

N E W S L E T T E R



PLANTS OF TASMANIA NURSERY AND GARDENS

NO.5 SPRING 1999

65 HALL ST RIDGEWAY 7054

OPEN 7 DAYS A WEEK

9am-5pm (Winter 9am-4pm) ph (03) 6239 1583 fax (03) 6239 1106

Well, what do you know, **Spring again!** Did anyone notice Winter? The winter of '98 wasn't a cold one, but this year was a **non-event!** In S.E. Tassy it was mild, it was benign and there wasn't any rain, let alone wind or snow. Still no rain now it's October. Luckily we have lots of plants for sale that can handle dry conditions!

But first up, did anyone notice a newsletter in Autumn? Sorry, missed that one. One moment Autumn was just begun, the next - **gone!** No use putting out a newsletter in Winter I thought, may as well wait until Spring has sprung. And sprung it has - the garden is in **bounteous florific display**, chirping birds and buzzing bees are doing **cartwheels** and the air is heady with perfume and the mild humidity of spring! Wow.

I heard somewhere that pet ownership in Australia saves the health system **5 billion dollars** (or was that 3). It seems that pets keep a person happy and healthy. Now I haven't heard the figures for gardening but I'm sure it'd be substantial. Those of us with pets **and** gardens are probably so laid back, we'll live to be 100! (Then of course there's the opposite theory - the screaming at the dog to get off the garden theory - takes years off your life!) So, Spring in the garden. A great time for planting. A great time for **sprucing up**. Get it all shipshape and looking it's best for the Barby season.

NURSERY NEWS

Over the years it has been great to see the **growing interest** in our Tasmanian plants and flowers. And it's been (and still very much is) a great challenge to do our best to grow these plants and display them in such a way as to make them **mouth-wateringly irresistible**. I reckon we're about halfway there. In fact last year we took another step towards turning out a bigger range and a more desirable potted plant. We were lucky enough to acquire an adjoining quarter-acre, which we've devoted entirely to production. It's a sunny block and should enable us to grow nothing but the best - well, we'll try anyway. It was a fortunate buy, as we were getting very cramped.

The main Winter Project was to buy a composting toilet and build an appropriate **country-style loo**. It's not yet finished, but hopefully by the year's end. I asked the staff for suggestions for what to call it. Lindy's suggestion was P.O.T.N. POTTY (ie. Plants of Tasmania Nursery, Potty) What do you reckon? (I don't suppose there's many newsletters about, that herald the arrival of a new toilet, but there you go). (And there you will go - if **nature calls**). (Is that the same as the call of the wild?)

Back in autumn we **reshuffled** the plants around a bit to include some **new categories**. The plants are now arranged in the existing categories of Groundcovers and small shrubs, Alpine, Tufties (for wet and dry), Shrubs 1.5-6m, Vines, Conifers, Ferns, Rainforest and Trees (Eucalypts), and two new sections - Coastal and Bushfoods Plants. Some plants are now repeated in a couple of sections, so it's worth a look in a couple of places if you are after a particular plant. For example, we will normally stock *Kunzea ambigua* both in the shrubs section and in the coastal section. However if we were running short of stock, we may have a few left only in one or the other.

We are **on a mission** to improve our nursery labelling. The old handwritten descriptive signs on our timber boards will gradually, over the summer, be replaced by new **"computer-neat" labels** on a waterproof surface, which we hope will last longer than the old ones.

As well, we have taken the opportunity to add two plant ratings to the signs. These will indicate the **hardiness of the plant** in the garden, and also its **suitability as a tub specimen**. Each species will have a rating on a scale of 1 to 10, where a score of one, would indicate that a plant is so difficult to grow, that if you paid good money for one, it'll probably turn up its toes before you got home! And a plant with a rating of nine, indicates a plant so tough that if your **dog ate it** on the way home, you could probably still plant it with success!

We hope these ratings will assist with plant choices. If all goes according to plan, the next nursery catalogue in Autumn 2000, will include the ratings.

Nursery plans for next year are to build a deck overlooking the garden, to expand the sales area a titch, and to extend the bonsai house. (All planned for last winter mind you, it's a shame winters these days are so short!) Speaking of bonsai, nothing much new as yet this year I'm afraid. **I blame that short winter.**

Staff News Mark moved on to an offer of fulltime employment, and we have now welcomed Lydia to the team. That leaves me (Will) to contend with **three** women - the long serving, but still enthusiastic Kris, the next longest serving, but still enthusiastic Lindy, and Lydia, who is newly enthusiastic. (Oh - there is also **Dolly the trolley**, but she's only enthusiastic when fully charged, after a night with **Aurora**). (And don't forget, Lindy also grows and sells herbs - find her at Salamanca Place on Saturdays, or grab one of her plant lists from the nursery. And Lydia, in her non-nursery time runs a garden maintenance service - feel free to avail yourself of one of her cards from the nursery counter).

