

N E W S L E T T E R

PLANTS OF TASMANIA NURSERY AND GARDENS

65 HALL ST RIDGEWAY 7054 OPEN 7 DAYS A WEEK

(Closed Christmas day, Boxing day and Targa afternoon)

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

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newsletter no 8 spring 2001

Welcome to spring 2001! A time to anticipate. The calling of birds. Longer days. Warmer days. Windy days. Lots of flowers. Scents in the air. Daylight saving - yes!

Peak flowering season is nigh upon us. October and November is very florific in our gardens. Our gardens are maturing nicely and we have planted up some open areas this winter and topdressed with mulch. As the spring flowers are starting it's really looking quite nice. The early spring flowerers are doing it now. Just yesterday (Sept 21), as the sun was about to set over the flanks of Mt. Wellington, we gazed, delighted at the backlit ribbons of **bright red flowers**, adorned along the branches of my favourite Tassy Sheoak, *Allocasuarina crassa*. The flamboyance and wild abandon of its growth, and the spring delight of flowers running along the branches on the female tree are truly wondrous.

In spring, **everything happens at once** in the nursery. After the semi-hibernation of winter, suddenly all and sundry demand our attention - thousands of cuttings that Lindy has struck over the winter need potting on, masses of seed needs to be sown, then almost **immediately it germinates** and needs to be potted on. There's never enough room in the shade house, we scratch our heads, what do we move out into the uncertainty of wild winds and the occasional day of intense sun? Weeds grow prolifically, suddenly plants we have hardly watered for four months, need watering with a **frightening regularity**. How on earth can they possibly dry out so fast? It's busy, but it's good.

And this year, **just so we don't get bored**, we'll be part of the **Australian Plants Society's wildflower spectacular**, the biennial (approximately) showcase of Australian and Tasmanian flora. This year the theme is **Spirit of Gondwana**, and promises to be a **fascinating display of plants**, relating to their evolution over the millennia from the huge southern land mass that split into Australia, New Guinea, New Zealand and South America. There will be some interesting **scientific displays**, great plant and flower displays, **oodles of plants for sale** from the Australian Plant Society's nursery and others, a botanical art show, a cafe, a kids play area and much, much more. Entry fee - **free!**

So whack these dates in your diary or on your calendar now. **Hobart City Hall, November 2nd, 3rd and 4th.** That's a Friday, Saturday, 10am - 6pm, and Sunday, 10am - 4pm. It's been three years since the last show, so if you miss this one - it might be a while!

Back to the present. We have some fine plants in stock this spring, many massed in flower in their pots. As I write, the Blue Love Creeper, *Comesperma volubile*, is putting on a great display - it is a superb plant, virtually invisible for most of the year, then erupting into a riot of intense blue in September.

Since this time last year we have expanded our sales area and are now displaying an increased selection of plants in advanced sizes - many would make handsome tub specimens, or for a more instant result in the garden. In quite a few lines we can now supply plants in three or four sizes.

The deck we built last year, which overlooks the lower garden, has settled nicely into the landscape, and provides a relaxing view down to the pond, where often our semi-nomadic wild ducks couple, can be seen, swimming lazily or basking on the verge.

SOME PLANTS TO LOOK OUT FOR THIS SPRING AND SUMMER

Button Grass *Gymnoschoenus sphaerocephalus* It's a fabulous pot plant, and very hardy in a moist or wet spot in the garden too. (It's also got a fabulous botanical name!) Even though it's tiresome to walk through in the south west, it is a signature plant of the wilds of Tassy, and I never tire of sitting down for lunch, during a bushwalk, to gaze at the view through its graceful and gently arching flower stems. We have button grass for sale this year in at least three sizes, and although it's a bit slow to get started, it soon develops into a fine specimen, and is very reliable. The thick tuft of arching grass-like foliage to 40cm, gives rise to slender, gently curving stems in October, to about 1m, topped with creamy coloured spherical flower heads, which then mature to leave the round 'buttons'.

