



Hello and welcome to the 13th installment of our OG newsletter. I remember our first year back in 1995 as Wendy and I were sowing seeds for our upcoming crop and along came Cup Day and a huge easterly blew in and dumped bucket loads of rain on us. Well, there must be some affinity with rain and Cup Day (maybe the weather gods back a particular horse well suited to a dead track) as rainfall around the district varied between 125mm and 180mm in 12 hours. Talk about a land of droughts and flooding rains. One thing for certain: the trees planted this year have all been well watered in!!

However, it was only one year ago that we were all VERY concerned about the dry and its affects on many aspects of our rural lives, farms and communities. In fact, had we not had that rain on the Cup weekend we still might be talking drought. So let us call it a reprieve from what has been a very extended dry period. This winter, most tree planters were not discouraged by the dry conditions - they were certainly more organised though. Fences went in early, spots were sprayed early and plants, on average, went in the ground about 4 weeks earlier than usual. If we continue having drier than average winter months it may be worth planting earlier than normal to get the trees established prior to the ground drying out. It's important to keep your eye on the rain gauge and be prepared to plant early. Having all this late rain may have one detrimental effect of encouraging weed growth and competition with young tree seedlings. Watch out for this as the seedlings may not be able to cope with competition from annual weeds like thistles etc.

MATTHEWS CREEK REVEGETATION

I THINK HAVING NAME SIGNS ON OUR LOCAL CREEKS IS A GOOD IDEA. Not only does it identify the creek for the sake of the name (who was Matthew anyway?) but it gives the creek some sort of importance- that it's more than just a drain or an eroded gully. The Matthews is an important, and yet, degraded stream whose headwaters begin around the intersection of the Mt Sabine/ Erskine Falls Roads. Most of us begin to notice it at Murroon as we cross over the creek on Kinsella's Bridge (who was Kinsella?) and then it winds it's way through private land. We cross over it again when we do the "dogleg" going in the back way to Colac. It finally joins the Barwon upstream from Birregurra. All up, the stream is about 25 km long. The Matthews Creek has been having a serious renovation over the last few years. Some very dedicated members of the Murroon landcare group, the Upper Barwon Landcare Network and the CCMA (with financial assistance from government grants), have been working together to repair the creek. Stream bank stabilisation, rock chutes, willow/woody weed removal, fencing out stock, building stock crossings and planting of indigenous plants have all taken place over the years. The project has taken place from where the cleared land begins and continues downstream between the two bridges. Another 30,000 trees/shrubs from Otway Greening have been planted this past winter. If you drive over Kinsella's Bridge you may notice the little trees with their "stocking" tree guards. These guards are made of woven "onion bag" material that are placed around the tree in the nursery and are planted with the tree. No need to go back after planting and put a guard around the trees. These stockings are biodegradable and are used for rabbit browsing rather than wind protection. It will be interesting to see how these guarded plants survived the floodwaters on the Cup weekend. I'm sure the river health people at the CCMA and our Landcare facilitators will be keen on seeing the stabilisation work after the flood as well.



AGROFORESTRY AND LANDCARE TIE THE KNOT!

IT WAS BOUND TO HAPPEN as farmers and landowners in the region have been showing an increasing interest in both agroforestry and landcare. Why not kill two birds with one stone. If you are going to fence off that gully for an indigenous, biodiverse, landcare planting, why not move the fence further up the hill and put in a few trees that may have some value in the future as a commercial product. Both ventures are very compatible with one another if you choose the correct positioning of the commercial crop away from any eroded areas, etc. The Otway Agroforestry Network * has been leading the way for many years in giving landowners the skills to grow their own tree crop. And surprise surprise, many farmers who are planting agroforestry species are also keen landcarers. Whether it be a sugar gum plantation for firewood, a few blackwood trees on the flats or even a stand of the local bush tucker shrub, mountain pepper, there are many variations on the theme of agroforestry. They are only limited by your imagination, budget, and size of paddock!

We specialise in growing indigenous plants (grasses on up to trees) for various revegetation programs, both public and private, however, we also grow a wide range of agroforestry species to suit your needs. We stock excellent provenance seed for growing top quality timber trees, so feel free to enquire.

The Otway Agroforestry Network has been encouraging landowners to grow mountain pepper. This plant is local to the high rainfall areas of the Otways and is

currently being grown for its leaf and “peppercorns” which are used as a pepper/chili substitute. The network is currently having tests done on the Otway provenances to ascertain its chemical makeup.

