



Wollombi Valley Landcare Group News for October 2011



A Visit to *Grow Local*, a Specialist Native Tubestock Nursery

Saturday 15 October 2011 at 2:00 pm
at the nursery in Ellalong

On Saturday 15th October, you are invited to join us for a visit to the Grow Local nursery in Wallaby Gully, Ellalong, to meet Max Elliott a qualified horticulturalist who operates the nursery and learn from his experience.



Grow Local has been operating since 2003 supplying native tubestock – endemic to Cessnock and the surrounding area – for revegetation projects.

The nursery operates at Wallaby Gully, 5km from the town of Ellalong and works on a grow to order basis, but there are always a few extras in stock for small projects.

Orders are grown from October each year ready for a planting during the following autumn. Autumn planting is crucial in this part of the valley for a good long term success rate.

Max Elliott is a qualified horticulturalist with 20 years experience specialising in the native plants of the Hunter area.

His local knowledge of flora has been used to nominate threatened species and endangered ecological communities with the NSW Scientific Committee as follows:

- 1) Kurri Kurri Sand Swamp Woodland
- 2) Hunter Lowland Redgum Forest
- 3) Lower Hunter Spotted Gum/Ironbark Forest
- 4) *Grevillea linearifolia* dwarf fine leaf form (now known as *G. parviflora*)

Directions on how to get to the nursery are overleaf. We will also be arranging car-pooling for those that don't have a vehicle or prefer to share.

Everyone is welcome. We look forward to seeing you there. Tea and coffee will be provided.

For more information contact Jane Mowatt on 4998 8158 or Graham Taylor on 4998 3326.

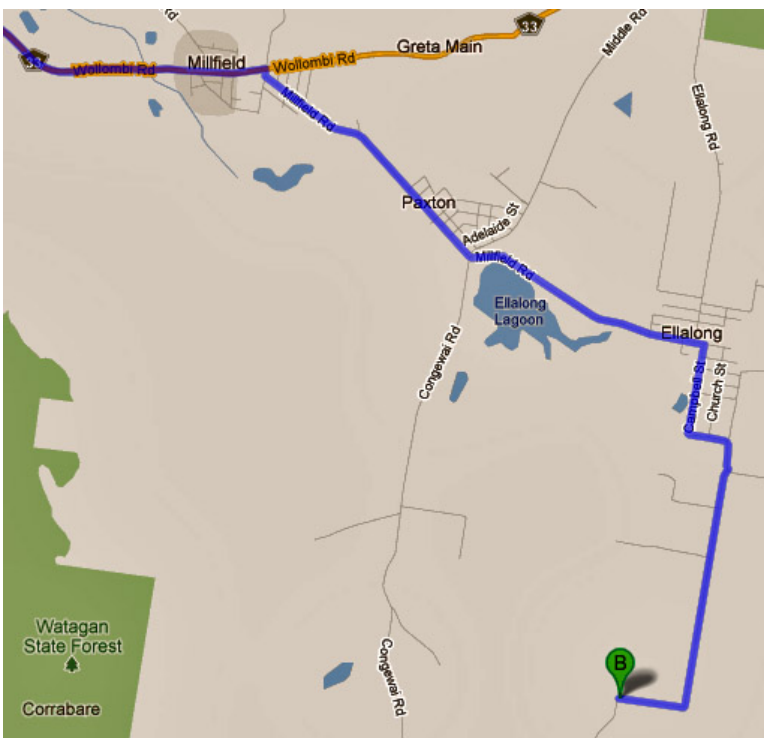
The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of Wollombi Valley Landcare Group Inc, or any other Landcare agency or government department, but are presented to promote discussion about and the practice of sustainable land use and environmental responsibility.

GROW LOCAL is a specialist native tubestock nursery growing plants for the Cessnock region, having grown many thousands of plants for revegetation projects and provides a list of local plants.

Our aim is to grow plants from local seed and to help you with advice on best practice for planting.

Max Elliott
Horticulturalist - Revegetation Specialist
Grow Local Native Flora Nursery
 No. 10 - Lane Q4
 Wallaby Gully Rd
 ELLALONG 2325 NSW
 P: 02-49981069
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 W: www.growlocalnativeplants.blogspot.com

Here is a map and driving directions courtesy of Google, Inc.



