

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 14 Number 3, April 1992

FERN SOCIETY OF VICTORIA Inc.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

The March meeting which was a "Members' Fern Night" was most successful. We had an excellent number and variety of ferns and Bill Taylor drew out comments from members with skill and humour. The interchange of information which occurred is what our Society is all about. The only disappointing aspect was the limited number of members who were there to enjoy the evening. The monthly meetings are the best opportunity for members to benefit from their membership of the Society. I urge members to join in and participate.

Speaking of membership, the annual membership fees will be becoming due soon. We have a special this year! Sign up two new members and your own membership renewal will be free. The Society needs new members, and we need to encourage current members to get out there and sign up new members. To qualify for free renewal all you need to do is to sign up two new members between now and the 30th of June. So, cast your mind about to friends, relatives and acquaintances who may have an interest in ferns and use the application form in this Newsletter to good effect (further supplies are available from the Secretary).

As advised earlier, there will be no meeting at the Herbarium in May. Instead, Mary Frost is going full blast organising a fern show and sale in Wangaratta for Saturday, 30th May. This is a big job for Mary and I hope members will give her full support if she approaches them for assistance; and also support her by attending on the day. Full details of the day will be published in the May Newsletter; in the meantime plan to keep the date available.

About 20 fernatics from America will be visiting Victoria for three days in October. Chris Goudey is drawing up the itinerary. It is proposed that they visit the Otways in a mini-bus on Wednesday, 14th October. If there are enough of our members interested in accompanying

(continued opposite)

NEXT MEETING

DATE: Thursday, 16th April, 1992.

TIME: Commencing at 7.30 p.m.

VENUE: The National Herbarium, Royal Botanic Gardens,

Birdwood Avenue, South Yarra. (Melway Directory Ref. 2L A1)

TOPIC: Fern Essentials

(See last paragraph of President's Message).

SPEAKERS: Chris Goudey, Keith Hutchinson, Bill Taylor, Terry

Turney and Barry White.

MEETING TIMETABLE

7.30 p.m. Pre-Meeting Activities: - Sales of Ferns, Spore, Books

and Special Effort Tickets; Library Loans.

8.00 p.m. April General Meeting.

8.30 p.m. Topic of the Evening.

9.40 p.m. Special Effort Competition.

9.45 p.m. Supper.

10.00 p.m. Close.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE (cont'd):

them, a larger vehicle could be booked. Please let me know if you would like to share the pleasures of the Otways with our visitors. It is also proposed that they join with us at our normal monthly meeting on Thursday, 15th October to make a special night of it. Something special to look forward to.

Two months ago I made reference to the possible risk of getting legionnaires' disease through inhaling dust from potting mixes. The Age newspaper of 14th March carried some advice from the National Health and Medical Research Council. Whilst acknowledging that only on rare occasions may potting mixes be associated with the disease, the Council does recommend buying mixes with perforated packaging, and that the mix should be moist when handled to avoid the inhalation of dust.

Finally, our next meeting will be a "Fern Essentials Night" where we will have a panel including Terry Turney, Chris Goudey, Bill Taylor, Keith Hutchinson and myself presenting an overview of fern structure and of some of the major fern groups, i.e. <u>Aspleniums</u>, <u>Adiantums</u>, epiphytes and <u>Blechnums</u>. Be there!

Barry White

DISCUSSION REPORT GENERAL MEETING - 19th MARCH, 1992

Discussion Leader: Bill Taylor

Topic: MEMBERS' FERNS

A rather small audience brought along a good collection of ferns, which formed the basis of a very interesting evening's discussion.

First on the agenda was Leptopteris superba (Prince of Wales Feathers or Crepe Fern), a New Zealand fern which is regarded as one of the most beautiful in the world. The plant was initially covered by a plastic bag in which it had been enclosed for transport to preserve the high humidity essential for the survival of its delicate fronds. We were assured that, contrary to the impression this precaution might give, the fern is not difficult to grow. Its only special needs are high humidity, which can be maintained by growing it in a terrarium or similar enclosure, and a relatively low light environment; standard potting medium is satisfactory. Growth is not vigorous and fronds come in flushes of three or four after dormant periods of a few months.

A number of attractive and interesting Adiantums were discussed, including

- A. raddianum 'Crested Majus'.

