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## NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2018

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### APS FORUM

This year the timing of our Australian Plants Society forum was perfect, as the bleak cold and blustery outdoors made the cosy function room at the Goulburn Workers Club a very pleasant alternative to walking in the wilds. The format which was so successful last year was repeated, with an even higher attendance, at about 60 people.

Members and guests were greeted by Tony and Sandra—this roll of attendees will be a valuable contact resource for sharing information about activities, events and information. As MC, Bob also took the opportunity to give a brief overview of the range of our activities and explained how to join.

Long-time member, Jen Ashwell, shared her extensive knowledge of soils and experience of gardening locally since the 1980s. Jen began by outlining the broad range of factors influencing the conditions in any particular garden—topography, aspect, hours of sun/shade, hard structures such as buildings and roads which may impact run-off and temperature, availability of light, prevailing wind etc. as well as the impact of natural structures such as windbreaks and shelter belts. Climatic conditions such as rainfall, severity of frosts and heat waves, average temperatures throughout the year, humidity and altitude all impact the conditions which will affect plant choice—this is before we even start to consider soils.

Building on the foundations laid by Rob Lance last year, who focussed on the geological origins of Australian soils, Jen focussed on the factors gardeners must identify in their own patch in order to make the best of their situations. Starting with the makeup of inorganic elements—identifying whether one's soil is predominantly sand, silt or clay is the first step.

Jen provided a clear and practical overview of factors such as soil pH, availability of nutrients and oxygen and drainage. She then related this information to local conditions and the needs of Australian plants. Strategies to consider when selecting plans include:

- Growing indigenous plants, particularly if conditions are extreme;
- Improving the soil with organic matter—avoiding blood and bone and chicken manure which are both high in phosphorus.
- Bringing in significant quantities of soil to make raised garden beds.

The latter is particularly useful where there may be compaction issues or where previous intensive gardening has made the soil unsuitable for natives. Jen described the approach adopted in APS member, Frank's town garden, after he had had significant numbers of native plants die when planted directly into the garden. The new approach involved creating raised beds—this provided excellent drainage and enabled some experimentation with soil make-up. One recipe involved one third clean sandy gravel, one third compost and one third gardening soil. Another recipe was one third sand, one third small gravel, one third soil. While it will be interesting to hear the long term results as to which of these recipes promote the most health plant growth—to date, Frank has had markedly better success than previously.

Some consistent factors in growing natives are to ensure good drainage, avoid adding too much phosphorus to the soil, and to use native-specific fertilisers to promote growth.

Following the presentation there was interested discussion about specific issues attendees face. We then broke for morning tea and chat.

After the break, Kirsty Chalker inspired attendees with her enthusiasm for native plants. Pointing out the advantages natives and indigenous species have over exotics, she encouraged the audience to take a fresh look at how we may use natives in the garden.

Kirsty's background in creative arts is obviously a sympathetic match for her current direction of horticulture and landscape design. She demonstrated the versatility of native species by highlighting how well they adapt to a range of garden styles, whether cottage, formal, Japanese or modern. She also stressed the importance of really getting to know your site, and designing your garden to fit with the landscape—whether the architectural landscape in town, or the natural landscape of an acreage.

Through her visual presentation, Kirsty demonstrated the beauty, as well as the variety of natives. After inspiring us with the vision of which plants are well suited to the different garden styles, she presented a selection of highly attractive plants for a variety of purposes and situations—small scale gardens, low light, hot dry, wet, sculptural, narrow spaces, pots, ground covers and fragrant.

The really inspiring element was that each of the plants she highlighted were suited to local conditions. Her own refusal to blindly comply with accepted wisdom about where plants may be grown also encouraged an adventurous approach to plant selection and gardening with natives.

The take-home message from the informative morning was to do one's homework—get the basics right, and then let your creativity and inspiration be reflected in your gardening with natives.

About 20 people stayed on for lunch at the Workers Club with the presenters and members.

