



AUSTRALIAN NATIVE PLANT NURSERY otway greening

Hello and welcome to the 2013-14 version of the Otway Greening annual newsletter (affectionately known as the OG!). We put out an OG once a year to give you an update on what's been happening for the last year, to discuss new innovations in the native plant field, the latest revegetation information and to remind you that plant ordering time is fast approaching. First a big thank you to our many dedicated customers (that's you!). Without you and your annual orders we would find it very difficult to propagate the wide variety of plants we do. Because of the pre-orders, we can take a few risks on some of the rarer, hard to grow, hard to collect species. Our customer base is varied so here's a little list of who buys from OG:

1. Landcare & assoc: 45%
2. Priv farms/industry: 40%
3. Landscaping: 6%
4. Hobby/backyards: 7%
5. Markets, etc 2%

Almost all of Landcare, farmers and industry customers buy their plants in Lannen cells, whereas the others almost exclusively order tubes. The figures show a reliance on rural and industrial land, however, an increase in landscaping and hobby customers continues every year, thus we grow to our customers' needs. Demand on grasses, sedges and associated plants both for rural and landscape customers continues, but we can only meet your plant needs if we get orders in advance of seed sowing, and as usual, we offer a 15% discount if you order 2014 plants before 9th Dec 2013.



Caleana major- flying duck orchid, Carlisle Heath

ON AFRICA TIME...

As I rest my weary bones camping in amongst the heathy woodland near Carlisle, I'm reminded of the wise words of Andrew Stewart, Deans Marsh farmer and Otway Agroforestry Network Coordinator, who said "a strategic muffin is very important"! Well, I've got the coffee on and the zucchini muffin delicately poised between plate and gob... However, Andrew wasn't talking about the finer points of camping

cuisine, he actually was waxing lyrical about how important refreshments are to a successful meeting or gathering of people. The food break provides the opportunity to dig deeper into conversations, to become less formal and get to know each other on a more human scale, helping to strip away shyness, awkward silences, guardedness or even officious wankery!

So when seven regional farmers, including Wendy and I, recently spent 4 weeks in Uganda and Kenya teaching a MasterTree Grower course to local farmers, morning teas and lunches were overflowing with friendly chats and introductions. I don't remember too many muffins but plenty of bananas and cups of tea! The course organised through the Australian Agroforestry Foundation and Beyond Subsistence was the follow up to hosting 10 Africans in the Otways in 2012. One of the participants of that course, Joy Tukahirwa (World Agroforestry Centre representative in Uganda), was very excited by the innovative program we in the Otway Agroforestry Network provided, which included a workshop at Otway Greening. She lobbied strongly for the MasterTree Grower course to come to her own country which, she hoped would motivate farmers in the Kabale district.



We all pitched in in the various aspects of the course, however, Wendy and I utilised our plant growing skills in presentations and during visits to the many tree growing nurseries. The official course was six days long encompassing morning theoretical sessions from many speakers, followed by practical field trips in the afternoons. Subjects covered included silviculture, farm management and planning, nursery management, conservation values, bioenergy, firewood and sawlogs, catchment planning- working as a team, working with neighbours, etc.

I guess though, it was the time spent on field trips and in between sessions where the real work got done. We all discovered the similarities between us, the respect for each other, and how we are connected through land and family, regardless of our backgrounds and where we live. The 55 farmers in the course didn't want handouts and they didn't want to be told what to do. They came to learn, be empowered, and to share ideas and knowledge.

The nurseries we visited grow their trees using a totally different system than us. Root trained cells and tubes, pine bark/coira based potting mixes and time-release fertilisers are mostly unknown but like us they utilise labour to drive their businesses rather than capital equipment. It was this labour intensity that we were all able to share ideas about. The use of tweezers to prick out plants was a big hit with the participants. They quickly caught on how important the root structure is to a healthy, long-lived tree. We were encouraged by their enthusiasm and participation to learn and improve their lives and their community. The Otway Agroforestry Network is now a mentor to the newly formed Kabale



A strategic banana over lunch enjoyed by Master Tree Growers, Kabale Uganda

Agroforestry Network and the two groups communicate regularly comparing notes and offering support to each other. We all can't wait to get back there!

