

# BLUE MOUNTAINS PERMACULTURE NETWORK

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Hello

Welcome to the Spring Newsletter. Thank you to the contributors who sent articles so close to our last newsletter.

I have just visited the Gardening Australia Festival at the Showground. Permaculture North have a most impressive display, range of plants, edges, herb spiral, chooks, and a great deal of information. They won awards for best educational display and best environmental display. These were well deserved. Congratulations.

We are planning to have an information stall at the Sustainability Fair on 17 September at the Hawkesbury Earthcare Centre. The purpose is to provide information on Permaculture, that it is much more than organic gardening, to explain about permaculture in our special region, the Blue Mountains and to distribute relevant material. See the article on p.7

If you have ideas for the stall and/or are available to help on or before 17 September contact me on 4751 4338 or email [bmpermac@iinet.net.au](mailto:bmpermac@iinet.net.au) .

Pat  
BMPN

## WHAT'S ON?

- 1st Saturday of month  
3rd Friday of month      **Katoomba Community Garden** 10 00- 2.00  
9.00 - 2.00  
Contact Derek Pracy 0405 249528
- Sunday 4 September      **Meeting to plan stall at Sustainability Fair** 10.00 - 12.00  
1A Kanimbla St Blackheath      Contact Pat 4751 4338
- Sunday 11 September      **Mid-Mountain Seedsavers 2783 Meeting**  
Bullaburra Progress Association Hall, crn Noble St and Gr Western  
Highway, Bullaburra 10.00 - 12.00 Bring a plate to share  
Contact 4759 2118 or [mcrun@hermes.net.au](mailto:mcrun@hermes.net.au) to indicate numbers.
- Sunday 11 September      **Winmalee Neighbourhood Garden Centre**  
Meeting 10. am
- Sunday 17 September      **Sustainability Fair** Hawkesbury Earthcare Centre  
10am to 4 pm      [www.earthcare.org.au](http://www.earthcare.org.au)
- November/  
December      **Permaculture Design Certificate** Contact Rowe Morrow  
or Pat on 4751 4338
- Saturday 3 September      **Threatened Species Tour of Baulkham Hills**  
8.30 - 3.30      Contact Robyn Williams 9686 4842
- 11 September      **Solar House Day** - [www.solarhouseday.com](http://www.solarhouseday.com)
- Thursday & Friday  
15 & 16 September      **The Great Greenhouse Gamble** A Conference on the Impacts of  
Climate Change on Biodiversity and Natural Resource Management  
Powerhouse Museum Sydney  
Contact Melinda Cook, Nature Conservation Council  
phone 02 9279 2522, email [mcook@nccnsw.org.au](mailto:mcook@nccnsw.org.au)  
[www.nccnsw.org.au](http://www.nccnsw.org.au)

## Native Grasses by Brian Coates

It is often believed that extensive tree planting is an essential exercise in the maintenance of groundwater balance. However studies in WA have shown that native grass pastures provide an effective level of control over deep drainage. Studies in southern NSW have also shown that grazing production systems based on a mixture of native grasses were more sustainable than those based on introduced species.

It is not known the extent of tree cover in the Pre-European Australian landscape. However, the extensive re generation of once natural grassland by the inappropriate planting of ' out of area ' native trees has, in these ecosystems, caused more harm than good.

On the other hand, over grazing and tree clearing has reduced once fertile regions to deserts. Once the ground cover has disappeared, dust storms blow the land bare, blue -green algae blooms in water ways, river choke with eroded sediments and rising salt levels in ground water lead to warning signs that we need to plant more perennial native ground cover vegetation.

Tree planting is not the only answer to Australia's environmental problems. It is important to plant a variety of native grasses as opposed to introduced grasses because:

1. They are deep rooted perennials that prevent erosion and maintain the soil structure plus provide 100% ground cover all year.
2. They survive drought , heavy rains , frost , and fires--esp. *Microleana* and *Themeda* sp.
3. They have evolved to suit all ranges of Australian soils especially acid soils.
4. They are disease tolerant, out compete weeds and are good nutrient value for grazing stock.
5. Taller native grasses provide a sheltered environment for native fauna and other fragile flora of grassy woodland systems.
6. Taller native grasses also reduce wind speed at ground level, reducing the number of trees needed as windbreaks.

