

Editorial :

Trees occupy a mythic position in our culture. Ask anyone to discuss their concerns about nature and the conversation quickly leads to trees. This is not surprising as trees are the most prominent members of the plant kingdom. It is, then, natural that we seek to adorn our small suburban plots with one, or more trees to signal our suburban pride, our concern for nature and our appreciation for gardening and a contact with the land.

In a garden, trees fulfil a number of functions. Firstly they are a sculptural element. They add form and height to the garden and provide a contrast to smaller plants which will be present in much greater numbers. They also provide shade, reduce wind speeds and provide habitat for animals birds and insects. Less obviously, they are critical binders of the soil, they absorb water, thus preventing excessive runoff and clothe the ground in a protective mulch, helping to recycle nutrients, suppress weeds and control soil moisture. Lastly, they are a carbon sink, helping to remove carbon dioxide from the air and storing it in a form that can be used for construction or fuel, or simply to exist as an object of beauty to adorn our gardens. So ingrained in our culture is this view of a tree as a symbol of nature that any revegetation work is inevitably referred to as “tree planting”, even when the majority of plants are far too small to be classified as trees.

Many of the trees native to an area before settlement are not desirable as garden specimens. This lack of suitability may be due to poor appearance, excessive size,

brittle branches, aggressive root systems, propensity to weediness and probably many other reasons besides. Enter the age of gardening nationalism, namely the sixties and seventies. “Natives” were the way to go, they were fast growing and required low maintenance. After all, they belonged here so you couldn't go wrong. Nurseries obliged by sourcing a limited range of “natives” from around the country which guaranteed garden success. Unfortunately many of these plants were a disaster, chosen for easy propagation and quick growth, many plants sold by nurseries as “small trees” quickly outgrew small gardens. Some were prone to insect attack, and were short lived, others dropped large limbs or blocked drains. Usually they were not even strictly “native” having origins as diverse as the tropics to the alpine forests. There are not many plants native to our area which appear on the nursery lists of the sixties or seventies.

Now I would guess that the majority of readers of this newsletter would have gardens established in this era and most likely would have one or more trees which are not suitable for one of the above reasons. Prevention of such mistakes in the future is paramount and critical to the acceptance of gardens that provide wildlife habitat and other environmental benefits.

My first piece of advice would be to avoid being seduced by beauty alone. The prime culprit in this case is the magnificent Lemon Scented gum. Often mistakenly called the “Ghost gum”, this tree originates in sub tropical Queensland. It grows well in Victoria and is a graceful specimen in many parks

and large gardens around Melbourne, just keep it away from your home unless you take special (and expensive) precautions. My second piece of advice would be to treat the phrase “small fast growing tree” with extreme scepticism. This was applied to *Eucalyptus nicolii* which, for a eucalypt, is small but still too large for suburban gardens. Other unsuitable plants are Silky Oak (too large), *Pittosporum undulatum* (weedy) and black wattle (short lived, prone to insect attack). Of course there are many others, too numerous to mention here.

If you desire a native garden, the plant industry has progressed a long way from the sixties and seventies. Many plants are available as cultivars well suited to suburban gardens. There are also many species, particularly among the eucalypts, which do not grow too large. A little work researching available species will pay dividends here. It pays to visit a specialist native plant nursery such as Kuranga in Mount Evelyn if you want to source such trees. A handy reference is “Grow What Where” from the Australian Plant Study Group. This handy book extensively cross-references available Australian plants against specific applications.

If you want to be a purist and grow plants specific to Mount Waverley, the ultimate reference is “Flora of Melbourne” which lists over 1100 plants together with their locations within the Melbourne area. This seems to be an intimidating book, but it is easy to use for a non botanist. Accessibility to plant stock is limited to specialist nurseries, namely Greenlink (Box Hill), Bungalook (Blackburn South) or Knox Environment Society

(Ferntree Gully). Other sources cannot be trusted as species vary considerably over the metropolitan area and commercial nurseries may claim that a species is indigenous even when the plant material is sourced interstate. Some species occur Australia wide (e.g. Lomandra Longfolia) but plants of this species from Queensland are quite different from those from Victoria.

Working Bee

We will be working at the middle bridge this month. Your help is welcome, even if you cannot weed or plant. Help with morning tea, welcoming new members and handing out information is also required.

Dog Stories

Our president, Helen Clements, is compiling a collection of stories of the "Dogs of Damper Creek". This project is progressing well and the first stories have been posted on the website. Further anecdotes are welcome and you are invited to share them with Helen on helencleme@gmail.com

Greenhouse Games

You can help the environment, yourself and the Scouts by visiting the sustainability Victoria website, logging on to "Greenhouse Games", selecting "Scouts and Guides" and selecting "Waverley Valley Scouts". You will be asked to select some energy or water saving actions and once you complete these points will be allocated to the nominated scout group. These points will be converted to cash at the end of the "games".

Friends of Damper Creek Important dates to remember:

	July	Notes
Meeting:	Wed 27th - 7:30 pm	Alvie Hall
W-Bee	Sun 31st 10-00am to 12-30pm	Middle Bridge
	August	
Meeting:	Wed 24th- 7:30 pm	Alvie Hall
W-Bee	Sun 28th 10-00am to 12-30 pm	To be advised

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Printed by courtesy of the City of Monash
as a community service.
Responsibility for editorial content
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The Friends of Damper Creek Reserve Inc is supported by the City of Monash and Melbourne Water.

Damper Creek Reserve Inc is a member of 'Landcare' and 'Land for Wildlife' Volunteer Nature Conservation.

Damper Creek Bushland Reserve: part of the Yarra Catchment.

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The Newsletter of

FRIENDS OF DAMPER CREEK RESERVE INC.

Reg No. A0029531G

www.vicnet.net.au/~damper

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DAMPER CREEK DOINGS

July 2011

