

ASSOCIATION OF SOCIETIES FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS

GARDEN DESIGN STUDY GROUP

NEWSLETTER No. 24

February 1999

Study Group Leader/Editor: Diana SnapeTreasurer/Membership: Peter Garnham

Dear Members,

I hope those of you who are in particularly vulnerable areas are not experiencing extreme summer conditions. It's a testing time when temperatures soar and water is limited.

Last spring I was busy with the usual garden activities & delights, and the opening of our garden - challenging but I think very worthwhile. Since the last Newsletter I have spent time visiting and selecting gardens for the Open Gardens Scheme, a rewarding but also frustrating task when I occasionally had to visit gardens with a high proportion of non-Australian plants. It's the Australian plant gardens I like to see!

The most recent '*Australian Plants* (Sept 98) concentrates on Tasmanian plants - excellent timing for the Snapes who are heading south for a holiday in Tasmania later in February. Articles include one by GDSG member **Jennie Lawrence** on 'Ferns in a Garden', and another on 'Pines' (Conifers) of Tasmania by Alan Gray. GDSG members have written articles on their experiences with conifers for three of our recent Newsletters, NL22-15 (**Rosemary Verbeeten**), NL21-14 (**Geoff Simmons**) and NL20-10 (**Barbara Buchanan**). Two Tasmanian gardens are described in this issue of '*Australian Plants*' - those of Marion Simmons and Jeanette Closs - both illustrated with photographs. I'm hoping to be able to see Marion and Jeanette's gardens during our visit to Tasmania, in addition to Jennie's garden and those of other Tasmanian GDSG members. Since first reading about it (and seeing photographs) I have wanted to visit Lindsay Campbell's garden, The Sorn. Lindsay wrote a wonderful article about the design philosophy behind his well-established garden (see NL18-6). I'm looking forward greatly to our Tasmanian visit - natural gardens as well as created ones - and plan to report on it in the next Newsletter.

NEXT MEETINGS

Please see details of these meetings in text (pages 17-18)

MELBOURNE: Sunday February 7 at Doug & Margaret McIver's

NE VIC: Sunday March 14 at Jennifer Davidson's

SYDNEY: contact Jo Hambrett to check

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CORRESPONDENCE extracts

Letter from overseas

Alison Payne

"How are you? I'm settled in Basel, Switzerland and enjoying my first White Winter (and hopefully Christmas). The garden hobby is a little on hold since we are living in a 1 bedroom apartment in the city. It's really quiet, and there is a lot of green around, but I think the neighbours would be grumpy if I jumped off my balcony and started digging in their gardens.

I have been watching quite a lot of BBC TV since they have these great landscaping programs, particularly "Home Front in the Garden". They take over someone's old, uncared-for garden and make it look beautiful! They have about 2 weeks and a budget (5-10,000 pounds). Lots of colour in paints on fences, and lots of talking about focus points and features and garden rooms etc. Yesterday evening, they even did a largish (I guess for Britain it was huge) garden. They've done some neat water features. I've always associated a water feature with an open pond, but they have done two interesting ones so far. One had a pond well, but it was completely filled with rocks. It had a pump pushing the water up through the rocks to a watering can, through the watering can into a pot full of rocks and then running back over the rocks and back into the well where all the rocks are.

The second was a wall of glass bricks. It looked awful for quite a while, but it ended up looking very pretty with water running down it, low plantings in the front, and larger plantings behind - which you could see through the glass wall. Hope I'm describing them OK - they did look nice on the tele! Unfortunately, I

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can't find a web site for the program and I don't have a video recorder.

So, I'm a bit lost in Europe as far as gardens to visit, etc go. We are here until next October, so we have all of next Spring, Summer and Autumn to get around. We can cover lower Germany and Eastern France fairly easily, even perhaps parts of it with day trips. And we'll certainly have a trip to England/Ireland/Scotland, etc at some time also. Do you have any recommendations for places to go? Or even events to do with landscaping in Europe? We need a reason to get ourselves out of Switzerland (we're finding it so beautiful here - we're having trouble with motivation to visit any of the rest of Europe. A gardening weekend could just be enough for the motivation.)

Hope the 40 degree days aren't being mean to your garden!" Regards, Alison.

It's great to hear from Alison. Do any members have suggestions for gardens or landscaping events for her to see in those countries she mentioned? If so please let me know in time for the next Newsletter. DS

What is a small tree?

Geoff Simmons Qld

" Regarding small eucalypts, I would like to know when GDSG decided that a small tree is limited to no more than 6 metres. As a member I would advocate that we aim for 4m as maximum and 3m preferred. In a suburban situation most householders could be excused for wanting a tree to conform with house height and decrease the possibility of leaves in gutters and still provide shade. They may also like to see the tops rather than trunks.

Shouldn't we be concentrating on seeking out trees no more than 4 metres high, if the desire is to introduce Australian plants into gardens? There is need to guard against ideas of persons designing for large gardens, parks, botanic gardens or institutional environments of large buildings. One nurseryman has told me that people were not interested in trees of the height suggested - this nursery sold mainly to owners of suburban allotments,

Lastly, from what I have seen, most topiary trained plants rarely reach 6 metres - nearer 3 metres - for the good and logical reason that owners like to see the full picture, not just the trunk, in a design where space is limited and beyond the fence is another land."

In GDSG Newsletters, tree size was I think first considered in NL8-10, where we suggested the common definition of the size of a 'small' tree (less than 15 m!) should be *reduced* to less than 6m. This was based on discussions in the Melbourne group but of course is completely open to discussion and suggestions such as Geoff's. In the article in NL 20-8, most of the ornamental small eucalypts Dean Nicolle describes are less than 4m, with a couple 5m or 6m. Many gardeners expecting conventional "trees" would consider a number of these eucalypts shrub-like rather than tree-like. We welcome members' comments on this topic. DS

"I have just been elected Vice-President of SGAP Canberra Region and next year I'm commencing a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture at the Uni. of Canberra (assuming my application is accepted). However I am planning to continue writing for the GDSG Newsletter as often as I can, so I'm cutting back on my other commitments! Meanwhile I'm doing all kinds of interesting things in my garden. When the weather gets altogether too hot to be outside, I'll write something about my garden." **Shirley Pipitone** A.C.T.

