

# SalviaNews

Victorian Salvia Study Group  
A Branch of the Herb Society of Victoria

January /February 2003

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*Rain!! Just a little bit but what a difference it made. Now , almost straight away, it is dry and horrible again. I find that if my plants are miserable I am too, and nasty and unbearable and awful in every way. My dearest ones have a lot to put up with! Thank you for your many kind enquiries about my son. He is continuing to improve so we have a lot to be grateful for. It is difficult for many of our regular 'reporters' to write at this time. Our thoughts are with you and we hope all is well soon.*

## Dates For Your Diary

**March Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> & Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> Donna's Salvia Clearance Sale over page for details**

### **March 30<sup>th</sup> 9am-2pm THE COCKATOO PLANT MARKET**

This sale of plants is a twice a year Hills Tradition. People in search of plant bargains flock from near and far. The market is held twice a year on the last Sunday of March and October-----Daylight Saving Changeover days---in aid of the CFA. Follow the prominent signs and find plant treasures in a lovely country setting. The Salvia Study Group will be there WITH SALVIAS FOR SALE. Volunteers welcome to assist.

**Follow the signs once in Cockatoo**

### **March 29& 30 Leon & Elly Roos Garden 59 Ferguson Street Upwey (Open Garden Scheme)**

**April 27 11.00am – 'The Botany of a Salvia'**

**Meg Bentley's Garden**

**3 Fords Road, Gruyere BYO Lunch to share Ph 59 649 360**

**May 18 11.00am**

**Hampton Workshop**

**21 Barnett Street, Hampton BYO Lunch to share Plants for Sale**

**June 15<sup>th</sup> 11am lunch BYO lunch to share**

**Elly & Leon Roos Garden 59 Ferguson Street Upwey ph 9752 6712**

## **REMARK NEWS**

I am still in holding mode as I do not have a garden yet. Every one of my salvias is in a pot. I took cuttings from those that were too large to transplant and most have taken. We have had searing days with the temperature often exceeding 45C and accompanying hot winds. Unusually for here, we have also had days of high humidity but no rain for months. I have noticed around the town that people are wasting precious water keeping their lawns green but overlooking the needs of the trees which need a deep watering. Really makes my blood boil. Dying red gums on the flood plains and dying trees in every town.

Once a fortnight I give my potted salvias a drink of kelp based fertilizer and I am certain that this has helped them to survive the heat. Most are now potted on to 10" pots and have good root development and some like *Salvia africana-lutea* are showing strong top growth. The cuttings and young plants are doing much better than the large plants that I dug up and put in huge pots. Lesson learnt there.

***Mary Ann Dyer***

## A MAD COLLECTOR

As a new member of the Open Garden Scheme ( our garden will be open on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> March from 10am –4.30pm both days) and an addicted gardener it has been a real challenge for me, as no doubt with all our members, coping with the intense heat and water restrictions. But under these extreme conditions being on mains water not tanks as so many of you are, means that our garden is holding up well. It is a young garden of only six and a half years and my aim has been to observe for my own interest the never-ending variety of new plants coming on to the market, whether they be from Bunnings, local markets or the many nurseries scattered around the hills of Upwey. Always hunting for the different and unusual. There always some that don't reach their full potential because of their short flowering span. I usually send them to better homes.

One of my greatest loves are the Salvias of which I have now collected over 100, thanks to my fellow Victorian Salvia Group members and other suppliers. But my collections don't stop there. I'm always looking for the best performing and longest flowering roses, that collection has reached almost a hundred. Other interests are now succulents which are scattered around in a wide selection of pots. The fernery has expanded with some very impressive and large cythaeas and large and small leaf varieties, one being an upside down leaf fern. I am amazed how hardy they have been, most were purchased from the Upper Ferntree Gully fern man. He surely knows his ferns.

Perennials are another favourite. The longer flowering the better I like them. Campanulas, dianthus, euphorbias, geraniums, cranesbills, heronsbills, hydrangeas...Well you can see how addicted I am. Apart from plants I love artistry and design in the garden. Distinct features of our sloping garden are rock terraces, walled areas and an unusual mix of garden arbours and other structures both functional and theme creating.

