

S.G.A.P. ACACIA STUDY GROUP
NEWSLETTER
MAY 1963

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A welcome to our newest members, Mr and Mrs M Simmons of 30 Ravenswood Rd, Launceston, Tas. They are beginning an Australian garden including an acacia section and we await their results with interest.

At the commencement of 1962 I had about 30 Melaleucas, 12 Leptospermums and the same number of Grevilleas. Most failed to recover with the exception of a few not so badly damaged. This proves nothing, as all were young (3 to 4 years), small, and not particularly active at the time. There were 6 Hakeas, one, *H. suaveolens* was 15 ft high and a spiky tough looking tree. It had a fair singeing but soon picked up and flowered in the Spring. Like some others, it expired shortly afterwards. The remainder, much less mature, failed to survive. This death of small trees (15 to 20ft) after flowering has been a feature of the damage done. I postulate that the sap channels were narrowed by the heat but able to carry sufficient nourishment to produce leaves and even to blossom, but this rush of fluid was too much for the size of the narrow channels and the whole system clogged; much as a sclerosed blood vessel forms a clot. Any other theories?

In April of last year a professional botanist inspected my place. I asked him which specimens had a chance of recovery and he said any with even a few green leaves could pick up but the rest were hopeless. Asked how long I should leave the stumps of the latter he suggested a further 3 months ie August 1962. I dug out a few (mercifully very few) and then as there was so much clearing up to do, time ran out and the rest were left. As a clumsy scratcher of the soil myself I can't understand this because he could not have been more wrong.

Omitting the wattles, the ashes (golden and claret) were the first to move in early Spring throwing out numerous shoots from the blackened stumps. Others followed and by the end of October the majority had produced these shoots. An exception was a row of nine pinoaks (*Quercus palustris*) bordering the dam. I know they showed no sign of recovery up to the end of October and then forgot about them. I tripped over them in mid-December and to my surprise found they had produced shoots as had so many others. In all cases the strongest growth only was preserved and firmly staked. The growth rate has been astounding. Two Cottonwoods (*Populus deltoides*) planted 7 years ago which had reached to only 12 ft, now have each a shoot 12 ft high – and in one growing season. The claret ashes (*Fraxinus* 'Raywoodi') averages 5 ft, and one is actually 10 ft. Few are like this but most are at least 3 ft. Examples are:

Oleander, Cassia (actually in flower at present) Tuliptree, Paulownia, Japonica, Cratageus and Cotoneaster, *Cryptomeria* 'Elegans', Camphor Laurel, Arbutus (Chinese Strawberry), Flame Tree, Silver Birch and 30 other varieties of non-Australians.

These natives followed the above pattern: *Grevillea robusta*, *Hakea laurina*, *Agonis flexuosa*, *Calothamnus torulosa*, several callistemons, boobialla, Lillpilly (*Eugenia smithii*) and *Syncarpia laurifolia* (Turpentine Myrtle) which lived up to its reputation of being fire resistant and didn't hesitate to come into full leaf and grow on.

A row of silver poplars (*Populus alba*) 40 ft high, with one exception, were burnt out, throwing no shoots from the butts but numerous suckers and two liquidambers stood right up to it and are now in full autumn colour.

As I have no theoretical knowledge of botany I don't pretend that this experience or my notes thereon are particularly helpful but of one thing I am certain, my garden thrashed by two bushfires from two directions on two successive days, and given up by experts, has, thanks to Nature's remarkable recuperative powers, picked up to such an extent that even this year I have a miniature garden, will have next year a half grown garden and a short three years after the holocaust, a real garden again. Come to think of it, this is not surprising. There would not be a world as it is today if the recovery powers of Nature were not able to overcome almost anything.

There are doubtless many lessons to be learned from an incident such as that described. Here are a few – you will, I hope, suggest others.

1. Cleared property with forest on three sides will certainly be destroyed. It acts as does a funnel and the draught does the rest. Mine was the only property in the vicinity badly damaged for this very reason.
2. In bush fire country, and I believe this means any country over 20 miles from a big city, pines and cypresses literally act as dynamite. I explained before that these explode, broadcast sparks and begin fresh fires. Yet an imported gentleman over my back road, who was lucky to have his new house saved in January 1962, is busy planting a forest of pines on his nature strip and the front of his garden.
3. Eucalypts firewise, if of any size, are practically indestructible.
4. Medium size trees and shrubs to 15 ft regenerated better than the larger ones. Anything 4 ft or less had no chance.
5. Do not grub the stumps, no matter how hopeless looking, for at least 12 months.
6. My house was saved because the area immediately about it had no shrubs or undergrowth. The local firefighters told me that even though it was surrounded by fire there was never any doubt about the saving of the house. Even a clear space of 15 ft about the house would be sufficient they said.
7. The trees which recovered quickest were the ashes, oaks and liquidambers.
8. Wattles are not a good bet if stricken by fire.
9. Beware of even qualified ie University degreed botanists unless they have had some practical experience of fire damage. My bloke didn't grow things himself but he's read a lot of books.
10. Finally, some people in the surroundings of the Dandenongs had complacently said "We're alright, we're not in the mountains". Yet this fire burned through to Mitcham within 12 miles of the outskirts of Melbourne and only the timely rain prevented further tragedy. No rain and a strong wind in the state of the ground at the time could have fanned the fires to the city itself.

My thanks to Mons. Lapostelle for seeds which arrived safely. Also to Mrs Simmons, Messrs W Tucker, N Boyd, W Payne, I Holliday and Brig Officer, for practical assistance.

By the way, we're all in this. These letters are supposed to carry reports of progress from members, observations etc. What about it?

A C Keane