

**ASGAP AUSTRALIAN PLANTS
FOR CONTAINERS STUDY
GROUP**

NEWSLETTER



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Leader Gill Muller

7 Railway Tce, Blackwood SA 5051

Ph. 08 82784614 email gmuller@senet.com.au

Dear Reader,

After over a year of ill health and other happenings I am finally feeling like life is happening again! I feel like gardening, potting and writing Newsletters! We are also in the middle of renovations, so life is full at present. I am determined to get this newsletter out before January, I had hoped to have it finished before Christmas, but that wasn't to be.

I am going to the ASGAP conference in Launceston in January, and I am madly trying to get the garden and pots into a manageable state for John, as he has nobly volunteered to stay home. I am going to pay a young man that I work with who lives nearby to come and water a couple of times to lighten John's load, to water every one of my pots thoroughly takes three hours! I have spent a lovely afternoon today (Boxing Day) putting Saturaid into every pot, than watering it in. The local garden centre had 10 Kg bags of it for less than ½ price, so 2 bags were my Christmas present to myself.

The theme of the Spring Flower Show in Adelaide this year was "Wise Water Use – Native Plants". This is the first summer for many years that Adelaide will have water restrictions. I know many of you from the other states have had them in place for some time. We have been tucking rainwater tanks in everywhere, we now have 6, but only a total capacity of 12,000 litres. They are currently full, but we need to keep some in reserve for fire safety. At the Flower Show my display focused on "water wise" natives for pots. I find that most of my pots are quite low water use, the few ferns I have being the highest water use. I have learnt over the years what the different water requirements of my plants are, I may see some plants drooping, Boronias for example, and I'll water them, but I'll leave others for another day or longer, depending on the weather. It makes watering difficult when I have so many, but I would rather do that than water everything every day, regardless of whether they need it. Mulching the top of the pots, and regularly using a soil wetting agent also helps with water conservation. The photos below were taken a year apart, I thought I'd show you what a year's growth can do. The callistemon is C. "Baroondah Station", the white flower *Platysace lanceolata* from Austraflo's Edna Walling range. This is in our back yard, it gives you a very small showing of some of the pots I have squeezed in there. A lot of my wine barrels have white ant damage, they are definitely attracted to the moisture from all the pots. We have had to have the house treated again, another price to pay for all my containers!



Ali Broome, from Toolangi, Vic. writes: "Some of the bushfood plants that we have in pots are: *Hibiscus heterophylla*, *Dianella longifolia* (and *revoluta*), *Backhousia citriodora*, *Acrotiche serrulata* *Kunzea pomifera*, *Billardiera cymosa*, *Tetragonia tetragonioides*, *Bulbine bulbosa*, *Themeda triandra*, *Viola hederacea*, *Tasmannia lanceolata*, *Mentha australis*, *Prostanthera rotundifolia*.

We've also got a few midyims, (*Austromyrtus dulcis*) but none of them produced this year - the drought affected us badly, even in cool moist Toolangi!" *Ali included a species list of Bush Food plants that are available at her nursery, "Blue-tongue Organics". I have included a copy of the list, readers may be interested in growing Bush foods in containers, and I found the key to parts used interesting.*

I have grown Austromyrtus dulcis in containers for a number of years, I find its weeping habit makes it an attractive container specimen. I agree with Ali, it does need plenty of moisture to provide a good crop of fruit. The small white flowers that appear in early summer are usually profuse, and the pretty spotted berries that follow are really delicious. I used them as a garnish on a red berry dessert in May, (they carry the fruit for quite a long time) and they were a real talking point around the dinner table. They do look a bit like little eyes, so I had to convince my guests to try them. I think they have a sweet cinnamon flavour. One of my dogs is keen on them too! I have read that they are a coastal plant in their natural habitat, which is Northern NSW and the Wallum district of Southern Queensland. Has anybody else grown this little plant? If so, under what sort of conditions? I also grow A. 'Copper Tops', which is a cross between A. dulcis and A. tenuifolia, and which also produces the yummy fruit.

