

NEWSLETTER

PLANTS OF TASMANIA
NURSERY AND GARDENS
65 HALL ST RIDGEWAY 7054



OPEN 7 DAYS A WEEK

9am-5pm (Winter 9am-4pm)

(Closed Christmas day, Boxing day, Good Friday, and Targa afternoon)

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Newsletter 13 Spring 2004

Today's nursery rhyme:

*Spring has sprung, the grass has riz
I wonder where the birdies is
The birdies are upon the wing - but hark
Some pardalotes are nesting in the bark !*

And indeed, thus it is. The other week we noticed a round hole drilled into our pile of potting bark, albeit in a somewhat inconvenient position, it being a portion of the bark we were about to use. I quickly reconstituted that particular part of the pile (luckily no eggs were yet laid), and using the shovel formed a vertical bark wall in a more suitable area. I then provided a starter hole for them, and on advice from Paulette, stuck a small branch into the bark above the hole. At this stage I had not spotted a pardalote. (They come that way already) Well, would you believe it. Within half an hour, there they were - one sitting lookout on the branch, the other perched on the edge of the hole, looking in! So that's our avian news - a pair of spotted pardalotes nesting in the bark pile, and we trust, eating lots of little insects to keep our nursery plants happy. In these last few days they have been lining the nest with shreds of bark, so keep an eye out in the Mercury for the happy announcement!

Hello all, welcome to spring! The best comment I've heard concerning the winter just past, was from one of our customers - *a good old fashioned winter!* And it certainly was. I can't remember so much snow on the mountain, consistently for so long.

Interestingly enough though, here at Ridgeway we've recorded only an average of 2.7mm of rain per week for the last 5 weeks, compared with an average of 25mm per week for the previous 15 weeks!

As per usual, for this time of the year, lots of our Tassie plants are about to come out into flower - many will be flowering in their pots, so it's a great season to take plants home seeing how they will look in their floral magnificence. And of course it is a great time to plant - if they get their roots out into the soil before summer they'll need minimal attention over the warmer months.

We've enjoyed a good propagation season here, and have lots of yummy plants to grow on, many will be ready from the summer on. We decided to get serious and have a decent go at some species we love, but haven't had in the system for a while. It is really too early to count struck cuttings, but we hope to have some *Spryridium vexilliferum* and *Pimelea nivea* ready in autumn 2005, and *Nothofagus gunnii* ready in late spring 2005. (The latter from seed from Sib's Ferntree garden - Thanks Sib!)

STOP PRESS: *Note this weekend in the diary*

October Fri 16th - Sat 17th - Sun 18th Wildflower Spectacular - City Hall (free entry)

October Sat 17th - Sun 18th Collectors Plant Fair - 1115 Huon Rd, Neika (\$2 donation)

You'll notice both these events are on the same weekend. We did too, but not till we had committed ourselves to attend both, not realising their timing! Nonetheless, we shall muster all resources and do our very best.

The **Wildflower Spectacular** runs for three days at the **City Hall** (that's the big one down near the Grand Chancellor) only happens every two or three years and is always fantastic! There are many displays and lots to learn, for both little kids and adults (perhaps not so much for the average teenager). This years theme is *'From wild water to garden ponds'*. So there'll be lots of displays surrounding water features. I remember from past shows, the wonderful scents and freshness of the air upon entering the hall, (and this year add the tinkle of water) and always I am astounded by the variety of displays, the flora, and educational value of the show. (*Open Fri 16th 10am-6pm, Sat 17th 10am-6pm and Sun 18th 10am-4pm*) The official release of a new book, Tasmania's Natural Flora will be on this weekend at the City Hall. I haven't seen it yet but it sounds great!

The **Collectors Plant Fair** at **Sally Johannsohn's nursery** at **1115 Huon Rd, Neika** will also be fascinating, especially if you have an interest in world flora and rare plants. Sallys garden is set in an entrancing nook, perched beautifully on the verdant flanks of Mount Wellington, and featuring a wonderful mix of Tasmanian and other cool climate flora. She has invited plant growers that specialise in growing all manner of horticultural gems to display their wares. In a wonderful setting, with fascinating plants, it would be well worth a visit. Quite a few keen gardeners from the mainland will be attending this function. The Plant Collectors Fair is open from 10am - 4pm on Saturday, and 10am - 3pm on Sunday.

