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editor's bit

Hello to you all.

This is my final Newsletter as Editor. I am delighted to have spoken to Gill Muller, a South Australian member (see Newsletter #28, page 5). Gill is interested in taking on the role of Leader and is currently in liaison with Jan Sked, the ASGAP Study Group Co-ordinator. When all the 'red tape' is completed I shall write to you, giving all the details of the changeover date, address etc. Gill has a wide knowledge and love of growing plants in containers and I look forward to her input and I'm sure you will enjoy many new ideas and stimulation from her leadership too.

In this issue we have compiled an index for the four years I have been Leader. I think this will be useful for those of you who like to refer to back issues.

We have produced a color page again this month - it was enjoyed by many of you last year, and is a chance to 'show off' some of the plants we have been discussing.

It is good to have in this Newsletter, input from a number of our members, telling us what they are growing and sharing their ideas. What a wide variety of Australian plants we can grow in tubs, pots and other containers. I am sorry we do not see more in use in public places - such as in the gardens at the National Gallery in Canberra (see color page).

I do hope that those of you living near the bushfires this summer escaped damage to your home and garden. Here in this part of Victoria we are currently having a much cooler summer than usual. John and I are off to Longreach and Rockhampton early in March - that will be a change of climate and flora for us.

Leading the Group has been fun and a challenge for the past four years. My greetings to you all; "GOOD GROWING". I shall be in touch soon with details about the changeover.

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Letter from Jenni Lawrence, Burnie, Tasmania

Newsletter #28 arrived just when I was going to write to you. You asked whether members read the newsletter straight away or put it away for later. I normally read newsletters and any magazine I subscribe to straight away while I have my breakfast or lunch - while I keep reading books for the evening. Like you, I receive the quarterly interstate journals from our local APS group and report on anything that might interest our group. It is good to keep in touch with what is happening Australia-wide.

I can understand that after four years as Leader you feel that somebody else should be taking over. I found Liesbeth's letter on my return from the mainland and she receives great inspiration from the newsletters. She is such a dedicated Australian plant grower..

The Gondwana Expo in Hobart was tremendous. So much work and thought had gone into it Kris Schäffer told me on the Saturday that that was the happiest day of her life! All her trees looked so healthy! Now for my pot plants.

Libertia pulchella is the member of the *Iridaceae* we saw in a display of the Nowra Group in the Visitor's Centre during the ASGAP Conference tour. I have seen it in wet conditions growing in Guildford in Tasmania's west. I lose it in the garden, but it does well in a pot in the shadehouse.

Isophysis tasmanica. I had this in a pot for ± 15 years but it never flowered. The first time I saw it flowering was at Lake Phona in the Southwest.

Prionotes cerinthoides has been flowering for years in a pot in the shadehouse. I have divided it and given plants away. Last year for the first time it started to look dry, but after the recent rains I hope it will pick up for it to flower in the autumn. I fertilise my pot plants when I think of it, probably five times a year. This morning I used fish emulsion; next time it will be 'Thrive'. I always use Osmocote when I repot potplants.

Epacris. Various species are in pots and have been for about twelve months or so, and they look very healthy. This is meant to be an experiment for the Epacris Study Group.

I also grow Tasmanian ferns, *Richeas* - (with the dry and hot summers I am a bit reluctant to plant them out, but they do well in the shadehouse.), Orchids, *Dendrobium spp.*, *Anopteris glandulosa*, (the pink form.), *Prostanthera magnifica*, *Phebalium whitei*.

The majority of my pots are of course the result of cuttings and seed, and are in transit to be used for our annual plant sale or for my own garden. My concrete area facing north is extremely windy and not suitable for many pot plants. Like you, I lost my *Rhodanthe manglesii*.

I have enjoyed visiting Jenni's garden. The view is spectacular over Bass Strait - I can understand it being windy. It is good to hear about some of Jenni's plants in containers. Isophytis tasmanica - I referred to Elliot & Jones - it is a monotypic genus which grows in mountainous areas in the west and southwest of the island. It has limited success in cultivation, but Elliot & Jones say "Excellent potential for a potted plant. Flowering may be slow to occur in climates which lack cold winters". There is a lovely picture too. - ed.



letter from Geoff. Simmons, Eimbah, Queensland

"Tripladenia cunninghamii (previously Kreysigia). It produces attractive white flower spikes; comes from the Moreton district in open forest. I have it growing in the garden in virtually full shade where it has produced flowers, whereas in the pot with some exposure to sun it very quickly burnt and has not flowered. You can see the whitish leaves and some browning. The lesson seems to be that it should be grown in total shade, in my area anyway. It is quite attractive although not remarkable".

I too grow this plant in a container here in Victoria. At Balnarring I had it in full shade and it flowered both years there very well. This year, with not such a good spot for growing this plant, it is still flowering but the leaves have some burning - most unsightly. I agree with Geoff., it certainly requires total shade. My plant has most attractive mauve/pink flowers which start in early December and persist over January and February in the right position.

