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ASSOCIATION OF SOCIETIES FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS.



**GARDEN DESIGN STUDY GROUP**  
**NEWSLETTER No. 44**  
**November 2003**

**Study Group Leader/Editor:** Jo Hambrett

**Treasurer/Membership:** Bryan Loft

Dear Members,

A big welcome to Spring and some much needed, but not enough of course, rain! Our resident swallows are onto their second batch of babies if nest refurbishment - remudding along the rim and extra feathering - is anything to go by! Whilst we are on the topic I have some GDSG "housekeeping" for your consideration. I would like to know how members feel about a website for the Study Group? I have contacted Brian Walters to discuss it and would welcome feedback; still on matters technological, how do members feel about receiving their Newsletter by email ?. Feedback and email addresses appreciated, either to me or Bryan.

Now, I know all our members are a very busy group of people - but - please make that extra effort to attend organized members' days- with enough notice I'm sure we can organize car pools if transport is a difficulty - it can be a nailbiting affair for the organizer the week before as the numbers slowly drift in. Remember ,send in book reviews ,articles and your thoughts in general for the Newsletters, they are very welcome Wishing you all a safe, happy and healthy Goray'murrai and Gadalung Maroo - read on!

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## NEXT MEETINGS

**Melbourne: November. 2<sup>nd</sup>.**

**N.E.Vic: October. 25<sup>th</sup>**

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## CORRESPONDENCE extracts

- Re your piece on *Acacia armata* [ May 2003 NL]. I am about to plant a copse to supplement my bird protection garden. I have found Frances Bodkin's *Encyclopaedia Botanica* invaluable when planting out my acacia garden. Frances is bringing out a revised, updated and enlarged edition this summer .Here is what it has to say about *Acacia armata*, hedge wattle or kangaroo thorn: naturally occurring in NSW Qld SA Vic WA.Prefers medium to heavy soils, open position and mild climate. Evergreen tree [3m.] flowers are large and solitary golden bells. It has several stems armed [and how!] with spines Propagation is by scarified seed. The hedge wattle provides ideal shelter for small birds at nesting time. **Arthur Dench**

- Send in the Clowns ..... Gardening with living plants is always an act of faith as well as vision, sometimes the timing is wrong too. Here are some sad experiences.

Several years ago I planted a pink form of *Eremophila glabra* next to one of my favourite mintbushes [ *Prostanthera scutellaroides*]. The result was as pleasing as I had imagined. I took a photo of the bushes in flower - a month later the *prostanthera* was dead. The *eremophila* lives on in solitary splendour!

Even longer ago I planted a *Clematis aristata* to trail over a dead stump, instead it took off into the nearest shrubs - a *hakea* and a *hibiscus*. The spring displays of white drifts of flowers encouraged me to leave it where it was but eventually both shrubs died. I cut back the *clematis* and bought one of those Victorian style arches for it to grow over, I imagined another beautiful drift of white flowers over the arch the following Spring - instead there was nothing, only more green leaves, I consoled myself that it had to adjust to the arch after the more natural habitat of the shrubs - still no flowers. Yesterday I was heartened to see at last a few flowers near the bottom of the arch .....Well maybe next year! **Jennifer Borrell**

- *I'm sure members will find the following story of "Marilynne Vietnieks an interesting and highly relevant one , given the feelings of dismay and helplessness engendered by the senseless destruction of privately owned native gardens and natural bushland in all States. It shows there is a way forward for committed individuals I'm sure we all wish her and the Group every success.*

Two years ago my neighbour took it upon himself to remove trees and clear bush on my property - he had already removed most of his own. I really did not know what to do, I was so upset because he had taken away

something that I valued and loved. I wrote to Council, took photos and absolutely nothing happened. I attended council's bushcare courses to get some basic knowledge but soon found out that bushcare groups only work on council properties - there was no group operating in the Hills Shire for private property owners who make up 95% of landholdings in the Shire. I had no choice but to rally support and start up a landcare group for private properties. Cattai Catchment Landcare Group was incorporated in May 2003 and this involved writing our Constitution and Rules with a clear statement of the group's mission - "to help restore and maintain the natural ecological system of the Cattai Catchment Area". We have set up a pilot program of four adjacent private properties which are working to a plan developed by the Dept. Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources [ used to be Dept. Land and Water Conservation]. Alex Muir is the Landcare coordinator at DIPNR .The Group has developed a cooperative working relationship with local Council which hopefully will help in obtaining change. Our aims include: lobbying Council to introduce an Enviromental levy and a Rural Lands Incentive Program [ encouraging rural property owners to maintain the rural qualities of their land rather than sell out to property developers and urban development]. A catchment wide management plan, a riparian management plan and a roadside vegetation plan.

## Gardens of the Mind Vlad Sitta

Landscape architect Vlad Sitta migrated from his native Czechoslovakia to Australia 20 years ago. He has worked on a number of public projects{ see May 2003 NL}and his work has been featured in international publications on garden design. He recently gave a talk on his work at the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney. His talk was warm ,engaging and passionate, so much so that when I looked up my notes to share the occasion with you to my horror all I had written on this charismatic individual was -

Design philosophy: One cannot deny the human presence

The ideal client: Open cheque book and an open mind. A client doesn't need to know everything, they get disturbed!

Influences on the design process: Wine, women and poetry

Probably an accurate summary on reflection! He also mentioned the cultural significance of fire as a design element in an Australian landscape and his love of bamboo as a plant to use in his designs - I wondered if we could find an Australian plant equivalent, any suggestions?

**Genevieve Jacobs** in the Open Garden Guide Book 03/04 engages in an in depth discussion with Vlad about his work which I think will challenge some of our deeply cherished gardening philosophies.