The Deans Marsh Community Cottage has invited us to talk of our African Adventure on the evening of 22nd of November. Ring the Cottage on 5236 3388 for more information. Entry by gold coin donation toward the Kabale health care clinic in Uganda. All are welcome.

THE DIRT FROM THE NURSERY

We've had some excellent germination results with many

of our winter germinants (those needing time and cold weather to germinate). Many are Otway understorey species: satinwood, myrtle beech, banyalla, balm mint bush, tall rice flower, white elderberry, etc. Others come from drier foothill and plains country: flax lily, short purple flag, tree violet, sweet bursaria, prickly currant, spiny mat rush, silver banksia. Our main crop of seed will be sown very soon. By ordering your plants prior to 9th December, you have a great chance of getting the species, provenance and numbers you require, and we then know what, and how much to sow. For those wanting more advanced plants, without foregoing root quality, we do pot on selective plants into various size "rocket pots". These root trainers grow high quality plants with air pruned side and bottom roots with no root circling. Establishment of these plants is quick with no time lag between planting and growing.

In our highly fertilised landscape full of aggressive foreign grasses and weeds, restoration of grassland, wetland verges and garden landscapes become very difficult, labour intensive and on-going jobs. Some of our landscaping customers are utilising weed matting with some success. This jute "carpet underlay" is pre-cut with slits for ease in planting and is pinned down with "tent pegs" over top of mowed areas. Overall, the target plants (usually grasses, sedges, and other ground huggers) have an almost weed free environment to get established before the matting breaks down (around 18-24 months). By this time the target plants should have outcompeted the pesky intruders without any chemical weed control- a great alternative for all jobs but especially planting near water or for organic growers.



Bambra Wetland Planting with Deans Marsh Primary School kids. Sedges, rushes, grasses, woolly tea tree planted using weed mat for weed control

Eva and Gus hard at it last year at OG



It is with much regret that Wendy and I say goodbye to long time employee Gus McFarlane. Gus has been a stalwart here, always keen, motivated and full of good humour. He started off as our “wheelbarrow technician” at the ripe old age of 16 and graduated to ever reliable prickette! He’s now finally decided the Big Smoke is more of a draw card than OG’s supremo coffee and Beryl’s bikkies! Good onya Gus for all your help over the past six years. Come back and visit anytime...

And speaking of great workers (we seem to pick ‘em), Cath Greenop (part time), Jemma Lewis and Eva Hayes (both full time) return to OG’s prickette team. Cath has worked for us for, must be about 12 years and joins us after a couple years break soaking up the sun in Barwon Downs. Jemma also returns after two years spent sampling some of the better teas of Melbourne, while Eva seems to enjoy coming back to the tweezers in between studying to be an

unemployed artist. Welcome back all of you, we look forward to catching up and also helping to mentor our latest recruit, neighbour Rose Phillips. Welcome Rose!

PRODUCTIVE LANDCARE

For the past few months many of the iconic western district cypress trees have been succumbing to a fungal disease called seridium or cypress canker. This has been devastating to some farmers as they have relied solely on these cypress hedges for stock shelter and windbreaks. Many farmers will now be spending thousands on cutting trees down and burning them, not to mention re-fencing, replanting and loss of stock shelter.