I see in Australian Plants for Indoors, by David and Patricia Ratcliffe, they state "the plant happily accepts low light levels". I shall put it in the greenhouse next winter and bring it out mid-spring to grow outside our bedroom by the Huon Pine. This is where I have moved it from our west-facing patio where it had only partial shade - after two weeks it is already looking happier.

*I like its foliage which is attractively veined. It is easy to get new plants by dividing the rhizomes. Geoff. sent me a photo of his plant. I imagine that *Tripladenia cunninghamii* would do well in a fernery.- ed.*



another from Geoff. Simmons

Following, are a few comments on a remark on page 4 of Newsletter #28, about Australian themes on pots. I agree that instances such as kangaroo pouch planters leave much to be desired but the word *kitsch* (why was this word invented?!) has an unfortunate derogatory sense.

Some further explanation seems in order. No mention is made of species of Australian flora being depicted on containers. This means that floral emblems are downgraded as themes. There could be a case for a set of pots to display these traced or shown on pots. Another instance could be a large terracotta pot showing a leaf of *E. ptychocarpa* - this species has magnificent large leaves. This would not be blatant, but a soft expression of one of our plants. Again, why shouldn't a container have an inscription concerning the centenary of our Federation, even just two dates? None of these suggestions are bizarre but are Australian.

I have a sundial on which the state and commonwealth floral emblems are etched around the edge of the brass base plate. Most people would not realise that they are there, but a glance when passing reminds me of the diverse and unique flora of Australia.

*I like the idea of a pot showing an imprint of a leaf of *E. ptychocarpa* and am quite envious of your lovely sundial. I am still on the lookout for some small sculpture, or Australian decoration for our patio fence. We have a beautifully-modelled echidna in our small west-facing garden bed. He/she looks very much at home, peeping from under a *Grevillea aquifolium*. - ed*



from Roger Hnatiuk, Canberra, Leader of the "Australian plants as bonsai" Study Group

I spoke with Roger at the ASGAP conference in Canberra. He has written the following article for our Newsletter. Bonsai, as it is now widely known, is a combination of horticultural skills and artistic capability. To successfully grow and maintain bonsai, it is essential that the grower has an intimate knowledge of the horticultural requirements of the particular species that they are growing. Bonsai must be maintained in a very healthy state for years stretching into

decades and even into centuries. To do this requires an understanding of how to prune both roots and branches. The timing of this pruning may be critical if one wants to develop branches, leaves of a particular size, or encourage the plant to flower. Pruning at the right time invigorates the root system; at the wrong time it can kill the plant.

The horticultural requirements of Australian plants grown as bonsai are becoming known, but in general, knowledge is still very sparse and many myths abound. The new Study Group aims to sort out existing information and to discover new knowledge. In these respects there is probably considerable overlap between the new Study Group and the Australian Plants for Containers Study Group. I am sure that these two Groups, sharing what they know, can learn much information relevant to growing Australian plants in containers. If that was all that bonsai was about, then there would be no need for the new Study Group. It is fair to say that bonsai is a subset of cultivating plants in containers or pots generally.

What then distinguishes bonsai from other pot culture? If I had to name only one thing, then it would be the importance of art in the presentation of a particular image. All bonsai are aiming at creating the illusion of a mature tree, whether a tree that appears to luxuriate in its fullness of health, or one that calmly demonstrates the tenacity and dignity of a creature that has survived the many vicissitudes of a long, arduous life - the veneration of age itself. There are a number of areas of pot culture that bonsai focusses on that make it significantly different and worthy of special attention, just as there are other foci of pot culture which have specialised requirements worthy of individual attention.

Once the horticultural requirements are known, the bonsaiist's attention turns to aesthetics. Here there is room to overlap in general principles of design that the broader world of pot culture may be interested in; for example, issues of color, distribution of mass and void, symmetry and asymmetry. When bonsai growers talk about *style* they mean the orientation of the trunk (formal upright, informal upright, slanting, cascade, free-form, group planting, etc.) This focus on the trunk is unlike the interests of most other pot culture. It is not accidental in bonsai, but because part of the art of bonsai is to create the illusion of an ancient tree, the shape and size of the trunk and major branches are of great importance to this illusion. (Remember the old witticism: "All art is illusion".) The arrangement of branches, the angle they describe as they leave the trunk, and the placement and condition of the foliage also contribute to the overall aim of making the small plant remind one of a tree growing in nature. The color and texture of the bark are as important as the foliage.