Leatherwood *Eucryphia lucida* Another signature Tasmanian plant, more well known for its honey, but as well, it too is a beautiful and hardy garden or pot plant. The flowers are exquisite, four petalled in pure white or pale pink forms, and about the size of a 20 cent piece. Flowering commences in late December or early January (beautifully scented), is usually prolific for a month, then sporadic through into autumn. Leatherwood can be left to grow to about 5m in a cool moist site, but trims easily, and can be pruned to any height.

We have in stock, the white flowered form, two pink forms and a less well known form with variegated foliage. As well, we have most of these forms in a range of three or four sizes - if you can't find the larger sizes, please ask, and we can point you in the right direction.

Pandani *Richea pandanifolia* The queen of the Richeas and an absolutely outstanding and truly Tasmanian botanical icon, appearing as a featured plant in many wilderness photos, where it may be emergent from the snow, nestled in the cool forest or set against a stream or sparkling tarn. (Featured also as our nursery motif). It is such a pleasure to be able to grow the pandani, and to find how well it adapts to pot culture. Very slow from seed, it takes twice or three times as long to grow into a saleable size, but from that age on, can grow surprisingly quickly. Its handsome, graceful arching foliage is so very strong and sculptural, it is superb either on its own, or amongst other foliage. We have pandanis in stock in three or four different sizes, and they're all beautiful!

Leggy Black-eyed Susan *Tetralochea labillardierei* The white flowered form. Located in the wild, by one of our customers, this form has proved to be reliably spectacular in flower, every spring. (Note: All the *Tetralocheas* are known as Black-eyed Susan, so to differentiate between them, we've added a name or two, in this case, leggy, as often in the wild, *Tetralochea labillardierei* is of that nature. However, to date, the white flowered form seems remarkably compact! Beats me!) The white flowers are just opening now, in late September, and the plants, either in 3" tubes or the next size pot, will soon be awash in white. Growing to about 60cm, *Tetralochea labillardierei* prefers a light or sandy soil, and is also beautiful in a pot.

And now for something completely different. Horticultural joke of the week.

Q. What sort of man adds bits of old car bodies to his compost?

A. A man without a sense of humor.

And now for something completely coniferous

TASMANIAN CONIFERS

I thought I would muse on the Tassy conifers, this newsletter, for indeed they are quite special, and mostly unique to this island.

Tasmanian conifers range in size from prostrate alpine groundcovers, to majestic forest giants - including stands of trees that are truly awe inspiring. Just thinking now, of the beautiful stand of Pencil Pines at Dickson's Kingdom in the Walls of Jerusalem National Park, I just want to be there again, to soak up their majesty and their antiquity and their presence.

Or to walk up to the north east ridge of Mount Anne in the south west, deep in dappled shade of myrtle forest, and suddenly notice the forest floor covered in conifer leaves, knowing that the solid, deep reddish brown trunk beside you, extends straight and true, up through the canopy where hundreds of pyramidal King Billy Pine tops emerge, well above the rest of the forest. I'd like to be there too.

Of the eleven species of conifer found in Tasmania, eight are endemic, found only on this island, and one, the South Esk Pine is a sub-species of the mainland *Callitris oblonga*.

Of these eleven species, nine are found in wet and mountain habitats, with the two *Callitris* species, the South Esk Pine and the Oyster Bay Pine occurring on the drier east coast.

Under the international system of plant classification, the more advanced vascular plants bear seeds and are divided into **angiosperms**, whose seeds are protected within an ovary (excluding conifers, this includes just about all the worlds trees, shrubs, and grassy things etc) and **gymnosperms** (the conifers) whose seeds are borne naked on a cone scale.

The gymnosperms are divided into families, then into genus, then into species. The Tasmanian conifers fall into two families, **Cupressaceae** and **Podocarpaceae**.