- A. 'Bartelsii', a tropical American fern of the trapeziforme group, probably A. curvatum, which is being grown cold. This fern had been given up as dead by a previous owner, but was found on inspection to have just a few active root tips and was nursed back to health and beauty. The moral here is not to give up too easily on a special fern that has apparently died. A check on the roots is a good move with any new fern, whether healthy or not.
- A. 'Dissect' which looks rather like A. raddianum 'Fritz Luth' but with smaller pinnae and a more upright growth habit.
- A. latifolium sold under the trade name 'Big Bertha', a tropical fern which is growing well in a kitchen.

 - A. raddianum 'Compactum', a slow grower which likes to be repotted

every year.

- A. hispidulum, which was thought by its owner not to be this species as it was taller and less stiff than our native variety and its fronds had more than five "fingers". However, it was considered by other members to be probably A. hispidulum from another area, such as Lord Howe Island, where plants with more than five fingers are
- A. aethiopicum 'Lady Carrington', a shredded form which is a new introduction to the nursery trade and which was originally found by Rod Hill near Lady Carrington Drive in the Royal National Park south of Sydney.

A plant of Blechnum articulatum displayed the deep red new fronds characteristic of this species. The red colour intensifies at higher light levels. This is an extremely hardy fern and will tolerate quite severe drying out. In nature, however, it grows on rocks in the middle of creeks right at water level with its roots continually in the water. Presumably, its tolerance of drying out enables it to survive low water levels during drought periods.

Another Blechnum species from the mountains of Bougainville Island, where it grows in dark rain forest, also displayed bright red new fronds which pass through a copper colour as they age.

Cyclosorus interruptus is a native of N.S.W. and Queensland with a very strong, thick rhizome which was used by Aborigines as a source of food. Growing this species in the ground is not recommended, as it grows extremely vigorously and soon becomes a pest.

An un-named <u>Davallia</u> in a basket stimulated much discussion. Its rhizomes projected horizontally outwards past the edge of the basket and looked similar to those of <u>D. pyxidata</u>, but did not grow upwards in the way that is generally characteristic of this species in cultivation. (With most <u>Davallias</u> the rhizomes tend to turn downwards over the edge of the container and follow its contour). An identified <u>D. pyxidata</u> in a pot had rhizomes growing upwards at angles of 45° and steeper to lenghts of 50 centimetres. One member specialising in Victorian ferns stated that the rhizomes of the native <u>D. pyxidata</u> tend to follow the contours of the rocks or logs on which it is growing and are often found growing downwards. The un-named plant was positively identified after the meeting as <u>Davallia</u> sp.(Tonga) by two members who had purchased identical plants labelled with this name.

Two beautiful plants of the Nephrolepis exaltata cultivars 'Suzi Wong' and 'Elegantisssima' had been grown with plenty of light near the roof of a polythene house. 'Suzi Wong' and other Nephrolepis with dense foliage are difficult to keep growing well, as the foliage tends to rot near the centre of the plant, especially if it gets wet. Strict precautions should be taken to ensure that the foliage of these plants is kept dry. Water should be applied to the roots only and they should be allowed to dry out well between waterings. The tendency to rot in the centre is thought to be aggravated by the fact that these ferns release ethylene gas, which causes premature ageing and helps to break down the plant tissue. Ethylene is the gas used to promote the ripening of bananas and other fruit. When plants have rotted in the centre, the best course of action is to break them up and re-plant the outside portions; the centres will not re-grow of themselves.

Another Nephrolepis exaltata cultivar displayed was a variation on 'Fluffy Ruffles'. This tends to revert to 'Fluffy Rufffles' even though propagated vegetatively. The multitude of N. exaltata cultivars available makes it difficult to identify them with any certainty and the problem is compounded by the fact that many horticulturalists here import plants from overseas and give them their own trade names. Most do not produce spores.

Three Tassel Ferns, Lycopodium phlegmaria, L. phlegmarioides and L. polytrichoides, were growing successfully in a cold glasshouse even though two of them had been brought from Cairns last April and put straight into the glasshouse. These two have not been reported and it was said that not disturbing the roots more than necessary is the best approach with Tassels.

