

Some Australian Plants

ACACIAS or **Wattles** are the best known of our Australian plants and they form the largest genus in this country. There are over 1100 species and you will find that whatever the diversity of climate, conditions and soil, there is a Wattle to fit. They are very quick growing, although sometimes short lived, and can perform the function of 'nursery plants' while other slower species are developing.



BANKSIAS are fascinating types of plants with their large 'candlestick' blossoms made up of a multitude of quaint, individual flowers arranged around a central axis to form a cylindrical spike, in some cases up to 30cm in length. There are some 50 species of *Banksia* in Australia, most of them in Western Australia. The eastern species are the ones recommended for S.E. Queensland.



CORYMBIA & EUCALYPTUS: There are well over 500 species of *Eucalyptus* and *Corymbia* (commonly called Gums). They vary from forest giants to low straggling shrubs. In most species the blossoms are white, but some, particularly from the drier areas, are very colourful. No native garden could be complete without at least one. As they are deep-rooted plants, they do not rob the garden and many other plantings can be carried out beneath them.



GREVILLEAS form one of the most spectacular groups of plants. They can vary from prostrate, ground-hugging species to shrubs and large trees. Their foliage is fascinating in its diversity of shape and size. The colourful flowers, rich in nectar, are very attractive to birds. They grow quickly and flower over long periods. Most require well drained soils.



LEPTOSPERMUMS or Tea-Trees, as they are often called, have been in cultivation for many years. There are over 30 species and they are to be found in all states of Australia. They are usually small trees or shrubs with small leaves and open, pink or white, five-petalled flowers. *Leptospermum* will grow under a wide range of conditions. They make excellent garden specimens or may be planted to form windbreaks and hedges.



MELALEUCAS (**Bottlebrushes, Paperbarks & Honey Myrtles**) are wonderful plants for beginners, as they are easily grown and very hardy. There are over 200 kinds of *Melaleuca* found throughout Australia, from swampy to dry areas. They range from large trees to small shrubs and even prostrate ground covers. Their foliage is mostly fine and can be soft and delicate or prickly. Some species have attractive papery bark. Flowers range from bottlebrush to pompom to claw shape, in a variety of colours, attracting both birds and bees. They will grow under a wide range of conditions, with a minimum of attention. A sunny position gives best flowering. Shrub species should be pruned after flowering to retain a good shape.



Native Plants Queensland

(Society for Growing Australian Plants Qld. Region Inc.)

Visitors are welcome to attend our Regional Gatherings hosted by the various Branches of our Society. Branches in Queensland are:

Brisbane Daytime, Brisbane Southside, Brisbane Western Suburbs, Caboolture Daytime, Cairns, Gladstone, Innisfail, Ipswich, Kingaroy & Districts, Logan River, Mackay, Pine Rivers, Rockhampton, Samford, Sunshine Coast & Hinterland, Tablelands, Townsville and Warwick.

For details contact :

Honorary Secretary

P.O. Box 586

FORTITUDE VALLEY 4006

Email: secretary@npq.org.au

Phone: 07 3285 3322

Internet web site: www.npq.org.au

ABN 92 312 012 800

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Cultivation of Australian Plants

PREPARATION:

Before planting native species, it is important to consider their nature. Group them according to their aspect and moisture requirements. This will achieve easier maintenance and healthier plants.

For plants requiring a well drained position, it is best to raise the garden bed above the surrounding area if you suspect that the drainage is inadequate. This allows the moisture content to be more easily controlled and is particularly necessary if you have a clay soil.

Clay soil should be aerated by digging and gypsum may be added as a soil conditioner. If you have a very sandy soil, you should incorporate moisture retaining material such as peatmoss, old cow manure or well matured compost into the planting site.

PLANTING:

When your plant is ready to be put into the ground, water it well in its container. Dig the hole about 50cm in diameter and slightly deeper than the container. Loosen the soil in the bottom of the hole, then fill with water and allow to drain away.