It sounds like a busy year ahead, Shirley. We'll look forward to hearing about your garden ideas. DS

"John and I have just returned from a great five days at Mount Buffalo - the flowers were great and the rocks magnificent (the best designed 'garden' we have seen for a long time!)." **Pat Webb** Vic

'Natural gardens' in alpine areas are very special and can be inspirational for our own efforts. DS

In NL 2-2 there was a description of a method of classification of garden styles. These categories and associated sub-categories were:

1. Naturalistic Gardens
 - 1.2 Indigenous Garden
 - 1.3 Natural Plant Community Garden
 - 1.4 Ethos Garden
5. Formal Gardens
 - 2.6 Classically Formal
 - 2.7 Formalistic
8. Theme Gardens

3.9 Collectors Garden	3.10 Colour Garden
3.11 Productive Garden	3.12 Functional Garden
3.13 Perfume Garden	3.14 Wildflower Garden
3.15 Water Garden	3.16 Period Garden
3.17 Cultural Garden	3.18 Portable Garden
3.19 Sculpture Garden	3.20 Idiosyncratic Garden
21. Eclectic Gardens
 - 4.22 Integrated Eclectic
 - 4.23 Segregated Eclectic

As one who has no formal training in landscape design (although I do have a keen interest in this area), I have had great difficulty interpreting the words that describe the above categories when trying to decide what style my home garden is. While I acknowledge that a lot of effort and thought went into the original classification method the problem is getting all members (or most of them) to consistently interpret the words the same way.

Judging by the small amount of discussion that has been in our Newsletters regarding the original classification methods and its application to gardens, I would suspect that many members are also having trouble with it.

Perhaps another way is to start with three simple classifications of styles and then develop and expand them from discussions that result from members applying them to their gardens or commercial projects.

My three basic proposed styles are as a result of looking at many gardens over the last year. They are:

1. Natural - applies to gardens that back on to natural bushland and they have replicated the natural character and natural plant communities.
2. Garden of purely native plants. This includes all types from formal to 'bush' style. This will need sub-categories to define degrees of formality.
3. Gardens where Australian plants have been integrated into a garden that originally contained all exotic plants.

I would imagine that if Australian plants are to become the first choice by all gardeners then the third method is where we must concentrate - however that is outside this article.

What are members' comments - am I the only one having trouble using the original classification method and is my proposed method any good?

Thank you for your ideas on this tricky topic, Jeff. A lot of effort and thought did go into the original classification of styles but, with all the possible sub-categories and crossovers between categories, I agree members may well have difficulty in interpreting the words. Your three simple classifications of style could be a good place to start, followed then by expansion. What do members think?

NL2-2 included further explanation of the terms to help make them clearer, as Jeff's would need, eg does 'native' mean indigenous /local to that particular area, or Australian plants generally? Most gardens would certainly come under Jeff's category 3 (or the original eclectic or mixed gardens), but at that stage we were concentrating on gardens of predominantly Australian plants.

It's interesting to compare categories devised by others (see pages 13 & 14 of this Newsletter). DS

The comment on the Mission Statement (NL 23-4) seems an objection to the word 'good' and with this I would agree. On the other hand the suggested wording ('the Garden Design Study Group promotes the use of Australian plants through providing garden design theory and examples') is neutral whereas a positive slant is desirable, i.e. design that will appeal more to owners and probably to other persons, especially if it is a public garden.

I think that without some imagination or innovation, minimal or great, a garden is a wasteful endeavour so encouragement to think about design is a worthy aim.

DESIGN

Principles of garden design

Gordon Rowland NSW

Part of one of Gordon's articles from his series for the 'Inner Western Suburbs Courier'.

Garden design is about balance, colour, form, harmony, pattern, scale, space division, style, texture, time, unity. It is also about working within the constraints imposed by the site and sometimes by the budget. The most important principle of design is unity because it embraces all the others. In an essay written almost a century ago, the English garden designer Gertrude Jekyll hints at the loss of this quality resulting from just one plant out of place:

"It is not possible to use to any good effect all the plants that are to be had. In my own case, I should wish to grow many more than just those that I have, but if I do not find a place where my critical garden conscience approves. . . . I would rather be without it.

It is better to me to deny myself the pleasure of having it than to . . . (place) it where it neither does itself justice nor accords with its neighbours, and where it reproaches me every time I pass it."

Unity also depends on the choice, design, pattern, finish and repetition of hard materials such as stone, brick and timber. It is enhanced when materials and finishes are in harmony with one another and with the exteriors of adjacent buildings and surrounding vegetation.

I like to aim for style and simplicity, emphasising form before colour. Growing many different species with only one or two specimens of each will make any garden look fussy and contrived. You will achieve a sense of unity more easily by repeating a limited number of visually compatible species at each level, adding a few accents of specimen plants, selected and placed with care. When using plants in repetition, planting them in drifts and at varying distances from one another gives a pleasing and natural appearance. Position your plants equidistant and in straight rows of course, if you prefer a formal garden.

Tidy or untidy?

Diana Snape Vic

Many people see a 'bush garden' as untidy and therefore unattractive, just as they see 'the bush' as untidy. We know the value of dead trees and fallen timber in woodlands, so I'm not concentrating here on large gardens which have the space to accommodate these. Danie Ondinea has pointed out the importance of habitat for wildlife in our urban or suburban gardens (NL16-7) as much as in the country. However, many of us (and even more of the general public) like a certain degree of tidiness in our gardens, so I'm interested in how a smaller garden can be created which satisfies both desires simultaneously - to be tidy and yet untidy enough to provide habitat and shelter!

Obviously it helps to include a variety of plants, many recognized as providing different types of food for birds, and also prickly shrubs to shelter small birds. Depending on the size of the garden, trees are a

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valuable addition to the range of plants. In any garden, groundflora including grasses, sedges, rushes, lilies and iris extend the scope. Each year, over a few days, we see large numbers of skinks in a *Stypandra glauca* (Nodding Blue Lily) and I don't know what the link is there. In spring we delight in watching Australian bees and butterflies in plants such as our daisies and pimeleas. To a considerable extent these plants can be arranged in a neat or even formal way (though most of us might prefer a naturalistic picture).

However as well as the plants, there's a need for a range of nooks and crannies. As just one example, picture paths outlined on one or both sides by low stone walls. A wall on one side may adjust for a change in level on a sloping block or where soil levels have been manipulated. Walls on both sides again indicate level changes which will provide better drainage for the garden. Depending on how regular and even it is, a stone wall is likely to be 'tidy' and a strong structural line in the garden. If straight or in a very regular curve, it is formal.

