



**FERN SOCIETY  
OF VICTORIA**

**NEWSLETTER**

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

The petrol stike caused a few problems for us at our last meeting, but we still had a good attendance of approximately 100 members.

Peter Abetz gave a very interesting talk on the advantages of using Maxicrop as a fertilizer for ferns. Our Vice-President and Treasurer, Albert Jenkins, then spoke on composting in relating to ferns. For those who were unable to attend the meeting, a summary of this talk is included later in this issue.

In our last Newsletter, I mentioned that Rod Hill would be giving a short talk at our March meeting on the propagation of fern spores without the aid of a glasshouse. I hope that those who came along expecting to hear Rod will accept our apologies. Because of a slight mix-up, Rod's talk has been held over till the April meeting.

At the last meeting, members were asked to suggest ferns for our monthly competitions, and the following subjects were chosen:

April: A lacy fern  
May: A silver fern  
June: A tassel fern (*Lycopodium* sp.)  
July: A batwing fern  
(*Histiopteris incisa*)  
August: A fishbone fern  
September: A tree fern in container

The winners of last month's competition were:

Novice Section

1st - Ivy McCarty  
2nd - Joyce Bersholt  
3rd - Jan Siebel

Open Section

1st - Mrs. Irwin  
2nd - Mr. R. Blacker  
3rd - Miss C. Goudey

The excursion to see my collection proved very popular; I believe that there were 35 cars parked in our yard

at one stage! Very few members went on to Alden Lodge after leaving our place, which was understandable considering how late we finished.

Lorraine and I were very pleased with the enthusiasm shown and the care taken by all members. We would especially like to thank Rod and Lyn Hill, Irene and Ted Bolster, and Albert Jenkins - without their help we could not have managed. Thanks also to the ladies who brought along a plate, and to Mr. & Mrs. Rossack for allowing concession rates for Fern Society members visiting Alden Lodge.

At Easter, Albert and I will be spending four days in Adelaide, visiting members of the South Australian Fern Society; we hope to come back with full details of our excursion to the Otways in May.

We expect to leave Melbourne at approximately 6.00 a.m. on 3rd May, and meet up with the S.A.F.S. at or near the Otways, where we will visit Turtons Track, Melba Gully, Beauty Spot and other notable fern haunts including a native fern nursery, returning late on the same day.

Please have a deposit ready for the next meeting. A tourist coach seats approximately 45 people, and we have 21 bookings already.

We are still awaiting arrival of the following books from America: Hardy Ferns, Exotica, Tropica, Fern Growers' Manual, Ferns to Know & Grow, Ferns and Fern Allies of New Zealand, and the 1980 Calendars. We are also waiting on additional copies of Ferns & Fertilizer, Fern Dictionary, Fern Growers' Manual, Platycerium Fern Facts, The Genus *Adiantum* in Cultivation, Handbook on Ferns, and a second Exotica.

CHRIS GOUDEY  
President





THIS DELIGHTFUL PHOTOGRAPH SHOWS CHRIS GOUDEY WITH JUST A FEW OF HIS MANY FERNS



SECRETARY'S REPORT:

Some of the members who heard Albert Jenkins' interesting talk on composting have asked where they can obtain copies of the booklet entitled "Composting - making soil improver from rubbish", which was passed around at the meeting. It is sold by the C.S.I.R.O., and costs \$1.25 including postage, and is available from their Publications Department at 314 Albert Street, East Melbourne.

Those members who enjoyed the R.H.S.V.'s Summer School (and some of those who missed out) might be interested to know of two further schools being held this year:

1. Autumn School at Ballarat, to be held on May 21 - 23. Live-in facilities, if required, will be available the Ballarat Advanced Institute at Mt. Helen.
2. Spring School, to be held at Mt. Buffalo on October 8 - 10, with both the School and accommodation at the Chalet.

This is advance information, as the brochures are not yet available - for further information and bookings, please contact the Royal Horticultural Society of Victoria at 418A Station Street, Box Hill South, or ring (03) 88 7646.

Ted and I attended a conference at Mt. Dandenong, held by clubs of the Dandenong Ranges area; it was interesting to hear of other clubs' activities, and to realise that some of our problems are common to all clubs and societies.

Further arrangements have been made for visits to the Greenhouses at the Botanic Gardens in Melbourne; we have made arrangements for two visits - at 2.30 p.m. on Saturday, 12th April, and at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, 16th April. As the number in each party is limited to 25, please either ring me at 755 1222, or enter your name on the list at the meeting on Thursday, 19th April. We will meet inside the gates, next to the Herbarium in Birdwood Avenue.

In his report in this issue, Chris Goudey mentioned the trip to his property at Lara to see his collection of ferns. Our thanks are due to Chris and Lorraine for all the work which had to be done beforehand to make it easier for us to view the greenhouses.

Cars arrived in a steady stream, and we divided into groups to be taken around the greenhouses and to learn about the varied ferns there.

