

Well here we are again, the 14<sup>th</sup> annual newsletter from Otway Greening. And at the time of writing (mid Oct), spring is looking like it may have already sprung! The soil is drying out quickly, the paddock grasses are heading for the sky and the farmers are in full swing with crops, silage and hay. For us, it's a chance to take stock and prepare for next years tree crop. As well as sowing seed, washing trays and organising potting mix, part of that preparation is reminding you about ordering your 2009 plants now. I know next winter seems a long way off, but by ordering now, you'll get the plants you want and we'll sow the right seed so no one is disappointed.

Is there a plant you'd like us to grow but isn't on our list? Feel free to enquire about us growing it for you. We like to keep our plant list to one sheet of paper so about 70 of the most popular plants on our current list. However, looking back at 2008, we grew well over 120 species. Just ask!

## **SPRING '08 NEWSLETTER, DISCOUNT OFFER, PRICE LIST AND PLANT CATALOGUE**

### **TWENTY YEARS OF LOCAL LANDCARE**



In 2009 The East Otway Community will be celebrating twenty years of Landcare in the district. The East Otway Landcare Group began as a subgroup of the Barwon Valley Farm Tree Group based in Winchelsea. The idea grew from a meeting of local landholders ( Lindsay Stewart, Wayne Stevenson, Jeff Watts, Rowan Reid, Mike Robinson-Koss) who felt there was enough interest in the Deans Marsh District to go out on their own and concentrate on agricultural and environmental issues related to the higher rainfall foothills of the East Otway area. As in any volunteer group, the interest in projects goes up and it goes down. One thing we learned fairly early on was having a

government grant did not make a successful project! What did make a successful project was dedicated and hard working volunteers putting in the hours on their own land as well as for the community. Like any community group, the success is measured by the interest of its members. And like many community groups, the East Otway Landcare Group has had good years and not so good years! We have had the knockers, we've had the supporters. But the group is still there doing important work for the community. In my opinion, one of the major achievements of the group has been its continued work at the Bambra Wetlands. It was the first community project the group took on back in 1989. (We may not have taken it on if we knew then how much work it was going to be!).

Through all the years, a small but dedicated group of locals (with some valuable assistance from Landcare facilitators and others) has battled the willows, blackberries, phalaris, floods, rabbits, wandering cows, snakes, and access issues to achieve something of a small miracle.



Gus McFarlane hard at work direct seeding Poas and sedges that were eventually planted at the Bambra Wetland. By direct seeding many species, especially grasses and sedges, we can charge less per plant and there is no transplant shock to the seedlings.

Battling the phalaris (large introduced tussock forming pasture grass) might have been the toughest assignment yet. Through perseverance and hard work over the past 3 years, the group is succeeding in controlling most of the phalaris. Reseeding of this grass has been curbed through grazing, herbicide application and planting many thousands of native poas and sedges to fill in the spaces left by the phalaris.

The East Otway Landcare Group continues to work on other projects as well. One that is connected to the Bambra Wetland is the East Otway Living Landscapes

Project. Landholders are fencing off strategic areas on their farms to help link up remnant natural areas in the district which will assist native flora and fauna moving from one isolated patch of bush to another while also helping to diversify the genetics of these animal and plant

species which is vital in maintaining healthy populations.

**Congratulations to the East Otway Landcare Group and its members for a mighty job well done.**

### **THE DIRT FROM THE NURSERY**

As mentioned in the introduction, we do grow a number of plant species not on our official plant list. And we do like a challenge! For a number of years now we have been growing some “off the list” plants for various customers. These include plants indigenous to the Coastal fringe, Heaths, and Basalt Plains grasslands. Some of these are very challenging plants- they are used to growing in poor soils with low fertility, and when we try to grow them in the nursery situation, all this TLC we give them is exactly what they don’t want! Many of these plants have associations with soil borne microbes (bacteria, fungi etc) that assist the plants in growing in these poor soils. The microbes “root system” can reach into subsoil moisture making moisture available to the plants and they also help convert unavailable nutrients in the soil into usable nutrients.

Observing this cohabitation in nature, has made us a bit smarter here in the nursery. Providing the correct bacteria’s and fungi’s to these plant species in the nursery not only helps them thrive under the nursery conditions, but when you, the customer, plants them in the ground, the association continues. This is vital in areas that have been utilised for agriculture and the soil microbe population has dwindled.

Some local farmers are also starting to look at microbial life below the soil surface and how it can be beneficial to their agricultural crops. Although many of these microbes are related to grass and crop species, it is the same idea as what we are doing in the nursery- seeing the soil (or potting mix) as more than a structure that supports roots- it is a complex mosaic of living critters. By encouraging these critters, farmers can become less reliant on artificial fertilisers and pesticides growing a healthier agricultural product with less impact on the environment.



Cones & Female flowers on the black she oak



As climate change takes hold, we get more and more enquiries about plants suited to very dry conditions. There are plenty of species able to withstand dry soils and extended dry periods, however, the hard part is to get the young seedling established in minimal soil moisture (especially if the sub soil is dry as well). All plants (regardless of their drought tolerance) need some help in the establishment stage. Consider the following:

1. Prepare the site early, maybe even months before planting. By controlling weeds early, available soil moisture goes to your tree and nothing else. If you spray only a week or so before planting most of the soil moisture would have been “wasted” by the weeds/grasses using it.
2. In these parts we traditionally planted in September/October. We may need to reconsider our planting calendar. **The plants need moist soil**- it’s as simple as that. If the plant roots are wet and the surrounding soil is drying, the moisture from the plants roots will get sucked into the soil- the plant may die before establishment takes place. If the winter is looking dry, plant early. Landowners out on the plains may have to take a chance with the frosts. One frost will injure a seedling, multiple frosts over successive nights will kill seedlings.
3. We grow all our plants outside- no shade house, no hot house. Our plants are tough. If any plant is going to survive frosts and dry conditions, ours will.
4. We may have to select species more suited to drier parts of our farm. The swamp gum and woolly tea tree cannot handle dry conditions, while their close relatives yarra gum and prickly tea tree can. Many of the “scrub wattles” turn up their toes early in life especially when stressed by environmental factors like drought. Some other local understorey plants, however, can tough out droughts much better. Consider the sweet bursaria, tree violet, and silver banksia- all are fairly long lived, provide important environmental duties in the bush and are quite nice to look at as well! One set back is they are somewhat slow growing. Sometimes that’s the payoff, quick growing can mean quick dieing.
5. Hedging your bets by planting a full suite of species indigenous to your property is probably what is called for. Some plants will find their niche in time, others (like wattles) will grow up, look pretty, provide important bird habitat, fix nitrogen and then die- till the next fire or disturbance- then watch out!
6. In large scale revegetation, watering your plants is not very practical, but some of you may find it therapeutic! The most efficient thing you can do is to water the plants at planting time so they establish quickly- and get your weed control organised early. Watering over the summer may discourage the plant’s roots from going down into the subsoil.
7. Make sure you plant the right species (and of local provenance) in the right spot. This will give each individual plant the best possible chance of growing through the first summer.



### **THE END**

Keep reading further as our discount offer is next! But before we bid you adieu, we’d like to thank you for your past custom and we look forward to working with you in 2009. And please don’t forget to return any Lannen trays you may have collecting dust out in the back shed. You can contact us on 5236 3314 or [trees@otwaygreening.com.au](mailto:trees@otwaygreening.com.au) or even visit our website [www.otwaygreening.com.au](http://www.otwaygreening.com.au) . Have a peaceful holiday period and a fire free summer.

Mike and Wendy Robinson-Koss