OTHER NEWS

Bonsai - The proposed new Bonsai nursery has been delayed. I am now hoping to get it up and running next year. Probably later next year. However I have had a bonsai pot shopping spree and we do now have a number of new pots in stock, including some exquisite hand crafted pots from a colleague in NSW. He has been producing some wonderful pieces, reminiscent of Australia's ancient and rugged landscapes.

Staff - We are delighted to welcome a new employee to Plants of Tasmania, Peter Crook. Peter has been studying horticulture at TAFE and we have taken him on as a trainee. We met him earlier this year when he was doing work experience with us. As well as being a thoroughly nice chap and having a keen interest in horticulture and Tasmanian plants, he's a good worker and a quick learner. He is a welcome addition to our team.

Unfortunately however, we've lost the services of Lindy Campbell, who has moved on in leaps and bounds with her own business, Island Herbs. She's now far too busy with the herbs to fit in time for Plants of Tasmania, but we still love her.

Lindy was with us on a part time basis for 7 or 8 years I guess, and was a tremendously productive worker as well as being a wonderful person to work with, and we miss seeing her smiling face around the place. If you need to buy any herbs, Lindy's the girl - she has beautiful plants and lots of knowledge and you'll find her at Salamanca on Saturdays.

Plants - We'll have a closer look at some of our plants in the next newsletter (Autumn 2005), but for now some that caught my eye this week are:

Veronica formosa (Speedwell Bush or Handsome Beauty) Apsley Blue

This is a fast growing shrub to 1.2m with strong upright branches and neat, formal foliage. It is bedecked in about November with attractive sky blue flowers. It makes quite a strong feature in a garden. It is also

amenable to pruning, either lightly, moderately or very hard. After about 5 years of providing a good show, I cut back my garden specimen from about 1.2m down to a mere 10cm! It then grew away very strongly and by the next flowering season was back up to 80cm and flowering again.

Stackhousia monogyna Creamy Candles

It's just a delight to have this attractive little plant back in the system after our very good germination last spring. Not necessarily a long lived species (3-5 yrs) but it flowers for a good two months in spring and puts on a lovely show. Pruning back after flowering may increase this plants' longevity. It prefers a well drained soil. It would make a handsome addition to a native heathland or grassy woodland garden. Equally it would fit neatly into an exotic perennial display(as would *Veronica formosa*).

Stylidium graminifolium Trigger Plant

Another gem for a native cottage garden, but not so easy to grow. Some of our customers grow the trigger plant well, but it doesn't do well in all gardens. When it does, it puts on a delightful show of bright pink flowers, usually in early summer. A superb pot plant. Watch out for our white form, coming soon.

Dampiera stricta Blue Dampiera

And yet again, a little beauty for a cottage garden. This small plant to 30cm, displays sky blue flowers in spring or early summer. One of our plants we kept in a hanging basket for many years, flowered consistently for the whole of summer. It prefers a light or sandy soil. We will have deeper blue and a pink form available soon.

Allocasuarina crassa Cape Pillar Sheoak

I know, I do go on about this small tree, but it's flowering now - I can't help it! The female plant at this time of year has delightful fluffy red flowers running up the stems. It's a striking display on a striking tree, (often grows with limbs somewhat akimbo!) not everyone's cup of tea, but then I've been a tea drinker for years. *Please note: we have seed grown crassa from \$2.85, so it's pot luck for male or female plants, or our known female plants which are cutting grown, (with some difficulty) start at \$7.50*

Rhodanthe anthemoides Chamomile Sunray

We haven't grown many of these for a while, so it's lovely to have a good batch coming on. A small rockery sized plant, it displays a mass of small paper-daisy flowers in late spring or early summer. A gem!

Leucophyta brownii Coast Cushionbush

Used to be *Calocephalus brownii*. A rounded, mounded silvery bush to about 1m, this coastal shrub is adaptable to most sites as long as they're not wet. A fine accent plant. Good for 8-15 yrs. Trimming lightly every year or so may well prolong a healthy life. It's good for the plant too.

Bauera rubioides Wiry Bauera - Western White

I spotted some trays of this white flowering selection yesterday and they were just so delightful! Its a great plant for a moist, coolish spot. We have beautiful pink forms too, but the white is my favourite. To 1m.

Athrotaxis cupressoides Tasmanian Pencil Pine

A handsome potted plant for a shady corner, or in a moist, cool part of the garden. Neat compact foliage gives a formal look to this wonderful tree originating from Tasmania's alpine gardens. I'd love to plant out a little forest to enjoy in my dotage.

