

ASSOCIATION OF SOCIETIES FOR GROWING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS
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GARDEN DESIGN STUDY GROUP

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65

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Dear Members,

A Sydney summer is truly underway when, along with the beach goers, the *Angophora costata* begin to shed. Brittle bark peeling in tight mauve curls reveals the summer smoothness of curvaceous trunks and graceful twisting branches; sunlit the soft red of outback sand, they trace winding vertical pathways against the dense coastal bush of the Hawkesbury sandstone.

Spectacular.

On the “what to do with our money” front – the book has emerged a clear winner being the first choice of 7 members and the annual scholarship comes in second with 4 votes. About 10% of the membership has voted - so if you want your say and haven't yet done so be quick! I still haven't completely surrendered the photographic prize idea. Photography is a most useful medium, not only for illustrative purposes but for historical records as well. As Chris Larkin urged in the November newsletter, get clicking members and any good photographers you know as well. Remember not so many close ups, as seductive as those shots are - its all about DESIGN.

You will note in the first letter of the Correspondence section a request from ACRA. After a mini consultation with some members the GDSG has donated \$1750 to the cause. I hope this meets with everyone's approval; the February deadline, mentioned in Merren's letter, prevented wider member consultation There is lots of material in the Plants section of this newsletter to help acquaint you with ACRA if, like me you were unaware of all the interesting details.

Members may remember I included an article in NL64 by John Walters from APS Vic. on the history of Study Groups? He has done it again, writing another most interesting article covering the recent name change of our federal body and the historical support for cultivars and hybrids within the Society. The two topics are linked and it makes most informative reading whilst encouraging us to reflect on our society and its future directions.

Still on John's articles, I got to thinking about the message in his NL 64 (Nov. 08) article. Let's resolve to be even more proactive and report diligently on our successes and, equally as important, our failures over the years.

What we did (design, plants, soil),

Why we did it (response to what?),

Reasons for success and/or failure – yes, its possible in garden design to have both! – plants thrived, or some did but aesthetically unpleasing or practically unworkable, or practically excellent, aesthetically unappealing...see Diana's mathematical exercise in Correspondence!

Where to find information that would have been helpful in achieving success

.....and most importantly knowledge gained from the project.

Do think about past projects you have undertaken, break them down into the above categories (or feel free to improve on those) and record your findings in the GDSG newsletter.

To start the ball rolling, next NL I shall report on my trunk garden, first reported in NL 42 (May 03).Then, I promised to keep members informed of progress – I didn't or rather, haven't yet ...so 5 years later, with the benefit of hindsight, I shall report on the success or otherwise, of the trunk garden at Yanderra.

I have rather taken up a lot of space but it's a bit of a bumper issue this month and there were a few things to discuss.

I do hope you enjoy the article on Peter Watts, an important figure in the contemporary Australian gardening and architectural landscape. His comments should resonate with everyone with an interest in garden design.

Good luck in the garden through the summer and remember let's keep the study in study group!

INDEX

4 CORRESPONDENCE

8 DESIGN

Designing with Nature – planting a native garden	Lawrie Smith Qld.
Oh, Our designing ways	Chris Larkin Vic.
Some capital Canberra Gardens	Shirley Pipitone ACT & Jo Hambrett
The Growing Shame of Mondo Grass	Peter Watts

18 PLANTS

Eremophilas	Diana Snape Vic.
The Future of Cultivars	“Growing Australian” APS Vic. John Walter
About ACRA	Jeff Howes NSW
Are Australian plants growing in popularity?	Jeff Howes NSW

23 MEETINGS

25 TREASURER’S REPORT

CORRESPONDENCE

November 16, 2008

Dear State Council, District Group, Study Group,

In April 2008 the then Registrar of ACRA approached the National Council of ANPSA/ASGAP for a donation to enable the beginning of a project to set up a 'Checklist of Australian Native Plant Cultivars' including all published names non-registered, registered and PBR (see below). This is a very important project which will be of great benefit to all native plant enthusiasts.

This project will once and for all provide us with a comprehensive data base complete with pictures and all recorded information on every Australian cultivar, be it registered or simply produced by nurserymen and home gardeners and under cultivation at some time in Australia or overseas. With the rapid growth in interest in our Australian native plants, and the resultant response from nurseries to produce a multitude of new cultivars, it is essential that an accurate record is kept of them all. This will be accessible to all via the web and will no doubt go a long way to promoting further interest in our native plants in the general public. We have currently raised \$10,000 towards this project and only need another \$5000 to enable us to apply for matching funding from the Horticulture Australia Levy. This must be raised by the coming February if we are to be successful.

We urge all states (other than Canberra and Victoria who have already made donations) as well as all district groups and Study Groups to help out with this important project.

Cheques should be made out to the Australian Cultivar Registration Authority and donations should be sent, as soon as possible in view of the February deadline, to: The Registrar, Australian Cultivar Registration Authority, Australian National Botanic Gardens GPO Box 1777 Canberra ACT 2601

Regards,

Neil Marriott

Merren Sloane

ASGAP representatives ACRA

Gwyn Clarke

Alternate delegate

I do tend to feel the cultivars are important not only for the general public/nurseries, but also in garden design... the best form for the position. I know there is, or was a feeling we should stick to pure species and for reveg. that is appropriate, but is much too limited for serious gardeners. Hybrid vigour helps gets plants out there. We hardly ever see Poorinda grevilleas these days, but I reckon they did an enormous amount to spread the word. **And** I would love guidance on selections and hybrids which is so hard to come by in the sticks. I imagine a lot of upkeep to be up-to-date will be needed. I also worry that other countries are developing some of our plants, lets encourage as much as possible done at home.

Barbara Buchanan Vic.

We are interested in the use of grevilleas in landscaping, as many are too big for the average garden; the good combination of grasses and tufties with shrubs in the garden and in the design of creek beds both wet and dry. Where can we get this sort of information?

Neil & Wendy Marriott Vic.