*Thanks to Pauline for her description of the forum presentations. When I first started with native plants, the overbearing message was the need for good drainage. You can get good drainage in two ways - through well-draining soil or through raised beds. If creating raised beds, it may also be possible to have depressed areas where moisture-loving plants could be placed.*(ed)

## CALENDAR

Sat Aug 4	Bullio Tunnel Trail
Sat Sept 1	Walk - Nattai National Park
Thu Sept 13	Propagation
Sun Sept 16	Propagation
Sat Oct 6	Walk - Nadgigomar West Nature Reserve
Wed Oct 24	Wetlands Garden Maintenance
Sun - Tue Nov 11 - 13	Walks - Nature Reserves near Mudgee
Sat Dec 1	End-of-year function + AGM

## LOCAL SNOWGUMS

We came across the snowgum in our June walk at Laggan. The botanical name for the snowgum, *E. pauciflora* can be misleading. Literally the epithet 'pauciflora' means few flowers. However, in November when it flowers locally, some trees can be covered in masses of flowers, quite eye-catching from some distance away. The local snowgum is a different species to those growing at higher altitudes in the alpine areas.. Its distribution is interesting and aspects of this can be noted as you drive along some of the local roads. The snowgum usually has a clean white bark with some greyish blotches. In this it is similar to the local brittle gum, *E. mannifera* which can sometimes be found growing not far from snowgums. By contrast, the other clean-barked scribbly gum (*E. rossii*) is generally confined to ridges, upper slopes and shallow soils. The leaves of snowgum are larger (and usually not as crowded as in brittle gum) and they reflect direct sunlight very well and are a mid-green in colour. The leaves of brittle gum are often a dusty-grey green. Snowgums will often branch from near ground level, have a more open canopy and due to their location often appear wind-blasted. *E. pauciflora* also has pressure ridges under the joins of the major branches (absent from brittle gum). If you are able to study the two species separately and close-up, you would find that you will be able to tell them apart as you drive along – safety first, however, as always.

Some of the locations along roads from Goulburn include roads to the south - excluding the Hume Highway - although they can be seen along the Federal Highway as you get closer to Collector.

'Better' roads are those to Windellama and Tarago. Another occurrence is adjacent to the Hume if you have left Marulan on the way towards Mittagong. Before the highway rises just near Narrambulla Creek, there is a line of snowgums on the right hand roadside. If you are able to take note of the location, you would notice that the trees are growing on the eastern slope of a broad depression or valley. That is the sort of location that most of our local snowgums occupy - and I emphasise 'most'. If you are familiar with the Tarago and Windellama roads, you will drive through sections where again the snowgums are a little bit above the broad valley floor and again they face the westerly winds.

If you drive east from Tarago towards Bungonia South/ Windellama, you will go past a fairly pure stand of snowgums as the road rises. However, as the road rises further, the snowgums disappear and are replaced with trees like silvertop ash (*E. sieberi*) and some stringybarks.

So, the local snowgums can be found along the lower slopes (mostly eastern) of broad depressions or frost hollows; their altitudinal range might be between 600 and 750 metres. (If you were to collect seed for propagation, it would be best to do so from the lower trees which might have superior frost resistance to those high up). You may well be aware that the trees that mostly line the Federal Highway along Lake George are ribbon or manna gum, *E. viminalis* (higher water availability might be a factor here). Looking across the lake, snowgums would be found on the eastern slopes near the wind farms.

For snowgums at the higher altitudes of sub-alpine and alpine areas, there are similar distributions. Treeless valley are common in the alpine regions. Snowgums descend the slopes but they stop short of the valley bottoms which are dominated by grasses, especially the snow grasses, *Poa* species. You may recall that several species of *Poa* were seen at Laggan. The grasses are able to survive the very low temperatures that occur on the valley floor and their growth may also be aided by the slightly more fertile soils. Some of these treeless valleys with the alpine character can be seen in a few higher parts of the A.C.T.



Snowgum (left) and Brittle gum (right). Although hard to describe, other than darker versus lighter, note the different shades of green in the foliage. On the left, the pale blotches in the foliage are the sunlight reflections from the leaves. The Snowgum is at an altitude of about 600m while the brittle gum is at about 680m.