

NGIA CLIPPINGS

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This month's Nursery Paper... Ornamental Plant Breeding in Australia

Many of the plants on the market are new, improved varieties. But does the industry, let alone consumers recognise the time, effort, expertise and cost involved in developing these plants? We pay a premium for a superior vintage wine or to eat at a first class restaurant, but are we prepared to pay more for better quality plants? The industry and gardeners should support our plant breeders and celebrate the fact that Australians are now developing and exporting our own flora rather than letting other countries reap the benefits. Australia has a greater gene pool of flowering plants than any country in the world, but in the past we have been slow to recognise the value and commercial potential of our native plants. In this Nursery Paper, freelance horticultural writer Helen Moody discusses and applauds ornamental plant breeding in Australia.

CNP Student Scholarship winners



Last year, the first ever CNP Student Scholarships were awarded. To be eligible for a Scholarship recipients had to be in their final year of studying for a qualification in horticulture (Certificate III or above) at the time of applying.

There were two Scholarships, one for a student in a metropolitan area, and one for a student in a rural area, and the prize for each winner was expense-paid participation in the Urban GreenScapes Symposium 2009 and Nursery & Garden Industry Conference, which took place in Canberra last month.

Diana Fullalove was the Metropolitan Scholarship winner (sponsored by Ramm Botanicals). She recently finished her Wholesale Nursery Certificate III and works at Yarra Valley Nursery on the outskirts of Melbourne.

Diana says when she found out she had won the Scholarship, she got extremely excited. "It was great to be acknowledged for the job that I do."

The green-thumb found her time at the Symposium informative and says she enjoyed meeting new people within the

industry. She was particularly interested in the presentations by international speakers Adam Schwerner and Greg McPherson. "Their presentations brought a lot of new things to the table for the Australian industry."

The events, which brought many nursery and garden industry members together, showed Diana that everyone in the industry has the same aims, and want to work together to achieve the same things.

Amy Sutton, who won the Regional CNP Student Scholarship (sponsored by Australian Horticulture) says she could not believe it when she found out she had won. "I was over the moon, just stoked."

Amy, who has recently finished Certificate III in Horticulture, says she was blown away by what people had to say at the Symposium and Conference. "It was a real eye-opener."

Of particular interest to her were the presentations by Phil Hewett from Newcastle City Council, as currently working for Dubbo City Council, Amy related a lot to what he had to say.

She also enjoyed the presentation by Greg McPherson, in which he discussed the dollar value of trees and green-life in relation to their environmental benefits. "This is something the Australian industry could really push."

Through the events, Amy's perspective was changed on rooftop gardens. "I really see the purpose of rooftop gardens after Adam Schwerner's talk" she says.

Nursery & Garden Industry Australia congratulates both Diana and Amy for their receipt of the CNP Student Scholarship.



Amy Sutton and Diana Fullalove, winners of the CNP Student Scholarship.

Debrief with Dr Greg McPherson

Dr Greg McPherson, project leader for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Centre for Urban Forest Research spoke at the Symposium and Conference about putting a dollar value on trees and green-life in terms of the environmental benefits they provide. We ask him about his recent experience in Australia.

"It is diverse and beautiful," Dr McPherson says of the Australian landscape. "From eucalyptus forests studded with tree ferns to rolling pasture land, coral reefs and sparkling cities, I was taken by all that I saw."

He sees the Australian nursery and garden industry as vital and healthy. "Although water restrictions have adversely impacted on the health of some landscapes, the industry seems to be using this crisis to increase its profile and make itself more relevant to its customers."

However, Dr McPherson says given the magnitude of the industry it appears to him

that educational opportunities are lacking, particularly at university level. "I sensed widespread interest in gardening and urban greening, but under investment in horticultural research and development."

The American believes urban forests in Canberra and Melbourne are poised for transformation. "Trees that have nurtured generations of residents are ending their life cycle. Frequently, drought stress is hastening their demise. Managing this transition is a challenge that has economic, social and ecological dimensions."

While this may seem to be a crisis, he says it can also be a touchstone for increasing public awareness in green infrastructure. "Efficient harvesting of rainfall, improving soil resources, optimising shade effects, maximising carbon sequestration, and increasing age and species diversity will be hallmarks of the future of urban forest. Ultimately, increased investment in urban greening will make Australian cities healthier, safer, and better places to live."

The Symposium was a unique experience for the 'tree-hugger', and he says it opened his eyes to the potential for influencing policy through a well-planned symposium and media events. "It looks like the Australian nursery and garden industry is positioned to realise important gains from this effort. It is definitely something we in the U.S can learn from."



Dr Greg McPherson speaks at the Urban GreenScapes Symposium 2009.

Simple tips to help you be greener

Buy unbleached paper

Use unbleached paper at your place of work. Many paper products are bleached with chlorine, even some that are made from recycled fibres. The bleaching process can create harmful dioxins which accumulate over time in the air, water and soil.

Fire up the barbie

Cooking on a barbecue is healthier because no cooking oil is needed, but what's more, a barbecue uses less energy than a kitchen oven does. Use grills that burn propane or natural gas to reduce air-pollutants.