Probably the most unique fern of the evening was the small fragile Crystopteris bulbifera, called the Berry Fern because of small green berry-like bulbils on the tips of the fronds. The plant is deciduous and has a remarkably short cycle. It comes up in early October, develops and drops its berries by early January and becomes deciduous again at the end of March. New plants had already developed from the berries dropped in January this year.

A plant of <u>Humata tyermanii</u> (Silver Hare's-foot) on a piece of treefern was growing well in the open, even in winter. This species is normally considered to require some protection from the cold in southern Victoria. One fern which was obviously very cold hardy was <u>Polystichum</u> acrostichioides, the Christmas Fern of North America, so called because it is still green at Christmas time. This fern has an unusual spore pattern for a <u>Polystichum</u> with the spore clustered towards the tip of the frond.

A plant of <u>Polystichum onocolobatum</u> from Japan displayed unusual contorted fronds. It was reported as being very easy to grow in an open mix but requiring plenty of water (as for many Japanese ferns).

Three baskets of <u>Microsorum scandens</u> (Fragrant Fern) illustrated the diversity of frond shape found in this species. One had only simple fronds, one was almost entirely pinnatifid, while the other was a magnificent crested specimen.

The long arching fronds of an Anglaomorpha 'Roberts' displayed well in a basket. This is a sterile cultivar of unknown origin which grows best in a well-drained potting mix. It is a very hardy plant and was stated to be even hardier than its very-easy-to-grow relative Pseudodrynaria coronans.

An Oleandra neriiformis (Stilt Fern) had been struck from a cutting in a mixture of sand and peat moss. This is a fern from high-altitude areas in north-east Queensland and care has to be taken not to over water when growing it cold in Victoria.

Another member contributed a healthy <u>Platycerium superbum</u> (Staghorn) in a 10 cm pot, one of a number he had grown from spore. This is one of the hardest of all ferns to maturity from spore.

Another interesting fern was <u>Asplenium dimorphum</u>, a native of Norfolk Island. This has sterile fronds with broad, bright green segments while its fertile fronds are finely dissected and lacy. This dimorphic character gives rise to its species name, but it also has some fronds which are part sterile and part fertile and so has been given the common name Three-in-one Fern. The fern prefers the protection of a cold glass-house in temperate regions.

A member who has had success with growing a number of ferns in water-well type pots demonstrated this with a plant of <u>Leucostegia immersa</u>. The growing medium was a standard commercial potting mix with a little fine pine bark added.

One of the last ferns of the evening was a strikingly beautiful plant of the true <u>Asplenium pteridioides</u>. The shining fronds have an unusual "geometric" appearance as the pinnae are roughly rectangular in shape and stand out at right angles to the secondary rachis.

A number of other attractive and interesting ferns were examined and discussed during the evening. As Bill said in his concluding remarks, their quality augured well for the display at our coming Fern Show.

President Barry White thanked Bill for his skilful and knowledgable leading of the discussion and members for their contributions of ferns. Members enthusiastically supported the former in the customary fashion.

VEGETATIVE PROPAGATION

by Chris Goudey

(Continuation of Speaker Report for February General Meeting)

(3) Cuttings (cont'd).

Lycopodiums can be propagated from tip cuttings 5-8 cm long (laid horizontally on the peat moss/perlite mix or sphagnum moss) if they are kept moist in warm and humid conditions, but the process is very slow (and not well suited to Victoria). A simpler method is to take advantage of the tendency of the hanging stems to turn upwards at the tip when they encounter an obstruction. If a pot of medium is positioned under a tip and left undisturbed, it will eventually form roots, but the process may take up to two years.

(4) Auricle Cuttings.

The stipe bases of Angiopteris and Marattia species are enclosed by thick, fleshy structures called auricles, which persist on the trunk for many years after the stipes have died. Each auricle contains two dormant buds that can be used for propagation. In nature the buds stay permanently dormant, only beginning to grow under special circumstances, such as if the plant is severely cut back by accidental damage. However, they will become active and begin to grow new plants if the auricle is removed and appropriately treated.

The auricle is carefully cut from the plant using a long, narrow, strong blade. The cut is made vertically down behind the auricle and then curved out under it, taking great care to avoid damaging the buds (which are seen as two swellings) and the dormant roots below them.