The choice of pot - its color, texture and shape are also of great interest to the bonsai grower. Although the pot can be changed, in general, the plant will be staying with a pot for many years and therefore must be carefully chosen to suit the image being sought. It is my not well-informed understanding that most horticultural uses of plants in pots either aims to replace the plants annually or after a few years, with new plants. If the plants are left in pots for extended periods, then they will either outgrow their pots or become unthrifty for need of root regeneration; they are replaced, rather than spending time on regular root and shoot pruning that is essential to bonsai. Where shoot pruning is practiced in general pot culture, it seems usually to aim to maintain a compact form or to encourage the dense production of flowers, not to shape the plant to resemble a fully mature tree.

Almost anyone can spot a 'bonsai' and distinguish it from most other 'pot plants'. Some bonsai are grown primarily for the beauty of their flowers. Thus a bonsai azalea may only be displayed when in full flower. It may not be distinguishable from an azalea grown as a 'pot plant' for the same purpose. Exceptions such as this do not make the foregoing arguments weaker. In the Australian plant context, once pot culture of species of *Callistemon*, *Calytrix*, *Kunzea* or others becomes common in both bonsai and pot culture, then the same grey area between the two areas will blur a little. However, the distinction of bonsai aiming to create the illusion of an aged tree will still distinguish it from the growing of other plants in pots purely for their floral or leaf decorative values.

Where Roger refers to "choice of pot color, texture and shape" - I think this is most important, not only for bonsai but all plants in containers. Geoff. Simmons has frequently drawn our attention to this subject. I know I delight when the plant and pot are 'just right' - it brings a great satisfaction. Some of you may remember in Newsletter #20 of April 1999 about David Ratcliffe's Dad's Bunya Pine - a story I loved. His father's tree was 21 years old, in the same container with minimal care or maintenance, and took up residence in the lounge.- ed.

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Container plants indoors, by John Webb

Many people like to have plants growing in containers indoors as an alternative or addition to cut flowers in vases. For success, a certain amount of attention to detail is needed.

The amount of available light is an essential factor in the growing of healthy indoor plants. It may not be realised that, even on a dull day, the light outside may be 100 times brighter than indoors. On a clear, sunny day, it may be 1000 times brighter. Therefore, the position of plants indoors is vital. For plants requiring **most light** - eg flowering plants - about a metre from a north-facing window should be satisfactory. Any closer to the window and there is a risk of damage to the plant, either from sunburn by direct sunlight through the glass, or frost damage on cold nights. **Medium light** would be provided at a couple of metres from a north window, but out of direct sunlight. And for most foliage plants, **low light** is generally satisfactory ie 2-3 metres from a sunlit window or closer to windows that get no sun. For the serious grower of indoor plants, "plant lights" are available. These are specially-formulated fluorescent lights with a purple hue - not suitable for ordinary lighting as they are harsh on the eyes. Artificial lights should not be left on for more than twelve hours at a time as plants need to 'sleep' as much (or more) than we do.

Humidity is a most important factor and one which should affect our choice of indoor plant. Warm rainforest regions may have a relative humidity in the 70-95% range; a summer day in temperate regions, about 40-60%. The average house has only about 10-20%. Most indoor plants need a minimum of 40% for health and rainforest plants can require up to 60%. How to achieve this inside the house?

- Pots can be stood in a tray or dish filled with pebbles in water. (Do not let the pots sit in the water as this can lead to root-rot).
- A large tub or planter containing a number of pots - the space around and below the pots filled with bark or pebbles.
- An aquarium nearby, a couple of water-filled vases or a bowl with floating flowers provide other sources of humidity for plants without causing discomfort to we mortals.
- Spraying the leaves can lead to fungal attack on the plants and could encourage mildew on curtains or wallpaper.
- Remember that air-conditioners in summer reduce humidity, so you need to compensate for that by one or more of the methods suggested above.

All writers on this subject recommend that most indoor plants should be given a 'rest' by being put outside periodically. Equally, most pot plants which are normally grown outside may be brought indoors for a few days without coming to any harm.

Which plants to choose?

As mentioned above, *foliage plants* do best indoors unless plenty of light can be provided. So rainforest plants, the Tasmanian pines, ferns and palms, Cordylines, Figs, Lomandra, Restio (now *Baloskion*), and Syzygiums would be suitable.

Flowering plants, needing more light, include many of the container plants we would also grow outside, including *Baeckea ramosissima*, *Bracteantha bracteata*, *Bracyscome* spp., *Hibbertia* spp., *Lechanaultia biloba*, *L. formosa*, *Lobelia membranacea*, *Lobelia trigocaulis* (for hanging baskets), *Persoonia tenuifolia*, *Rhododendron lochiaie* (large pot), *Scaevola* spp., *Tetratheca* spp., *Viola hederacea* (baskets) and *Wahlenbergia gloriosa*.

These lists are far from comprehensive but indicate a variety of possibilities. You can enjoy experimenting with different species and make your own list - be daring, - have fun!

References:

Australian Native Plants for Indoors by D. and P. Ratcliffe, published 1987 by Little Hills Press.

