Report on visit to Lyrebird Lane

Quite a crowd travelled to Lyrebird Lane Little Forest, to enjoy the extensive garden of Catriona and Phil. As leaders of the Petrophile and Isopogon Study Group, they share a keen interest in domesticating these members of the Proteaceae family. Phil has spent some years perfecting a process of grafting the difficult to grow but horticulturally desirable Western Australian species onto more reliable Eastern states rootstock. From this work he has ventured to graft many difficult to grow plants within the Proteaceae family, including Banksia, Dryandra, Grevillea and Hakea species onto stocks which not only survive, but thrive in his garden conditions. (Phil has kindly supplied an extensive list of the successful grafts in his garden, which follows this report)

Phil and Catriona ponder a difficult question during their opening comments at the last meeting

Catriona and Phil's property is located on the edge of the escarpment overlooking Lake Conjola and Milton at an elevation of 350m, just below the Little Forest Plateau area of the Morton National Park, about ten kilometres from the sea, and is a garden set on the rich soils of former rainforest pockets, comprising two hectares of volcanic soil known as Milton monzonite. Whilst we marvelled at the plants and the almost perfect maintenance, both Catriona and Phil were quick to point out aspects which they struggled with. First of course, as the soil retains so much moisture, many plants simply grow too quickly, then being top heavy, are affected negatively by the strong westerly winds which flow down from the nearby escarpment. First timber stakes then heavy star posts have solved the problem. Then of course the roots of many of their favourite plants cannot cope with the constant moisture, and subsequently died suddenly. Hence the serious interest in grafting onto more adaptable rootstock.

Phil explains the difference between Banksia vincentia, B. spinulosa and B. cunninghamii

This garden allows substantial experimentation into the requirements of an extensive range of Australian plants. Not just Proteaceae plants find a home here, many other plants from quite a range of families happily enjoy what little space is offered. Despite being a large garden, plants often have to earn their space, fitting within the garden beds and jostling with neighbours to be noticed. I guess this should encourage a more flamboyant flowering to ensure each gets the recognition it deserves. Catriona has her doubts as to the validity of this theory.

One of the real treasures is Western Australia's ***Banksia occidentalis***, a dwarf form which is grafted onto ***B. integrifolia***, which is a large tree. Catriona was keen to point out that such plants can be long term successes, and that apical dominance determines the long term growth habit. That is the scion, in this case a dwarf Banksia, determines the final size of the grown plant, despite the strong growth of the stock plant, ***B. integrifolia***.

A surprise later addition to the garden is this rockery, which was discovered when a vigorous clump of Kikuyu was finally eradicated.

When asked how the rocks were placed, Catriona was honest enough to say "that's just where they were".

Phil is happily and unashamedly extolling the virtues of the many **Eremophila species** growing in this area. When it was pointed out that we were here to learn about Proteaceae, he quickly pointed to a low growing form of ***Grevillea iaspicula*** collected on a recent Grevillea Study Group excursion.

Grevillea bipinnatifida is a plant not often grown these days, although it was popular in the late 20th century. That seems a long time ago. It was one of the parents of the very popular **G. "Robyn Gordon",** and subsequently many other similar shrubs. Now grown only by enthusiasts, there is a number of low growing forms found in various locations near Perth, and this one is especially attractive for its prostrate habit, and long flowering period. Phil suggests that it can flower all year if given enough sunlight. Another low growing form known as ***G. bipinnatifida*** **"Boys Town",** was mentioned also as a reliable garden plant. Both these forms are growing on their own roots. Cultivation practice requires that pruning should be regular, to prevent older growth detracting from the showy plant. Old growth tends to dry off and become brown. Pruning prevents this, and despite cutting off a few flowers, the overall benefits are immense.

Although not flowering at the time of our visit, Phil was keen that we all tried to grow ***Isopogon cuneatus***, one of W.A's most stunning wildflowers. A number of these plants feature in the garden, and as it is easy to graft successfully onto the eastern states ***Isopogon anethifolius***, Phil always has a few in stock. In fact he has been supplying these to some botanic gardens. Another reliable grafted **Isopogon** is **I."Stuckey's Hybrid**", which arose as a chance seedling in the garden of Ken Stuckey in South Australia following the 1983 Ash Wednesday bushfires. It is believed to be a hybrid, possibly between ***I.latifolius*** and ***I. buxifolius.***

Banksia plagiocarpa Hinchinbrook Island

Not all plants in this garden need to be grafted for success. Eastern state Banksias thrive, including the very distinctive and attractive ***Banksia plagiocarpa*** which grows on Hinchinbrook Island. This small tree has brilliant new growth, first reddish, then brown, light yellowish green then dark green, and the flowers have purple tones. It is easy to grow, requiring good drainage, but adaptive to soil type. Extra water in dry periods will prove beneficial.

Not far away, one finds ***Banksia robur***, a vigorous shrub to 3m. Known as Swamp Banksia for its preference for wet heathy environs, and also creek margins, this plant has proved reliable in gardens for many years. It responds very well to hard pruning to keep it in check, and rewards the keen gardener with even greater flower production. Our picture shows just how hard ***B. robur*** tries to please. I wonder, just how many more flowers could a plant squeeze in?

Banksia robur Noosa heathlands

This garden inspires all who visit, and these few words cannot do justice to the incredible experience offered those who accept a ready invitation.