The auricle is dipped in a fungicide solution (Benlate or Previour) and then about half buried in sphagnum moss, sufficiently to keep it moist while getting plenty of light. An ice-cream container covered with plastic film makes an excellent housing. The film can be held in place by the container lid with the centre cut out, leaving a rim about two centimetres wide.

Development of a plant to the potting stage takes 6-12 months. Small auricles grow more quickly but large ones, though very slow, produce larger plants. As fronds grow tall enough to touch the plastic film, cut a slit in it to allow them to grow through, while still maintaining maximum humidity for those still inside the container. When the new plant is taken from the container it has a long wiry root (unlike the fine roots of other ferns) which has to be untangled and freed of as much sphagnum as possible. The root and fronds and the adjoining section of auricle are then cut away from the main body of the auricle (which can be put back in the container if necessary to continue the development of the other bud).

Rod Hill propagated <u>Angiopteris</u> from spore some years ago, but this method is not normally successful with <u>Angiopteris</u> and <u>Marattia</u> as it is not possible to sterilise the medium. Growth of these species requires symbiosis with a soil-borne fungus.

(4) Stipe Cuttings.

Certain species of <u>Asplenium</u>, those with an erect tufted rhizome (caudex), can be propagated from stipe cuttings, but this is not an easy method. The lowest frond is cut from the plant together with a section of the caudex, thus giving the equivalent of a heel cutting from a normal plant. The cut is made by running a knife down from the top between caudex and frond. This procedure is difficult to control and somewhat dangerous, as it is possible to damage the plant severely if the cut is too deep.

The cutting is then reduced to about 10 centimetres long and most of the leaf part is trimmed off. It is then dipped in a fungicide solution and laid on sterilised medium with the lower (caudex) end just touching the surface and the upper end supported clear of the medium on a small prop about a centimetre high.

(5) Division.

Ferns which form large clumps with multiple growing points, e.g. Adiantums with creeping rhizomes, can be propagated by division. The clump is simply pulled or cut apart at appropriate points of weakness and the resulting sections planted.

Clumping species of <u>Platycerium</u>, such as <u>P. bifurcatum</u>, can be propagated by dividing off the "pups" with a sharp knife, cutting sufficiently deep to remove a portion of the rhizome and roots. The pieces are then backed with a pad of sphagnum moss and mounted on a board or piece of tree-fern.

Sphagnum moss is preferred to compost as the backing medium (compost is added after the plant is established). Because sphagnum moss holds moisture, is very sterile and contains no nutrients it is ideal for stimulating root growth. It is often possible to save a sick plant by washing off the soil, treating the roots with fungicide and planting it in sphagnum.

(6) Stolons.

Some ferns produce wiry lateral growths called stolons which have dormant buds along them. The buds remain dormant until they come into contact with a suitable moist site, when they produce young plants. The stolons are cut away from the main rhizome and the plants potted up.

The best known examples of stoloniferous ferns are the Nephrolepis species, but a number of Blechnum and Doodia species also produce stolons as do some tree-ferns, such as Cyathea baileyana, C. rebeccae and Dicksonia squarrosa. Spreading by stolons probably explains why D. squarrosa can be found growing right at high tide mark in New Zealand. Nephrolepis cordifolia produces tubers on its roots, but these are only food and moisture storages and are of no use for propagation.

(7) Layering.

In this method of propagation portion of the plant, generally the rhizome, is pinned down on to a suitable medium. Examples of plants to which this technique can be applied are Lycopodium species (discussed above), Blechnum filiforme; Oleandra neriiformis and those which form bulbils on the ends of the fronds.

When the new plants propagated by the various methods above have formed roots they can be potted into tubes, using a mix with low nutrient value. At this stage root development is the primary aim; top growth is secondary. A commercial tube mix (such as Debco) is satisfactory or one can be made from sand and peat moss. Well-aged tree-fern fibre can also be added; <u>Dicksonia</u> is preferred as <u>Cyathea</u> tends to be too acid.

President Barry White complimented Chris on the quality of his presentation and thanked him for getting the year off to a good start. Members present supported these remarks with acclamation.

