

**GARDEN DESIGN STUDY GROUP****Newsletter No. 58****May 2007****Study Group Leader/Editor:** Diana Snape**Treasurer/Membership:** Bryan Loft

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OR Google 'Australian Garden Design'

Dear Members,

Mulch is certainly the main topic of this Newsletter, with valuable information and different perspectives from Kevin Handreck and a number of members. I hope you can find among them any answers you want, though the topic's not closed. Annette Houseman describes her very original garden with its own special and effective mulch and Jeff Howes reminds us of the fundamental importance of soil. As usual there are interesting ideas raised in the correspondence, such as Glenda Datson's thought about gardens for children (do they *really* need to have a lawn?). We have two more great plans from Thea McCarthy and Pam Yarra. Jeff Howes suggests (over time) putting plans on the GDSG website, with lists of plants suitable for different areas and readily available in those areas. We'd need some-one to draw up the plans with a consistent format, others to nominate suitable plants for their area, plus photos of some of the plants selected.

I think Judy Baghurst's delightful poem in this Newsletter is our first and I hope not our last. It must be time we Australians started recording our appreciation of some of our wonderful plants in this way. You might like to choose your own plant (or garden theme) for another poem. Or, if you prefer, keep to prose to tell us about a favourite plant (or group of plants) of yours. It might be one you've only discovered recently, or one you've grown for years. Plants, and plant knowledge, are central to our design work. You could tell us of any recent successful combinations, any drought stalwarts you've discovered, or possible plant disappointments.

Thea McCarthy's wonderful fabric design (unfortunately only email subscribers can see the vibrant colours) reinforces the idea that garden design is a form of art. On this theme, Nicky Zarer sent from the UK a stimulating article in which Mary Keen explained that "the greatest gardens are works of art fit to rank beside poetry and painting." Gardens are both kinetic art (we walk through them) and performance art (they change over time). I think garden design is the most complex and challenging form of art, with the variability of living plants and all their inter-relationships, plus that fourth dimension of time. A naturalistic garden in which we try to let plants do their own natural thing, with just a bit of friendly guidance, can be a project for life.

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**NEXT MEETINGS**

*Please see details of meetings and contacts on pages 19 to 23*

**MELBOURNE: Sunday June 10** 2 pm at the Studpark Community Centre

**NE VIC: Saturday June 16** 10.30 am at Helen & John van Riet's

**SYDNEY: October 1-5** ASGAP Conference in Newcastle

**CANBERRA:** Please contact Shirley Pipitone

*Visiting members from other areas are welcome at meetings!*

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## CORRESPONDENCE

The simplest way for me to respond is to send you a copy of my mulch article that appeared in the November 2005 issue of 'Gardening Australia' (*please seepity*). My trial data suggest that a mulch that has reasonably satisfactory properties can have up to about 30% of particles finer than 5 mm, but I would generally prefer it to have less than 20%. Other information is in my book 'Gardening Down-Under' (CSIRO). A coarse organic mulch is a good compromise that gives water-retaining benefits together with minimal interception of rain water.

The addition of wetting agents to mulches is largely a marketing tool. An easily-wet fine mulch as is marketed by one Victorian company will retain most of the water that falls in showers. The best mulches are coarse and water repellent, as they retain the least water. This water-repellence should not be transmitted to the soil below if that soil has more than about 10% clay. I have next to no faith in water crystals. They are essentially useless in potting mixes and of less use than a few irrigations applied to newly planted trees and shrubs. The likes of Seasol will do no harm! Kind regards **Kevin Handreck**

Whilst thinking about what to include in the 'Intelligent Gardening' course to be run by our group, I realized that rarely do we talk about children's gardens, apart from a brief comment about the necessity of a piece of lawn for young children to play on. Children's gardens can be so much more, a real learning experience. If we want to attract young couples (who may have young families) then I think APS needs to consider this. My last garden was not designed for children, rather it was a collection of plants aimed at attracting wildlife. However I found that young children visiting us were delighted with the narrow winding paths, where they could hide from one another, the bridge over which they would run, the frogs they could look for in the pond, the native bees which sheltered in the reeds. The garden shed which acted as a bird hide for us became a play place for them to raise or lower the hinged window cover, spying on one another with an old telescope.

They could check the rock shelters for lizards and beneath the leaf mulch for skinks and, at night, with the aid of Auntie Glenda's red shaded spotlight, they could see gliders leaving the nest boxes put up for rosellas. As gardeners we plant to suit our own requirements but how much more enjoyable our gardens would be if they were actually designed from a child's perspective. So we don't need a square of lawn, just imagination. Cheers **Glenda Datson**

Newsletter received and printed. In colour! I'm glad I didn't have to fold all that into an envelope!

We regret that we weren't able to get to any meetings last year. Due to the unfortunate perversity of fate, it happend every time that the Garden Design meeting was in the afternoon on the same day as the Nepean Conservation Group's morning meeting in Sorrento, and Margaret's on the Committee. Perhaps this year will turn out better. Thanks for the Newsletter, and cheers. **Doug McIver** Vic.

With some luck the topic of soils may be a new thread and prompt some good feedback from members. You should try and follow up your contacts re an article on mulch as inland plants seem to have very little mulch in their natural habitat, while coastal plants have a lot more. For optimum growing conditions it may be the case of applying similar type and quantity of mulch as that found where the plant grows naturally. **Jeff Howes** NSW

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## DESIGN

### My Garden Design

Thea McCarthy Vic

The drought in the North East is taking its toll. Our dam is nearly dry and we are rationing the water by watering using a bucket with a small hose attached near the bottom so the newly established shrubs that were planted in winter will have a deep watering about every 10 days or so. All the rest are on their own. The biggest challenge is the kangaroos who have feasted on plants such as correas, eremophilas, young eucalypts, the young *Hymenosporum flavum* and *Brachychiton acerifolius* and even the spring onions in the herb patch! I have lost some established plants but overall the garden is coping quite well. I have made a list of the surviving species and have used mainly those plants for this my first garden design.

I have always struggled with garden design generally and find it difficult to put a plan in place. I am a keen free machine embroiderer and was challenged recently by our stitchers group to create an abstract design based on flowing lines. I have always felt more comfortable interpreting nature around me using photos and sketches because the "design" is already there before me. However I decided to give my new project a go. By tearing, cutting and manipulating fabric, exploring textural layers, repeating, linking and integrating shapes using complementary colours, I was finally able to produce a piece that seemed to flow.

Whilst I was undergoing this exercise I realised that this is what garden design is like. Flowing lines, shapes, textures, complementary colours, blending and balancing with one another (*please see p1S*). So here is my very first attempt at a garden design emulating the flowing lines in my embroidery. This design is for a garden which faces south in a property at the base of the Warby Ranges where the soil is sandy loam.

I based the plan on a view from the upper balcony of the house facing a newly established plantation behind the garden area. I attempted to design the garden to keep this view. I suggest that all the garden beds be mulched with gravel as this is a fire prone area.

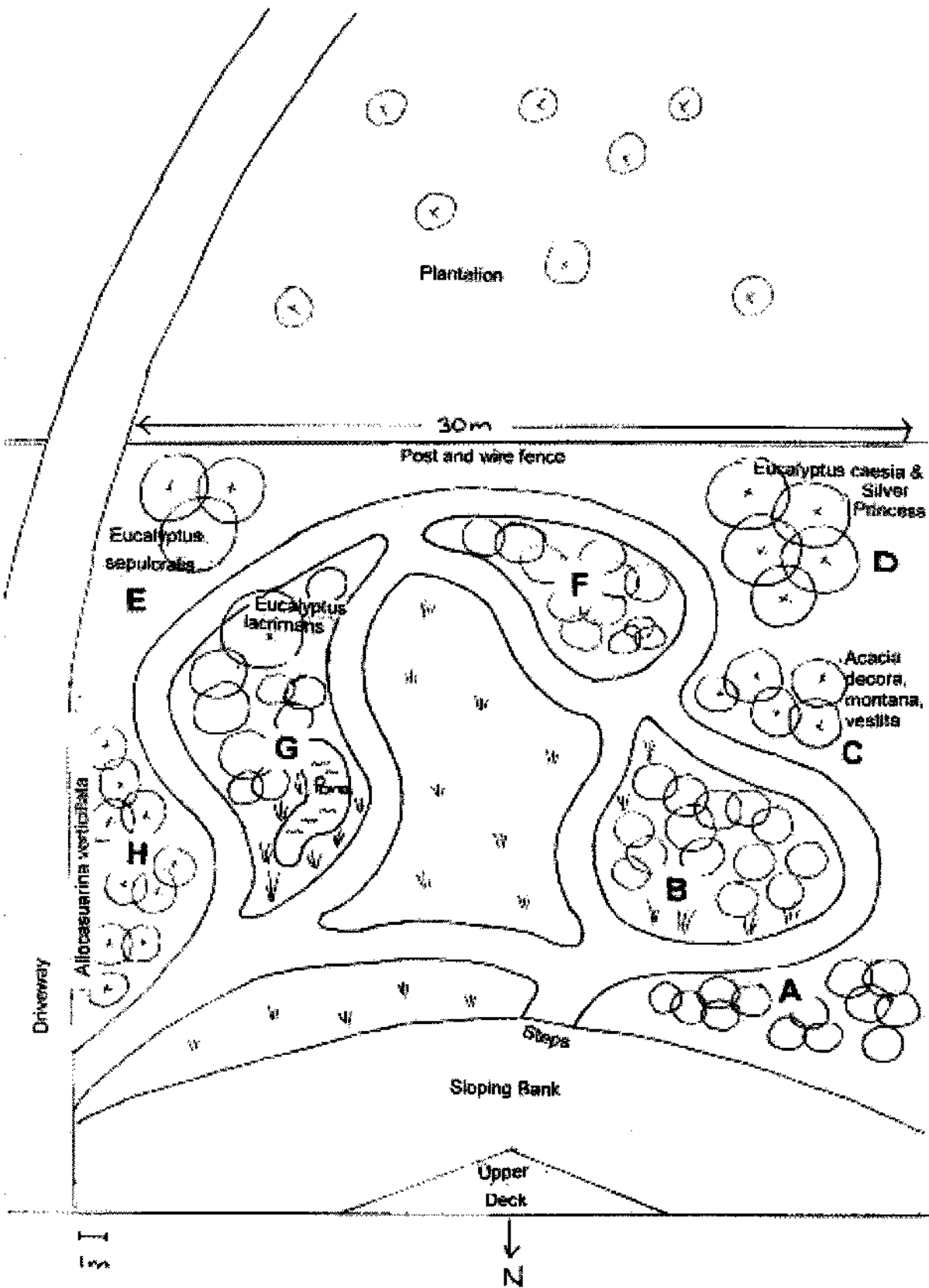
A bank with a sloping side along the house has already been planted on top with numerous shrubs and Kangaroo Paws but very little has been planted on the slope itself. I suggest the following hardy ground covers to cover this slope: *Kunzea pomifera*, *K. ambigua* - prostrate, *Eremophila* prostrate species - red and yellow, *Myoporum parvifolium* - white and pink, the gorgeous long purple flowering *Dampiera rosmarinifolia*, *Pultenaea pedunculata*, *Grevillea curviloba*, *G. lanigera*, *G. 'Forest Rambler'*, *G. bedgoodiana* and *Enchylaena tomentosa*, all plants that are doing well in our garden. Perhaps some steps made from local granite slabs with rocks placed strategically beside them could be constructed to lead into the garden area below.