Wollombi to Wallaby Gully Road = 28.1 km (31 minutes)

Driving directions from Wollombi to Wallaby Gully Road, Ellalong		
1.	Head north-east on Wollombi Road	17.3 k
2.	Turn right onto Eleventh Avenue	78 m
3.	Take the 1st left on to Millfield Road	5.1 km
4.	Continue onto Helena Street	600 m
5.	Turn right onto Campbell Street	1.0 km
6.	Campbell Street turns slightly left and becomes South Street	220 m
7.	Continue onto Sandy Creek Road	500 m
8.	Turn right onto Wallaby Gully Road	3.3 km

Bushfire Safety Workshops

At our last Landcare meeting on the 20 August, Glenn O'Rourke, Deputy Captain of the Wollombi Volunteer Rural Fire Brigade, gave a presentation on Bushfire Safety.

Mention was made of two workshops that were coming up which several members indicated an interest in attending. But these workshops are not just limited to Landcare members that attended our meeting - anyone can attend and is welcome.

So, please, for the sake of your safety, that of your family, your property and any livestock you have, consider attending one of these workshops. See details below.

Bookings can be made on line at brigade@wollombibushfire.org.au

Wollombi Volunteer Bushfire Brigade is holding two BUSHFIRE SAFETY WORKSHOPS

- Community Bushfire Safety Workshop (open to all locals) – 8 October 2011, 9.30am to 3.30pm at Wollombi Fire Station
- Women’s Bushfire Safety Workshop (run by local RFS women for local women) – 22 October 2011, 9.30am to 3.30-m at Wollombi Fire Station

The aim of these workshops is to guide locals in the preparation of a personal **BUSHFIRE SURVIVAL PLAN**, as well as to provide the opportunity to learn practical bushfire preparation & protection skills

Specifically the program will include:

- Things to consider when preparing your BUSHFIRE SURVIVAL PLAN
- What to do in the event of fire - LEAVE EARLY or STAY & DEFEND
- Implementing your BUSHFIRE SURVIVAL PLAN

In addition, the program will provide practical skills regarding

- The use of personal firefighting equipment including portable pumps
- Techniques to put out a fire

The following are a couple of comments from our 2010 Workshop

“It was excellent – great interaction, lots of questions by people kept them involved, great handouts, so....hard to be better!!”

“Very well balanced, presentation clear – balanced, open for discussion – good”

If you wish to attend or know of anyone, such as friends or neighbours who may be interested to attend please ask them to book via email at brigade@wollombibushfire.org.au

Plants for Gardens in Fire Prone Areas

The problem of choosing plants for the areas near the house when there is a high probability of a bushfire sooner or later is an exercise in balancing safety against aesthetic and environmental pressures.

Concrete and cacti are at one end of the spectrum (very safe) with a dense shrubbery of a wide range of native plants at the other (lots of flowers, birds, lizards, small mammals, etc).

Reading the advice for making your garden wildlife friendly, you are given a list of recommendations that almost exactly match the Rural Fire Brigades list of “Things to Avoid”!

I have been trying to sort out what can be done to make the area around the house pleasant to live in, good to look at AND to not increase the likelihood of burning down the building.

This is an ongoing project. Other peoples' experiences and input is welcome and will be published in the newsletter. We would be particularly pleased to hear about actual local experiences with our type of fires and local gardens.

The horrific experiences in Victoria (which have been occurring regularly ever since European settlement in that area) should not be allowed to overshadow the knowledge of how fires behave **here**.

The lists

The RFS has published a list of recommendations and a very short list of approved native plants.

Joan Webster has provided a much more comprehensive list as well as some general rules of thumb for judging plants in "The Complete Bushfire Safety Book", 2000, Random House Australia. "Grow What Tree" has a list of recommended trees and Indigenous Landscape Design Australia, www.ilda.com.au also has a list. "From Seeds to Leaves" also has a short list.

Many plants are common to several lists that means either consensus (or copying).

Recommendations by the Rural Fire Service and agreed to by everybody else.

- Avoid plants that accumulate dead leaves and twigs e.g. older cypress hedges are particularly dangerous.
- Avoid trees with loose, fibrous, or stringy bark e.g. the Manna Gums, *Eucalyptus viminalis*, and Candlebark Gums, *E. rubida* native to Victoria are notorious for spreading fires.
- Avoid plants with high oil content in the leaves e.g. lots of plants in the family Myrtaceae, eucalypts, bottlebrushes and paperbarks.
- Avoid plants with fine leaves e.g. bipinnate Acacias

Lots of native fire resistant plants require lots of water i.e. naturally grow near creeks or in rainforest. These are communities which are less likely to burn and plants from such communities can be difficult to grow in drier areas, particularly in extended droughts and with limited water available.

Rainforests don't burn easily. If they do, then the plants are killed.

Two reasons for this immunity:

- 1) where they are is generally moister – along waterways, on south facing slopes, in deep shady gullies.
- 2) the types of plants that grow there are fire resistant, hence their presence on RFS and other lists.