Open Gardens Kris has her **excellent native garden**, at Neika, in the Open Garden Scheme this spring. If you missed having a look the other week, it's open again on Sat & Sun, 13th and 14th November. It's a large scale native garden in a rural setting, but with **lovely detailing** and a **pleasantly relaxed ambience**. She's also running a little Bushfoods cafe for the occasion. Entry is \$3.50. (NB The Corbett garden at Ferntree is open on the Sunday only, and the Dombrovskis garden is open both days - well worth a look - both are a mix of native and exotic plants, but in different styles).

Bushfoods Workshops Kris has been running these workshops for the Hobart council, at the Springs on Mt. Wellington. They include a bit of a bush ramble and some **tucker** with bush flavours from local areas and further afield. They have been popular, they're free, but you need to book to attend. Phone 6238 2884. The next dates are 31st Oct and 30th Jan. Great for kids and adults alike.

NEW AND INTERESTING PLANTS IN STOCK

Hot off the press - we have just put out for sale, our first offerings of *Pandorea pandorana*, the **Wonga-wonga** vine. (But only about 30 for this season) Kris has diligently propagated our first saleable batch, from seed collected from our cutting grown stock plants. (We managed to strike three cuttings from the only plant we saw, on a trip to Flinders Island, many years ago). The Tasmanian distribution of *Pandorea* is limited to Flinders Island in damp gullies, so we feel **very privileged** to have them represented in the nursery. Of interest is the naturally occurring spread of the Wonga-wonga vine: Flinders Island, S.A., Vic, N.S.W., Qld, New Guinea and islands of Ceram and **Lombok!** Our *Pandorea* has a cream bell flower with pink tips, and displays with a great **bower of flower!**

A more humble newcomer is *Senecio spathulatus*, Prostrate Coastal Groundsel, found growing happily on a coastal sand dune in the S.E. of the state. It has a succulent, bright green leaf with the typical *Senecio* yellow daisy flower in summer. Ideal for coastal sands, or indeed any sunny well drained site. I've planted some at home in a new garden bed with a dash of extra nutrients, and they're growing like the powers.

We now have in stock another pink leatherwood. Pioneered by Woodbank nursery many years ago, *Eucryphia lucida* - Ballerina, has beautiful flowers with deep pink tonings.

Other plants new this year are: *Acacia gunnii* - **Ploughshare Wattle**, *Acrotriche serrulata* - **Ant's Delight**, *Atriplex cinerea* - **Coast Saltbush**, *Velleia montana* - **Mountain Velleia** (just to drive home that it is a Velleia, and that it does grow on the mountains), *Helichrysum milliganii* - **Snow Everlasting**, *Dianella revoluta* var. *brevicaulis* - **Arching Flax Lily**, an assortment of new rushes and sedges, all four *Xyris* species (great for wet spots and ponds, with their three-petalled yellow flowers on slender stems), *Asterotrichion discolor* - **Native Hemp** (a very fast grower, and you can't smoke it), *Brachyglottis brunonis* - **Tree Groundsel**, *Comesperma volubile* - **Blue Love Creeper** (back in stock - what a gem), for conifer collectors, we have some *Microstrobus niphophilus* - **Mt. Mawson Pine**. Also, *Chielanthes austrotenuifolia* - **Rock Fern** (a small delicate looking fern that belies it's appearance by growing in dry and fairly sunny sites) and *Todea barbara* - **King Fern** (almost ready). Not to mention the new white flowering *Tetralthea labillardiere*, that's our **Leggy Black Eyed Susan**, and she's dressed in pure white instead of mauve - and very well clothed too. Also a double-flowering, pale pink *Bauera rubioides* and two plants expected to be ready in the new year, *Pultenaea prostrata*, rare, and with a soft orange coloured pea-flower (beautiful), and a pale pink flowering **Woolly Tea Tree**, *Leptospermum lanigerum*. What a smorgasbord! (what a strange word!) (- it's Swedish actually, means sandwiches on a table). (That would mean that if you went to a bonsai show, and likened it to a smorgasbord of bonsai, you would actually be saying - those plants in trays look like sandwiches on a table!)

DUCKS

Not only do we have bumbling bees and birds in the trees, and the invisible bandicoot(s) still digging enormous holes in the garden, but we now have two native ducks that appear to have taken up residence on our pond! They're fairly tame if you go quietly. I hope we get some babies. I'm assuming they're **him and her**. Wonder how many tadpoles they'll eat?

TASMANIAN BUSH TUCKER

This is the third and last part of our notes on Tassy bush tucker. (If you stuck to the herbivorous diet we've outlined so far, you'd be losing weight faster than a Jenny Craig diet, so we do recommend sticking to your normal food - perhaps a little taste now and then.)

In the last two newsletters we covered edible berries, fruits, leaves, teas, seeds, and edible flowers, nectar and pollen. On now to roots and growth tips. But first, a repeat of the introduction from last newsletter.

As many of you are aware there are some native plants in Tasmania which have **edible bits**. Fruits, shoots, berries, leaves, seeds, sap, flowers, pollen or tubers can be edible - even palatable.

