

THE FERN
SOCIETY OF
VICTORIA

NEWSLETTER

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

Dear Member,

Annual General Meeting:

The Society's fourth Annual Meeting produced few changes to the Administrative Personnel. All personnel were elected unopposed which, in view of the steady progress and growth achieved during the past year is a just reward for work well done. Two new members were elected to the Executive Committee to replace Audrey O'Connell and Mark Forster. We welcome Bernadette Blackstock and Bernadette Coleman to the Executive and express the hope that they will find satisfaction and enjoyment in their involvement with Society Management.

The election of Office Bearers resulted as follows:

Vice Presidents: Albert Jenkins &
 Bill Taylor
 Treasurer: Jean Trudgeon
 Secretary: Keith Stubbs

Committee Members:

Bernadette Blackstock
 Kath Brown
 Bernadette Coleman
 Bernard Coleman
 Bernice Hale
 Margaret Radley
 Joan Taylor
 Robert Ward

Show Sub-Committee representative on the Committee is Robert Lee and Immediate Past President is Chris Goudey.

1982-83 has been a good year, a year of steady growth and outstanding achievement. It will not be very easy to make 1983-84 as good but with the blend of youth and experience in the new Administrative Personnel, a repeat is highly likely.

Program of Speakers:

At the conclusion of the business of the Annual General Meeting the procedure reverted to the order for a normal General Meeting. In this we were entertained by six speakers, all of whom had prepared well and succeeded in imparting varied and interesting information to us.

1. Bill Taylor: spoke briefly on "Mistakes". One which comes to mind was the mistake of potting up young sporelings out of a humid enclosure and placing them straight out into a de-humidified admosphere. Bill said that he had "lost the lot".

2. Neil Baillie: described the procedures involved in importing plants from overseas. This was completely new to most of us and I was intrigued by Neil's disclosure that ferns are imported completely free of soil and that the Quarantine authorities actually report the ferns and care for them until they are cleared.

Continued on next page



Next Meeting: Guest Speaker at our September Meeting will be Mr. Greg Bunting, whose subject is titled, "Conservation of Ferns in the Domestic Environment". Greg is the proprietor of the North Balwyn Fernery in Doncaster Road and is well known for his love of ferns and his willingness to impart advice to fellow fern lover.

Date: 8th September, 1983
 Venue: Burnley Horticultural College
 Hall, Swan Street, Burnley
 Commence: 8.00 p.m.

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3. Bernard Coleman: explained how he had set up the equipment, including regulators and outlets to provide heat for his glass house. Bernard's glasshouse is 16' x 12' and the heat source is Portable Gas. He is very happy with the health and vigour of his plants and stated that the cost is much less than electric power and that handling of the gas bottles is done completely by the suppliers.

4. Albert Jenkins: showed us how to make an attractive and strong hanging basket from one inch square weld mesh. Albert appeared to use only three tools in his demonstration; wire cutters, pliers and a crimping tool. He said that the baskets take only twelve to fifteen minutes to make and that they can be made rust proof by coating with preservative.

I went home firmly resolved to try to make one of those lovely baskets as soon as possible.

5. Harold Olney: used chalk and a blackboard to illustrate how he transfers heat and humidity from a little furnace room in which he has installed a pot belly stove. The heat and humidity is drawn out by a system of ducting and the use of fans. Harold said that the temperature in his tropical glasshouse is controlled by the amount of fuel placed in the furnace. He grows a fine collection of tropical maidenhairs which are a glorious testimony to the effectiveness of the system he has evolved.

6. Keith Hutchinson: described the process by which horticultural charcoal is produced and warned members not to use ash gleaned from a garden incinerator ash could contain toxins produced from burning plastic bottles, paint tins and the like. These toxins would permeate through the ash and prove detrimental to ferns if included in a potting mix. Keith's advice: use only commercially produced charcoal in your mixes.

Spore Bank Manager: At the meeting I announced that we have a vacancy for a Spore Bank Manager and that volunteers are being sought. It would be a tragedy if a Society function as important as the Spore Bank were to lapse for want of an interested worker.

S.A.G.P. Wildflower Show:

The Society, through the efforts of Show Sub-Committee members, staged a magnificent exhibition of Australian native ferns at North Ringwood on the week end of 13th and 14th August.