FAMILY CUPRESSACEAE

The conifers in this family are divided into about 30 genera, with approximately 40 species in the southern hemisphere and 110 in the northern hemisphere. So you can see that even though most of the Tasmanian conifers are endemic to this island, they have relatives all round the world. The Tasmanian genera and species in this family are:

Athrotaxis cupressoides	Tasmanian Pencil Pine	Endemic
Athrotaxis x laxifolia	Intermediate Pine	Endemic
Athrotaxis selaginoides	King Billy Pine	Endemic
Callitris oblonga		
subspecies oblonga	South Esk Pine	Endemic
Callitris rhomboidea	Oyster Bay Pine	also S.A., Vic and N.S.W.
Diselma archeri	Cheshunt Pine	Endemic

FAMILY PODOCARPACEAE

Of 7 genera in this family, there are about 100 species, mainly well in the southern hemisphere, but also in Japan, China and Mexico. They get about, these conifers. In Tasmania we have:

Lagarostrobos franklinii	Huon Pine	Endemic
Microcachrys tetragona	Creeping Strawberry Pine	Endemic
Microstrobos niphophilus	Mount Mawson Pine	Endemic
Phyllocladus aspleniifolius	Celery Top Pine	Endemic
Podocarpus lawrencei	Mountain Plum Pine	also Vic.

As you can see, there's some well known conifers amongst them. Huon Pine, Celery Top Pine and King Billy Pine are all well known for their timber, although less well known as trees in their natural habitat, or as garden specimens. We will now look more closely at these distinctive Tasmanian plants.

***Athrotaxis cupressoides* Tasmanian Pencil Pine**

A characteristic and striking conifer, of western mountain regions and the central plateau, often on the verge of lakes and tarns, where it provides a distinctive vertical accent in deep green. Often in exposed sites, with history written into its countenance - bent and gnarled, but still strong, constantly battered by biting winds and heavy snow, stoically surviving, even thriving, and doing so for centuries. Countless thousands of Pencil Pines standing today, were here long before this island saw white people, some may well be thousands of years old. They can grow up to 15m high, with a conical habit and a tapering trunk. It is an amazing experience to be amongst a stand of mature Pencil Pines. For many, they seem un-Australian, more northern hemisphere. They are indeed unique. They are very special. In the nursery we propagate Pencil Pine from seed or cuttings. They are a bit slow to get started, but form nice compact little trees after three or four years. From this age they can grow at up to 30cm a year, either in a pot or in a cool, moist site in the garden, where you could expect about 2m height after 8 or 10 years. However in less ideal conditions they will be a lot slower. They make fabulous pot plants, and have bonsai potential.

***Athrotaxis x laxifolia* Intermediate Pine**

This tree is considered to be a naturally occurring cross between the Pencil Pine and the King Billy, and thus we have called it the Intermediate Pine. Whereas the Pencil Pine has a tight compact dark green foliage, and King Billy a larger open leaf structure, the Intermediate Pine has a leaf size and openness about halfway between the two, and a light green colouring. It is faster growing than the Pencil Pine, easily capable of 50 or 60cm per year. In the mountains it grows up to 18m. We have a splendid specimen in the garden, down near the pond, now about 5m high and thriving. It is in a position where it takes considerable summer sun, but certainly has a cool moist root zone. I suspect it to be hardier than either of its two parents as a garden plant. Propagated from seed or cuttings it makes a fine pot plant and a very nice bonsai.

***Athrotaxis selaginoides* King Billy Pine**

On the wet forest slopes of the central, western and southern mountains, the King Billy Pine can grow up to 40m. Often it occurs in myrtle forest. On more exposed and higher altitudes it can be gnarled and twisted. In every situation it is a beautiful tree. It has been used for window frames and boat building. I have heard stories of trees of enormous girth, cut down in the past for timber. (I heard another unsubstantiated story of a King Billy cut down in the last 12 months and trucked to the woodchip mill in the dead of night, so big, that it took two trucks to take the one trunk! I do hope not, but then again I wouldn't be overly surprised.) King Billy is a beautiful plant in a pot. Very upright and statuesque. In the garden it requires a cool, moist site. In a suitable situation it can grow up to 50cm per annum. I would expect 10-15m maximum height in most suitable gardens, and that would take 25 years or more.