*It used to be that a truly Australian garden was seen as a collection of Australian plants, perhaps a quotation of the heath, and of course that doesn't make a garden..! think the elements we have to work with are the quality of light, a relatively high transparency and an almost homogenous nature - with the exception of rainforest there's not a very great variety of elements inland. Unfortunately there's not a demand for difference and not enough curiosity - you don't have too many clients or projects where you can take risk on originality. At the deepest level this country doesn't have a design culture. The pragmatism that was probably necessary to survive has affected the whole country. Design doesn't have to be expensive, look at Scandinavia, they have well designed things everywhere, it's ingrained in their culture. We need an open mind and a willingness to experiment - and to stop image makers from presenting Sydney Harbour as the benchmark of their inspiration!*

*I think my gardens try to respond to the way we live people spend so much time at work, when they come home it's dark there is no garden, so we create another garden for the night — lights are quite magical, they are transformative, you see things in a way you've never seen them before. Japanese gardens are like stage sets the way they plan your movement and focus on certain aspects, the great Baroque gardens of Europe do the same, it's not new by any means.*

*We can't keep building and living as we are, I'm quite critical of even people like Glen Murcutt with the way they celebrate the shed, the vernacular bush architecture - they are wonderful objects but they don't solve our urban habitation and environmental problems as all. You can't have acres of bush around your building and claim that it's a sustainable landscape response. Let us forget about gardening in the traditional sense for now, the city should become more cooperative in creating an urban, human, inclusive ecology. There is an enormous expanse of inert areas in a city — if we need a building, the land taken should be replicated as gardens or urban farms on roofs and facades. A new garden city but not in the romantic sense.*

## **CRITERIA FOR A DESCRIPTIVE ASSESSMENT OF A GARDEN'S DESIGN**

**Chris Larkin** [ refer Melbourne Garden visit reports - F YI ]

### **Pathways to and from house and through the garden**

Practical in purpose width, surety of surface  
Pleasing in shape (producing flow and rhythm) and choice of surface

### **Relationship of house to garden**

Views & vistas from house  
General access from house to outdoor living and garden

### **Pleasing spaces to look at and be in**

A balance of open (e.g. paths, ponds, low ground covers) and closed space  
Framed space - vistas and trunk gardens  
Garden seats

### **Harmony, unity and balance**

Between house and garden and the surrounding environment  
Within the garden (overall structure, visual balance & proportions)  
Blending of hard landscaping and soft

### **Successful soft landscaping**

Effective screening of external and internal areas  
Framework of trees - balance of shade and sun  
Foliage contrasts and textures  
Appeal to the senses - light, colour, fragrance, sound, touch  
Predominance of appropriate Australian plants to the environment  
Repetition of visual links

### **Delights and surprises**

### **Environmental concerns**

Use of water (ornamental and conservation)  
Inclusion of indigenous plants  
No use of weed species to the area  
Provision for wildlife

### **Overall management**

## Show Fever Lawrie Smith Qld.

This year we have two concurrent shows to organize .Our usual "Ékka" display has been scaled down allowing us to concentrate on the annual Flower Show at the Brisbane Botanic Gardens, Mt. Cootha. We have planned a bold exhibit highlighting the green and gold colours and floral emblems of Australia through a massed display of David Hockings Xerochrysum cultivars set against the greens of rainforest foliage. A map of Australia flanked by an emu and kangaroo made of paperbark are integral elements of the display. We are offering the public a chance to walk through a theme garden which demonstrates how our native plants can be used to advantage in a range of display gardens. A new brochure "Down the Garden Path with Aussie Plant" has been prepared for the Show - it provides a list of the most tried and tested native plants for garden use in Brisbane, together with some tips on garden planning and design.

*Jan Sked, Qld SGAP Bulletin Editor among many things, as well as kindly offering to try and get some photos of the displays, has sent me a copy of the brochure, it really is a most comprehensive list and I'd recommend it to professionals and amateurs alike for use in subtropical gardens. She also mentions her books "Planting a Native Garden in the Subtropics "and 'Planting an Outback Garden', both these books certainly cover a huge range of conditions and should be very helpful indeed. She can be contacted on [iansked@powerup.com](mailto:iansked@powerup.com), au JH*

## A Reply to Glenys Jo Hambrett

- Victorian member, Glenys Eskdale sent in a letter with some comments and questions which was published in our last NL [Aug. 2003].I felt she raised some important points which are probably pertinent to many gardeners, I have attempted to answer her questions and would be interested in other members thoughts.
- Don't be afraid to experiment - it increases your [and our] knowledge of gardening with Australian plants.
- It appears you are heading towards a blended garden. Exotic species you choose should not only suit the soil and climate but generally blend sympathetically with the indigenous plants you have in order to maintain the sense of place within your garden, if you want a particular exotic to become a feature in an area you will need to strengthen the surrounding indigenous framework to maintain harmony and balance.
- Design your garden with the fact that you love seasonal changes in mind, naturally look for Australian species that might satisfy that need however I think it is possible to blend in bulbs, deciduous trees and Autumnal colour into a largely Australian plant garden - the tricks are in the choice and placement of the species, the design of the garden spaces and maintaining the harmony ,balance and sense of place in your garden.

- Brown lawns should certainly be a part of the Australian garden psyche unless you replace them with Australian native grasses or more garden.
- A lot of fairly tough Aus. Plants provide a green lush look - lomandara, cordylines, orthrosanthus, libertias, rainforest species, ferns, orchids, some correas etc. You can create an absolute haven of Aust. plants around the deck and patio area which is in effect a managed microclimate, the lizards and frogs will love you. All of these will give you colour in their Spring blooms but if you long for the splashier colour of exotics why not put them in pots? That way you can change them according to taste and season. The Qld SGAP brochure mentioned above may be helpful in creating a tropical look.
- Shade and privacy are a lot to lose, why are the trees too tall? If you decide some or all must come down I'd suggest hastening slowly, one at a time, looking at the resulting hole and working out how far you want to go — it may be all the way but you can't put them back after the event [ a bit like cutting one's fringe]. Don't be afraid to create beds under the trees, the layered look of tree/ shrub/ground cover/ climbers is highly visually satisfying and creates effective habitat - you will find many species adapted to dry shade. John Knight's article in the Aug NL "Summer in the Garden" should give you some ideas.
- Good Luck, may you have all the years and the energy you need!

