

AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY

Southern Highlands Group

...your local native garden club

Coming up:

Thursday 1st April 2pm Talk on cottage gardens by Kris Gow and Sarah Cains

Thursday 6th May 2pm Visit to Bundanoon gardens

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Pink flannel flowers *Actinotus forsythii* made an exciting show in the Bundanoon end of the Morton National Park recently. And I'm sure elsewhere. Barbara Eckersley took photos and wrote an account of her sighting in this newsletter. The flowers are quite tiny, probably the size of a chamomile flower. But they appeared in profusion in shallow damp declivities over sandstone.

<https://austplants.com.au/Southern-Highlands> The Southern Highlands Group promotes the planting of natives in our local gardens. We encourage members to share their knowledge and we organise walks, talks and workshops. We also sell native plants and advise on local plantings in private and public spaces including Wingecarribee Shire Council and business.

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Once in a lifetime sighting in Morton National Park?

Barbara Eckersley

Something very special has been flowering in Morton National Park throughout February largely unnoticed. To see them is possibly a once in a lifetime experience because these delicate soft pink beauties only flower under special circumstances - one year after a bush fire and if there is lots of rain. Looking like daisies they are in fact *Actinotus forsythii* -the Pink Flannel Flower.

My first reaction when I saw the profusion of them near the Wishing Well car park was that they were spectacular but that they were not flannel flowers! A quick Google showed me how mistaken I was! They have also been seen on Lovers Walk, I'm told. However, on my last visit to the Wishing Well blooms on March 3 flowering was just about over.

The following description is from <http://anpsa.org.au/a-for.html>

Actinotus forsythii

Family: Apiaceae

Distribution: Scattered populations in damp areas in open forest and heath from the Blue Mountains west of Sydney to north-east Victoria.

Common Name: Pink Flannel flower

Although of fairly widespread distribution, pink flannel flower is rarely seen in the wild as it does not appear every year. Apparently it requires specific climatic conditions for seed stored in the soil to germinate. It is reported that it flowers for one season a year after a fire if there has been rain.

The pink flannel flower is a straggling small plant. Looking like daisies at first glance, pink flannel flowers consist of a cluster (umbel) of tiny pink flowers fringed not by petals, but by 11–12 furry-textured white or light pink bracts (modified leaves). About 1–3cm across, the flowers grow in spreading clumps to 50cm high.



This very much enlarged image of Actinotus forsythii shows the bracts and the male and female flowers. You can even see the stamens. Notice the similarity to the actually much larger common flannel flower.

The umbels consist of male flowers circling up to 60 female flowers on peduncles. The bracts are elliptic and white to pink with silky hair above, green and hairless below. The male flowers have small and obtuse sepals and papery petals and are about 0.3 mm long. The female flowers have tiny sepals which form a skirt on the summit of the ovary and have no petals.

(Plantnet.rbg Syd.nsw.gov.au)



Common flannel flower with its grey velvety foliage.

Unlike the common Flannel flower *Actinotus helianthi*, *Actinotus forsythii* doesn't have grey and velvety foliage (although the anpsa website describes it's foliage as such). Leaves are small, green and deeply lobed.



A. forsythii's small green leaves

Pink flannel flowers grow in shallow soil on sandstone in damp areas in eucalypt forests and heaths often on ridges, hence it's other name: Ridge flannel flower.

Propagation Demo with Eileen Burnus 4th March, 2021

Paul Osborne

A well-attended gathering enjoyed an early autumn afternoon at Bill and Fran's for our anticipated propagation demonstration. Our guest, Eileen Burnus, has been producing native plants with the Wollondilly Shire Nursery for 20 years and she shared her great knowledge and experience with some good input from Kris Gow too.

Seeds and cuttings for the home gardener were our main subjects and a theme throughout was to know your plants. Observation and experience help and of course there's all the usual sources of information.

A good summary at a glance of Eileen's propagating medium (the same for both seeds and cuttings) and her method of taking cuttings, is in her handout below.

Soft tip/soft wood
Soft, spring growth
Can wilt quickly

Semi hardwood
Hardened new shoots in summer/autumn
Do not wilt as easily

Ensure you have at least 3 nodes in your cutting.

