

# WINTER NEWSLETTER 2000

Dear Friends and Allies in the Revegetation Game,

I thought June would be an appropriate time to send out this newsletter especially since the GST will be coming into the equation very very soon. I was hoping earlier on that conservation works might just be exempt from the GST but alas, no we're caught in the tax merry go round like all other businesses. Our new pricing arrangements are listed below. The prices have increased, on average, by 10% to account for the GST.

<u>Numbers</u>	<u>Tubes</u>	<u>Cells</u>
<u>0-99</u>	<u>\$1.10</u>	<u>\$.90</u>
<u>100-499</u>	<u>\$.93</u>	<u>\$.73</u>
<u>500-999</u>	<u>\$.87</u>	<u>\$.67</u>
<u>1000-1999</u>	<u>\$.81</u>	<u>\$.61</u>
<u>2000-4999</u>	<u>\$.75</u>	<u>\$.55</u>

A big thank you to those of you who ordered your trees before December 1<sup>st</sup> last year. This amount of lead time in the nursery is very important to both you as customer and to us as grower. I'll give you a couple quick examples why. Without pre orders I would normally grow about 500 prickly tea tree. Ecologically, it's a very important plant i.e., an ideal bird nesting site and a rare summer flowering plant (important nectar source for birds and native predatory wasps) but when it all boils down, the birds love it and most people hate it (it's scrubby, prickly, boring, etc.). This year I had pre orders for 5000 prickly tea tree! I wouldn't even have come close to filling these orders if they'd have come 3 months later.

The blackwood is such a diverse species. Enquiries from just about every district would include blackwood. Fortunately we've got stored seed from over ten different locations- Skenes Ck, Mt Sabine, Winchelsea, Deans Marsh, Geelong, Meredith, etc. All differing soils, rainfall, uses and tolerances. Pre orders this year amounted to over 14,000 trees from all the areas mentioned above.

It's great to see so many of our indigenous species being planted in the region. Areas that have been devoid of native vegetation for generations are now beginning to sprout young trees again. Most "experts" agree that 15-20% of the farm needs to be under tree/shrub cover. They argue that with this amount of land strategically planted with trees and shrubs, the farmer will have a greater chance of controlling agriculturally related degradation (i.e., rising ground water table which increases soil salinity; soil erosion; degraded soil structure and nutrient levels; poor quality surface runoff; etc.) as well as improving stock and pasture health and, hopefully, providing an aesthetically more pleasing place to live.

Some comments that have stuck in my head from the recent International Landcare Conference in Melbourne were from Don Henry (Australian Conservation Foundation President) when he talked about passing our land on to future generations. Environmentally, will it be in better condition than when we assumed the reins? Short term (5 years) goals are important but what about the long term, say 100-150 years. Are the farming practices we use now short sighted and, if yes, what can be done to improve the future prospects of the land so we may pass this land on in better shape than it is now. It's a hard ask. Sometimes, the list of jobs just keeps on growing and "conservation works" tend to be at the bottom of the list. There is help out there, though. Many organisations run courses/programs in this very field of "sustainable agriculture".

- 1) Taking part in a Whole Farm Planning Course (through DNRE) will assist you in "stepping back" from your land and creating a new picture that will include all aspects of your farm ( stock, soils, fencing, water, shelter, etc.).
- 2) More specific to trees, a course entitled "Trees in our Rural Landscape" (through Greening Australia) focuses on all aspects of trees on your land, from seed collecting and propagation to the suitable placing of them on your farm and everything in between.

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- 3) If you join the Otway Agroforestry Network (for a nominal fee), part of your membership includes a site visit to your farm from a locally trained “master tree grower” who can help you formulate plans about tree planting on your property. The idea behind this program is to encourage farm forestry but many site visits deal with multiple issues, ie., erosion or salinity, etc.
- 4) The Upper Barwon Landcare Network has a paid, part time coordinator who can visit properties and help share ideas about Landcare issues and if your farm meets certain criteria you may be eligible for government grants. You may be eligible if you have remnant native vegetation that needs fencing, or landslips and other erosion problems, or salinity and high water table issues. Almost every district is covered by a landcare group and are run by farmers and landholders just like you and I- a very worthy group to join.

There are many other groups/programs out there designed to assist you (not tell you what to do) in your conservation/landcare endeavours. You only need to ask. Feel free to contact us here at Otway Greening and we'll try to put you in contact with the relevant person.

I mentioned the Otway Agroforestry Network before. As a member you receive a quarterly publication called ‘Agroforestry News’ (you'll also receive it if you become a member of any Victorian Agroforestry Network depending on your location). The most recent issue has many excellent articles pertaining to trees and related issues. I might quickly list a few of them because they are very relevant to “non agroforestry” plantings as well.

- 1) “What can we do About Wallabies?” by Matt Armstrong. An excellent summary of various means of wallaby control in recently established tree plantations.
- 2) “Native Vegetation and Orchards” by Alex Sislov. This article discusses the thorny issue of planting natives around/near fruit orchards to assist the orchardists in natural insect control (and thus cutting down on insecticide use), wind protection, dust reduction on fruit, and it gives examples of which native trees to grow that won't encourage fruit eating birds. Very interesting.
- 3) “Mixed Plantations-Imitating Nature” by Dr Partap Khanna and Mick Crowe. The authors have studied soil nutrient levels (in particular, nitrogen) between a monoculture crop of 100% gums and mixed plantations of wattles and gums. In one study, growth rates in the mixed stand were 15% greater than the pure stand of gums. The wattles may be providing as much as 30kg of N per hectare not only to supply the gums but to replace the loss of nitrogen when the gums are finally harvested.

Hopefully you're all getting ready for your Spring planting. If you are ripping and mounding your site you should have done so by now to ensure satisfactory shattering of the soil and not just slicing through the soil. Don't forget that weed control is the most important factor in this whole game. If we continue getting below average rainfall, every drop of soil moisture saved now will be vital next summer, so prepare now! If using herbicide, spray your spots/lines now. If mulching, lay it out now to kill off the weeds that will be using the soil moisture. And please, don't leave your planting too late in the spring. September is the month for planting trees for most of you. Be ready!

Just a date to mark on your calendar (right next to those 2mm rainfall totals!). A big tree planting day has been organised at Lake Modewarre on the weekend of August 12-13 (not sure which day at the moment) where 20,000 trees, shrubs, and grasses will be planted by lots of Melburnians (who'll travel down by train) and, hopefully lots of locals as well. Keep your eyes peeled on the local papers for more details or contact Claire Dennis at Greening Oz on 5236 2399.

Once again, thanks for all your custom and here's hoping for a wet wet winter!

Naturally,

Mike