



AUSTRALIAN PLANTS SOCIETY SOUTH EAST NSW GROUP

Newsletter No. 98- December 2013

NEXT MEETING- SATURDAY 1st March 2014 AT 10.30AM

Native plants in private and public landscaping

Venue to be decided. More information in the February newsletter.

Don't forget SHOW and TELL(bring samples of native plants)

Please bring morning tea, lunch and a chair...also walking shoes, hat and warm clothes.

<u>FUTURE MEETINGS</u>		
DATE	GENERAL/COMMITTEE	TIME/LOCATION
5 th February 2014	Committee	Bermagui
7 th June 2014	General	To be decided

COMMELINA CYANEA

By Jennifer Liney



Another Australian plant, that has its place in the bush, but definitely not welcome in fertilised garden beds, is *Commelina cyanea*. A prostrate tuberous herb that produces roots at each leaf node on a stem where it touches the soil, it can spread rapidly over a garden bed, smothering everything that stands in its way. So if a blanket groundcover is what is needed, then many Australian plant species dislike enriched soil, preferring low nutrient skeletal soils, but this one revels in good living. (Photo by Jackie Miles, copied with permission from her website <http://thebegavalley.org.au/plants.html>)

Commelina cyanea is a member of the same family as the dreaded Wandering Jew; i.e Commelinaceae, and it is nearly as hard to eliminate from a garden bed. There are other *Commelina* species from tropical Asia and parts of the Northern Hemisphere; two of these imports have naturalised on the Central and North Coasts. *C. cyanea* is one of two New South Wales species. The other is *C. ensifolia* from the NSW North West Slopes and Plains.

The Type specimen was described as having been collected in 'Australia'. The original description was published by Robert Brown in 1810. The name *Commelina* is after Johan and Caspar Commelin, 17th century Dutch botanists; *cyanea* means deep blue, referring to the colour of the flower, a flower that appears to have

three petals, but they are really tepals, a name used when the sepals and petals of a flower are combined in the one structure.

Unusually, the plant has had only one genus name throughout its botanical life, although there have been a couple of misapplications. In 1873, Frederick von Mueller called it *C. communis*, and as recently as 2007 Neville Walsh, from South Australia, suggested the specific name of *diffusa*. Neither of these species names was accepted.

The leaves of this plant were eaten either cooked or raw to stave off scurvy in early settler days, hence the common name Scurvy Weed. Today, some say that it does not taste too bad – rather like bitter lettuce. All parts are rich in vitamin C, niacin, and riboflavins. The other common name, Creeping Christian, refers to its similarity to the original Wandering Jew, *Tradescantia albiflora*, but the leaves of the Scurvy Weed are spaced further apart, not quite so fleshy and a slightly different shape. Scurvy Weed has fleshy tuberous roots at the nodes, while the roots of Wandering Jew are fibrous, but both species break off easily at each node when pulled up by hand, leaving the roots in the ground to grow another stem.



(Photos by Jennifer Liney)

It turns out that *T. albiflora* has recently suffered a name change to *T. fluminensis*. So that is another one for the memory bank.

Cyanea commelina is most common in new gardens wrought from bushland. It seldom appears in older, more civilised gardens.

Local Shows - be involved!

by Sue Sullivan

Our Group is again sponsoring prizes at these two shows in 2014 for Australian native flowers. We are keen to showcase Australian plants to our local communities and also to increase the number of entries in this category. So we are encouraging our members to participate by entering native flowers at these events.



**Bega Agricultural, Pastoral
& Horticultural Society**
serving our community since 1871

SHOW DATES

EUROBODALLA	BEGA
Saturday 25 th and Sunday 26 th January 2014	Fri 14 th , Sat 15 th & Sun 16 th February 2014

Information, including entry forms, closing dates, sections etc. can be found on their respective websites at www.eurobodallashow.org.au and www.begashow.asn.au or by phone to their secretaries at (02)4474 3980 and 0427 921 452 respectively.

Driveway Beds

by Leigh Murray

At both Tuross Head and Queanbeyan, our steeply sloping concrete driveways each have a central garden bed between two drivestrips. With a low-clearance car, only flat or very low-growing plants are suitable for these locations.