**Area A** to be planted with hardy bird attracting shrubs such as eremophilas and correas, *Grevillea alpina* and *Callistemon 'Little John'*, where the birds can be viewed from the house.

**Area B** to be planted with groups of naturally sculptured type shrubs such as *Ziera* sp, *Eriostemon myoporoides*, *Melaleuca incana* - dwarf species, *Leucophyta brownii*, *Ptilotus obovatus*, and the graceful Lemon Grass, *Cymbopogon ambiguus*, to create a green/grey tapestry effect.

**Area C** a group of acacias, *A. montana*, *A. decora* and the beautiful weeping *A. vestita* to provide some shade from the western sun and give a magnificent display of flowers in Spring. In **Area D** I suggest a group of the hardy *Eucalyptus caesia* ssp. *caesia* and *E. 'Silver Princess'*. These along with a group of the graceful *Eucalyptus sepulcralis* in **Area E** will frame the view of the plantation behind it.

**Area F** to be planted with indigenous and other hardy low-medium shrubs, *Indigofera australis*, *Calytrix tetragona*, *Grevillia alpina*, *Einadia nutans* and *Rhagodia spinescens* for contrasting colour, *Stypandra glauca* with its beautiful blue lily-type flowers, *Xerochrysum viscosa* which will pop up happily in the gravel in Spring, and the delightful Billy Buttons, *Craspedia canens*.



## 6

**Area G** to have the graceful and weeping *Eucalyptus lacrimans* behind the pond to be reflected in the water. Also the hardy *Baeckia densifolia* with its elegant graceful branches. Some more *Grevillea alpha* and eremophilas to link with other areas, *Dryandra* and *Isopogon* species to the left of the pond and various tufties and grasses such as *Craspedia* sp, *Dianella revoluta*, *Poa labillardieri*, *Themeda triandra*, *Carex appressa*, *Lomandra longifolia* and other *Juncus* sp. along the edges.

**Area H** to have a group of local drought-hardy *Allocasuarina verticillata*, with its drooping habit which will also be reflected in the pond. Its shed 'leaves' will, over time, provide a soft mulch and although the trees may look ungainly when young the appearance will improve with age. Also it is lovely to hear the wind whispering through the trees.

The lawn in the middle of the beds to be planted with *Microlaena stipoides* which is very drought resistant and I believe tends to stay green in the summer months even without watering.

Overall the plan includes small eucalypts, hardy "living" ground covers, a tapestry garden and a lawn with native grasses. The garden beds to be mounded, perhaps even mounded and channelled as per John Hunt's book '*Creating an Australian Garden*' for optimum water capture. Gravel mulch for these beds is sensible for a fire prone area. Perhaps crusher dust to be used in the pathways. The disadvantages of the last two items are the cost and we need to consider the environmental implications at the source site.

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### Redesign of a corner in a suburban bush garden

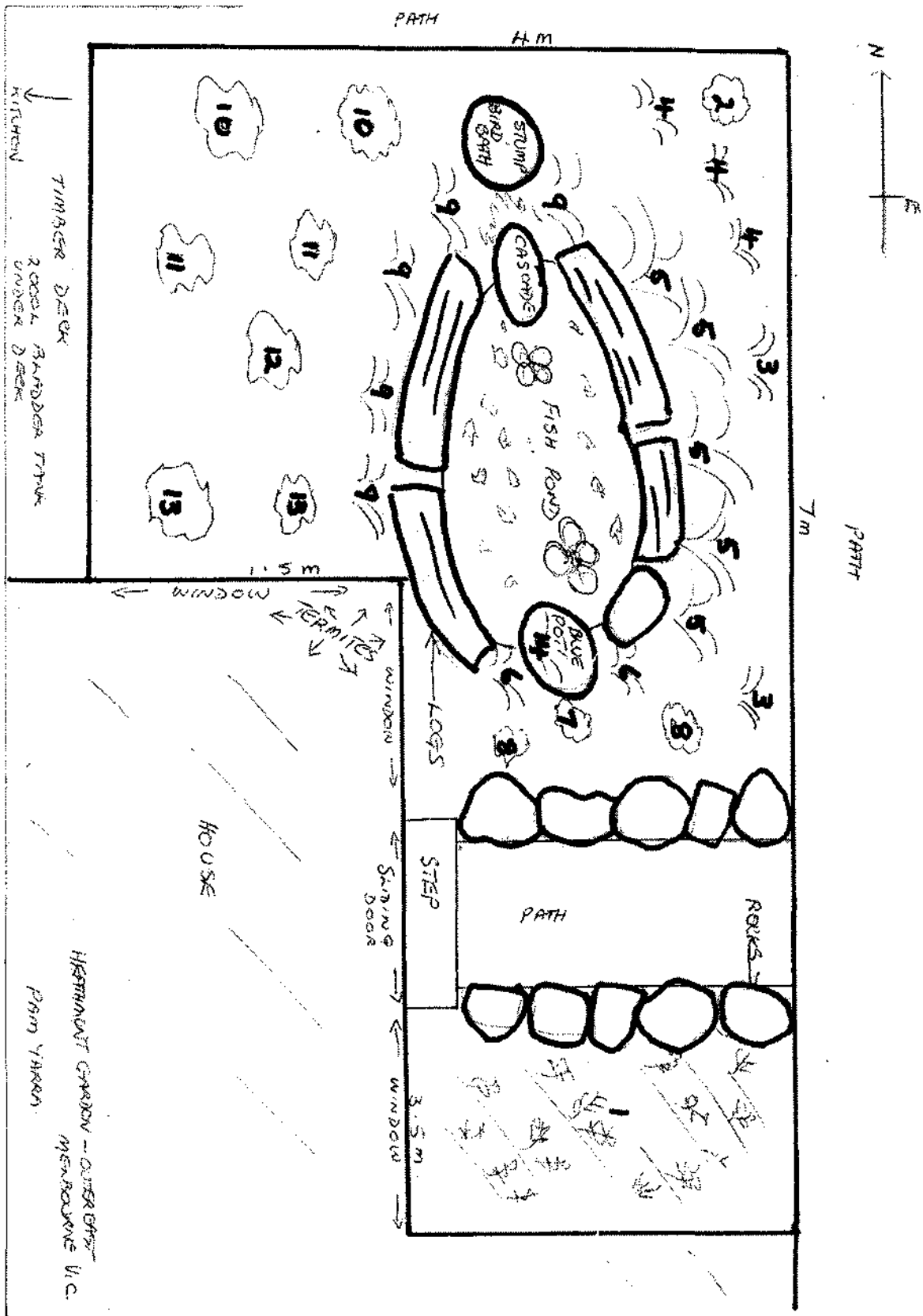
Pam Yarra Vic

This small area of garden, except for the strip of grasses between the path and fish pond, was completely remodelled/redesigned last spring. The motivation for this was the completion of a baiting program to eradicate our termite infestation (we hope). The sleepers next to the house were removed and the raised garden soil lowered, both had contributed as a welcome mat for the termites. This section of the garden is dry and semi-shaded. The poor clay soil was turned over and treated with gypsum before planting. Each hole was treated with potting mix and wetting agent and the whole area was well mulched after planting. Husband Jim installed a 2000 litre bladder water tank with pump under the deck and a tap close to this area of garden. This water supply, together with waste water from the kitchen over the deck railing, has seen the new garden thrive.

At the time of writing (autumn), the mainly pink and mauve flowers with a touch of cream are attracting the many honeyeaters already in the garden. The bird bath on the tree stump and the pond cascade provide bathing opportunities for a great variety of birds. We have placed wire over the fish pond as the many local kookaburras have treated it as their take-away food supply. As the moisture level has been maintained, we have had the pleasure of hearing frogs again. The whole garden is frog friendly with a frog pond in an adjoining area. The many grasses soften the edges of the paved path with the contrasting greens of the poas and the bright greens of the lomandras and carex plants, attracting many butterflies. The garden is visible from all aspects of the house, the lounge room windows, kitchen and deck and the visual and auditory appeal of the pond and cascade contribute to a feeling of peace and calm for me.