The listed species *Acmena* (Lillypilly) and *Tristaniopsis laurina* (Water Gum) are found along creeks.

The periodic Victorian holocausts occur mainly in Wet Sclerophyll Forests ie very tall eucalypts, all very similar in size, growing in damp areas with a fern understorey. These forests are adapted to fires at 80 or more year intervals which occur during an El Niño and after extended hot dry periods. They burn extremely hot, all the trees are killed, and their seeds fall onto the newly created ashbed and an even aged stand grows up again.

Our Dry Sclerophyll Forests are quite different. The trees are shorter, more widely spaced and with a diverse shrub understorey (usually prickly) and a wide range of ground cover plants. They are adapted to fires approximately 20 – 25 years apart with a wide range of intensity. The trees survive and reshoot from epicormic buds along the trunk and branches. The shrubs either do the same (most *Banksias*) or reshoot from lignotubers under the ground (*Bursaria*, *Euodia*) or are killed but have hard seeds which germinate as a result of the fire (*Acacia*, many species of pea).

In fact, of the RFS recommended plants, only *Eucalyptus maculata* (sometimes called *Corymbia maculata*), Spotted Gum, *Pittosporum* spp., *Breyenia*, and *Podocarpus*, Plum Pine are found in dryer communities.

Weeds

The opposite problem is introducing species which will become weeds – spreading on their own accord into the surrounding bush. Locally, this is less of a problem away from the waterways. The solution is to concentrate on species native to the area.

Testing an unlisted species

Just because a species isn't listed doesn't mean it is a fire hazard.

To find out – take a small bunch of leaves to the incinerator or gas stove and slowly move it towards the flame. The ones that catch fire farthest from the flame and **flare** most are to be avoided. Leaves that crackle have oil and should be avoided.

Those that splutter or are hard to light are the ones to keep e.g. comfrey leaves.

Problem: If its been raining (like now) the levels of water in the leaves will be higher than after prolonged hot temperatures i.e. bushfire weather. Even bracken is slow to catch when wet. Test leaves which have been partially dried out as well as fresh ones.

At this time of year (and level of humidity) anything in the way of kindling useful for getting the fire started will be a hazard come the bushfire season.

I have been trying to plant only the recommended plants near the house and thought I'd pick out a few species that have proven successful.

The Plants

1. *Breynia oblongifolia* – common native shrub in the Wollombi Valley – berries for birds - will survive in dry areas and heavy browsing by wallabies – leave and encourage.
2. *Ficus coronata* – Sandpaper Fig – native to area, will grow in wet and dry areas, not eaten by wallabies, fruit for birds. Aboriginals used leaves for sandpaper.
3. *Ficus macrophylla* – Moreton Bay Fig – harder to establish, more of a rainforest species – once established hardy and becomes a very large tree casting dense shade, fruit for birds and bats (flying foxes).
4. *Acmena smithii* - “Lillypilly” -- is on all the lists (I suspect the *Syzygium* spp would be similar). Native to area. These species only prosper locally in our moister, more sheltered sites. Frost tender when young. Along permanent watercourses. Berries edible to humans and birds.
5. *Casuarina cunninghamiana* – also along riverbanks in the area. This was a surprise to me and I'd like to do a flame test on the needles. As a plant, easy to propagate and establish. Grows well along the Wollombi Brook even in exposed sites.
6. Eucalypts (including *Corymbia*) and *Angophoras* - not all these trees are a problem in fires. Spotted Gums (previously *E. maculata*, more recently *Corymbia maculata*) makes it onto all the lists. Native to the Millfield area and north and east from there growing on clays although not found naturally on the sandstones of the Wollombi Valley. It is considered by Joan Webster to be protective in Sydney but dangerous in Melbourne, shedding its bark after the earlier northern bushfire season (Oct to Jan) but during the southern season (Dec to Feb). Of our local sandstone species: *Angophora costata* – Smooth barked Apple, Sydney rusty Gum, - another very clean smooth barked tree is recommended. *Angophora hispida* – is listed by Webster, a bit of a surprise because it tends to have loose bark on the trunk but the leaves are thick (which is good) – try the flame test? *Eucalyptus gummifera* – Red Bloodwood – another surprise because of its rough flaky bark – but it is listed by Webster.

Except for *Eucalyptus saligna* and *E. deanei*, the two blue gums, all eucalypts native to our area survive the intensity of our local fires. The two advantages of having these species are 1) the recovery after fire is fast and automatic – reshooting along the trunks and branches within months especially if there is rain, and 2) much less danger from falling dead trees.