Pat's Pots

Pat Webb, Berwick, Vic.

30/7/03

Mid-winter. A review of my plants in pots, and noting a couple will need to go up a size in the spring; and several other repots due and some pruning.

My *Acmena smithii* is now covered with reddish tips. This is a great plant either for the porch or outside our bedroom window. The *Backhousia citriodora* (lemon-scented myrtle) is another welcome plant currently growing in the porch. I do enjoy the fragrance of the scented foliage.

A new addition to my plants in pots is the *Howea belmoriana*, which I bought home for Lord Howe Island. What a shock for it in this cold wintry month – however I am bringing it inside each night, well into the spring.

About a month ago I planted two wide dish like containers with *Brachyscome tadgellii* and *Rhodanthe polyphylla* – members of the Asteraceae family for me. I was given them at a recent meeting of the Australian Daisy Study Group. The former comes from the high country; it is a species useful for bog gardens and containers in temperate or montane climates. The *Rhodanthe* is fairly new to cultivation, preferring an open position in full to part sun. It apparently performs well as a cut flowers. I am looking forward to seeing this and hope it withstands the Berwick breezes. (We have a very windy spot at number 99)

References 'Australian Brachyscomes' – Aust. Daisy Study Group, 1995, 'Everlasting daisies of Australia' – Aust. Daisy Study Group, 2002.

Thanks Pat, I hope people don't get confused reading about your winter writings in summer!

Patina Pots Fun with old pots

Pat Webb

About two or three years ago, browsing in the library, I came across a book or magazine with an idea to brighten up some of my older pots.

You need: Some 100ml cans of acrylic exterior paint, white, turquoise, tan or rust-coloured, gold. (I used dark green as I had some leftovers)

Tools: 1" or 2" paintbrush, old rags or a sponge.

Exterior varnish (I haven't used this, and the pots I painted over a year ago are still fine).

Method: 1. Dilute the white acrylic paint 1:1 with water.

2. Brush this diluted mixture onto a section of the pot; wipe off excess, leaving an uneven haze or wash of colour. The paint dries quickly, so a small area you can work with is better than trying to cover the whole pot before it dries.

3. Brush the tan/rust-coloured paint, wiping off the excess as in Step 2. Allow to dry.

4. Repeat step 2 with turquoise or green paint, then repeat step 3.

5. Use bronze or gold metallic paint using a clean dry cloth or sponge to give a stippled effect.

6. Seal with exterior varnish. (I didn't bother – no problems so far).

You may experiment with other colours – any old exterior paint that you have left over. Use an old pot until you get the effect you like. Good luck, have fun – a nice winter job in a sheltered spot, or wait until spring.

Thanks again Pat. I was watching one of the many lifestyle shows, can't remember which one, probably Burke's Backyard, as customers at the Nursery will often want Australian Plants he has shown. (They actually frustrate me, I try to avoid them these days, so much 'instant' effect). The presenter treated a plastic urn in a similar way, and it did appear to look similar to the incredibly expensive cast iron urn they also showed.



Joke Meyer from Tamworth, NSW says “ About six months ago (written on 11/8/03) I bought a 6” pot with *Lechenaultia biloba*, and planted it in a 400mm pot. It seems to like the pot and position, full sun, because it has 24 brilliant blue flowers! Just great!” Joke also sent me a picture of a *Correa* ‘Federation Belle’ in a container that she was given by Maria Hitchcock, leader of the *Correa* Study Group, 2 years ago. I agree with Joke, it makes a beautiful container specimen, flowering for a long time through autumn and early winter with it’s fat pink and cream flowers. It strikes readily from cuttings too. I mentioned in the last newsletter (I can’t believe that March was the last NL!) that I was going to take lots of *Correa* cuttings this year and I did, and had a great strike rate. John and I went to the Grampians in June on the combined *Correa* and *Grevillea* Study group crawl. We had a wonderful time, it was great to meet Mollie Lau, a member of this study group from Vic. I got some great *Correa* cuttings from Neil Marriot’s garden and from the *Correa* cutting swap (bit of a bun fight!) on the Saturday night. John put the rice salad on them in the Esky unknowingly, and I only managed to salvage a few! Neil had a most unusual white flowered *Correa* that was almost a semi climber. I have one cutting of it still hanging on.