Propagating mix

- Coco peat - good absorption
- Sharp sand - good drainage - can be heavy
- Perlite - good drainage, light
- Vermiculite - allows for good drainage + also holds moisture
- Commercial mix

eg. 1 part coco peat to 1 part perlite
 1 part coarse sand to 1 part coco peat (more sand in winter)

SEED

Before collecting seed give some thought to where and whether permission may be needed to do so.

How to collect can vary and relates to “knowing your plants”. Some examples being:

- Eucalypts – younger green capsules are not ready. Take stems of mature darker brown to grey ones and place in paper bag to open. Much chaff with this as well, sow thinly.
- *Callistemons*- capsules when grey like the eucalypts.

Some ripen on the tree e.g. *Hymenosporum*. Others need removing and some treatment:

- *Banksia*- cones will open with heat such as when placed on a bbq plate.
- *Acacia* – hard coats can be softened in boiled water overnight. Dry on paper towel for easy handling.
- Pea types such as *Hovea*, *Indigofera* are the same as *Acacia*.

Smoke treatment aids germination of flannel flowers, *Xanthorrhoea* and others. There are commercial products, or try placing above a well smouldering fire with a cover to gather smoke onto them.

It was noted with delight the large numbers of flannel flowers about in the bush now after all the smoke last year.

Viability of seed differs greatly, with some lasting years and others like clematis, flannel flowers and paper daisies needing to be fresh.

SOWING SEED

The all - important propagating medium is simple and the same for both seeds and cuttings.

- 1 part coco peat – holds moisture
- 1 part horticultural perlite – drainage, light.

Can use sharp horticultural sand for drainage but not preferred.

- Vermiculite can be good to cover fine seed and inhibit mould on the surface.

Firmly tamp mix down into chosen cleaned containers with good drainage

- Sow seed in moist mix watered from below or mist, avoid overwatering.
- Depth of sowing depends on seed size.
Finer dust-type just cover with vermiculite
Acacia can be buried in a hole of about their own depth
The more vigorous like hakea, banksia can be sown 1 or 2 to a tube or pot
- Label batches with name, date and any special conditions like smoking
- Place in a shade house or suitably protected spot where they are kept consistently just moist with perhaps a misting system or daily checking.

Germination of natives can be erratic so don't give up on them too soon.

Once up and growing with good roots

- Gently tease out, avoid touching roots, and pot up in native plant mix without fertilizer (add your own native *osmocote* for instance to be certain of the dose)
- Carefully pour mix to fill up around the roots and water in, can use seasol
- Back in the shade to acclimatise and strengthen before moving to their suitable position and conditions

Normally 18 months should see them grow to decent plants.

Late winter is the optimal time for sowing native seed but Eileen had found exceptions over the years such as grasses which have varying requirements or paper daisies that come up after the first winter rain. Kangaroo grass has a fussy short window between Christmas and New Year it seems.

CUTTINGS

Soft tip and semi hardwood for natives, hardwood cuttings being rarely used.

- Usually 5cm to 15cm and at least 3 nodes depending on the type of plant
- Remove flowers and buds
- Cut just below a node for the base of the cutting

SOFT TIP or SOFTWOOD

- These are from new early season growth perhaps after some pruning
- Susceptible to moisture loss so place in *Plant Starter* solution after collecting
- Remove leaves from bottom of stem, carefully with some so as not to damage the stem
- Use pots suitable for cutting size and fill firmly with the mix leaving a little mound at the top
- Dibble hole to the bottom
- Can dip in hormone gel or powder but not essential for most cuttings
- Water in with *Plant Starter*
- To cut down moisture loss can place plastic bag or container over top or into other protection like a propagator
- Such cuttings fare well with company so put plenty in the pots

SEMI HARDWOOD

- Late summer and autumn as the new growth hardens is best for these. Take from back down the plant and perhaps a heel can be left on as well.
- Remove or cut 50% of the leaves carefully
- Match pots to cutting size

As with seeds put cuttings in a shady area protected from wind, frost and other hazards. Don't sit them in water but do keep just moist.

They'll strike at different rates of course but when they are coming on well pot them up firmly with native mix poured gently around roots.

An interesting note was that grey foliated specimens can be difficult, perhaps to do with less chlorophyll production. Sometimes larger cuttings of these are needed for success.

It's those lesser known facts and experiences which kept us engaged and attentive and fairly silent apart from good questions here and there and at the conclusion.

There's many places to find out about propagating natives including a book "From Seeds to Leaves" by Doug and Robin Stewart which was given a mention. However such a conversational demonstration was a fine way to be enthused and encouraged to "have a go" and experiment and grow on some new plants of our own.