I would like to see a few gardens closer to Sydney for our get togethers and maybe some low cost answers to garden design?

Carol Bentley N.S.W.

I like the idea of a second volume of a garden design book but with more photos of landscaping plans. I would like more information in the Newsletter for Qld and Northern Territory gardens.

Ruth Crosson Qld.

I have enjoyed reading the newsletters that have been forwarded to me and look forward to sharing and contributing my gardening experiences with fellow members. Gardening with native plants has been a part of my life now for 38 years and retirement has allowed me to indulge in this interest. I am interested in foliage plants and the contrast they provide throughout the whole year. I have tried to make our present garden less of a collection of plants and more of an environment where many of the same foliage feature plants, that can survive on the steep slope form the backbone of the garden. We are close to the Bargo River and two National Parks and I am conscious of making it wildlife friendly. We have to accommodate bandicoots, possums, wallabies and the odd echidna. The frog pond is a delight and attracts 5 species of frogs and numerous birds. Only one downside being that it also attracts snakes!

We do not have a large garden (1380sq.m.) but I am fortunate in being able to borrow the view to the front of our property which gives the garden a very spacious feeling.

Joy Cook N.S.W.

My suggestion for spending the money is a book “Gardens of the New Millennium” containing designs especially for small suburban gardens. This could be a valuable resource in influencing the gardening public to use Australian native plants in a range of gardens eg: cottage gardens. Many conventional gardeners equate natives with “the bush”.

Pam Yarra Vic.

Long term I am more for further publications, personally book form, but electronic for the modern day and age if appropriate, rather than scholarships. I was interested that one member said not another picture book, another the very opposite, albeit as I have always wanted with photos that really relate to the text. Counsel of perfection maybe, but we have the time and the digital cameras to achieve it. I know pretty pictures sell a book, but they don't help it last. We are probably not yet knowledgeable enough to write the classic which stands solely on its written content but that is the ultimate. With modern publishing methods we need not be so concerned with immediate sales but print new runs as called for. Glen Wilson is publishing his review of his life's work in this way. I am so pleased he did write it because he gave our group a talk explaining his development and we were concerned that it be properly recorded. At that stage he was saying no more books. I didn't even get around to writing it up for the NL in spite of good intentions, now I needn't feel guilty, his full version will be better

Barbara Buchanan Vic.

I love receiving the Newsletter with its helpful, interesting articles, comments and the members' interaction. We feel a bit isolated in S.A. – most of the action seems to take place in the Eastern states. Particular foci such as designing small gardens and drought resistant plants provide very useful information.

Judith Baghurst S.A.

I enjoyed the November NL and especially your article (Design...and sticking to it! NL 64).I kept nodding in agreement. There are just so many uncertainties in creating a garden. The growth, form, health, flowering and lifetime of each plant are uncertain. The interactions between plants and their effect on garden space and viewlines can't be predicted accurately. The suitability of the soil, the effect of each separate aspect of the climate and the plant's microclimate are all uncertain. We can be mathematical about this. Maths doesn't readily apply to gardens but it does give some appreciation of the scale of the variations involved, so here goes

- If for each uncertain factor there are 2 ways it can go (and it's usually more than 2!), and then you multiply these uncertainties for 2 different factors, the number of possible outcomes becomes 2 squared or 4.
- For combining 3 different factors, each with 2 ways, it's 8 possible outcomes (2 to the power of 3), & so on.
- When you reach 20 different factors (& that's not many in a garden), the number of different outcomes is already up to a million (1,048,576 to be exact - I googled it). With more factors and more ways each can go, it very quickly gets astronomical! So in designing we're really trying to control chaos - no wonder we find it a challenge. One consolation is that many of these different outcomes may be just as beautiful, in their different ways. The outcomes are also spread out over the years of a garden, not happening all at once. Plus the more information, knowledge, experience, intuition and artistic vision we have, the more predictable the outcomes are likely to be. Luck helps too! ("The harder I work, the luckier I get.") Pruning is one of our few control tools. It's just as well plants are so beautiful and garden design is so fascinating, enjoyable and rewarding or we'd give up before we start.

Diana Snape Vic.

The following link is for a great article on creating a butterfly garden using native plants - a great read!http://www.sgaonline.org.au/info_butterflies.html However, after reading this article you will soon realise that you will have to change your outlook regarding caterpillars. No caterpillars -- no butterflies. To help identify your caterpillars you will need to look at this site which shows pictures of the caterpillars of Australian butterflies:

<http://www-staff.it.uts.edu.au/~don/larvae/butter.html>.

Contemporary Australian Garden Design, Secrets of leading garden designers revealed.

By John Patrick and Jenny Wade

<http://www.global-garden.com.au/gardenbookreview.htm>

Jeff Howes NSW

My main concern in Queensland is that the public reaction to the drought is to use succulents and cacti ad nauseum (unfortunately aided by the nursery industry and the TV media garden shows! Now it seems that the drought may be lifting in SEQ and we may be cycling back to the 'normal' wet and stormy seasons last seen in the decades leading up to the seventies, the use of these exotics may be short lived! My two small dams are now full and they have been dry since the eighties!! But will it last? The attached photos show some of the destruction in the Roma Street Parkland last week!!! Climate change forecasters are saying that such storms are to be more frequent and the norm here. I love the *Eremophila* genus and am always green with envy of those with gardens in drier climates where they thrive. Obviously they do not like the usual humidity of coastal Q. I use them at every opportunity in landscape designs in the west of the state - the Longreach BG is a good example. Unfortunately these opportunities are few and far between! I know that some of our Brisbane members have limited success but I put this down to the drier climate we have been experiencing for so long.

Lawrie Smith Qld.

DESIGN

DESIGN with NATURE – Planting a Native Garden

FIRST . . .

Record the physical characteristics of your garden whether new or under rehabilitation

Prepare a layout plan showing the size and shape of your block . . .

- Most important – locate north!
- Indicate the slopes and levels
- Indicate the on-site & adjacent structures
- Show the underground and overhead services
- Define the landform, rock & soil patterns
- Locate existing vegetation for preservation

SECOND . . .