At Tuross, the only plant used is *Grevillea* 'Poorinda Royal Mantle'. This has proved a great success. It is flat and dense and long-flowering, with pinky-red toothbrush flowers that birds adore. Both Red and Little Wattlebirds like to hop around on it, dining on the flowers. Regular car usage on one driveway keeps the plant neatly trimmed. On the other driveway – which is almost never used – the plant has been allowed to spread over much of the concrete.



At Queanbeyan, I've also planted 3 *Grevillea* 'Poorinda Royal Mantle' in the 20m long central bed. The plants look fairly healthy, and they flower, but they haven't grown to cover a large area. So, some years ago, I added a variety of other flat plants, to see if any of them did better. The bed is now home to *Pelargonium rodneyanum*, *Grevillea confertifolia* prostrate, *Kunzea pomifera*, *Correa decumbens*, and *Carpobrotus modestus*. None of these are flourishing but they're all doing OK, and provide a nice mix. The *Carpobrotus* sometimes gets eaten back by rabbits, and gets the odd bit of scale, but apart from that, all plants have been trouble-free. Over the years, I've tried a few other plants too, notably our naturally-growing, ultra-flat forms of *Einadia hastata* and *E. nutans*, which proved a major disappointment when they didn't survive the tough conditions of the driveway, ditto *Brachyscome multifida*. The problem is that because the drive is west-facing and unshaded, it cops a good dose of sunbaking heat on summer afternoons.

A considerable advantage of central driveway garden beds for us is that they help to interrupt the rainwater that belts down our steep driveways during heavy downpours. This is especially important at Tuross, where it isn't uncommon to get 150mm within a day or two. And central driveway beds provide what plain concrete doesn't: an additional area for wildlife. We love to see wattlebirds or lorikeets popping about amongst the flowers, a whipbird raking through the mulch under the leaves, or a lizard diving into the foliage as a refuge.

Committee Members

by Jan Robilliard

Our new expanded committee has been elected and you can refer to the back page to see the impressive list of names and positions. Thank you all for accepting your nomination and election.

Notable omissions are Wendy and Bob Ross who have been on our committee, holding various offices including President and Newsletter Editor. Bob was responsible for producing the newsletter in the form that it is today. Both of them have contributed significantly to APS SE and I would like to thank them for their time and commitment.

New Members

by Jenny Johns

Welcome to Karen Dahl from ACT and Karen Walker from Buckajo-new members of our group.

SAVE OUR FLORA!

Bob Ross, APS-NSW Conservation Office

When I started work as the Conservation Officer of the NSW Region in January 2012 I contacted Margery Street from the North Shore Group – Margery has been providing leadership in conservation matters for APS NSW for many years and she represents us on the Nature Conservation Council of NSW.

During 2012 I worked with Margery on submissions from APS NSW to federal and NSW governments on major issues like the Murray-Darling proposals. We put in some major submissions and I think what we did was worthwhile and necessary. However it took a lot of time and the results were not encouraging. We didn't get meaningful feedback from the bodies that received the submissions or from our APS Region, and there were always more conservation issues arriving.

We decided to go to the members and try to find out what they thought were the conservation priorities for native plants in NSW, and I published an article in the April 2012 issue of Native Plants for New South Wales asking members for suggestions.

Unfortunately the results were not good – we received only one reply! I admit I didn't do a good job of writing it – too boring, not interesting.

Then I got an idea after reading an article by the Victorian APS Conservation Officer in the APS Victorian Region journal. Maybe the way to stir up conservation interest in our NSW Region was to have an article on threatened and rare/endangered native plants in each issue of Native Plants!

Three articles have now been published – all on rare and endangered natives in our area (the Far South Coast).

Several weeks ago Wendy and I drove 1000 km to Armidale and spent two nights (3 days) with Maria and Don Hitchcock. While we were there we talked about lots of things but the most productive was an idea of Maria for a new group – she has named it “Save Our Flora”.

Save Our Flora (the Project) aims to build an Australian register of gardeners and conservationists who are growing threatened/ rare/ endangered native plants. Along the way we hope to find out who is growing what.

Maria has sent out a flyer inviting interested people to contact her and she is getting lots of interest – including quite a few people who are not members of APS. The first newsletter has already gone out (in pdf format only, by email). We also hope to work with specialist native plant nurseries that supply rare or threatened species of native plants. It is very exciting!

If you want to join this new project you can contact either me or Maria Hitchcock.