Bill Taylor led the transformation from what appeared to me to be a load of untidy rubbish into a thing a great beauty. Ferns had been lent by several members, all of which were in immaculate condition. When these were assembled by the skilful hands of Bill Taylor, Alan Bone and Barry Stagoll the scene became in effect ".... paradise enow". Thank you to all who took a part, particularly those who set up, those who lent ferns, logs and mallee roots, and those who gave of their time as Fern Society Hosts and Hostesses.

With kindest regards,
 DOUG THOMAS

AUGUST MEETING SPEAKERS

Bill Taylor titled his talk "Mistakes I have made with ferns". Bill told how as space ran out in his eden glasshouse he bricked up the base to give him extra shelf space. He duly installed three windows and then put newly pricked off sporelings on the bottom shelves. They soon died and then Bill realized that lack of light due to a fence close to the windows was the reason. First important lesson learned. Bill and his wife, Joan, then pricked off another 350 very healthy ferns and this time put them out in their fernery. Lack of humidity soon killed them off and a second lesson was learned. Now all new fern sporelings are put into polystyrene boxes with a glass lid for humidity and protection. The glass can be removed for a short time each day to harden them off.

Bill almost gave up growing ferns when he found another batch died due to his potting mix being too rich and subsequently all roots were burnt off. Sporelings need a very bland mixture with just a little cow manure.

One other problem Bill encountered was after closing all the vents in his glasshouse due to very strong wind. Lack of air circulation caused fungal rot of all his maiden hair ferns. Ferns do need some fresh air circulation.

Finally Bill suggested calling upon other members to see their tried and proven methods and told how Harold Olney has taught him to think things out thoroughly first. Harold suggested that if he had a sick fern to put it into the smallest pot possible and then place it on bottom heat and many have been saved this way. Bill prefers to purchase a small fern and watch it grow rather than a large lush one almost every time. His motto is "Buy it small and watch it flourish".

Our next speaker, Neil Bailey, spoke on his experience importing ferns.

If you wish to import ferns you must first write to the Department of Agriculture at Box 4041 G.P.O. Melbourne, asking for an application for Permission to Import Plants, which is a QB6 form.

Then you must state the number and species of ferns, the supplier, and the manner in which they are produced and treatment prior to shipping. All must be free of soil and chemicals and notification of approximate time of arrival is important.

A Sanitary Certificate must accompany the ferns and then the Agricultural Department checks for bugs, etc. Finally they spray them and gas them for two hours, pot them and keep them in quarantine for approximately eight months. The average cost of importing the ferns was \$4.50 each. Neil said that unless they are strong plants with a good root system they don't survive this treatment too well so it is very important to have a reliable supplier. He wrote to a Club President in the U.S.A. who was willing to swap ferns and found this the most successful and cheapest way. He recalled unscrupulous dealers who take your money and have no intention of supplying the ferns.

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To send ferns overseas is a reversal of the import procedure. About 20 minutes per fern is needed to wash it completely, then pack it in Sphagnum moss, and wrap it in silver foil or plastic and carefully place in a box to avoid damage while in transit.

The cost of sending 23 plants air freight to America was approximately \$68.00. They took 3 days arriving in excellent condition.

To send ferns out of Australia an Export Permit is needed and can be obtained at the airport.

Bernard Coleman then told us how he uses portable gas to heat his glasshouse.

The main reason for choosing bottled gas for fuel was cost and convenience and an accurate record of cost. He wanted to site this glasshouse at the back of the yard, for ascetic appeal and to protect it from the cold winds. To heat it with natural gas he would have had to lay 100 yards of pipe under the patio and a solid brick wall and under a concrete drive. The thought of digging all that up was out of the question.

The glasshouse he has is 16 ft. x 8 ft. with 6 ft. high eaves and isn't insulated, hence he didn't consider electricity as a viable proposition. His system for portable gas consists of two 45 kilo gas cylinders with a regulator connected to a heater. The heater is thermostatically controlled, has five gas jets and a galvanised iron cowling surrounding it. It heats the air by convection and is capable of a 12,500 BTU output. The formula used to calculate the heating output you need, is to take the square footage of the glass area, multiply by the minimum temperature requirement over the outside temperature. For instance, if wanting to heat the glasshouse to 20 degrees and the outside temperature is 10 degrees, multiply the squarage by 10, multiply that again by 1.13 which is the heat loss through glass. He maintains a minimum temperature of 20 degrees in his glasshouse so a 12,500 BTU output is more than adequate. The regulator is just a simple device that regulates the amount of gas to the heater and incorporates a valve which automatically switches over from the empty cylinder to the full cylinder.