Having said all this it is also important to realise that 70% of humanity's calories come from the grass family, Aboriginal people used Woollybutt Grass ( *Eragrostis epiopoda* ) which contains 13--17% protein and large amounts of iron and zinc, Grey Beard Grass ( *Amphipogon caricinus* ) , Fairy Grass ( *Sporobous carol*) and Kangaroo Grass ( *Themeda triandra*). The seeds were used in a variety of ways --as a paste ,as a flour and as a dough.

Thus native grasses have the potential to enhance the sustainability of Australia's agricultural systems and therefore we must carefully manage and treasure our native grasses.

## Homage to Paul Sorensen by Brian Coates

With the exception of Richard Ratcliff's book *Australia's Master Gardener*, Paul Sorensen has been a largely forgotten topic even in the Blue Mountains where his legacy lies amidst many of his gardens which he designed from the 1930's through to the 1970's. These gardens, like other heritage properties, are 'a window in time'.

It is interesting to examine Sorensen's work because he applied permaculture principles as a garden designer.

His first principle was to identify any existing site features such as unusual trees or landforms and work around them. One of his catch cries was "One should always respect what is already on the site."

Perhaps Sorensen's most obvious signature in his gardens was his terracing and pathways made from local ironstone. He took advantage of the undulating nature of Blue Mountains gardens to construct terraces which I believe facilitated both good drainage and good soil conditioning through slower water runoff and thus increased water percolation.

These terraces were stabilized by well constructed ironstone walls thick enough to withstand pressure from moist soil and roots from trees which were planted on the terraces. Holes were left at random on the walls in which smaller plants grew.

Another one of his enduring legacies was his ability to transplant mature trees (even natives - a practice rarely accomplished). His success was due to his own recipe of soil which included mainly spent poultry manure, leaf mulch and lots of feathers as the magic ingredient. It is interesting to observe that feathers are hygroscopic, meaning that they can absorb and release water according to the relative humidity of the immediate environment. The average feather consists of water 42.65%, nitrogenous substances 53.65% and 1.69% fat. Other elements are sulphur, phosphorous, silica and calcium. So using feathers in a planting hole mixture is clever because they can regulate the environment of the planting hole by providing a slow release of moisture and nutrients to the delicate needs of transplanted tree roots.

He then wrapped the heavily pruned trunks and major branches in straw for the first year to reduce transpiration. Then every 6 months for 2 years he dug a trench around the tree immediately outside the previous trench, then backfilled with 'Sorensen's soil mix'. to encourage root growth. This method produced amazing growth.

At Lidsdale House near Lithgow, he constructed an ironstone rockery on a steep slope with drainage channels that fed each specimen box by facilitating slow water percolation under the soil thus preventing small volumes of soil from drying out.

He identified 'soaks' and poor drainage problems and solved them by constructing weirs 'upslope' thus creating ponds and ornamental edges. Interestingly he rarely used earth moving equipment as he highly valued good soil structure.

Pergolas were used creatively to frame views, divide areas and provide screening. He not only used exotics but his favourite natives were Banksias and Waratahs.

More can be discovered by studying the layout of heritage gardens and the philosophy of their designers, as they reveal lost secrets of design that we can apply today. Sorensen's gardens are indeed a 'window in time.'

## **Information about the state of our local environment now available**

### **Information provided by Blue Mountains City Council**

The most recent *State of the Environment Report for the City of Blue Mountains*, for 2003-2004, is now available! Community groups, residents, local businesses, students & teachers are encouraged to access the report from Council's website [www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au](http://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au), Public Libraries or Council Offices.