I can only encourage farmers as they take stock and begin to plan (and plant) for the future to consider diversifying plantations (multiple species of trees and understorey preferably indigenous, grown with locally collected seed) and managing them for future use. Consider multipurpose

plantations- useful for stock and human shelter, erosion and salinity control, firewood and sawlog supplies and, yes, even future cypress wood supply. Our house is lined with cypress and we love it for its many qualities, however future trees will need pruning and thinning (management), so when the next seridium outbreak occurs (or fire or drought), dead, straight trees can be harvested for some profit instead of burnt in a heap at the owner’s expense. Cypress canker information includes:

- Canker spores enter the tree through physical damage- pruning, broken limbs etc.
- Stressed trees (by drought, waterlogging, poor nutrient status of soil) are more susceptible to disease outbreak and spread.
- Seridium spores grow more quickly in waterlogged soils than in dry soils.
- Don’t replant in disease prone sites, including soils with high nitrogen levels.
- Prune carefully and during appropriate seasonal weather; sterilise pruning tools.
- No fungicides are currently registered for use on cypress canker. Three seridium species cause the disease.

And speaking of land care, I’ve been visiting different farms over the past year looking at how planting projects are progressing. Again we continue having tough climatic conditions. Record breaking dry conditions and extreme heat has been tough on some projects, especially those where the plants went in late or the weed control wasn’t up to scratch. The wet winter we’ve just experienced made the timeline tight in getting the pre planting weed control organised. Removal of grass and weed competition helps conserve groundwater that will be utilised by your newly planted tree/shrub/grass. I’ve said it before (and I might as well say it again!) weed control is by far the most important aspect of successful revegetation work. If weed control is late/ poor/ non existent/ poorly targeted, your little babies might not get their roots established before the upcoming hot dry summer.

I’ve also noticed some farmers having success with planting on steep creek banks. The trick is to plant the usual wet loving sedges/rushes at the water’s edge but keeping the large trees away from the steep

banks. Plant fibrous rooted low shrubs on the erodible steep banks to hold the soil as much as they can. When the inevitable flood comes along and the bank subsides, the shrubs have a better chance of riding out the slip, whereas large trees with a minimal fibrous root system would more than likely just topple over as the soil gives way taking a large chunk of the bank with it. Plant the large trees up on top of the creek flat away from the edge to strengthen that area, provide habitat and potentially be used in the future for selective wood use. Slowing creekside erosion is a slow process, the area has to find its own equilibrium and that may take years, however it all begins with fencing the stock out...

GREY MATTERS



Patersonia fragilis, short purple flag usually grows in wet heathy sands

OK so the grey hair seems to be taking over from what's left on top of my head, but you know it's what's inside that counts! I've been involved in two very interesting learning experiences this year. The first being a two day Angair workshop on identifying monocots- grasses, sedges, rushes, lilies, etc. The leader, Geoff Carr, from Ecology Australia was a very patient wealth of knowledge to the students. What an event, what a team of local experts that Angair mob is, and what an amazing array of plants we have in the region. The subtle differences between the related plants are all important, many of which are only seen through a magnifying lens. Without local workshops like these, it would be next to impossible understanding our very interesting monocots.

The second workshop, "Sowing seeds of success", took place in Hamilton and was presented by the Nature Glenelg Trust. CSIRO plant geneticist, Linda Broadhurst spoke at length about various genetic studies taking place in remnant vegetation reserves in SE Australia, including a study on drooping she oak in our own region. Take home messages:

- Collect seed from at least 10 parent plants in a population, preferably 30 or more. This ensures genetic diversity in restoration projects in private and public land.
- The legacy of a restoration site will become increasingly important if the genetics of the site are appropriate and of a high standard. This gives the site a much better chance of surviving the continuing warming climate.
- There is not enough scientific information trickling down from researchers to restoration practitioners (nurseries, planters, seed collectors, cma and depi officers and last but not least, land owners). This information could very well help make a good landcare project become a vital landcare project in the future.

Please don't forget about the December 9th deadline. If you order on or before this date, you will receive a 15% discount on your order. This doesn't mean you can't order after December 9th, it just means you miss out on the discount. We also require a 30% holding deposit on all plant orders. We hope you enjoyed your annual OG in this our 19th year.

Regards, Mike and Wendy Robinson-Koss
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Our daughter Mikala is the keeper of our OG website and we get lots of kind comments about its quality and usefulness. Please check it out if you haven't already done so!