The Beginnings of our Southern Highlands APS Group

Jenny Simons

When a daughter studied Information Science, including Archives, I became interested in the topic of archiving and have assisted with the archival preservation of the records of several organisations. Thus it is that I am currently caring for the records of our SHAPS group. They are conveniently housed in a large plastic container on wheels and reside at my place. So at Trish's suggestion I went back to our earliest records, to record in summary how we began.
J.S.

In 1996, a public meeting was organised by Christine Beasley, a member of the Society for Growing Australian Plants (now Australian Plants Society) who lives locally, to discuss the formation of a Southern Highlands group. 16 people attended the meeting at Welby Hall that August. They included Jane Lemann, Elizabeth Smith and Gillian Davies. Congratulations on still being with us! Sydney visitors were Merle and Lyn Thomson. Lyn, now deceased, talked about forming a new group. Merle, her sister, continues her active role in APS co-editing 'Australian Plants' with John Aitken.

Those present at this meeting signed a letter to the President of SGAP NSW requesting that the group be formalised. The state group agreed immediately and sent seed funding of \$100.

The first meeting of SHAPS, in September, was held at the property of Gillian Davies. Gillian had in those days a retreat at Paddy's River which adjoined the bush and the meeting began with a fine bushwalk with masses of wildflowers to enjoy. She recalls that a Sydney visitor had a particularly enjoyable experience: it was the first time she had seen a kangaroo in the wild! At this meeting Helen Tranter also attended; apologies included Jane and Martin Lemann and David Tranter.

The following committee positions were filled: President, Christine Beasley; Secretary, Peter Stuart; Treasurer, Yvonne Everingham; Promotions, John Cole; Newsletter Editor, Chris Stimson. The members agreed each to donate \$1 at each meeting to cover the cost of the Newsletter as it cost \$21 to post.

The next meeting was at Wirrimbirra Sanctuary in November, 1996. Consideration was given to using their facilities and resources for meetings and perhaps creating a display garden for the group.

The next meeting was held on a Saturday, 18 January, at the home of Helen and David Tranter in Robertson. The group were shown the natural rainforest and the native plantings on the property that the Tranters had made. The first 'Show and Tell' was held at this meeting.

So back to Wirrimbirra in March, 10 members attending. Peter Cuneo of Wirrimbirra held a seed and cutting propagation workshop and a general meeting followed. The subject of discussion was assisting the Sanctuary with caring for the Strom garden there. Over the rest of the year work was undertaken intermittently on this garden, but abandoned by the end of the year as it was decided that the group was too small to manage this project and 'several problems had occurred'.

Between visits to Wirrimbirra in alternate months the group visited Peter Stuart's property in Exeter. The group admired his mudbrick house and enjoyed his native garden with plants that had grown briskly over 5 years. Jane Lemann was the speaker.

In September our group joined with the Southern Tablelands group in a trip to the Boxvale Track. October's visit was to the Barren Grounds Reserve, but only two members attended.

The group's first Annual General Meeting took place in February, 1997, at the home of Angus and Margaret Wilson in Willow Vale. Angus was elected President; Christine, Vice-President. Other positions remained the same, with the addition of Helen Tranter as Publicity Officer.

Footnote. It was at this meeting that I joined the group. I had been a member of SGAP for many years when I lived in Sydney but had let my membership lapse when I moved to the Southern Highlands. I am mystified as to why it took me so long to connect with the new local group.



Gillian Davies' hideaway at Paddy's River, on September 22, 1996. The third adult from the right, in a pink jumper is Margaret Wilson who was secretary. On her left is her husband Angus Wilson who was president for many years. And peeping out between the big man in blue and the woman with the black waistcoat is Helen Tranter. Can anyone help with other names?

A list of the first attendees is of interest.

Helen Tranter, Elaine Everingham, Jonathon Persse, Georgina Persse, Joe Petrie, Jim Clark, Denise Turner, Chris Stimson, Jon Cole, Peter Stuart, Angus Wilson, Margaret Wilson, Gillian Davies, Christine Beasley, John Beasley.

