

AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY

Southern Highlands Group

...your local native garden club

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Plants flowering in January and beyond have to survive the drought, especially this year as we all sadly know. These splendid kangaroo paws *Anizoganthos* sp. in a Southern Highlands home garden are flourishing.

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Program for 2020

There are wonderful talks and outings being lined up for 2020. As usual our year begins in February.

Thursday February 6th in the Moss Vale CWA rooms at 2pm. For our meeting of the year we are fortunate to have Emma Heyde to speak to us.

Bio Emma is a Greens councillor on Hornsby Council where she has an opportunity to get the community involved in making decisions and speaking up about issues like overdevelopment, public transport and climate impacts. She works in the city, and spends her weekends in the garden at her home in Cheltenham where she lives with her partner Eric, her two teenage children and their flock of chooks.

Talk With the environment in rapid change, what role does caring for and propagating plants at a local level play? In this talk, Emma will discuss the importance of community gardens, planting programs and community propagation in the context of climate change. Emma will also shine a light on the remarkable Hornsby Council community nursery in Pennant Hills and its success in giving away 50,000 free plants and trees a year.

Other talks and outings being planned, in no particular order of occurrence [dates still to be confirmed] follow.

One or two workshops will be held to assist interested members in propagating Australian native plants for our local APS, possibly one workshop by the Wingecarribee Shire Council's propagator Jenny Slattery who spoke to us not long ago. Until now Kris Gow has done the bulk of our propagating and fund raising. She will continue but will step back from being the main propagator. It is fun and very satisfying to produce plants from just a few seeds or cuttings of plant material.

Peter Gray, from the Bundanoon photography group will show us how to use our digital cameras to take good photos of native plants. Peter Lach-Newinsky will talk on native plants to attract insects and birds. We will hear from a local landscaper who substantially uses Australian native plants. And from the Wingecarribee Shire Council on recycling.

Garden visits are popular and always inspire us. Two native gardens in Bundanoon will open especially. And we will visit the gardens of local APS members Robyn Kremer and Chris Goodwin. There will also be a River walk at Berrima. And of course there will be the AGM and the Xmas party.

Something special. APS Southern Highlands will be hosting the APS NSW Weekend Get Together on the weekend of November 14th and 15th 2020. Many of our members will be involved in organising and running this weekend, and showing other APS groups from all over NSW what the Southern Highlands has to offer. More information will be available in the newsletter and from austplants.com.au as we get closer to the date.

Christmas Get Together



Southern Highlands APS Christmas lunch at the home of the very hospitable Sarah and Geoff Cains. Great food and conversation. The photo [taken by Sarah Cains] says it all.

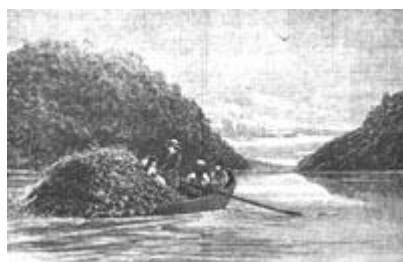
The door prizes were much appreciated, and presentation books were made to Kris Gow and Sarah Cains in recognition of their work on the committee.

Australian Native Plants for Christmas

Trisha Arbib

I hope you all had a very good Christmas. Observing the traditional Christmas tree this year has got me thinking. If you had one it might well have been a *Pinus radiata* branch, an artificial tree in its semblance, or a potted exotic conifer. Traditional table decorations are more often than not exotic flowers and leaves. But what would be more appropriate for lovers of Australian native plants?

To my surprise, Australian native plants were used as Christmas decoration as long ago as the 19th century. This can be seen from illustrations in the newspapers of the times. *Taken from the website of the Australian National Botanic Gardens, "cultural history of native plants"*.



A boatload of Christmas Bush (*Ceratopetalum gummiferum*) being rowed towards Sydney for sale in the markets [Sydney Mail 23 December 1882]

'Christmas Belles' the caption of an illustration of young ladies collecting Christmas Bells (*Blandfordia* spp) from the *Illustrated Sydney News - Christmas Issue 1886*.



Tree Ferns (probably *Dicksonia antarctica*) were also popular as Christmas decorations, as seen in the illustration by Julian Ashton of a young lady selling fern fronds titled 'Christmas is Coming' from the *Illustrated Sydney News* 20 December 1879.