The wall can be softened (and 'untidied') considerably without its structure disappearing altogether. Its height can vary along its length and it can grade down at either end. The wall can have gaps in it, providing homes for skinks, insects, etc. Plants such as grasses and groundcover plants spilling over the top of the wall may introduce 'untidiness'. If the wall is set back from the path, there can be tufted plants or low shrubs at its base. If the wall does disappear completely and is lost as a structural element, the garden may then rely on the definition of the path still provided by the wall for its 'tidiness' (or 'formality').

Tall dense shrubs; thick bark on a tree trunk or on the ground after shedding; pots (as well as plants) beside a pond for frogs; rocks used 'in ground' or in walls; the variety of plants mentioned before - I think all these elements can be used to create a garden which is both 'tidy' and 'untidy'. I liked a quote from *'Japanese Garden Design'* (1996) by Marc Keane, referring to: *'striking a harmonic balance between wildness and control of that wildness'*.

Planning for appearance or collection

Geoff Simmons Qld

Whether private native plant gardens will ever receive general acclaim as beautiful gardens compared with those making use of the world-wide supply of thousands of exotic species and cultivars is a moot point.

Several years ago, a visit to a private garden of an Australian plant enthusiast revealed a number of beds containing a good selection of Australian plants without any apparent design or arrangement to form a display. Such a no-design garden would not suit persons who like to see a pretty garden irrespective how neat and tidy. In this type of garden only individual plants in flower would be attractive.

At the other extreme are gardeners who plan garden paths and beds with meticulous detail including the names of plants to go into each spot. Colour and foliage combinations are prime considerations to produce a desired scene.

In between there are a large group of gardeners who employ some design element but may retain the desire to have some expression of plant selection for particular types of plants. The result is that these gardens contain collections such as grevilleas, bottlebrushes or grasses. For these gardeners an attractive outcome is muted by the desire to exhibit special groups. This type of garden means greater difficulty in design.

As exotic species may be absent or in minimal numbers in all three categories, this limiting factor necessitates a much greater skill and knowledge of design than is the case when exotics are used, as then the gardener can draw upon countless examples of gardens seen either locally or overseas or portrayed in books. Gardeners using Australian plants to express their thoughts and feelings as Australians may not strive for a prize winning garden but, whatever the outcome, the aims are admirable and lift the designer to a special level of expertise.

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Horizontal divisions in a garden

Diana Snape Vic

Geoff Simmons' article on width of paths in NL23-16 introduced ideas which had not occurred to me before. I like the idea of narrow paths as 'wallaby paths', similar to those we often follow when wandering in the 'bush', and not just because that's how many of my paths develop anyway. I'm going to start using the term. 'Bulges' in those 'wallaby paths', possibly marking intersections of paths or points of special interest, could then be places to pause (or rest).

In an area of low growing groundcovers (daisies, scaevolias, pimeleas, lomandras, etc), relatively large for our small garden, access is necessary for weeding and there's insufficient directly from the adjacent brick pathways. Useful 'wallaby paths' provide a solution. They gently both divide and outline or frame sections of the garden, so the shapes of these sections and their layout and patterning can ideally be designed, like a mosaic.

The recent November Newsletter of the SGAP Journal, S. A. Region, includes Part 2 of an article on 'Native Grasslands - growing a natural garden' by Ann Prescott & Millie Nicholls. After listing many different grasses and relatives, they make two other comments in particular which are worth noting.

- *"Grasslands will have 40 - 80 or more different species in total. They have as many types of wildflowers and other flowering plants such as peas, lilies and daisies as they have grasses.*
- *They should have lots of 'bare' ground which actually has a binding crust of lichens, mosses, blue-green algae and liverworts in between the grass clumps. This is where the native reptiles and seed-eating birds live and feed."*

If only we could duplicate in gardens that crust of lichens, moss, etc, to make our 'bare' ground both functional and attractive! I suppose organic mulch is probably our chief substitute, acting in a different way to resist weeds and evaporation of water. However it's interesting to note the statement "they should have lots of 'bare' ground", as many of us have followed gardening advice that instead advocates trying to cover every patch of ground with plants. Once again this bare ground provides divisions which form part of the patterning at ground level.

Wallaby paths between larger shrubs (1 - 2 m) probably need to be somewhat wider for practical purposes and to delineate more definite divisions. I'd expect less access to be needed here with fewer weeds likely to grow beneath larger shrubs. The 'bulges' would be correspondingly larger. With a narrow wallaby path, much continuity of plants across the gap would look natural. The wider the path or open space, the larger the division between garden beds, the less linking of plant material is probably necessary across that division.

The pattern of paths in a garden should be attractive on its own, whether hard or soft edged, formal or 'naturalistic'. Paths contribute to the patterned horizontal structure in the garden at ground level, along with paved areas, low timber decks, etc. (If only we could see it from a hundred metres or so up in the air, as well as from ground level.) Once in place, hard paths will probably last a long time so the divisions they create will be significant and help determine the evolution of the garden. One attraction of extensive mulched areas and also lawn is their structural quality. The proportions of one of these open areas within the space of the garden as a whole can give a different 'feel' to the garden - extensive and spacious, well balanced, or small and intimate.

8 GARDENS

Design outline

Merele Webb Vic

In response to my request, Merele Webb has sent the outline for her proposed landscaping and planting at a residence in Kilsyth South, Melbourne. Merele's plan is shown on the following page (p9). DS

The whole block is 50 - 60 cm (2 ft) above surrounding areas, composed of road rubble, and there will be a tricky manoeuvre involved in collecting water in a "lake" and retaining a "swamp". The owner is pleased with the crossover for the return driveway his wife wanted. The southern boundary has massed planting of eucalypts and callistemons, 1.5 - 2m high already. Large trees - eucalypts and acacias 7m high - on northern side of house screen a neighbour's house and yard.

