

SUMMER 98-99 NEWSLETTER

Hello and welcome to another edition of our newsletter. We hope your spring has been a fruitful, but not too busy one. I'm looking out the window at a rainswept landscape. The rain is angling out of the east for the first time in many months. In fact I can't remember the last REAL easterly. If you've got hay or silage sitting on the ground you may not be too happy with this weather but just try to think positively about how your newly planted trees are literally soaking it all in. Some areas of the plains, though are missing out on the heavy rain. The old rain shadow strikes again. One customer near Winchelsea commented only last week how some of their new trees were showing signs of moisture stress. During prolonged hot dry spells inspect your plantations for stress and, if necessary, water your trees. Leaves browning at the edges, especially on the broad leaved Eucalypts is a sure sign of moisture stress. Also, inspect the new young shoots emerging from the ends of branches or in the crown of the seedling. If they are shrivelled up or drooping it may be drink time. And, just a hint for next year, if you're mounding your site you might want to consider making a small indent in the ground before planting the tree. The indent will help the water run INTO the trees' root zone and not away from it. This may save a lot of time and effort later on when the trees are in need of water.

A big thank you to all of you who supported OTWAY GREENING this year. We were very pleased with the orders we received. But we were also happy with the quality of our product this year. Early in the growing season last February we lost quite a few emerging seedlings to grasshoppers. They especially love those tasty she oaks. Fortunately when sowing seed directly into tubes/cells usually more than one seedling germinates and really the grasshoppers just did us a service by thinning out the trees for us! When using a new system like Lannen trays there are bound to be hiccups along the way. One such hiccup is the problem of the outside row of cells in each tray drying out because of being more exposed to the air. We were able to overcome most of this problem by increasing the number of sprinklers on the benches thus maintaining even watering in the trays. However, in some trays, cells did dry out to some extent which caused the potting mix to trickle out the bottom of the cell before the trees' roots could hold the potting mix together. We've been able to work out a system to counteract this problem for next year so we hope it never occurs again. Fingers crossed! We hope all of you who ordered Spotted Gums and Sugar Gums this past year were happy with the product. In fact we were very proud of the quality of these two difficult species. If your not familiar with the difficulties let us elaborate for a moment. Both of these species are not tolerant of frost in the young seedling stage. If the seedlings are affected by severe frost during the winter, fungal diseases such as damping off enter the wounds caused by the frosts and in many instances decimate the crop of trees that are all cuddled together nice and snug in the nursery. The fungus spreads like wildfire. Once it's going it is very difficult to stop the spread. Fungicides are usually useless once the disease is rampant. The best cure is in prevention. We use many methods to prevent the damage caused by the frost and fungus. We grow these species early in the season so they are hardened off before the cold. We use fertilisers that are lower in nitrogen to keep the trees from growing too quickly and too soft. We have all the trees on benches well off the ground to increase the ambient air temperature and air circulation decreasing the frost and fungal risk. These trees are difficult to grow for the above reasons and we must be ever vigilant during the cold weather.

We completely sold out this year. By the middle of June all of our indigenous understorey species were sold out. The timber species were the last to sell and the salt tolerant species were all ordered by late August. Why are we telling you this, you may

ask? Well, we hate getting enquiries and having to say “sorry, no trees”. Please order your trees well in advance. All of the tree nurseries in our region sold out this year so the early bird.... One thing that concerns us is if people are wanting local species to their area and they can't source these species because they are late in ordering, they may end up taking “whatever they can get”. When considering the long term nature of the product a phone call to your local nursery well in advance of the “winter rush” is very wise indeed. And don't forget, some of you are receiving landcare grants for your trees, many of which stipulate the planting of indigenous species to your property. Some of these local species are quite difficult to grow and may be in limited supplies. Last year we grew about 4000 bursarias and sold every one of them. This year that number will be well down due to lack of viable seed sources in the district. It's not quite as difficult as getting Port Fairy tickets but it's not too far from the truth.

Many customers have shown a keen interest in one particular plant this year. This is the *Gynatrix pulchella* (Native Hemp Bush). Of course I get the usual sniggers about the common name but it is quite an apt name. Aborigines used the fibre of the Hemp Bush to help bind the rough canoes that were made from the bark of the Paperbark trees (mostly Swamp Paperbark or *Melaleuca ericifolia*). The Hemp Bush is a quick growing but fairly short lived species. It grows along watercourses and can withstand quite long periods of flooding. Associated plant species are the River Red Gum, Woolly Tea Tree, Swamp Gum, River Bottlebrush and *Poa tussocks* etc.. Unlike many species in our region it appears in both the high rainfall Otway streams as well as the basalt plains where it clings to the banks of the Barwon, Leigh and Moorabool Rivers amongst others. It is a member of the Malvaceae family of which the garden Hibiscus species are the best known representatives. Australian plants of the same family include the Flinders Ranges Hibiscus and the Australian Hollyhock. The only resemblance to the Indian Hemp is that they both have male and female plants (the she oak family as well). Thus when collecting seed (ripens in mid summer) one plant will be laden with seed (the female) and another will be lounging around with nothing to do (the male...sorry guys!). The female flowers in early spring and are very pretty small clusters of creamy coloured drooping bells. Some customers comment on how “non Australian” it looks. In fact because of its leaf shape it may even resemble an elm leaf. If you're planning on revegetating a creek or watercourse, the Native Hemp should certainly be considered as well as the more common species. Once grazing animals are removed and the plants are established they should begin to self sow downstream. Don't fear, though, it's not invasive and will not become a pest weed. It grows to about 4-5 metres tall and can be coppiced. In fact cutting of the branches will stimulate new growth.

As most of you are aware, Otway Greening requires a deposit on the Lannen trays that your tree order is grown in. The deposit of \$10 per tray is quite steep, we know, but we are just covering our costs with that deposit. We would rather have the tray back than keep your money! If you have any problems with the deposit please contact us and I'm sure we'll be able to arrange alternative means. In these days of throw away everything, reusing the Lannen trays, and for that matter the forestry tubes makes a whole lot of sense to us. If you haven't returned this past years trays please do so now. We begin propagating in mid December. Oh, and by the way, please don't return forestry tubes from other nurseries to us. Nothing against the other nurseries but they use a different size tube which doesn't fit into our crate. We, then, have to take them to the tip. You'll find enclosed our annual discount “early bird” offer as well as our 1998 tree list. The 1999 list will remain pretty much the same as last year. Overall, though, we will be growing more indigenous species because of the growing interest so if you missed out last year try again this year. We enjoy growing the scrub! Hope you have a great summer and holiday period.

Naturally,