Get to know your site and its surrounds, personally

Illustrate on the layout plan the physical and microclimate impacts . . .

- Most important – locate north!
- Assess the patterns of sunshine and shadow
- Identify the effects of storm, wind, breeze
- Identify the effects of rainfall and water runoff
- Identify the positive and negative views
- Assess the quality of the soils & sub-soils
- Identify existing vegetation for preservation, transplant or removal

THIRD . . .

Identify your principal family needs & functions

Define on plan how YOU want to use the garden . . .

- Assess your budget, priorities & available time
- Plan for interesting arrival & first impressions
- Identify vehicle circulation requirements
- Plan functional & interesting access pathways
- Define and locate areas for outdoor living activities
- Plan for children's play facilities
- Identify areas for work activities in the garden

Don't forget – a garden is an artistic creation that evolves over time

FOURTH . . .

Choose a style & theme for your garden

Your preferred garden character will influence the site planning & plant selection.

- Is your garden to be . . .
- Formal, informal, traditional, contemporary or for seasonal horticultural display?
- Reflect the architectural style of the house?
- Exciting fusion of plants and materials
- Bush garden, rainforest, coastal, cottage or ?
- Collectors, scientific, experimental?
- ‘Walkabout’ or stroll garden?
- New fresh and uniquely Australian!
- Fundamentally simple, livable & affordable

FIFTH . . .

Now you are ready to select plants for your garden

Each plant has differing attributes . . .

- What is it? – tree, shrub, cover, vine, fern, palm or ?
- Where is it from?
- What conditions does it prefer?
- How big does it grow in nature?
- Does it adapt to horticultural techniques?
- Have you seen it thriving nearby?
- What is its most prominent feature – form, foliage, flowers, fruits, bark or ?
- Where are the most flowers and colourful foliage displayed & when?

LISTEN TO THE PLANTS!

To help you select the right species

They can tell you about themselves . . .

- Large leaves = *shade tolerance*
- Small leaves = *sun preference*
- Thick & waxy leaves = *store water for later (water wise)*
- Swollen trunk = *store water (drought tolerant)*
- Ligno tubers = *fire resistance*
- Aromatic = *insect resistance*
- Massive seed production = *weed potential*
- Grey & silver leaves = *sun tolerant & salt resistant*
- Delicate leaves = *moisture stress indicator*
- Thorns & spines = *wildlife protection & habitat*

TREES

Trees have a variety of characteristics and functions

- Evergreen or deciduous
- Consider root systems
- Diverse forms: globular, upright, umbrella, irregular, weeping, conical, etc
-

- Specimen tree as a feature or focus element: form, foliage, bark, flower , fruit or fragrance
- Shade tree locate to control sunshine and shadow
- Multi planted as a grove, forest or windbreak

PALMS & CYCADS

Palm fronds add a special & unique character to a garden

- Size: tall, medium, low
- Self cleaning or persistent fronds
- Feather frond or palmate frond
- Individual specimens
- Formal avenues
- Informal groves

SHRUBS

Shrubs fulfill some important design functions . . .

- Size: tall, medium, low
- Screens & hedges: privacy, conceal, windbreak, filter breeze,
- Feature: form, foliage, flower, fruit, fragrance
- Shrubbery: foliage contrast, water zone
- Aesthetic: colour, texture,

GROUNDCOVERS

Covers are diverse in colour, texture and form as well as functionally and structurally useful . . .

- Dwarf shrubs, mattes, tufts, vines, scramblers, grasses, ferns,
- Erosion control
- Living mulch
- Feature plants, seasonal colour

VINES & SCRAMBLERS

Vines are functionally and structurally useful . . .

- Select & locate to maximize flower display – over canopy, under canopy, along stems
- Shade & shelter: pergola and arbours
- Softening: fence, walls,
- Maintenance: pruning, woody, fire, tree damage

FIVE BASIC PLANTING TECHNIQUES FOR ANY AUSSIE GARDEN

WATER WISE GARDEN DESIGN ISSUES

1. **Garden Layout & Maintenance** - to simplify & minimise water application;
 - Group plants with similar water needs together - Hydrozoning
 - Shallow regular watering (unwise) – encourages roots to remain in the drier upper soil levels
 - Deep soaking watering less often (wise) – draws roots down to permanent reserves of subsoil moisture
 - Apply water deep down in the root zone through a slotted tube (wise) – to replenish subsoil reserves of moisture
2. **Soil** – aeration, fertility, additives;
 - Amend soil texture to improve water absorption and aeration – add sand and organic material;
 - Use additives to lock applied moisture into soil so it is progressively available to plants;
 - Do not over fertilize and promote soft new growth – can you supply enough water to keep the plant alive?
3. **Exposure** - sun or shade, air movement;
 - Reduce exposure to sun and minimise moisture loss through transpiration
 - Utilize available shade from house or trees to insulate plants from drying sun
 - Protect plants from excessive air movement to inhibit loss of moisture from foliage
 - Plant windbreaks and water-efficient shade trees to create cool shaded conditions
4. **Landform** - water runoff & harvesting;
 - Form suitable landform to collect surface water to absorb into subsoil and minimise runoff
5. **Insulate the garden against the sun**
 - Mulch; Mulch; Mulch;

A minimum of 100mm of mulch will insulate the soil like a blanket and conserve applied moisture

Choose & use Australian Natives - *a basic element for landscape design* **Lawrie Smith Qld.**

OH, OUR DESIGNING WAYS

I agree with Jo H that NOTHING focuses the mind and energy quite like a garden visit. For an AOGS visit the 'i's' and t's of it ALL will be attended to. Or that at least should be the aim because the public after all is paying to see something good. A visit by a group of people will take me down the same path, but to some extent at least, how far I go may depend on how well I know the people. Recently I had 2 friends from Wangaratta visit the garden for the first time and I couldn't believe how hard I worked. Thank you Helen and John it was about time I dealt with some of those tidy-up chores. The Van Reits – active members of this group – have a beautiful young garden in Wang so I had to pull my gardening finger out. And let's face it we all like to impress and dare I say it we even like complements.

