitchelliana*, *Anigozanthos manglesii*, (or a hybrid thereof) and a *Baeckia* sp. Also on our table were displays of S/G Newsletters and our photo album illustrating the work of our members from all over. Several other Groups' displays had potted plants - the most spectacular being the new Bonsai group with three enormous bonsai specimens - rather too formal for my taste.

Displays around the entrance and stage of the Conference centre were mostly plants in containers and made an attractive show despite Canberra's somewhat fickle climate playing havoc with flowering times. Another good display was provided by the Australian National Botanic Gardens. This included *Dampiera trigona*, *D. purpyra*, *Dillwynia floribunda*, *Chrysocephalum baxteri*, *Hibbertia viscosa*, *Phyllothea (syn eriostemon) australasius*, *Thomasia pygmaea* and *Ziera 'Grey Ghost'*. They made a lovely backdrop to our canteen area. A Canberra member told us that these plants had come up from the coast.

Other snippets:

- Barbara Henderson, Leader of the Wallum and Coastal Heathland Study Group grows white *Boronias* in containers - she "floods" them every two days. (Must be something to do with the Queensland climate!)
- Peter Ollerenshaw (who has a nursery just outside Canberra at Bywong), gave us a fascinating talk on hybridising plants for the nursery trade. Some of the wild names for his new cultivars are *Leptospermum* "Why Worry", L."Tickled Pink", L."Outrageous" - a bright, vibrant pink/red, L."Love Affair" and L."Passion". One of his *Grevilleas* is G. "Bedspreed". We saw a couple of these cultivars in a nursery at Cranbourne recently. Beautiful, but expensive (\$10-\$11). One of Peter's tricks is to match the color of the pot to the color of the flower.
- At the ANBG we saw *Bracteantha bracteata* "Helping Hands" in full production for the "Year of the Volunteer". In November they will be giving all their voluntary staff a plant, and then selling to the public. They have 10,000 plants in cultivation - some grown hydroponically in 100% perlite, which looked particularly healthy - others in their standard potting mix of 50:50 perlite with washed river sand. Their cutting mix is 5 parts perlite to 1 part cocoa fibre (or similar peat substitute). (We understand that a member of the Australian Daisy Study Group found this plant originally - we didn't gather how it got to ANBG). This *Bracteantha* "Helping Hands" is a low, clumping plant with white petals and yellow centre and grey foliage.
- Also at ANBG we saw a 'different' container. A wire tube approx. 15-20cm in diameter and 90cm deep, filled with coarse bark chips and suspended from overhead, and used to grow various orchids. When full of plants it looks like a branch - most effective.
- *Eremophilas*. Colin Jennings, Leader of the *Eremophila* Study Group was another of our speakers. He has had some success with cuttings of this species, but more as grafted cuttings on *Myoporum insulare* rootstock. He takes soft, young tip growth in January/February. They prefer a very alkaline soil with a pH of 7 to 9, and very little fertiliser.
- On the pre-conference tour we visited the Fitzroy Falls in the Morton National Park. At the time of our visit the Nowra District Group of A.P.S. was having a plant sale and display of native flora at the Visitors' Centre. This is their main annual fund-raising effort and members drive up the Illawarra escarpment daily to man (person) the stall and answer questions. They had a rich and varied selection of plants for sale and were much enjoyed by the public going into the Centre - a great effort we felt. At the same time, a local orchid nursery from the Kangaroo Valley had some outstanding specimens on display - a splendid *Sarcochilus hartmannii* on a log particularly took our eye. There were some attractive small *dendrobium* species in bonsai dishes too. "Orchid Images" has a wide range of plants for sale.
- One of our most exciting 'finds' was the Wollemi Pine, *Araucaria nobilis*, in two containers near the entrance to the ANBG shop. One was already quite tall, but another was a prostrate form, apparently grown from a cutting taken from a low, horizontal branch. A surprise.



Pat's Pots - October 2001

Big changes in my containers. We have been at Berwick for seven months now, and have observed our microclimate for both our small garden and containers with interest. We have a very windy spot in the village - the only area which gets protection from these winds is the small patio. It would be easy for this to become too crowded so some on-going drastic changes -eg. giving plants away or transferring them to the garden.

A great sadness for me was losing the *Rhodanthe manglesii* which I so enjoyed - a disaster here with the wind and not enough sun in the sheltered area. I shall have to enjoy these flowers in other people's gardens!

