

ASSOCIATION OF SOCIETIES FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS

**VERTICORDIA STUDY GROUP**

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**MEMBERSHIP**

The Study Group extends a warm welcome to **Ms. M.A. Rossington** of 90 Barton Street, Scone, NSW 2337.

She says she has become hooked on Verticordias and is desperately trying to increase her collection. Her favourites are *V. monadelpha* and a brilliant yellow she refers to as *V. chysantha* but which I suspect is actually *V. chrysanthella*. (Most nurserys have yet to catch up with the species revision by Alex George)

She lost *V. plumosa*, ( too shaded she thinks), but has struck two cuttings. She is a little disappointed with *V. cooloomia* as the flowers do not have the familiar feathery appearance she had come to expect of Verticordias  
She is also growing *V. fragrans* but comments:- "It looks a little insipid in contrast to the first named species."

**Dave Gordon**

On a sadder note is the passing in 2001 of our most senior member, **Dave Gordon**, who has left us at the age of 102. Dave's enthusiasm for the Australian Flora was recognised Australia wide. Who has not known or grown *Grevillea Robin Gordon*, which originated in his Myall Park Arboretum at Glenmorgan , Queensland ?

Before the establishment of our Society for Growing Australian Plants, Dave was establishing the above Arboretum and spreading the "gospel". He became a member of our Study Group in 1986. I first met him personally about 10 years ago when I accepted his hospitality at Myall Park. Even at the mature age of 92 his enthusiasm and knowledge of our Australian Flora and his plans for the future development of the Arboretum were an outstanding inspiration.

As one of our early pioneers it is certainly true that Dave Gordon had a most significant influence in the development of interest and enthusiasm for our Australian indigenous flora, and contributed very significantly to the recognition and respect our Society enjoys today.

**Pat Moyle**

It is now 12 months since I reported the passing of Norm Moyle, one of our foundation members.

Norm's wife Pat has been carrying on their garden, but in a recent telephone conversation she gave me the unfortunate news that with her health not as good as she would have wished, she is finding it increasingly difficult to maintain the large property at Mandurah, W.A.

Accordingly, she has come to the realisation that the time has arrived for her to move to a more manageable situation.

While we certainly appreciate the difficulties of Pat's position and extend to her our best wishes, we will always remember her services to our's and her favourite wildflower, and in particular to our Study Group

## CULTIVATION NOTES

The last Newsletter included a report from **Graham Eastwood**, Bateman's Bay, of his *Verticordia grandis*, to the effect that it had regrown well following the "good prune" referred to in Newsletter 34

I had occasion recently to speak to Graham, and during our conversation he mentioned that it was still progressing well. He offered me more cuttings, if I should require them, which I readily accepted, as it was then mid-summer and I considered this the most desirable time in Sydney for propagation of this species. The cuttings arrived promptly, and as was the case with the ones he sent last autumn, not only their lushness, but the fact that some were carrying well advanced flower buds, suggested to me that he may have been a little over generous and spoilt his garden display by cutting back too heavily.

Accordingly, in thanking him, I mentioned such, but he stated that it had been his intention to again prune it, in an effort to induce further development from the lower stem region. As he had noted last August, the response to the previous pruning seemed to have had the desired effect. He said that the specimen now had approximately 20 stems and these were about one metre long. He added furthermore that the plant, although not having received any artificial watering, had not only produced new growth to all branch tips, but had retained all of the older foliage to ground. This specimen has now been four and one half years in the ground.

In an earlier Newsletter I described his garden situation and general cultivation procedures. Perhaps a brief repetition at this stage might be appropriate.

His garden is situated above a coastal cliff face with major exposure to north-east.

His soil is brown, rather heavy, compact sandy loam.

He does not water artificially.

He prunes as necessary to curtail rampant development

His preplanting treatment with commercially grown nursery specimens is as follows:-

They are firstly bare-rooted and all original potting mix removed.

Any root coiling or distortion is cut away and leader stems pruned to compensate.

It is then repotted using his own soil.

It is then nurtured until new growth is evident, even should this, at times, take up to six months.

Before actually planting out it is staged in the ground for a few weeks, (still in it's pot), to acclimatise to it's garden position.

The *V. grandis* in question was purchased from a nursery at the juvenile stage.

Graham surely must be doing something right. Some others of our Study Group, as well as I, have frequently lost nursery acquired specimens after early indications of successful establishment.

The plant in question was purchased by him at the same time as similar specimens, both by me and by Ted Newman and Pat Kenyon. These plants however did not survive beyond the first or second flowering. I feel that Graham's success might well be attributed significantly to his preplanting treatment, as noted.

I referred earlier to a batch of cuttings from this specimen, placed by me last autumn.

I was only able to strike one of them and unfortunately failed to raise same after potting on. A similar fate happened to several others from a batch of cuttings. I was able to strike earlier from my own plant.