Apologies: Elaine Buckman, Norma Cohn, Robyn and John Hawkins, Martin and Jane Lemann, David Tranter, Dianne Stimson

February Visit to the Kremers' Garden

Sarah Cains

The little cul de sac where Robyn and Andrew Kremer live filled with cars around two o'clock on the early February afternoon chosen for our visit to the Kremers' garden. Car-sharing, hatted and in breezy summer clothes suitable for the very hot weather, we gathered in the bushland front garden. Presentation to the street of their pretty timber house has changed recently due (sadly!) to a town house development across the road which is contributing noise and disturbance to this quiet corner of Mittagong. Andrew's architect's eye is evident in the design of bush-coloured screening panels installed amongst established trees and shrubs in front of the house. They reduce the impact of the new development which will bring noise, cars and extra wear and tear on the fragile, swampy soils of the area.

The Kremers have owned their block for thirty years now and during that time have created what many dream about but few actually achieve. The garden is a joyful romp of productive food plants, natives, intriguing sheds and structures created with an eye for design plus a linked chain of ponds dug by Andrew to deal with the storm water that flows across the land in times of heavy rain. A few hearty old exotics remain to make their contribution and the whole merges with stands of remnant native vegetation enriched, to the delight of local wildlife, with extra native plantings. The whole presents as a harmony of colour, energy, vitality, and production and it speaks eloquently of the love the owners have for this beautiful place they have made together.

Progress through the garden is directed by the three ponds dug by Andrew at the beginning of their stewardship of this acre of land. Now long established, the ponds sit comfortably into the landscape providing both wildlife habitat and storm water mitigation.



Mature fruit trees are positioned to benefit from the underground reach of the water and are carefully netted in order to protect bounteous crops of fruit of many varieties. We visitors found it hard to keep our hands off anything that protruded from the nets and some members yielded to temptation when we reached the area where fat, purple berry fruit beckoned from the top of canes. Those of us who know the Kremers are in awe of the amount of cooking they do to make use of all this produce. Jams, chutneys, sauces and pickles stream from their kitchen and are often gifted to fortunate friends.

As you walk through the garden, enticing sections of house are glimpsed between the plantings. Courtyards and verandahs offer welcoming chairs, coloured rugs and cushions and a range of pots placed with easy artistry are home to happy plants of various species. Dividing of spaces around the house has made for nooks of varied microclimate conditions which offer a range of planting opportunities. Knowledgeable plants people, Robyn and Andrew have taken advantage of these places and filled them with plants specifically suited to the conditions. One thriving plant showing lustrous blue-green foliage caused particular interest due to its prolific flowering. The Cape Primrose (*Streptocarpus sp.*) comes from South Africa, but we happily forgave it for not being an Australian native due to its amazing display of violet blue trumpet flowers. Multiple plants of this beauty were tucked into pots and crowded into a shaded courtyard. At flowering time it can be taken inside the house so the flowers can be enjoyed at close quarters. Andrew generously gifted pieces of the plant to those who wanted to try growing it for themselves.



Afternoon tea saw us enjoying Robyn's excellent cooking and a welcome cuppa from a clutch of mugs big enough to tell that many guests are welcomed to this lovely home. Andrew passed around an elegantly presented treat of sliced, semi-frozen plums from the trees in the garden; they were just the right touch to round off a hot afternoon.

As we have come to expect, Kris had brought with her a tray of hearty little tube stock plants for us to peruse and purchase to try in our gardens. Thank you, Kris!

Thank you, Robyn and Andrew. Our first garden visit of the new year and first post-Covid adventure was a very real pleasure and uplifting to our rather downtrodden spirits.



Snippets

Australian Native Bonsai - Michael Thorpe

When my wife Juanita and I moved to Wayo (20min North West of Goulburn) in 2018, the bonsai bug had already bitten deep. I'd grown the typical bonsai specimens such as Maples, Junipers and Elms, but it wasn't until we moved to Berowra in Sydney with the bush as our backyard, amongst a stunning array of Eucalyptus, Acacias and Banksias, that I started growing natives.



Acacia howittii prostrate

I buy natives as tubestock and I use bonsai wire to create



Callistemon 'Red Alert'

curves in the trunk. This gives the plant some character, an appearance of age and mimics a plant's efforts to grow in tough Australian conditions. I then plant them up into 200mm pots.



Banksia serrata

I start pruning any new growth to develop branch ramification. In a growing season I will prune 3-4 times. Choosing a "front" to view the tree is an important step as this will dictate where you prune and also where you may want to wire a branch.