### **Who might find it useful?**

This report helps us understand the condition of our local environment and the impact our actions are having on it. Students, teachers, community environment groups, new residents, people concerned about health and the health of our natural and built environment, people wanting to get more involved in local environmental programs may all find this report useful.

### **What information is in the report?**

This report contains information about water, air, biodiversity, waste and more. It talks about our local environmental problems, what Council is doing, what residents and the community are doing and how this relates to the City Vision.

### **Help shape the report for future years**

Although Council compiles this report, it draws on information from a number of sources and ideally will be used by many people as a decision-making tool. For this reason it is important that the local community help shape the structure and content of reports so that they reflect our combined wisdom and are useful for the Blue Mountains community.

**How can I get involved?** Let us know what you think of the information in the report or what information you'd like to see in future reports. Let us know if your organisation has any data or information about the local environment that other people could find interesting.

Email [soe@bmcc.nsw.gov.au](mailto:soe@bmcc.nsw.gov.au) or phone 02 4780 5775 and ask for Rosemary Dillon.

## Slow Food Blue Mountains

by Nerida Burton

**Slow Food** is a rapidly growing worldwide organisation which exists to promote the enjoyment of good quality, nutritious food. This should be locally grown and seasonal when possible. The Blue Mountains Convivium of Slow Food was formed a year ago and has undertaken several projects so far.

**The Fruit Tree Register** is a record of fruit trees already growing in people's gardens and on council land. There are many old fruit trees in the mountains and the aim is to link jam and preserve makers to the fruit supply. Often in the past, the fruit has been wasted because the owners couldn't use it all. An extra benefit is that this fruit is usually organic and consequently very nutritious.. If any one has a tree they would like to register, this can be done at the Coop in Katoomba or by calling Anne on 47827376. Likewise, jam and preserve makers may also register.

**Seasonal Dinners.** A number of these have been held . The Autumn Dinner featured chestnuts, which grow at Mt Wilson and come into season in March and April. They are not well known in Australia, but are a much-loved food in other parts of the world. They are delicious roasted, but can be used in soups and dips or in cakes. They are labor-intensive to prepare, so next year we will be looking for helpers to collect and prepare chestnuts to be used in the Winter Magic Festival.

We plan to have jam making workshops, a nectarine picking trip and bread-making in a wood-fired oven. New members are very welcome.

For further information contact Anne on 4782 7376 or Nerida on 4782 9386

## COMMUNITY UPDATES

### Blackheath Community Garden

by Suzanne Reaney

*promoting an ecologically sustainable environment for the whole community*

located in Whitley Park cnr Great Western Highway & Prince George Street Blackheath

The garden shed has had an early Spring clean! As soon as the weather catches up there will be much planting and caring to be done.

The Little Sprouts have been meeting on the more pleasant Mondays with some lovely results:

- Raspberry canes have been planted and mulched,

- a temporary (but very cute) picnic area has been crafted from left over pine pieces,
- the compost piles have been turned and enhanced with Alpaca manure, and
- all garden beds have been maintained to some extent.

The new herb spiral has been left to settle in with good results.

The landscaping at the front entrance is still to be done. We need a few healthy people to volunteer some time and energy.

If you would like to be involved in any aspect of the garden, please either visit or give us a call. There's plenty to do so come and join us. Many hands make light work.....you know it's true!

For info: Pop in or call BANC on 4787 7770, Bec on 4787 8482 or Suzanne on 4787 5229  
Blackheath Community Garden is a project of BANC

### **Katoomba Community Garden**

New members most welcome.

Activities	1 <sup>st</sup> Saturday of the month	10 - 2.00
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Friday of month	9 - 2.00

Contact Derek Pracy -0405 249528

### **Winmalee Neighbourhood Centre Garden Group**

Meeting at garden second Sunday of month at 10.00.

More participants needed.

Call Mark Lutherborrow 0418694969 or 47541055 for more info.