**Contact us: saveourflora@gmail.com Maria 02 6775 1139
Bob 02 6495 0306**



Prostanthera staurophylla is listed as endangered under the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995 (New South Wales). It is currently found on a granite outcrop in the Tenterfield area of the New England tablelands, and it is one of the native plants that will be included in our register. (photo by M. Hitchcock)

Thomasia for the garden.

By John Knight

At our November meeting, members were introduced to *Thomasia*, a Genus of 40 species of dwarf to medium shrubs confined almost exclusively to the south west corner of Western Australia, with only one species extending to South Australia and western Victoria.

It seems that few species have made it to cultivation, which is a shame as *Thomasias* are generally well behaved garden plants, with softly hairy leaves. Foliage is usually maintained to ground level. As our gardens mature, there is a need for plants which will fill difficult spots under trees and large shrubs, and *Thomasias* will fit the bill.

Some species worth considering:

Thomasia angustifolia, Narrow-leaved Paper Flower, a small erect to spreading shrub to 1.2m. Foliage is more open than in larger leaved species, and the prominent mauve to purple flowers are well displayed in terminal racemes from late winter through spring.

Thomasia foliosa, Leafy Paper Flower, is also a small shrub to 1m, but spreading, up to 2m in old plants, but plants can be maintained much smaller than this with regular pruning. As its name suggests, this species is densely foliated, but has proved very reliable in cultivation, especially under established trees. Flowers are small, and often white to light mauve, so are not as prominent as other species, but the attractive foliage more than compensates. Old plants can be rejuvenated by hard pruning during spring or autumn.

Thomasia grandiflora, Large Flowered Paper Flower, is usually wider than high, spreading to 1.5m but can easily be controlled to maintain a compact habit. Foliage is narrow, 25 – 50mm long but often less than 10mm wide, and the large pinkish mauve flowers, to 30mm across are very prominently held in terminal racemes from mid-winter through spring.

Thomasia laxiflora can grow to 1.2 x 1.5m, and is a small shrub which has been widely grown for its spectacular floral display. Heart shaped, deep green leaves 30 – 70mm x 20 – 40mm are quite dense and very hairy. During spring and early summer the many – flowered racemes of pinkish purple flowers cover the plants, almost hiding the foliage.

Thomasia pauciflora, Few Flowered Paper Flower is usually a more upright shrub, growing to 2m x 1 – 1.5m, with many branches. Leaves are dull green and softly hairy on both surfaces, up to 50mm long and 10 – 15mm wide. Despite the common name, this species is usually quite a prolific flowerer, with many mauve or white flowers from winter through summer. Pruning is beneficial, and the plant makes a very good hedge in shaded sites.

Thomasia petalocalyx is the most widespread species, growing in WA SA and western Victoria, usually growing in coastal heaths and woodlands. Plants can grow to 1.5m x 2m, but is usually much smaller, and in cultivation can be kept to less than a metre with regular pruning. Lanceolate foliage is pale green and densely hairy, 20 – 50mm long x 5 – 20mm wide, held on long stalks. Flowers are pink to purple, about 10mm across, profuse and well displayed from late winter to the following autumn. Plants do best in shaded sites, but will tolerate sunny positions.

Thomasia pygmaea, Tiny Paper Flower, is probably the most widely grown species. It is a very attractive dwarf shrub, growing to 30cm high and 50 – 70cm wide. Leaves are ovate to almost rounded, small, to about 10mm, greyish-green, covered with many brown scales. Foliage is usually not dense, which allows the mauve to purplish-pink flowers to be conspicuously displayed from late winter to summer. Individual flowers are about 15mm across, held on slender stems longer than the leaves. Plants prefer a semi-shaded site, but will adapt to full sun if the soil does not dry out. It is an ideal container plant, requiring little maintenance.

Thomasia quercifolia, Oak – leaved Paper Flower is a spreading, small shrub to 1m high and up to 1.5m wide. The sparse foliage is very attractive, softly hairy, the leaves about 20 – 30mm long and 10 – 20mm wide, deeply 3 lobed, and further divided or toothed, hence the common name. Although small, to about 10mm across, the pinkish purple flowers are well displayed on long stalks, held outside the foliage during spring and early summer. Plants do best in shaded sites but will tolerate some sun.