### **COLLECTORS v. DESIGNERS** Barbara Buchanan

This is a confrontation which has uses but can be carried too far. Few of us amateur gardeners think of ourselves in these terms and few of our gardens fall neatly into one or other category, Interestingly the same topic has been debated in the Royal Horticultural Society's journal in England recently and had me pondering on the different reasons for collecting. There are of course the followers of fashion who must always have the latest, something new before everyone else is growing it, even just something they don't already grow, or something that displays wealth (and hopefully conveys status). Status can also come from being able to grow something most other gardeners can't. Other collections are sentimental, plants which hold memories of people and places.

Some gardeners are botanically minded and try to grow as many as possible of the species in a genus or a family. Many APS collectors fall into this group because there is still so much to learn about our plants, how to grow them and how they will perform under cultivation, what conditions they will and won't tolerate. To me it is just so interesting to see the similarities and differences between species in a genus. Without the contributions of collectors the knowledge of the performance of available plants would be much smaller. While one can always play safe and only grow plants from conditions similar to one's garden, it is amazing how some plants will do well in very different circumstances so that it is a shame to never test them.

Then there are those 'designed' gardens which feature lots of hard landscaping and very few plants and yet win awards because they are new and different. Some I have seen pictured look downright ugly to me, e.g. tree trunks have been painted to match painted walls. I'm sure you all know the type of thing I mean.

In the real world most gardens, especially Australian plant gardens fall somewhere between the two camps. Although I had very little design expertise when I began concentrating on Australian plants, I remember making grandiose plans, mostly in my head but sometimes on paper and writing out lists of plants I hoped to use then trotting along to nurseries to buy some. I was never naive enough to imagine I'd find the lot. Mostly I would not find any, but there would be all sorts of unexpected temptations which I took home with me instead. I would try and match the features I had been seeking and my growth conditions but get hopelessly muddled and out of my depth with new plants and finish up buying on 'pot appeal'. At home I would gloat over my new treasures, make more lists of their requirements and growth habits and set about trying to find them just the right spot. The spot that gives the plant the best conditions available without disrupting the original plan too much. I'm sure most gardens are made by similar compromises. I'm quite realistic about it now, I try to propagate my own replacements or new plants but it can be an uncertain process. My impulse buys are generally restricted to certain favourite groups because there is often a family similarity which means consistency yet the subtle variations to give spice to a pattern. Sometimes plants I have lusted after for years (the collector in me) turn up in a nursery or sale bench, come home with me in triumph, and then I scratch my head to remember why I wanted them. Their place in the scheme is sure to be already filled with something else in the ground. In practice it comes down to using what is available to best advantage at the time.

The other big problem is how plants can diverge from the expected behaviour, as if they haven't read the books and how the plants from one batch of seed can vary. With exotic herbaceous plants growing from ground level afresh each year size and shape are reasonably predictable and controllable. With evergreen shrubs growth may be uneven in a batch of plants, size increases steadily each year and some skill may be needed to keep them in bounds and from getting scrawny and twiggy. Some of our treasures are naturally short-lived, we don't yet know all of them. Taking pot luck with what is available does not always come out so much worse than carefully planned schemes.

So I was really heartened to read an editorial in "Fine Gardening", an American journal my daughter gets, where the editor confesses to being more of a collector than a designer. His definition of a designer is someone who puts pencil to paper before heading off to a nursery, just as I used to. To him, this spoils the fun and he often buys plants with no idea of where he is going to put them or even if he can fit them in his garden. This 'emotional abandon' and the following challenge give him his kicks, for him gardening must amongst things, be fun. While it is quite true we generally look for relaxation and peace in our gardens, it does not hurt to have a bit of excitement too.

The relative strengths of collecting and designing often depend on the stage of the garden. With a completely blank sheet, either a new house or cleaned out bed, the exotics evicted perhaps or a lawn dug up, one really does have to sort out what one wants to achieve, where to begin, how to do it, then try and find the plants. At this stage even the most addicted collector pauses for thought and considers design. It can be an awesome responsibility and maybe rather expensive, getting everything together in one planting season. In my experience there is always something missing, some vital plant that influences the whole design concept. It could well have been flower of the month and in every nursery last month, but not now. Then as the planting gets under way new ideas may occur, new opportunities arise, collecting intrudes again. An APS plant sale or a lucky

strike of cuttings brought home from a meeting need to be incorporated. Will they match the gaps created by the losses?

For as a garden matures, shade increases, a plant swamps its neighbours, dies, or looks so scraggy that it might as well die. Individual choices are no longer as far-reaching. Impulse buys or additions to the collection can be tried as the chances arise. There are so many new plants becoming available all the time, who knows how they will do **here**? Now the collector can have a say, with the designer, for the ultimate development of the interest of the garden. A truly great garden will have a bit each way, a satisfying plan and a remarkable plant palette.

At the Grevillea seminar a few years back we heard of plans for a Grevillea garden in Mildura to be designed by Paul Thompson. I hope it is progressing although it will take time to assemble all the plants. I look forward to seeing it one day as a shining example of a bit of both worlds.

I have decided I would rather be remembered as a Plantsman than a Designer or Collector. This is another topic aired recently in the RHS Journal where the author regretted the casual application of the term to almost anyone growing plants. In his view, and as I have traditionally understood the word Plantsman should be an accolade only bestowed on one who has an intense love of plants backed by a wide knowledge of them, where they originate, what growing conditions suit them, which are the finest forms available and how to use them to best advantage. Moreover a Plantsman is a natural teacher who shares his knowledge freely with those who have less experience than himself. I claim the first qualification, that intense love of plants and I'm working on the rest.