Requirements

- large pond/dam/lake
- above ground pool
- swamp
- rainforest
- mounds for arid flora
- paving at rear
- access to sheds at rear of block
- shade for upstairs room in midsummer
- retain view of Mt. Dandenong from front upstairs window
- path from patio to garage with sitting area in shade of existing trees
- possible circular driveway if required

Sydney gardens

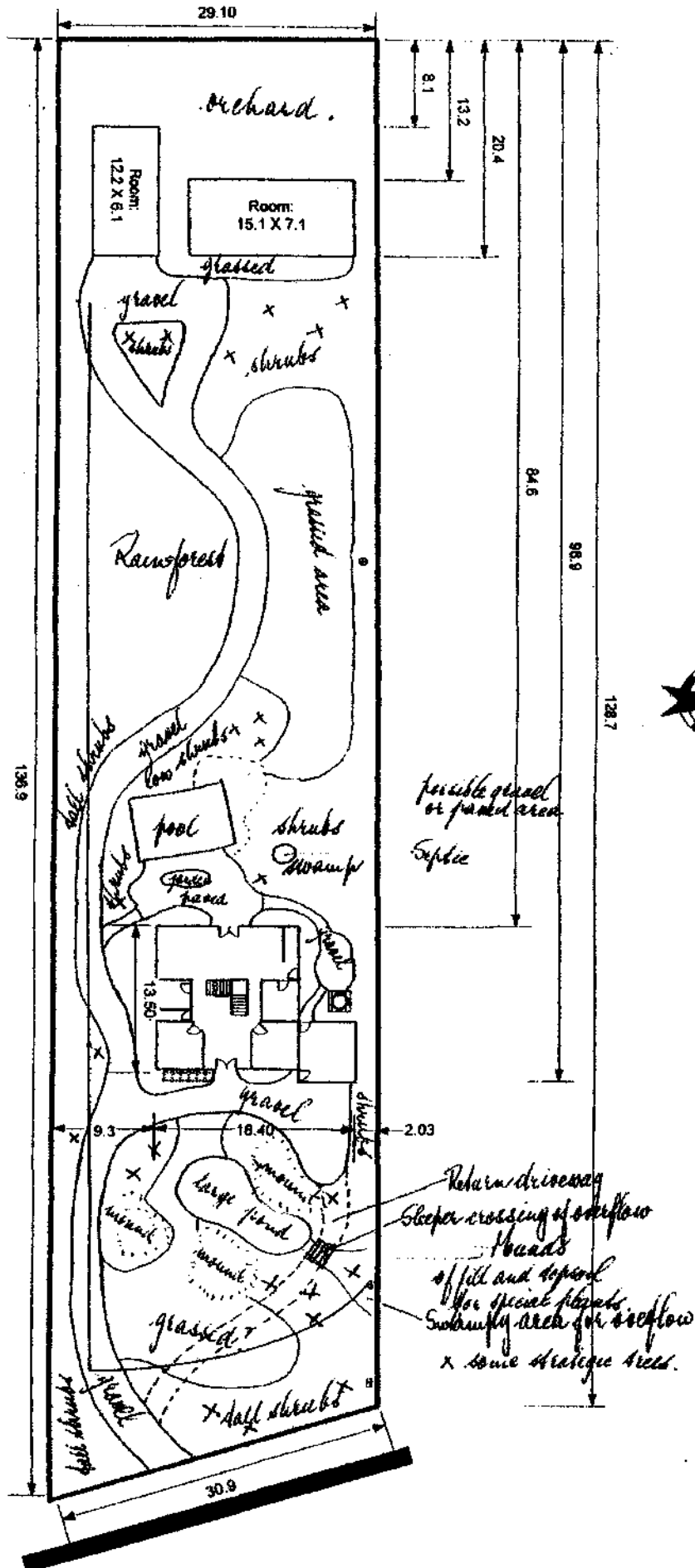
Jo Hambrett NSW

At the last meeting for 1998 we inspected three prize-winning gardens on Sydney upper North Shore; the gardens were judged on factors such as water conservation, habitat provision and the use of Australian/indigenous plants. Betty Maloney, gardening guru and author, was one of the judging panel and the '*Kuringai Observer*' is to be congratulated on running this competition. The Kuringai area is one of great natural beauty (National Parks, rivers, waterways, Hawkesbury sandstone escarpments, etc) and gardening interest is high, though, due to pockets of deep loamy soil and the highest rainfall in Sydney, the mindset is still predominantly English/exotic. It was therefore all the more gratifying to see a large and interested turnout at the three gardens.

The gardens (as well as satisfying the judging criteria) had some things in common:-

- all owned by keen plants people
- approximately the same size (suburban block)
- in the same geographical area
- an interaction with a public place (creek bed, National Park, council reserve)

1. The first garden swathed the side of a very steep hill, the house cutting the block acrossways into a 1/3 (behind), 2/3 (in front) ratio. The back one third was left to its own devices and consisted of dense bracken fern covering the very steep slope. The front two thirds was planted out with all types of Australian and indigenous rainforest species, climbers, groundcovers, shrubs and trees. There seemed to be a real appreciation of their delicate blossoms and myriad of leaf shapes, sizes and textures (continued on page 10)



(continued from p8) by the visitors, which gave me hope that Australians are beginning to change their way of seeing. The gardeners of this house had crossed the road and weeded and planted out with similar species the creek bed that divides the cul de sac.

2. The second garden was on a sloping site, bounded on two sides by National Park (at the back) and Council reserve (at the side). The house and a superb honeycombed rock divided the garden into three distinct areas (I'm sure this rock housed a couple of families in the Dreamtime!). The front area between the street and the house linked to the Council reserve and proclaimed the owners' interest in Australian plants with grasses, sedges, climbers and groundcovers jostling for space amongst the shrubs and tall trees. Behind, between the house and the rock were more plantings (not necessarily indigenous and not obviously 'controlled') to suit the various microclimates occurring in that space, shelters for tender plants, nurseries for the seedlings and frog and taddie residences. Beyond the rock, the last one third was pristine bushland, lovingly left (only weeded) to do its own thing, a perfect entrance to the National Park behind.

3. The third garden on a flat site had evolved over thirty years and had a vacant bush block on one side. The front area was essentially reclaimed lawn and consisted of raised beds of Australian plants, mostly indigenous, bisected by an informal path. This front area had a totally different look and feel to garden no. 1 as it is predominantly dry sclerophyll which complements the adjacent bushland. On one side a small circular sweep of lawn overhung with tall shrubs and trees provided a very pretty picture as well as privacy from neighbours. The lovely SE Qld Plunkett Mallee (*Eucalyptus curtisii*) in both form and flowers did very well in this more formal context.

Grass-like *Carex* species edged the path leading from here to the back (more bush beds - as the vacant block was a buffer again) and to the side where the pool for the humans and pond for the amphibians were cooling, relaxing elements.

We then retired to a nearby park to discuss garden design in the context of these three Australian plant gardens. It was a great opportunity to evaluate the gardens using Diana's article in NL23-5 on 'Design - are there formal elements in your garden?' **Jeff Howes** was able to raise his old 'bete noir' of formality - how much control should one exert over an Australian plant garden? He also emphasized that an in depth knowledge of Australian plants is necessary before one can achieve good garden design (I think for most of us we are learning at the same time as designing). **Michele Pymble** responded to the ambience of the most informal of the three gardens (no. 2) feeling it was that very informality and naturalness that made it so evocative!