Planting list All these plants tolerate dry soil and shade/sun.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. <i>Doodiaaspera</i>                             | 8. <i>Astartea</i> 'Winter Pink'          |
| 2. <i>Banksia spinulosa</i> 'Birthday Candles'     | 9. <i>Orthrosanthus multiflorus</i>       |
| 3. <i>Lomandra confertifolia</i> 'Little Con'      | 10. <i>Melaleuca violacea</i>             |
| 4. <i>Carex tasmanica</i>                          | 11. <i>Correa</i> 'Pinker Bells' - hybrid |
| 5. <i>Poa sieberiana</i> & <i>P. labillardieri</i> | 12. <i>Correa</i> 'Mallee Pearl' - hybrid |
| 6. <i>Orthrosanthus laxus</i> (dwarf)              | 13. <i>Brachyscome</i> 'Mauve Delight'    |
| 7. <i>Lysiosepalum involucreatum</i>               | 14. <i>Verticordia plumosa</i>            |



**Design of the Keith Moore Habitat Garden**

Keith Naylor Landscape Designer

*(Please see picture page 21)*

The overall aim of the design was to develop an Australian native plant garden that displays the local natural environment, incorporating local native (indigenous) plants that could be used for educational purposes. The garden was to be accessible to the public, especially the disabled. It was important to retain and have minimal disturbance to the existing frog habitat amongst the established native reeds and bulrushes but at the same time create other types of habitats around the edges of the designated area.

The shape of the existing area lent itself to a modified shape of Jervis Bay. Therefore the design then followed the theme of Jervis Bay and surrounding areas by including various notable features around Jervis bay, such as Point Perpendicular, the Ruined Lighthouse, the Hole in the Wall, Bowen Island, many of the beaches, Currumbene Creek and a representative mooring post for Huskisson wharf. A small causeway, representing Plantation Point, was designated as a point where the public could walk out to experience the frog habitat. St. Georges Basin, Lake Windemere and Lake McKenzie are represented in a three-pond water feature. There were already stockpiles of sandstone rock on-site, originally from development work at the Vincentia Golf Club, which were to be fully utilised in the construction of the landscape, with other recycled materials. Sandstone rocks have been specifically selected and placed to represent these many features.

Indigenous plant species are to be used to form the themed vegetation types to be displayed in the garden. The vegetation types selected are Grassland, Dune Woodland/Heath, Heathland, Shrubland and Sedgeland. The plants selected, where possible, are to be botanically significant for the local area, horticulturally suited to the site and aesthetically pleasing.

Finally the design needed to take into consideration that the construction, planting and the long term maintenance of the garden was to be completed by volunteers. This then allowed another feature of the overall design of the garden to be towards a water wise garden and in itself provide another educational aspect to show how local native plants can be used in gardens.

**Garden design plans online**

Jeff Howes NSW

The May 2007 ABC 'Gardening Australia' has a large supplement by NGIA (the Nursery & Garden Industry Association) and they feature plans for an Aussie Kitchen Garden -- see link:

[http://www.lifeisagarden.com.au/gardening/achievable\\_gardening.asp](http://www.lifeisagarden.com.au/gardening/achievable_gardening.asp)

The following is a Victoria based site for sustainable gardens -- you can subscribe (free) to their monthly on-line magazine <[http://www.sgaonline.org.au/info\\_sustainabledesign2.html](http://www.sgaonline.org.au/info_sustainabledesign2.html)> Go down the page to the Para "Wants" and click on Garden Plan examples, or alternatively go to the following and look at the last garden for their ideas on a native garden <[http://www.sgaonline.org.au/pdfs/garden\\_design\\_ideas.pdf](http://www.sgaonline.org.au/pdfs/garden_design_ideas.pdf)>

It is something that the GDSG could place on the ASGAP site -- and have plans for many situations in different states. To me, the secret will be selecting plants readily available for the location eg a plan for an inner Sydney small garden would need plants not too hard to find. A good job for someone to co-ordinate members' plans and then redraw them so they are presented in the same format. That way we would appear to be a bit professional. It could be a good project instead of a book as 'everyone' (well nearly everyone) looks for information on the web.

*Thanks for the information, Jeff. I'd say they're all native gardens, composed of Australian plants in different styles. I think your suggestion would be a valuable project, showing each plan with different suites of plants for different areas/ conditions. (Eventually, a selection of plans could be assembled in a book.)*



Different members might:

- draw a plan of a small garden (say 25 - 50 sq. m.), designating plants in categories (with repetition of some plants), eg 2 species of tree; 1 species of large shrub, 2 medium, 4 small; 2 species of groundcovers; 3 tufted/strap-leaved plants; 1 climber.
  - select suitable plants in those categories available in their area and find good digital photos of some.
  - draw the plans professionally before they're put on our website.
- What do members think of the idea? Could you help in some way? DS

## PLANTS

### In Praise of Cushion Bush

Judy Baghurst SA

In summer when the north wind scatters dust  
and leptospermums shrivel up and die,  
when correas crisp and kangaroo paws fade,  
consider *Leucophyta brownii*.

In winter-time when south-west gales attack  
and fling the eremophilas awry,  
tear and splinter branches, strip off leaves,  
then plant some *Leucophyta brownii*.

Grown from cuttings or from suede-soft seed  
Cushion Bush you'll soon identify:  
half-moon sculpture wired in silver-grey,  
night-bright *Leucophyta brownii*.

To cliffs the bushes cling, or wind-dried sand,  
and bring a drowse of shimm'ring bees that fly  
between the yellow, honeyed, pom-pom flowers -  
tenacious *Leucophyta brownii*.

And so, with no regret, pass roses by,  
the parching sun and summer drought defy,  
for ev'ry Aussie gardener can rely  
on unsung *Leucophyta brownii*.

## GARDENS

### 20 facts about mulches

Kevin Handreck SA.

{This article was previously published in 'Gardening Australia', Page 74, November 2005}

In nature, virtually all soils have a mulch on their surface. The soils of forests have litter and leaf mould; those of grasslands have a layer of decaying grass and mosses; many desert soils have a stony surface; the sand of sandy deserts is an excellent mulch.

In our gardens, we use mulch as a substitute for these vital natural soil covers.

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1. Look at the organic litter on a forest soil. It grades from very fine highly decomposed humus at the soil surface to the coarseness of recently fallen leaves and twigs at the top. In our gardens, the ideal mulch will be like that.

2. The most important property of a garden mulch is that it should reduce the rate of water evaporation from the soil below.

3. A mulch is like a blanket on the soil. The best mulches allow most rain or irrigation water to move into the soil below, but they minimise the loss of that water by evaporation. They reduce evaporation partly by providing a break between soil water and the air. Water is not then simply 'sucked' out of the soil by the sun and wind. It has to pass as a vapour through the still layer of air within the mulch, and this is much slower than direct evaporation.

4. Many of the organic mulches available in retail packs are too fine to be of top effectiveness in reducing water use in the garden. A thick layer (eg. 50 mm) of fine mulch will hold most of a light rain that falls on it: only with heavy rain or prolonged irrigation will water actually reach the soil. There is no break between soil and air, so water wicks up through fine mulches. The rate of water loss from fine mulches can in fact be **higher** than from bare soil.

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| Mulch ranking              | Relative evaporation rate | Particles larger than 5 mm | Particles smaller than 2 mm | Irrigation water held per 500 ml dry mulch (mL) |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Excellent<br>(chunky bark) | 40                        | 100                        | 0                           | 38  |
| Good                       | 50                        | 66                         | 20                          | 78  |
| Fair                       | 65                        | 37                         | 38                          | 112   |
| Very poor                  | 110                       | 16                         | 65                          | 172   |
| Bare soil                  | 100                       | -                          | -                           | -   |

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5. The data in the table are for four of 20 mulches I recently tested. They show that in good mulches, most of the particles will be larger than about 5 mm. Only a small proportion will be smaller than 2 mm. The higher the proportion of 'fines', the less effective will the mulch be in reducing water losses.

6. Loss of rain or sprinkler water from fine mulches can therefore be faster than from bare soil. But if most of the water is applied below them (via drippers or soaker hose), they will reduce evaporation rate.

7. Fine mulches are excellent seed beds for any weed seeds that are blown into the garden. Weeds use water too!

8. The large particles of coarse mulches will gradually decompose, so that after several years of additions, the earlier additions will have decomposed to be like the fine humus of the bottom layer of forest litter. The later additions will be doing the work of reducing evaporation. To speed up this process on a new garden bed, you could first apply a thin (eg. 10 mm) layer of fine mulch and then a thicker layer (eg. 40 mm) of coarse mulch that has few fines.

9. In summary, the most benefit is obtained from water by applying irrigation beneath a coarse organic mulch.

10. Organic mulches are living mulches. They are gradually decomposed by small soil animals, fungi and bacteria. In the process, nutrients are released for use by the plants.