Replace your shower head

If you have an old-style shower head, replace it with a modern, low-flow shower head with a shutoff valve. You'll reap savings both in water and power. Since water heaters account for about 25% of home energy use, you could end up saving hundreds of dollars each year.

Use an electrical lawn mower

Petrol-fuelled lawn mowers release as many hydrocarbons into the atmosphere in half an hour as a car does in an hour and a half.

Use an electric lawn mower, they are kinder on the environment and cheaper to run.

Get an LCD computer screen

An LCD flat-panel screen uses about a third of the electricity of a tube-based model, which will help the environment and reduce your power bill.

Unplug appliances with LED lights

Appliances that glow after you turn them off have what is called a Light Emitting Diode (LED). When these appliances are glowing, although they are switched off, they are still continuing to draw power. Televisions and mobile phone chargers generally sport LED lights. Instead of plugging these appliances into wall sockets, plug them into power strips, and flip the strip switch when you leave the room.

Do full washing loads

If you ever just wash a few dishes or clothes at once rather than waiting for a full load to accumulate, you're wasting power, water and money. Most of the energy used by washing machines and dishwashers goes towards heating the water; about 90% in the washing machine and 80% in the

dishwasher. Only putting on full loads, choosing short cycle options and using cold or warm rather than hot water creates savings.

Print on both sides

Set your printer so it prints on both sides of the paper. Also, rather than throw out the blank sheets of paper that sometimes come out at the end of printed emails and documents, put them back in the printer for reuse.

Get an annual tune-up for your car

Your car could have faults and could be emitting excess air pollutants without you even knowing it. For example, a loose or poorly sealed petrol cap will vent gasoline vapour, polluting the air and wasting petrol and money. Make a set time each year to get a full engine tune-up, it's worth it.

Use compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs)

Compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) cost a bit more than regular bulbs, but you'll end up lowering your electricity bill and pay less in the long-term, as they last up to 10 times longer than traditional light bulbs.

New guidelines for achieving the Mark

Smart Approved WaterMark, Australia's labelling program for products and services that help save water outdoors, has just released a new set of guidelines to assist applicants to the scheme.

Independent verification of water-saving claims is the key item used by scheme's Technical Expert Panel to assess applications. The latest guidelines, for amendments that increase soil water retention, include a suggested testing regime that demonstrates the type of evidence the Panel would like to see accompanying an application.

The new soil amendment guidelines complement the scheme's existing application guidelines for mulch products. Both are available to download on the scheme's industry website at www.smartwatermark.info.

"Increasingly, consumers are looking for third-party endorsement of claims such

as water saving. That's where the Smart WaterMark has an important role to play. The rigorous approach to assessing applications taken by the scheme's Expert Panel is what gives the scheme its credibility," says Julian Gray, CEO of Smart WaterMark.

A not-for-profit organisation, Smart WaterMark is run by four industry associations including the Nursery and Garden Industry Australia with funding from the Australian Government's Water Smart Australia programme through the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts.

If you have questions or comments about the new guidelines, or would like more information on applying to the scheme, contact the Smart WaterMark office by phoning (02) 9290 3322 or via email info@smartwatermark.info.

New web links



2009
Nursery &
Garden
Industry
Awards

Nursery & Garden Industry Australia congratulates the winners and finalists of the 2009 Nursery & Garden Industry Awards. To view photos and profiles of

the winners go to <http://www.ngia.com.au/awards/overview.asp>



To view speaker presentations and videos from the Urban GreenScapes Symposium 2009 go to <http://www.ngiaevents.com.au/sympo2009/speakerpresentations.php> or click through via the NGIA website.

President's Comment

At the recent Industry Advisory Committee (IAC) meeting in Brisbane, the members were asked what issues they thought would impact the industry most for the remainder of 2009. Several issues were discussed:

1. Financial Stability of the industry

There will be casualties from this economic downturn; bad debts and slow payments of debts can cause huge stress and problems. Allocate time to regularly service your creditors, debtors and cashflow, it is critical.

All NGI State Associations will be running business skills and training seminars, so contact them to get involved.

2. Costing of Products

The falling Australian dollar means that anything imported will cost more now. This new economic environment means you need to keep on top of costs and constantly upgrade your final product costings. While it may not be possible to pass on cost increases due to trade pressures, you need to know how to offset increases with cut-backs in other areas to protect your bottom-line.

3. Industrial Relation Laws

Your industry has fought hard to put in place a Nursery Industry Award for both growers and retailers. One aspect of the Award is the requirement to pay the 9% superannuation loading on total package rather than on the base 38 hour week

only. You owe it to yourself to get across these changes as quickly as possible so you can make the necessary alterations to offset these costs. As an industry we have been paying at the lower end of the wage scale so when you are revisiting this area; mechanisation, computerisation, sub-contracting and rearranging of layouts are vital to consider. Review the new wage rates that will be effective from January 2010.

4. Infrastructure

Inadequate roads as the result of poor planning by State Governments dramatically increase the costs of moving stock around. In the case of Darwin, in the wet season there is only one road south that is passable with no way to move stock to the east or west.

