

ASSOCIATION OF SOCIETIES FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS

CALOTHAMNUS STUDY GROUP NEWSLETTER

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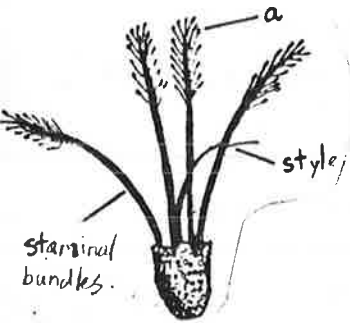
Sorry that this newsletter is a bit late, but I have had wall to wall grandchildren over all the holidays. It has been really wonderful. I'm afraid that this years July newsletter will have to be skipped, as I will be away for six months from May to the end of October. We will be following National Parks around Alice Springs, Darwin, the Kimberley region, West & Southwest coast, then through S.A. to home. Time available will dictate the final route. While in W.A.

I will be looking for Calothamnus to photograph and collect seed where this is allowed.

The reason for the photos is that while compiling many beautiful slides I thought that some shots of Calothamnus growing in their natural settings, and some of their general environment would improve the audio-visual. So I am afraid it will be a bit longer before this is available.

I still have plenty of seed in our seed bank, as published in newsletter no. 9. The study group can only supply seed on request or help people get in touch with others who could supply cuttings, but I am afraid that I am not able to supply seedlings as I have not the facilities to do so. I would like to hear from anyone who knows of any place where plants could be purchased & sent to some of our farflung members. Even seeds of the more rare species of Calothamnus have been very hard to get hold of.

There is a lot of trouble even with the popular Calothamnus villosus. Every one I have grown from seed has so far been another form of quadrifidus. I am looking forward to seeing the flower on the plant I grew from some cuttings that Kaye sent. She said that it is the best of her villosus. Once the plants flower it is very easy to identify, as C. villosus has 5 staminal bundles & fruits 1cm in diameter, while C. quadrifidus has 4 staminal bundles & fruits from 5 cm



This is a flower of *Calothamnus quadrifidus* showing the four staminal bundles or clusters. So if the flowers only have four of these it cannot be *C. villosus*. But look at more than one flower, as the flower could be broken. *Calothamnus quadrifidus* is a very variable species and the reason for the mixup is that *C. quadrifidus* var. *hirsuitus* has greyish green hairy leaves similar to those of *C. villosus*.

At our Arboretum the *Calothamnus* are growing very well & really looked magnificent when in flower. They are growing in a fairly hot dryish climate in a shaley loam mixture. Mulch was heavily used when the plants were young, about half a bale of hay around each plant. Then a tyre was placed on top of the mulch to keep rabbits away. Why? I'm not quite sure but a few reasons put forward are the uncertain feeling underfoot when the tyres are trodden on, smell of the rubber or the habit of dogs to put their territorial mark on tyres when they are still on cars. But when one tyre was removed a bit too soon the rabbit razed the plant (*C. quadrifidus*) to the ground. This plant is doing well again after being protected.

The oldest & largest shrubs are *Calothamnus torulosus*, lovely, thick dark green bushes with brick red flowers massed rather deeply in the centre, but the flowers were still very visible & spectacular. One shrub has a lot of very beautiful mealy bugs very thickly infested, but as yet we haven't done anything about it. The shrub hasn't shown any ill effect & we would like to wait & see if some natural predator will help in control. The *Calothamnus quadrifidus* is a lower more open shrub, so the large, bright red flowers were very attractive & easy to see. The *C. quadrifidus* var. *hirsuitus* is taller, but open like its green leafed relative. It flowered for the first time this year, a deep red which contrasted beautifully with the greyish foliage. It also enabled us to realise that it was not *Calothamnus villosus* as we had thought! When a visitor saw it flowering he said, "Just by growing this beautiful plant the Arboretum is proving it's worth"

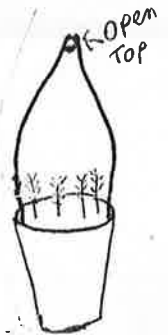
Not flowering yet, but looking great & covering a lot of ground are some yellow flowering, prostrate forms of *C. quadrifidus*. Kaye sent me the cuttings which were very easy to grow.

If anyone would like some cuttings of these, please let me know soon. Of course if any enquiries come after the end of April I will not be able send them until November. Actually I have found that I have had most success from cuttings in autumn, winter or early spring. Quite often summer ones are O.K., but as I haven't a very good set up for propagation

a sudden hot snap can burn off everything.

For the information of anyone who would like to try some cuttings I will tell you my system. I use a mix of 3 parts coarse sand & 1 part peatmoss for the potting medium. I cut pieces about 5-10 cm & carefully cut off any leaves from the bottom 30mm of the cutting, dip the freshly cut ends into a liquid cutting-hormone mixture then make holes in the damp medium before placing the cuttings in. Firm around the cuttings & place a soft drink bottle (plastic) with its bottom cut off & top off over the cuttings. Put the pot in light shade if the weather is hot or full sun in the winter. Make sure the pots never dry out. The hardest part is deciding when to take the covers off, as the cuttings can mildew if it is on for too long. Of course this is not a patch on having a proper set up with heated tables & mist, but it generally works for me. Generally I leave the drink bottles on for 2 or 3 weeks. The bottles keep moisture around the leaves but leaving the top off lets the air move around the cuttings. I also use the thicker stems that I have cut the cuttings from as sometimes these also take.

Mildura Group have joined our Study Group, & as Calothamnus should grow so well there, I am hoping for some active members from there. I haven't heard from anyone in Tasmanian Region who would try some Calothamnus (or have already some growing). I'm sure that there would be some sheltered gardens or some places where frosts wouldn't be hard enough to harm them. Is there someone brave enough to try?



I have grown Calothamnus homolopholus prostrate form from seed & it seems to be keeping its prostrate habit. It would be good if some others in the group could do the same, as one result is not enough for a positive result. When I get some seed from the yellow prostrate Calothamnus quadrifidus I would like some volunteers for growing this as well, to see if the seedlings keep the prostrate habit.

Best wishes to all,

Barb.

Thank you for
your subs &
donation.