11. But in addition, plants actually help themselves to the nutrients in the mulch. Most plant roots have beneficial fungi (mycorrhiza) growing on them. These fungi send out hyphae into the lower layers of leaf mould, where they secrete acids and enzymes that dissolve nutrients such as phosphorus and take them back to the plant.
12. Proteaceous plants (grevilleas, banksias, hakeas, proteas) do the same thing by producing clusters of fine roots in the humus layer. If you repeatedly remove leaf litter from a garden bed, you are robbing your plants. Poorer growth and health is inevitable.
13. Another benefit of mulches is that they protect the soil from the pounding of rain and irrigation water. On sloping ground, soil erosion is minimised.
14. Mulches also shade the soil below. In summer, the lower temperature under an organic mulch allows roots to continue to grow into the topsoil.
15. But in winter, mulched soil will tend to be cooler than bare soil, so plant growth may be slightly reduced and the effects of frost more severe.
16. Any problems? There can be, but they are minor compared with the benefits.
17. Uncomposted 'waste' materials may contain weed seeds, may be temporarily toxic to plant roots and can reduce nitrogen supply to plants for some months. Composting kills weed seeds and eliminates toxicity. Some extra nitrogenous fertiliser should be applied with woody mulches.
18. If you find that repeated heavy organic mulching produces water repellence in your soil, overcome this in the short term with a wetting agent: reduce applications.
19. Organic mulches are the best, but what about non-organic mulches (stones, crushed rock, etc)? These can give interesting decorative effects, but they are difficult to maintain in good condition. Fallen leaves have to be removed, so the benefits of those leaves to the plants are lost.
20. Plastic sheeting must not be used as a mulch. Unless it has holes punched into it, neither water nor oxygen can move into the soil below. Plants will be harmed. If you do want to use a plastic, use woven products such as Weed Mat, whose holes allow water and oxygen to pass.

*For more detailed information about the chemistry of soils, see Kevin's best-selling book 'Gardening Down-Under' (CSIRO).*

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## Mulch and fire

Barbara Buchanan Vic

Alan used to rake up leaf and twig litter from under the gums and cart it away. I used to sneak what I could back onto areas of the garden. I found it helped improve the soil and was especially valuable in newly planted areas even though I took care never to make the layer thick. Over the last few years I have come to realize why he was cleaning up; reading Linda Handscombe's report of the Grampians fires was a turning point. I make an effort to dig in rotted cowpats when I plant but do not use them as mulch. The roughly circular burnt bare 6-12 inch diameter spots in the paddocks that were burnt are a startling vindication. They are real holes in the surface showing up clearly against the rest of the 'pasture', where the roots have partially at least survived. I was so pleased we had gravel surrounding the house. It needs renewing now after at least 12 years and I never did get enough. So for fire risk areas, inorganics are the only answer.

I have been driven to wonder if the instantaneous death of a garden by fire is not better than the death by a thousand cuts drought brings. The only water I have is grey household waste and averages 3-4 buckets a day. Deciding how best to use this is a pain. It doesn't help seeing plants that I have given good water to dying anyway. Young crowea plants surprised me by dying quite early on, whereas older ones are

hanging on, albeit a lot are hollow stemmed which I put down to borers. They certainly do not shine in this condition. Correas are starting to fail too, and I have always looked on them as extra tough. There does seem to be a position effect, plants in shade surviving much better, despite the root competition they must have.

While I want to remove the dead plants for appearances and kindling potential (surely we won't have another visitation, there's not much left to burn but odd patches) and it would be one job out of the way ahead of the autumn break, I hesitate to remove most because they offer a little shade to neighbours. My philothecas are looking dicey especially in the sun but the phebaliums or leionemas seem to be managing. Touch wood. I don't really walk around the garden unless I have to. One ray of sunshine is provided by the small growing acacias from the seminar, not all are still with us but those that are are still growing—in fact this worries me, are they wearing themselves out? I am hoping it is due to the 'Wattle Grow' inoculant that I lightly forked in a few weeks after planting.

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**Mulching with crusher dust - advantages and disadvantages**

**Thea McCarthy Vic**

I was interested in Alan and Jan Hall's article regarding mulching with gravel which followed on from Jo Hambrett's comments on mulching generally. We have a 12ha property in the Warby Ranges, west of Wangaratta. When establishing some new garden beds 18 months ago, we purchased crusher dust from a local quarry for mulch - partly because it is a byproduct of their crushing operations, partly because gravel from the nearest supplier was not available at the time and was more expensive and partly because my husband (who made fairly high mounds in the garden beds) felt that the crusher dust was more stable on slopes. We believed that the crusher dust would help retain the soil moisture and keep the new plants stable and of course there would not be a problem with collar rot. We did not consider using a sand mulch as we had used it some years ago and had great difficulty keeping the weeds out of it.

Up until the drought all the plants were growing well and the mulch seemed to be keeping the soil moist. However during the drought, when watering young plants with a bucket which had a small rubber hose attached to it for slower and better absorption, I noticed that the crusher dust absorbed most of the water. Obviously, as Jo Hambrett has indicated in her article on mulching, unscreened mulches tend to absorb water because of the fine particles. Indeed when I searched on the net about the qualities of crusher dust I found conflicting articles ranging from its ability to keep subsoil moist when used as a mulch, to the opposite situation where water holding capacities happens only in the mulch instead!

So here we are with a mulch that appears to be resisting our efforts to keep some young plants alive in the drought. To overcome this problem in the future we have removed some of the crusher dust at the base of the new plants and will replace it with screened gravel and will do the same for future plantings. Despite the disadvantages of crusher dust in extremely dry conditions for young plants, we are still happy with it overall as it discourages the growth of weeds, encourages the germination of welcome daisies, it keeps the soil cool and moist, the more established plants seem to like it and it looks good in our garden.

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There have been many articles written on mulch and the following are my views together with the results of some research that you may find of benefit. (You can click on the mulch sheet in this link for a good mulch sheet: <http://www.mcsl.org.au/BlitzFactSheets.html>)

#### There are three types of mulch

- o Organic material such as: eucalyptus leaf litter, wood chips, pine bark chips, compost, lawn clippings, pea straw, stable straw, lucerne, seaweed, hay, manure, sugar cane mulch, paper, etc.
- o Inorganic mulch such as: gravel, decorative pebbles, any crushed rock, sand, etc.
- o Living mulch: any dense growing ground cover plant.

Why do we mulch native gardens? The main reason is to try and simulate the growing conditions in the bush, where leaf litter forms a very natural and effective layer over the soil. This is especially so along the coastal regions. As well, mulch makes the garden look more 'Australian' in its appearance.

How thick should mulch be applied? In general, mulch should not be applied any thicker than 75 mm. Mulch applied too thick causes deoxygenation of the soil and this can, at worst, kill plants.

#### Advantages of mulch

- o An effective and safe way to reduce weeds.
- o Reduces evaporation resulting in less watering.
- o Keeps soil temperatures cooler in summer and warmer in winter.
- o Using organic mulches, results in the soil benefiting from addition of nutrients as the mulch decomposes. This helps create good soil structure as it greatly increases the biological activity in the soil (especially earth worms and other beneficial microbes).
- o Protects the soil surface from the compacting effect of rain.
- o Using living mulch has the added results of flowers and interesting leaf texture.
- o Eucalyptus mulch is particularly beneficial in a native garden because it promotes the development of micro-organisms in the soil which enhance plant health.
- o Improves the appearance of garden beds.
- o Organic mulch decomposes over time and this benefits the soil by the addition of nutrients, especially nitrogen.

#### Disadvantages of mulch

- o Soil needs to be wet/damp before mulch is applied.
- o If the mulch material used is so effective it can completely insulate the soil and prevent moisture penetration.
- o Use of fresh, green organic material can deplete the soil's nitrogen supplies as nitrogen is used up in decomposition. Added extra nitrogen (e.g. blood and bone) is needed to compensate for this and best applied before spreading the mulch.
- o Layers of paper are often used under mulch as a weed suppressant but this may attract nematodes. Thick layers of paper can also be colonised by termites.
- o As organic material breaks down it coats the soil with a wax like substance making the soils and especially sandy soils "non-wetting" or water repellent. Applications of soil wetting agents are very effective and well worth using to overcome this.

- o Use of mushroom compost as a mulch is not recommended for acid loving native plants, as it is often quite alkaline.
- o Organic mulch needs to be topped up every 1 to 2 years to maintain desired thickness as it breaks down over time.
- o Inorganic mulch can look unsightly when leaves fall on it and they can be difficult and time consuming to remove. As well, lawn mowers and pebbles/crushed rocks are a bad mix.

#### Mulching tips

- o Before mulching, remove any grass, weeds and dead plants from the bed.
- o Put in any new plants before applying your mulch layer.
- o Mulch can be applied at any time, but is best applied in mid spring or early summer.
- o How you are going to water the plant needs to be considered before the mulch is laid. Drippers or soaker hoses placed below the mulch work more effectively. Water applied above the mulch may not always get down to the soil. After rainfall or watering dig down to see how far the water progressed through the mulch. The soil can still be dry even after heavy rainfall - an all too common problem.
- o Do not pile mulch up against the stems and trunks of plants. Piling mulch against plant stems can lead to trunk rot and plant death.
- o Use inorganic mulches for native plants growing naturally in low nutrient soils.
- o Before selecting what type of mulch to use, take into consideration where the native plants you are using originate from. For example, for inland plants from drier areas, a mulch of gravel may be the best option as damp organic mulch often leads to fungal problems with these plants. On the other hand, for rainforest plants, deep green organic mulch would be a better option.

#### Conclusion

No one mulch is universally the best so consider the above before making a choice.