Growing Native Plants Indoors by Wrigley and Fagg, published 1992 by Simon & Schuster.

Unfortunately, both these useful books are out of print, but you may find them in your library or in a secondhand bookshop.



Letter from Barbara Melville, Wyoming, NSW

Due to a lack of enthusiasm these days I have fewer and fewer pots, but do occasionally lash out and buy a new plant. The most recent of these is a *Conostylus candidans* - it is in a squat pot and it's foliage is really interesting - it starts out 'curly' and straightens as it ages. It is growing well, but no flowers yet.

We recently bought a huge jade-colored ceramic pot for our verandah which receives little sun in winter and a lot in summer, although we do have shadecloth blinds for extreme hot days. In this pot we placed a water-well contraption that is designed for using in ceramic pots. We planted a *Syzygium francisii* which had been used in our Central Coast 'Christmas tree' experiment, under-planted with *Mazus pumilio* and a common *maidenhair*. The lilly pilly has settled in brilliantly, even coping with two tip prunings in 6 weeks, and the *Mazus* is spreading nicely. The maidenhair has done very little, but is still quite healthy-looking - all one 'branch' of it!

In a hanging water-well pot we've put a *Pandorea jasminoides*, also off the pergola/verandah. I realise it will probably outgrow it very quickly but in the meantime we are enjoying its light growth and flowers. Ideally I'd like it to form a little 'curtain'.

Our *Buckinghamia celsissima* that has been in a large pot (ordinary) for several years and is about 1½ metres tall and covered with buds, so we are hoping for a good show soon. We've only had 2 or 3 flowers before. As with most of my pots it is sheltered from extreme weather by large trees; however I suspect the reason for its excellent budding this summer is that our neighbour has removed a tree that was probably producing too much shade for good flowering. (I was actually quite annoyed when they removed the tree - one less food source for local birds). Watering is very much a casual affair for these large pots down the back - they survive on rain with occasional hoseings.

The paper daisies that our group grew for the Floral Festival in September looked fantastic. At home we also has several other pots of daisies that looked great, scattered throughout the yard.

Now to respond to your July and November newsletters -

We'll have to try cactus mix - sounds good for WA plants.

Several years ago we purchased two gorgeous troughs carved out of tree branches. In them we planted *Dendrobium kingianum* that are still flowering each year. However the bark outsides, which so attracted us in the first place, fell off within a year. The pots are at the base of a huge gum and are lost in loose bark these days so it is not a problem - but it could be something to be wary of if people wanted to display them.

For many years we have tried unsuccessfully to grow *Hardenbergia violacea* in our garden. Maybe I'll have to talk Andrew into another large tub under the trees!

Way back to the July Newsletter - what did I do with the *Callitris oblonga*? Well! I gave it a root prune, some nice fresh potting mix, same pot - and it died!!!

On the subject of design with containers, I personally dislike lots of little pots in a row somewhere. As I don't have a designer's bone in my body I feel happier with my pots amongst the garden - grown plants where I feel they look more natural. They also don't need quite as much attention. However I do have an old-fashioned pole with hanging pots of ferns and begonias that fills a corner of the verandah most pleasantly.

After having re-read the last two Newsletters (I DO read them immediately) I'm feeling enthusiastic again and what's more you have given me an idea for our next Plants in Pots meeting - it's our turn to come up with the agenda. I had thought about topiary after seeing a couple of magnificent topiarised *Calistemons* (garden grown) in Gunnedah (north western NSW) recently. However now I think we'll do something with the cactus mix and WA natives. I'm off to the nursery! Thank you Pat.

Nice to hear from you, Barbara. I think the Syzygium is under-rated - they make excellent plants for containers. They certainly need regular pruning to keep them manageable, and root-pruning when re-potting. Topiary is very "in" generally in nurseries at the moment - I think many Australian plants would respond well grown this way. regular pruning and trimming would be essential.

*Your *Buckinhamia celsissima* will be most striking when in full flower. There is an excellent photo in Australian Native Plants for Indoors, by David and Patricia Ratcliffe. Like many of the rainforest plants, I understand this new growth has attractive pinkish leaves.*



Pat's Pots

Much reduction in the number of pots, and changes too. I am adapting to a reduced growing area - quite a challenge. Limited shade in the summer months means quite a big rethink for me.

I shall become more likely to grow a plant in a pot for a shorter time and then plant out into the 'common garden', give it away or throw out. It is much more important in a small area to have the containers looking good; there just isn't the room to rest or nurse on a rather seedy specimen. I shall use the glasshouse in winter to protect one or two plants from the huge winds and occasional frosts, but this is not close to our unit, and I do enjoy saying "g'day" to my friends early!

As we are going away twice this summer there may be some casualties, despite kind offers to water.