Eucalyptus melliodora Yellow Box, and Eucalyptus saligna Sydney Blue Gum

I root prune every two years. I hear all the time that natives don't like having their roots disturbed but if the root ball is kept moist and the plant is given a good haircut, your chances of success are good.

To complement my natives I like to use pots that have a rough, textured look. Something that may look like the tree is growing in sandstone or granite. I use moss, rocks and river sand to create a small scene which also helps give the plant proportion.

Some of my favourites to try are *Callistemon viminalis*, *Banksia marginata*, *Eucalyptus*

nicholii, *Acacia floribunda* and my all-time favourite *Banksia integrifolia*.

I wanted to share how stunning native plants are. I think we grow far too many exotics in our own backyards. Growing a native plant as a bonsai is a great way to showcase its beauty. It's a talking point when friends and family visit and starts a discussion.

I take some of my creations to the Exeter markets (1st Saturday of the month) and Mittagong markets (3rd and 5th Saturday.) You can also see some of my bonsai on my Instagram page. @australiannativebonsai Happy gardening.

Native Grace - New Native Nursery in Robertson

Some of us have discovered this new nursery on the edge of Robertson. In fact as I went in I met a happy Deanna coming out with a trolley load of plants.



This is an attractive fresh looking nursery selling only Australian native plants, together with a design and landscaping service, and a shop. The café is open Friday to Sunday. Luke is a horticulturist who worked for 20 years at Warriapendi. The good looking plants are bought in and are \$15 for a 140mm pot. Their website nativegrace.com.au gives details.

Illawarra Grevillea Park Open Days

For your information. This is always a fascinating place to visit. Open days are 1st & 2nd May and 8th & 9th May. Illawarra Grevillea Park is part of the Australian Botanic Gardens. Plant sales will occur on these days. Opening hours 10am to 4pm. Location is Grevillea Park Road which runs off the Princes Highway. The park is about 900m from the intersection with the Princes Highway.

Macarthur APS Garden and Rain Forest Walk

APS Macarthur would like to invite SHAPS members to join them for a meeting on **Wednesday the 21st of April** to Malle and David Eden's property in Oakdale. All will be Covid safe.

The plan is to start about 10 am with a morning tea, provided, and brief discussion. This will be, followed by a tour of their mixed garden and rain forest. The Edens do have a kart that

can take a few of the less mobile people down their garden paths. It will be good to see how their forests and gardens are regenerating after the bushfires that went right through there last year.

Macarthur members have been bringing in native plants to exchange and we would be welcome to take part in that. This includes seeds.

Here is a link to a google map for a simple route from the F5 at Picton Road to the Eden's at 220 New Jerusalem Road, Oakdale. <https://goo.gl/maps/WaANBUyMFoxH9Z1a7>

In order to organise morning tea and seating, **please advise Kim (Secretary SHAPS) at least a week ahead of the date** on southernhighlandsaps@gmail.com. We will also try and organise some carpooling.

Louise Egerton's Local Radio Debut

Who heard Louise on community radio 107.2 on Friday 5th March? It was a free ranging 15 minute discussion with host Adam Stokeld, including a discussion of Why Grow Natives, and provided a real opportunity to spread the Australian native plants message wider.

There are plans to have a regular spot at 1pm on the first Friday of the month. Trisha Arbib will be joining Louise in April, and it is anticipated that more SHAPS members will become involved in later sessions.

Southern Highlands' Plant List

A comprehensive listing of 1600 plants can be found on the NSW APS website.

Upcoming Program

Thursday 1st April, 2pm

Kris Gow and Sarah Cains will give the long awaited talk, previously cancelled, on Australian native cottage gardens. They will cover plants and design in small gardens and courtyards.

Place: the home of Bill and Fran Mullard, at 150 Devon Road, Exeter
Covid regulations require you to sign in at the event, and hand sanitize.



Thursday 6th May, 2pm

We will be visiting one or more Bundanoon gardens. One is the garden of Pam Tippet, written up in the November 2020 SHAPS newsletter. There I described "native plants (and not just natives) scrambling, sprawling, shooting up, seeding, forming layers of vegetation, intermingling..."

Details will be emailed to you closer to the date.

I'd like to thank Barbara Eckersley, Paul Osborne, Jenny Simons, Sarah Cains, and Michael Thorpe who contributed to this newsletter. Contributions are always welcome. Please write to me at trisharbib@gmail.com with suggestions.

MANY THANKS
to all
contributors to
this newsletter.