Plants are not often available in general nurseries, so why not propagate our own ?

There are a few species being grown by members, and as always they would be happy to supply some cutting material for others to have a go.

Propagation of *Thomasia* can be by either seed or more usually cuttings.

Seed collected and sown fresh will usually germinate successfully. This can be assisted by soaking the seed in hot, but not boiling water for up to 24 hours.

Cuttings are taken of current season's new growth. Pieces with about six leaf nodes are ideal. The stems should be still green, not yet turning brown. These soft pieces will wilt easily, so the cuttings are best placed in a shaded area. As the cuttings are usually very hairy, regular misting of the foliage should be avoided to prevent moulds growing. Large leaves can be reduced in size to prevent the cutting wilting. In selecting suitable cuttings, be aware that material with flowering nodes will usually not root.

Reference; Encyclopaedia of Australian Plants suitable for cultivation Vol 9 (2010) Elliot & Jones

At the November AGM, we spent a lovely day at Horse Island, owned by APS member Christina Kennedy who kindly opened her beautiful garden to our group. Thanks once again Christina for your generosity.

John Knight gave an informative talk on *Thomasia* and the AGM was conducted speedily and successfully with several new members being elected.

Nathan Benbow, (pictured below) the Horse Island head gardener, talked to us about their problems with myrtle rust, and how they manage it.



Myrtle rust has many factors on its side! It reproduces in only 10 days, and is happy down to 14 degrees Celsius. It's associated with rain – but it can easily survive on just 6 hours of leaf moisture, so it can be found even when there has been no rain, but only heavy dews. To add to the difficulties, the spores are viable for 90 days. Untreated, myrtle rust can defoliate a plant, and cause deformed new growth.

Part of the reason they have had a problem at Horse Island is their extensive use of *Agonis* species, which look beautiful but are very susceptible to rust. Other species easily affected also belong to the *Myrtaceae* *Leptospermums*, *Austromyrtus*, *Chamelaucium*, *Syzygium*, and native guavas. Plants with harder leaves are usually more resistant.



Nathan's management plan includes several approaches. Constant and vigilant monitoring is necessary, particularly in cool, damp areas and in the humid months of summer. Plantings are pruned and managed to maximize light and airflow to susceptible areas and species, so that the leaves are less likely to stay moist for long enough. If any rust is seen, the affected areas are pruned and all material burnt.

Despite all these preventative measures, systemic fungicide treatment is required.

Nathan uses two different chemicals that impact on the rust in different ways, and rotates their use, to minimize the chance of the rust becoming resistant. The fungicides he uses are Tilt (a mixture of propiconazole and cyproconazole) and Bayfidan (triadimedol), although he is now changing over to Plantvax (oxycarboxin) since he feels the Bayfidan is becoming less effective. He treats affected areas twice, once before the peak humidity hits and then again after 90 days, when the humidity has lessened.



Craig Lavis joined Nathan and the group, and led us through the gardens, starting at the newer *Grevillea* garden designed with the help of Peter Olde. Spectacular kangaroo paw, *Anigozanthos*, line the driveway which has a *Xanthorrhoea* and *Thryptomene* feature garden in the centre.

Other significant plants include *Telopea*, *Brachychiton acerifolius*, *Doryanthes excels*, standard *Grevilleas*, *Cycads* and *Stenocarpus*.





The vegetable garden created great interest being designed as a “wick” garden. The beds are raised and lined with black plastic, covered with a layer of gravel, then wire, topped with soil and compost. A watering pipe is inserted in one corner and an overflow pipe in the other, ensuring efficient moisture levels. The plants were very productive and healthy.

Our thanks to Christina Kennedy for letting us use her lovely gardens for the AGM, and to Nathan and Craig who spent many hours on a Saturday, showing us around and telling us all about the gardens.

New Membership fees as of 1st January 2014

The Australian Plants Society NSW has increased the cost of membership, effective from 1st January 2014.

The new fees are:

Individual membership : \$50

Individual Concession : \$45

Joint membership \$60

Joint Concession \$55

A concession is available to seniors, people on fixed income and full-time students. This applies in joint memberships where one person is entitled to request it.

APS South East receives \$9 or \$10 of this, depending on your method of payment. The rest covers publications, insurance, office expenses etc. of the NSW parent body. For membership enquiries contact Jenny John.

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