Linda Gowing, SA writes “I took this picture of my *Lechenaultias* (sp?) just before we went to Brisbane (mid November), when all the plants in the pot were in flower, including the grass. It was a good move because this seems to be the only pot that suffered while we were away. There is a little *Hibbertia* in there which was lovely when I took this picture. I think it might have got a bit dry at some stage - the flowers look like they withered rather than dying naturally. The *Lechenaultias* are also now past their best, but I can’t complain as there has been colour in this pot since June! It was one of the things we left at Aberfoyle Park when we moved to Macclesfield, to help sell the property so I have a definite marker of when it was first nice enough to attract comment. The challenge now will be to prune the plants to rejuvenate them so we get another show next year. The gold *Lechenaultia formosa* has been busy putting up suckers and with a bit of food hopefully they will all come away.”



I remember seeing this container at Linda’s, her theme was the Adelaide Crows colours! The *Hibbertia* at the back by the post looks like *H. stellaris*, the red *lechenaultia* is probably *L. formosa* ‘Scarlet O’Hara ’and the grass looks like a *Poa*. This is an excellent example of how stunning a mixed planting can look. I have been playing around a lot more with mixed groups, I planted one wide shallow bowl with *Tetrateca pilosa*, *Goodenia blackiana*, *Wahlenbergia stricta* and *Hibbertia exutiacies*, all small

plants found naturally in my area. I’m trying to emulate some of my favourite understory areas.

New Members Welcome to Shirley Delahoy, Cavendish, Vic., Ian Pamment, Newton, SA and Audrey Harvey Burpengary Queensland.

Results from Questionnaires. Collating these results has been a bigger job than I anticipated! I'll give you some brief findings, and do a detailed analysis in the next newsletter. One of the interesting results from the 24 replies was that only 7 of you considered yourselves to be collectors, including one 'hopelessly addicted', and that wasn't me! Reasons for growing native plants in containers were varied, the most interesting one 'to keep monocots away from Geese'!

Some information that may be useful for summer, many members applied wetting agents such as Wetta Soil (one member couldn't live without it), Saturaid and Ezi Wet in spring or when potting soil had dried out. Seaweed products such as Seasol were also commonly used. Seasol is supposed to help strengthen the plant against water loss. At the start of this summer I immersed every pot that I could in a Seasol/Yates Waterwise bath, and any that were too large for this I soaked from the watering can in this solution. This is my first year of using a liquid soil wetter, I have used the granular Ezi wet in the past. The range of soil wetting products on the market seems to be growing. I am interested in any more information on these products that any one has. Do you prefer one brand over another? Do you prefer granules to liquids or the other way round, if so why? How soon after using fresh potting mix do you find you have to apply a wetting agent? Please let me know your thoughts and findings on these products. I note that Kevin Handreck in his book 'Gardening down Under' says "All wetting agents available in Australia will not harm plants if they are used at the recommended rate. But several of them have been found to reduce plant growth when they are applied at 2 or more times the recommended rate: do not go above the recommended strength or rate: do not apply them more frequently than once every 6 months". Fewer of you used water storage crystals, only 3 using them regularly. One member used to use them but "not any more, crystals too disruptive to mix". I haven't used them previously, but thought I may try them this year, I have a *Correa lawrenciana* that droops very quickly, I thought I might see if the crystals might lessen that. Most people handwater their pots. I was keen to see if anybody used the Moss AquaSmart watering system for pots, but nobody mentioned it. You install it through the drainage hole, and leave it on all the time. It has sensors that open valves when the soil around the sensor becomes dry, then close when the soil is moist enough. Has anybody tried these? They are rather expensive, certainly out of reach for my huge collection.