Richea pandanifolia Pandani

And yet another beautiful plant for a pot in a shadier spot. We've found the Pandani to be an extremely hardy tub specimen, and its' striking palm-like foliage is quite spectacular. My oldest potted specimen is from seed I collected some 15 years ago. It has flowered twice I think, in that time!

WILL'S WARBLE

I was reading an article recently on 'native plants' and thinking about the generalisations we associate with that term. The general public often associate the following with 'native plants' and gardens, and these generalisations permeate through, and are regenerated by horticultural professionals, in the nursery, gardening and landscaping trades.

AUSTRALIAN PLANTS GENERALISATIONS

1. Native plants are unreliable and short lived
2. Native plants are scrappy, scraggly, leggy, messy, prickly
3. Native plants have small, insignificant flowers
4. Native plants are quick growing
5. Native plants are drought tolerant
6. Native plants attract birds
7. You can't mix native plants with exotics
8. Native plants are a fire hazard

I'm sure there are many more - it would be interesting to do a survey around the states on the public perceptions of Australian plants as garden subjects. Interestingly enough, some of these generalisations are positive to the use of Australian plants in gardens. When I first started to dwell on this issue, the negative connotations were the first to come to mind.

These generalisations are continually being addressed by those of us who delight in having examples of our indigenous flora present in our gardens, and associations like the Society for Growing Australian Plants has for decades been actively encouraging the populace to discover the wonders of our natural flora.

The largest proportion of people who have plants in their gardens, buy them at nurseries or other retail outlets. Not many propagate their own. Thus, most of the plants that are sold, are nursery driven. Public pressure does have some influence here, but in the most part, when a customer goes to a nursery or garden centre to obtain plants for a particular spot, if they don't find species they think they might like, then they'll be recommended something else.

In almost every case the plants suggested will be completely adequate for the job, however as that garden centre sells out of that line, they'll order more plants in and the wholesaler will make notes to grow more of that species next year. So you can see how the same old species are continually churned out. Mind you for some customers, a good, hardy, reliable, well proven plant, is all they should be given! We also grow plenty of good, steady, reliable plants for our more horticulturally challenged, or novice gardeners.

So in the main, the trade is nursery driven. It's really up to propagators and plant breeders to select forms of plants that are garden worthy. And for the Australian flora this is really only just happening with any degree of real professionalism. In the sixties and seventies there was a surge to plant Australian natives. The nurseries churned out thousands of quick growing plants which soon became too big and too messy and most were probably eventually ripped out to be replaced once again by the tried and true exotics.

This era was part of the learning process of using our Australian flora in horticulture, for the propagators, sellers and buyers, and unfortunately many of the buyers were turned off for life. The word 'native' became a dirty word in relation to plants.

And thus it largely remains amongst a large proportion of the public. It's not that they don't love and admire the Australian flora. Masses of them go fishing, and camping, park their caravans amongst it, drive through it and enjoy barbeques amongst it, but then it's back home again to the rhodos and roses.

(Actually, now I put it that way, it doesn't sound so bad really - a balanced horticultural perspective perhaps?) Mind you, others go out and chop it down for woodchips, bulldoze it for subdivisions and continue to clear it for marginal farming enterprises.

In this last decade, there has been a steady increase in the number of carefully selected varieties of Australian plants appearing on the market. Some are promising selections from the wild such as *Melaleuca gibbosa* 'Pink Passion' (Plants of Tasmania), some are selected from nursery grown seedlings such as *Melaleuca ericifolia* 'Jims Twister' (Oldina Nursery, Wynyard), and some have been actively bred such as the Waratah hybrids from the mainland. Some of the Australian plants appearing on the market, with their flashy new labels, do not even mention their local origins, which seems a bit of a shame, but then again how many exotic plants we buy tell us the country of origin on the label?

Without a doubt over the coming decades, many more hundreds of Australian plants will come onto the market. Some will be selected from the wild or from gardens or nursery stock, others will be bred deliberately, and most will be wonderful garden plants. Because just as much as the market needs good old reliable faithfuls, it also needs new plants - regular new introductions are absolutely vital to maintain a buoyant market place. Gradually the negative image of the 'native plant' will fade. And maybe some of the generalisations too.

Already, with the hard hitting water restrictions in many mainland areas, nurseries are coming up with innovative ways to promote and label drought tolerant plants. I imagine these labels will be for exotics and natives and can certainly see sections of nurseries set aside for such plants. With some Australian plants in the drought tolerant sections and some in the fernery section, and some in the indoor plant section, I can see people gradually comprehending that Australian plants are varied and are not all the same. And I'll look down from my view point from the next world, and smile and be happy.