To remove a plant from a pot, place one hand on the top of the soil with the stem of the plant between the second and third fingers. Up-end the pot (supporting the plant on this hand), tap sharply on the bottom, and gently ease the pot up and away from the plant in its ball of soil. If your plant is in a tin or plastic bag, cut the sides of the container away carefully.

Taking care not to disturb the roots, place the plant in the hole and gently firm the soil around it. Keep the soil

level at the same height around the stem of the plant as it was in the container. Water it well and continue to do so about twice a week until established. Watering will vary with the type of plant, soil and climate.

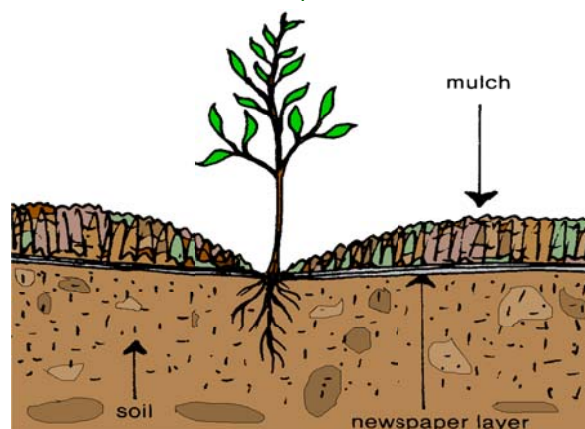
FERTILIZING

Complete fertilizers, whether granulated or liquid, and blood and bone contain too much phosphorus for some native plants, particularly *Banksia*, *Buckinghamia*, *Grevillea*, *Hakea* and other members of the Proteaceae family. The use of these fertilizers may have the effect of causing yellowing of leaves and die-back. The low phosphorus Osmocote (18:2.6:10) and Nutricote slow release fertilizers formulated for native plants are suitable for pre-planting application and may be mixed into the soil at the rate of 25-30grms per planting hole.

When plants are established, compost and animal manures are useful additions to the soil, also soluble fertilizers like sulphate of ammonia. However, exercise caution when using fertilizers and, when in doubt, don't.

MULCHING:

Our native plants resent any disturbance to their root systems; so cultivating to remove weeds should be avoided. Mulching is the answer to this problem and it is just as essential to the success of your garden as the selection of the correct plants.



There are several benefits to be gained from mulching. It helps to retain moisture in the ground and maintain a more even soil temperature, keeps down weed growth, and adds to the appearance of the garden. Mulch can be composed of such materials as gravel, river

pebbles, sawdust from untreated timber, pine and casuarina needles, pine bark chips, leaf mould, dried lawn clippings or broken up shrub prunings.

To prevent weed growth, first put down thick layers of newspaper or sheets of cardboard, then pile on the mulch. It needs to be at least 10cm thick all over. A point to note when applying mulch, keep it about 10cm away from the stem of your plant to avoid collar rot.

STAKING:

It may be advisable to place a short stake near the plant as a marker. However, the use of stakes to support plants should be avoided, except in exposed, windy situations. Staking and pruning of lower branches reduces trunk diameter and strength. Retention of lower branches and light tip pruning in the early stages are a better alternative.

If staking is necessary, place three stakes around the plant and tie loosely, so that it can move within this space. Plants develop a stronger trunk and root system if they can move with the wind.

PRUNING:

Pruning can be very beneficial to your native plants. Regular tip pruning from an early age helps to develop shapelier, bushier specimens (this is not necessary with trees).

Tip pruning means pinching out the growing tips of the stems, usually the end two or three leaves. Be careful not to remove buds before the flowering season.

The removal of old flower spikes prevents plants from becoming woody and will increase the number of flowers they can produce. It also helps promote foliage growth rather than seed. This type of light pruning is usually sufficient for most native species.

PESTS and DISEASES:

Native plants are as susceptible to pests and diseases as any other plants. Healthy, vigorously growing plants are more resistant to insect attack and are quicker to recover. Biological control by birds, spiders, insect predators and parasites is much more preferable than the use of insecticides, which may harm birds and the useful insects and other associated predators in the garden.

If you must resort to commercial remedies, ask your nurseryman or garden centre to recommend an appropriate product and follow the instructions on the label at all times.