



WE COLLECTED, WE SOWED, WE PRICKED OUT, WE TENDED, WE SORTED, WE EVEN PLANTED, AND FINALLY WE WERE PAID!
NOW WE'RE SITTING ON THE BANKS OF THE LODDON FOR A WHOLE FOUR DAYS... AND WE RESTED!

Well, sort of. As we dangle our feet in the passing current and the crickets and frogs recite their own love songs, Wendy and I actually write out our annual OG newsletter. It's not really work though, sitting back and going over the last year in our heads. This is actually our 10th year and my how the time has slipped by, just like the gum leaves floating along the current.



And speaking of current, the health of our rivers has been an important topic over the past year. Much of our Landcare funding has been going toward willow and weed removal, stabilising creek banks, and revegetating with indigenous plants. And as we read in that most prestigious Landcare magazine "Treetalk", monitoring of our local rivers has become a regular occurrence. I'm sure this data will become important as the years go by and water quality comparisons can be made. (A big congrats to John Readhead, Neil McInnes, Robyn Giles, and Craig Clifford of the Upper Barwon Landcare Network for their efforts with Treetalk).

We also saw the release of "A web of Trees" this year. Put out by the Otway Agroforestry Network from information collected by Lawrence Burk and Rowan Reid of Melbourne Uni, this excellent 8 page booklet describes the vast changes that have occurred in the Yan Yan Gurt Creek catchment (Deans Marsh) over the relatively short period of 12 years.

One fact amongst many that stands out is the catchment has gone from a 6% to 21% forest cover in this time period. It also talks about how varied the plantings along the catchment are, reflecting the needs and aspirations of the landowners who participated. The collection of "before and after data" is vital in justifying continued funding, not to mention the scientific and ecological need.

And from our vantage point along the Loddon, I see a whole range of weeds out of control: yellow broom, gorse, blackberry, as well as a plague of lerps sucking the nutrient out of the river reds- a sure sign of nature out of balance. Vigilance in maintaining the health of our natural systems is an on going task, and in some circumstances where "nature appears to be losing the fight" it may even seem almost beyond our ability to do anything about it. You are certainly not alone out there. Get some help, talk to Landcare and other professionals. Do a "whole farm plan" or attend a Master Tree Grower course. If you are keen, arm yourself with the skills and knowledge to work out the environmental issues on your property. If you want to start with planting trees, well you are reading the right newsletter! So, how do you arm yourself with knowledge? Start with asking a few questions right now, well in advance of planting a single tree.

- In the area you want to plant out, are the weeds currently under control? Control of woody weeds like blackberry is vital prior to tree planting and is much easier before fences and trees go in.
- Does the soil need ripping or mounding? If the soil has been compacted by cattle or cropping, ripping through the soil during the drier months ahead of tree planting does help tree survival.
- Do you think you might qualify for a Landcare grant? Ring up your local Landcare officer and get them to look at your project now so you are on their radar screen. Very important!
- Do you know what trees and shrubs you need? Give us a ring here at the nursery and we can help!

Looking back over 2005, as well as growing plants, Wen and I found ourselves in “teaching” roles. Early in the year we had the honour of hosting 25 refugees from all corners of the globe. Still waiting for permanent visas, many of these people are just looking for some normality in their chaotic lives. I think they really wanted to be amongst some everyday people doing everyday things. Milking the goats, pricking out the trees and for the children, eating a peach off the tree were highlights of their visit. Having them come here was truly a highlight for us.

We were also visited by a Greencorp team for 3 days. As well as sharing our knowledge about propagation and seed collecting, these young workers helped us put orders together and, hopefully, they learnt something about running a nursery and things environmental.

As the bunya nuts began to fall, I went over to the Birregurra Primary School where we talked about, and tasted some edible wild plants. The bunyas, of course, were from garden trees and the children found the taste somewhat bland and yet sweet (maybe like a raw chestnut). We talked about the yam daisy (murrnong) which used to grow around Birre (and may still yet in patches) and then the big hit of the day was tasting mountain pepper. Even some of the “toughies” had tears in their eyes!



Unripe fruit of *Tasmannia lanceolata*, Mountain Pepper

Mike attended the Smoke Signals conference in Creswick where Dr Kingsley Dixon was the keynote speaker. Dr Dixon is from Kings Park Botanical Gardens in Perth. He was the first Australian to utilise smoke to assist in the germination of difficult to propagate plant species. Many nursery people (and our customers!) now owe a great deal of thanks to Dr Dixon and his team for opening up this Pandoras Box for us. After hearing from Dr Dixon, we heard from three other speakers who have successfully used smoke in their propagating business. Mike was one of those speakers, describing how smoke treatment of the seed of coastal beard heath and red fruited saw sedge improved germination of these species.