Fran Lakin, from Naroma NSW emailed me that some of her *Correas* had yellowing leaves. While I was diagnosing an insect attack, Fran gave them and her other pots a dose of Nitrosol and within a few days noticed a vast improvement in the condition of all of her plants. She had been using Osmocote, and wondered if the drought, and her lesser watering regime may have reduced the effectiveness of the slow release fertiliser. I certainly think the water soluble fertilisers will give a quick response, particularly for nitrogen, though I queried with Fran the phosphorus content of Nitrosol. She replied "There is 2.9% phosphate in Nitrosol as compared with 1.9% in the native slow release. This was used frequently on a native garden in Sydney without any adverse affects. However it is expensive and as such a native plant grower (Phil Keane of Ausplants, do you know him?) uses Aquasol at half strength. The fact that all the pot plants responded to the Nitrosol indicated to me that either there was insufficient amount of the pellets in the pots or insufficient water was given to them. So does this mean I have to water more frequently even though the potting mixture is damp?" I'm not sure of the answer to Fran's question, can anybody else help. There will be more on fertilisers in the next newsletter.

Barbara Melville is a member of the Central Coast (NSW) Plants in Pots Group. Barbara was in Adelaide in September and I met her at the APS SA Spring Flower Show and Plants sale. It was great to meet up with a study group member from another state (I also met Sylvia Oats, the only SA member I hadn't met). I think she and her husband were impressed at the size of our sale. John and I hired a covered trailer to carry our container display, we can carry a lot more since I traded my little Mazda 121 for a Falcon ute! Barbara gave this information as a follow up to the March newsletter. "We recently had a meeting of our plants in pots interest group where we discussed a couple of issues I raised in your March newsletter. My experiment with pot feet will probably not work as well as I'd like. The "air pruning" would work better if the pots were higher off the ground - maybe on bricks. The *Buckinghamia celsissima* I spoke of has been repotted again - this time into a much larger tub and it is soooo much happier! It was suggested at 'pip' that I use Seasol not once only but about once a week until the plant settles into its new situation. The new leaders of our interest group are Bruce & Thelma. Our experiment for the next 12 months is on potting mixes. We all have 5 different coloured pots containing *Viola hederacea*. Only Bruce knows which potting mix is in the purple pot, which mix is in the yellow pot, etc, etc. In 12 months time we will evaluate the success or otherwise of our native violets. Should be interesting. The *Darwinia taxifolia* in the cactus mix is very dead!"

The 'Plants in Pots Interest Group meets quite regularly, Alan Hodge has sent me the minutes from their last two meetings. The details of the experiment Barbara mentions are "Thelma and Bruce had potted up a large number of seedlings of *Viola hederacea*, a hardy enough plant to allow an experiment testing the extent to which a range of potting mixes maintain their bulk and friability at the end of a period of one year.

They provided each member with 5 pots, each of a different colour, and five different brands of potting mix, placed in unmarked containers. Members potted up a seedling in each of the five pots using the different mixes. These are to be tended with water and fertiliser as required. The quality of the mix at the end of the year will then be assessed by conducting an air porosity test and conclusions will be drawn about the viability of the various

mixes." I'll keep Study group members informed of the progress of this experiment. Some other comments from the Minutes:

"Lorna finds a problem with excess moisture in water well pots when they are standing outside."

"Barbara has no such problems, but suggests they are not suitable for all plants."

"Audrey likes water wells for her Hoyas and for *Rhododendron lochiaie*. They provide a buffer against dry spells".

"Bruce stressed the importance of letting the saucer (of the water well pot) dry out between applications of water; he raised the differences of opinion about watering from the top, or directly into the soil."

"Audrey reminded us that the root growth touching the sides of the pot are most prone to being "cooked" in hot weather. She has success in placing pots, especially black ones, inside bigger pots, thus protecting the roots with a slender air cushion".