The installation of the unit took him about half an hour. It was a simple matter to connect the regulator to the gas cylinder and this was achieved by doing up two nuts on the end of the regulator. And the regulator was connected via a small gas pipe to the heater which again is a matter of doing up two nuts. The cost incurred for the gas heater was around \$150.00, the regulator around \$60.00. Gas cylinders are acquired over a five year period, and the rental cost on that is \$72.00. Running costs for the cylinders is \$26.09 per 45 kg cylinder. The life span depends on many factors - whether your house is insulated, what running temperature. His cylinders last from 1 to 2 months, costing approximately \$56.00 for a two month period if he drops the temperature down to 18 degrees. During a cold snap he increases the temperature to 25 degrees with the cylinders lasting approximately 28 days.

Bernard installed an exhaust fan upside down over the heater to spread the heat around. The heater is situated in the centre of the glasshouse with exhaust fans at either end to help circulate the air.

The gas breaks down to water laden carbon dioxide which is supposed to be very good for the plants, but he didn't notice any remarkable improvement at all.

Albert Jenkins then demonstrated his method of making a hanging basket which proved very popular with all in attendance.

Next Harold Olney spoke on heating his glass house with a pot bellied stove.

He said that it was seven years since he was first bitten with the fern bug and some six years since he decided to have a hot house, which he thoroughly recommended. The system he spoke of started off six years ago upon buying a Derby glasshouse, which he found quite good. It is 9'6" by 12' long and is of galvanised steel construction. Up until last year he used electricity to heat it because his home is electric and the more you use the cheaper the tariff becomes so he installed a small Goldair electric range which had 1200 watt and 2400 watt range. He installed the heater on a raised box; on top of the box he arranged a coolgardie effect over the edge and down the frame and this was very effective and efficient.

After a while the glass house became too small and he extended it a further 4 feet. But the heater could not cope with the extra 4 feet, unless he raised the temperature on the heater to 2400 watts which, with the new tariffs, would have proved too costly. He also had the problem of heating another 8' x 8' house. After looking at various methods of heating he chose a method of primary heat. He rejected the idea of a slow combustion stove because of the space factor and overheating of plants. After more thought he settled on a pot bellied stove.

Harold bought a galvanised shed 6 x 6 x 6 to house the stove away from the plants.

He also erected a 15 foot high chimney on the shed so that the smoke would not annoy the neighbours. His first mistake was that he simply connected it by a pipe to the hot house direct. He soon found that he could not regulate the heat, and that the plants near the opening were dying. He quickly shut that outlet down making a connection with ducting pipe from the stove house to the existing electric heater which had a vulcan fan. This sucked the hot air into the glasshouse and circulated it. He found this system very efficient and versatile. To keep the moisture content in the air, Harold hung damp towels and rags in the stove house. This kept the hothouse at approximately 24 degrees centigrade which is an ideal temperature for the tropical ferns. He also found that he could reduce his electricity bill by boiling water in the stove and only burns wood that is completely dry.

Finally, Keith Hutchinson told how Horticultural Charcoal is produced by burning 4 foot logs buried under ground and allowed to burn very slowly. This charcoal is very safe to use compared to the types people obtain from incinerators and barbeques. These can contain harmful toxins.

All those present obviously appreciated the information imparted by each of the speakers.

BEGINNER'S PAGE

Cheryl Cousland of Benalla writes that she is hoping to build a fernhouse in the near future and would like some help in planning the project. Cheryl states that Benalla has very hot summer days and severe frosts in winter, so adequate protection is imperative.

A shadehouse, a greenhouse and a hothouse all have different purposes and we will discuss these over the next three issues.

A SHADEHOUSE is mainly used to protect hardy ferns from extremes in temperature. It will not protect sub-tropical or tropical ferns from frost and cannot hold humidity in hot weather. It can be built of treated pine and covered with treated pine slats or shade cloth 70%. Also galvanised iron pipe can be used with shade cloth clipped on with Deutcher straps or pikeco clips.

The shadehouse should face east and have protection from cold south winds and hot north winds. It is important not to completely cover in the sides, as the wind will sometimes swirl around them and damage the ferns. By butting 6 x 1 treated pine spaced $\frac{1}{2}$ " apart or 2 thicknesses of 50% shade cloth, the wind will dissipate as it gently passes through.