An Australian garden in the Tuscany style

reprinted from the SGAP Qld Dec 98 Bulletin

Bonni Reichelt Qld

(Bonni was for a while a member of the GDSG)

In our 1998 Display we attempted to show how native flora can be used in a formal garden style. Our 'Australian garden in the Tuscany style' consisted of a courtyard with an illusory 'gate' in a high wall and two alcoves set on a lower wall of artificial stone blocks. Paths, edged with brickwork, led to the gate and also across the display. An antique fountain was the centrepiece.

Claire Shackel made two spectacular arrangements of banksias, kangaroo paws and everlasting daisies which were set into the alcoves (framed by arches of artificial stone). Two tall *Callitriche columellaris* flanked the gateway. The garden beds on either side of the central path were edged with a low hedge of *Westringia* 'Jervis Gem'. *Viola betonicifolia* and a sedge, *Carex* sp, were used as an inner border. Flowering pots of

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Dampieralinear, *Brachyscome* 'Sunburst' and *Anigozanthos* 'Bush Pearl' made colourful sectors of blue, yellow and bright pink.

Vases of cutflowers also provided colour in the centre of the garden. The outer edges of the courtyard were framed with symmetrical, spiky plants such as *Doryanthes palmeri*, *Cordyline stricta* and *Dianella caerulea*. Three pairs of topiaries made from dried flowers and gumnuts flanked the path and looked beautiful.

We are very grateful to Linda Brennan of Showpiece Gardens for the design of the display and help in setting it up.... *Bonni then went on to list all the people who had helped in many different ways, contributing to the setting up of the display. The Bulletin didn't comment on the response of the public to this formal display as a whole. Did any members see it?*

A garden beside the sea extracts from an article '**Dune commune**' by **Jane Burke** in *The Age*
Extra Gardening (date not recorded - sorry)

'A garden beside the sea' can be much less idyllic than it sounds. In this article Jane Burke describes a garden close to the ocean beach at Sorrento in Victoria, with a south-westerly aspect and exposed to relentless salt-laden winds and hot afternoon sunshine. This garden has made successful use of low-growing local (indigenous) plants and local materials. It also incorporates rocks and modern sculpture.

"Beach combed treasures decorate the gravel surface. Shell grit is used here, with sea-blasted, coloured glass fragments and a lifetime collection of marine flotsam. Seaweed is used as a fertiliser mulch.

Quaint, springy, rounded Cushion Bushes Leucophyta brownii are mixed with leafy shrubs such as Coast Daisy-bush Olearia axillaris. Coast Everlasting Ozothamnus turbinatus. White Correa Correa alba and Seaberry Saltbush Rhagodia candolleana. Various sedges and grasses grow among the shrubs, providing shape, texture and colour variation.

Coastal dune plant communities present an interesting mosaic of generally glabrous (coated with a waxy secretion or hairs; pale grey to pale green leaves) with some glaucous foliage (without surface ornamentation - at least, the upper surface of leaves are shiny and usually darker green). Other characteristics include reduced leaves, succulence and salt glands. Many coastal plants produce edible fruits and berries to aid seed dispersal. These are halophytes (salt tolerant plants), adapted to severe conditions of wind and salt spray, low-nutrient soils, and constant attrition of wind-blown sediments."

The specific requirements of many seaside plants may prevent their growing successfully away from their natural environment, under less suitable and/or more competitive conditions.

"Dune communities rarely form a continuous canopy. Gaps are caused by treefall, sand erosion and deposition. This association includes few understory plants, except for herbs such as Sea Celery Apium prostratum, with ground covers Bower Spinach Tetragonia implexicoma and Coast Twin-leaf Zygophyllum ballardieri. The majority of dune shrubs are adapted to maximum sunshine and good ventilation. Some may not flourish under canopy trees or in a site shaded from the afternoon sun.

Some coastal shrubs do tolerate a broader range of environments. Correa reflexa (green flower coastal form) and Seaberry Saltbush, and tussocks of Knobby Club-rush Isolepis nodosa. Coastal Tussock-grass Poa poiformis and Black-anther Flax-lily Dianella revoluta var. breviculmis are suitable for semi-shaded sites."

Details of indigenous nurseries in different areas are available from Greening Australia.

"Gardening Companion: the principles and practice of the gardener's art"

by Hugh Johnson (Mitchell Beazley 1996)

Barbara Buchanan Vic

Although this is an English book, the subtitle suggests its wider application and I have found it a very impressive source of common-sense with the scientific background of gardening put into accessible language. Not only the last two chapters, which deal with 'Composing the picture' and 'Roots in history', are relevant to garden design though these are the principal ones for this Study Group. Naturally the space devoted to descriptions of plants we are not likely to want to plant are heavier going but there are principles to apply to our circumstances embedded throughout. I began by thinking I could dissect certain areas for this Newsletter but hardly knew how to pick and choose.

One illustration which is completely irrelevant but just intrigued me is a photo of a New England garden rugged up for the winter, the expanse of bare soil broken up by odd misshapen bundles - the evergreens wrapped in hessian! So while I grizzle about our current heatwave I can still be thankful we do not have such long stretches of no garden-time and ugly times. I could have wished for more on dry climate gardening, but at least the need to be waterwise is recognized even if California is the example.

I found my copy in a discount bookshop - if you should also see it, buy it!

"The Self-sustaining Garden" by Peter Thompson (BT Batsford 1997)

Barbara Buchanan Vic

I have not read this book but intend to try and find it. These notes are based on an article in *The Garden* Jan 1999 by the same author.

I have felt uneasy ever since I wrote strongly (NL23-3) about the contradiction in terms I considered *self sustaining* to be when applied to gardening. After all I believe we should be striving towards self sustainability in agriculture, so was I being illogical in rejecting it in the garden?

This article solves my dilemma, at least in theory because once again it is based on English conditions. The thesis is that we should encourage competition between plants to arrive at an equilibrium, like an ecological climax. The communities are established by what is called *matrix* planting as the aim is to build up a matrix of roots, stems, foliage and flowers which provide mutual support and shelter and resist invasion by outsiders - or weeds. Apart from when planting, digging should be out, as well as chemicals and fertilizers except maybe during establishment of plants. After the first few years the natural leaf fall should both mulch and return the nutrients.

