

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST



GOLDMINES

89

April 1984

Another Plant of the Castlemaine
District

PELARGONIUM RODNEYANUM
Magenta Storksbill

Flowering: November to April

One of the plants which seems to have thrived and multiplied after the drought is this small herb with its brilliant magenta flowers.

The flowers are carried on branching stems up to 25 - 30 cm tall, surrounded by a loose rosette of green leaves, "rarely divided, with bluntly toothed edges." (Jean Galbraith)..

The two upper petals are larger, and have white towards the base, and darker magenta stripes.

The common name of the flower comes from the shape of the fruit.

They seem to prefer poorer soil, and are seen at their best among rocks.

by Rita Mills

This Month: Meeting, Friday, April 13.
Mr Albert Perry of Creswick F.N.C. on Goldmines.
Outing, Saturday, April 14. Wombat Forest, Lyonville



THE MONTH AT CAMPBELLS CREEK

by Terry Collins

The Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrikes have moved on. Apparently like clockwork they leave early March and reappear nearly to the day early September. Quite a bit of noise from them one day, then next day silence. Honeyeaters not to be seen although one New Holland flew in for about 15 minutes, inspected the shrubbery for flowers and decided against residence.

Plenty of Thornbills and Blue Wrens around. Two Rufous Whistlers availed themselves of a drink and bath before flying on.

The Grey Currawongs have come back around the house. Lovely plump bodies with shiny plumage unlike the then miserable specimens that robbed us of all our green tomatoes last year. The curse of Campbells Creek, the Wattle Birds are slowly drifting back -worse luck. Our two permanent Bronze-winged Pigeons have nested in a small Cypress down the drive. Two eggs on a six inch square platform of twigs. The most fragile erection I have ever seen and its a wonder the eggs don't fall through.

Plantwise, nothing of note except by appearances the wattles are getting ready to put on their best show ever. Plenty of seedlings showing around some natives probably due to the drought last year.

Barkers Creek Observations

from our resident correspondent, Wyn Palmer.

Wyn reports a sighting of a female Leaden Flycatcher near a dam which is behind their house, and of hearing the Grey Butcher-bird for the first time in 8 years.

Parsons Bands orchids usually have white perianth parts but Wyn has one growing on her block which is not white but pink.

Bargain:

Members are advised that the third and most recent edition of the Castlemaine Plant List is now available. Compiled and printed by Ern Perkins, it may be purchased from him for the low, low cost of \$1.

— PLANT PROPAGATION —

Report of a talk given by Geoff Sitch to the C.F.N.C.
March 9, 1984.

The three main methods of propagation said Geoff, are seed, cuttings and by division.

Seed:

The first thing to do is to collect your seed. In the case of Eucalypts this may not be easy because the ripe seed capsules can be many metres from the ground. (Faced with this situation one might decide that a Melaleuca would look better anyway. Ed) Assuming that one might climb, find a fallen branch, knock one down with a well-aimed rock, or shoot one down with a gun, one must then select capsules which are properly ripe. These will be brown or grey, not green. If in doubt, scrape with the finger nail; if ripe the nail can not dig in. If very grey, look for holes in the valves, if they are present it will very likely mean that the seed has already gone or been taken.

To extract the seeds from the capsule, place capsule in a paper bag in a warm place such as on the dashboard of the car for a couple of weeks. In such conditions the valves will open releasing the tiny seeds into the bag. Do NOT forget to label the bag as all Eucalypt seed looks very much alike.

In the case of wattle and pea plants it is important to be on hand when the seed becomes ripe, otherwise the explosion of the pod will scatter the seed far and wide as it is meant to do. Mark a spot and keep an eye on it, or enclose ripening fruit in a portion of old stocking, not plastic or paper. Seed can be collected green but is not as good. Once again, don't forget to label before you forget what is inside the package. Place seed in seed envelopes, remove remains of pods and store in a cool dark place.

Australian Pin Cushion - touch the top, if ripe the seed will fall out. Grevilleas are hard to catch at the right time but will ripen if placed on the window sill.

Sowing the seed : The seed raising mix should be fairly friable, having good water retention properties but also being well drained. N.B. the mix should be moist when placed in the pot.

Myrtaceae seeds are very fine and should be lightly sprinkled on the surface and not covered. A very fine spray must be used or the seeds will jump out. Perhaps better to stand the pot in water and allow the seeds to be wetted by capillary action.

Sprinkle the seeds sparingly, you don't want them to grow too thickly, and label the container.

Best time for sowing is August-September-October.

In the case of Brunonia seeds, they can be sown in pots and left out to germinate naturally when it rains.

Wattle seeds present a special problem as they have a very hard seed case which may prevent germination for many years. Many cases are known where wattle seedlings have sprung up after a fire in a paddock where they had not been seen for many years. To hasten germination therefore it is essential to allow water to penetrate the hard seed coat. This may be achieved by filing the seeds to penetrate the coat, rubbing with sand paper or chipping with a sharp blade. You could light a little fire over them, or place them in a china mug, not a glass or plastic one, and pour on boiling water. Leave the seeds for some time, overnight perhaps, then select those which have become swollen. Alternatively you could try boiling them for 30 seconds, no longer or they will be overdone.