There is a blend of 6 distinct areas--- oriental, cottage, fernery, dry /arid, vegetable garden and a native area. Pathways wind through staircases of rock and mosaic. Pots, statuary and garden sculpture are other interesting features. The garden is truly an ever -changing experience. As I have previously written many plants get moved or given away to happy friends and to family members.

A planting of the clumping and rosette forms of Salvia was done with mixed results. The area runs along the base of a hedge of alternating *photinia robusta* and *pittosporums*. It is very dry and has morning sun till 1pm. Underplanted are various colours of *Salvia coccinea* that are doing extremely well. More will be planted to add some extra colour. *Salvia nemorosa* 'Rosewein' flourished in early spring and summer but has been given a cut back to encourage another flush of blooms before summer/autumn. *Salvia nemorosa ssp tesquicola*, lush green foliage and beautiful purple flowers, is still looking good, no need to prune as yet. *Salvia indica* performed beautifully but after flowering was cut back at the end of January. New foliage is already growing back. One of my favourites, *Salvia taraxacifolia* has been blooming since spring and even though still holding some white to cream flowers its bracts are very interesting. The foliage too has a lot of character, a pale sage green almost silver appearance. The rapid growth of *Salvia aethopis* was spectacular. Leaves of up to six inches wide and eighteen inches long. This may seem incredible but they truly were magnificent. To top this growth we were rewarded with a huge spreading tower of white flowers from 3 foot in height to just over 1 foot in width. Staking was necessary to prevent the spike from snapping. I probably should have left it for longer but decided not to wait till seeds developed, so at the end of January I lopped it down at the base. There were a few shoots but with the heat they have shrivelled away. I'll leave the stump and see what happens. *Salvia argentea* with its furry white leaves is progressing slowly. Leaves are very flat to the ground and don't seem to be doing much. I'll keep an eye on it.

*Salvia nemerosa* 'Snow Hills', of which there are two in the garden, formed a dense clump of foliage and beautiful white flowered bracts. As they continued growing out wards the central area began to form a new set of leaves and flowers. One has had all the outer foliage and flowers removed leaving the central new growth, it may be a big mistake but I've left the other one complete, to compare them at the end of the growing season.

Going back to my previous article... **PROPAGATING CUTTINGS IN WATER**...The window sill was too small to hold the large amount of cuttings this year. From mid- November a selection of salvias and other perennials have been propagated for the Open Garden Scheme. Groups of up to 20 tip cuttings planted in 3-4 inch pots with either potting mix, propagating mix or seed raising mix or

whatever I can get my hands on at the time have given me an 80% success rate and nice healthy plants potted on ready for sale.

I am looking forward to meeting heaps of interesting people at our Open Garden. Panic sets in at times but Leon and I still have plans to build a few more arbours with a combination of natural wood fallen from some trees and pine poles. Sounds interesting. I love carpentry and a challenge. Friends and family are helping us out on the two days and we are really looking forward to sharing this special garden. I think a few bottles of champagne will be the go at the end of it all.

We hope that some of our members and their families share this experience with us and say hello when they find us somewhere in the garden. See flyer for details.

Happy gardening ***Elly Roos***

### **DONNA'S MAD MASSIVE SALVIA STOCK CLEARANCE**

**VARIOUS SALVIAS AVAILABLE FOR 50cents, \$1 & \$2 DISCOUNTS FOR BULK PURCHASES**

**EVERYTHING TO GO! Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> & Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> March 11.00am-5.00pm**  
**62 Falls Road Kalorama**  
**9728 1335/0412 766 763**

### **Salvias at the Geelong Botanic Gardens**

The Salvia collection at the Geelong Botanic Gardens (G.B.G.) was increased in 1999. Graham and Velda Ellis, members of the Salvia Study Group donated plants and tube stock was purchased and added to the Salvias already on site. G.B.G. Staff carried out the initial research, documentation and labelling of plants and all Gardens Staff assisted with planting out in beds in the centre of the Gardens.