### **'Dairy Cans' pebbly garden**

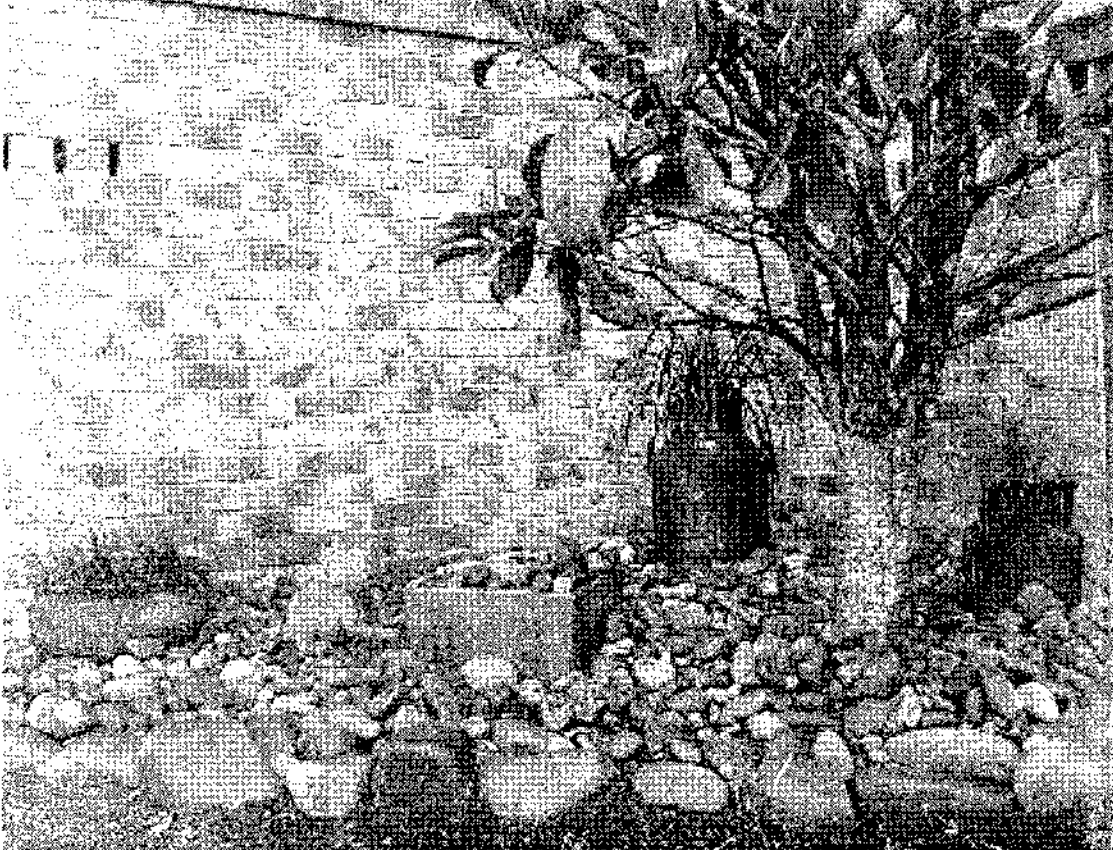
**Annette Houseman NSW**

The 'Dairy Cans' garden started last November when I attended a St John First Aid Meeting at an old established dairy farm in the hills of Upper Comboyne. I espied a scrap metal heap of disused and rusty dairy equipment. The property owner was kind enough to let me take home an old milk can, an even older cream can and the bowl of a milk separator. All of these items were missing a base and were full of holes. Surprisingly my husband John's expected question "Why did you bring that rubbish home?" didn't eventuate; just as well as I didn't have a sensible answer.

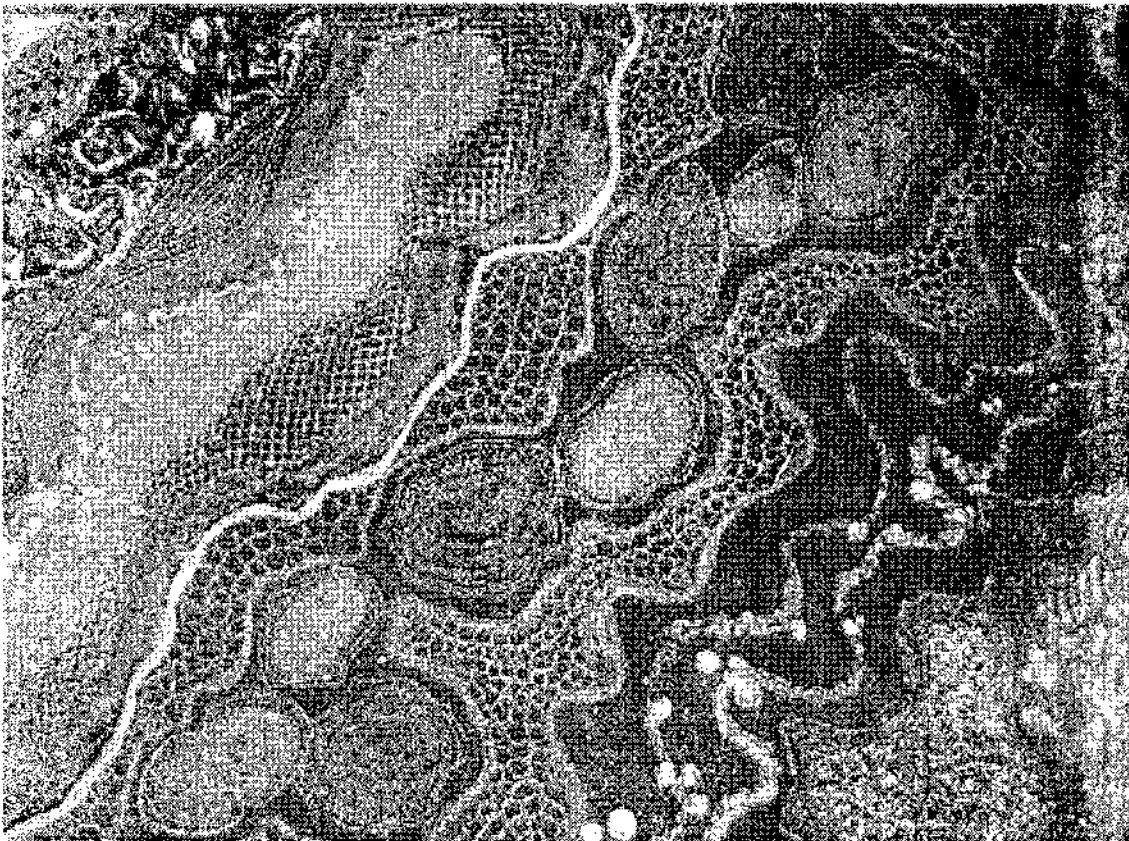
Christmas came along with our daughter, son-in-law and their two children aged 11 and 7. It just so happened that our youngest son gave us a submersible water pump as a Christmas gift, suitable for a water feature in the garden - just what I wanted, but not what I needed. Our garden already has two other water features and several bird baths. The weather was hot, the youngsters needed to use up some energy & the nearby river was inviting us to swim in it. An idea was forming in my mind, always a bad sign. Why not hook up the trailer and collect some river pebbles after our swim. I phoned our friend - it was his property that we planned to 'invade' - he said "Sure, take as many pebbles as you like".

The proposed new garden area was cleared of plant debris and a native gardenia *Randia fitzalanii* was pruned to about 2.5 m. Next a weed mat was cut to the appropriate shape and laid ready to receive the pebbles. Mid afternoon we hooked up the trailer to the 4WD and then put extra air in the trailer's tyres. On arrival at the paddock where the pebbles were located the six of us (4 adults + 2 children) wasted no time in picking up pebbles of all shapes, colours and sizes. A half trailer load was deemed sufficient to avoid damage

Annette Houseman's pebbly garden



Thea's abstract design



due to the weight. The river beckoned shady and cool under the trees, together with a rope to swing on for the children. The following day the same 'pick up stones and have a swim', took place.

Back at the garden the trailer was again carefully manoeuvred into position next to the drop off site. One by one the stones were placed in position, the larger ones forming the border's edge. Our Christmas visitors bought a beautiful ceramic square shaped brown garden pot with rusty red toning for the water fountain. The pot was sealed to waterproof it; this was done twice over two days to ensure that no water would permeate it.

The next day it was decided that a garden water pump needed a proper power supply to make it work. After a considerable amount of effort a suitable power outlet was fixed close by. The attractive *Cordyline banksii x pumilio* var. 'Red Fountain' was given to me as a Christmas present. With its tough arching strap leaves, rusty red in colour and small star shaped pink flowers in late spring & summer; it became a natural to be located in the large milk can against the north facing wall. What to put in the other containers? At a visit to the local nursery 'Greenbourne' it was decided that 'Seascape', a selection of *Lomandra confertifolia* ssp. *rubiginosa*, would be just the thing for the cream can, with its blue-grey foliage and graceful weeping habit. 'Seascape' bears small yellow flowers that embellish the air on warm, summer evenings with a sweet aromatic scent. The separator bowl also required tough plants able to withstand high temperatures. Five dark-coloured Mondo Grass (*Ophiopogon planisapus* 'Nigrescens') plants fitted the requirements. They tone in well with the dark texture of parts of the brickwork and the black in some of the pebbles. Does anyone know of a similar Australian plant?

