

Coffs Harbour Group NEWSLETTER No.145: April 2020



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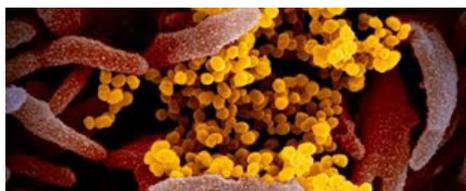
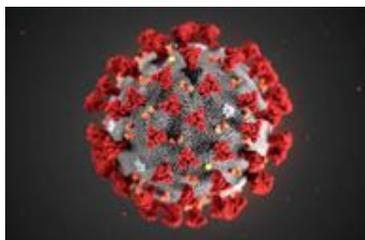
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**Jan Whittle: Keeping in touch through sharing our gardens**

This will be our last Newsletter until our Program of meetings and outings can resume. However, with physical distancing our current way of life, we have much more time to spend in our own gardens! While we will miss our APS face-to-face interactions, we can stay connected by sharing news about your own gardens and native plants of interest. Simply email me a paragraph or two, and/or a photo of a plant, flower, insect, or garden project. I will collate these and forward to you on a monthly basis. Keep safe and enjoy the extra time for gardening, and walking in the North Coast Regional Botanic Garden (yes, it is open) or local regions.



*Coronavirus (Covid-19) images have become all too familiar as virologists race to find a vaccine to bring this pandemic under control.*

To start the ball rolling, here are two lovely flowering species I noticed near the Main Path of the Prime Display Area in the Botanic Garden. *Cassia speciosa* (Calceolaria shower) (syn. *Senna spectabilis*) is a tall shrub/small tree with a slender trunk and masses of huge yellow flowers amongst dark green foliage. Nearby is a bed of *Orthosiphon aristatus* (Cat's moustache/whiskers) in full bloom. The 'whiskers' are long stamens. This perennial herb is native to northern Australia and the leaves can be used to make tea.



After discussing the concept monthly news with our Committee, I was delighted to receive the following contribution from our Treasurer, Janice Fitzpatrick.

**Janice Fitzpatrick: Flowering Gums - *Corymbia ptychocarpa* and *Corymbia ficifolia***

The Swamp Bloodwood (*Corymbia ptychocarpa*) is flowering in our garden at the moment, apparently out of season as it should flower in spring. The flowers appear more red than these images show – that makes it unusual as pink is more common in this species, which comes from northern Australia, from Cape York across to the Kimberley. It has the largest leaves of any species in the Eucalypt family. The gumnuts are also large. Lorikeets love the blossom. We got this tree as tube stock from John Ross about 6 years ago and for 2-3 years it stayed as a pathetic sprout of 2-3 twigs with a few leaves until it suddenly took off and now is close to 3m tall. It is in a sheltered spot along a fence but was still frost bitten in the early years.



We also have another Corymbia that Holger propagated from seed of unknown origin. It flowered last February, with clusters of creamy orange blossoms that have reddish stems and a red rim to the calyx. Morrie and Gwyn suggested it was probably *Corymbia ficifolia*, which comes from southwest WA and is not so happy in humid areas. Its flowers are more spectacular in size of the cluster, the leaves are smaller but the gumnuts are surprisingly large, almost the same as the *C. ptychocarpa*. Both species come in a range of colours – red, pink, orange and cream.

Given the different regions these two flowering gums come from, it was inevitable that attempts would be made to create a hybrid that the best characteristics of both – spectacular, and colourful, blossom display and tolerance for humidity. There are several popular hybrids – Corymbia Summer Red, Corymbia Summer Glory and Corymbia Summer Beauty. Does anyone have them in their gardens, or know of them growing in this area? They look spectacular when flowering and can sometimes be labelled as Eucalyptus Summer Beauty etc. (Ed. Please let me know via email and I will include in our next newsletter.)

There has also been effort put into creating cultivars of *C. ficifolia*, I presume because of demand in the southern states where it does better than further north. Unfortunately these cultivars and hybrids are grafted because apparently the rootstock is not very hardy, and *C. ficifolia* and *C. ptychocarpa* cuttings are very difficult to strike. *Corymbia gummifera* and *C. intermedia* may be successfully used as stock.

## Rob Watt: Col's Favourite Plants – as at 2019

Col's brief was to give us a talk of about 10 of his favourite plants for the local gardener. He apologized that he would be slipping in a few more but that he felt that there was a need to get away from some of the plants that he was beginning to tire from seeing in a lot of gardens. However, there would always be room for the favourites:

***Acacia terminalis*** (Sunshine Wattle): this plant brings colour to the garden in the winter months. Be a little careful that the colour pallet can range from pale to vibrant yellow. [This will not be a problem, I am sure if coming from the Boggy Creek Native Nursery.] A low maintenance plant but can be pruned to a dense habit.