Christmas bush

The obvious Australian native cut flower for this time of year is Christmas bush, *Ceratopetalum apetalum*. Although *Ceratopetalum* doesn't produce its coloured bracts in the Southern Highlands until well after December 25th, it can be found at florists as a quintessentially Christmas flower. In Bowral this December, florists were selling bunches of Christmas bush for as much as \$20 a bunch due to scarce supply, possibly a consequence of drought and bush fire.

Another is Christmas bells, *Blandfordia grandiflora*. The bells have been a popular cut flower in Sydney for many years. It is a protected native plant and a license is required to harvest wild blooms. A small number of growers produce flowers for domestic and export markets. However, supply is limited by the slow growth of plants, which take at least 3 years to produce flowers. Kangaroo paws, *Anigozanthos spp.* and cvs. as shown on the cover of this newsletter, make a magnificent statement and are available at florists if, like me, you have trouble growing them.

Substituting Australian native trees for exotic Christmas trees needs more thought. Like the latter, they can be a whole plant or a cut branch. Grown either in a pot [temporarily or long term] or decorated whilst growing in the garden. Who says Christmas trees have to be inside!

Callitris species are the most conifer like of possible natives. They are known as cypress pines and are in the family Cupressaceae. They are mostly of conical or columnar habit and produce a compact tree with their small scale-like foliage almost to the ground.

Any shrubby *Banksia* that is young enough to not be leggy or has been trimmed to a compact shape can look stunning as a carrier of Christmas baubles and even lights. At this time of year the plant is covered in *Banksia* cones which can be sprayed silver and interspersed with more traditional decorations.

Wollemi nobilis, the Wollemi pine, with its conical shape and pendulous branches, could well be used for hanging decorations, as could be the Bunya pine, *Araucaria bidwillii*. Before they get too large! And once Christmas is over, you can take your potted tree outside or plant it.

The pine leafed Geebung *Persoonia pinifolia*, known by some as the “Australian Christmas tree” due to its pine-tree-like leaves, thrives as a garden plant or in a medium to large pot, both indoors and out. A fully grown Geebung can grow up to 4m tall, however regular pruning can ensure it stays at your desired Christmas tree height for years. I’m sure that you can think of many more examples. Maybe next year.

I know Europeans who take a branch of a deciduous tree, spray it gold or silver, and festoon it with Christmas ornaments. *Eucalyptus* branches can have such interesting shapes, and some don’t even need paint. Beautiful, simple, don’t shed needles, and don’t need water. Although you will be missing that wonderful evocative smell of a Christmas pine tree.

Eucalyptus Oil – A Major Southern Highlands Industry from the 1890’s

Philip Morton

Eucalyptus oil was one of the unexpected discoveries made by colonial settlers in NSW. Within a few weeks of the First Fleet arriving in 1788, settlers discovered the wonders of the eucalyptus tree, first found growing on the shores of Port Jackson. The properties of the oil were already well known and put to use by local Aboriginal communities. Distilling plants were set up and Eucalyptus oil was amongst the first natural raw products exported from the colony.



Eucalyptus smithii

By the 1890s enterprising businessmen in the Berrima District were participants in this ‘dinkum oil’ industry. A scarce species, *Eucalyptus smithii*, which renders a higher yield of oil than many other species, was identified early on in the Southern Highlands. Found at Hill Top and through to Wingello, it is a tall tree, up to 45m in height, with a 150cm diameter. One of the earliest local mentions of the industry appeared in the *Scrutineer* on 26 August 1892: “Eucalyptus oil-making appears to be all the rage now. We have no less than three factories at Wingello, viz, Mr R Curry, Langshaw and Bond, and Mr J Simmonds, and the oil manufactured is first class. In visiting Mr Curry’s establishment the other day we were informed by that gentleman that he intends sending a sample of his oil to the Chicago Exhibition. Mr Curry is exporting half a ton of oil to England next week.”

In November that year the paper reported that eucalyptus cultivation had been declared a purpose for which to reserve land under the 90th section of the Crown Lands Act of 1883.