Next step - where to place the containers? The cream can with its 'Seascape' was situated under the existing gardenia for it to offer some sun protection in the hottest part of the day. The milk can containing its plant was placed towards the rear of the garden, almost central; far enough away from the wall in order that the growing straps could not touch the bricks and suffer thermal damage. The bowl of the separator could be placed anywhere, however it looked best to the left where it blended with the garden's rounded edge. Each container was half filled with stones & pebbles; top quality potting mixture with water crystals was added for the plants that were planted in the cool evening. Some of most attractive pebbles were arranged around the fountain outlet in the square pot, which was then filled to the brim with water and it was time for the 'switch on'. The water circle from the fountain wet the pebbles making them look as though they were polished, thus highlighting their colours. The 'circle' of water was preferred to the jet in order that more water would be recirculated and to avoid losing water on windy days. When the whole garden is wet after rain or watering the effect is extra pleasing, as all the pebbles tend to shine. A nearby portion of the garden was edged with pebbles to give unity and cohesion through repetition. A life sized garden statue in the shape of a koala from a neighbour's garage sale also found its way into the pebble garden. It seems to be walking in a different direction each time I look over the balcony!

My thanks go to my family and everyone concerned for a great time in the preparation of this minimum care garden, another original Aussie garden.

### Non-green mulches - the good and the bad

Diana Snape Vic

*I've attempted (foolishly?) to make a summary in simplified point form. I think Jeff's conclusion sums it up well.*

#### All mulches

- Good**
- retain water in the soil and reduce evaporation
  - shade the soil and so help protect plants' roots
  - are permeable to really heavy rain



**Organic mulch**      *Kevin's article tells us in detail about organic mulches. Ideally, they would be put on the soil after rain but removed when rain is due (rarely carried out?).*

**Good**

- \* all suppress weeds
- \* all eventually add humus and nutrients to the soil
- \* coarse mulch is permeable to light watering
- \* often readily available
- \* can provide a pleasing surface
- \* fallen leaves, twigs, etc, can just be left to add their nutrients to soil

**Bad**

- \* all are flammable
- \* all will eventually break down to finer particles and require replacement
- \* fine mulch can be impervious to light watering
- \* fine mulch can become a seedbed for weeds
- \* some may lower the soil's nitrogen content
- \* can cause damage in frost prone areas

**Inorganic mulch**      *Barbara's article reminds us that inorganic mulch is the type to use in fireprone areas. Gravel, pebbles and stones act in a similar way to coarse sand but may provide a more decorative surface.*

**Good**

- \* all are inflammable
- \* coarse sand is permeable to light watering
- \* remulching should not be required
- \* can suppress weeds initially
- \* can provide a pleasing surface

**Bad**

- \* adds no humus or nutrients to the soil
- \* fine sand can become hydrophobic
- \* sand can become a seedbed for weeds
- \* source of pebbles and stones can be a concern
- \* fallen leaves, twigs, etc, if not removed will break down to fine organic particles and can look untidy

**'Soils ain't soils' and plant selection****Jeff Howes** NSW

In NL57 Judith Baghurst was writing regarding her excellent reforestation project and some disappointing plant losses. Judith said "there are subtleties at play here that I know little about". Perhaps the following may be one answer to these subtleties.

I have been gardening on heavy northern Sydney soil for many years and have had my fair share of plant losses. One of the problems Judith is experiencing could be the fact that she is planting plants that naturally grow in light soils and hence have a weak root system that is unable to penetrate her heavier soils. When there is adequate rainfall and soil moisture this is not too much of a problem. However, when the soil dries out, these plants are the first to die as they do not have a root system extensive enough to get enough moisture.

In the past, when selecting plants, I often did not worry too much about what soil type they grew in as I was more concerned with height, attractiveness of the flowers, light requirements and leaf texture, etc. I now take into account the plant's natural habitat and soil type that it grows in after reading a few years ago, two excellent Australian Plant Society books both written by Ken Newbey. The first was *'West Australian Plants for Horticulture -1'* (published in 1968) and the second was *'West Australian Plants for Horticulture -2'* (published in 1972). In Ken's second book on page 135 under the heading of 'conclusions' all became clearer as to why I was having plant losses. While the book is written around Western Australia, the comments he makes about soil types, climate and selection of species applies to all, well most, I suspect of Australia. Some, but not all of the points he made are (and I quote):

- \* Species which occur naturally in shallow soils should do well in deep soils of the same type but the reverse is not the case. Species occurring in shallow soil have very strong root systems necessary to penetrate the hard clay subsoils. Species growing in deep soils do not have this strong root system and

have extreme difficulty in penetrating the hard clay subsoil. Species growing in deep soils have a much more even moisture content throughout the year with only very temporary waterlogging whereas the shallow soil species have a wider range of moisture content in the top soil and more chance of waterlogging.

- Using the five topsoil types as a standard - sand, sandy loam, loam, clay loam and clay - plant species are usually adaptable enough to do well in one soil type either way. There is a possibility that the species may be suitable two types either way, eg, a species which occurs on loam should do well on sandy loam and clay loam and may be successful on sand and clay. A large number of our species are selective in their soil type and this guide should be followed carefully.
- Species which occur naturally in waterlogged areas usually do well in drier situations but the reverse is not the case. This means that species which occur naturally in dry situations should be planted where they will not get excess water.
- Rocky soils are often essential for growing species in exposed places so that they form a stable root system and do not suffer from root movement which is either retarding or fatal to the plant. Rocks also assist drainage.
- Within reason, the rainfall is not of a great importance. What moisture is retained in the soil is the main factor. For instance, rocky ridges in the heavy rainfall areas may have lower annual moisture content than areas surrounding massive rocks in semi arid areas where there is excessive run off.

The more I garden the more I realise that there is more to selecting plants than just using the criteria that they are 'local' or look nice. Diana in commenting on Judith's article stated that we will have a lot to learn about reduced rainfall and the effect of climate change on how we garden. We may need to be a lot more clever in plant selection than we have been in the past to help minimise plant losses.

## BOOKS

### Books mentioned in this NL

**'Gardening Down-Under'** (CSIRO) by Kevin Handreck

**'Creating an Australian Garden'** 1986 (Kangaroo Press) by John Hunt

**'West Australian Plants for Horticulture -1'** (1968) and **'-2'** (1972) by Ken Newbey, both published by the SGAP and printed by Surrey Beatty and Sons. Jeff Howes says *"If you e-mail the NSW office on <office@austplants-nsw.org.au> they may still have a set for sale, cheap. They are soft covered and book one is 127 pages and book two is 256 pages."*

## SNIPPETS

### **Top new tourist development in Australia in 2006**

The Australian Garden at the Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne was named the top new tourist development in Australia in the 2006 Qantas Australian Tourism Awards. All involved in the development of these wonderful gardens should be congratulated. The prestigious Awards were announced at a gala evening in Sydney on 23 February. They salute the tourism industry's leading operators, businesses and individuals. Dr Philip Moors, Director and Chief Executive of the Royal Botanic Gardens, said "This award is overwhelming confirmation that botanic gardens are an important part of tourism in this country."

## **Eurobodalla Regional Botanic Gardens**

If you're visiting Batemans Bay on the south coast of NSW, you have the opportunity to visit the Eurobodalla Regional Botanic Gardens. John Knight and his team have been very busy. A new Sensory Garden has recently been opened, appealing to all visitors but particularly those whose sight is restricted. The creation of a Rainforest Garden is now underway and a new Sandstone Garden will soon be commenced.

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### ***FOR YOUR INFORMATION***

#### **MEETINGS**

##### **Melbourne Branch meetings**

**Next Melbourne meeting - Sunday June 10**

**Chris Larkin Vic**

We'll meet at 2 pm at the Studpark Community Centre, Fulham Rd, Rowville (Melway 81K1). Then we can come on to my place entering via a new road

Please ring me to let me know you are coming.

**Proposed dates for future meetings:** September 9th; November 25th

**Possible venues:** Gardens at Glaxo, Xmas break-up at Cranbourne. Other suggestions welcome.

**Report of Melbourne meeting March 2007**

**Diana Snape Vic**

The meeting started at the home of Carol and Paul Belcourt, where we admired the front garden and nature strip garden designed about two and a half years ago by Chris Larkin and Colin Turner. The large nature strip garden is oval-shaped with lawn at either end plus a lawn-mower wide strip of lawn adjacent to the foot path. The garden is not watered at all and features four different forms of *Myoporum parvifolium*, all flourishing; some are more compact, some have reddish foliage. Higher plants including daisies such as white and yellow Everlastings (*Bracteantha bracteata*) and two beautiful eucalypts as street trees (see p21).

In the front garden there is no lawn but border gardens around paths following a pleasant figure of eight shape around two central beds. The soil is sand, enriched by the addition of humus before planting. Most plants have grown extremely well, especially an *Acacia glaucoptera* ('Clay Wattle' seems a misnomer), a magnificent plant that has almost taken over one of the beds encircled by the pathway. This led to consideration of suitable border plants in this bed to balance the mass of the wattle. Other plants with attractive rounded forms included small forms of *Acacia cognata*, a *Templetonia retusa* and *Lomandra confertifolia*. Another appealing plant was a very floriferous form of *Correa reflexa*. Casuarinas grouped behind a seat at the western end of the garden performed several functions - hiding a power pole, providing shade from the western sun, looking beautiful and sighing in the wind. Planting along the fenceline was generally kept low, with a couple of taller shrubs carefully placed for both interest and privacy. Yet another form of *Myoporum parvifolium* forms an excellent edging along the footpath.

We moved on to the George Pentland Botanic Garden for lunch. Many members had not visited these gardens before and were impressed, particularly with the vistas (developed from the fairways when it was part of a golf course) and the wonderful old established trees. We first visited the display bed yet to be designed by Chris Larkin, Colin Turner and myself. It consists of a number of interlocked beds of irregular shapes and at different levels - it will be difficult to draw plans for it. The theme for this bed is to create an attractive garden using plants generally available in nurseries and suitable for growing in sand, partly to

encourage local people to grow them in their gardens. We looked at the plants already growing there and considered which should be removed (or transplanted) and which repeated. Members suggested a range of possible plants and their arrangement in the beds, with spines of taller plants running through the centres of some (not uniform in height).