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CONTACT WITH BRITISH PTERIDOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Members Gay and Barry Stagoll renewed acquaintance with Ray and Rita Coughlin, enthusiastic members of the British Pteridological Society, and Margaret and Matt Busby (Matt is the long-serving Secretary of BPS), and met over a dozen other BPS members whilst on a short motoring holiday in the UK in mid-1991. Barry reported:

"We telephoned the Coughlins whilst on the road to learn that, by happy coincidence, a meeting of BPS members was to take place at their home only a few days later, and were delighted to accept an invitation to visit on the day.

The BPS members were enjoying a guided walk in the Coughlins'award-winning South Birmingham garden when we arrived towards late afternoon, and there was much discussion into the evening about ferns and their different cultivation requirements.

Australian tree-ferns were obviously a subject of great interest, and regret was expressed that snowy winter conditions made experience at trying to grow these in British gardens more-than-somewhat disappointing. One member was reputedly making out with some Dicksonia specimens, but only by taking the care to cover them with straw during winter. Perhaps larger specimens would cope in relatively sheltered conditions in localities which provide milder conditions, but of course such larger specimens are not to be had in the first place.

Gay seemed a bit disappointed that no-one was growing tropical Adiantum, but it is expensive enough to provide suitable heated accommodation for these in Melbourne winters!

We congratulated the BPS on reaching its centenary in 1991, and conveyed good wishes on behalf of FSV members. The BPS members reciprocated with their good wishes to our Society.

Gay was also able to compliment the BPS on the exhibit by the Wisley Garden (Royal Horticultural Society) at the Chelsea Flower Show, to which Ray Coughlin, Matt Busby and other members contributed. She had taken the opportunity to visit the Show whilst in London. Chelsea is as popular as ever, and Gay reported that it was difficult in many places to see the exhibits for the visitors!"

Society members will be interested in the contents of the leaflet which was distributed in connection with the Chelsea exhibit. This is reproduced below, with acknowledgement to the RHS Garden, Wisley.

THE ROYAL HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY'S GARDEN, WISLEY CHELSEA SHOW, 1991

The exhibit this year recognises the centenary of The British Pteridological Society.

The collection of hardy ferns exhibited illustrates only a limited range of what is available but hopefully it shows, in a small way, the great decorative value of this group of plants. Their primeval ancestors have helped to form our coal measures and natural gas reserves but it is with their value as garden plants that we are concerned.

Ferns represent a large and very distinct group of plants, with over 8000 species recognised world-wide and occurring in a wide range of habitats. The majority are robust woodland plants but many occupy very different niches - ferns may be found in marshy places, dry rock crevices, mountain screes, as epiphytes on tree-trunks and even as free-floating water plants. There is diversity of habit too: many ferns have a short rhizome bearing a characteristic shuttlecock of fronds whilst others have a far-running rhizome from which the fronds arise singly. In some species (the tree-ferns) the fronds are borne at the top of a trunk-like caudex which may be several metres tall, still others have climbing fronds 2-3 metres long and there are even a very few annual species.

Ferns became extremely popular in gardens in the nineteenth century, but it was the remarkable range of variation that may be found within a single species that stimulated the 'Victorian fern craze' which lasted from the 1860s until the turn of the century. During this period, the collection and breeding of abnormal but often very beautiful variants of the 70 or so native species rose to a great pitch. Indeed, in some areas wild populations were severely depleted by over-zealous collecting. Fortunately, ferns are now protected by legislation, as are all other wild plants in the British Isles.

As the many beautifully illustrated fern books of the period testify, many of the native species gave rise to astonishing numbers of such variants, lady fern, male fern and hartstongue fern being especially prolific. Whilst the full range of this variation is not represented here, there are examples of its diversity, such as the goffered fronds of the Crispum Group in Asplenium scolopendrium, cresting in species of Dryopteris, cruciate variation in Athyrium filix-femina 'Victoriae' and even variegation, in the Japanese Athyrium niponicum 'Pictum'.

Further information concerning ferns, their cultivation and propagation may be obtained from representatives of The British Pteridological Society at their exhibit on stand number 5 in the Scientific and Educational Section of the marquee. The Society may also be contacted via its Secretary, Mr A R Busby, 'Croziers', 16 Kirby Corner Road, Canley, Coventry CV4 8GD.