I must also, however, have the devil on my back because even when no-one is visiting I'm still hard at it. Striving towards some vision is part of it, having to keep a large garden under control is another part, but then there is the personality factor – a tendency to be obsessive and want EVERYTHING to be perfect – which is the whip hand.

I was talking to a woman the other day. She wants to create an Australian plant front garden and she may then think about doing the same with the back yard. She had visited Bev Fox's garden in Jan 07 during the AOGS weekend (that is in fact how we met) and she loved the restful feel of the garden. We talked away and then our conversation took an interesting turn when I started to talk about the complexity of Bev's garden. I said the relaxed (and relaxing) feeling achieved in this garden is a result of a complex arrangement of plants within an informal hard structure. The relaxed feel hasn't been achieved by a relaxed attitude; a lot of thought has gone into the role, and hence placement, of each plant. I said it's about shapes and space primarily and to organise this well you need to have a good knowledge of a range of plants and how they will grow. Contrast that to the much simpler plant design of a formal garden. I said to understand HOW the garden works to make you feel relaxed would mean looking at the garden differently – critically – analytically. The woman said she had problems moving from experiencing/feeling the effects of a garden to looking at how it's put together. (I would suggest the problem for APS members is dragging their focus away from individual plants.)

My final comments were along the lines that if she wants to maintain a garden someone else has created for her she will need to start the long and interesting journey of thinking about how it works because only if she can understand that will she have any chance to effect – through design maintenance or redesign – her emotional response to the garden. This is in fact how I started out.

While this woman has trouble looking critically/analytically at a garden I sometimes think I suffer too much from the reverse and no-where – surprise, surprise – more so than at home. Here I am the problem-solver; I go out looking for problems. I may niggle away at them until I solve them or more often I find times when I'm 'in the zone' and things just fall more easily into place. Do you find that? Sometimes you worry and work away at something without result but at other times decisions come as effortlessly as breathing.

If I dared to trust more to these creative times then I could (maybe) wean myself from the less productive, somewhat manic, niggle times. Being too critical and too focused on ‘problems’ I do need to remind myself that (a) I garden for pleasure and as a result I have a beautiful garden that (b) I can enjoy looking at or being in - when I take off the designer glasses.

Now to pose an interesting question: does an ability to move between two modalities – the experiential/feeling and critical enable you to have a greater appreciation of a beautiful garden or does the critical voice mean that experiences will always be moderated? As to sticking to a design or changing the design – well - gardens in some very real sense just can’t be designed once and for all unless they are as static as a row of well managed mondo grass – for all the reasons stated by Jo H concerning the growth of plants and ourselves. More often than not it is the plant design that changes over time while the hard structure may remain largely unchanged. This does mean that the hard structure has a vital role to play and must be thought out carefully if it involves different levels and the use of rocks, paving, decking etc because changes at this level could be difficult and costly.

Chris Larkin Vic.

SOME CAPITAL CANBERRA GARDENS

Last November I was lucky enough to take a mini busload of Friends of the Botanic Gardens (Sydney, Mt Irvine and Mt Tomah) to Canberra for a 3 day short break tour..... *no wonder our GDSG newsletter isn't out on time I can hear you all saying!* ...be that as it may....an enjoyable time was had by all – mainly due to the overwhelming hospitality shown to us by the Canberrites who helped us organize the tour– all of them APS members by the way, so why am I not surprised?

Whilst the tour took in some wonderful historic sites and a few exotic gardens, (APS influence hasn't spread to the Governor General's home at Yarralumla...yet!) I know our members will be most interested in the Australian plant gardens and nursery that featured on the itinerary. Our first stop was the Australian National Botanic Gardens followed by APS members, Tim and Shane Woodburn's solar passive house and garden. We were spellbound as Tim walked us through their marvelous house, designed by Canberra architect Anne Pender, patiently explaining its many environmentally sustainable features. That the Woodburns hardly have to heat their house during a Canberra winter speaks volumes for the success of this house's design. The next day we visited and toured the historic Yarralumla Nursery established in 1911 to supply plants for the nation's new capital. Well worth a visit for its historic buildings alone, the wonderful array of Australian plants, friendly service and great café are bonuses!

The day ended at Ros and Ben Walcott's extensive native garden at Red Hill. After enjoying their delightful garden we retreated to the beautiful multi tiered fish pond and were served delicious food by APSers resplendent in black tie! How civilized!!

The Walcotts gardening adventure began five years or so ago, much the same as the Woodburn garden; it was interesting to see the two gardens, sharing a similar time frame and Australian plant palette but completely different in scale and therefore design.

Both the Woodburn and the Walcott gardens have extensive, bordering on the positively awesome, planting lists, not the least amazing thing about these gardeners is that they can remember all the plants - successes and failures, that they have put in over the years... must be something in the Canberra water. I am more than happy to photocopy these lists and post out to any members interested in species that grow well in that particular climate. The handout for the Walcott garden is reprinted below.

Co incidentally Shirley Pipitone sent in an article on 2 Canberra gardens for this newsletter, (member Pam Finger's garden Greenfingers and the Woodburn garden) so I have combined both of our articles in the following.