My delight at the moment is a medium-sized pot with a *Cordyline stricta*. This plant grew in the garden at Balnarring and I always liked it's structure. I pulled up a stem which had rooted near the main plant the morning we left, popped it into a plastic bag and potted it up a day or two after we arrived here. I have already potted it on and over the past few weeks several new shoots are appearing. It is excellent for the porch. I 'rest' it outside every couple of weeks. I see from Elliot & Jones that it will tolerate low light levels. Sitting alongside the *Acmena smithii* and an *Asplenium bulbiferum*, they make a most attractive trio.

(In the last Newsletter I wrote about moving some potted ferns from the porch to the southerly aspect outside our bedroom. I did this in early December and they sit happily in the shade of my large container of the Huon Pine. My plan is to return them to the patio or porch in the winter months).

I lost my *Lobelia membranacea* this winter and am very sorry not to be enjoying the lovely little blue flowers this summer. I have a *Lobelia alata* in a small pot - nowhere near as pretty as the former but quite attractive with it's small blue/mauve flowers. It sits amongst my few bonsai and next year I plan to plant it out in the garden amongst the ferns. (I see in Elliot & Jones that this plant also occurs in New Zealand, South Africa and Chile). Here, I have seen it in several places in Victoria beside creeks. This plant also came from our Balnarring garden, near the pond.

I have been more diligent in giving my containers a little 'boost' this spring/early summer every 3-4 weeks with 'Seasol' and Maxicrop liquid plant food. They appear to be enjoying this.



Letter from Tam Kendall, January 2002

I have had a beautiful display of massed *Schoenia cassiniana* (annual) in a terracotta pot since spring, flowering right through to now (January). The individual plants are very small with sparse foliage but when planted in mass they tend to grow together and fill the pot to their own liking. This *Schoenia* has very small papery flowers with yellow stamens and petals that fade to pink and then white as they age. The flowers develop and open over a period of time, so towards the end of the season you have a mixture of flowers still in flush and those that are aging gracefully. (Thanks to Judy Barker, Garden Seedbank coordinator of the Australian Daisy Study Group for putting me on to them).

Rhodanthe var. diffusa, (another Judy gift) flowered in a plastic pot in the garden; but unfortunately the snails and slugs got all but one of the plants before flowering. It is very similar to *Rhodanthe chlorocephala* but smaller in flower size. It would look much better in a mass planting.

I am also growing *Brachyscome tadgellii* in a pot; it is a quite intriguing little plant. A perennial with a basal rosette of dark green, glossy, narrow leaves that develop uneven teeth up the leaves as it grows. It hasn't flowered

yet but I like the foliage so much I've germinated some more. The one I have is about 10cm in diameter; I am thinking of putting a couple in a pot to see how they like growing together - I imagine they spread by stolon growth so they might fill up a 30cm pot. Too quickly? The *Lechanaulitia formosa* (red) that I have in a black plastic pot is flowering sporadically and has produced offspring.

I think our Australian daisies make excellent container plants, especially in a reasonably sheltered position. I certainly miss being able to grow *Rhodanthe manglesii* or *R. chlorocephala*. That has been a great flowering season for your *Schoenia cassiniana*. Tammy wrote to me in mid-January, so that is several months. -ed.



Odds and Ends

Seen recently - a *Baloskion tetraphyllum* (syn *Restio tetraphyllus*) in a pot sitting in a large, attractive pottery dish with pebbles and water. The graceful, slender stems and foliage looked most handsome.

In January, John and I were delighted to see two large pots with Cycads (species unknown to us) used as decoration in a Uniting Church in Ballarat. They made most attractive specimen plants with their arching fronds.



"Tips for Apartment-dwellers" - from *The Australian newspaper*

Twice in recent times, these weekly tips have mentioned Australian plants. One was *Chamalauceum* "Homelovers Elite Wax" (where do they think of these names?) It is a variety of grafted Geraldton Wax from an un-named Australian research project. They are so superior in reliability that they are being sold with a guarantee - if they die within six months they will be replaced. Keep moist in a sunny area, lightly prune after flowering and repot annually.

The second recommendation was *Xanthorrhaea*. Part shade or full sun with 50:50 potting mix:coarse river sand. Do not over-water, add native fertiliser every second year and enjoy. Be sure to buy them from a reputable source to be certain they haven't been taken illegally from the bush.



Kuranga Native Plant Nursery, Ringwood, Victoria

In their "Bush Telegraph" newsletter, December 2001, I found some interesting information which I am passing on to you. This year Kuranga had growing *Rhodanthe anthemoides* "Sunray Snow". This delightful, easily-grown ground cover (in the right situation - lots of sun, not too much wind in the winter months in Victoria). This plant grows well in a container or hanging basket. People who enjoy a flowering plant indoors will be pleased to know that this little gem lasts well indoors. Two years ago I grew the *R. anthemoides* on my north-facing patio in a large container. Planted in May, they flowered well for a long period.