If I succeed with the current cuttings I contemplate reverting to a potting medium I found reasonably successful with *Verticordias*, much earlier. This comprised merely fairly coarse quartz gravel. A little more attention was required however to prevent it from drying out excessively. At planting also there was sometimes a little difficulty from soil collapse, until I became accustomed to a procedure of adjusting the moisture content before removal from the pot. Even when, as did occasionally occur, the specimens did become actually bare-rooted at planting, they established well without set-back. Perhaps the selection of suitable planting weather; mild and humid after rain periods, could have helped in this latter regard. The growth response of the freshly potted up cuttings however, was certainly superior to recent results I have been achieving.

While on this subject of potting mixes, I should note that I have tried out a few commercial mixes of late, as well as a number of my own trial mixes, but generally I have not been very happy with results. In a conversation recently with Pat Moyle, I mentioned same. She commented that, in her experience in WA, only one commercial mix had proved generally satisfactory for her *Verticordias*.

**Paul Niehoff**, Blackburn, Victoria, makes the following comments:-

My *V. polytricha* is looking very nice after I cut the dead half off.

*V. monadelpha* var. *monadelpha* (grafted), is gradually dying.

*V. monadelpha* var. *callitricha*, (at least that is what they called it when I bought it), is doing well.

*V. densiflora* is doing well.

*V. cooloomia* died after looking scruffy.

*V. brownii* is doing well.

*V. mitchelliana* died.

In the next few months I want to try grafting onto *Darwinia citriodora* as an experiment

In Newsletters 32 and 34 I referred to a specimen of *V. mitchelliana* being grown by **Ted Newman and Pat Kenyon** at Dural NSW.

This specimen continues to grow very well and last spring, it produced quite a few flowers, despite the very indifferent weather of recent times, to which I refer separately below. Perhaps under more favourable seasonal conditions we may yet see this specimen burst forth into the dramatic flush of bloom we expect from the species.

If it continues to thrive foliage wise, this would seem to suggest good acceptance of the particular soil type and the general garden aspect. (Refer later comment).

I am afraid there is little else to report, *Verticordia* wise, on the Sydney home front except to say that our unusual weather patterns of late continue to be a little discouraging. Perhaps it would be useful to note the recent responses of some species, taking into account varied soil conditions and other cultural matters.

You would have noted my comment in recent Newsletters regarding difficulties being experienced by some species from such unusual weather patterns. In my garden I had originally set out to guard against particular hazards expected to ensue when seeking to satisfactorily maintain species from summer/dry zones in our region of opposite climatic pattern. One such practice has been the elimination of artificial watering, at least during

summer, once plants have been reasonably established. Until recent years this practice seems to have paid off, as our summers are not as rigorous as in WA. and many species seem to respond well to occasional summer rain.

Graham Eastwood at Bateman's Bay, NSW and Ted Newman and Pat Kenyon at Dural near me, have also adopted this non-watering procedure with considerable success, but in both cases soil types, have I believe, played some part in plant performances. My basic soil is very heavy clay loam but I have modified it in some places by adding compost and lighter materials to the upper strata. I have also introduced gravel sections and others of relatively deep sand in order to test-grow particular species.

As I have noted, the practice of avoiding summer watering has, for me, worked reasonably well. The recent occurrences however, of unusually cold and dry springtime weather, following upon a short-lived September build up to warmer conditions, seem to have added another dimension to our efforts, *Verticordia* wise.

On the subject of artificial watering, I have noted recent comment by Dick Mills from Banjup, who in WA, finds this necessary. Pat Moyle, Mandurah WA, in a recent telephone conversation, commented also that watering of her *Verticordias* was essential. I was a little surprised in Pat's case particularly, as she has been maintaining such a large garden and the amount of time involved in such maintenance must surely have been considerable. Jeff Jones, Banksia Park, South Australia, has also previously commented on the necessity and manner of watering in his sandy, summer-dry conditions.

Here in Sydney, early flowering species such as *V. chrysanthella*, *V. galeata* and *V. plumosa var plumosa* benefitted from mild and relatively humid growing conditions from mid-autumn to mid-September 2001, when temperatures, as in 2000 previously, built up to our customary, mid-spring warm spell. Flowering and post-flowering performance of these have been in line with expectations, based on long term experiences.

With the ensuing weather again as in 2000 however, going a little awry, some later flowerers have suffered. The warm spell was again, followed by an unusually cold and dry spring, such conditions prevailing, very similarly, until after Xmas. We were told in January by our Weather Bureau that the previous four months were the driest such period on record. Late spring low temperature records were also given a shake. Perhaps the species affected may have ridden out the conditions for one such season but the repetition of this weather pattern in successive years seemed to considerably affect seasonal development, and hence flower quality, of some later flowerers.

Species particularly affected included *V. s monadelpha* and *blepharophylla*. In Ted Newman and Pat Kenyon's garden which is of medium textured loam with concretionary ironstone inclusions, the plants did a little better than in mine. I believe their gravelled loam would have retained a little better sub-soil moisture. As noted above, I have introduced lighter soil conditions in places, to improve deep drainage facility.