***A. amblygona*** (Fan (leaf) Wattle): a small, spreading wattle, ranging from complete prostrate to about 1.5m high. The bright yellow flowers occur in globular-shaped clusters. The prostrate form sometimes is sold under the name "Winter Gold".

***A. binervia*** (Silver Cascade): a small to medium tree (can get up to 8m) but long-lived for a wattle. Can be found around the Port Stephens area. However, may be toxic to cattle. The silvery foliage provides an attractive contrast to the flowers. (Ed. Below is one growing in my garden that I purchased from Col a few years ago. Both foliage and distinctive bark are stunning.)



***Actinotus helianthi*** (Flannel Flower): One of the iconic Australian flowers, with 19 of the 20 different species endemic to Australia. New Zealand has the 20<sup>th</sup>. NSW selected the cultivar "Federation Star" at the time of the centenary to represent it. This plant doesn't like wet feet and is best mounded and shouldn't have trouble getting it to self-sow.

***Banksia serrata*** (Green Cape dwarf): closely resembles *B. aemulata* (both common from the area) but can be distinguished by an orange-brown, rather than grey, trunk, with adult leaves narrower than 2cm in diameter. The inflorescences of *B. serrata* usually a duller grey-yellow in colour, and follicles, are smaller than *B. aemulata*. *Banksia* "Pigmy Possum", a form developed by Austaflora Nursery, is a prostrate form originally developed from the Green Cape area. [Wikipedia suggests that *B. serrata* (Prostrate) are from the same source.

***B. aquilonia***: first described in 1981 as a form of *B. integrifolia* (Coastal Banksia) from a special collection from near Ingham, north Queensland ("aquilonius" latin for 'northern'). Adapted to cultivation in humid or legitimate areas, can grow in acidic soils 3.5-6.5; and while propagation normally by seed, vegetative propagation possible from semi-hardwood cuttings about pencil thickness. Col suggests *B. integrifolia* (Roller Coaster) is easier to propagate and he uses honey rather than hormone powder.

***B. oblongifolia*** (Rusty Banksia): found along east coast on sandy soil in heath, open forest or edges of swamp. Leaves are leathery, serrated and rusty-coloured when new. Because of lignotuber, tends to have a number of stems, which keep to about 3m.

**Boronia chartacea:** grows in damp gullies, near creeks in the mid-north coast area; has been found in Newry State Forest, Urunga. Flowers from August to October. Latin *chartaceus*, papery, referring to the thin leaves, very brittle when dried. Most closely resembles *R. rosmarinifolia* and *B. ledifolia*.

**B. keysii:** grown up to 20m above sea level, on land where the water table within 1m of soil surface. Found in the Gympie area of Queensland, in mixed eucalyptus woodland and brush box (*Lophostemon confertuis*). Flowers from May to November, leaves opposite, dark green with paler under. Relationship with *Zieria* obvious.

**B. umbellate** (Orara Boronia): found in a relatively small area north-west from Coffs Harbour, near Nana Glen and Glenreagh, both within the Orara region. Latin *umbellatus*: like an umbrella, referring to the umbel-like inflorescences. Flowers August – October. It can be confused with *B. keysii* except for latter's origin in mid-Queensland coast.

**Casuarina glauca** (Cousin It): seen by Col at Cranborne, Melbourne, which in the hard landscape created by rocks and gravel, setting off the foliage of this beautiful prostrate plant. Time to think of a replacement for the rather overdone 'Poorinda Royal Mantle' as a prostrate solution for difficult spots in the garden.

**Corymbia eximia** 'Nana' (Dwarf Yellow Bloodwood): grows to about 8m and with striking flowers in spring. Naturally bird attracting.

**Angophora hispida** (Dwarf Apple): grows in the Sydney Basin, and grows as a small tree. Unlike other eucalypts and like other Angophora, the leaves are arranged oppositely along the stem. Flowering takes place in November to January. Has a lignotuber. It can flower within a year of being burnt and plays an important role as a food source for nectar-eating insects after bushfires.

**Goodenia ovata:** small ground cover that can grow up to 1m. Not widely cultivated because it is viewed as being rather 'weedy'. There is a prostrate form (sold in the nursery as 'Gold Cover') that can be easily controlled in the home garden.