Epacris "Nectar Pink" is a hybrid native heath with *Epacris longiflora* as one of its parents. The tubular bell-like flowers are coral pink. Each flower is nectar-laden and attractive to nectar-loving birds. With height and width around 80cm, Kuranga Nursery say the plant is well suited to a basket or container in a well-drained potting medium in filtered sun. This plant, like the *Rhodanthe*, is available from Kuranga.

The Editor of their newsletter talks about the extraordinary number of dwarf Lilly Pillies coming onto the market. She goes on to list about a dozen varieties of *Syzygium* and *Acmena* species. I have an *Acmena smithii* var. *minor* growing in our porch. It is a great little plant and is already in flower after only six months. The cream flowers contrast well with the glossy dark green leaves and I am looking forward to the fleshy pink berries. The orange/red new growth of the leaves is pretty. I tip prune quite frequently to keep a neat shape - every 3 to 4 weeks. It is a good, hardy plant for a container.



letter from Liesbeth Uitewaal-de Vries, Neer, The Netherlands

(November 2001)

All my plants are enjoying their winter home again, at last. Due to our lovely warm October, (almost summer!) I didn't take them in until November 7th. All, except the two huge wattles in their 70 litre tubs. I thought I'd better not try and drag them along myself, so waited until Bert's return from France. But when the next evening, -4° was forecast for Friday night, I thought I'd better be brave and do something about them! With the help of my children, Frank (strong boy) and Elke (good with the torch), we saved their lives. On Saturday morning everything outside was white with frost.

Because of our extended summer, most plants have developed further than normal. The rods of *Acacia longifolia* are a least two cm. long now, normally only one cm. by this time of the year. *A. podalyriifolia* is in flower even (for the first time); according to the books it should be flowering in late winter! It's a beautiful sight. The flower buds of *Melaleuca incana* are in the same stage now (November) as they were in February before its first flowering - so, three months earlier. Lovely. And as hoped for, and expected, it has far more buds than last year.

Another thing I noticed this year is interesting too. We had periods of rain but very sunny, warm (even hot), dry periods as well. Quite exceptional. I'd expect my plants would love that and be in flower all the time. But those plants

that used to flower all through the summer in other years, stopped flowering for a while. When you think of it though, it's not surprising at all since in Australia they would not use too much water and energy in hot dry periods either.

The only nasty thing bothering me at the moment is that many plants have some sort of aphids on their roots. They don't seem to suffer too much but I simply don't want bugs. Since I've been fighting those bugs for some years now and can't get rid of them, I decided to treat all pots this year, even when no bugs are visible. I'm really fed up with them and hope this might help. This means soaking each pot in a systemic insecticide (dimethoate), so it will keep me busy for a while! I hope my little friends don't hate me too much for soaking them at this time of the year. Spring would be better but I don't want the bugs to spread too much over winter.

One cutting of *Allocasuarina verticillata* has struck fortunately, so I'm not in danger of losing the species altogether. The parent has suffered a bit lately since I'm afraid I let it dry out a bit and then soaked it in this dimethoate - hope it will be forgiving - cross fingers!

Cross fingers too with my *Kunzea baxteri*: this week I noticed some unusual outgrowth, somewhere at the top of the plant.....it might be a flower bud....but I won't think that aloud! But it would be great. I might get a ladder and take a picture of it - I'll keep you informed.

It is interesting to read the Newsletter again. The idea of growing plants in woven bags (Kris Schaffer) appeals to me. It won't look too attractive though and a major disadvantage might be that the potting mix will dry out easily because of the tiny holes in the woven structure. This is even more disadvantageous since in nature the soil will rarely dry out 'sideways'. Following this reasoning, plastic pots are more natural to the plants than terracotta ones!



More from Liesbeth - January 2002

In my November 2 letter I mentioned my *Acacia podalyriifolia*: it's still in flower! A great plant, the deep golden yellow flowers are a beautiful contrast with the velvety grey leaves. The good thing with winter-flowering plants is that the flowers last much longer than in summer due to the lower temperatures. (I keep a minimum of 2°C in my glasshouse.) There is one *Callistemon* flower spike that has been sitting there, bright red, for at least six weeks. In spring, when it is still too risky to take the plants outside, the entire plant would have finished flowering within a month since the temperatures in the glasshouse rise rapidly when the sun is shining. Other flowering *Acacias* are *A. suaveolens* (flowering since October, and it won't stop soon by the look of it), and *A. retinodes*. The other watties like *A. pravissima*, *boormannii*, *uncinata*, *longifolia*, *alata*, *myrtifolia*, *floribunda*, *elongata*, *armata* (*paradoxa*) are still in bud.

I temporarily stopped treating the plants for root aphids. I didn't have much time in December and during the colder months it wouldn't be too good anyway to soak the root balls. Many of the plants I soaked in November are still wet! Hope they don't hate me too much for that. My *Allocasuarina verticillata* is looking pathetic again, being wet too. I hope it will recover like it did last year. If not, I've got two rooted cuttings this time for safety!