***Callitris oblonga* (subsp. *oblonga*) South Esk Pine**

There are about 20 species of *Callitris* in Australia and New Caladonia. At least one, is an important timber tree, the White Cypress Pine, with considerable stands in central western N.S.W., which yields a timber resistant to white ant attack. Our South Esk Pine is a bit small for a timber tree, but is a great size for the garden. It is a slow to steady grower, and compact, with a decidedly formal countenance, tapering from the lower trunk, out in a curve to its greatest width, thence tapering back to the tip. The blue green foliage is a nice contrast against other lighter and greener foliage. We grow *Callitris oblonga* from seed. It makes quite a handsome pot plant, and is very hardy in the garden withstanding quite dry conditions. Expect a height of 3-4m in 10-15 years. It is not common in the wild, with populations in the east, on the banks of the St. Pauls and Apsley rivers and on the South Esk River near Avoca and Launceston.

***Callitris rhomboidea* Oyster Bay Pine**

This *Callitris* is quite widespread, being locally abundant on the east coast from Fortescue Bay to Elephant Pass, Cape Barren Is (and Flinders Is ?) and in S.A., Vic. and N.S.W. The common names vary, and this is a good example of the value of botanical names. We have Oyster Bay Pine in Tasmania, Cape Barren Pine on Flinders Island and Port Jackson Pine in N.S.W.!

In the wild, the Oyster Bay Pine usually grows as a fairly open, slender pine, the foliage being a light bright green. It has an aromatic timber (also the roots - very evident when potting on in the nursery) and often grows to about 7m - occasionally up to 14m in an ideal situation. In cultivation it tends to be bushy with cascading branchlets, growing to about 5m in 10 years. It is easily pruned, as is the South Esk Pine. It is very hardy, and is especially suited to a dry situation.

***Diselma archeri* Cheshunt Pine**

The Cheshunt Pine (note, that's Cheshunt not chestnut - The common name refers to the name of the property in northern Tasmania from whence the named specimen came. I guess it's a bit historical, but a bit silly nonetheless) grows on Tasmania's wild wet mountains and is quite widespread. It is however, endemic to the island. It is very slow growing. Expect 1m high and wide in 10 or 20 years. In its natural habitat it usually grows to about 1.5m high, but often with a greater spread. I have seen one venerable specimen of great antiquity on a west coast mountain, that had the proportions of a small tree, being 6m high and having a considerable trunk - it must have been extremely old.

The grey-green foliage with its weeping tips is most attractive, and it makes a hardy pot or garden plant, also being very suited to bonsai.

***Lagarostrobos franklinii* Huon Pine**

The oldest living single Huon Pine as yet identified, has been dated at 2,500 years old. To put this in white historical perspective, this tree would have been 500 years old, by the birth of Christ. In black historical perspective, it's only a young thing. 30,000 years of living in Tasmania is pretty impressive. White living in Tasmania is only 200 years.

There may be older trees out there still, and there undoubtedly would have been older trees cut down in the past. They occur only in Tasmania.

Young Huon Pines give no indication of their commercial timber potential, probably because the first few years in a life of 500, is only a drop in the ocean. Young trees are very floppy. We often stake them up in the nursery - it helps people believe they may be more than just a shrub! However in their first 10 or 20 years, they are indeed a beautiful shrub with their bright, light green, cascading foliage. They are very hardy in a pot (including bonsai) or in the right spot in the garden - cool and moist. They will happily put on 20cm growth in the year, but as it's arching, it doesn't equate to the same in height. We grow Huon Pine from cuttings. It can also be grown from seed.

***Microcachrys tetragona* Creeping Strawberry Pine**

A slow growing prostrate plant, endemic to Tasmania, and frequent in subalpine habitats in the central, west and south west. *Microcachrys* appears to have square stems because of the way the tiny leaves overlap. A long lived pot plant, mature specimens look very handsome cascading over the side of a pot. Female plants develop tiny red 'raspberry' like edible fruits in the summer. A hardy and reliable ground cover for a cool, moist spot in the garden. Propagates from cuttings.

