MEPA NEWS

Volume 2, Number 10 **May 2012**

President's note

Welcome to the May issue of the MEPA News. As I write, the sun streams down and the rains appear to be finally easing after another wet summer. The kingfishers have headed north again to their winter playgrounds, late-breeding finches busily feed up the last of the summer fledglings, and the forest slows down with the cooler weather. There's no slowing down at the MEPA News desk, however. In this issue we welcome two of several interesting articles received from Sue Phillips. Happy reading.

Dominic Hyde

Flowering now – Native Piccabeen Palm Spectacle

(*Archontophoenix cunninghamiana*)

Have you ever witnessed the spectacle of the "birth" of the piccabeen palm flowers?

You hear the telltale crash of a palm leaf being shed and falling through the undergrowth. You rush to the window and see the pale yellow-green sheath (spathe) split, then, bulging up, comes the great ball of compressed flowers. It expands at an even speed as the long tangled strands bearing the purple flowers unfold. After perhaps 10-15 minutes the whole inflorescence hangs like some African hair-do to sit above the previous "birthing" event which is now a glorious chandelier of red fruit.

Sue Phillips

Guest column, by Joe Wilde of Greening Australia, The Gap

Deep Stem Planting

The first time I came across deep stem planting was in 2009 while working on a large scale re-vegetation and carbon off-set project. It was like learning another language having been brought up in the school of 'don't plant too deeply or the plant will get collar rot!'

So what is deep stem planting (also called long-stem planting)? It is the name given to the practice of planting seedlings well past their root mass and in some cases right to the leaf tip. Usually 100-400mm above the top of the root mass deep is the norm.

What are the advantages of deep stem planting? It insulates and protects the root mass from drying out and competing weed roots. It stabilises the seedling on windy and exposed sites. As roots begin to form along the stem underground it allows for a larger area of the developing seedling to draw nutrients. It is particularly useful on sites where follow-up watering can be difficult to achieve.

The species done successfully to date have been:

Eucalypt
Allocasuarina
Casuarina
Angophora
Melaleuca (Callistemon)
Acacia
Leptospermum
Ficus
Streblus
Acmena
Syzygium

Once you overcome conventional wisdom, deep stem planting becomes a very useful tool to have in your planting belt. Give it a go and see for yourself.

Joe Wilde

Two local Natives

One of our prettiest small trees growing on the edge of the rainforest is the Bleeding Heart (*Homalanthus nutans*). It has quite a Japanese look with its open, spreading canopy and heart-shaped, blue-green leaves. The occasional red leaves are an added

attraction, each one an exquisite blending of russet colours like an abstract painting. But we are not the only ones to appreciate this plant. Its fruits are one of the Brown Cuckoo-Dove's (Brown Pigeon) favourite foods. We are lucky enough to have a couple of plants just outside the windows so can appreciate these birds at close range along with the numerous Lewin's Honeyeaters that also love these fruits.

Another bird attracting shrub which is just coming into fruit now is the Banana Bush (*Tabernaemontana pandacaqui*). The Lewin's Honeyeaters relish the red seed when the banana-shaped fruit splits open. This shrub is usually wider than it is high and is another edge plant. Pademelons are very keen on the leaves which is a surprise as the plant has milky sap and is poisonous to humans.

Both of these shrubs are well suited to the home garden, being a more manageable size than the rainforest giants.

Recently my brother, who is helping to restore bushland in Corinda, made a small study of what insects visit the native Wandering Jew (*Commelina diffusa*). For 15 minutes on each of 4 days at his patch he watched the goings-on and photographed the visitors to the royal blue flowers. He saw:

- Blue-banded Bee, sipping nectar
- Native Stingless Bee, also after nectar
- Gold-tipped Leafcutter Bee, (nectar)
- Neon Cuckoo Bee (probably waiting to track down a Blue-banded Bee in order to lay its eggs in its brood chamber where they will hatch and the larvae will gobble up the food intended for the baby Blue-banded Bees)
- Black-banded Hoverfly (lays its eggs on plants and the hatched larvae feed on aphids)
- Several other hoverflies
- Beetles eating the flower petals
- Dragonfly waiting to feed - on one of the above?

For more information on *Commelina diffusa* see the online newsletter at:
http://dl.dropbox.com/u/76236455/FBR201204.pdf

Isn't the microworld packed with drama! It makes you wonder how the replacement of this plant by the exotic, rampant Wandering Jew (*Tradescantia fluminensis*) has affected the insect world.

Sue Phillips

Flowering now – Weed

Easter Cassia

(Senna pendula var. glabrata)

Although we may have thought we didn't have any Easter Cassia on our properties, once again those distinctive yellow flowers are appearing out of the tops of other shrubs. Obviously, the last two summers have contributed to the increase and it is time to remove the plants yet again. Please remove flowers before the seed pods form and then eradicate the whole plant. This can be achieved by hand pulling or digging out of the ground, ensuring that all roots are removed.

Gardening in the Mountains

Myrtle Rust Update

Myrtle Rust is still spreading throughout Queensland with most sightings being in the South East and Central regions but also now in Cairns.

Some plants in the Myrtaceae family are succumbing to the disease more than others and on the mountain this is evident in two locals - *Rhodamnia spp*. and unfortunately, *Gossia* (*Austromyrtus*) *inophloia* which was a very useful garden plant and already endangered in our area.

The spread cannot be contained but Biosecurity is still monitoring the progress of the disease as, even though some plants seem to be able to 'grow through' the problem, in the long term, continued attack may eventually weaken them.

Wendy Lees.

Do your block!

Free bush care service

Would you like some assistance managing bushland on your block? Advice on weeds or advice on planting local native plants in your garden?

MEPA has a free service offering advice and information (supported by MBRC)

Contact Maggie - 3289 8175 or
Dominic - 3289 0093 or
Email: askmepa@yahoo.com.au

Publisher: MEPA
P O Box 29
Mount Nebo, 4520, Australia

Editorial: Wendy Lees, Ruth Lowe
email: askmepa@yahoo.com.au
http://www.gloriousnebo.org.au/mepanews

Photocopying courtesy of Dale Shuttleworth, MP, State Member for Ferny Grove