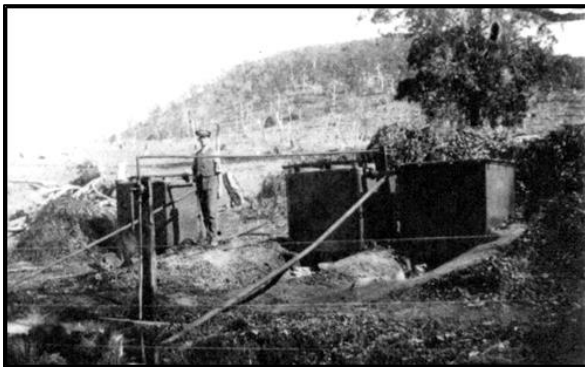
The Bowral Free Press reported on 15 March 1893 that Frank Hook lost his eucalyptus factory in a flood at Mittagong. At Hill Top, Daniel Chalker established a distillery in the 1890s using *Eucalyptus smithii* leaves from trees that still grow today on land he originally owned. Daniel gained a prominent mention in the first edition of *A Research on the Eucalypts and their Essential Oils*, published by the Technological Museum of NSW in 1902.

Only eucalyptus leaves and terminal branchlets were required by the distiller, so large trees were naturally a disadvantage, the material having to be collected either by lopping off the branches or by felling the trees. Lopping was dangerous and more easy collection of the leaves could be obtained from the ‘coppice’ growth, which springs rapidly and abundantly from the short remaining stems of felled trees.

The leaves and bark were carted by wagon to the distilleries where the freshly cut material was dumped into vertical iron digesters set into the ground below wagon level for easy filling. After steam had distilled the volatile oil, the spent leaves and sticks were hoisted out by derrick and dumped on the fire. The rising column of smoke was a constant landmark.

Back in the 1880s this work was often carried out by indigenous workers and by former miners as the goldfields rush petered out. The old distilleries were somehow kept going by pieces of wire, bits of tin, lumps of clay and the resourcefulness of the true bushman whose ramshackle buildings were made of hand-hewn posts and roofed with branches of nearby trees.

By the early 1890s first-class oil was being produced locally in numerous distilleries at Hill Top, Mittagong and Wingello. The *Scrutineer* of 23 May 1894 reported that: "Mr Langshaw's eucalyptus factory at Wingello, which has been idle during the past two months, will commence operations and a large quantity of eucalyptus oil will be manufactured for the colonial and foreign markets."



*Liquid gold: A Eucalyptus oil still at Wingello c. 1900
Photos: Berrima District Historical Society*



Direct firing, 3 tank Eucalyptus oil distillery plant at Wingello c.1910

The business was at the mercy of international markets. The *Scrutineer* of 12 April 1893 noted: "For the sake of our local eucalyptus factories we regret the news from the London market that eucalyptus oil has dropped to 9 pence per lb and that a further decline is expected." This proved to be but a temporary setback as the industry was soon flourishing again.

The *Bowral Free Press* of 26 November 1898 advised that: "The Australian Eucalyptus Oil Company is under the management of Mr Easson, brother to the chief at Joadja. He is a resident of Bowral, but the works are at Moss Vale, a large estate having been secured for the gathering of leaves; some six men are now engaged in felling and collecting, and the works are capable of indefinite extension."

The paper also outlined the distilling process and the product. "The leaf and fine twigs of the eucalyptus yield a volatile oil, which has a good commercial value both in a crude and refined state. Each variety of gum tree has an oil distinctive to itself, but the difference is chiefly perceptible in a laboratory, so slight is it."

"The usual procedure in an oil distillery is to fell the trees both small and great, and collect the tender twigs and leaves. These are finely chopped and placed with water in a closed boiler. The steam and vapour come away and are condensed in a coiled copper tube immersed in cold water. This first distillate is allowed to settle in a vessel with numerous taps, so all the floating oil is drawn off, whilst the mixed residue of water and oil is collected in other vessels until enough is accumulated for redistillation. The crude oil is purchased by the wholesale druggists and through them finds its way in a refined state into all the chemist shops. It is purchased wholesale on analysis."

In April 1899 the Goulburn Evening Penny Post advised that Mr R T Baker, Curator of Sydney Technological Museum, had visited the eucalyptus oil stills of Wingello and Bundanoon. In conjunction with Mr H G Smith, the museum's chemist, Baker had done much to bring before the world the value of eucalyptus oil bearing trees of NSW. The above report makes it clear that the Southern Highlands ranked highly in regard to eucalyptus oil production and from it we learn that a still had opened at Bundanoon. Over following years more were set up locally, including one at Bowral in 1903.

By the 1920s, eucalyptus oil was a major Australian export. Back in 1852 Joseph Bosisto, an emigrant pharmacist from England, had been encouraged by Baron Ferdinand von Mueller, the government botanist of Victoria, to begin commercial production of the oil. He obtained high-quality oil from a mallee-type tree that only grew near Bendigo in Victoria and at West Wyalong in NSW.