**G. paniculate** (Branched Goodenia): a small groundcover shrub that flowers from October to April. Usually found in moist or swamp conditions, often on sandy soil. The epithet *paniculate* refers to the flower panicles, but the flower form on racemes and not panicles. When it is in the right place, it spreads easily and can get quite dense.

**Gymnostoma australianum** (Daintree Pine): this is not a pine at all but rather part of the Casuarinaceae plant family that are often named she-oaks. Endemic to the Daintree tropical rainforest region. It grows in a wide range of habitats and soils, and at various altitudes. It grows into small trees of 4-7m. Trees tend to be either male or female. A multi-trunked specimen in the Botanic Garden, is on the Main Path just before the workers' shed. A Queensland nursery is currently marketing it as an "Aussie Christmas Tree".

**Lomandra:** most species are 'tough as old boots' - put them in and you can usually forget them except for the occasional weeding. This would be the case for *L. longifolia*, *L. fluviatilis* or *L. hystrix*. The downside is they are pretty ordinary. One, however, *L. confertifolia* is different. It lacks the 'thugginess' of the others and the plant breeders have been working their magic to create some great new plants. *L. confertifolis* 'Little Con' is one of them. Hardy and easy care, it is a clumping grass that makes a great border or for a pot. With much the same qualities but a bright green but narrow foliage, is 'Little Pal'. Col also suggested that if you can get one of the new types with a bluish tinge, used with rock and stone it can create a great impression of water through the landscape.

**Lomatia fraseri** (Tree or Silky Lomatia): a large shrub or small tree, about 8m, that in summer produces white flowers in clusters (racemes) of up to 12cm long. Blooms followed by follicles that carry a number of winged seeds that ripen between April and October when they are released. Grows on the margins of cool and warm-temperate rainforest.

*L. silaifolia* (June's Joy): like all lomatias, the flower has a distinct grevillea look about it but this bloom particularly showy. Grows in sun or part-shade.

## Jan Whittle: Roger Bagley talks about Native Water Plants

We were delighted to finally hear from Roger about his favourite topic 'Native waterlilies and aquatic plants'. He presented live specimens as well as a comprehensive photographic show. He began with a discussion of the environmental value of native aquatic plants such as rushes, bladderworts, water ribbons and grasses, which absorb nutrients and keep water clean.

Waterlilies were the centrepiece of the presentation and Roger explained how to distinguish between native and exotic species. Key factors for native species are large leaves and large flowers with curled stamens and no perfume; also the flowers open at night. Examples include *N. elleniae*, *N. gigantean*, *N. immutabilis*, *N. violacea*. In contrast, exotic waterlilies are perfumed and flowers open during daylight and their stamens are straight.

Newly discovered rare native waterlilies with pink flowers have been identified in northern Australian waterways in the Kimberley and the Gulf of Carpentaria (eg. *N.* 'Andre Leu'). (Ed. One rare pink species is conserved in a lagoon at Myall Park Botanic Garden, Qld.).



L to R: Roger Bagley; *Nymphaea* 'Regal' (exotic); *Nymphaea* 'Andre Leu' (native)

## Alison Moore: Garden Moves

*Editor:* I invited Alison to write about Tasmanian native plants and her new garden near Hobart. Instead she has provided us with wonderful descriptions of how she and Angus established their **three** gardens! Their story begins in northeast Tasmania with *Wollumbin*, a 22ha bush property at Nunamara, situated on the Patersonia Rivulet and St. Patricks River, then moves to NSW Emerald Beach, *The Moon and Stars*, and finally back to Tasmania at *65 South*.

### *Wollumbin*

As some readers will identify and/or remember from your own experiences, creating a garden from bushland requires a great deal of patience, commitment and learning many lessons along the way. For us, adding to this challenge was living under primitive conditions (electricity supplied with a generator for minimal periods) with two small children, regular frosts and a lot of mud! Working old basaltic rock and clay from a mainly native grasses and White Gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis*) bush/pasture into a living productive soil for growing food and planting a garden, was done in fierce competition with the native wildlife that readily appreciated this generous addition to their diet.

Thirty one years on, we had created a fabulous fully enclosed vegetable and herb garden, fruit trees and a beautiful 1.5ha landscaped garden of exotic and mainly Tasmanian native plants. Three decades of hard work with many failures along the way; whether the incorrect choice of plants, killer frosts, lack of water or the voracious appetites of Tasmania's wildlife - Tasmania Devils, Forester kangaroos, Pademelons, Rufous wallabies and Eastern Barred bandicoots. Occasionally, I was abruptly shocked from my garden reverie when

hoeing the soil by startling a beautiful but venomous Tiger snake (usually to be found near the chicken coop for a ready feed of eggs or mice!). Time to move onto another section of the garden!