The weather was pleasantly warm - in fact, the greenhouses with the heat and humidity gave the effect of 'instant Singapore', so after we had seen all the ferns, afternoon tea was most welcome.

Some cars went on to Alden Lodge at Grovedale to see the Gardens with the shell collection and the ferns, making the whole afternoon a feast for the eyes. Members who could not make it this time have asked if another visit can be arranged - we will have to ask Chris. Maybe a Sunday trip could be arranged this time, to cater for those who are not free on Saturdays.

We are taking names (and deposits) from those who would like to go on the trip to the Otways on May 3rd. There is plenty to see and it should prove an enjoyable day. Later in this issue you will find a map of the area we will be visiting.

IRENE BOLSTER  
Secretary



TREASURER'S REPORT:

Our income for the month including badge sales, diary profits, subscriptions (\$54), special effort, plant sales and donations, amounted to \$192.85.

Expenses were as follows: printing and poster \$50, badges \$327.75, hire of hall \$20, Newsletter and postage \$204.92.

Our working balance at the end of the month was \$321.02.

ALBERT N. JENKINS  
Treasurer

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SUMMARY OF TALK ON COMPOSTING, GIVEN BY ALBERT JENKINS AT THE MARCH MEETING

Albert commenced his talk with a short history of his interest in horticulture since 1939, when his family moved to Kinglake and started potato growing. He was always inquisitive, and gained advice from other growers in the area. He said that his early days in New Zealand with the many ferns there had given him an interest in gardens and ferns in particular.

After a few years, he read a book entitled "Ploughman's Folly", and found it both challenging and interesting and started to experiment in the garden with new ideas.

At first, they had ploughed in deep the Rye grass on the paddocks so that it would interfere with the potato crop. However, his book disagreed - it said that grasses and other plants should only be lightly turned in to the top 3" - 4" so he grew lupins, which grew to 6', then chopped them up and covered them with  $\frac{1}{2}$ " of soil. At the time, his father on property with similar soil, etc., dug deep in the normal way and was then most surprised at the condition of the soil in Albert's garden, and the fantastic crop of vegetables harvested compared with his own.

So next year he did no ploughing and grew a crop of field peas, afterwards just lightly discing the plants into the soil. He then grew seed potatoes in this paddock, and the Department of Agriculture were so impressed by the plants and the crop that they took a film for display on potato production.

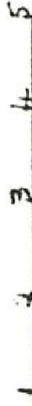
Albert continued by saying that although he left Kinglake thirty years ago, he continues the same process in his garden. He said that he had always been keep on compost and the benefits it brings to plants. He pointed out that nature makes her own compost by the leaves which drop on the surface of the soil where the micro-organisms go to work. Then there is the air to provide oxygen, water from the rain, and birds to turn over the debris in their search for food. The debris is then turned into mulch (plant food) and the soil is enriched.

In making compost, he uses tree fern fibre, sea weed (rich in trace elements), oak leaves, garden and kitchen refuse, animal and fowl manure, paper, cardboard, briquette dust, plus hair and feathers, which are high in nitrogen content.

He puts the various materials through a shredder which helps greatly in speeding up the composting process. If you have no shredder, the motor mower will cut the material up, if used in a confined area.

Continued overleaf ...

MILES



↑ TO COLING  
18 MILES

TO MELISSA  
FEAR

800  
DA

MT  
SABINE

TURTONS TRACK

PIECON FOREST

MEACUSON

TRIPLET  
FALLS

OTWAY RANGES.

BINNS RD

MARTS  
REST

COAST OCEAN RD

LAYERS HILLS

BEAUTY  
SPOT

MERRA  
CULLY

SHANNA

GLENAIRE

SOUTHERN  
OCEAN

Apollo Bm

SKENES CREEK

BASS STRAIT

CRET OCEAN

To  
ME



Cont'd. from previous page

In making the compost heap, Albert uses rows of bricks spaced about one inch apart and covered with shade cloth to keep the mulch from falling through, as it is essential to have a good air flow through the compost heap. Remember, the essentials are: 1. a good airflow through the mix, and

2. correct moisture content (about 50% is best).

It should feel like a squeezed out sponge. If the pile is too wet, the mix is soggy and restricts the air flow. It then rots and is too acid.

3. light and warmth.

Albert said that it is essential to turn the heap over frequently. The first turning should be seven or eight days after putting the heap down, then gradually extending the period by a few days each time.

4. a balance of composting material is essential for best results.

There must be a good balance between carbon-producing and nitrogen-producing materials, e.g. if using a lot of grass or lawn cuttings, balance this with some carbon producing substance, such as sawdust, paper or straw.

Albert uses several methods of composting. The heap, as already explained, the rotary bin, and the steel mesh bin as supplied by A.R.C. When using the tumbly or rotating bin, and putting in a well-balanced shredded material, you can make a good compost in about 21 days. The drum must be rotated daily. The steel mesh is a good bin as it admits plenty of air.