In 'collecting' over there and here. For various reasons, from the effects of the last Ice Age to centuries of agriculture and waves of invasions, the indigenous English flora is very restricted compared with the wealth of our own. So collecting there began as the introduction of new plants from newly discovered lands, including ultimately Australia, and still involves new plants from newly penetrated regions of Asia and the gradual realization that there are some Australian plants hardy enough to survive and contribute. Nowadays it also involves much selection of superior forms and hybrids without which English gardens and those of the world generally would be much poorer.

## The Collector and the Designer Jo Hambrett

Chris Larkin broached a very important topic for most APS and SGAP members with her excellent article [ one of two ] on "Garden Design and the Collector" Aug 2003 NL.. This article sprung from a conversation with Tony Cavanagh when he stated that "many APS members would like to know more about how to indulge their passion for collecting native plants and still make a designed garden." This is a very important question for the Study Group to address, given the interest of APS/SGAP members in collecting and growing Australian plants.

I have to say I certainly don't feel the two are mutually exclusive, it is though, a much more challenging exercise. Good design can only enhance the themed or collected garden [see the garden visit report on the Cox garden NSW].

In some respects the challenges are similar to those of us attempting a blended garden using exotics and Aus. plants and some of the principles of a successfully designed blended garden apply ie: a plant's appearance and needs will determine its position and use in the garden and group plants together according to their needs - plants with similar horticultural requirements usually look right together.

The design to accommodate the collector's garden should have inbuilt flexibility in order to accommodate changes in plant numbers, appearances, requirements etc. - such as Chris's friend having most of her collection in pots - the ultimate in flexibility.

I think that the collector can certainly work within design concepts such as scale, proportion, shapes, balance, style [ especially for a themed garden] and visual devices such as repetition and patterning . Establishing "a sense of place" is always more difficult for urban gardens of any type so here the problem could be a part of the solution where a theme [ desert plants, banksias, colour combinations etc.] actually can give the garden its own strength and individual sense of purpose if not entirely place [ I think some of this is what Vlad Sitta meant in the article above, where he dismisses romantic gardens , especially in an urban context.]

The owner of a large garden and passionate collector has a greater challenge ahead as that space is more dependent on a sense of place for its harmony, balance and logic.

The collector can also be a designer, it is a juggle between the general and the particular, the big picture and the small, a supremely worthwhile exercise though to better showcase our native flora.

## **Landscaping — do we need lawns in suburbia? Jeff Howes**

Over my many years association with the Australian Plants Society (SGAP) and the Australian Open Garden Scheme, I have visited many gardens and their choice of plants has ranged from using all Australian natives to using all exotics and many are a mix of both. As well, the size of these gardens has ranged from very small to two hectares and larger and all but the smallest have had a lawn. These lawns are always mowed, green and use exotic grasses such as couch, kikuyu or buffalo. I have yet to see gardens that make use of native grasses as a lawn substitute.

Looking at these exotic lawns has made me think about their role in the overall landscaping theme of suburban blocks. I have tried to put my all my thoughts down on paper, as follows:

### Advantages of using lawns

- a.. Are an ideal, uniform media, to link isolated garden areas together;
- b.. Define garden beds;
- c. Presents a degree of uniformity which is expected in suburban gardens;
- d.. Are flexible, as it allows gardens to be enlarged or reduced in size

easily;

- e.. Provide a cooling effect to a house (real or imagined?); and
- f. Are soft to touch compared to other ground covers and are ideal for sitting on and playing with children;

Disadvantages of using lawns

a.. The obvious big disadvantage is that they require a lot of water to keep them green and chemicals to keep them growing and weed free. Although, in my case I never fertilize my exotic lawn, but do keep it mowed when it is growing. I also only occasionally water my back lawn and never the front lawn in drought, as it quickly recovers when rain does come and I have adjusted my outlook to having scrappy green/brown lawns;

b.. Having well tendered lawns, perhaps shows that we have not adjusted to the Australian environment of nearly always hot and dry conditions that make growing a decent lawn difficult. If you have large trees that suck all the moisture out of the soil then that is also an added difficulty to maintaining a good looking lawn;

c. There are other media for linking garden beds together such as: native grasses, mulch, gravel, crushed sandstone etc;

- d.. Lawns are time and labour intensive compared to other ground covers; and
- e.. Need to mowed regularly when growing to maintain that formal look.

What about using all native grasses?

I feel that the idea of replacing suburban exotic lawns with say, Kangaroo or Wallaby grasses only looks "right" if they are mass planted (>20 or more) in larger areas as their clumpy look is not formal enough for suburban gardens, especially when they are in flower (although Poa species are much more formal in their appearance). Native grasses do not have as good as cover as exotic grasses (of course) and as a result are not suitable to as much foot traffic or use.

In conclusion

I suppose your outlook on exotic lawns as compared to using native grasses depends on how formal you think a suburban garden should be. If you choose to use exotic grasses, then you must, in my opinion, to be environmentally correct, be prepared to not water or fertilise them and be content with that brown appearance in time of drought (or frost).

What do other GDSG members think?

*Another topic that crops up time and time again - a very important one to address philosophically and horticulturally within the Group and the Society. JH*

## REASONS OF THE YEAR

### **Goray'murrai**

**Nov-Dec (approx)**

Time of the blooming of the Kai'arrewan  
(*Acacia binervia*)

warm and wet, do not camp near rivers.  
Parra'dowee the Great Eel calls his children to him.

### **Gadalung Marooi**

**Jan-Feb (approx)**

Time of the blooming of the Weetjellan  
(*Acacia implexa*)

hot and dry, eat only fruit and seeds.  
Burra (kangaroos) start having their babies.

