

Summer Survivors

by Leigh Murray

The past summer was really tough on our plants. At home in Queanbeyan, we had many hot days plus two 5 – 6 day runs of 38 – 40 degree maximum temperatures. Temperatures as high as these are unusual for the Canberra area, and these high temperatures were much longer-lasting than the norm. And the soil was powdery dry. At Tuross, during a long period without rain, the temps were much milder, but the winds were something else, and they desiccated many plants almost as much as a heatwave.



Banksias, correas and callistemons have been among the strongest survivors. Banksias didn't blink at Tuross. But metre-high plants of *Banksia integrifolia*, (Photo by Jackie Miles, copied with permission from w/s

<http://thebegavalley.org.au/plants.html>) growing slowly in awful spots at home (fully exposed to the western sun on a bare, rocky ridge), were badly burnt. Yet, amazingly, with only one or two leaves left unscorched, they're on the way to recovery, helped by autumn rain. It's a lovely sight to see new

growth amongst a mass of dead leaves. *B. integrifolia*, the Coast Banksia, does of course do brilliantly at Tuross, but it's been a surprising success at Queanbeyan, where apart from a magnificent *B. spinulosa*, it's the banksia that copes best with our conditions, even beating *B. marginata* for toughness there.

Callistemons at home (a wide variety: mainly cultivars of *C. citrinus* and *C. viminalis*, plus *C. pinifolius*) actually appeared to revel in the heat, putting on new growth during the heatwave (everything else looked stunned), and those at Tuross (*C. citrinus* cultivars mainly, plus Council-planted *C. 'Dawson River'*) didn't blink during the long, windy dry period. A couple of the correas at home had some burnt foliage, and others drooped strongly but they all recovered well, and many are flowering now as I write this in early April (eg several forms of *Correa glabra*, plus *C. decumbens*, *C. pulchella* and *C. reflexa*). *Correa glabra* is a wonderfully hardy shrub for inland conditions but doesn't do particularly well at Tuross, whereas *C. baeuerlenii* thrives in both places. Croweas (eg the gorgeous *C. 'Poorinda Ecstasy'*) toughed it out at home; they didn't even droop. (I haven't tried any at Tuross since several died in our early years – I've found them to be susceptible to root rot, a constant threat there.)

Tufty plants such as *Dianella revoluta*, *D. tasmanica* and *Lomandra longifolia* hardly blinked – their foliage tended to go yellowish in the heatwave, but it soon greened up again once we had rain, and wind doesn't seem to bother them. Most climbers (such as *Clematis aristata* and *C. microphylla*, *Pandorea pandorana* and *Eustrephus latifolius*) did well in both gardens. But an *Hibbertia scandens* and a couple of *Cissus antarctica* that had been growing happily on a northern fence are only just beginning to recover from those drying winds at Tuross, which also burnt foliage on some Lilly pillies (eg *Syzygium smithii*). The *S. smithii* seem pretty tough, surviving for us at Tuross in some of the harshest spots (wind-exposed and/or under Norfolk Island Pines). (I haven't tried growing them in Queanbeyan, but an *Elaeocarpus reticulatus* is doing nicely there, so they too might do well under eucalypt cover.)

Hit hard were some of our grevilleas. Quite a few became distressed by the heat (although the wind didn't bother them). Elderly grevilleas (20 years plus) such as *Grevillea 'Bronze*

Rambler' and G. 'Clearview David' decided they'd had enough. G. 'Poorinda Royal Mantle' fought hard against the heat: a couple of smaller plants succumbed, but the others are shooting back from burnt foliage.

I did what I could to shade sun-exposed plants at home (by mulching and by draping smaller plants with bits of shade cloth or leafy branches), and this did seem to help. The effects of the drying winds at Tuross came as such a surprise given the mild temps, that all I could do was water the plants belatedly once I found them in a distressed state. To our delight, the autumn rain in both places has led to a resurgence of growth, especially in Queanbeyan where indigenous plants such as Cassinias are popping up in areas that were previously bare.