Actually, the bandicoots with dogged perseverance could get through our wire but they were most welcome with their distinctive cone shaped diggings searching for fungi and grubs. We were also on a very small budget and until we could afford a 1.3m high fence topped with two strands of electric wire and foot-wire (specifically for the rabbit population) we battled to create any sort of garden, edible fruit or flower without the restrictions and ugliness of wire cages.

However, when we sold up prior to moving to New South Wales, it was a garden we were intensely proud of and felt a terrific sense of achievement in these three decades.



It was a huge wrench to leave a garden and property which had so many good memories and given us, our children and pets a peaceful and happy home. We placed a covenant upon the land, excluding the house area, in an attempt to protect the bush and animal life 'in perpetuity'. A vital factor in our submission to secure the Covenant was the presence of two threatened species; a plant in the Malvaceae family, Hemp bush (*Gynatrix pulchella*) and a land crustacean, the Mt Arthur Burrowing Crayfish (*Engaeus orramakunna*), both found in the riparian habitat of St. Patricks River, which formed the eastern land boundary.



### *The Moon and Stars*

And then we moved to Emerald Beach in the sub tropics, just north of Coffs Harbour. The immediate challenges we faced here were; a very different climate, rainfall pattern (summer rain as opposed to Tassie's winter rainfall), higher temperatures, a nutrient deficient soil with minimal humus cover as the house area had been scraped clean for a building 'envelope', plus loads of wallabies which ate anything and everything and continually spread weeds through their droppings.

It was a steep learning curve in an alien plant landscape for two Taswegians: choosing the right plants, the minimal soil cover and the heat, humidity, biting ants and ticks. We initially removed most of the exhausted, unwanted and overgrown exotics and an abundance of 'farmers friends', lantana and the ubiquitous 'purple weed', *Ageratum houstonianum* alias blue billy goat crofton and floss flower or my favourite common name, Todd's Curse! Only then could we begin to implement our plan for a mostly native garden, which attracted insects, reptiles and birds.

Fortunately, we gardeners are a resilient lot and my decision to join the *Australian Plants Society*, Coffs Harbour branch, put me on the right path to learn about my new environment, meet like-minded folk who taught me so much and make new friends and colleagues. In no time at all it seemed, I was voted into the President's role along with another new member and the current Secretary, Rob Watt. I sincerely enjoyed my three years in the group and made some lifelong friends. I also volunteered at the Herbarium and Seedbank in the North Coast Regional Botanic Garden, working with Alex, Lindy and Wayne. This experience added

enormously to my knowledge of the plants, the history and current projects proposed in the area. Gradually, our sub tropical garden took shape with many plants generously given (thankyou Gwyn and Geoff) or were purchased through the group's plant sales at the monthly meetings and from stalls at the Bellingen Show (notably Col and Lyn & Rowan).

Visually, the garden progressed quickly through removing a lot of exotic and tired plants, weeds or plants growing in the wrong place. The exception was the beautiful large Red Ash (*Alphitonia excelsa*), a survivor from when the property was an Avocado farm, and the twenty or so Pecan trees and a smattering of Macadamias, much in need of a good prune and irrigation. And thus the makeover began – daily weeding, pruning existing plants into shape, lavishing lots of water on everything, regularly topping up bird and lizard baths, installing a 600metre long subterranean irrigation system and doubling our water storage to 100,000 litres, half of which went onto the orchard area and rainforest arboretum. The rainforest section was a project I felt strongly about due in part to this particular vegetation community's decreasing and threatened cover in this region, but also because they are such beautiful trees, shrubs and vines which attract a different set of insects, butterflies and birds. And here I would like to acknowledge the generosity of Wayne, Lindy and Col in supporting and helping me to achieve this perhaps fanciful vision with a variety of plants and good advice on the care, conditions and management of rainforest species. As this new section was unfenced, Angus did a superb job in making tall sturdy wire cages to protect the plants from browsing wallabies and kangaroos and upon our departure they were healthy and growing!

We discovered the indiscriminate diet of wallabies made it necessary to fence them and the wandering neighbours' dogs out of the garden around the house and adjacent clay banks, an area of approximately 80x40 metres. The fence was constructed with a wire product called Stocktite and was 1.1m high with star pickets at 3m and droppers at 1m intervals. These measurements were calculated to accommodate the uneven terrain on varied slopes and to be stiff enough to prevent animal incursions. It succeeded minus a persistent kangaroo for which a 1.1m high fence posed absolutely no difficulty at all. He remained king of his domain until we chased him out when he became a bit too cocky. The fence was tremendously successful and finally the new plants grew, our vision was being realised and we saw far fewer weeds popping up with the exclusion of the wallabies and regular weeding.