A real success has been a medium sized pot of *Hibbertia dentata*; it's bright yellow flowers have delighted us this spring. (I also have it growing well in the garden, trailing over the brick pathway). Yesterday, we had great excitement when a blue-tongued lizard appeared from behind the pot - we knew one lived in the rockery near us but were delighted to welcome him/her on our patio. Another plant doing well is a *Cordyline stricta*; as a structural plant with the various ferns I have grouped together it looks great.

We have a porch which is enclosed by flywire and clear plastic sheeting through the winter to protect some of the plants from the gusty westerly wind. The ferns I have in this area are: *Adiantum aethiopicum*, *Pellaea falcata* and a *Blechnum nudum*, all looking very happy too. I think the time for a summer home for these plants is due soon, either on the south wall of our unit or in the patio under the shade of neighbour's trees (both deciduous species).

I have enjoyed my pot of *Adenanthos sericeus* (dwarf form). I was given this plant by a neighbour in Balnarring three years ago. She had seen it in a supermarket whilst on holiday and brought it home for me. At the time I had no spot in the garden for this plant so I put it in a container and it has thrived. It has only flowered once but it's soft, silky foliage is a delight and makes it a fine container plant. It is growing in a the same green plastic pot 35x26cm after two years and has not been repotted. I use a gravel mulch. As I look at it today I think I see several flowers forming. (It is a plant which attracts complimentary comment from folk who do not really appreciate much of our native flora!)

Time for me to give them all some 'Osmocote for Natives'. I used 'Wettasoil' for my containers before going to Canberra for the ASGAP Conference. It is worth reading the small print carefully in Directions for Use, especially noting "it is not recommended that fertiliser be used at the same time as 'Wettasoil'". I have now been using this agent with my pots for three years and it has certainly improved water penetration and retention for my plants.

Enough of my pots - how are yours going? What has been special for you recently? Do write and tell us about it.



At Glyn and Peg Sago's garden, Beaconsfield, Victoria

The Sagos live just a few kilometres down the road from our home in Berwick. Mutual friends told us that they are coming to live in Berwick also, and that we ought to see their garden before they leave it. So we invited ourselves down one afternoon and received a very warm welcome. Just walking up the driveway of their unit is a delight with a wide variety of shrubs and ground-covers with a wonderful collection of *Grevillea* species in full flower. (Our favourite was *G. lavendulacea* Tanunda form - a lovely low-growing pink variety).

Glyn's container plants included:

Grevillea lavendulacea "Crosbie Morrison" in a 30x30cm pot. It was full of flower in August. It has been in it's pot for eight years without repotting, with some mix added when required, together with some slow-release Osmocote in the spring, and small white stones for mulch and pruned regularly. It was growing near a brick wall with a sheltered north-east aspect.

Isopogon anemonifolius in a pottery container 30x30cm. It is a seven to eight year old plant, healthy-looking with many buds forming - again never repotted and with similar treatment to the *Grevillea*. It has a very neat, attractive growth habit, making an excellent container plant. It is important to ensure good drainage for these plants which were both enjoying a sheltered position with good sunlight hours.

Banksia spinulosa (one of the small cultivars, but not known which one.) This had recently been pruned, having had many flower spikes and already new growth apparent. Care has been very similar to the two previous plants.

Glyn says that he feels we sometimes give our container plants too much care!! He is, however, a firm believer in regular hard pruning. These three amongst many other in this delightful unit garden were obviously flourishing under his regime.

(Glyn was also responsible for developing a native garden at the entrance to Wilson Park Botanic Gardens in Berwick, and a feature on this appeared in the February 2000 issue of the ABC Gardening Australia magazine).



Book Review

"Gardening Down-Under" - a guide to healthier soils & plants, by Kevin Handreck. Second edition, published by Landlinks Press, Melbourne, 2001

Many of you will have read articles and papers by Kevin Handreck (Kevin and his wife Eleanor were for several years, editors of the A.P.S. South Australia Regional Journal). He has now retired from CSIRO's Division of Soils in Adelaide after a distinguished career in soils research and communication.

This book is a 'must' for all of us who care about our plants both in the garden and in containers. It is clearly set out, reads easily and full of practical issues which we all face in our gardening. There is a large section covering growing plants in containers, an excellent section on potting mixes, use of wetting agents, propagation and seed raising.