*V. fragrans* is another species which has suffered. Specimens failed completely in both of our gardens, but again, their plants hung on longer than in mine.

Another weather phenomenon, I believe, warrants special comment as it has highlighted certain weaknesses in cultural practice in our Eastern Australian gardens. On two occasions in the recent very dry pre-Xmas period, two extremely destructive dry wind storms

occurred, wreaking great general suburban havoc. Ted and Pat reported a significant amount of damage, with some plants being snapped off at ground level. In my garden, despite having a greater degree of general protection, some wind rock was also evident

I believe the elevated beds adopted in both of our gardens, as noted above, have contributed to plants being more exposed to wind. In Ted and Pat's case, I believe greater interplant spacing adopted was also a factor. This however contributes to better control of plant mildews and moulds and in some cases to superior plant development. While I would continue to advocate the adoption, particularly in our climatic zone, of both elevated beds and, where space permits, extra interplant spacing, it is evident that both practices leave specimens more vulnerable to wind. It is clear then, that more attention must be given to provision and maintenance of adequate staking.

Species which have shown particular wind sensitivity include *V.s attenuata* and *fragrans*. I might add that the latter grows as a rather willowy plant in its natural environment at Eneabba, where it gets its support from associated relatively dense heath flora. Plants of both species, when damaged here in early growth by wind rock, have suffered later in maturity, post-flowering losses having occurred. Root examinations suggest that earlier wind damage was responsible. Dick Mills, as reported in a recent Newsletter, cited a case where stems had been blown over, but plants later made a good recovery. Unfortunately we have not been as lucky here. Perhaps in Dick's lighter sand, lack of surface rigidity may have allowed roots to be displaced a little without actually fracturing.

Another effect seems attributable to the successive, unusually cool and dry, spring conditions of recent years, with the very low humidity levels, especially at night, when plants might normally be expected to stage some recovery in moisture content. I believe this repetition of weather pattern might explain the lack of availability later, of good propagating material, due to weakening of the plants. Where cuttings have been taken the strike rates have generally been very poor. Such observation has also been made by Ted and Pat. Glasshouse misting, with or without bottom heating, seems to have been ineffective to compensate. When some cuttings have eventually struck furthermore, resulting specimens, after potting on, have been a little loathe to thrive.

With the breaking of the conditions towards the end of the recent January, things seem to have taken a change for the better and we are now back to conditions we have grown to expect at this time of year.

You would have been aware of the extremely hazardous Sydney bushfires since Xmas which coincided with a January heat-wave. In early February the rains finally came and 25 % of our normal annual rainfall fell over 10 days or so. The amount of precipitation however over the period did not, I believe, in itself, constitute the major hazard. I consider this came from the sudden and extended, complete lack of summer sunshine, associated with very minimal temperature range between day and night of about 2C, coupled with sustained, very high humidity levels. (90+%). In my general garden new growth was frequently a little chlorotic.

I sustained the virtual over-night demise of a 4 year old *Chamaelaucium uncinatum* and an 18 year old *Hakea salignus*; a local species, both of which had previously appeared very healthy. It is not surprising that some of our Verticordias, to say the least, appeared a little apprehensive. Cuttings of many plant species as well as Verticordias, which had been holding on for some time, promptly deteriorated. On the bright side however, we now have

soil moisture again and weather conditions more in keeping with what we have come to expect for this season of the year.

In my garden one of the first species to show it's appreciation of the moister conditions was *V. grandis*, which quickly started new growth and production of flower buds. It was planted in Nov. 1989 in a very gravelly bed, but has had to endure trauma at times from causes other than it's own, as referred to in earlier Newsletters. Unfortunately it lacks adequate afternoon sun exposure during the cooler part of the year due to shading by an adjoining shed, and tends to be rather rangey. I am trying to gradually induce more new growth from the lower stem region, having been inspired by Graham Eastwood's plant and it's treatment, as reported elsewhere in this Newsletter.

*V. huegelii* var *decumbens* is another which has responded with good new growth since the change to moisture conditions. Last spring it flowered well, but in spring 2000, plants flowered very poorly. Ted and Pat have had corresponding results to me for these last two years.

My small plant of *V. muelleriana* subsp. *minor*, which had flowered before Xmas, but which had, in the hot and dry conditions, looked decidedly yellowish, and failed to respond to artificial watering, but has now quickly burst into new green growth. Hopefully some of my other Verticordias will get the message and sharpen up their act a bit.

#### THE VERTICORDIA BOOK - NEWSFLASH

Study Group Members would have been aware that Elizabeth George has been working towards the issue of "The Verticordia Book" for some time. She has just advised me that it is in the last stage to go to the printer.

#### DONATIONS

I am very pleased to acknowledge the following donations to our Study Group on excess of our nominal \$3.00 annual subscription:-

SGAP Victorian Region-----	\$7.00
Nich Derera-----	2.00
SGAP NSW Region-----	27.00
Paul Niehoff-----	4.00
Graham Eastwood-----	4.00

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