"Thelma stressed the need for us amateurs to do what the professionals do and feed our plants more. She recommends Osmocote at six-monthly intervals and regular applications of water-soluble fertilisers. We need to take care with Proteaceae, which are more sensitive to excessive phosphorus. "Charlie carp" is OK as a quick fix, but it can be rather smelly."

I envy this groups ability to meet, bring specimens and share information on container growing. As the Study Group has members in all states and France and the Netherlands I doubt if we'll ever all get together! The comments about "cooked" roots are relevant at this time of year, I prefer terracotta because I feel it has a cooling effect. The plants that I do have that are in black plastic pots are crowded together as much as possible to protect the pots sides, with the hardier ones around the edges.

*Thelma may have answered Fran's question from the previous page, suggesting the use of both slow release and water soluble fertilisers. She mentioned Proteaceae, I also have problems with Darwinias, I find it very easy to over fertilise most of them, except for *D. citriodora*. Have other members had this problem?*

The Central Coast Group has a Web site, and they have fact sheets available on it. I have included a copy of their fact sheet on Container Plants, it has some very useful information, particularly for people just starting their collections. The address for the Central Coast Group is www.australianplants.org/.

Adenanthos display at Spring APS Flower Show, Adelaide

I mentioned earlier that John and I took a large display to our Spring Flower Show. Amongst many other plants I took my collection of Adenanthos in pots. This is the text of the notice I had with the display:

Adenanthos is an interesting genus in the Proteaceae family, with approximately 33 species.

The foliage is a feature in each species, and they make good container plants for this reason.

The tiny flowers are very attractive to nectar feeding birds.

They can be lightly pruned after flowering, and can stay in the same container for a number of years.

The species I took were *Adenanthos sericeus*, *A. cunninghamii*, *A. pungens* (which has since inexplicably dropped dead), *A. macropodianus*, *A. cuneata*, (**pictured below**) *A. elliptica*, *A. argyrea*, *A. ileticos*, *A. cygnorum*, *A. meisneri* and *A. forrestii*. The *A. sericeus* and *A. cunninghamii* are particularly beautiful, over 1.5 metres tall in their pots. I have had them for years, and have used both as Christmas trees at different times. One man was very keen to buy them, I had trouble making him understand that they were a collection, and that I wasn't prepared to part with them!

I need to stop this now or I will never get it finished and posted to you! I have included a list of members, and which state or country you are from.

I hope summer treats you kindly, and I look forward to catching up with any of you who are going to Launceston.

Happy Potting

Gill Muller

FEES ARE NOW DUE



"Container Plants"

Growing plants in containers can be both challenging and rewarding. There are many native plants which can be successfully grown in pots. Experiment with your plant selection and enjoy the challenge of growing something different.

What are the advantages of growing plants in containers?

There are many beautiful native plants we would love to have growing, but our gardens may not provide the conditions for the particular plant of our choice. In a container, the right aspect, the right type of soil and the right drainage conditions will make it possible for the plant to flourish.

Garden spaces are becoming smaller. For some of us, there is no garden space. If you live in a flat or unit, the only way to grow any plant is in a container.

Attractive pot plants can be used to enhance any verandah, courtyard or be used indoors. Pot plants can be 'portable gardens'. They can be moved from place to place to suit the occasion or importantly, moved with you when you move house.

Native plant species are being endangered as their habitats are destroyed. Their conservation may depend on people maintaining them in garden situations. Growing plants successfully in containers may be a valuable contribution to this cause.

Are plants easy to grow in containers?

A garden plant may survive with lack of attention but a plant grown in a container needs continuing care to provide the right amounts of food, light and moisture to ensure its survival.

What plants should I grow?

Choose the right plant to suit the position you want to place the pot, remembering that growth, size and the requirements of the plant will be important. A plant which requires warmth and light will not flourish in a cool, shady corner.

What type of container?

There are many containers both decorative and functional from which to choose. Choose containers to suit the plant and the position.

Any container should be slightly larger than the plant and in proportion to its size. It must have good and adequate drainage holes. Plastic pots which are light to handle can be placed within elaborate decorative pots and can be easily moved.