### **Bana'murrai'yung**

**Mar-May (approx)**

Time of the ripening of the fruit of the Lillipilli  
(*Syzygium* spp)

Wet, getting cooler, time to make cloaks and start the journey to the coast  
Marrai'gang, the tiger quoll seeks her mate.

### **Tugarah tali**

**Jun-M (approx)**

Time of the flowering of the Burringoa  
(*Eucalyptus tereticornis*)

Cold, time to gather the nectar for ceremony,  
Barrugin, the echidna begin their gatherings.

### **Tugarah gunya'marra**

**Aug (approx)**

Time of the flowering of the Marrai'uo  
(*Acacia floribunda*)

cold and windy, build shelters facing the rising sun, time to begin the journey to the  
highlands along the rivers, plenty offish.

Boo'gul the marsupial mouse mates and dies.  
Wiritjiribin, the Lyrebird builds his mounds when season ends.

### **Murrai'yunggoray**

**Sep-Oct (approx)**

Time of the Miwa Gawaian  
(*Telopea speciosissima*)

Cool, getting warmer, time for major ceremony.  
Gathering of the Ngoonuni, flying foxes.

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<sup>1</sup> Copyright 2002 Fiances Bodkin, Intellectual property of the Bodkin/Andrews clan of the D'harawal Peoples.

## SNIPPETS

### **Scleranthus biflorus - Canberra Grass**      Brian Roach

For something totally different and eye catching in a native garden, try Canberra grass - a lush bright green moss like plant that rises no more than a few centimeters and spreads to a metre or so. In ideal conditions, plenty of sun and water, it forms a very dense cushion effect closely reflecting the contours of the ground. The young and the not so young seem to have an overwhelming desire to thrust their fingers into the inviting "moss". Holes in the surface are usually thus explained! For something a bit out of the ordinary, Canberra Gem is a bobby dazzler.

### **The Friends go Native**

Such was the title of the day planned as a fund raiser for the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney. It was a terrific example of cooperation between members [ mainly] of APS NSW and the Friends of the Gardens, initiated by President Tim Jackson. The Friends saw three native gardens at Westleigh - Jeff Howes, David Chandler and Brian Roach were the kind owners, followed by two Dural gardens - Leanne Ezzy and Jo Hambrett. All the gardens were quite different and people really enjoyed talking to the owners getting tips and information and seeing native plants used exclusively in a garden setting. It was a sellout for the Friends and according to Tim, a most enjoyable and informative day judging by the chatter on the bus going back!

### **Yanderra news**

We had our Open Garden Scheme weekend on Sept.20/21. It was a very successful weekend with around 250 people coming through; the organizers had done a great job of promoting the garden with write ups in the local papers and their efforts were reflected in the attendance. Fortunately there was NO wind unlike the week before — typical Sydney spring- hot/cold/windy and then its summer! The *Prostanthera ovalifolia* and *Alyogyne huege* were glorious in their purples and the *Phebalium squamulosum* and *olearias phlogopappa* and *pimeloides* twinkled in cream and white respectively. The fine leaved tuckeroo had not only magnificent foliage but its best display of deep yellow blossoms ever. Many people had come, some quite long distances, specifically to see the native parts of the garden, which was very heartening.

A Spring colour combination which looks great in the garden at the moment is the grey foliage and white flowers of the flannel flowers and *olearia phlogopappa* I have a small

planting [ will definitely put in more] near the front gate and it's a very welcoming combination.

Another group of plantings that would suit the tiniest spaces is the combination of "tufties" flowering at the moment under one of our large Grey gums [ *Euc.punctata*] - they are: members of the Iridaceae family, *Patersonia sericea*, *Bulbine bulbosa*, *Orthrosanthus multiflorus* and *Libertia paniculata* as well as *Thysanotus multiflorus* [ fringed lily], Dwarf *lomandara* and *Dampiera trigona* - there are so many beautiful blues in Australian plants, and these are offset by the bright yellow of the *Bulbine* lilly and white star of the *Libertia* - the chocolate/purple pods housing the *Patersonia* flowers are, to my mind as exquisite as the deep blue blooms which incidentally only last a day, beauty is fleeting!

Now, keep your eyes out those of you who have cable for a show called Moar Gardening, in it the APS gets a plug through yours truly - unfortunately terms of the contract were not adhered to and I appear without the help of a Vaseline smeared lens or soft focus - however the nice thing is that I get to talk about designing with Australian plants and what makes an Australian garden ,which is quite a pleasant thing to do and every little bit of publicity helps.

Whilst on matters media I note that members **Deidre Morton** and **Ros Andrews** appeared on and in *Burkes Backyard* and the *Daily Telegraph* respectively.

It will be interesting to see how the garden fares under the new water restrictions, Sydney will get a taste of what other areas have had to put up with for years.

## **F.Y.I.**

### **GARDEN DESIGN STUDY GROUP. NORTH-EAST BRANCH**

Next meeting : Sat 25<sup>th</sup> Oct.2003 10.30am at Glenda and Bernie Datson's Albury

We will view Glenda's latest developments, have our discussion and lunch, then meet the curator responsible for the grass trials on the University campus at 2pm. On her second visit Glenda realized she had made a mistake and misidentified *Chloris truncate* but there are interesting grasses there.

#### **Report of Aug 16 meeting.**

The Burke St. (not Pangerang) Neighbourhood house are working on the plans we supplied and will be holding an Open Day to involve the community. They also look to

prepare and publish a list of plants suitable to grow in Wangaratta and hope this will increase the greening of the suburb.

From the latest NL we discussed the collectors/designers division and I hope to write up my thoughts for the next NL.

Our main discussion centred on our 'homework'. When I re-read the previous contributions on water that I had undertaken to correlate I realized they were not as different as I had thought at first reading. However I still had not done the correlation as the presentation styles are different and I wanted a clearer idea of our purpose. Those members who had worked on the current homework agreed. We decided we are aiming to produce a booklet to cover "planning, planting and maintaining a native garden in the foothills and plains of northern and north-eastern Victoria."