Further interest was shown by the Salvia Study Group later in 1999 when Bill Whitehead, Geelong Group member offered further help with I.D, donations and exchange of plants. Bills ongoing interest has been much appreciated. Meg Bentley, who holds a salvia collection with the Ornamental Plant Conservation Association of Australia, had recently reviewed our collection and will be writing a report and setting out guidelines for registration of the collection.

We are currently undertaking documentation of all the living collections at the G.B.G, including our rapidly expanding collection of Salvia We currently have 110 species, varieties, forms and cultivars and fully documenting these plants will be an important development in the management of the collection.

Salvias are displayed at the G.B.G. in a number of different ways and localities. We have a significant taxonomic display of a diverse range of salvias in the original garden. This display area will expand over the course of 2003 to represent more of the diversity of this plant group.

Late last year the gardens opened the new 21<sup>st</sup>, Century Garden which focuses on a series of thematic plant displays. Salvia has been incorporated into several of the displays including Southern African species, arid zone species from South America and Salvias of 'Islands' origins.

I am really enjoying the challenges associated with developing the Salvia Collection at the garden and hope to strengthen the relationship with the Salvia Study Group and the Geelong Botanic Gardens

*Des Lawrence*

### **Judi Forester and the Gardens at Otway Herbs**

Biddles Road, off Wild Dog Road... don't you just love that address, that's how you get to Otway Herbs and Judi's home. Situated on a hillside, up in the Otway Ranges giving you a sense of being on top of the world, especially as you round a bend in the road and a magnificent vista opens before you...steep rolling hills and valleys and in the distance...down below, is the ocean.

This is the first time I have been here in Summer and I did miss the low cloud and rolling mists but this was different, warm and not a cloud in the sky.

Apart from all the herbs, Judi grows quite a good range of salvias... and it is interesting to see how well they perform, especially when they have to contend with such contrasting elements like heat, dry, full sun, mists, drizzle, cold and wind throughout the year. *Salvia officinalis* var *rosea* grow very well so too does *S. corrugata*, *S. muirii*, *S. somalensis*, *S. 'Waverley'*, *S. cacaliaefolia* and *S. karwinskii* also the tall growing *Salvia sprucei* with its showy magenta flowers.

One particularly good salvia in the garden, flowering a treat with masses of white flowers... the white flowering *Salvia sclarea* ( it was commented that it could be *S. macrosiphon*, this needs to be checked out). Another special was *Salvia forskahlei* 'alba'... quite unique and great to have another white flowering salvia since we have so few. Please note... Judi does not have plants of this for sale since they have to be grown from seed and at this stage one doesn't know as yet if it comes true white from seed.

The nursery is open daily from 9am - 5pm but for those folk who can't make the trip, plants are sold via Mail Order. For an informative catalogue on Herbs, Perennials Salvias, Fragrant and Medicinal plants, Rockery, Shrubs and Bulbs... contact Judi at Otway Herbs, Ph/Fax 03 52 376318; 155 Biddles Rd, Apollo Bay, 3233.

*Meg Bentley*

[ Recently, some members of the Salvia Study Group made a visit to Geelong... January 18/19 2003: to see Bill and Shirley Whitehead...the Geelong Botanic Gardens and travel on down to see Judi Forester of 'Otway Herbs' in Apollo Bay, Judi also grows quite a number of Salvias, with some for sale.]

### **A little bit of news on the new extension gardens at the Geelong Botanic Gardens**

The dry climate gardens are really growing quite well... having seen it from the very beginning... right up to this stage, I would have to say that the salvias are doing very well, so too are all the exotics and the natives.