The roof can be treated pine slats 3 x 1" spaced $\frac{3}{4}$ " apart or 70% shade cloth preferably the knitted type. Eldorado weather shade is excellent. Shelving should be A.R.C. galvanised fence panel 3" x 2" mesh. This product is light, strong and allows good air circulation.

The floor should be covered with fine pine bark (Debco brand) as this helps to slightly humidify the air if watered during very hot weather.

Cobblestones add character to the setting if placed at random between the ferns, and provide stable access.

As assistance to beginners, I will commence a glossary of terms often used by fern writers. Although technical, these terms save space and should be used whenever attempting descriptions of ferns. Keeping the number small, we may learn a few each month.

Bifid:	Cut deeply into 2 lobes
Capillary:	Hair-like
Capitate:	Shaped like a head
Caudate:	Having a tail like appearance
Circinate:	Coiled with Apex nearest the centre as in unopened fern fronds
Compound:	Composed of several different plants (as opposed to simple) e.g. A frond divided to the midrib and composed of several distinct parts termed leaflets
Coriaceous:	Of a leathery texture



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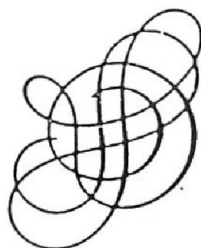
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Members are reminded that subscriptions are now due. Please send your renewal subscription as soon as possible, so that you will continue to receive the newsletter. (September issue is the cut-off point, so don't miss out!)

Subscriptions should be sent to our Treasurer,
P.O. Box 45, HEIDELBERG WEST, 3081

FERN SOCIETY OF VICTORIA - SUBSCRIPTION FEES - 1983-84

Single Membership	: \$ 8.50	Family Membership	: \$10.50
Single Pensioner	: \$ 5.50	Full-time Student	: \$ 5.50
Overseas Membership	: \$12.00	2 Married Pensioners	: \$ 7.50



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The Fern Society currently subscribes to various other Fern Clubs around the world. Their magazines or newsletters are available for loan from the library for 10 cents a copy per month. Here is a list of present holdings.

FERN WORLD - San Diego Fern Society
 LAIFS - Journal of the Los Angeles International Fern Society
 FERN GAZETTE - British Pteridological Society
 BAILEYA - Journal of Horticultural Taxonomy
 TASMANIAN FERN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER
 S.G.A.P. FERN STUDY GROUP - Newsletter
 GARDENING NEWS - Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society of Victoria

SOMETHING NEW

This new column is for your use, for those members trying to procure a fern that they would like but are unable to find, and those who may have some ferns they would like to sell or exchange.

Our first requests come from Bill Taylor.

BUY	SELL	EXCHANGE	PLANT	MEMBER	PHONE
✓			Adiantum Pedatum	Bill Taylor	277 4310 63 3725
✓			Adiantum Imbricatum	Bill Taylor	277 4310 63 3725
✓			Adiantum Cultratum	Bill Taylor	277 4310 63 3725
✓			Adiantum Phillipense	Bill Taylor	277 4310 63 3725

DROUGHT TOLERANCE OF CHEILANTHES

by Barry White

Helen Quirk and T.C. Chambers of the Botany School, University of Melbourne, reported in the 1981 Fern Gazette on some experiments on drought tolerance in the Cheilanthes ferns.

The Cheilanthes genus is represented in Australia by about 10 species. They are small ferns, very hardy but resent disturbance.

The fronds of some species may completely die down during the summer months and regenerate from the rhizome in the autumn e.g. *C. tenuifolia* (rock fern) and *C. sieberi* (mulga fern). These two species may still lose their fronds during summer despite adequate water. The loss of fronds may therefore be related more to temperature or length of day than to dryness. Other species such as *C. vellea* (woolly cloak fern) and *C. lasiophylla* (also known as woolly cloak fern) extend into drier areas but do not lose all their fronds and maintain a few in a very dehydrated but living state.

The Cheilanthes species have several features which aid their survival. Some of them have a dense layer of hair or scales on their fronds and the rhizome is covered by dense scales. The small fronds and the low surface area to volume ratio of the leaves of many species would help conserve moisture.

Spores from Cheilanthes species have good longevity but when exposed to moisture the spores germinate relatively rapidly and the prothallus reaches maturity quickly. Apogamy (whereby the prothallus produces a fernlet without fertilisation occurring) is a feature of a number of Cheilanthes species. This means that they do not require the presence of a droplet of water which is normally essential for sperm transport and therefore fertilisation.