Some plants like Cranberry Heath require the seeds to be passed through the body of a bird. Perhaps you could use an emu or a turkey. It might be worth experimenting with exposure to an acid such as Hydrochloric or Sulphuric if you can get some (Hydrochloric acid = Muriatic Acid = Spirits of Salts)

Potting on:

Suitable containers for potting on are the long 5 inch pots such as are thrown out by the S.F.C. each year if you know where to look. These pots (should they be 13 cm ?) offer the advantage of requiring less soil while allowing satisfactory root growth and also take up less room.

The Mix : This consists basically of river sand or fine gravel passed through a $3/8$ " sieve. Use 2 parts.

Plus, good compost/peat moss/ very old sawdust, at least 2 years old to ensure removal of toxins. Use 1 part.

If you have some good loam, you could add a smidgeon.

To a brickie's barrow of the above mix you add the following quantities of fertilizer :- i.e. per 6 c ft. add -

Nutricote or Osmocote 6 handfuls

Meat Meal (Blood & Bone) 2 handfuls

Dolomite lime $1\frac{1}{2}$ dollops

FeSO_4 = Ferrous sulfate /Sulfate of iron 2 teaspoons

For Grevilleas, Hakeas, Hibbertias, Banksias, omit the B & B and lime.

For containers, you could use fruit juice tins after cutting holes in the side of the tin at the bottom. Use tinsnips.

Milk containers are suitable (1 litre) as are polythene bags made for the purpose.

If your compost has been made with animal manure, omit the B&B.

Method 2 Cuttings:

For collecting, use a plastic bag, wetted and shaken out.

For trimming cuttings, use sharp, clean secateurs, or a sharp knife, not pruners which crush the stem.

Cuttings may be :-

Heel cuttings, a small side branch pulled off with a heel of old wood at the base.

Stem cuttings, sections of stem. The soft tip may have to be cut off. Several stem cuttings may be obtained from the same length of stem.

Tip cuttings; these are most likely to be successful. Should be 3-4 " or even 2" if the leaves are small. The tip of the cutting should spring back if bent, if it does not it is too soft.

Leaves should be removed from the bottom $\frac{2}{3}$ of the cutting, and the heel if present should be trimmed. The leaves may rub off but a sharp implement may be preferable to tearing the bark and inviting microbial attack.

Cutting Medium:

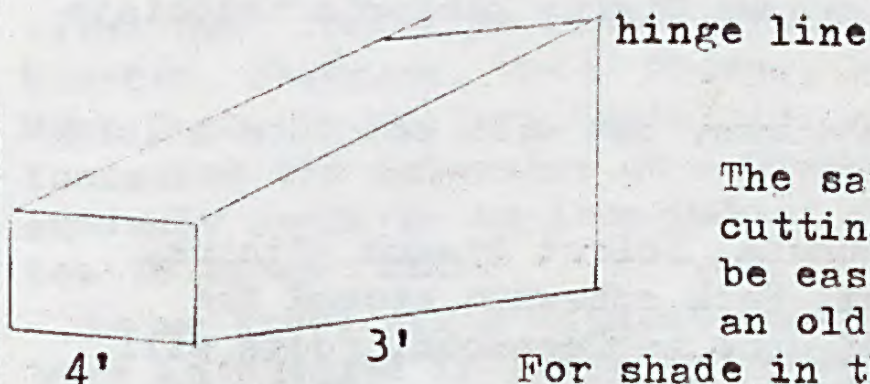
This should consist of :-

- 4 parts of sieved washed sand, through $\frac{1}{16}$ " sieve
- 1 part of old sawdust or peat moss $\frac{1}{8}$ " sieve.

The bottom of the cutting may be dipped in one of the rooting hormones such as Seradix or Strike, shake off the excess.

To protect the bark and hence the Cambium layer of the cutting poke the hole in the medium with a stick before inserting the cutting.

If you do not have time to pot your cuttings straight away they may be kept in the plastic bag, closed with a clothes peg, in the fridge for up to 3 months. When you place them in a pot, remember to label the pot, give the date, and start looking for roots after 2 weeks. Feel carefully, look at the bottom of the pot. The friable soil should fall off without root damage.



The safest place to put your cuttings is in a cold frame which be easily built, or you could use an old fruit box with plastic on top

For shade in the Summer, hessian could be used. Use a fine spray and keep pots moist but not wet. Spray during the day if possible, but not while

the sun is on the cuttings.

Grevilleas may produce a callus on the base of the cutting and no root, or they may produce one long root. Prune off the callus dip in hormone and repot.

It is better to water in the mornings, when the roots will have all day to warm up, than to add cold water at night. If necessary, add only a little water at night.

Hardening off:

From the frame, remove the cuttings to shade for about 2 weeks gradually exposing them, but protect from hot dry winds. If it should be necessary, enclose them. Avoid potting on in the hot part of the year.

The best time for taking cuttings is in the Autumn, or whenever there is suitable cutting material on the plants.