The salvias chosen for this section were the hardy species from parts of Africa including South Africa and other countries like Mexico, the Mediterranean and South America. *Salvia somalensis*, *S. disermis*, *S. dolomitica*, *S. chamelaeagnea*, *S. lanceolata*, *S. rugosa*, *S. nilotica*, *S. stenophylla* and *S. africana-caerulea* represented South Africa. Some of the other salvia representatives were *S. hirtella*, *S. polystachya*, *S. urica*, *S. chamaedryoides*, *S. discolor*, *S. chiapensis* and *S. cacaliaefolia*.

Also doing remarkably well was the *Dracaena draco* from the Canary Islands... this huge Dragon Tree appears to like its new position... standing like a sentinel over the large cactus area and it hasn't looked back. What a ghastly summer it's been for all the new plants in this wonderful extension and yet everything has survived the heat and dry.

Plants like Leatherwoods... and the Celery Top Pine have been remarkable since they usually prefer a much cooler climate eg. Tasmania and New Zealand or rainforested areas.

*Euphorbias*, *Plectranthus*, *Pelargonium*, *Cussonia*, Grass Trees, Grevilleas, Calitris, the Desert Cassia and of course the *Brachychiton rupestris*... the extraordinary Bottle Tree, carefully positioned at the entrance to the Gardens. Other plants... too numerous to mention, have settled in and grown very well.

Des Lawrence, the gardener who maintains the Salvia beds also made the trip to Apollo Bay to visit Judi Forester at Otway Herbs and brought along Bill Whitehead from Geelong.

*Meg Bentley*

### **News from the Dandenongs – Mt Evelyn**

The day I received my first Salvia Newsletter, I found my 5ft high *S.dombeya* had five buds! It hadn't flowered the previous winter in my hot house. In early December it was still in a 15" pot, so lest I should lose it, I decided to risk moving it. After a month, attached to an arch in my sheltered, part-shade "trial garden", flowers began emerging, one at a time. Such excitement!

"Rivendell" Nursery has 4 "trial gardens" – in an environment of both hot sun and part-shade under tall deciduous trees. The *S. dombeya* garden has morning sun all year, some north sun on one side, yet is sheltered by tall alders. *S. cacalaefolia*, *S. gesneriiflora* 'tequila red', *S. elegans* "honey melon", *S. guaranitica*, *S. dorisiana*, *S. van houttii* all thrive here.

On either side of a wide path the area gets more sun. *Salvia* 'Marine Blue' flowers constantly. *S. karwinskii*, *S. madrensis*, *S. Purple Majesty*, *S. involucrata* and *S. miniata* do well on the south side. The soil is poor in this whole area– yet we still get good flowering from all but *S. mexicana major*, which may need some extra potassium.

On an exposed north-facing hillside with no regular watering available, but fertilized in spring 2001, the largest Salvias – *S. Karwinskii*, *Salvia gesneriiflora* 'Tequila', *S. gesneriiflora*, *S. iodantha*, *S. dorisiana*, and *S. mexicana* 'Limelight' are forming copses. Many have developed up to five separate root systems since December.

These contrasts truly are evidence of this superb, versatile species and their ability to survive.

We have one area getting water system assistance. The difference here suits *S. "Waverley"*, *S. Indigo Spires*, *S. californica*, *S. canariensis*, *S. greggii* (and several yet to be identified).

Since reading in the January newsletter of the rabbit inhibitors, we've planted *S. repans*, *S. chamelaeagnea* and one yet to be identified. We must wait a while to see how effective these plants are. We planted them along a trellis fence where rabbits were eating through even the bird netting placed there. These critters certainly are persistent!

I have plenty of staked *S. dombeyas* and also a good supply of *S. miniata* for sale. Ph: 9736 2718 (evenings are best) or visit us on Tuesdays between 10am – 5pm or Saturdays by appointment.

**Sandra Bilsborrow**

### Mornington Peninsula News

One consequence of the drought, for us here on the Mornington Peninsula, was the loss late last year of two salvias which we have had for about twenty years - previously at Mt Eliza and then transplanted here and grown successfully for the last seven years. Both hardy *Salvia elegans* (Pineapple Sage) and *Salvia* 'Marischino' (Cherry Sage) with its bright pink flowers, succumbed to the dry conditions.