However - and this is where I really sat up - it does not follow that less time will be needed in the garden unless one is prepared to let a few dominant species take over, which leads to a dull garden very quickly. Selective thinning, cutting back and replacing losses are needed to maintain a balance but this is much lighter work needing less physical strength than mowing and digging. This is just what I have been aiming for. Moreover the author points out that 'it is easy to assume that this is a method of gardening with native plants....' and it sounds like giving the natural looking garden most of us want. Writing for English gardeners he is at pains to assure them it need not be as disordered as they might assume even if it is different from their concept of a garden. Natural vegetation may appear chaotic to the eye used to clipped box and manicured lawns but in fact there is always order in any established community, plants do not grow haphazardly and without interactions with all their neighbours. The gardener's role in making a garden as distinct from a wilderness is to introduce visual logic and deliberate intention.

The author's garden of an acre contains many different soil types so he is able to use a variety of plants, the only criterion being they must suit the environment. Much of his acre is woodland so he has a natural layering of plants enabling many to co-exist but he does admit it is more difficult in sunlit situations because grasses tend to be dominant there. Clumps of grasses are both fashionable and handsome, but grass plumes emerging haphazardly from shrubs are decidedly not. It is not just the left over pasture grasses, Yorkshire Fog and Phalaris etc. but *Microlaena* is equally unwanted there. An illustration of the South African fynbos shows a tapestry of interwoven shrubs, all much the same height, which corresponds roughly to our kwongan in W.A.. Both of them develop on infertile, dry soils. This makes them difficult to reproduce in fertile, well-watered garden situations but can turn such mineral deficient soils, as a lot of ours are, into an advantage.

Overall I get the impression that the author is advocating just the type of gardening most Australian plant growers are practising in varying degrees. Because it *is* gardening, self-sustainability as he defines it does not preclude the gardener having a controlling role, the resolution of the seeming contradiction that bothered me. This style of gardening may be familiar to us but is revolutionary to many English gardeners and those in Australia who attempt to follow their tradition. All success to the new style - it should lead to greater use of our own flora even by the copyists and, equally importantly, to reduced water wastage.

In November last year, Peter Thompson spent some time in Melbourne looking at gardens with Paul Thompson. Among other gardens, he visited that of Rodger and Gwen Elliot, and our garden. His next book will be about the plants and gardens of the Southern Hemisphere, and the working title is 'The Looking-glass Garden'. DS

'LandscapeAustralia', 4/1998

Garden design is not necessarily the same as landscape design, particularly in regard to its scale and the emphasis on plants rather than hard landscape. However I often find stimulating or challenging articles in 'Landscape Australia', for example one in this issue (which celebrates 20 years of its publication), researching changing attitudes towards an Australian design ethos - Landscape architecture through the eyes of 'Landscape Australia'.

In 2/1983 and 1&2/1984, **Rodger Elliot** and Glen Wilson wrote a series of key articles on planting design using Australian species, focussing on the 'Bush Garden'. Their planting philosophy was based on the beauty of the Australian wilderness, its textures and colours.

In issue 4/1987, Rodney Wulff referenced seven design ideas in Victoria as a sample of what the 'Australian Design Style' is. The article was entitled 'Contextually appropriate? Some interpretations on design directions in Australian landscape architecture'.

- Sophisticated art expression: extensive use of art forms / sculptures (by artists).
- Nationalistic/naturalism: rocks, sleepers and native plants.
- International: elements from all over the world.

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- Historic restoration emulation: attempt to restore and/or duplicate past period design.
- Merge: placed in the landscape so that is virtually unseen or harmonises with existing landscape.
- Australian eclectic: mental approach using traditional Australian materials.
- Dream time/Ethereal landscape: attempts to appreciate the vast, undefined limitless Australian landscape by the use of abstraction of unusual characteristics.

In issue 1/1S88, **Paul Thompson** responded to these design ideas as simplistic and short-sighted. He stated that a design ethos must support, reinforce and extend the natural characteristics of this country, and merged the 7 categories into three:

- Naturalism & Merge, with some Restoration, Australian eclectic and Art expression.
- Internationalism with Historic emulation aspects and hopefully some sophisticated Art expression.
- Purely sculptural or conventional arty approach to ideas, Dream time /Ethereal.

He also referred to the work of early pioneers of the profession in Victoria developing in the late 50s, for example John Stephens, Grace Fraser, Beryl Mann, Glen Wilson and others.

More recently, in a talk entitled 'In search of an Australian way' (4/1995) taken from the *Gardens for tomorrow* Conference, John Brookes stated that "As Australia was now beginning to be affected by an Asian influx and an acknowledgment of its Aboriginal heritage, design development was now at cross-roads. . . . The Australianness of Australia seemed to be purveyed very much in terms of its plant material". His concern includes an interest in the geology of a region.

And we're still trying to find that 'Australian way' in garden design! Use of Australian plants is a vital ingredient, but how we create a garden that belongs here and nowhere else does not rely exclusively on Just using the plants - it's how we use them too. DS

In 'Australian Horticulture', Oct/Nov 1998 there were three articles concerned with research on Australian plants for marketing purposes:

- developing eucalypt buds and flowers for ornamental horticulture: big-flowered species are being crossed with small-flowered species with the aim of producing an attractive intermediate size.
- to improve the compactness of branching, colour and size of calyx, plant habit, hardiness and vigour of NSW Christmas Bush and extend the flowering season.
- an overseas trip by a group of Australian plant breeders and growers, targeted at cut flowers but also international pot and amenity plant industries, e.g. the imminent release of new *Chamelaucium* spp. (Waxflowers)

Such research can lead to availability of plant forms (or species) with a valuable role in garden design. DS

DESIGN IDEAS

Giving much thought

Pat Webb Vic

in NL 23 Barbara Buchanan writes "No matter how much one reads and knows in theory, this does not guarantee a beautiful garden. Some people have the 'eye' and can create beauty instinctively; most of us muddle along, having to adapt and alter as the garden grows".

Yes Barbara - perhaps not 'muddle' but 'give much thought'. I know I would do many things differently now ten years after starting this garden. Greater knowledge of the soil, microclimate and growth of some plants are some of the factors which would affect my choice. That is one delight of having one's 'own'

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garden; you can change, modify, add to and take out - all great fun to do. In your editorial, Diana, you say so aptly "It is important that you are happy with your garden". I find this to be very true now that John and I are both retired - the garden is one of the most important areas of living, and gives a lovely welcome each time we come home.

An important factor which we recently have noticed and commented on is the 'Energy Factor' - we too are now ten years older. Questions to consider:

- Can I make it sustainable?
- When rejuvenating an area, what more appropriate plants could I place here?
- Will we need to plan the modifications with a view to setting eventually?