### **Mid Mountains Seed Savers - 2783**

Next meeting Sunday 11 September

Please contact Loret or John on 4759 2118 or email [mcrun@hermes.net.au](mailto:mcrun@hermes.net.au)

### **Sustainability Fair *Learning for Sustainability***

The Sustainability Fair will be held on 17 September at Hawkesbury EarthCare Centre, crn Campus Drive and Science Road, UWS Hawkesbury Richmond.

Last year the fair attracted about 2000 people keen to learn more and to share in a celebration of choices in sustainable living. The theme for 2005 is *Learning for Sustainability*.

As well as showcasing sustainable living products and practices, the fair includes speakers, workshops and demonstrations on everything from building techniques to renewable energy sources to gardening and home efficiency ideas. The Sustainability Fair is also a celebration of community spirit with entertainment throughout the day, children's activities, information from community groups and a broad range of organic and wholesome food.

The event will be broadcast live on ABC 702BL Sydney Radio.

Blue Mountains Permaculture Network will have an information stall at the Fair. Be part of our stall, help us set up or come along and introduce yourself. Meeting to prepare for Fair on Sunday 4 September at 1A Kanimbla St, Blackheath at 10.00.

Contact Pat Rayner on 4751 4338 or [bimpermac@iinet.net.au](mailto:bimpermac@iinet.net.au)

## SEASONAL PLANTING

**Time to start up!**  
by Wayne Levy at Lithgow

Yet again I am reminded of the precious gift a small piece of land with water, wind protection, good soil and a healthy life. Time to get up out of the winter blues to prepare for the spring planting of food.

First jobs have been to correct what's growing in the beds, weeding and defining borders. I've separated all my strawberry runners to replant along the naked borders, yum to have these treats throughout all the beds. I've expanded all the berry beds and cut the canes to stimulate growth; our best raspberries seem to produce most berries during the time the apples are just coming on so we planted currants and berries under fruit trees.

Any new fruit trees need to be purchased and planted, any specific relocating needs doing up to the end of August, consequently this year we've planted a screen, windbreak along one side of the property of hazelnuts, about 30 plants. Next year we will incorporate other planting between the hazelnuts like flowering quince or edible quince to grow into a very beautiful hedge.

Windbreaks are more obvious during winter and holes have to be filled or a second layer planted. We've introduced *Hakea salicifolia*, and *Acacia melanoxylon* into the windbreaks both fast growers.. These natives can bring the extra dimension of nitrogen fixing.

We have gingerly tested the soil temperature with some rocket and beans but the results are not good, so basic needs must really be taken into consideration, like the new compost heap to deal with prunings from winter. We've settled on the open biodynamic stake method using lots of

herbal activators and the chook house residue. The beds now also need feeding and the asparagus beds mulched extensively, during this time look out for layering of plants like gooseberries, rosemary etc. These layerings can now be potted up and given to friends. I am looking forward to our next chat soon.

## **Sustainability at Mid Mountains Youth Centre**

The Mid Mountains Youth Centre at Lawson moved into new, yet temporary, premises earlier this year and the newly appointed staff of Chrysi and Hella are hoping to demonstrate a few principles of sustainability around the centre.

They have a well set up kitchen available, so they felt why not demonstrate simple gardening techniques along side simple cooking skills, a collaboration of Hella's experience in Permaculture and Chrysi's experience in hospitality

They have already put in a compost, of course! Now they are hoping to grow a few herbs and simple vegies that can be used when the kids make snacks, in preference to processed junk food previously used to entice the kids into the Centre on cold afternoons. Because the old Uniting Church premises are only the temporary home of the Youth Centre this undertaking will necessarily be of a temporary nature. Foam boxes at this stage.

There is of course no budget for this, so if anyone has some seeds or access to cheap potting mix or even advice it would be most appreciated.

Chrysi Girard can be contacted at: [mmycyfg@bigpond.com.au](mailto:mmycyfg@bigpond.com.au)

## **PEST REPORT**

### **Observation is essential in Permaculture by Sue Girard**

Earlier this year I had one of those amazing days, you know the sort I mean. when you're happy in the garden doing the Permaculture thing, harvesting the produce of a season's labour and creating compost for the next season? Then the biodiversity that you have worked so hard for -jumps up in your face and you find you need to revise your plans yet again.