The Woodburn garden

The Woodburn's distinctive solar passive house is introduced in a very low-key way by a subtle native grassland on the nature strip with yellow *Chrysocephalum apiculatum* and blue *Wahlenbergia communis* flowering almost all year. This is followed by profuse planting of mixed native and exotic shrubs and perennials, and tree ferns and other ferns nestled close to the house. The rest of the garden is composed entirely of Australian native plants. Every available space in this garden is heavily planted as Tim believes in letting the plants sort out which will be dominant. Along the left side of the house a dense screen of mixed native shrubs gives way to a beautiful back garden where a small natural-looking creek trickles down from top left to a small pond near the back entrance to the house. Rushes and native lilies lean over the smooth rocks edging the creek. Tree trunk circles are used to good effect as low steps up the gentle slope and sandstone is used for low retaining walls where necessary. The garden is exuberant yet the central paved pergola area provides a place for serenity. In one corner a small vegetable garden and compost heap are positioned behind the rainwater tank. While the garden is only three years old, many of the plants are already well over a metre high which gives an indication of the garden's structure and future shape. Small eucalypts will shade the pergola and medium-sized shrubs will soon screen the fence and divide the garden a little so all is not seen at once. Grevilleas, wattles (September), leptospermums, callistemons, banksias, *Boronia heterophylla*, brachyscomes, kangaroo paws, *Dampiera* etc should be flowering at the time of opening. Grasses and other clumping plants provide contrasting form and movement all year. Foliage contrast is also well used. **S.P.**

I would add, (from hastily scrawled notes and, as always, apologies for any mistakes), that the predominantly blue/mauve colour scheme (at time of visiting) was indeed a beautiful thing in this abundantly planted garden. Diana has often mentioned the huge range of blues available in Australian plants and the Woodburn garden demonstrates this admirably with, amongst other things, plantings of Canberra's state emblem, *Wahlenbergia stricta* & the gorgeous double *stricta*, Scaevola "Bombay" and *Dampiera diversifolia* *purpurea*. Three to four different species of wallaby grass with seed heads of varying whites soften the paved areas and Tim notes that *Correa glabra* is great for hedging; still amongst the grey palette, *Eremophila drummondii*, *racemosa* and *glabra*, the latter with its variously yellow, apricot and red flowers, as well the wallum banksia, *B.aemula*. The endangered *Grevillea bakeriana* from Jervis Bay is also represented, I do agree endangered species should be grown in our gardens as a matter of course A striking pink combo were the Brachycome tricolour planted with Peter Ollerenshaw's, *Pelargonium australis* x *P.* Applause. As with so many successful and fast growing native gardens the beds are raised 18 inches and for the WA plants a mixture of equal parts sand, mushroom compost and clay is used.

JH

"Green fingers"

Pamela Finger's "front" garden, the wide end of the battleaxe block, is first visible from Spalding Street. Native grasses and sedges wind their way slowly down through colourful small shrubs, groundcovers and perennials in a designed creek which takes rainwater from the roof through the garden. While it is now usually dry, the creek bed runs into an overflow pond at the lowest point which does fill after several days of heavy rain. In September/early October, masses of yellow/red pea flowers will be open. Many species of *Grevillea* will be flowering throughout September/October/early November. At ground level, Brachyscomes and *Pelargonium rodneyanum* will be flowering throughout the season.

Approached from Rechner Place, Pamela's garden overcomes the problems usually faced in battleaxe blocks – this is the area first seen by visitors but it is really the back garden. The utilitarian elements of Pamela's back garden are designed to be invisible, for example, compost making is discreetly hidden behind large shrubs. The design here is more traditional, with screen shrubs around the edges and a small lawn area leading to a secluded outdoor entertaining area surrounded by ferns and palms, and shaded by tall eucalypts. Their white trunks are a design element in their own right. A man-made creek runs through the lawn under a little bridge and over rocks towards these ferns. Rockwork is subtle and natural-looking. The front door welcomes visitors with shade, more ferns, some lovely purples in the Brachyscomes and *Alyogyne huegelii*, and a sculptural *Homoranthus* low shrub with its lime-yellow flowers contrasting magnificently with both the purples and its own fine blue-green foliage. The garden is about 15 years old.

Pamela's aims were to create a natural low heathland in the garden facing Spalding Street, to provide a foreground for mountain views from front windows. She also wanted her garden to be low-water use and attractive to wildlife.

Shirley Pipitone ACT

Walcott Garden

This property was first developed in 1926 when a small house was built on the 9300sq.metre block and a number of *Pinus radiata* were planted around the perimeter. Other large conifers were planted at the front of the property and a hedge of cotoneaster along one boundary.

The property was used as their chancery by the French government for many years.

We purchased the property in 2001 and planting started in 2003. The garden is planted almost entirely with natives, with a very few NZ and Sth African species added. Apart from pre existing exotic trees, we have 3 lemons, 7 pistacia and 1 flowering cherry in remembrance of the original name of the property, La Cerisiae, the cherry orchard. We wanted to integrate the design of the house and garden. Helen Cohen designed the garden and was a part of the architectural team who designed the house.

Between 2001 – 03 with consultation with Helen by email, phone and letter from America we developed a plan for the garden. Basic design principles included the following – the garden would contain mostly plants native to Australia; there would be little if any lawn, where open space was needed it would be a meadow consisting of grasses, forbs and lilies; the garden would attract birds and other wildlife; plant foliage and shape would be more important than flowers, though flowers would be needed to attract many of the birds; we would attempt to retain all rain water on the property for use in the garden; there would be some open water to attract wildlife; we did not want a series of enclosed garden rooms, rather different areas that flowed into each other; there would be more emphasis on the natural rather than the formal, including wide paths in curved shapes and while native plants require trimming, they would be trimmed only to enhance their natural shape, not to create any formal shapes.

Over a 6 month period the basic planting was completed.2,500 plants incl. trees. The meadow, 1100 sq. meters in area, was planted with over 20,000 grasses, lilies and forb seedlings. The soil was not amended in this part of the garden, as ripping would have encouraged more weeds. The meadow planters used a drill to make a hole, then added a gel containing both water and nutrients and then planted the seedlings The soil is ph neutral and high in clay content. Lots of dynamic Lifter helped cope with the clay soils, all beds were mulched with wood chips and forest litter has improved the soil immensely. Straw necked ibis, for 2-3 months each year, work over the entire garden, removing scarab beetle grubs and aerating it to a depth of 20cm.

The making of the house and garden has been an intensely interesting, occasionally frustrating and mostly enjoyable experience. We expect to continue learning about our plants and growing conditions for years to come.