More recently we lost a newly planted *S. grahamii* though this was more likely to have been the result of poor water quality. Our dam which is very low and had very little water added to it over the winter has become quite saline. I was not aware of this until the shrivelled leaves of some of our roses which had had the foliage sprayed told me.

The rainfall which has been remarkably consistent at about 785 mm was only 546 mm last year. In spite of this our other salvias are coping quite well, including a number newly planted although *Salvia africana-lutea* is struggling. I have taken cuttings and hoping.

I was interested in the article in the November/December edition of Salvia News referring to rabbits not being able to stomach salvias. That had been my experience but the other night I had a rabbit, obviously confused by the dark, which feasted on my *Salvia lyrata*, almost eating all of it before realising that it was not a lettuce. I guess not all rabbits are smart.

**Bevan Whelan  
Tyabb.**

SalviaNews begins its third year in June 2003. Subscription forms will be sent in the next issue and will be due at the end of May. We have kept the subscription fee at \$12. We promise you another year of interesting articles sent in by you our readers. We have subscribers interstate and internationally and they love to read your news and views. The deadline for copy is the end of March.

Another Summer and another painstaking headache of sparing the water to keep the many, many plants alive in pots as well as the gardens. One does have to be ruthless and determine what plants are easily replaced and what rare 'specials' need water the most. It's a bit like playing God, dealing with all the helpless minions and deciding who is going to live and who is going to die... so to speak! I love everyone of them and want them all to live but I do have to be practical. When tank water is All the water you have, then, as always, water restrictions are a constant thought and concern... year in and year out!

As a consequence of playing God... many of the older plants have been 'laid to rest'. I have decided that many areas of the garden are over due for updating and a 'makeover' so to speak... so, when Summer draws to a close, I shall set to work remodelling and replanting quite a few areas. It has been very interesting though to see just what can survive the dry, either with a minimum of moisture ... or no watering at all.

The South African species win hands down of course without the watering... but interestingly quite a few of the Mexican, Central and South American species have lived in a comatose state through those hottest days. Those that live in the part shade are showing slight signs of coming back from the dead, having had a little light rain, mind you the same species that have suffered in the full sun are awaiting burial. We can hardly wait till Summer is over... or good rainfall!!

**Meg Bentley**

### **NEWS FROM ELTHAM**

I have little to report this month, my garden is looking rather sad from lack of water, like many others; and in all conscience I can't use too much water.

Unfortunately, having missed the pruning day, I am not quite sure when to prune some of the salvias. Anyhow as *Salvia. corrugata*, which is lax at the best of times, (for me) was looking decidedly droopy, I pruned that. I noted that it strikes very easily where it touches the ground. *S. `Omaha Gold* looked a bit `leggy' so I cut that back too. *S. mexicana* `Limelight' is huge so maybe I should do something with that as well.

My friend, Liz Damaschi gave me *Salvia regla*, *S. apiana* and *S. discolor* (which I lost last year) for my Christmas present (aren't I lucky). These were in quite small pots and as I was loathe to plant them out at this time of the year, I transplanted them to larger pots and they are looking great. Though drooping in the hot days, *S. dorisiana* perks up and is about 3' high, looks good. After having nearly lost *S. spathacea* twice, I dug it up a couple of months ago and put it in a attractive terracotta pot; what a difference, looking great and doing what it has a propensity to do, suckering. What a nice, modest plant *Salvia`Waverley'* is, doesn't shout but always looks just so. Another smaller one that is looking good is *S. sinaloensis*, and as Betty Clebsch says in her book, a very true blue. Oh, another one I nearly lost was *S. semiatrata*, potted that, will look for a more suitable position when the weather cools down.

What a funny summer we've had, all that dry, many plants flagging (and ourselves as well) and yet there are other plants that have never looked better, though even the roses seemed to burn badly.

I may have more (and better) news for you next time.