It was the importance of observation that was impressed upon me this month. To set the scene...The Jerusalem artichokes were safely stored away, the okra (known in the Greenharvest catalogue as NZ yam), was being washed and sorted in the kitchen. So on a high from my feelings of productiveness, I went out to tackle the job of harvesting my water chestnuts.

I had sown two ponds with water chestnuts this year. They had grown well below a thick layer of duck weed, so I knew there would be a good number of tubers and I planned to add the refuse of dying rushes onto the compost.

The first pond had been the noisy home of a family of Striped Marsh Frogs for much of the year. so I should not have been surprised when I hauled the mat of roots and stalks on to the bank, and discovered a mass of wriggling tadpoles within the matrix. Too many to pick out, I instantly rejected the idea of using this organic refuse as compost. So I took as many water chestnuts as I could without disturbing too many tadpoles and put it all back into the pond.

The next pond I knew had not had the cacophony of frog calls. It was much newer and I did not think it would have much integrated biodiversity as yet. I was sure that this pond would give me the compost I wanted, but no you guessed it, I was wrong. When I pulled out this clump of water chestnuts, I was amazed to find dragon fly nymphs sheltering in the roots.

These will not emerge as Giant dragon flies that excited the Conservation Society in the Winter Magic Parade. But they excited me just the same. I know my integrated pest management system will work well this summer, thanks to these and other predators. It wasn't hard to buy some straw for the compost...

## COURSES

### Gardening with Permaculture, Lithgow Style!

by Vanessa Steele

Do you live near Lithgow or are interested in travelling to Lithgow to attend an intro course to Permaculture? Well if so, then I want to hear from you! This is an initial 'call-out' to seek your interest and to confirm that there is need to host such a course. No dates have been set as yet, but the idea is for a Saturday morning course to be run over a few weeks later this year and or in early 2006.

If you are interested or know someone who might be, please feel free contact me for more information on 02 4782 2813 or send me an email at [veeandsteve@hotmail.com](mailto:veeandsteve@hotmail.com) with your contact details.

### Permaculture Design Certificate in Upper Mountains

Rowe Morrow is planning to coordinate a Permaculture Design Certificate during November and early December (finish in plenty of time to organise Christmas).

Enquiries Rowe or Pat on 4751 4338 or [bmpermac@iinet.net.au](mailto:bmpermac@iinet.net.au)

### Workshops

#### Brynmawr Sustainable Living Resources

- Saturday 3 September      **Earth Building**  
This workshop explores the various ways earth is used as a primary building material.
- Saturday 10 September      **Ecology Human Health**  
This workshop will explore and identify the values that guide your life and develop a cobweb model of well being to make a map of your health
- Saturday 17 September      **Personal Impacts**  
This workshop will consider what the concept of sustainability would mean in terms of your own life.
- Saturday 8 October      **Sense of Place**  
In this workshop we map the important places in our lives, adding art and photos to help us identify what is most valuable to us about these places.

- Saturday 22 October      **Sustainable Technologies**  
In this workshop we'll explore ways we can be much more water and energy conscious, how you can downsize and how it will feel to make changes like these.
- Saturday 5 November      **Making a working Garden**
- Saturday 19 November      **Sustainable Christmas.**

Cost of each workshop \$45 for 3 hours in the morning and lunch.

Contact David and Suzanne Alder  
Phone 6359 3175    Email [bsir@bigpond.com](mailto:bsir@bigpond.com)

## The Great Tomato Festival

At Brynmawr David and Suzanne are convinced of the great superiority of heritage varieties of fruit and vegetables, and in the spirit of encouraging others to grow them they are issuing a challenge to all-comers for the end of summer next year. They are announcing the challenge now, to give all time to prepare your secret weapons, the tomatoes.