Fuel load of trees consists of three components – 1) fine fuel in the **canopy**; leaves, flowers, fruit capsules, dead twigs, 2) bark on the **trunk** and larger branches either loose (ribbons) or attached and 3) recently dropped fine fuel on the **ground** below the tree.

An ideal tree has:

- either a bark that won't burn or is cleanly dropped outside of the fire season.
- leaves all high above the ground and thick, with high salt and or water content.
- Refrains from dropping large quantities of leaves and/or bark in high fire danger periods.

All ironbarks have bark that is neither dropped nor flaky enough to burn. Although not mentioned on the lists *E. crebra*, Narrow leaved Ironbark, carries a very light fuel load and is locally common and hardy in dry areas. Stringybarks are a problem because the top layer of bark burns carrying the flames into the canopy. *E. deanei*, Round leaved Blue Gum, peels in August. Most trees drop the bark fairly quickly and cleanly and it can be removed from the base of the tree before the fire season. The Red Gums of the area, *E. tereticornis* and *E. amplifolia*, do not peel cleanly and patches of loose bark hang in the tree at this time of year (Sept/Oct). Not as big a problem as the Ribbon Gums and Candlebark trees of the Victorian Alps but advisable to clean up the trunk of trees near the house.

7. *Pittosporum* spp. There are two *Pittosporum* native to the area: *P. revolutum*, a shrub, and *P. undulatum*, a small tree. Both are listed as fire resistant on lists (in fact the genus seems to be fire resistant with 5 other species also listed in Webster). *P. revolutum* occurs naturally on my block in Knights Arm and is not a problem. *P. undulatum*, on the other hand, has disgraced itself in Sydney and areas of Victoria by forming dense stands and taking over the shrub layer and shading out all the other seedlings, forming monocultures. Barry Shepherd, Weeds Officer, Cessnock Council, advised us, after reading last month's newsletter, that *P. undulatum* is invading bushland in the Cessnock area and becoming an environmental weed.
8. *Hymenosporum flavum*, Native Frangipani, a close relative of the Pittosporums – is also native to the area, easy to grow, frost tolerant, not eaten by wallabies, with pleasantly scented yellow flowers – the most successful so far planted on my block.
9. *Tristaniopsis laurina* (formerly *Tristania laurina*) – Water Gum – locally common native along water courses and at base of rocks – successfully planted and thriving – a good candidate for riparian plantings in exposed positions.
10. *Banksia integrifolia*, *B. marginata*, and *B. spinulosa* are all listed by Webster. Local natives, successfully planted here, all survive fires and reshoot, have beautiful flowers and attract birds.
11. *Brachychiton populneus* is a local native tree scattered along roadsides and through dry areas. It has been recorded as a weed elsewhere in Australia. Leave and encourage.
12. Climbers – listed locals are *Cissus antarctica*, *Hardenbergia violacea*, *Smilax glycyphylla* and *Kennedia prostrata* and *K. rubicunda*.
13. *Lomandra longifolia*, Mat Rush, – is listed by Webster. A relief to all of us who have planted hundreds of them.
14. *Hakea laurina*, *salicifolia*, and *suaveolens* all have broad tough leaves and are all listed by “Seeds to Leaves” with *H. salicifolia* native to the Sydney area.

In conclusion

I am not suggesting that many other plants should not be planted on our blocks, providing habitat and beauty but especially downslope and/or on the south west and north west aspects, only plants that are not easily inflammable should be planted near the house and other vulnerable assets.

Additional information on plants' behaviour, both good and bad, is very welcome.

Jane Mowatt

Propagation workshop held on 16 October...



Once again Evelyn Bloom shared her knowledge and plants with a group who all went away with a bunch of cuttings in pots and a lucky couple with a polystyrene cuttings box. Starting the day with pancakes and jam, a good time was had by all.

Thanks to Shelagh Brigg who brought additional plant material for cuttings, especially *Darwinia* and the red *Calothamnus*. Evelyn donated *Melaleuca ericifolia*, *Baeckea*, *Micromyrtus ciliata*, a yellow *Calothamnus*, *Westringia*, *Prostanthera*, *Grevillea* and *Leptospermum* cuttings. Shelagh then showed us how to divide *Dendrobium kingianum* a native epiphytic orchid, allowing interested people to take home a piece. Finally

she smoked some Flannel Flower seeds that we also took home with us.

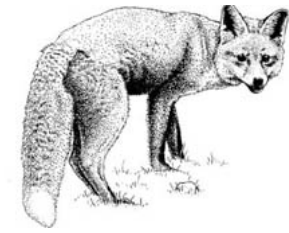
Next time we will need to start the quest for polystyrene boxes a little earlier so everybody will be able to make a cuttings box.