THE GROWING SHAME OF MONDO GRASS

Peter Watts

Peter Watts was Director of the Historic Houses Trust NSW for 25 years (he retired in 2008). During his tenure at the National Trust of Victoria he undertook a 2 year survey of Victoria's historic gardens and subsequently established the Australian Garden History Society. He is the author of "Edna Wallings and her Gardens".

All over Sydney, large estates with their orchards, vineries, houses and gardens have been swept away, their names remembered in the eponymous suburbs that swallowed them up. Given the circumstances in Sydney over the past 220 years, it is not unexpected that we should have lost so many of our great colonial gardens, and others from the C20th. But it is sad. Not unexpectedly this has been mostly the result of urban development. The living nature of a garden has also played its part, as has fashion, the bane of all conservationists. As in all things, each era gives us fashions in gardening. I smile now when I think of all the effort my parents put into their carefully graded annual borders of portulaca, asters and zinnias, with Queen Elizabeth roses rising above. Their garden stretched from the front gate to the porch of a modest bungalow in a Victorian country town. Such a lot of effort for so little result. How much better it would have been to have planted a single oak, or better still some stately endemic eucalypt or casuarina. But they loved it. It was their pride and joy – at least for two weeks a year before the harsh northerly winds of Victoria's western district shrivelled it to nothing. Their friends called them "good gardeners" and I still think of them, and refer to them, as such. In truth, like others of their generation, they had inherited the inter war style and, like their friends, went on to make very different gardens – relaxed, low maintenance, fragrant and delightful. Their early gardens reflected their times and the popular taste.

Do I think one of these mid C20th. Gardens worth keeping? Of course, but one might be enough. As with most conservation movements, those of us who play a role in their development are subject to bias and almost always tend to go for the "high art" version rather than the ordinary. We spend much more time and energy fighting to save a garden by Edna Wallings or Paul Sorenson than we do for those surrounding houses from the same period. I expect we have this bias, at least in gardens, because there is something universal that make the qualities of a good garden. I count among these qualities good plantsmanship, interesting form, texture, colour and fragrance. A comfortable relationship with nearby buildings is also essential as is respect for climate, soil and environmental conditions. For some reason floppiness, within a strong architectural framework, always works, as does good ornament, interesting variations in light and shade, places to sit and ancient trees. Then there is *gentle firmness*: that subtle balance between hard and soft elements and the even subtler sense that a garden sits on an edge between control and chaos. And what would a garden be if there were no flowers to be cut and brought inside? And the last, and perhaps most important is reference to, and respect for, time and place.

When I think of the Australian gardens I love most, they have all, or many, of these qualities: *Eryldene, Cox's Cottage, Vauchuse House, Elizabeth farm and Rouse Hill House* in NSW; *Wigandia, Cruden farm and Karkalla* in Victoria and *Lenaville* in Fremantle, W.A. My universal criteria makes a lengthy list and perhaps a complex one. But they do provide some good lessons. The best of our new generation of gardeners has learnt them and are making gardens with these same qualities, but expressed in new and interesting ways.

I am repelled by the expensive, emotionally and horticulturally sterile gardens filled with box hedging, pleached avenues and mondo grass that have become the norm for "designed gardens" in Sydney. They fill none of my criteria. The water crisis and global warming will almost certainly nudge us towards more sensible planning and practice, and, as always, the past will give us clues.

PLANTS

EREMOPHILAS

Conferences are not always exciting but the one I attended recently was. A biennial seminar commemorating Fred Rogers, a pioneer and early leader in growing Australian plants, focuses on a single genus of plants. Held in Horsham, this seminar broke all attendance records and, sadly, some people had to be turned away. A regional conference that attracts almost 400 people must have something special going for it - and this year that special focus was the genus *Eremophila*.

Much celebrated by Victorian gardeners already acquainted with them, eremophilas are still unknown to most Australians. However, for over 30 years they've been studied by a group of enthusiasts who belong to the Eremophila Study Group of the Australian Plants Society. Members of this Study Group have searched for eremophilas throughout Australia, especially in the drier areas where they flourish ('eremophila' means 'desert-lover'). They have (with permission) collected seeds and cutting material to propagate new species or forms, then trialled them as garden plants. Some species grew easily, others had to be grafted onto a myoporum (a close relative with tougher roots) for success.

Now the results of years of patient work have been published in a beautiful book, "*Australia's Eremophilas: changing gardens for a changing climate*". Launched at the conference, it was written by Maree Goods, Norma Boschen and Russell Wait. For the home gardener it is a treat, illustrated with lovely photographs and containing all the information necessary to help in selection and cultivation. Many appealing forms, hybrids and cultivars are described.

During the conference, we visited colourful gardens filled with eremophilas - cameras were kept busy! Excitement reached a peak when we visited a local nursery, the Wimmera Native Plant Nursery at Dimboola. Even those who had sent orders beforehand couldn't resist buying additional plants from the wonderful variety on sale. The rarer species are not yet generally available in nurseries but others are. These include many attractive forms of hardy Fuchsia-bush or Common Emu-bush, *E. glabra*, (in vivid yellow, orange or red) and Native Fuchsia or Spotted Emu-bush, *E. maculata*, (adding pinks to this colour range).

Other eremophilas feature white, cream, mauve and purple flowers. If you happen to travel to Port Augusta, visit the wonderful Arid Lands Botanic Garden to see the extensive range growing there. Though most are small to medium shrubs, eremophilas range in size from groundcovers to small trees. Their tubular flowers are decorative for many months and some species have a spectacular calyx that may persist long after petals have fallen. The little shrub *E. flaccida* (an outstanding pot plant) has mauve-pink calyx with purple petals, while medium-sized *E. platycalyx* has delicate mauve plus white with lilac spots. Different forms can have different flower colours too, as in the large shrub *E. lucida* (from pure white to brick red). In some species, changing colours produce a striking effect - a long time favourite, *E. racemosa* has two different forms, one changing from orange buds to pink flowers, the other yellow to white. As green-leaved groundcovers, I've found *E. subteretifolia* (orange-red flowers), *E. biserrata* (lime-purple) and *E. debilis* (round pink berries) all excellent. I've seen *E. serpens* (lime-purple) and *E. glabra* "Mingenew Gold" (bright yellow) both covering large areas with dense foliage. Nearer the other end of the size scale, I've recently planted *E. oppositifolia* (Twin-leaf Emu-bush) as a fence-screen. Its petals and sepals are a 'mix and match' of colours from white, cream, pink, mauve and purple. *E. miniata*, another suitable large shrub, also comes in a range of colours, from lovely pastel shades to rich dark purple-red.