So gather your seed and prepare your soil for the inaugural Festival of Tomatoes, with picnic and competitions, to be held here at Brynmawr on Sunday April 16, 2006.

Classes will include

- Best tasting cherry type tomato
- Best-tasting slicing tomato
- Best homemade tomato sauce
- Best homemade chutney
- Most peculiar looking tomato
- Largest tomato
- The tomato that flies the farthest
- The heaviest tomato
- The ugliest tomato
- Best-dressed tomato
- The best picnic

Everyone will be involved in the judging, and there will be a seed saving demonstration to help us make the most of our harvest.

There will also be a talk on the slow food movement.

Come and join us for a great day and a cut-throat comp!

For details (nearer the time perhaps!), phone 63593175

## ODDS & SODS

The following programs are coordinated and supported by Blue Mountains City Council. More information is available in the city of *Blue Mountains State of the Environment Report*. They all need more local participants

- Streamwatch Call Anne Carey 4780 5457
- Bushcare Volunteers Contact Chris Dewhurst 4780 5528
- Landcare Group Contact Linda Thomas 4780 5612
- Sustainable Living Tips Do an Earthworks course  
Contact Rebecca Tempest 4780 5621
- Spruce up your School Contact Adrienne or Jasmine 4780 5739

### New Zealand Permaculture Convergence

21 - 24 October 2005

Taranaki [www.vironaki.co.nz](http://www.vironaki.co.nz) email [info@vironaki.co.nz](mailto:info@vironaki.co.nz)

**September is National Biodiversity Month** and the time to remember that Australia is home to more than one million species of plants and animals. About 85% of flowering plants, 84% of mammals, more than 45% of birds and 89% of inshore, freshwater fish are endemic, found nowhere else in the world.

National Threatened Species Day was first held on 7 September 1996 to commemorate the death of the last Tasmanian Tiger in captivity in 1936 in Hobart. There are more than 500 species currently threatened in NSW with an additional 35 already presumed extinct.

Baulkham Hills Shire Council has organised this threatened species tour to celebrate National Biodiversity Month. Join the tour to discover some of the vulnerable and endangered species of the Sydney Region.

THREATENED SPECIES TOUR OF BAULKHAM HILLS LGA Presented by botanical consultant Teresa James for Baulkham Hills Shire Council

DATE: Saturday 3 September 2005

TIME: 08:30am - 3:30pm

COST: \$50.00 includes

- bus transport from Castle Hill
- morning tea and lunch

#### THREATENED SPECIES

in order of appearance:

*Eucalyptus cattail*

*Acacia pubescens*

*Hibbertia superans*

*Darwinia biflora*

*Eucalyptus squamosa*

*Micromyrtus blakelyi*

*Leucopogon fletcheri* var. *fletcheri*

*Grevillea parviflora* var. *supplicans*

*Pultenaea scabra* var. *biloba*

*Persoonia hirsuta*

*Epacris purpurascens* var. *purpurascens*

*Tetradthea glandulosa*

*Pimelea curviflora* var. *curviflora*

*Acacia gordonii*

*Kunzea rupestris*

*Acacia bynoeana*

*Dillwynia tenuifolia*

Places are strictly limited so please register your interest as soon as possible.

#### CONTACT DETAILS:

Robyn Williamson

Nursery Projects Officer BHSC

(Thursday, Friday, Saturday)

BIDJIWONG COMMUNITY NURSERY

[adjacent to the Ted Horwood Reserve car park] Renown Road, Baulkham Hills

Ph: [02] 9686 4842

Fx: [02] 9686 7415

Mob: 0409 151 435

[rwilliams@bhsc.nsw.gov.au](mailto:rwilliams@bhsc.nsw.gov.au)

## Support the BMPN Stall at the Sustainability Fair

### SUMMER NEWSLETTER

Contributions for the Summer Newsletter by Friday 18 November PLEASE.

To **unsubscribe** please reply with subject 'Unsubscribe'.

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