Thanks again to Evelyn for the hospitality and plants.

Jane Mowatt



NPWS Wildlife Pest Management Strategy



On September 19th, Catherine Craig and Jane Mowatt attended the National Parks and Wildlife Pest Management Strategy Consultation Forum in Cessnock.

Perhaps 30 members of the public attended- Jane and Catherine being the only Landcare Representatives with other people representing the Cessnock Council, Hunting groups, the Defence Dept, Rural Land Protection Board, Pest Eradication groups, the St Albans Common Trust and so on.

The aim was to discover what people saw as the most important issues that needed addressing with regards to pests and weeds in National Parks and to gather suggested strategies for addressing them.

The participants were divided into 3 groups to workshop the questions and hopefully the NPWS got some useful ideas out of it.

The participants were definitely coming from different backgrounds but common concerns were identified- such as problems with wild dogs, the need for co-operation between NPWS and their neighbours and other groups such as Councils, RLPB, the necessity to identify key areas to protect and key species to attack, the importance of collating results, informing the public etc.

A new Pest Management Strategy will be put together by NPWS that will be an operational plan for the 4 years starting from 2012. Good Luck to them- it seems an enormous challenge

Jane connected with Ben Seraphin from the Rural Lands Protection Board and discussed the idea of a new fox baiting programme in our area here for next winter. He seemed to think there shouldn't be a problem but was planning to visit Jane and discuss the matter further.

Catherine Craig

Wollombi Valley Country Fair – Sat 5 & Sun 6 November

Many members will recall the Country Fair held in the village over the Saturday and Sunday. Now in its 3rd year, the fair it is getting bigger and better each year.



Last year Landcare had a stand in Negro Street on both days at which a number of our members volunteered to help staff the stall. We will emailing members shortly asking their availability to help out for a few hours. We also welcomed a number of new members who joined during the two days.

This year the theme of the Fair will again be '*Tasting the History*', reflecting the wonderful diversity of the Wollombi Valley.

The Fair is over 2 days and centres around

- Woodchopping at the Wollombi Tavern on Saturday 5th
- Museum Open Day, and antique machinery displays on Sunday 6th
- Historical re-enactments by NSW Corps of Marines on Sunday 6th
- Produce, craft and general stalls in Negro Street on both days
- Music and entertainment throughout the Village and Stall areas on both days
- Cakes and Preserves competition in Wollombi Cultural Centre
- Lantern Parade throughout Wollombi Village at dusk on Saturday night.

The Town Crier will also walk throughout the Village and Fair areas, generating interest and drawing people to the various activities.

We hope as many of our members and their friends can visit the fair and the activities that are planned over the two days. If you are around please call in at our stand and have a chat.

National Day of Action on Coal Seam Gas

Sunday October 16th 2011 has been chosen as the National Day of Action on coal seam gas.

This marks the beginning of National Water Week so it's a very appropriate time for actions that highlight the importance of respect for, and careful management of our irreplaceable water resources.



I urged you to get involved and help to stop the destruction of our land and water – go to <http://lockthegate.org.au/> to learn how you can assist.

Graham Taylor

From: Sean Gough <sgough@wage.org.au>
Subject: [WAGE] AGL definitely coming into the Wollombi Valley
Date: 29 September 2011 12:28:01 PM AEST
To: WAGE Announce List <announce@wage.org.au>
Reply-To: sgough@wage.org.au

I have received information that AGL are definitely planning to develop their gas field coming south from Broke at least as far as Paynes Crossing and they intend mining under the Pokolbin State Forest.

They confirm they are already trying to negotiate with a number of landholders.

We must demonstrate total unity in the face of this desecration.

Lock The Gate signs are available from Laguna Wine Bar and Wollombi General Store.

Please let WAGE know of any hard information that comes to hand.

Best wishes,

Sean Gough
Chair
Wollombi Valley Against Gas Extraction (WAGE)

sgough@wage.org.au

05-Oct-2011 - Andrew Duffy (Australian Mining)

The vineyard of prominent merchant banker and coal seam gas objector, the late David Clarke, is set to be sold to AGL, the company whose exploration he opposed.

Clarke provided financial support to the Hunter Valley Protection Alliance's campaign against AGL, and also supported the Hunter Wine Industry Association's move to have vineyards removed from AGL's exploration areas.

The Newcastle Herald reported today that the executors of Clarke's estate had signed the contracts to hand over the Poole's Rock vineyard (between Wollombi and Broke on the Broke Road).

For the full story go to:

<http://www.miningaustralia.com.au/news/agl-grabs-hunter-vineyard>

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