Grateful acknowledgment is given to Matt Busby, Ray Coughlin, Reginald Kaye (Waithman Nurseries Ltd), Mrs Hazel Key (Fibrex Nurseries Ltd), Martin Rickard and John Woodhams (Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew), for their help in providing many of the plants, as well as valuable information.

Leaflet compiled by P G Barnes & R A Waite RHS Garden, Wisley, Woking, Surrey GU23 6QB

FERNTASTIC QUOTE

We are indebted to the current issue of the American Fern Society bulletin "Fiddlehead Forum" for reproducing the following quotation from an 1870 British fern nursery catalogue:

"The bright colours in flowers are admired by the least intellectual, but the beauty of form and textures requires a higher degree of mental perception and more intellect for its proper appreciation."

We always knew fern lovers were something special!

Our Society has recently taken out membership of the American Fern Society and their excellent publications will be available through the Library in due course.

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FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

(1) MAY

Remember that there will be no meeting at the Herbarium this month (see President's Message re alternative function at Wangaratta).

(2) JUNE

Our June meeting will be addressed by Mr Kevin Handreck from the Division of Soils, C.S.I.R.O., Adelaide, who will be our Interstate Guest Speaker for the year. Kevin is well known as a specialist in the field of growing media and is the co-author of the book "Growing Media for Ornamental Plants and Turf". The meeting will be at the Herbarium on Thursday, 18th June at the usual time.

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SPECIAL EFFORT WINNERS

March General Meeting

Jack Wilkinson

John Hodgestl Fran Harrison

Anne Bryant

Joy Horman

Betty Duncan

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nurseries and other places where garden products are sold.

Opinions expressed in articles in this Newsletter are the personal views of the author and are not necessarily endorsed by the Society.

BUYERS' GUIDE TO NURSERIES

VICTORIA:

Andrew's Fern Nursery - Wholesale and Retail.
Melbourne Road, Arcadia, 3613. Ph: (058) 26 7285.
Large range of ferns for beginners and collectors.
Open daily 10 am - 5 pm except Christmas Day.

<u>Austral Ferns</u> - Wholesale Propagators. Ph: (052) 82 3084. Specialising in supplying retail nurseries with a wide range of hardy ferns; no tubes.

Dingley Fern Market - Wholesale and Retail. Ph: (03) 551 1868.

233 Centre Dandenong Road, Dingley, 3172.

Specialising in Ferns, Palms, Indoor Plants, Orchids and Carnivorous Plants. Open daily except Christmas Day.

Fern Acres Nursery - Retail.

Kinglake West, 3757. Ph: (057) 86 5481.

(On main road, opposite Kinglake West Primary School).

Specialising in Stags, Elks and Bird's-nest Ferns.

Fern Glen - Wholesale and Retail. Visitors welcome.

D. & I. Forte, Garfield North, 3814. Ph: (056) 29 2375.

R. & M. Fletcher's Fern Nursery - Retail.
62 Walker Road, Seville, 3139. Ph: (059) 64 4680.
(Look for sign on Warburton Highway, 300m east of Seville shopping centre). Closed Tuesday, except on public holidays.

Ridge Road Fernery - Wholesale and Retail. Weeaproinah, 3237. Ph: (052) 35 9383. Specialising in Otway native ferns.

Viewhaven Nursery - Wholesale and Retail.

Avon Road, Avonsleigh (near Emerald), 3782. Ph: (059) 68 4282

Specialists in Stags, Elks, Bird's-nests and Native Orchids.

NEW SOUTH WALES:

Jim & Beryl Geekie Fern Nursery - Retail. By appointment. 6 Nelson Street, Thornleigh, 2120. Ph: (02) 484 2684.

Kanerley Fern Exhibition and Nursery - Wholesale and Retail. 204 Hinton Road, Nelsons Plains, via Raymond Terrace, 2324. Ph: (049) 87 2781. Closed Thursdays and Saturdays. Groups of more than 10 must book in advance, please.

Marley's Ferns - Retail.

5 Seaview Street, Mt. Kuring-gai, 2080. Ph: (02) 457 9168.

QUEENSLAND:

Moran's Highway Nursery - Wholesale and Retail.

Bruce Highway, Woombye (1 km north of Big Pineapple; turn right into Kiel Mountain Road). P.O. Box 47, Woombye, 4559. Ph: (074) 42 1613.