Albert said he is now retired, and still uses the same methods in his gardening and fern growing. He mentioned that his front garden had been dug over and a layer of compost placed over the top of the soil. This has several advantages. It keeps the soil cooler in summer and warmer in winter, and it enriches the soil, as it is where the micro-organisms work on it converting it into plant food. You will notice that fence posts first rot at the line where moisture, air, and sun meet - at the surface.

Pine bark is not favoured by Albert as a mulch for ferns, as it provides a perfect cover for slugs. He has found that few slugs hide in compost.

He finally showed us a booklet which was entitled "Composting - making soil improvers from rubbish", which can be obtained from the C.S.I.R.O. (see details in the Secretary's report earlier in this Newsletter).

Note: Albert's talk was most informative, and was given in such a way that everyone could both understand and enjoy it - a knack which not all public speakers share.

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FROM THE EDITOR: At our March meeting, it was suggested that we have a question and answer column. I would be happy to arrange this, so if you have a question, just post it off, hand it to me during a meeting, or phone me, during business hours, on 459 9716. In this issue, I will answer a question put to me some time ago ..... what do the following terms mean?

STIPE: The footstalk of a fernfrond

PINNAE: Leaflets on either side of the midrib of a fernfrond

RACHIS: The midrib of a fernfrond

FROND: Foliage of a fern, usually consisting of a stipe, rachis and an extended leafy portion

CROSIER: The curled top of a young fernfrond.

I hope to hear from you, with some more questions.

KEITH HUTCHINSON  
Editor

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Marattia pellvada	

## FERNS IN CONTRAST

by IAN BUCKMASTER

It seems to be one of the common practices in life to be always learning.

How many ferns do you have? ... I've probably got less.

How many ferns do you want? ... I probably want more.

Perhaps that's a bit philosophical. Perhaps it might be best said that I have a number of prothalli and a few very fine specimens at work, and will construct a really fine home environment for ferns when I finish building my new house.

Albert told us last month that he makes good compost. I'll settle for that, too, in a quiet shaded spot, with filtered sun and broken raindrops, the perfume of natural plant material blended with musk-mint and vaporised gases. If we have to go, let's make it a good spot - away from the hustle and bustle of 'dog eat dog', mechanical monsters, and politics.

Thanks, Albert, for a most interesting talk on how you get success at composting for ferns. How and why is what we are all wanting to know.

Now that the experts are finished, I hope to provide you with a number of facts and hypotheticals surrounding the contrasts in ferns. You could get heavy material, light material, and even a laugh. Do you talk to your fern? Come and hear me. How do you feed your fern? I do it differently. Come and see it actually gobble up a banana. I will tell you how good the 'WHO' glasshouse can be.

Come and look at fern scales, hairs, and sporangium - micro-visually. Better still, come and buy raffle tickets to help keep us going.

IAN BUCKMASTER  
Vice-President

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Several factors can cause that frequently reported browning and shrivelling of fern foliage.

First, it is not always appreciated that old leaves will eventually brown and shrivel as they only have a limited life span. New replacement growth comes mainly in Spring, but with some types it is a fairly progressive process.

Excessive and sudden shrivelling of the entire plant can be caused by botrytis. Cut away and burn all badly affected leaves then spray the rest of the plant with bordeaux mixed to ordinary spraying strength.

New growth may not follow for a month or more, depending on the season.

Another common browning is caused by microscopic leaf-invading eel worms or nematodes. These first cause an angular browning of maidenhair leaflets and brown bands on straplike ferns, such as brake or pteris.

Shade: Cut off and burn badly infested fronds and carefully pinch out occasional leaflets showing the symptom. On a larger scale, the plants can be moved to a shaded spot outdoors and sprayed with Rogor.

Do not confuse the brown rust-like clusters on the backs of some leaves with disease. These are the natural spore bodies or reproductive parts of the fern. The spore clusters, or sori, take different shapes on different kinds of ferns.

On maidenhair they are no more than a velvety spot in a crimped indentation behind the leaflets, on fishbone evenly spaced spots and on pteris are in bands around the edge. Bird's nest ferns carry them in herringbone grouped rows, while on elkhorns they occupy an inch or so below the tip of mature fertile fronds. Stag horns have them in a wide patch below the junction of the two tendulous, antler-like fronds.

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FROM THE EDITOR:

Don't forget - any contribution for the Newsletter, whether in the form of a letter, question, article, photograph, or perhaps simply a suggestion, is always most welcome.

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- DIARY DATES -

APRIL 10TH, 1980 - Ian Buckmaster, on  
"FERNS IN CONTRAST"

8 p.m.  
Burnley Horticultural School Hall,  
Burnley

MAY 8TH, 1980 - Demonstration Night  
(Various speakers)

JUNE 12TH, 1980 - Neil Laird, on  
"A SELECTION OF UNCOMMON FERNS"

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