In general, there is not much happening at the moment. Once the temperatures are increasing and the days are getting longer the plants will be more active. I'm looking forward to a white-flowering *Hardenbergia violacea*. I sowed it one year ago and am surprised to see it budding up already. Tiny white tips are visible now, while the purple form I obtained at the International Plant Fair at Essen last year has its first flowers. A member of our society happened to find a pink form there and gave me a cutting of it. It has got buds as well so I'll be having three flowering varieties shortly! I'm looking forward to our next visit to Essen in early February. Another plant that has been in full flower for quite some time now is *Hakea nodosa*. I've got five plants from seed, sown in summer 1998. In November '99 the first two plants had some flowers, this year all five are flowering. The yellow flowers are not impressive but very cute. Do you think hand-pollination might help to make them develop seed? Would be so nice to have fruits on them.

Westringia fruticosa is a lovely plant that flowers throughout the year. I never pruned it but it is a nice and bushy indeed.

It is always good to hear from Liesbeth. I am constantly amazed to learn how many Australian plants grow and thrive in northern Europe. See photos on our colored page. -ed.

more on Cactus mix

I have been using this mix with success for cuttings of *Brachyscome multifida*, *B. formosa*, *B. angustifolia*, *B. segmentosa* and *Hibbertia glossularifolia*. I found it excellent for growing *Brachyscome tenuiscarpa*. These had not been flourishing in my normal potting mix and have now been planted out in the garden.

I shall continue to trial some plants in this mix - so far I'm impressed with plant growth - it certainly is free draining. I am using it as a growing mix for one of my bonsai Huon Pines, a bonsai *Leptospermum scoparium*, *Acmena smithii* var. *minor* and *Asplenium bulbiferum* all with success. I can appreciate how good it would be for *Lechanaultia formosa* and *L. biloba*.

I get my Cactus mix from Propine in Bayswater, Victoria. It is only available to the public from their own warehouse. They supply it direct to growers, but not for resale. However, there must be equivalent products available elsewhere.

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Letter from Gill Muller, Blackwood, South Australia

"Baeckeas in Containers"

The Baeckeas that I have flowering in pots at the moment are *B.virgata*, *B.virgata* dwarf, *B.linifolia*, *B.imbricata*, *B.robusta*, *B.camphorata* and *B.behrii*. They all have small white flowers, but really stand out against the beautiful green foliage. *B.linifolia* and *B.imbricata* are my favourites. *B.linifolia* has soft weeping foliage that has a purplish tinge and is such a delicate plant. *B.imbricata* is much more robust and sturdy looking, and the flowers come out along the stem in an unusual manner. *Imbricata* means overlapping, like tiles, and this is true of the flowers and the foliage.

I also have *B.astarteoides*, *B.brevifolia*, *B.crassifolia*, and *B.crenatifolia* but they are not flowering.

B.ramosissima has pink flowers that tend to be larger than the other Baeckeas, and that finished flowering only a month ago after flowering for nearly three months. That is another attraction they have, their long flowering period. I have found all the species I have tried in pots have grown really well. I use a 'Slow-release for Natives' fertiliser when potting, and then again in spring, as the potting soil I use only has trace elements, no added fertiliser.

The foliage can be pruned by a third when flowering has finished, then I tip prune regularly. I have also pruned the roots quite severely with no ill effects, so they can be repotted into their existing container with fresh soil if required. I usually soak the root ball of all my plants in a weak solution of Seasol before planting or repotting. They don't seem to be susceptible to any pests or diseases. I am having quite a severe outbreak of brown scale on other plants at the moment, but it is not bothering the Baeckeas. Butterflies (not sure which ones) are attracted to *B.virgata*.

B.virgata has seeded and is popping up all over the place, including in cracks in the paving! According to Elliot & Jones in the *Encyclopaedia of Australian Plants* there are more than 70 species endemic to Australia, so I have a long way to go if I want to collect them all. They are just a lovely plant in containers (and the garden) for summer flowering.

Gill has a nice collection of Baeckeas. How lovely to have B.virgata seedlings 'popping up all over the place'. See the picture of B.virgata grown by Liesbeth in Neer. B.linifolia and B.imbricata sound particularly nice. I wonder where Gill grows these containers and the microclimate - I understand that B.ramosissima is difficult to maintain in the garden, so container growing would be great. -ed.

STOP PRESS - SEE PAGE 10

Plants in Pots Interest Group - Summary of Fertiliser Trial, 2001

A decision was made by the Plants in Pots Interest Group to conduct a project for their Group involvement. The project chosen was to compare the growth rates using different fertilisers available to the home gardener. The native plants were to be grown in containers over a six month period which each member grew under their own conditions. With a choice of so many fertilisers available for garden use, and all container plants requiring fertilising from time to time, it was felt this would be a worthwhile project.