Apparently some provenances have certain nasty chemicals in them. Early results of the Otway plants show no signs of the nasties. For more information give us a ring.

*Just to let you know that I am currently the President of the Otway Agroforestry Network. I also do site visits for the Network under their Peer Group Mentor program. I am also a member of the executive of the Upper Barwon Landcare Network.



Locals see firsthand how farming, landcare and agroforestry can work side by side

THE DIRT FROM THE NURSERY

HAD SOME INTERESTING TIMES LAST YEAR as the dams dried up toward March. We'd never had so many orders before and we were taking a real risk in growing our usual crop of 150,000 plants. We spent more time hand watering to not waste the precious resource. The automatic sprinklers are fine in perfect conditions but when the wind blows... However, the plants really enjoyed the warm dry weather- few insect attacks, no fungal issues and good growth rates for most plants. As April remained warm, plants continued to grow thus some fast growing species (wattles mostly) had the tops taken out to keep them in balance with their roots.

As usual, the mighty blackwoods (*Acacia melanoxylon*) were the mainstay in many orders. They are such a versatile and diverse plant. From out on the basalt plains to deep in the rainforest you'll find the blackwood growing. And, of course, this diversity shows how important it is for you to have the right provenance blackwood (and all other indigenous plants) for your locality (rainfall, soil, elevation etc). Many blackwoods have a suckering habit as well which is very important when planting near erosion. Along the Matthews and other local waterways, the blackwood has been very adept at competing with willow competition, stock camping and browsing, erosion, and other environmental damage. They are quite tasty though, so rabbits and wallabies can be a problem in establishing them.

And speaking of browsing macropods, wallaby repellent is back on the market. It is being sold under the name of Sen-Tree (where do they come up with these names) and is based on a smell deterrent (egg powder) and is unpalatable (silicon carbide grit) as well. I have heard both good and bad results from various people using the repellent over the years. A lot may depend on numbers of wallabies and how hungry they are. If you'd like more information about Sen-Tree please give us a ring.

We grew 15,000 silver tussock (*Poa lab.*) plants for the East Otway Landcare Group this past year. The grasses were planted at the Bambra Wetlands in September. The wetland has always had a serious problem with phalaris (introduced grass that grows to chest high when not grazed) so 12 months ago stock was placed into the area to graze the phalaris down, then the regrowth was sprayed twice prior to planting the native grasses. The idea is to try to outcompete the phalaris before it can get a foothold again. Next time you're passing the wetland, stop and have a walk in. There is now a graveled walking track around the area and the little tussocks are doing very well, especially after being inundated with the floodwaters. *Poa* is a popular plant in our nursery sales with many people using it in landscaping as well as in reveg projects. By planting the tussocks close together (9 per m²) they will grow into each other keeping weed growth to a minimum. They are also a summer growing plant unlike most introduced grasses. They also enjoy a good burn (or brushcutter) every few years to keep them green.

Many of you already know that we grow most of our plants to the orders we receive this time of year. The reason: we sow seeds to order and thus you get the plants and provenance you want. It also means we have a plan for the upcoming season. It would be impossible to guess what potential customers might want in their potential orders! We do grow an extra 20 % for late orders, however, it is the pre orders you put in before the December deadline that we are reliant on. As of the 1st November, we already have about 85,000 plants ordered. Seed is already in and many are growing (although the torrential rain may have washed a few seeds away!) to be transplanted once December starts so please don't hesitate too long. Not only do you get the plants you require but you get them 15% cheaper.



Had a visit from the Anglesea Greencorp crew back in October. They are a group of young people learning skills in all things reveg/conservation. I think this is a great way for environmentally aware young people to get some hands on skills and knowledge, especially those who come from a city background and nature is a long way out of town. Using plants grown by Otway Greening, these workers spent many weeks this past winter planting and guarding trees and shrubs in the Otway National Park near Anglesea. They spent two days in the nursery learning about propagation (an important part of their course) and took a keen interest in the plants that grow in the Anglesea Heath especially the iconic Grass Trees (*Xanthorrhoea australis*).

THE END

Well, it's time to bid you adieu. Hope last year's trees are growing well for you and you are satisfied with the plants and service from us here at OG. You can contact us on 5236 3314 or trees@otwaygreening.com.au. Look forward to hearing from you and have a great holiday period and a fire free summer.

Mike and Wendy Robinson-Koss