At times we all become confused with what is the best fertiliser for our pots. Kevin looks at the various soluble fertilisers available and the most commonly available 'controlled-release' fertilisers. I am interested in the fact that it is not easy to generalise about controlled-release products because the manufacturers are altering them all the time. Where to place fertilisers in the pot, how to store them; all this and many more items are covered.

There is a most interesting section on nitrogen drawdown in potting mixes - useful information for people who really want to understand the value and role of fertilisers. This includes how to avoid salinity and overcome this problem with our containers.

Do not be shocked when you look briefly at this book and see pictures of exotic plants as well as Aussie flora - the principles discussed in this book are applicable to all plants. It is great to have a book which gives some of the chemistry and science for us all to understand and appreciate easily.

I was lucky to find this book in our local library, but have now ordered a copy from our bookseller. There is so much information for the garden generally, a most useful resource for us all.

As Kevin says in his foreword: *"By delving into the various parts of this book you will increase your understanding of what happens in soils and potting mixes. I hope that as your understanding of what happens "down-under" increases, so will your success and enjoyment of growing plants increase"*.



letter from Liesbeth Uijtwaal-de Vries, Neer, The Netherlands, October 2001

A lovely long letter from Liesbeth came on my arrival home from the Canberra Conference, together with some excellent photos. I think Liesbeth deserves great credit for her lovely specimen of Sturt's Desert Pea, Swainsonia formosa, a photo enclosed with her letter.

"In the Newsletter #27 you pose some questions: I might answer those and then continue with some general smalltalk.

- What fertilisers do you use? Native Osmocote. I add 3g/l to the fresh potting mix in spring and use this for potting on and potting up. I know that this way the plants will end up with less than 3g/l in the container since the old rootball won't contain much Osmocote anymore, but I suppose having less fertiliser will be better than too much. Last month (August) I started using iron chelate monthly, I think it will improve the overall plant condition.
- Do you use watering agents? No I don't. I prefer to use materials such as volca-grit and sand instead to prevent the soil from getting too soggy in our frequent rainy periods!
- Arrangement of containers? For me, the most important thing is to give each plant the conditions it prefers; if possible I try to make it look good.
- As to 'ornamental' containers: I try to keep them as simple as possible. I have quite a few square wooden ones that a friend of mine made. They are ideal since they are not blown over easily, they look good and they keep the sun off the pots. (I always place the plants in the black plastic pots and then, if possible, place these into an ornamental container). The less fortunate plants sit in ordinary plastic containers without additional pottery. I used to have quite a few terracotta containers, but they are too fragile for our climate; whenever the plant is blown over, the container is broken.
- Growing orchids in pots? No. Actually I don't know any members of our Container Plant Society who do! We had a terrific show this summer with heaps of container plants, but no orchids.

Liesbeth continues.....

I suppose you are enjoying spring being on its way. It is real autumn here and I hate it! Last month I finally took most of my plants out of the greenhouse since the patio is paved at last, but yesterday I carried the taller plants like Eucalyptus and *Acacia pycnantha* inside again as they were constantly blown over although I had surrounded them with lower, more stable, plants. Very irritating. We had a lovely summer with periods of warm weather; my little Aussie friends must have felt at home. *Swainsonia formosa* did very well although it didn't grow all that large. But it had lots of flowers!

This year, I didn't have time to repot all my plants. Because I kept thinking I would have time to repot them later on, I didn't supply extra Osmocote either. The result is clear with the larger Callistemons; they hardly formed new shoots. As advised so many times, I decided to cut them all back behind the spent flowers (they didn't produce seed capsules anyway - perhaps because they were in the greenhouse all the time?), but apparently they need more nutrients to grow along. I'll behave better next year.

I've been brave with some other plants too and pruned the root balls of some *Callistemon salignus* (*C. formosus*?) plants. They were almost dead, lost all their leaves and looked awful (bad potting mix the year before I think). I decided to prune the branches and roots and see what happened. They're looking happy again, forming new shoots along the stems. They'll turn out to be nicer than before. *Allocasuarina verticillata* is as good as new too - did I mention that it had dropped all its branches in spring? Looked dead too. I didn't prune anything though, just gave a light dressing of native Osmocote and it sprouted all along the main stem and the occasional side branches too. Very impressive, I'm very happy it survived. I've taken cuttings now to reduce the chance of losing it altogether.