The Group decided to use *Correa* 'Dusky Bells' as their test plant, starting with twelve participants, nine of whom returned worksheets. Each participant was given four plants, four 150mm plastic pots, potting mix and fertiliser, the idea being that each member used a different fertiliser at home in their own growing conditions. (The timing of the trial was not conducive to good growth rates, being over winter.)

The potting mix used was Amgrow Potting Mix, regular Australian Standard. This mix was chosen because (1) It was regular A.S., (2) It had no fertiliser added during manufacture.

The fertilisers used were: *Osmocote Tree, Shrub and Citrus; Thrive; Miracle Gro plant food; Dynamic Lifter; Gro Plus complete plant food; Osmocote native; Fish emulsion; Nutricote; Aquasol.*

Most plants showed growth rates of around 10 to 30mm per month. The most positive report stated *Osmocote Native* - a good steady growth. At the end of six months the plants were large and branching. They required pruning to keep in manageable shape and would need repotting into a larger pot. It is a clean and easy to use fertiliser. (See Newsletter #28 for the recording sheet for this project).

Thank you to Bruce Wallace of Central Coast Group of APS who sent me the final report. For members who would like to read more about fertilisers for plants in containers, I do recommend Gardening Down-Under - 2nd edition by Kevin Handreck, pages 247-261. -ed



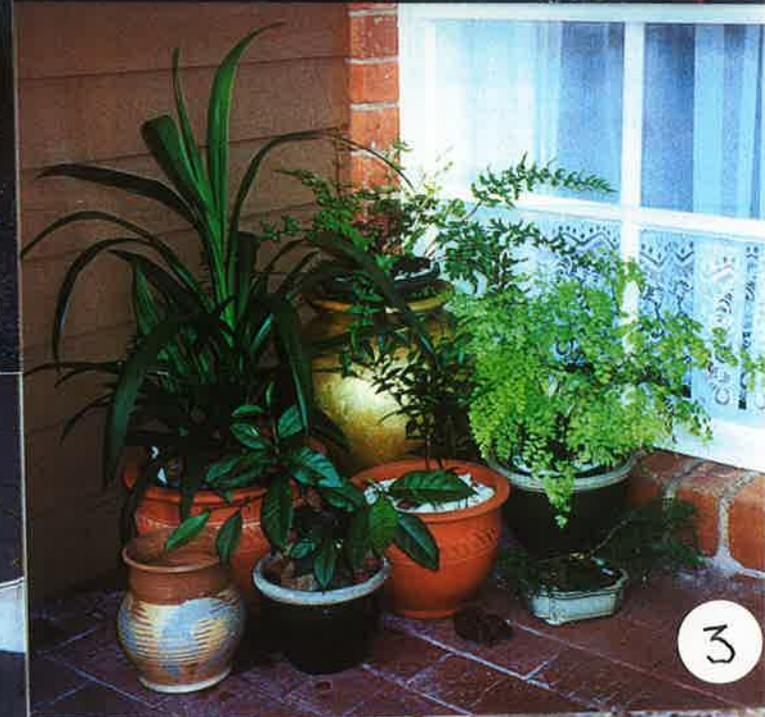
New members

A warm welcome to Roger Hnatiuk from Canberra, and Joke Meyer from Tamworth. I am sure the Study Group will enjoy input from these members.



SUBSCRIPTIONS will remain the same for July 2002 to June 2003

A first reminder... Subs will be due for the new financial year on July 1st



STOP PRESS!!!

I have just had a fax from Gill Muller (see page 8) with news of name changes to some Baeckea. The latest information, according to "Australian Plants On-line" 12/01: gives the following:

Baeckea behrii now *Babingtonia behrii*
Baeckea crenatifolia now *Babingtonia crenulata*
Baeckea virgata now *Babingtonia virgata*
Baeckea ramosissima now *Euryomyrtus ramosissima*

Gill thinks that the other plants in her article remain the same. *Don't hold your breath!*

COLOR PAGE in Newsletter #29, March 2002

1. Containers - used in garden design. We visited this garden in Goulburn, NSW during the ASGAP Conference in Canberra in October 2001. Note the bird baths made by John Russell who created this delightful garden using container plants placed with care all around the garden.

2. *Baeckea virgata* grown by Liesbeth at Neer in the Netherlands

3. Pat's Porch Pots: *Pellea viridis* (non native)
Adiantum aethiopicum (maidenhair fern)
Lagarostrobos franklenii (bonsai Huon pine, 6-7 years old)
Acmena smithii minor
Cordyline stricta (Palm lily)
?Elaeocarpus reticulatus (Blue olive berry)

4. *Swainsonia formosa* grown by Liesbeth - very clever!

5. *Xanthoroea australis* and *Kennedia rubicundra* at the National Gallery in Canberra, growing in a large container.