Hanging baskets, logs, large tubs, window boxes or terracotta pipes can also be used.

Water-well pots take a lot of the pain out of watering, and are particularly suitable for moisture loving plants and for hairy-leaved plants which may rot with direct watering. The choice is yours.

What type of potting mix?

Ordinary garden soil is not recommended for plants in containers. A good commercial potting mix, preferably one which carries the Australian Standard should be used. These mixtures ensure good drainage and contain all the elements which encourage good plant growth.

What type of fertiliser?

Native plants grow best with the use of fertilisers especially formulated for Australian plants. A slow release fertiliser for native plants is readily available.

Some guidelines for growing Australian plants in containers

- Water with care as it is easy to either over-water or to allow a container plant to dry out.
If a plant has become very dry, soak the plant in a bucket of water until the bubbles stop rising.
- Fertilise regularly and according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Tip prune constantly to maintain shape and compactness of the plant. Rotate for even growth.
- Check for pests and diseases. If used indoors, regularly move the plant to a protected position outside for a 'period of rest'.

Some suggestions for Australian plants suitable for containers

Large Containers

- Plum pine ***Podocarpus elatus***: A coastal rainforest tree which grows on the Central Coast. It is slow growing and makes a very good indoor plant when small. Can be maintained for some years as a container plant. Attractive light green foliage and shape. Suit medium to bright light.
- Black apple ***Planchonella australis***: A rainforest tree found growing on the Central Coast. A slow growing plant, makes a good indoor plant when small and is able to be maintained for several years as a container plant. Shiny leathery leaves.
- ***Syzygium francisii*** and ***Syzygium luehmannii***: Two attractive plants of the Lilli Pilli family. Good indoor plants when small, slow growing, compact shape, very colourful new foliage.
- Davidson's plum ***Davidsonia pruriens***: Large leaves with pink new growth - a very good indoor plant. A rainforest tree but can remain in a container for some years.
- Black bean ***Castanospermum australe***: Shiny dark green leaves makes this an attractive indoor foliage plant.

Hanging baskets

- ***Hoya australis***: Twining climber, fleshy new leaves, scented white flowers. Does well also as an indoor plant if given a climbing frame.
- Hare's foot fern ***Davallia pyxidata***: Locally growing fern. Easy to grow, makes a most attractive hanging basket as its rhizomes and long glossy fronds completely hide the basket.
- Native pepper vine ***Piper novae-hollandiae***: Strong climber which does well in a hanging basket, but can also be an indoor plant if given a climbing frame. Heart-

shaped glossy leaves.

- ***Brachyscome multifida***: Flowers vary in colour, white, pink, mauve, blue daisy. Successful as a hanging basket.
- ***Lobelia trigonocaulis***: This plant can also be grown in a shallow pot. Heart-shaped leaves. trailing habit, pale blue flowers.
- Fairy fan flower ***Scaevola aemula***: A very attractive plant that will cascade over the edge of the basket. Produces many mauve-blue flowers in spring and summer.

↑ Small to medium size containers

- Thyme honey myrtle ***Melaleuca thymifolia***: Fine narrow leaves, fringed flowers, shades of pink and white.
- 'Paper Baby' ***Helipterum anthemoides***: White paper daisy flower.
- 'Pink Crystals' ***Zieria***: Attractive pink flowers, small leaves.
- Red lechenaultia *Lechenaultia formosa*: Fleshy leaves, showy flowers of various colours, rose, scarlet, yellow.
- ***Crowea exalata***: Rounded shrub, bright pink star flowers.
- Native Fuchsia ***Epacris longiflora***: Gosford Shire emblem. Straggly plant, but most attractive red tubular flowers with white tips. Can be difficult to grow but worth a try.
- Native violet ***Viola hederacea*** and *Viola betonicifolia*: Two native violet species. Low growing, make attractive squat pot plants. Also suitable for hanging baskets.



Viola hederacea

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