We are in awe as to just how well Australian plants can grow when given the right conditions. Surely as growers of Australian plants we can learn a lot from the experience of Catriona and Phil's garden. We may not have the terrific soil, or the rainfall, but can do amazing things if we choose the right plants.

To encourage us even further, Phil spent quite some time after lunch demonstrating his grafting techniques, and I am pleased that a few members had a go at this mysterious propagation method, and went home with a little treasure, and great hopes for its success.

The mysteries of grafting in detail.

Phil shows the tools and the results.

Secateurs, Stanley Knife, sharp firm knife blade, bucket with 8% bleach for cleansing the stock and scion Methylated spirits for cleaning the implements, paper towel for drying the plant material after washing in bleach, Nesco film for wrapping the graft in place until the union is strong. And a cup of coffee to steady the nerves as you slice towards a finger.

Phil demonstrating just how to do it.

On the left, selecting the right diameter scion to match his chosen stock material, centre, slicing the scion on either side to create a V shape to fit inside the slit made in the stock, and on the right taping the graft with Nescofilm to protect the graft from drying out whilst the cutting strikes and the graft union is completed. Phil prefers to do cutting grafts, as there is no need to wait until seedling stock material reaches a suitable size, which could take a year or 2. The trick is to ensure you select stock material which roots reliably, and which has proven to be compatible with the scion. It is also important to use stock material which grows in your garden conditions.


For his work, Phil uses ***Isopogon anethifolius*** for Isopogons, a non-suckering form of ***Myoporum acuminatum*** for Eremophilas, ***Banksia integrifolia*** for Banksias and hardy Grevillea hybrids for shrubby Grevilleas. Obviously more work is needed to develop a comprehensive list of what can be grafted to what, and to this end Phil and Catriona maintain an ever increasing store of information. All APS members can help by having a go at grafting, and reporting their results. In this way a better range of impressive plants can be brought into cultivation.

A few members had a go at Phil's, and we now await the results of their work.

Here, Jenny Vine admires her graft of Eremophila.

Before we began the garden walk, a quick show and tell session presented some lovely flowers for discussion. As always Jenny John brought along some goodies (plants and a lovely slice) which we appreciated. In particular was a showy spray of the brilliant Grevillea 'Golden Lyre', a spreading low growing plant which performs brilliantly in full sun and well drained soil.

Also on display was this unusual form of ***Grevillea banksii*** (previously known as *G. banksii* var *Forsteri*) Some flowers on the plant, but not all, have a habit of retaining the floral tube attached to the expanding style, such that it appears the flowers are wearing boots. For this reason the plant was, on the day, named **Grevillea 'Puss in Boots'**. As the flowering as such cannot be guaranteed, there is no point in trying to release it as a new cultivar, but it was interesting anyway.

It was a pleasure to have been invited to view the garden at Lyrebird Lane, and all present thanked Catriona and Phil warmly for their generosity. The group presented our hosts with a bottle of fine red in appreciation.

Grafted plants at Lyrebird Lane:
Banksia
aquilonia, benthamiana, blechnifolia, brownii, burdettii, canei, croajingalensis, dryandroides, epica, grandis, laevigata subsp. laevigata, lemanniana, littoralis, media, meisneri var. ascendens, micrantha, occidentalis, occidentalis (miniature), oreophila, paludosa subsp. paludosa, plagiocarpa, praemorsa, prionotes, pulchella, rosserae, saxicola, seminuda, tricuspis, verticillata, violacea

Grevillea
agrifolia, alpina (Tooborac and Warby Range forms), armigera, caleyi, dielsiana, dryandroides subsp. dryandroides, dryandroides subsp. hirsuta, hookeriana, eriobotrya, eriostachya, eryngioides, excelsior, insignis subsp. insignis, insignis subsp. elliotii, intricata, leptobotrys, leucoclada, leucopteris, neorigida subsp. neorigida, petrophiloides, superba, tetragonoloba, thyrsoides subsp. thyrsoides, thyrsoides subsp. pustulata, 'Bulli Beauty', 'Canning Classic', 'Elegance'

Hakea
aculeata, bucculenta, clavata, coriacea, divaricata, erecta, francisiana, grammatophylla, invaginata, lehmanniana, multilineata, obtusa, petiolaris*laurina, 'Stockdale Sensation'
Isopogon
ceratophyllus, cuneatus, dawsonii, divergens, dubius, fletcheri, formosus, latifolius, petiolaris, pruinosus, scabriusculus subsp. stenophyllus, spathulatus, sphaerocephalus, trilobus, tridens

Dryandra

cirsioides, comosa, cuneata, foliolata, longifolia subsp. archeos, longifolia subsp. longifolia, polycephala, praemorsa var. praemorsa, tenuifolia var. reptans

Eremophila
biserrata, calorhabdos, cuneifolia, delisseri, debilis, denticulata subsp. denticulata, duttonii, eriocalyx, forrestii, gilesii, glandulifera, grandiflora, hygrophana, laanii, latrobei, mackinlayi subsp. mackinlayi, mackinlayi subsp. spathulata, miniata, mirabilis, nivea, oppositifolia, platycalyx subsp. pardalota, pterocarpa, punicea, spectabilis, subfloccosa subsp. subfloccosa, subteretifolia, tetraptera, youngii, cuneifolia*fraseri, 'Big Poly', 'Fairy Floss', 'Permiga Road', 'Summertime Blue', 'Yana Road'

Pimelea
ferruginea, nivea, rosea, spectabilis, suaveolens, physodes