5. Water Availability

This is a critical issue in Victoria and South Australia where the problems with drought have been ongoing. Whilst governments cannot be blamed, it is easier to take the responsible sustainability line rather than address the cost of ongoing infrastructure provisions for increased water resources.

6. Cost Effective Promotional Opportunities

There are a series of workshops conducted around the State Associations on presentation and marketing with the recently reconstructed Marketing

Committee chaired by Bryan Hillier, due to meet for a second time to push things along.

Whilst these issues were covered in one hour of a two day meeting, the focus was on strategically investing the levy dollars to achieve a stronger industry by growing more plant sales which, at the end of the day, is why the levy is collected. Tough decisions were taken to ensure best value for money by an efficient delivery structure.

I would like to end this column by saying the economic downturn has seen most of our industry treated well, as people are restricting expenditure and thereby spending more time at home. This encourages their focus on the home, including the garden so expenditure on green-life has been up, with health matters driving vegetable growing to a new level, so make the most of this seemingly prosperous period.



Geoff Richards
NGIA President

Upcoming events

April 14
NGINA Dubbo Trade Day
Dubbo, NSW
Ph: Robert Lee
02 6548 2472
Email: merriwa.nursery@hunterlink.net.au

April 16
NGIQ Brisbane Trade Day
Brisbane, Qld
Ph: Sarah Manser
07 3277 7900
Email: info@ngiq.asn.au

April 17 - 19
ABC Gardening Australia Expo
Brisbane, Qld
Ph: Expertise Events
02 9452 7575
www.abcgardeningexpo.com.au

April 21
NGINA – How to build customer relations & grow sales
Sydney, NSW
Ph: Mon Lulan
02 9679 1472
Email: info@ngina.com.au

April 28
NGIQ Toowoomba Trade Day
Toowoomba, Qld
Ph: Sarah Manser
07 3277 7900
Email: info@ngiq.asn.au

April 28
NGINA Wagga Wagga Trade Day
Wagga Wagga, NSW
Ph: Geoff Rapley
02 6922 5746
Email: info@ngina.com.au

May 2 - 4
Garden Fest
Toowoomba, NSW
Ph: Sarah Manser
07 3277 7900
Email: info@ngiq.asn.au

May 5
NGIV Trade Day
Melbourne, VIC
Ph: NGIV
03 9576 0599
Email: ngiv@ngiv.com.au

From the CEO's desk... Home gardening gets the Presidential nod

The recent news that the Obama's have dug up 1100 square feet of White House lawn to install a vege garden for the children has certainly put gardening onto the front page of major newspapers in the USA.

The health and well-being benefits of growing and harvesting food at home are 'unmeasurable aspects' of our industry which we all understand but need to promote widely.

As an industry, we have utilised the public relations vehicle very well and enjoy great support from the numerous television, radio and print mediums that are aligned with gardening and green-life. How else do we leverage the media's promotional impact? Do we place advertising, or do we take the media for granted and complain when exposure drops off?

Our recent Market Monitor shows plant sales are doing very well, reinforcing the

adage that in tough times the nursery industry stays strong. In this prosperous time for the industry, we need to think about investing with the media that supports us. Just as NGIA changed how we approach sponsors to support our programs this year, the industry should not just expect the media to be there, but respect their commitment and support them with our business.

I hope that Mr Rudd gets a tour of the Obama's new garden and comes home inspired to do something bigger and better. That would be a great stimulus package for all of industry.

"Unemployment is capitalism's way of getting you to plant a garden."
~Orson Scott Card

NGIA CEO
Robert Prince

AgriFood Skills Australia's 2009 Environmental Scan results

According to the recently released Environmental Scan by AgriFood Skills Australia, 'national consultations and validation have brought into sharp relief the three defining skills and workforce development issues which must be addressed to realise the industry's potential, and further strengthen its economic and social contribution to Australia:

- Attraction and retention of skilled and semi-skilled workers
- Adoption of higher skill levels across the workforce
- Adoption and diffusion of new research, practice and technology'

The Scan describes in simple terms the moment we are in and the factors shaping the AgriFood industry, of which Amenity Horticulture is one sector, which will have a direct impact on the skills and capabilities of our workforce over the next 12 months.

Further, the Scan states: 'To successfully resolve these issues requires a genuine and

active commitment on behalf of industry to adopt improved workforce development practices, matched with an assurance from the vocational education and training system to reform outdated policy architecture conceived under a previous economic era'.

Amenity Horticulture, according to the Scan, 'has been one of Australia's fastest growing industries due to its close ties with urban development. It accounts for around 30 per cent of all agriculture workers. Climatic change, new extremes in seasonal variability and management of scarce water resources are witnessing the job roles within these sectors relying more and more on higher level technical skills and knowledge'.

For a copy of the full Environmental Scan go to AgriFood Skills Australia website www.agrifoodskills.net.au or the training page of the NGIA website www.ngia.com.au/training/news.asp.



April edition of NGIA Clippings compiled and edited by Sarah McMahon, NGIA PR & Communications Coordinator.



This symbol tells you that the project, activity or event you're reading about is funded by your Nursery Industry Levy dollar.