And so to address the generalisations.

1. Native plants are unreliable and short lived

Many Australian plants are very reliable, but quite a few are not. Where this is the case, it is important for the nursery to let the customer know. Many gardeners are happy to try something a bit tricky, because if they can grow it well, it makes them happy. And if they fail, knowing that it was tricky, they don't feel too bad. In a specialist nursery like ours, we do propagate quite a few plants that may provide a challenge, firstly because we're addicted to growing Tasmanian plants and secondly because we do have customers who love to try these species. Other customers much prefer a reliable plant, and we have plenty of those as well.

This generalisation will take a long time to dispel, and it is up to the propagators and nurseries, firstly to make available a greater proportion of reliable plants, and secondly to provide honest information on the capabilities and requirements of various species.

2. Native plants are scrappy, scraggly, leggy, messy, prickly

This generalisation has good basis if people who like neat trimmed gardens wander into dry sclerophyll bushland or see untrimmed native gardens. For those gardeners who hold these impressions and add them to the unreliable, short lived thoughts, you virtually can't sell them an Australian plant (except for the ones they already have in their gardens that they don't know the origins of). These are the gardeners for whom the new Australian cultivars (bedecked with flashy labels) which don't mention their origins, are directed. They represent a huge portion of the buying public.

The overwhelming majority of Australian plants (is this a generalisation?) prune very nicely, and can therefore be adapted to suit many more formal garden settings. In fact even though I know this I am regularly surprised when I visit gardens and find dense compact bushes on species which I would not have considered likely candidates for such treatment.

The prickly nature of some plants is probably unavoidable. There are of course lots of exotic garden plants with spikes. One of the most popular is a killer! Something called the rose.

3. Native plants have small, insignificant flowers

Often small, yes. Often on mass, though. Often more subtle, yes. Often far less garish, yes. We plead guilty your honour. The gardeners requirement for bigger, brighter has meant selections world wide and breeding to go with it. And I'm part of it. I've been growing some trigger plants in the hot house over winter and yes they bigger - very impressive! So we'll get there folks. Along with our waist-lines I foretell that the average size of an Australian flower in nurseries in 50 years will be 50% bigger than those today!

4. Native plants are quick growing

Not so of course. Many are, many are not. Once again a generalisation born of the most common Australian plants made available from nurseries over the years. Quick growing = quick turnover.

5. Native plants are drought tolerant

Luckily many are. Now is the time to be trialing and propagating all those drought hardy little Australian gems, to entice those Sydney and Melbourne water-restricted gardeners.

6. Native plants attract birds

Isn't that nice, and they do tend to attract native birds at that. So do Cotoneasters. Lots of plants attract birds. Gives them somewhere to alight. But yes, the Australian plants win this one - it's a worthy generalisation. So many of those mainland Grevilleas. They seem to flower incessantly, a constant buzz of honeyeaters - a veritable avian supermarket. Unfortunately many of these Grevilleas are heading into the bush, so if you're anywhere near bushland, go easy on the mainland Grevilleas. And, unfortunately, on *Kunzea ambigua*, our delightful aromatically flowering shrub from the east coast. It is also prone to going feral, so keep it for the inner suburbs or the central and northern east coast.

7. You can't mix native plants with exotics

Well that's basically garbage. However it is important to mix plants that require certain conditions with others of their own ilk. If you love fertilising and watering it does cut back your choices a bit, but if you're prone to letting things garden themselves without too much involvement, then the choice is wide. Many Australian species are adaptable to better conditions and will reward you accordingly, but some species will turn up their toes at such indulgence.

8. Native plants are a fire hazard

Well that's basically true for lots of them with some exceptions, and of course plants from rainforests and alpine areas don't tend to burn so well, especially as they get watered more. Also some coastal plants are fire retardant. If one habits a fire prone area, combustible Australian plants can be used, but by designing the garden sensibly, the risk to house and home can be vastly reduced. Other aspects such as house design, having a bushfire strategy and water availability are extremely important.

So endeth the warble. Next newsletter I'm planning for less warble and more on our beaut Tasmanian plants. And if any of you would like particular subjects covered, please let us know.

We look forward to seeing you this season at the nursery and at the garden shows if you can make it.

Horticulturally yours,

Will, and trusty staff - Lydia, Paulette, Sam and Peter