In the relatively short period of four and a half years, we had renovated a tired, overgrown and weedy garden into a healthy growing predominantly native garden, which attracted snakes, frogs, echidnas, goannas, skinks, a variety of insects, butterflies, dragonflies and an appreciative bird population of more than thirty species.

However, the heat and humidity of the sub tropics took its toll on us both and each summer we would pack our bags and fly back to Tasmania, as volunteers for Parks and Wildlife at two wonderful locations on Bruny Island: Cape Bruny Lighthouse at the southern end and Quarantine Station up on North Bruny. We are currently applying for a Caretaker stint of four months on Maatsuyker Island, 10km off the South coast of Tasmania, the southernmost lighthouse of Australia for our next small island adventure. A common theme in our life has been living on islands of all sizes, a definite predilection for us and each summer when we came back to Tassie it felt like home and so, it appears to have been no great surprise when we mentioned to our friends in Coffs that we were returning to Tasmania.

## 65 South

We decided that after thirty-one years living in the north of Tasmania we would go south to Hobart. A capital city with many of the attractions and activities we are interested in - art exhibitions, music concerts, great cinema, annual events (Taste of Tasmania, Wooden Boat Festival), the famous Salamanca Market, good restaurants and cafés, fabulous bush and coast walks nearby, combined with a sizeable population all of which equates to an exciting, diverse place to live.

We bought a 1500sqm internal block four minutes walk from Bellerive beach on the Eastern Shore of Storm Bay. The property initially attracted us as it appeared true to its description of 'a private sanctuary' - a large level garden although surrounded by eleven neighbours, none could be seen or heard; a 15-minute drive to the city of Hobart; 20 mins from the airport and most importantly only 10 minutes to the botanic garden, my new workplace as a volunteer.

I shan't bore you with the 'buyer beware' tales, suffice to say we removed most of the weedy exotics and almost the entire garden, bringing it back to bare bones and discovering a lot of overdue maintenance, with both the house and garden. What we had left after removing 51 dead, decaying shrubs and trees was a large *Agonis flexuosa* (approx 8m with a girth of 3m and a canopy of 12m), forty two man ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*), three small tree size magnolias, and a pretty climbing rose. Following the removal of vegetation and stumps by machine and human power, we were aghast at the scene before us – it was no longer a private sanctuary but lots of decrepit fencing and neighbouring dwellings! We called it 'The Somme'.



Gardening facts in Bellerive - the garden soil is a misnomer for what was pretty much pure sand and tipping the PH scale around 9! Eek, never have I had such alkaline conditions, so there is regular applications of sulphur, used coffee grounds (free from Bunnings), and repeated testing to check the Ph to bring it down to a palatable level for the natives. The first plant we put in was *Eucalyptus pauciflora* small form (Little Snowman', which has a lovely pendulous habit although we are unsure how much staking it may need in the future, it seems exceedingly pendulous. The westerly winds we endured over Spring and early Summer have severely tested both humans and plants! Alongside the eastern fence line we have put in 40 tube size *Correa alba*'s (ex Plants of Tasmania Nursery, [www.potn.com.au](http://www.potn.com.au)), planted a metre apart and in front of those a similar number of *Poa labillardieri*.

A wonderful bonus of working at the Botanic Gardens is receiving 10% off plant purchases and so *Polystichum proliferum* (Mother Shield Fern), *Asplenium bulbiferum*, and most recently *Arthropodium cirratum* (NZ rock lily) plus some herbs and vegetables have all found a niche in our new garden, the former on our south facing walls. The NZ rock lily is perfect for under trees in shady spots and has lovely soft broad mid green leaves with the flower stalks arising above the foliage. The garden is filling up and no longer looks so devastating I am pleased to say, but there is a way to go yet before we have a fuller plant picture.

We transplanted six man ferns from alongside a narrow bed between house windows and path, which are all surviving and throwing out new fronds although I do question their longevity and overall health in our changing climate. We produced a massive amount of Pink Eye potatoes this summer, rhubarb, tomatoes, rainbow chard and herbs so a sandy soil is not all bad.

The tall Red Kangaroo Paws (*Anigozanthus* sp.) alongside our eastern house side are over 2m tall and have been providing a show of flowers well before Christmas and a feast for the Noisy Miner, not my favourite native bird species. Gardening is about patience and change for me – I continue to plan, enjoy and weed our latest project whilst simultaneously provide much needed shelter, habitat and food for our feathered and slithery friends.