Mike also has an ongoing relationship with the Ballarat Region Seed Bank, helping the team put together a knowledge base on the subject of provenances of local species of trees and shrubs. The information will assist those people who collect seed, make an informed decision about what is the provenance of a particular plant and how far away can they collect to be in that same provenance. All this information will be available to all when the project is complete.

Continuing on the theme of learning, Wen and I attended an Angair event with guest speaker Magali Wright speaking on her pet subject: “The fantastic relationship of bacteria, mycorrhiza and plants”. Many people think you can drop seeds in the soil, add a bit of water and sun and plants will grow. Well, after listening to Magali, the biological life and activity under the soil surface can be the deciding factor in the regeneration of many plants especially orchids and heathland species, many of which are rare or endangered. A subject where the scientists have only just hit the tip of the knowledge iceberg with many years of research left to do.

If you are the sort of person who likes to stretch the old grey matter muscles every now and then, but don't know where to look, try hooking up with some of the local conservation, landcare or government organisations. They all tend to have newsletters or email updates listing upcoming events. Here are just a few:

- Treetalk- Upper Barwon Landcare Network- ph 5231 6394
- Angair newsletter- ph 5263 1085
- Otway Agroforestry Network newsletter- ph 5236 3277
- Land for Wildlife newsletter- ph 5430 4363
- Corangamite Farm Forestry newsletter- ph 5233 5550
- Living Landscapes- Greening Australia- ph 5231 6913

Back home at Otway Greening we started sowing our summer crop of plant seed recently. The winter seed crop (those plant species that germinate in the winter months) has already germinated and we have had a good strike rate with many species including silver banksia, balm mint bush, sweet bursaria, hazel pomaderris, prickly currant, tall rice flower, coastal beard heath, myrtle beech and many more. If you wish to order any winter germinants, numbers are usually limited so get in early and order your plants now. We will also have limited numbers of cutting grown sticky boobialla and mountain pepper this year. Please enquire about numbers and prices.

As we gain a greater understanding of propagating our local flora, we continue to offer you, our customers, a greater range of plants from around the coast, deep down in the rainforest, and out on those grassy plains. Sometimes we have failures, though, and this year after flooding rains in February, satinbox and myrtle beech seed that would have been lying on the ground, was washed away before any could be collected. We will have small amounts of two year old seedlings available if anyone wishes to purchase some.

The satinbox (*Phebalium squameum*) is a beautiful tree to about 5-10 m tall. It has scented leaves and flowers (in spring). The white-pink blossoms literally cover the plant turning the trees to a soft hazy hue where they are dwarfed by the mountain ash, myrtle beech and blackwoods.



STINKWOOD- ZIERIA ARBORESCENS

A cousin of the satinbox has the rather off putting name of stinkwood (*Zieria arborescens*). It tends to grow in similar conditions as the satinbox (high rainfall ridges and gullies) but has been found in foothill forests in the Otways where the rainfall averages 800mm. It also has scented/smelly “trifoliate” leaves (unusual in the Otways) and also has beautiful flowers in the spring. It grows to about 5 metres and could make a lovely hedge although may be slower growing in full sun. Both of these plants are in the Rutaceae family. They are a family of plants known for their difficulty in seed propagation (and cuttings are not that easy either) but also known for their beauty. Two genera from this family are the correa and boronia- arguably some of the showiest of our native plants.

And I guess we have to end this newsletter with some bad news. Yes, I’m afraid it’s time for a price hike. I could give you lots of excuses like our labour costs have gone up (true), freight and petrol prices have gone up (you know it’s true), potting mix costs have skyrocketed, etc etc, but I won’t do that. Or maybe I just have! I would hope that those of you who come back to OG every year for your native plants realise we are more than a grower and seller of plants. We try our hardest to grow the right plants for the right place. This takes a lot of effort in propagation, seed collection and storage. In 2005, we grew 215 different provenances of plants. As an example, we grew 9 provenances of manna gum to suit our various customers and their different climates throughout the Otways and Western Plains. Growing plants this way makes our task more labour intensive. Other nurseries may grow tens of thousands of the one seed source using a direct seeding machine thus cutting their labour costs dramatically but are really growing generic plants that may, or may not be suitable for your site. By raising our prices, we can continue to grow the highest quality plants with high quality trained staff (affectionately known as the Priquettes!) and using the best materials (seed, potting mix, Lannen cell trays) available. We thank you for your past custom with Otway Greening and look forward to our continued association in the future.



Now, enough of this business stuff, where’s that fishing rod...