

S.G.A.P. ACACIA STUDY GROUP
NEWSLETTER
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Growing Wattles in Containers

Many of the Australian acacias will not grow at all, or at the best, indifferently, away from their native places. Quite a few tried out here, even on many occasions, and despite every effort to simulate their places of profuse growth, have failed to thrive. I refer particularly to the dry area specimens which, I suspect, constitute the majority in this country. Among those are many unattractive, and from a garden viewpoint, useless ones. But I am slowly finding that there are many well worth cultivating from an aesthetic point of view, and hence, suitable for gardens.

Diverting, Mr Payne considers this Group should concentrate for the present on finding out the best specimens for garden use under varying conditions of climate, soil etc, and I agree entirely.

One could give quite a few examples of these unusual ones but I mention only two as space is limited.

A. continua is described by G W Althofer as "an inland dwarf with large golden flowers, growing 2 to 3 feet".

I was fortunate enough to keep one alive for two years, actually until it flowered. The blossom consisted of the largest and most glorious golden balls I have yet seen. It was a show piece and many of my friends called just to see it. It died shortly after blossoming, probably because the general conditions of climate, moisture etc were unsuitable. I stress that it is a dry area specimen and just won't grow anywhere, but it challenges anyone interested in growing inland specimens in moist areas. I grant you its foliage is leafless and spiky but it is still arresting and it does not obtrude as it is just a small shrub. By the way, it is dubbed *A. continua* as its spiky phyllodes are continuous with the stems. It is magnificently and factually named as are many, if not all of the wattles. To me the naming of these trees and shrubs is full of interest and I would appreciate any information anyone can give me regarding the common name of any wattles.

Last autumn I was lucky enough to purchase four well grown seedlings of *A. continua*. I gave one away; two I planted in the open, and the fourth, in a tub. One of the open planted ones died early in the spring, its brother in the open looks well enough, and has grown about one foot. The remaining one, in a container, is 2'6" high, has thrown out numerous laterals and is nearly as broad. It is healthy and obviously going on to full maturity. The contrast between this and the open survivor is too striking to be coincidental and one must conclude that this type of planting suits this particular specimen and that open planting is at least doubtful of success.

Another example I have of this type of contrast is *A. gladiiformis*. Described as a shrubby inland type growing to 3 feet and very floriferous, in April 1963 I planted a small seedling in a tub. In September 1963 I planted another in the open. Now, March 1964, the circumscribed plant is 3 feet high and profusely covered with foliage. The open specimen has grown to about 15 inches and looks quite healthy, but the contrast is most striking. Previously I had considered planting small acacias under special conditions to see if the results would be better than open conditions.

I tried out 18 months ago, after the destruction of the garden, the following small shrubs – *A. drummondii*, *A. acinacea*, *A. glandulicarpa* and *A. flexifolia*, all six inch seedlings.

After one season's growth, the results have been most satisfactory; all are healthy and between 2 and 3 feet high. It must be admitted that all except *A. flexifolia* will grow well here anyhow, but the latter, an inland specimen, has done just as well as the others. Remembering *A. continua* and *A. gladiiformis*, I think this means something. Last autumn I added to my specials, the following: *A. brownii*, *A. farinosa*, *A. amoena*

In December, *A. sowdenii*, and in March 1964, *A. alata* and *A. pulchella*. Now I know *A. brownii* will thrive here. The fires badly singed another specimen; two months later I found it covered with new foliage, but it was planted in a bad position, so I took the risk and transplanted it to a more favourable spot. The gamble came off and it is spreading profusely. As I said, I tubbed another one, since it is an ideal plant for this, growing to 2 feet only. It has now grown to its 2 feet. An even better one for containers or rockeries is *A. aculeatissima* which is almost prostrate. I find seeds hard to get. The Seed Bank would appreciate some if anyone can obtain them. *A. farinosa* grows to 5 feet in the inland. My plant was transferred from the open where it had barely grown but appeared quite healthy. Transplanted in the autumn it is at least multiplying its leaf system and looks set to go. *A. amoena* is said to reach 5 feet, but I have no further information. It is growing profusely, too much so. Others suitable for treating as above are *A. bidentata*, 4 to 5 feet, *A. aspera*, 5 feet, *A. rupicola*, 5 feet and *A. dentifera*, 8 feet.

I have been asked "But where can we get these types?" Fair enough, they are hard to get. Impossible as seedlings. My reply is "From our Seed Bank if we put some effort into it". Miss Pearce will shortly be in a position to give us a list of those already available but we will have few more unless all co-operate. Any experimentation is dependent on raising seedlings from seed. In short, if you really want something out of the ordinary, say to grow in tubs, you will have to grow your own. Will you leave them in tubs when grown to say 3 feet or will you take them out and transplant? This is a problem it is too early for me to solve. Very small ones, such as the *A. aculeatissima* and *A. brownii*, could well spend their life in a container if the latter is big enough. I am using the large size plastic dustbins 18 inches in diameter. I have a feeling that inland specimens, hard to start in this country, could be initiated in the favourable conditions of a container and when well established and about 2 feet high, transplanted to an open site. My *A. amoena* is already nearly 4 feet high and threaten to burst through in the next twelve months. I propose to move it to the open next month. If it works I will try the same with others. In its new position special attention will be given to drainage. There is no hope for dry land types unless perfectly drained.

I am well aware that all this presupposes that acacias together with all Australian plants, will stand up to approximately the special treatment given to exotics. There is certainly another point of view widely held at present ie that natives should be treated as in their natural state. I will try and give both sides in a later Newsletter. As you probably have gathered, I am so far in favour of some special care, at least in the first year. Criticism of this viewpoint would help me to prepare my report. Will somebody start the ball rolling?

Finally, I am much in favour of Mr Scott Young's suggestions for the improvement of the Group. Mr Young has offered his services re geographical distribution. I am sure Mr Croll will agree to help us re recognition of plants and the botanical side generally, in fact, he has already done so. The seed section is so far open – I offer my services if there are no other takers and no objections.

Some subscriptions are still overdue – a few from last year. SGAP instructs that the Newsletter is for financial members only.