Some eremophilas exhibit distinctive forms, like tall, slender *E. calhorabos* and conifer-like *E. interstans*. Showy, medium-sized eremophilas, particularly suitable for pots, include *E. mirabilis* (pretty pastel tones), *E. cuneifolia* (pale to deep shades of pink and blue), *E. muelleriana* (deep wine against felty grey-green leaves) and *E. lachnocalyx*, displaying deep lilac against silver-grey foliage. Many eremophilas have this appealing combination of lilac flowers with the silvery grey foliage that shows adaptation to hot, dry conditions. For years I've considered *E. nivea* an outstandingly beautiful shrub but *E. delisseri* is reputedly even more beautiful.

It's a wonderful achievement to have studied a whole genus of plants (215 species), most new to cultivation, recording their success under different garden regimes. As a gardener, I'm truly grateful. If you weren't fortunate enough to be at the conference, the availability of the book is a great compensation (information <eremophilas@skymesh.com.au>). Having attended a helpful practical workshop, I'm about to try my luck grafting some eremophilas onto *Myoporum insulare* root stock.

Diana Snape Vic.

THE FUTURE OF CULTIVARS.....an extract from APS Vic. Study Group Report by**John Walter**

After many years researching the people and documentation surrounding the formation of our Society, I can say with absolute certainty that there was no doubt about the importance of hybrids and cultivars in the minds of our founders. (In) Arthur Swaby's draft Federal Constitution the primary purpose was "*to do all in our power to introduce Australian plants into cultivation and to improve them by breeding and selection.*" The ASGAP rules (following its establishment in 1985) use the more generic phrase "*to promote all aspects of the horticulture of Australian plants.*" In a leaflet to promote the soon to be established Society he wrote about the lack of research work previously undertaken with native plants, stating that "*breeding and selection for desirable qualities has been almost entirely neglected*" he went on to predict that the Society's members would "*undertake any experimental work which will make Australian plants at home in the gardens and improve them as plants of other lands have been improved.*"

One of the earliest steps undertaken by SGAP was the establishment of the Australian Cultivar Registration Authority (ACRA). After discovering in 1958 that other countries were responsible for the registration of cultivars of Australian plants, the fledgling society sought leave to take over the responsibility. When the formal approval arrived in 1962 ACRA was made up of two members of SGAP and two representatives from the National Herbarium. Our federal organisation continues to appoint two members to ACRA and details of new cultivars are published in Australian Plants. One key reason behind the name change to Australian Plants Society was to make the name more representative of the various activities undertaken by members. The well known botanist, the late Jim Willis, defined native plants as "naturally occurring" thereby separating garden hybrids from those plants that are considered native (plants identifiable as and referable to non naturalised species indigenous to the Commonwealth of Australia and its Territories.) These same garden hybrids are however most certainly "Australian plants". (The federal body ASGAP) has recently changed its name to the Australian Native Plant Society which effectively limits their interest to naturally occurring species and (ignores) the 50 years of strong support for cultivars. Study groups are like our members, some are interested in cultivars, some are not. My list of those who have some interest in cultivars includes Acacia, Correa, Daisy, Eremophila, Garden Design, Grevillea and Hibiscus.

AUSTRALIAN CULTIVAR REGISTRATION AUTHORITY (ACRA)

I am not sure how many GDSG members are aware of ACRA and its role in the horticultural industry relating to Australian native plant cultivars. I find their web site a valuable aid to help check my planting selection as often the label of cultivars does not say what the parent plants are. Knowing the parents is beneficial when deciding if the cultivar will be suitable for your gardens environmental aspects such as frost, dryness, humidity, coastal etc.

What is ACRA?

ACRA is a committee formed by representatives of each of the major regional (State) botanic gardens, the Society for Growing Australian Plants, and the Nursery Industry Association of Australia. Most of the work is done by volunteers. This includes the clerical, record keeping side of cultivar registration and mounting herbarium specimens.

What does ACRA do?

- ❖ Registers, in accordance with the International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants, names of cultivars of Australian native plants.
- ❖ Record the names of all cultivars of Australian native plants and hybrids between Australian and exotic plants (excluding Rhododendron and Orchidaceae)
- ❖ Encourages the horticultural development of the Australian flora to assess and describe cultivars submitted for registration.
- ❖ Cooperates with other organisations and individuals engaged in activities compatible with these objectives.
- ❖ Maintain a register, together with correspondence files, herbarium specimens, photographic collections and any other necessary information on cultivars or groups.
- ❖ Publishes information on Australian plant cultivars.

Authority

Under the 2004 International Code for Nomenclature of Cultivated Plants ACRA is the "International Registration Authority for Australian plant genera excluding those covered by other authorities". This includes all endemic genera and all predominantly Australian genera. They also register all Australian varieties accepted by the Australian Plant Breeders Rights Office. For more information on the operation of ACRA, look at their home web page: <http://www.anbg.gov.au/acra/> For a full list of all registered cultivars of Australian plants, together with their description and photos, look at: <http://www.anbg.gov.au/acra/acra-list-2004.html>

Jeff Howes NSW

ARE NATIVE PLANTS INCREASING IN POPULARITY?