***Microstrobos niphophilus* Mt. Mawson Pine**

Another endemic conifer, locally abundant in sub-alpine areas, especially near lakes, tarns and water courses. The Mt. Mawson Pine has fine foliage, and like the Creeping Strawberry Pine, is dioecious (male and female flowers on different plants). It is slow growing, up to 1m or more (occasionally to 2.5m). Having not had this species in stock for long, I haven't planted one in the garden as yet, but all indications would point to a hardy, slow growing plant in a moist, cool situation. It's certainly very happy in a pot. We grow the Mt. Mawson Pine from cuttings.

***Phyllocladus aspleniifolius* Celery Top Pine**

What a beautiful tree we have here! Not only does it produce an excellent timber, but such a handsome tree as well, and most becoming in a pot. The flattened stems, the 'leaves', are thick and leathery and a similar shape to celery leaves. On a female tree, the small seed bearing scales become pink and fleshy, surrounded by a white perimeter, and when in full display can look quite decorative.

In its natural surroundings the Celery Top Pine grows in a neat pyramidal shape, and even though it is endemic to Tasmania, it grows over a wide area, in wet sclerophyll and rainforest, from sea level to 900m altitude. In sheltered fertile sites it can obtain heights of 20m. It can be monoecious (both sexes on the one tree) or dioecious (an individual tree entirely male, or entirely female).

We propagate *Phyllocladus* from cuttings. As with many of the pines, they are slow to strike and grow in their formative years. However they do make a lovely pot plant. (We have a fine potted example in a shady corner of the courtyard at home, which is ceremonially positioned in the living room at the end of each December, draped with shiny stuff for a couple of weeks, then put out again! It's about 7 feet high, and has been happy in its pot for many years now).

In the garden, the Celery Top prefers a moist, cool site. A well planted specimen is a joy to behold.

***Podocarpus lawrencei* Mountain Plum Pine**

And last, but not least, the Mountain Plum Pine, a coniferous shrub of the high country in Tasmania (and Victoria), where it is widespread on mountains on stabilised talus (rock scree). Growing from 1 to 3m, or some forms which are prostrate, it may have green or bluish foliage. The small fruits, from which the common name arises, are bright red, about 5mm long, and have a green seed attached to the end. They can be quite decorative.

The Mountain Plum Pine grows from cuttings, and is very hardy in a pot. We have a fine looking, cascading example at the nursery, potted up for 8-9 years now. It is also a reliable garden plant, as long as it's planted in a coolish site, and can be allocated some extra moisture in drier times.

So that's it for the Tassy conifers. What a fabulous bunch. Something for every garden, and just great when you see them in the wild!

Ideas for Christmas

I know it's a bit early to even mention Christmas, but I only get to do two newsletters a year, so this is the one. Potted plants make a lovely present. Several small plants, multi-planted in a decorative pot can make a distinctive and different gift. We will gladly pot up your selection into the terra-cotta pot of your choice. This is a free service. (note: we do charge for the extra potting mix used).

However it is definitely less advisable to give people plants, if they are not "gardening types". Nearly all Tasmanian plants need to live outdoors, and like most other plants in pots, need regular watering. Bonsais are a beautiful gift, but need even more diligence.

We will have a nice range of Christmas trees available this year. Many of the conifers make beautifully shaped trees, and can be kept happily and healthfully potted for 5-10 years (more if you do a spot of root pruning, every now and then - as for bonsai).

We also stock gift vouchers. A gift voucher, combined with our catalogue, allows your friend or relative, the opportunity to select their own plants (or pots) and might introduce them to the variety and delights of the Tasmanian flora.

I trust your spring and summer will be most exceedingly fulfilling, with adequate rest and recreation, quality time spent in the garden and in Tasmania's wild places, and maximum enjoyment of our long and balmy summer evenings.

Horticulturally yours - Will Fletcher and staff - Lindy, Lydia, Paulette, Keryn and Dave.