Our reason is that in our experience most information is based on the coastal fringe of Australia where conditions of soil and climate may be very different from ours. There are a number of good small books (booklets) such as *Waterwise Gardening* put out by Coliban Water which cover local and exotic plants so we decided to concentrate on points of difference from exotic plants and those specific to native. We selected maintenance and pruning as continuations of the design process and lists of reliable plants for varied situations and purposes as areas needing information. Jan with her nursery experience convinced me at least that for newcomers to the native scene the plant suggestions must be sorted as to their role in the garden, especially as to size. Other members are keen for information to be given for commonly used genera where generalizations can be made for a group of plants. Having read the current homework which was along such lines and impressed me greatly, I feel we must find a way to incorporate this aspect too. We trust the best treatment will evolve as we progress.

The point was made that any recommendations we make must be plants that are readily available and we will consult with Park Lane on this. The final area we want to concentrate on is plant combinations and this is our homework for the next meeting.

2,3,4,5 or so plants that combine to make an attractive picture.

The ideal is to use only combinations we have seen (even photographed) so we know they actually work i.e. such things as size, growth rate and flowering times are compatible, as well as the obvious growth requirements. If we have 'thought' combinations maybe we could try and make them actual ones. List the virtual, but keep them separate from the real. A follow-up exercise could be to devise 'paintable' groups, both large and small that could help newcomers get started.

It was a beautiful sunny, spring-like day so we lunched and hurried into the garden.



## **REPORT ON LAST MELBOURNE MEETING - Chris Larkin**

Thanks very much indeed to Tony and Joy Roberts for hosting this very interesting meeting. Despite starting the meeting early (and apologies once again for my own late

arrival) there really wasn't time to do justice to both looking at the development of Tony and Joy's garden and discussing issues arising from the last meeting. Some members may feel they were short changed on the garden visit side but I'm sure that the Robert's garden is one that we will return to again in the not too distant future - if our hosts are willing to have us, that is:

Most of the meeting was taken up with dealing with the 'fallout' from the last meeting. Reports were written after our May visit to the Hirst's garden and published in the last newsletter. On reflection this was an error on my part as their critical content could be hurtful to the owners, who were generous enough to allow us entry. For me the issue is not the content of the reports but in publishing them they were unfortunately made public. Some people, however, possibly took issue with the content of the reports themselves. For that reason I think it would be extremely useful to develop a tool that guides the assessment of a garden. If we have such a tool then any person making an assessment would do so within an agreed framework of criteria. The report by Tony Roberts raised more questions than it answered but these questions came from referring to the "Design criteria for judging gardens for competitions" (Newsletter No 29, April/May 2000) and this was a great reminder that there has already been thought given to the kinds of criteria that could be used.

During the meeting we reviewed these criteria for judging gardens. The results of this have been organized into 8 major headings with, in most cases, some indication of the kinds of things that one might look at under these headings. I have called this tool, which can be found in this newsletter, "Criteria for a descriptive assessment of a garden's design". Please use future newsletters as a way of discussing and helping us refine this tool.

Many people are mystified by what is being talked about and looked at in relation to a designed garden. Hence the desire for the collector to have greater guidance in what they need to do to improve the design of their garden. It seems to me that the really exciting thing about having an assessment tool like the one proposed is any homeowner can use it to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their own gardens. Members of this group could use it to evaluate their own gardens and it may be valuable to include it in a welcome pack to new members along with the aims of the group. What do you think?

In the case of the Melb group I intend trialing this tool possibly as soon as next meeting. People could work in pairs to report on, for instance, 2 of the major headings. With only 8 people you could build a complete picture quite quickly. Alternatively several pairs of people may be sent off to look at the same set of criteria to see what differences occur in making an assessment. We are only likely to be able to assess the assessment tool if we actually trial it in the field!

## Reports on Sydney meetings August 10<sup>th</sup> and September 14<sup>th</sup>

### Sunday, Aug. 10th

#### Ian and Tamara Cox's garden, Kenthurst.

This garden was begun in 1992 on a 5 acre block of transitional Hawkesbury sandstone and Wianamatta shale, the house sits roughly in the middle of the block facing west towards the Blue Mountains, surrounded by indigenous species such as casuarinas, leptospermum and banksias. The decision was taken to manage the bush - the natural part and tend the garden or more formal part. The owners see one of the roles of the garden as showcasing Australian plants, the plants are chosen for their showiness of flower, foliage and form and their needs are closely monitored. Like most Australian gardens there is ongoing experimentation - for example the Cox's have found that most WA plants need a lot of air movement around them to stay healthy as their hairy leaves trap the moisture in Sydney's humid climate and that grafted grevilleas respond to a richer soil and feeding regime than the non grafted variety. The garden is watered by an underground drip irrigation system to conserve water. Behind the house is the billabong shaped pool, a fish pond which is part of the sandstone retaining wall and the fern garden, a lush oasis viewed from the kitchen, "planted", as Tamara says "from the inside".

A regular Fire management regime has been incorporated into the garden maintenance program as the whole area is routinely affected by bushfires. Parts of the managed bush are burnt and everything left standing after the burn is put through a shredder and used as mulch, achieving a tidier regrowth which occurs almost instantaneously. Tamara pointed out that a burn should occur in this area a minimum of 10 years and a maximum of 20 years apart to ensure maximum regrowth and germination. Interestingly Acacias have been found to have fire retardant properties in this area.

Whilst this is a garden that is largely about individual, unusual and rare plants, in short a type of collectors garden, with plant health and maintenance contributing to spectacular flowering and beautiful shapes [ natural but better] it is the placement and blending of their form, foliage and flower colour as well as the decision to gradually merge the bush and the gardened area that makes this garden a harmonious whole..