The Bosisto Company continued to expand, establishing a eucalyptus factory in the Southern Highlands at Mandemar in 1925. Other local manufacturers included William Quigg who distilled a special eucalyptus oil called Germinoll at his Paddy's River property, with sole manufacturing rights from Fauldings. A factory operated at Macdonald's Flat in the Joadja Creek area and oil was produced on the Mereworth property near Berrima from 1935 for export to Japan.

Australia dominated the world eucalyptus oil market for 80 years from the 1860s to the mid-1940s. Its market share then declined, and production in the local district ceased.

Australia wide, after World War II labour costs rose and the strong demand for wheat meant that drastic destruction of stands of high-quality eucalyptus species occurred. Wheat growing was viewed as more profitable than eucalyptus oil production. Australian oil could not compete with Spanish eucalyptus oil on international markets.

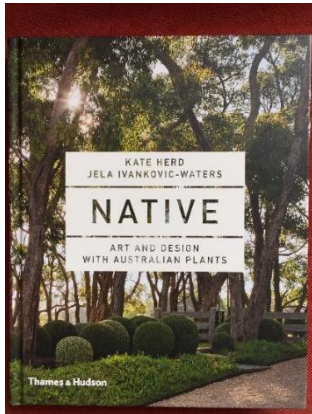
Recently this downward trend has reversed, at least for medicinal purposes. Today, for air vaporisers, body and household cleaning, many people wouldn't be without a bottle of the 'dinkum oil'.

This article [with slight amendments] was written by Philip Morton for the Bundanoon History Group newsletter, from an initial 2-part series compiled by him and other volunteer researchers which first appeared in the Berrima District Historical Society's History Column in the Southern Highland News, June 2016.

Book Review - Native: Art and Design with Australian Plants **by Kate Herd and Jela Ivankovic-Waters**

Sarah Cains

This is a book to lie on a table and revisit time and time again. When you come in from the garden feeling inspired by your plants, searching the pages of this volume is very likely to spark ideas. The authors' enthusiasm for Australian native plants has translated into a book that draws attention to the unique attributes of our plants and highlights diverse and imaginative ways to use them. Our attention is directed away from traditional ways of gardening and minds are opened to a different kind of beauty.



The inclusion of chapters on the work of artists inspired by natives and their landscape is a useful device and positions the book as one to be enjoyed by a person either unfamiliar with, or coming newly to the world of natives. For those already familiar with natives, the art work serves to change the way we look at plants, drawing fresh attention to shapes, colours and textures and sending the imagination soaring with ideas about the ways in which this unique flora can be enjoyed.

Journeying into this book is likely to make the reader want to grow the plants and the impression is given that many of the best treasures are worth a try. Frequent references to the plants being ‘tough hardy and resilient’ could lead a gardener astray; the statement that ‘growing the plants beyond their natural range has its challenges’ is perhaps an understatement. As one who wasted time and money on attempting to alter garden conditions to suit a particular plant, I suggest that, for the average gardener, success is more likely if the plant is selected to suit existing garden conditions. The fact that the text is of a general nature and does not include much specific cultivational information compounds this problem. It is probably fair to say that this book falls better into the court of art and inspiration rather than practical garden advice.

It is comforting to read chapters on the invaluable work undertaken by skilled and passionate people working with plants and to learn of the strides being taken in conservation of our flora (despite frugal government budgets!)



If growing the plants proves to be all too hard, or if we readers are in need of further joy and inspiration, we are directed to open parks and gardens where natives are displayed to perfection. Or we could treat ourselves by seeking out the artists and support them by purchasing a piece their work!

Likely the best ‘review’ of this lovely book is that everyone I’ve talked to who has read it has thoroughly enjoyed it. Certainly it is a beautiful and readable volume, and one to include on the Christmas wish list.



Thank you to Philip Morton and Sarah Cains who contributed to this newsletter.

I’m pleased to be continuing as editor in 2020. You will see details of the new committee in the orange box on the first page.

Wishing you all the best for the New Year, and with coping with the terrible dry and bush fires. I’d be interested to hear which Australian plants are doing best, or least well for you through these conditions. And how they compare in this with any exotic plantings.

And, as always, I’d love to hear from any of you with stories to tell, snippets to share, books to review or questions you want answered.... There is so much knowledge in our membership. Let’s share it as much as possible. trisharbib@gmail.com