Unfortunately our European colonising predecessors, by wiping out most of the original inhabitants, so destroyed most of the wealth of knowledge, gained over many thousands of years.

Some small portions of information were recorded by early white botanists in Tasmania, and some from archaeological remains, but most of the knowledge we can access, originates from Aboriginal people on the mainland. (Relevant for the Tasmanian species that also occur interstate.)

Kris Schaffer has a keen interest in the edible nature of our indigenous flora, and has prepared the following notes from her research. (NB. Edited and added to by Will) She is a member of the Australian Food Plant Study Group set up by The Society For Growing Australian Plants.

WARNING Please note that this information has been obtained from a number of references, and we pass it on in good faith, however we advise extreme caution. As well as many plants being edible, **some are poisonous**. (On some plants one can find both edible and poisonous bits.) At all times be cautious. It could be very unpleasant (or worse) if one started to experiment. Be extra cautious with children. Three points should be stressed.

- 1. Plant Identification** Don't guess. If you're not positive on the identification of your plant, or which bits are the edible bits, either find out from someone who knows, or forget it.
- 2. Conservation** Please observe State and Federal regulations designed for the protection of our native flora. (Especially if you're into wood chipping.) Remember also that for our native birds and animals, these edible bits (esp. fruits and berries) may be part of their existence - so harvest lightly, or grow your own.
- 3. Partake Sparingly** Some foods have substances that may be harmful in excess. Plants in the wild can be very variable, so start with small amounts. (For example: Many people have heard of early Europeans using Sassafras to make a tea or tonic. However Sassafras contains safrole, a possible cancer causing agent, so its use now is not recommended.)

ROOTS AND GROWTH TIPS

Roots and growth tips are often high in nutritional value. Many native bulbs and orchids are edible, but rather than demolishing plants in the wild, are best left for bandicoot snacks. Some bulb forming plants that can be grown in the garden are:

Arthropodium milleflorum **Vanilla Lily** Tubers can be eaten raw or roasted. (A New Zealand *Arthropodium* was an important Maori food, and was probably cultivated).

Bulbine bulbosa and *Bulbine glauca* **Yellow rock Lily** The roots can be eaten raw or cooked, and the young green seeds eaten, also raw or cooked.

Bulbine semibarbata Has inedible roots, but edible seed. In S. Aust. the leaves were cooked and eaten.

Burchardia umbellata **Milkmaids** Cooked roots (Not so easy to grow in the garden)

Microseris scapigera **Native Dandelion** In autumn and winter the tubers were eaten raw or baked in coals. Overwintered roots become bitter.

Carpobrotus rossii **Native Pigface** Leaves can be eaten for salad or cooked. (NB. Red fruits can be eaten).

Convolvulus erubescens A prostrate plant with pink flowers from dry open spaces. The starchy roots can be cooked.

Dicksonia antarctica **Soft Tree Fern** Tasmanians' first people would split the top half metre of the stem down, and the starchy pith inside was scooped out and eaten, raw or cooked. (NB This would most likely lead to the demise of the fern, so only practice on your garden plants). **Warning** In Japan, throat cancer has been linked to regular eaters of pickled fern fronds, so once again, moderation in all things.

Geranium potentilloides **Cranes Bill** Starchy, contains tannin which is not poisonous but astringent, and removed by cooking. Medication for diarrhoea.

Lomandra longifolia **Sagg** Young white shoots can be eaten raw, having a pleasant nutty flavour. The flowers or nectar can also be eaten.

Typha sp. **Cumbungi or Bullrush** Roots can be boiled, roasted or baked. From September to March the soft white shoots can be steamed or boiled.

Triglochin procerum **Water Ribbons** The thick tuberous roots can be pan fried or roasted. (They make great chips!)

SAPS AND GUMS

Acacia mearnsii **Black Wattle** The Aborigines would wound the trunk in autumn to ensure a good flow of gum, then the balls of gum were kept and carried about. It was eaten or dissolved in water with flower nectar to make sweet drinks.

Eucalyptus gunnii **Cider Gum** The tree can be wounded (just your own in cultivation of course) and the sap collected in a receptacle (covered to prevent animals from nicking it), and then used to make a syrup, (very like maple syrup) or as in Aboriginal times, to make an intoxicating beverage!

These references have been used in the collation of this information as well as personal experience.

Australian Bushfoods Magazine
(we stock this publication - \$4.95)

Wild Food in Australia - AB & JW Cribb

Bush Tucker - Tim Low

The Bushfood Handbook - Vic Cherikoff & Jennifer Isaacs

Bush Foods - Jennifer Isaacs

Fingers crossed for some good soaking rain here in south-east Tasmania (preferably at night). Our 1999 catalogue is available (out since April) - send four 45c stamps if you'd like one posted.

We trust you will all have a safe and happy transition from '99 to '00 and that the
millennium bug
won't
bite.

Best regards for the season,
Will, Kris, Lindy and Lydia.