Tamara's favourite : *Banksia phagiocappa* frjMnJffinchinbrock Isl. related to *integrifolia* this banksias has the most beautiful cone colours changing from burgundy to red to yellow and back again in the course of its life, another WA stunner.

The second Sydney garden was, by the map, just across the valley but the ten minute drive took us through the old orchard sites and capacious country estates that have replaced them.

The Ezzy's garden is approached down a drive that heads through both of the former until it drops into their 5 acre bush block.

The driveway winds through rocky outcrops and slopes dressed with casuarinas, tall eucalypts, grass trees and typical Sydney sandstone 'bush' in which could be spotted flowering dianellas, *Boronia ledifolia*, *Yroollisia pungens* and *pattersonia*. No doubt others awaited closer searching.

The house is on a levelled platform about halfway down the site.

The high slope on the approach side had been excavated to carve out the area and has been lined with stacked boulders to hide the scar. These are draped with very successful plantings of *Grevillea 'Royal Mantle'* and *Myoporum parvifolium*. At their base is a line of *Melaleuca hypericifolia*.

The house sits formally in its lake of fabulously maintained springy couch grass. It's looking a bit browned by the frosts at present but I'm told it greens up again at the start of warmer weather and the routine of mowing, scarifying and fertilising that Graham enjoys. Pop-up sprinklers take care of the watering but Leanne says this is where most of their water is used. It is a great children's play area and creates a wide band of bush-fire protection when green. Both Leanne and I wondered what other members could suggest as a less thirsty but equally durable alternative.

The formality is expanded with neat clipped hedges of, we assumed, *Syzygium 'Tiny Trev'* around paths and garden edges. The tiny leaves look very much like box and the sweeping curves were trimmed to about 50cm high.

Where the lawn meets the cliff, *Syzygium leuhmannii* stands tall, if a little bleached by the sun. These are under-planted with *Gardenia radicans*. In the shade of the house grow *Syzygium paniculatum* still hanging with clusters of vivid magenta fruits. These are teamed with sasanqua camellias and azaleas. All are richly green in this area.

This formal entrance garden was planned by the owners and a designer about 14 years ago.

At the bushy back, western aspect, the lawn divides, with one arm level in front of the house and its other sweeping down the slope to merge with the bush on a rocky ledge. At its end is perched a charming pool, virtually among the tree trunks with a pandorea entwined and a *Hardenbergia violacea* set to scramble.

The sloping garden between these levels was contained with weed mat originally and planted with a happy collection of standard Nursery natives. These include a sturdy *Eucalyptus 'Summer Red'*, several *Ceratopetalum gummiferum*, three or four *Banksia marginata*, assorted callistemon and grevilleas and clumps of kangaroo paw. More myoporum, Royal Mantle and a couple of prostrate *Acacia baileyana* successfully fill the gaps.

Formality is reintroduced with orderly plantings of *Callistemon 'Little John'*, specific placements of kangaroo paw and brachyscome leading down the steps to the pool.

Sculptures and little 'creatures' decorate the steps. The grass and plantings here are about 6 years old.

In a new garden (Feb 03) Leanne is creating a designed display either side of the back door. She's planted Bush Gems, *G. 'Miss Muffet'* and thryptomene for their pink

*Myoporum parvifolium*

blooms, blue brachyscome and grey leaved *Ziera cytisoides*, *Westringiafruticosa* and *Eriostemon myoporoides*

Towards the north end the land falls more steeply so the lawn is edged with original older plantings of massed *Grevillea* 'Robyn Gordon'. Further round, a sea of *G.* 'Forest Rambler' hides a deeper retaining wall. They combine handsomely. At this last corner against the house stands a formal hedge of gardenia which leads us back to the formality of the front.

It was a contrast to the morning garden and a credit to the owners who say they don't know much about plants but select the ones that have been successes, require little watering and thrive on once a year feed with a fertiliser suiting natives.

It seems it is possible to combine formal treatment with a laid-back 'bushy' look that suits the site.

**Caroline Gunter**

## **Sunday September 14<sup>th</sup>. South Coast Garden Visits**

Cathy and Mike Gorman's garden at Wattamolla was approached from the valley below via a steep drive through natural bushland supplemented with much additional planting. The house is situated on a site excavated from the hillside. The land was part of a dairy farm with a large amount of rainforest on the property and surrounding properties. The hillside faces the Illawarra escarpment so stunning views are afforded from every vantage point.

Mike and Cathy lived on the site in a caravan while they constructed their mud brick house. We were not there to study the architecture but the house seemed to provide an aesthetic and functional solution to rural living. During the time the house was coming together they had time to assess the site and decide how the garden should complement the house and the stunning natural beauty of the area.

The garden is planted predominantly with native plants but some exotics have been included either because in the early days friends contributed plants to the new garden or because the family liked the plants. These plants provide memories and sentimental links to the garden's early days, plants. As the garden has evolved the native plant emphasis has become stronger and Cathy has experimented with plants which are indigenous to the district. The house is approached from the drive below through a flight of steps through a rainforest area. The day of the visit was very windy and we were conscious of the blustery conditions as we stood talking on the driveway. As we reached the spacious lawn and planted area in front of the house the wind almost disappeared.

This sheltered garden has been planted on the fill from the excavation for the house. It provides a generous platform of scalloped lawn bordered with plantings of mainly grevilleas with lemon, white, pink and mauve flowers. Those of us who

struggle to grow plants in Sydney's poor soils marvelled at the lush growth of these plants. Beyond the lawn area is a dry creek bed which carries excess water away from the house. This has been planted with thriving pheballiums, correas and waratahs. The slope below this has been planted with bottlebrushes and banksias. Cathy attributes the healthy growth to deep soil and mulching. The rear of the house has several ponds which are fed by run off from the roof of the house. A backdrop to the house is provided by calicomas, pittosporums and lilly pillies. To the left of the house an excavated area has been formed into a grassed recreation area which seemed ideal for a leisurely game of cricket or even croquet. Actually the four younger Gormans probably use it for more energetic pursuits. It is edged with original rainforest and we were hard pressed to identify many of the trees growing there. It was an inspiration to see such a mature garden achieved in 11 years. I felt weak to think of the hard work which has been invested to provide such an outstanding result.