Our living area overlooks the front garden, facing north. This year we have been enjoying a large number of butterflies, especially 'Painted Ladies'. I would love to see the return of the small birds - but more cats and dogs in the neighbourhood have affected this population, despite our prickly hedges. The noisy wattle birds and the ibis flying overhead continue to delight us. This morning I was overjoyed when two little frogs jumped out of the watering can! What a welcome surprise.

I envy you your frogs, Pat. We've had no success attracting them to our garden although we have tried to provide for all their needs. DS

A low-maintenance lawn?

Gordon Rowland NSW

Part of one of Gordon's articles from his series for the 'Inner Western Suburbs Courier'.

It is a common fallacy that lawns reduce garden maintenance. A properly maintained lawn is far more work than a garden of trees, shrubs and alternative ground covering.

If you decide to sell your property, a well designed low-maintenance garden will add value as it matures and should be more attractive to most prospective buyers than a large expanse of high-maintenance lawn.

Lawn care means regular mowing and regular noise, increased work and expense, and stress for yourself, your family and your neighbours. Is this really what you want? It also means using lots of water, fossil fuels for fertilising and chemicals for weed control. It means spiking, edging, repairing bare patches and occasional rolling, on top of the initial cost and then regular maintenance of a good lawnmower.

Despite these disadvantages, lawns are pleasant to walk and sit on and in some ways the best groundcover for children to play on.

Other options include the use of Australian grasses (see ULT & W&A bmf comment in this NL p7). DS

PLANTS in DESIGN

Plants for steep banks (see report of Melbourne meeting - p 1-6)

Tony and Joy Roberts have compiled the following list of low plants suggested by **Trevor Blake** and others as initial groundcovers for their banks. A few of them - *Pultenaea pedunculata*, *Myoporum parvifolium*, etc - may even grow on the upper level 'cliff' where there is no mulch or soil!

Trevor suggested *Microlaena stipoides* on that part of the bank in front of the house they want grassed.

A. iteaphylla (Gootamundra Wattle) {prostrate}

A. cardiophylla (Wyalong Wattle) {prostrate}

A. iteaphylla (Flinders flange Wattle) {prostrate}

A. pravissima (Ovens Wattle) {prostrate}

Banksia integrifolia (Coast Banksia) {prostrate}

B. serrata (Saw Banksia) (prostrate)

Brachysema sericeum

Carpobrotus (Pigface)

Disphyma clavatum {Rounded Noon-flower}

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<i>Grevillea</i> 'Canterbury Gold'	<i>G. curviloba</i> (<i>G. tridentifera</i> IG. <i>bitemata</i>) (prostrate)
<i>Grevillea</i> 'Royal Mantle'	<i>G. thelemanniana</i> (<i>G. humifusa</i> IG. <i>preissii</i>)
<i>Goodenia ovata</i> (Hop Goodenia)	
<i>Hardenbergia violacea</i>	
<i>Hibbertia dentata</i> (Trailing Guinea-flower)	<i>H. scandens</i> (Climbing Guinea-flower)
<i>Kennedia coccinea</i> (Coral Vine)	<i>K. nigricans</i> (Black Coral-pea)
<i>K. prostrata</i> (Running Postman)	<i>K. rubicunda</i> (Dusky Coral-pea)
<i>Myoporum parvifolium</i> (Creeping Myoporum)	
<i>Rhagodia</i> sp (Saltbush)	
<i>Einedia</i> sp	
<i>Leptospermum</i> sp. (prostrate)	
<i>Pultenaea pedunculata</i> (Mat Bush-pea)	
<i>Tetragona</i> sp. (I. <i>tetragonioides</i> is known as Warrigal Spinach)	

SNIPPETS

A circular garden

Recently on Radio National (RN 'Encounter'), in a program on mandates (circular structures of significance to Hindus and Buddhists as "mystic symbols of the universe and an aid to meditation"), a circular garden was described in which heights of plants increased radiating from the centre. The writer noted the strength of this circular design. Do any members know of any circular gardens of Australian plants? (A complete circular garden would be very formal - a focal point of the garden - but segments could be used in an effective but less formal way.) DS

MEETINGS & COMING EVENTS

Melbourne

Karwarra Seminar

Marilyn Gray Vic

26th - 28th March 1999 "Living in Harmony with Wildlife: Australian Plants and Animals in City & Country Gardens" 4th Biennial Seminar at Karwarra Aust. Plant Garden, Mt. Dandenong Tourist Rd, Kalorama.

This seminar focuses on successful co-existence between people, parks and gardens and the plants and animals which share them. Areas covered include different perspectives on landscaping for wildlife: creating various habitats including corridors; fire as a management tool; and property assessment. Other topics consider different wildlife projects and controlling, coping with or planning for birds, possums, reptiles, frogs and insects. Murrumbidgee will tell us about Aboriginal plant use. The Keynote Speaker is renowned naturalist Alan Reid who will speak to the theme of the Seminar and then show us his own property both before and after dark as one of the venues on the Field Trip. Cost \$75 per day, \$65 concession.

Enquiries: Marilyn Gray

Melbourne meetings

Report of Melbourne meeting Sunday Decembers at **Tony & Joy Roberts'**

For our end of year meeting we enjoyed a beautiful sunny day and a very good attendance of members. Tony and Joy's wonderful new low-energy house was a great attraction, competing with that of their young garden in the early stages of its development. Tony's magnificent orchard fascinated everyone too, with its espaliered apples and quinces, 18 apple varieties on one tree, thornless blackberries, etc!

The house lies along an east-west axis with beautiful views from the house as the ground slopes down at the

front to two dams to the north. Cut and fill techniques have resulted in long banks both below and above the house, and these have provided the main design challenge. Heavy mulch (20cm or so) has been used to stabilize & then improve the soil. In front of the house a pair of very active spotted pardalotes was nesting in the bank just below where the mulch stopped. A small colourful 'wildflower garden' at the ground level of the house is visible from the kitchen sink. Behind the house in particular and also at the western end large basalt rocks have been introduced. **Bev Hanson** described how the rocks were placed (the biggest ones almost lifted the drott off the ground). The bed containing the rocks was built out from the steep embankment as far as possible, to break its line in a pleasing way, with much of each rock being buried so it "looked comfortable". Soil from the cut was mixed with gypsum and some fertilizer to use for these extensions. A relatively small number of large rocks were placed for maximum impact, with plants (not yet planted) to eventually complete the picture, giving the impression of more rocks than there actually are.

