

Every region of Australia does have its own specifically adapted assortment of native plants with potential for large-scale ground cover projects. Landscape architects and designers feel a great need for hardy, handsome and low maintenance natives. The local environment in every locality of our great country could be enhanced more economically and more sensibly managed if we would offer for such large projects enough good native ground cover plants.

The plant propagator has an important part to play in this field. We could, in our way, contribute in the search for, discovery of, selection of, and finally the breeding of new cultivars of native species of ground cover plants.

We could be the first supporters and possibly conveners of Regional and National Centres for native plant research, from which breeding and distribution of clonal material to plant propagators could occur. We badly need such centres; centres supported by adequate funds and with continuity of set programmes that could develop major discoveries and production of good material. It is our task to be the first advocates of such a concept. All those natives:- *Hibertia*, *Pratia*, *Podocarpus*, *Myoporum*, prostrate *Grevillea*, *Petersoonia*, *Notelia*, geranium, *Parahebe*, *Scaveola* and many other, known and unknown native plants and grasses suitable for the role of ground cover plants are important enough to go Regional or National for their improvement.

PRACTICAL HORTICULTURAL TRAINING

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I have spent many years in different branches of horticulture. Never have I seen an area that needs more attention than practical training. The trade is crying out for help in training — training for young and old; for nurserymen; and even the teaching staff themselves. Many think that the institutes are not geared to cope so they will not send their young to train there. The whole structure of training must be overhauled. There are many dedicated people working hard at it now but nowhere near enough. Training is the responsibility of all in the trade — educators, nurserymen, parks departments, botanic gardens, apprenticeship boards, students, apprentices, and nursery staff. We must all work together to get the results.

EDUCATION

Everyone in horticulture should have a sound general standard of education, including an understanding of botany which is most important to the horticulturist of today. A greater understanding of the plant and its functions is required if we are to advance in the fields of tissue culture, controlled environment growing, etc. Knowledge of the requirements of the plants is essential if we are to come closer to our goal — “The production and growing of good healthy plants at a minimum cost”.

BOTANICAL GARDENS

These are supposedly educational centers for all interested in plants but where are those natural order beds so vital to the study of plant families? Many students work hard to get a training place in these gardens for the status alone. How well are they really trained? Most of them are being used as general labor under no supervision at all.

HORTICULTURAL INSTITUTES

There are very few of these and they are overloaded. Therefore they should be used more for weekend training. More of the teaching staff should visit other establishments to get a better understanding of what is required in the field. It is no good sitting back and waiting until someone else asks for help. The trade is by-passing many of these establishments because they are too slow to respond to their needs; many go outside this country to get answers that should be there.

How many of the teaching staff of training colleges do you find at lectures held outside the normal working hours? Very few I can assure you. Many seem to think that when they became teaching staff their own training ended. Students complain of staff not being up to date with nursery practice. Horticulture is changing so fast that you can't expect every teacher to be an expert in all branches, but what is expected of them is that they go into class with up-to-date information on the subject of the day. They should spend a few hours on preparation of their lecture and not rely on last year's paper. A call to one of the experimental stations will give them up-to-date notes on particular procedures.

All teaching staff should keep up-to-date with all progress reports on experimental horticulture, both here and overseas.

PARKS DEPARTMENTS

I was surprised to find so few trained people in horticulture but what can you expect when many of their superintendents have to take orders from non-horticultural trained shire

engineers, or the local conservationist. The parks do not seem to have any power at all and lack the driving force that they should have.

I have served in parks departments overseas and there is no way those departments would tolerate electricity authorities or anyone else mutilating their trees. There is a difference, of course — street trees and nature strips are planned by parks departments, planted and maintained by them. Trees are inspected regularly by a tree specialist, not just by a truck driver who happens to pass by.

Overseas parks departments do much of the training of the young. Basic training is commonly over four years with one year spent in glasshouse production, one year in turf management, one in ornamentals and one in nursery practice. This may be supplemented by a day release programme and one evening class. The day release courses are held at horticultural colleges or stations. A lot of nursery money goes into these departments to help better the training in horticulture. Evening classes are usually run at local schools by staff of horticultural establishments. All are qualified teachers with many years of practical experience as well. At each of these classes they spend at least 20 minutes on identification, not only of plants but fertilizers, dusting powders, and materials used in the trade, diseased plant tissue, physiological disorders, etc. After four years of this sort of programme a well-trained student emerges ready to start training in specialized fields or to enter tertiary education for higher training in plant pathology, horticultural engineering, etc.

NURSERYMEN

What does he offer the young in training? Many nurserymen can not be bothered with an apprentice because they look at it in a selfish way. Why should he train them for someone else — what rubbish! They seem to forget that their manager or foreman was trained by some other nursery. Many who take apprentices have inadequate training themselves to be able to train them in a proper manner, and often have not even bothered to look at the training syllabus. There are, of course, many well-trained and very good nurserymen and I think that it is to these that we should look for help in practical training. Many of them are working hard for the trade now but perhaps they could take a practical class within their own establishment, say one Saturday per year. It would help to widen the range of training for the young and give them more interests and a wider range of practical experience than they could ever obtain from the institutes.

APPRENTICESHIP BOARDS

I think that they should take a good look at all aspects of the trade — find out just what is required to train a good horticulturist because there are so many different branches to study. A syllabus must be worked out for training so the apprentice could manage any position, be it parks, landscape or nursery. The apprenticeship board does not seem to know that one of the hardest jobs, and one that takes great skill, is watering. They seem to think that any old laborer could do it. As every nurseryman would tell you the man who can water properly is worth his weight in gold.

THE APPRENTICE OR STUDENT

He must ask himself if he really wants to be in horticulture, because you have to be dedicated to stay on top. Many students do not have their hearts in it. We find out when they go home without letting you know that they have not watered the last batch of plants potted, or walked past plants knocked over by the wind without picking them up. He must enjoy working with plants or it will be a waste of everybody's time. He must ask questions about his work and show interest. In so doing he will learn a lot faster and become more efficient in his trade. A scholarship to train for a year overseas should be made available to the apprentice showing most promise and dedication to the trade. This would give them more incentive to study harder and, let's face it, without hard work they are simply not going to make the grade. He must be prepared to give up more of his own time for evening study, attending as many lectures as possible on any subject relating to the trade.

We must also make reward to the craftsmen. They are the ones responsible for the output in our nurseries with their particular skill of grafting, budding, etc. They should be paid more for the years of experience that they so willingly pass on to the young person in training.

If we are to become better horticulturists we must strive to meet the need for better training than we have today. As I have said before, it is the duty of all to work together; there is no room for couldn't-care-less attitude within the trade. If we all pull together we may lessen those cries for help that are always with us at present.