The duo from the Botany School studied the drought tolerance of the prothallus which does not possess any obvious drought tolerant features. They grew the prothalli from several species and tested their drought tolerance by transferring the prothalli into containers with relative humidity at one of six levels between 5% and 80%. (In Central Australia the humidity may drop to 15%, in Melbourne the lowest humidity in summer is about 60%).

The prothalli were tested at four different stages of growth. Sudden drying (less than 5 hours) of the prothalli caused severe loss but if dried slowly (5 - 7 days) the prothalli survived at all humidity levels. Some losses occurred but they were irregular and not associated with any particular species or humidity level. However, there was a tendency for poorer survival at the 80% humidity. The researchers suggested that this may have been due to greater fungal and bacterial growth at the higher humidity.

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The prothalli were exposed to the controlled humidity for 10 days and then were rehydrated and tested for survival and ability to regenerate. The prothalli remained green during the drying but appeared shrivelled and severely damaged. At the lower humidity they became brittle to the touch. But on rehydration those which survived appeared indistinguishable from ones which had never been dried.

Prothalli from 3 other genera were subjected to the same conditions. There was nil survival with *Doodia media* (common rasp fern) and *Lastreopsis shepherdii* (shiny shield fern), and very poor survival with *Phlebodium aureum*.

One other interesting side issue with *Cheilanthes* is that one species *C. sieberi*, contains a high level of thiaminase a toxic principle which destroys Vitamin B1, and also a radiomimetic type poison similar to the one in bracken fern. This could be another protective mechanism as both sheep and insects have been shown to prefer to eat bracken ferns with a lower cyanide content rather than those with a high content.

RINGWOOD DISPLAY

The Fern Society was again represented at the Maroondah S.G.A.P. Group's Annual Native Plant Display on 13th and 14th August.

The display, arranged by members of the Society, was in the form of a banked creek with ferns tiered up each side of a small creek with associated plant varieties along each side, with tree fern logs, bush moss and mallee roots it really looked lifelike straight out of the bush, with hanging baskets overhead to form a canopy.

I must congratulate all those who came along on the Friday night to help in erecting the display and pass on all the compliments from the public (which were many). Thank you.

Special thanks to Gaye and Barry Staggoll, Allan Bone, Mr. President and his wife, Ella, Betty Allgood who travelled many miles to lend her ferns. Ted and Irene Bolster for lending their ferns, tree ferns, logs, mallee roots, etc. and as usual Rita and Harold Olney; last, but not least, my wife Joan and Bob Lee even under difficult circumstances.

Many thank to all.

BILL TAYLOR

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Mavis Bryant of Rosebud writes that although our President is just commencing the second year of his term in office he was not thanked at our Annual General Meeting for the excellent job he has done during this past year.

Doug has endeared himself to all members for his friendliness and helpfulness and we do wish him well during the coming year as our President.

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FERNY CREEK HORTICULTURAL SHOW

This year the show will be held on Saturday, September 10th, 2.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m. Lady Murray, wife of the Governor of Victoria, will open the show on Saturday 10th at 2.30 p.m.

Visitors will find many attractions inside the Society's hall and amongst the extensive gardens outside.

Light lunches and afternoon teas (well renowned) are available and ample free parking in the grounds make for a perfect day in the hills.

Remember the place:

HILTON ROAD EAST
FERNY CREEK 3786
Melway Map Ref. 75 E1

Admission: \$1.00
(Children under 12 years free)

FERN SOCIETY'S ROYAL SHOW DISPLAY

Free entry passes are available to any Society member who would help man our display during show week. Even a spell of 3 or 4 hours would greatly assist Bill Taylor, and you are not completely tied to the spot. Brief excursions to other displays makes for an interesting day. Free lunches also available to members willing to spend the day.

Please contact Bill Taylor on:

277 4310 (A.H.)
63 3725 (Bus.)

BUYERS' GUIDE TO FERN NURSERIES

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DIARY DATES

THURSDAY
SEPTEMBER 8TH:

Greg Bunting, speaking on
"CONSERVATION OF FERNS IN
THE DOMESTIC ENVIRONMENT"

NOTE: In the event of a power strike on the
evening of any meeting, we regret that
the meeting must be cancelled.

VENUE OF MEETINGS: Burnley Horticultural
School Hall, Burnley

TIME OF MEETINGS: 8 p.m.

PREPARED AND PRINTED
FOR THE FERN SOCIETY
OF VICTORIA



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EXECUTIVE SERVICES

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