Then we walked along beside the Proteaceae bed which was designed and planted in spring last year, before a hot, dry summer. Even with restricted watering most plants have done very well, most notably banksias, grevilleas and persoonias. There were some losses, for example most of a small group of petrophiles had unfortunately not survived. It is still too early for the design to become evident but we'll look forward to seeing it emerge.

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### **Sydney Branch meetings**

**Jo Hambrett** NSW

#### **Next meeting**

Because the ASGAP Conference is being held in Newcastle in early October and all APS members are encouraged to attend, there will not be another meeting of the Sydney Branch this year. I am away at that time for 6 weeks.

#### **2008**

Next year we are looking at March 08 in Orange - kindly organised by **Carolyn Gunter** and Oct- Nov 08 at **Gordon Rowland's** property on the North Coast - both weekend trips.

#### **Report of South Coast meeting 17th - 18th March 07**

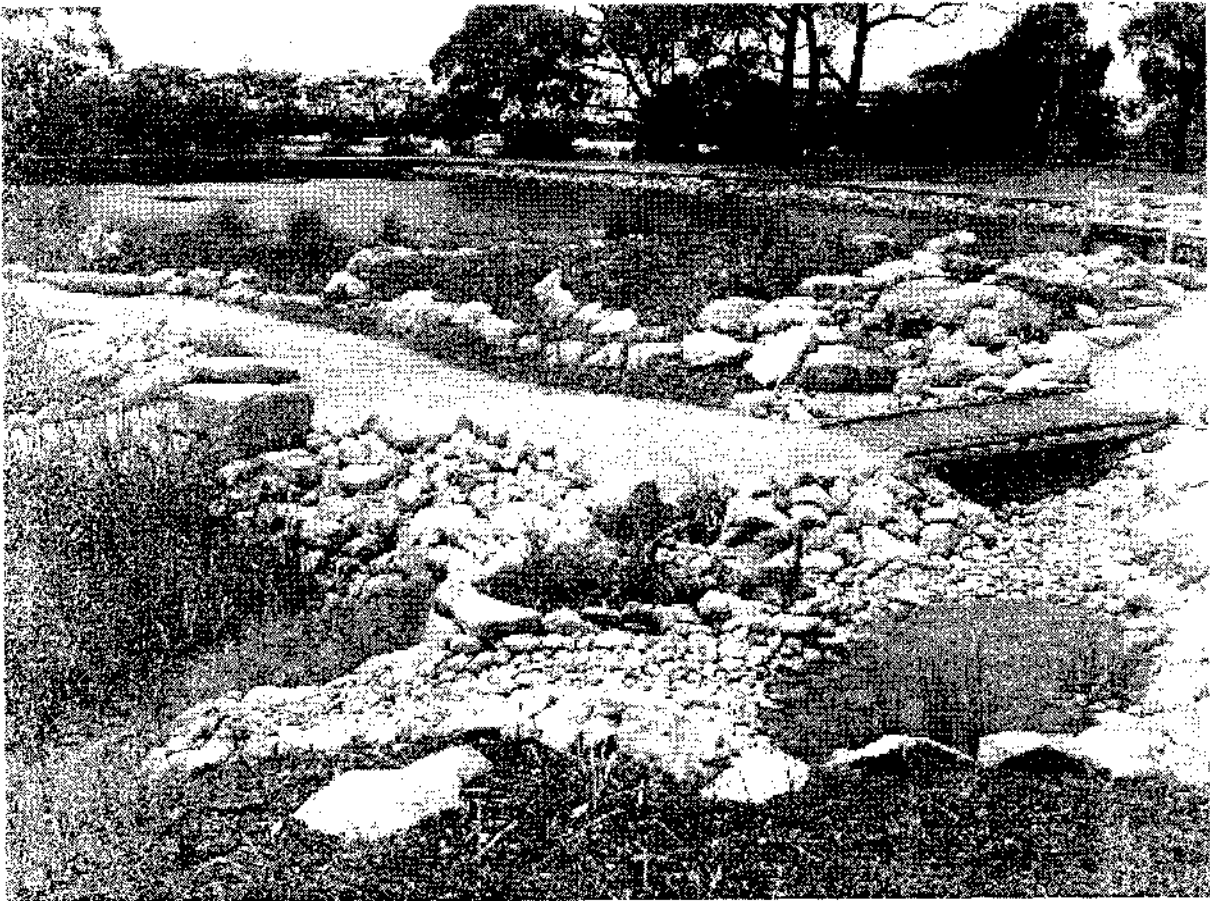
Another one of our weekend meetings which have proved so successful in the past. It has been 5 or so years since the group last visited the South Coast and GDSG members, Brian and Sue Harris and Norm and Maureen Webb, in conjunction with the Nowra branch of the APS, organized a jam-packed couple of days for us there, visiting public spaces and private gardens - all designed using mainly indigenous plants.

The emphasis this time was on public spaces created in the area with significant communal input; Nowra Respite Day Care Centre [see May 06 NL p3, Aug 06 NL p4 & Feb.07 NL p3], The Lady Denman Heritage Complex at Huskisson, and Tasman Rd., Blue Wren and Grasstree Reserves at St. Georges Basin. The two private gardens we were treated to were the Harris's very beautiful "Banksia Cottage" and Norm and Maureen's garden which we also had the privilege of seeing on our last visit.

An excellent Chinese meal on the Saturday night at the local golf club was the icing on the cake, although it was rivalled by the wonderful spreads of morning and afternoon teas we enjoyed on both days. The warmth and generosity of fellow Australian plant gardeners is always heartening as well as a challenge for the waistline. On behalf of our group, a huge thank you to Sue, Brian, Maureen and Norm for all their hard work [we are very much appreciative of the amount of time required to organize our visit whilst at the same time preparing your own gardens *and* the public spaces you manage]; as well, members of the Nowra APS, especially Dot Brown and Keith Naylor, and Directors and staff of the Day Care Centre and the Lady Denman Complex. We were indeed fortunate beneficiaries of a wonderful joint community effort.

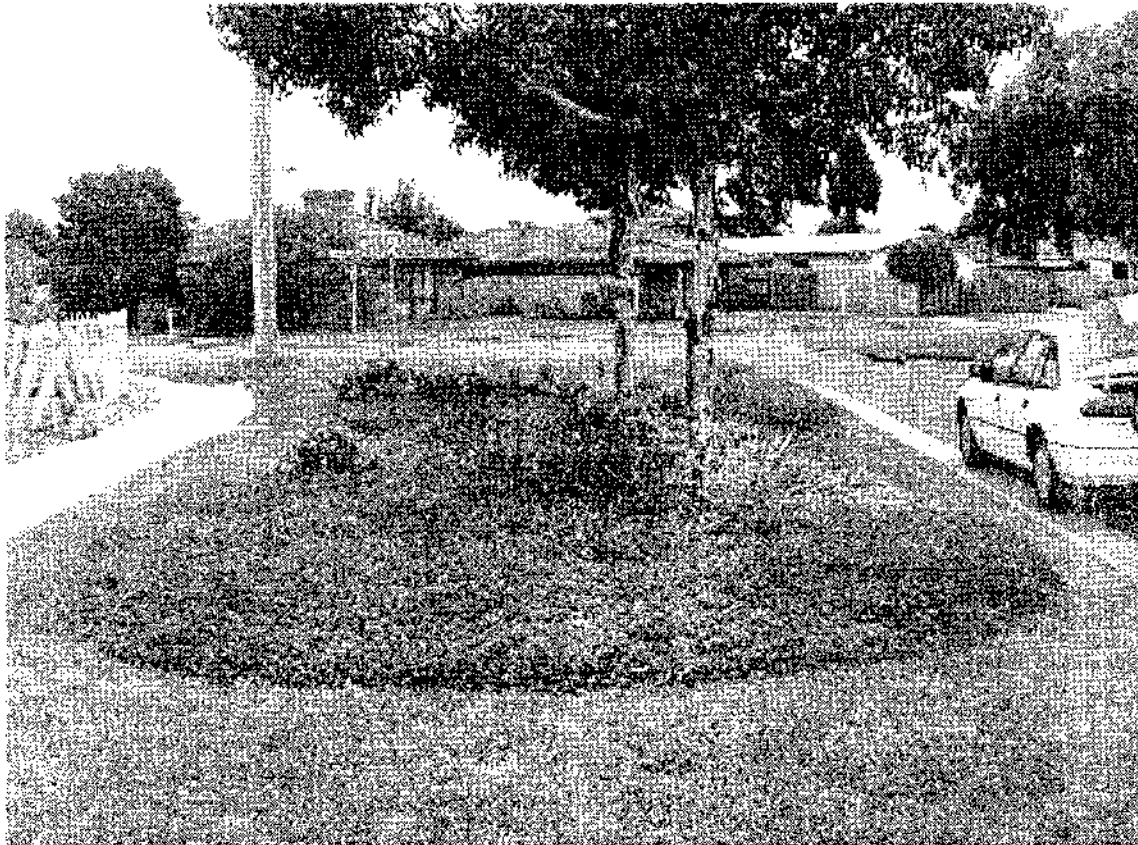
Our first stop on Saturday was at the **Nowra Respite and Day Care Centre**. Here, member and horticulturist Sue Harris and husband Brian and volunteers from the local APS have been busy implementing a design generously provided by Shane Doherty, another GDSG member. The circular concrete paths are in - leading the visitor out through one door of the complex and in through another, passing the visual, tactile and olfactory delights of a garden on the way - a central birdbath including a water feature and the boundary

Keith Moore Habitat Garden



The Belcourts' nature strip garden

Photo by Bryan Loft



planting is well up, decorative and healthy, a testament to Brian and Sue Ellen's fantastic soil preparation techniques. A large container is in the corner for veggie planting activities. It has been a long process, physically and at times, no doubt, emotionally demanding. However to hear the staff speak so genuinely about the importance of the garden both for them and the clients [frail aged, dementia sufferers and socially isolated seniors] is to appreciate the worthiness of the endeavour.