Behind the house a gently curved and well proportioned wide path and steps led up to a tractor roadway at a higher level. Above that narrow roadway (where there was insufficient space to build out), a steep red wall or 'cliff' promoted different responses from members. Some concentrated on what plants could be grown there to cover it, spilling over from the top or planted in the bank closer to the house to screen the view. Others liked it and **Beryl Blake** plans to lead a 'Save the red wall' campaign. Bev Hanson and other members were also wondering about ways to disguise the conspicuous water tank close to the house. **Linda Floyd** suggested making it a conspicuous 'folly', e.g castellated, instead.

Suggestions of hardy plants for any of the sloping banks are listed on page 16. We'll now follow the progress of Joy and Tony's garden with great interest!

Next meeting (to be) held on **Sunday February 7** at **Doug & Margaret Mclver's place**

Time: 2 pm (1.45 for a 2pm start).

Focus - treatment of open areas in small (0.1 ha) gardens - replacing grass (a practical design topic). (We'll also consider a similar situation in Maureen & Geoff Short's garden.) This Newsletter should reach you in time to give you the details of the meeting and there should be a report in the next (May) NL.

Doug and Margaret Mclver's front garden (see plan on pi9 to start you thinking, & bring it along on the day)

Brief:

Lower maintenance which acknowledges the dominance and formal style of the house.

Reduce or eliminate the lawn.

Front veranda is often used and should have a pleasing outlook - open but screened from the street.

Add garden seating?

Problems:

Perennial weeds, yet we are reluctant to use herbicides on a large scale, either on pathways or garden beds.

Need to water close to house to try to maintain steady subsoil moisture content to stabilise day foundations.

Gravel driveway tends to "tread-in" to house.

Windy site.

Plantings:

Largely post mature yet utilitarian (eg plum) and sentimental considerations apply.

Replanting may also be required as forthcoming plumbing and painting work is likely to cause some damage.

Doug and Margaret are keen to hear your suggestions. Come along and let them know your ideas on the design and on some questions relevant to many of us.

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Following Melbourne meetings dates to be decided at the February meeting

? Sunday March 7 - we'll be away

? Sunday April 4 - this is Easter Sunday

If you can't come to the February meeting, please ring Diana after February 7 for details.

Sydney Branch meetings

Report of meeting Sunday November 15

Jo Hambrett

At the last meeting for 1998 we inspected three prize-winning gardens on Sydney upper North Shore; the gardens were judged on factors such as water conservation, habitat provision and the use of Australian/indigenous plants. See under GARDENS page 8.

By the end of the day all of us had been exposed to many new plants, or seen plants used in different situations and been able to assess how three like-minded groups of people had responded to their own individual spaces with both hard and soft landscaping - it was an interesting and stimulating afternoon. (*Many thanks to those members of the group who brought afternoon tea, and Pam Renouf for the most delicious ginger slice.*)

Next meeting - probably on Sunday May 16. Members will be involved in the SGAP display at the Sydney Garden Festival from Friday April 30 to May Sunday 2.

Please phone Jo Hambrett for details and to indicate whether you can come.

NE Vic Branch

Next meeting Sunday March 14 at 10.30 for 11 a.m. start at **Jennifer Davidson's**,

Please ring for directions if planning to attend.

Agenda:

Plans for the year, next meeting, gardens worth visiting;

Discussion of Newsletter;

Progress in Jennifer and fan's garden and how experience has modified plans.

S.A. Branch

South Australian members please contact Margie Barnett if you have any suggestions for future meetings.

MEMBERSHIP & TREASURER'S REPORT

Peter Garnham

FINANCIAL STATEMENT - Quarter ending 31/12/98

<u>Receipts</u>		<u>Expenses</u>	
Subscriptions	155.00	Photocopying	207.00
Bank interest	1.48	Postage	<u>135.00</u>
Donation	<u>5.00</u>		
	<u>\$161.48</u>		<u>\$342.00</u>
<u>Balance in bank</u>	\$2964.96		

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MEMBERSHIP

15 subscriptions paid during the quarter, making a total of 196 subscriptions paid for the 98/99 financial year (approx. 240 members as a subscription can cover two members at one address). There are also SGAP Groups and two Libraries.

New members

A warm welcome to the following new members of the Study Group. We hope you enjoy your membership.

Helen Gage

Jan Gough-Watson

Membership renewals

My apologies to any members who had sent in their subscription but whose names weren't included in the last Newsletter.

John Armstrong, Sandra Davey, Judith Dykes, Jeanette Heinemann, Jo Kopp, Julie Slifirski, Joy Stacey, Paul Thompson.

New address & phone no.

Catherine Drew

Members should receive a copy of the list of members in their State with this Newsletter. Please let me know if yours does not arrive.

Reminder: *Please always let us know of any changes to your address or phone number, or email.*

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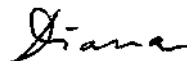
Maxine Armitage NSW writes that she has so much work at the moment she doesn't think that she will have the time to compile the index for last year's issues before the middle of this year. Maxine has been compiling the index for a number of years now and it is extremely helpful for locating earlier articles.

On 'Gardening Australia' the Channel 2 program at 6.30 pm. on Friday evening March 12. one segment will be looking at our garden. I hope the picture they present reflects what I would like presented. After a long interview and their team of four spending the best part of a day in the garden last December, it's hard to know how it will appear when they put it all together! I asked that the emphasis be put on the garden, not me, but I'm not at all confident about that.

When the cool change came after those three blistering hot days in December, I went for a wander in the garden to check for any immediate damage. Three losses were evident - a *Boronia muelleri* 'Sunset Serenade' we'd had for many years, an *Eriostemon verrucosus* 'Semmons Double Waxflower' which was a more recent introduction to the garden, and a phebalium. We'll leave them all for a while in case they resurrect (I know eriostemons can be fighters and the phebalium looks hopeful, though the boronia doesn't). If not, the question arises - do we try again with the same species, or different ones? With the boronia I think it will be the same, because this species has generally done well for us. However I think we might give up with the eriostemon if it doesn't survive, as that one was our first and only 'success' after a few tries! Here's hoping there'll be no more disappointments and that you have managed to avoid summer losses. It's the larger, older, framework plants that really matter of course - they cannot be replaced quickly so they leave a noticeable gap. There's an opportunity for a re-think, or for use of a fast growing 'nurse' plant while a longer term slower growing one becomes established.

Enjoy the autumn months - great months in the garden! Time to carry out all those activities you planned over summer when it was too hot, before the weather becomes less tempting again in winter.

Best wishes from



Diana Snape