The wattles are budding up nicely, even a one-year-old *A. myrtifolia*. It's some 60cm high, in a 11x11x12cm pot. Not many seedlings of this species grew well but the two that did are going great guns. *A. pravissima* is a good one for a container too; it's 6 seedlings are almost two years old now, over 1.5m high in 3 litre pots; four of them are showing lots of flower buds. They are very narrow plants but well branched. I did tip prune them a lot. My oldest *A. boormanii*, almost three years old, is a lovely, round bushy plant, beautiful with its grey-green leaves and red stems. It must be quite something special when it flowers in spring; it is showing its first few buds now. It's in a 12 litre pot and some 60cm high. *A. longifolia* never showed as many buds as it does now. I'll try not to let it dry out which would be detrimental to the buds. Although it rained a lot lately I still have to hand-water it since the large top of the plant prevents the rain from falling into the pot. Our kitten is particularly fond of this plant - not so much because of the sheer beauty of it but rather because of the well-branched shape which makes it ideal to sit in. The trunk is wide enough to ensure an easy climb up. The other plants are much appreciated too to play hide-and-seek with the other cats. They haven't done too much damage though, so far.

I did something very courageous (maybe stupid) with my three *Billardiera scandens* plants too. I cut them all back to about 10cm above ground level, only bare stems were left. The root balls were severely pruned as well and planted back into the same containers. Fortunately they are producing new shoots again. Only after I did this cruel job did I realise that if they hadn't grown from the old wood, I would have lost all my *B. scandens* and would have to start from seed again, a tedious job. I've been very lucky though.

My new potting mix is great. For plants that need very good drainage I add some extra volca-grit and it works very well. The banksias look beautiful, the three *Lambertia formosa* seedlings are growing well too. My two 3½ year-old seedlings of *Grevillea banksii* have flowered beautifully this summer and produced lots of seed which enables me to grow more of these beautiful plants and give some away to other Grevillea lovers. *Grevillea* "Robin Gordon" is a terrific container plant as well, flowering almost continuously.

(I am in awe of Liesbeth's energy and enthusiasm in growing so many Australian plants in her European climate! - ed)



'Plants in Pots' Interest Group, Central Coast, NSW

In September I received a brief interim report from Bruce Wallace who is coordinating the trial on the growth rates on potted plants using different fertilisers (See Newsletter #27, page 4). I spoke with Bruce on the phone recently and he feels that, after their November meeting the, Group will have more details - some of their members were away for their last meeting.

Each participant was given four *Correa* 'Marion's Marvel' in 150mm pots and a fertiliser to be used at manufacturers' recommended rates. Three *Correas* were to be fertilised with one plant left as a control. The potting mix used was kept secret from each grower. (I don't know what potting mix was used). I am not sure how many participants are involved. They have decided to prolong monitoring the growth rates until after summer as winter is a slow time for growth. Information on how many growers, the frequency they are using the fertiliser, when the trial started and what potting mix is being used will be interesting. Some of the fertilisers being used are: **Osmocote (controlled release) for native plants; Fish Emulsion; Aquasol; Dynamic Lifter; Thrive; Mirical Gro and Shrub & Citrus Osmocote.**

I enclose a copy of the form the Group is using and look forward to receiving the individual reports and giving more details in the next Newsletter.

NEXT ISSUE:

is due in March 2002.

CONTRIBUTIONS - (Lots of them please) by January 31st 2002



PLANTS IN POTS INTEREST GROUP
Recording sheet of Fertilising Project

<u>Date</u>	<u>Plant A</u>	<u>Plant B</u>	<u>Plant C</u>	<u>Plant Control</u>
Fertilizer Used				
Rate of Application (as specified by manufacturer)				
Frequency of Application				
Type of watering (hand held hose, automatic sprinkler, natural rainfall)				
Intervals between waterings				
Morning, afternoon or night waterings				
Position (sun, shade, dappled light)				
Tip Pruning (yes/no, date)				
<u>Growth Rates</u>				
Initial Height Height and Width				
After 1 month " "				
After 2 months " "				
After 3 months " "				
After 4 months " "				
After 5 months " "				
After 6 months " "				
Pest Controls (if any, date, what treatment)				
Diseases (if any, date, what treatment)				
If Died (Date, cause of death if known)				

Name
 (return all Pots/Plants to PIP meeting)