Method 3 Dividing

As an example, Swamp Isotome had been obtained from a dam on the Fryers Ridge. This had been grown in a shallow tray. To divide, the contents of the tray was tipped out onto a sheet of newspaper and cut up into squares of a suitable size. It might then be possible as in the case of native violet to transfer the squares directly to the garden. For cutting, use an old carving knife or similar.

Plants such as the native grass, Poa which comes in tussocks, can be subdivided by separating the tussocks with thumb and forefinger. Trim the foliage and the roots before repotting or planting out.

Plants like the native Iris are propagated by dividing the underground stem or rhizome, similarly with reeds and sedges. Kangaroo Paws can be propagated in a similar manner by digging up and breaking up the rhizome without worrying about the roots. The best time for this is in March-April. Cut back the foliage, trim the roots, pot up into separate pots and remove old flower stems. Pot up with potting mix as described previously.

Geoff concluded his talk by answering some questions from the audience. This session produced the following :-

1. Boiling does not kill the Nitrogen fixing bacteria associate with legume roots..
2. Mattles can be grown from cuttings, but will not form a large tap root.
3. Aerial layering: e.g. Cootamundra. Select branch $\frac{1}{2}$ " thick, remove bark in a circle 30 mm. Pack sphagnum around the wound, bind up in plastic. If done in December, roots will be visible through the plastic by Mid Jan. Cut off branch,

pot up. Gives a population plants which all flower at the same time each year.

4. Yellowing; may be due to lack of Nitrogen or too much water.
5. Wax flower; very difficult to get a strike and may take up to 2 years

B.O.C. Campout, Mt Beckworth, March 10,11,12.

by G.B.

At the last moment I decided that I would go to the BOC camp with Maggie and Kaye instead of going to Creswick. I thought that if everyone else went to Creswick I could write an article for the newslatter, secondly my little van was a bit wheezy while I was driving home on the Friday night, and I didn't want to be stranded somewhere in the bush over the long weekend.

So it was then that suitably equipped with binoculars, insect repellent and walking boots we arrived in the camp at the foot of Mt Beckworth just on the time designated for the afternoons expedition to begin. We had followed BOC signs from Clunes, but unfortunately the wind had rotated the last sign before we arrived so that we went scorching off (Kaye was driving) at 180° to our desired course. Happily the error was soon discovered so that on our arrival Kaye and Maggie had sufficient time to greet their large number of BOC friends before the watching began.

For the afternoon of birdwatching the convoy drove about 5 km around the North side of Mt Beckworth. At this point the expedition continued on foot, led by some of the experts. At the initial halt were seen several Rainbow Bee-eaters and Dusky Woodswallows, while a variety of parrots, Honey-eaters Thornbills, Treecreepers were seen while on the trek.

When returning home late in the afternoon we stoppued to check a large dam near a large old house which had a large sign saying NO SHOOTING. There was also a very large number of very smart Black Ducks clustered about the sign, as if they could read what it said. Along with the ducks was quite a variety of waterfowl, including Little Grebes, Little Pied Cormorant, Moorhen, Swamphen, Coot, Plover, Dotterel, Swan, Mountain Duck, Musk Duck, Shoveller, Sponbill. We were delighted when, while focussing the telescope on a Grebe, a large female Darter suddenly appeared as from nowhere and proceeded to demonstrate how to catch fish.

As we drove off I thought that if the owners of the property were interested in birds as seemed highly probable, they were certainly rewarded in having a magnificent view from the house of such an interesting body of water

CLUB PROGRAMME

Meeting: Friday April 13. Mr Albert Perry of Creswick F.N.C. will speak on "Goldmines"..

Outings::

Saturday, April 14; Lyonville. Leader, Stan Bruton. A trip through the delightful Wombat Forest with vegetation characteristic of a wetter climate than Castlemaine. This trip includes a visit to the very pleasant Lyonville mineral spring and is to be lead by Stan Bruton who has been birding around this area for goodness knows how long.

Saturday and Sunday, 7 and 8 of April. Western Victorian Field Naturalists Clubs Association Campout at Marrnambool. Those who have been to previous campouts at Marrnambool will know that this campout can be thoroughly recommended. Members who would like to have more details should contact the secretary.

Saturday , May 12. Mt Alexander. On the western slopes of Mt Alexander there is an area known as "The Oak Forest". This is an area where a large variety of exotic species were planted by the Forest Commission some years ago, and is now a fascinating place to wisit, particularly in the Autumn, when the late afternoon sun shines through the yellowing leaves, and a variety of fungi are usually to be found underfoot. Some of these are edible but perhaps it would be prudent to bring your afternoon snack with you.

CLUB CAMPOUT:

The question has been raised as to whether the club should hold another campout. Many members will remember the pleasant campouts which held a few years ago.

Suggestions as to locality include

Melville Caves

Grampians

Mt Franklin

Duration would probably be for a weekend.

What do you think ?

Would you go ?

Please voice your opinion at the next meeting.

Notes from the Committee:

Incorporation: Changes to legislation mean that the club has really no choice but to incorporate or to cease to exist. Initial cost of this will be about \$60.