### **Jennifer Borrell**



The garden of Michael Suckling and Judith Geary is 1.5 acres and part of an early subdivision for tenant farmers in Kangaroo Valley. When purchased in 1989 it consisted of swampy kikuyu pasture and 1/2 acre of pristine bush. Work has been carried out to convert a drainage ditch on the property into a landscaped watercourse which filters the storm water runoff [ through field stones, sedges and rushes] and diverts the water around the house into a settling dam before running into the creek. Garden beds are filled with native plants of the Sydney and IUawarra region, most are naturally occurring species; much of the garden is experimental, with Australian trees, shrubs and grasses being trialed for landscape use. A kitchen garden, a graveled herb garden, an Asian inspired garden and a greenhouse complete the picture.

### **The Owners**

At the entrance to the garden the cottage feel is strengthened by the huge central tree [ a Euc. Botryoides and E. saligna, cross] and the design to manage water movement on the property. The adjacent mound of clay and loam created when deepening this area conceals the bio-cycle system, waste water from the house is pumped up onto the mound and sprayed along two lines. A waratah planted very close to one of the sprinkler heads acts as a test plant for chlorosis. It is the healthiest plant in the garden! Many plants on the mound have self seeded, persoonias, melaleucas, hakeas, Stipa verticillata and Ziera cytisoides. Judith had manipulated a multi trunked scribbly gum using weights, to arch away from the boundary line and over the waterway this gave it a most romantic form. She regretted planting as many Carex appressa as tube stock so close to the feature rocks as their very successful growth had reduced the visual impact of the rocks.

There was no time to explore the robust looking, generous and quite formally laid out vegetable garden because the garden behind the house called. Open lawn and dam set to

one side gave a contrasting and tranquil feeling. Planted by the dam and using the natural seepage points are *Gahnia*, *Ottelia ovalifolia*, *Philydrum lanuginosum* and sedges which Judith mentioned were slow at first and exploded into growth after three years. *Banksia spinulosa* grows on the dam wall and a grove of *Casuarina glauca* planted on a natural soak provides a screen from neighbours. The open lawn space acts as a fire retardant and gives the birds, especially the ducks heading for the dam, some air space. In the garden beds on the North boundary native geranium is enjoyed by the swamp wallabies and mingles with Barbwire grass [pink stems in Autumn], *Poa labillardieri*, silky Bluegrass, *Correas*, *Prostanthera* Badja Peak and *Epacris impressa*. Near the house is a robust hedge of *Prostanthera ovalifolia*. Across the bottom of the garden runs a deep, quite dramatically rock lined creek, surrounded by climax rainforest where *Backhousia myrtifolia*, Bracken, Rasp and Maidenhair ferns provide a soft contrast.

Michael's large simple dish birdbaths are set in three parts of the garden attracting different birds according to their placement. They have no rabbit problems just wallabies and wombats! Some useful general knowledge gleaned on the day - I think mainly from Jeff Howes - as we walked around the garden : when planting *Lomandara*, ask for female plants as the male flowers are scrappier [I've just ordered hundreds, can the nurseries tell me what they are when young? No, they cannot!] and the clay form of *Grevillea sericea* has longer leaves than the sandstone form. A bonus of the day was the simply beautiful and at times spectacular country we drove through.

**Georgina Persse**

### **Members Joined or Renewed for 2003/04 since last Newsletter (15 July 2003)**

APS Armidale & District, ASGAP Study Group Coordinator, ANPS Canberra region, APS

SA Region, APS Victoria, John Armstrong, Roslyn Andrews, Michael Bates, Lynne Boladeras, Jane Calder, Jacci Campbell, Shirley Cam, Jill Dark \*, Gillian Davies, Dominic Della-Libera, Catherine Drew, Joyce Edgerton, Ted & Jenny Finnic, Ron Gornall, Nicole Garmston\*, Jo Hambrett, Paul & Barbara Kennedy, Molly Lau, Rosemary Manion, Don & Thelma Peterson, Barbara Phersson\*, Kris Schaffer, Gloria Thomlinson, Stephen Thomas, SGAP Queensland, W A Wildflower Soc, Christine Wadey,

\* denotes new member

Bryan Loft  
Treasurer

## ASGAP GARDEN DESIGN STUDY GROUP

### Meeting No 70 - 10/08/2003 - Garden and Home of Tony and Joy Roberts

#### Agenda

- To look at 'Design Criteria for Judging Gardens for Competitions' by Diana Snape. A list of criteria for judging gardens that evolved from a "brain-storming" session at a Feb meeting of the Melb group in Feb 2000 and appearing in Newsletter No. 29 pub April/May 2000. This list of criteria to be discussed with a view to using a 'tool' like this to guide our assessment of any garden we visit.
- Using the assessment criteria on the Roberts garden!
- Reactions/discussion of "Garden Design and the Collector" in the last Newsletter

Launch is Aug 22<sup>nd</sup>

Sept 6/7	Kennedy Garden
Sept 20/21	Hanson Garden
Sept 27/28	Jacobs Garden
Sept 27/28	Blake Garden -
Oct 4/5	Katrandra Gardens
Oct 4/5	Larkin Garden
Oct 11/12	Flowerdale Rd Native G
Nov 1/2	Karkalla & Offshore
April 18	Bickleigh Vale Village
only	
April 24/25	Fulling & Adams

Also 3 country gardens that I can see - Nos 525 (Jan Juc), 538 (near Bendigo and 553 (Colac)

- Newsletter items - please
- Next meeting and beyond - ideas please