Next stop was lunch in the beautiful gardens of **Banksia Cottage**, Brian and Sue's yellow and blue painted timber house on 5 acres of open woodland. They moved in 5 years ago, a week before the bushfires of December 01; fortunately there was not much of a garden there and only one boundary was affected; the burnt timber has subsequently given them an ongoing supply of edging material for the garden. The garden has been planned with fire-fighting access in mind and a picturesque and practical dam installed at the bottom of the gently sloping garden. Brian cheerfully admits to being the labourer as well as being in charge of the vegetable patches, the orchard and the chooks, whilst Sue Ellen is planner, horticulturist and propagator! Most of the plants in the garden are grown on the property.

The growth in such a young garden is phenomenal. I have listed below some of the procedures the Harris's employ to maximize their garden's potential.

1. Bed preparation: spray the grass and, when it has died off, make a bed on top of the soil with horse [yes, you have read it correctly!] manure, or native mix or gold blend soil [contains turkey manure and so must be left till the heat is out of it]. Then seed green manure on top and when it has sprouted to 2" high dig it in to nitrogenise the manure/soil and let sit for a further 6 weeks. Plant out using water crystals, and mulch with eucalyptus chips and leaf litter.
2. Fertilise with Dynamic Lifter long-life pellets, a handful once or twice a year, up to once a week in summer, tablets from the Forestry Commission or a tea made from a cold stewing of seaweed, collected from the nearby beach, and manure together in an olive oil container. Interestingly they do not fertilise their native and exotic plants differently - they are just mindful of the ingredients in the fertilizer they use.
3. Prune, prune, prune - the Nowra APS members referred to a plant being Sue Ellenised! ie: truly pruned!

After lunch we visited the **Lady Denman Heritage Complex** at Huskisson, right on the coast, where the old Manly Ferry the Lady Denman is housed, back in the town where she was built. She is surrounded in the same building by permanent and visiting maritime and nautical displays and collections. Our main interest here was twofold: the **Wirreecoo** [tea tree] **wildflower garden** [a project of Nowra APS] at the entrance to the complex; and, behind it, between the complex and the sea, a large area of very original, interpretive landscape, really every bit as much an installation and a sculpture as a landscape. This was originally a very large hole in the ground where the ferry lay whilst she awaited her new home. Consciously referencing local topography and landmarks, and using only indigenous plant species, it also provides a habitat for indigenous animal species. Designed by APS member and professional landscape design consultant Keith Naylor, the rest of the labour was provided by volunteers. The area can be walked in as well as viewed from inside on board the ferry. The design had to respond successfully to both uses. It is a part of the **Keith Moore garden** (please see notes on p8 and picture on p21).

Keith Naylor mentioned that the fairy wrens seem to love *Kennedia* species and enjoy flitting through the bulrushes and reeds in the deepest part of the depression. He has found the reeds [*Fragmites*] more aggressive than the bulrushes [*Typha*]. The control of both utilizes bio round up, not harmful to frogs.

Sunday saw us up early, meeting at the **Webbs** to wander through the garden, nurse the baby blue tongues [they love chicken cat food Norm says!] and check out the 'before' and 'after' photos of the work done at the various reserves Norm has worked in, as well as a photographic record of the progress of the

home garden. The area where Norm and Maureen live has been, like so many coastal townships, subject to huge pressure from sea-changers and encroaching suburbia - Maureen says over the last 10 years there has been a marked drop in indigenous animal populations, especially in the number of sugar gliders. She spoke of once watching a ringtail pull the bark from a tree in her garden, roll it firmly down its tummy and into a bundle for its tail to hold - ready to transport to its nesting site! Norm has erected a possum highway of slipropes and timber covering five house blocks to try and slow their almost inevitable demise. He has also removed all the large grevilleas from his garden to discourage the noisy miners; he found their presence intimidated his favourites, the blue wrens.

We visited three reserves, **Tasman Rd Reserve, Blue Wren Reserve and Grasstree Reserve**, which Norm, Maureen and other volunteers have created from degraded or neglected sites. They have planted them out and are maintaining them, showcasing to the larger community the beauty and appropriateness of using indigenous species; hopefully educating and converting residents young and old to the importance of valuing our native flora and fauna. Some of the areas benefit from a straight bush regeneration approach and maintaining good communication with the adjoining neighbours' [worries about bushfires etc.]; whilst others, such as the Blue Wren Reserve, originally the closed off end of a road and a very degraded site, has become a more manipulated space, almost gardened, using local species and carefully maintained and planted out. Tons of rocks spread over a natural watercourse with the plants surrounding the edges of the 'creek bed' adds to the beauty. There is a small remnant of the original bush; this is left alone, the provision of a bird bath is the only human intervention. All labour is volunteer and those same volunteers [no prizes for guessing their names!] apply to Council for grants to fund the work.

After marveling at such drive, energy and commitment and resolving to be more proactive in our own communities, we retreated to the Webbs' garden for some lunch and conversation before the drive home.

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### North East Vic Branch meetings

**Barbara Buchanan Vic**

**Next meeting: Saturday 16th June** at 10.30am at Helen & John van Riet's house

After an inspection of the progress of the garden and a discussion of the ideas for the Buchanan Benalla garden, we will move to Park Lane Nursery in Wangaratta. The nursery is taking over the adjacent land vacated by TAFE and we hope to offer some useful suggestions for the new layout.

Please let me know if you plan to come

### **Report of meeting, Saturday March 31st**

We started the year with a lively meeting at our 'retirement house' in Benalla, which presents me with a new challenge - making best use of a smallish block, with a drier, sunnier climate than we currently enjoy. We began with a discussion of mulches which highlighted the fact that the best solution depends on the situation. Those of us who live in fire-prone areas are better off with gravel and sand. If fire is not an issue then organic mulches, especially those formed by natural leaf drop, look best and help improve the soil.

The main discussion centred on possibilities for our new block. John van Riet had kindly done a survey and drawn up the plan, photocopies of which were distributed. I am expecting to get most of them back covered with all sorts of wonderful suggestions. We then ran through the existing features and constraints and I listed our current ideas on features we want. After the first summer we desperately want shade established quickly, but after a winter this may be modified. Paul checked the soil which had been too hard and dry until the recent rains and which turned out to be a quite promising gritty loam over clay some 30cm down. The fall on the block is very slight so moundina and channellina and the drainae svstem need

careful planning. Where the shade falls and how it moves, creepers, shade cloth and structures to support them, the clothes hoist, the front fence, suitable small trees, tanks, water feature (in a sealed pot or old wine barrel), a potting bench, tool shed and propagating house are just some of the topics raised.

**ACT Branch meetings**

Shirley Pipitone ACT

Please contact Shirley for details of next meeting.

**MEMBERSHIP NEWS**

Bryan Loft Vic

**Good News/Bad News**

Bad News: Your 2006/07 subscription expires on 30 June.

Good News: Subscription rates for 2007/08 have not changed. If you have not already paid for 2007/08 (see List below) please send your renewal form and cheque/Money Order to Bryan Loft soon, at 2 Calgary Court, Glen Waverley, Vic. 3150. To save Bank fees I suggest paying for two years membership. Annual fees are:

\$20 Overseas members

\$10 This covers up to two members at the same address

\$ 6 Email subscription (up to two members at the same address)

\$ 5 Concession for pensioners or full-time students

**New members**

*A warm welcome to the following new members of the Study Group. We hope you enjoy your membership and look forward to sharing ideas with you.*

Nicholas Bryant

Heather Haughton

**Renewals:**

Ros Andrews (two years), Romaine Harmor, APS Vic

The following members have already renewed for 2007/08:

Ros Andrews, APS Blue Mountains, Joan Barrett, Carol Bentley, Betty Denton, Pamela Finger, Linda Floyd, Carolyn Gunter, Jan Hall, Romaine Harmor, Bev Kapernik, Margaret Lee, Geoffrey & Ann Long, Win Main, Ann & Ray Mills, Ann Neild, Michelle Pymble, Lynette & Peter Reilly, Karen & Geoff Russell, Peter Shannon, Ros StClair, Carmel Statham, Rosemary Verbeeten, Maureen & Norman Webb, Pam Yarra.

**Vale Pam Renouf**

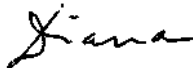
Jo Hambrett NSW

Unfortunately we have some sad membership news to communicate. It will be a shock to many of our members to hear that the lovely Pam Renouf died last November after a fight with cancer. Pam was a very committed member of the GDSG and a strong supporter of our Sydney group as well as the Warringah Australian Plant Society. She will be greatly missed.

*My apologies to any member who was inconvenienced by the incorrect email address given for Bryan in the last NL - unfortunately putting in an extra dot makes all the difference. DS*

Many thanks to all the contributors to this Newsletter. In the next, there will be a thought-provoking article by Chris Larkin, exploring further the idea of judging or assessing garden design, plus the usual wonderful eclectic mix of ideas and information from members. We hope you will all want to renew your membership for 2007 - 2008 and, if you renew now, you can relax without adding to your memory load.

Best wishes



Diana SnaDe