Native plants have been popular for a long time, one only has to look at the many beautiful examples of furniture, pottery, stained glass and art produced during the period leading up to and after Australia's Federation (circa 1880 to 1910). My copy of Vol 1, No1 (Dec 1959) of *'Australian Plants'* was wholly devoted to *Telopea speciosissima* – the NSW Waratah and floral emblem. There were articles on how to grow them, germination of seed and nutrition requirements just to name a few of the articles. Interestingly they listed four suppliers of native seeds and ten native plant nurseries (six in NSW and four in Victoria). What a good plant to write about in the first edition. I imagine it was a very popular plant then and still is today, although in my case I still have not managed to grow one successfully in the ground or in a pot and I have been trying for a long time!

During the 1970s there was a surge in popularity of native plants and this led to many desirable plants from Western Australia being introduced to the public, even though many were unsuitable for growing in the more humid eastern states.

This, with the then popular slogan of “plant and forget” set back the growing of native plants for many years and it was not until recently that that I started to see the popularity of growing native plants returning. This is due, I believe, to the availability of better plants and more detailed information on how to select and grow them but more importantly a new awareness of how some of our native plants can survive a long drought and limited water supply. The excellent prologue to Diana Snape's book – *The Australian Garden* is a great read on the concept of Australian plants and gardens over the years.

Two encounters made me think about the popularity of Australian gardens and native plant use. One was a talk with a new Australian Plant Society member who was explaining the difficulty of buying native tube stock plants in Sydney, she was unimpressed with the lack of variety at the big retail nurseries that she had visited.

The second was a chance meeting, at a large wholesale nursery, with an old friend of mine who until recently had owned, a large retail native plant nursery for many years in north west Sydney.

He stated that you need to “know native plants” to be able to grow them successfully. Apart from undertaking research about the native plants that you would like to grow, the only real way that you can ‘understand’ them, is to plant them and see how they go and accept the inevitable loss along the way. He did not think that native plants were any more popular today than 20 to 25 years ago – an interesting statement.

While at this large wholesale nursery I was impressed with the large variety of native plants for sale even though most of them would not appear on my list of hardy native plants that can be grown with little care in my local area. It appears that there is a greater demand from people asking their landscape designers to use native plants. This would explain the increase in variety and volume of native plants at this wholesaler. What concerns me and my friend, is that many of these plants may be lost due to lack of understanding and care by their new owner.

In summary I think I have not really answered my own question. On one hand I think that there is a much greater awareness of why we should all be growing 'suitable' native plants for our local area. Then on the other hand there is a problem purchasing (in Sydney at least) a wider range of native plants for our gardens. Perhaps some of our many professional members who are working in the 'industry' can comment on how popular native plants are. Is this an opportunity for the GDSG to use some of its funds to work with the States Native Plant Societies and perhaps even the Nursery Industry Association, to produce, print and distribute to all nurseries a pamphlet on planting and ongoing care and maintenance of native plants after you take them home. This may help reduce any negative opinions on our fabulous native plants.

Jeff Howes NSW

MEETINGS

Next Melbourne – Feb 15th, 2009

It became too difficult to organise a meeting at the end of 2008 so apologies for all members expecting an Xmas meeting. We will start the year with a picnic followed by a visit to the Australian plant garden at Cranbourne Botanic Gardens. For those of you who would like to get together for lunch please meet at the Stringybark picnic area at around 12.30. If there are sufficient numbers we may discuss the year's program over lunch. If you are not able to come for lunch but would like to tour the gardens with us then please meet at the entry at 2pm. We would like members to bring their cameras – digital if possible – so that we can all try our hand at taking good pictures of the gardens.

SYDNEY MEETING

Sunday 5th APRIL 2009

This meeting will be a real treat and great opportunity to discuss the design aspects of two large native gardens located in the beautiful and historic Camden area, gateway to the Southern Highlands. Hopefully, some of our Canberra members will be able to make the trip as well. I am sure there will be a lot of constructive discussion regarding the design of both these important and quite different native plant gardens.

Please notify Jo Hambrett and /or Jeff Howes if you intend joining us on the day. I am sure there are plenty of spaces available for car pooling and/or meeting Jeff at a central spot and following him down.

Garden 1

'Blackstump Natives'

Meeting time: 10.30 am

Owners: Penny and Tony Sexton

Size: 0.6 ha (1.5 ac)

Cost: As this is the weekend that this garden is open as part of the AOGS, you will need to pay \$5.50 per person entry fee. You can purchase tea/coffee and scones if you feel like morning tea.

Description: Inspiring park-like garden, cleverly laid out using raised beds and planted with a wide range of Australian plants, many unusual.

Garden 2

'Silky Oaks'

Meeting time: After we leave Blackstump Natives, we travel west in convoy. On arrival we can have lunch in a beautiful covered rotunda surrounded by many native plants. You will need to bring your own lunch, refreshments and chairs.

Owners: Margaret and Peter Olde

Size: 5 ha (12 ac)

Cost: There is no charge for this garden.

Description: Many rare Australian plants and one of the largest collection of Grevilleas in Australia thrive here. As these plants are all growing in full sun, they are being presented at their best. There is also an extensive rainforest and fern house.

TREASURER'S REPORT

As at 15 Jan 2009 the following members are now financial for the 08/09 financial year.

Please note: If there is a # after your name you are financial for the FY 09/10 and if there are two # # you are financial for FY 09/10 and FY 10/11

Ellen Hrebebiuk Neal Learne Janina Pezzarini Neil and Wendy Marriott # Diana Snape # Leeane Brockway Chris Larkin # Michelle Banfield Jennifer Davidson

A warm welcome to the following new members:

Ellen Hrebebiuk Neal Learne Michelle Banfield Jan Baillie Wendy Johnston # #

Please let me know if I have left anyone out or if the above does not tally with your records.

Please members..... do PRINT all your contact details CLEARLY - especially email addresses; I am developing psychic powers attempting to decipher unreadable email/home addresses as well as guessing which state members live in !!

Warm Regards for the New Year and hope we have not too many 35 to 40 degrees days. Unfortunately Sydney is definitely having a few of these all ready and it is only early summer.

Jeff Howes