**PADDY CHILDS GREEN**

**Geelong News**

In the south west corner of my back yard is the *Salvia discolor* which has bloomed more or less continuously for more than ten years. Sadly that , together with *Salvia madrensis*, *S. pulchella*, and *S. greggii* Alba must be cut down when the fencing contractor arrives, to replace the derelict fence they have nestled against so happily until now.

Following our recent hot days, I have lost *Salvia fulgens*, *S. sagittatis* 'Mosquito', and perhaps others. Also most of the two metre high bushes are showing signs of high stress levels too. However I still have plenty of survivors who have tolerated the heat well. In the cooler days which will eventually come, plus suitable rain, I have promised my garden and myself to do some mulching at long last.

Several days ago, I visited The Geelong Botanical Gardens to update myself on the *Salvias* there. On looking at the large bed of *salvias* some of us are familiar with I noticed it had recently been mulched. Many of the *salvias* were really huge, and several had no visible labels, hence I had some difficulty trying to identify them. Nevertheless it was still a good display showing many different species.

What really surprised and delighted me, was to see three new and fairly large beds, mostly planted with species not contained in the above mentioned bed. In the new beds I notice amongst them, a number of species I had donated to the GBG last year. Some of these were: *Salvia* 'Omaha Gold,' *S. holwayi*, *S. judaica* , *S. nubicola*, *S. austriaca*. Another one with the impressive title *Salvia leucantha* x *rutilans* 'Anthony Parker' bush sage, also came to them from me.

Others, not necessarily from me, bore very descriptive titles on their labels, such as:

*S. glechonaefolia* Ground Ivy sage

*S. guaranitica* x *gesneriiflora* Costa Rican Blue Sage

*S. nubicola* Himalayan Yellow Sage

*S. oppositiflora* Peruvian Salmon Sage

*S. puberula* Hairy Roseleaf Sage

*S. pulchella* Showy Fruit Scented Sage

There were 2 *salvias* located in separate beds, which made close comparison rather difficult, where each bore its own label thus:

*S. microphylla* var. *neurepia* Delta Leaf Sage

*S. microphylla* var. *neurepia* Fruity Little Leaf Sage

I wonder if one, or both of them, relate to our old time favourite we knew as Graham Sage? I have always regretted that very few *salvias* were known by common names. This is I believe to a large extent the reason why *salvias* are relatively unknown to the gardening public even today.

In summary, these new beds were well mulched and the *salvias* well grown and extremely healthy. Quite a change from the unmulched and un-fertilised lot trying to grow in my garden.

**Bill Whitehead**

### **REPORT FROM THE NOBELIUS COLLECTION**

Although Emerald has experienced some falls of rain during the summer, there have been long dry periods between these showers with temperatures often in the 30's and strong gusty drying winds. Keeping my own garden alive has taken much of my time, so the watering sessions at the Emerald plot have been few and far between. We have invested in a hose long enough to reach every corner of the plot from the tap nearest the garden, and this has enabled me to give the plants a thorough soaking on two or three occasions during the hot spells.

In spite of the drought the majority of *Salvias* in the Nobelius Collection are not only surviving but growing well, although the mid summer 'bloomers' are producing few flowers.

As I have noted in earlier reports the South African species enjoy our Emerald soil and open situation and they thrive in dry conditions. *Salvia chamelaeagnea* is definitely the glory of the garden...a mass of bloom as it will be for weeks to come. Competing is *Salvia lanceolata* with its dusty pink bracts as lovely as its flowers and *S. africana caerulea* causing much visitor attention, the birds seem to like them too.

The magenta form of *Salvia leucantha* is also enjoying the dry conditions with many spikes in full bloom, the white flowered form (due to a severe cutting back in early summer) is not performing as well. During the past few weeks *Salvia canariensis* has ignored the heat and winds by producing a brilliant show of colour and the resultant bracts are also quite spectacular and long lasting.

The forms of *Salvia greggii* in the garden are not as colourful as usual, although *S.greggii* Red is blatantly brilliant in its corner of one of the beds. *Salvia apiana* has almost completed its period of showiness, for weeks its long spikes of bluish white flowers have been the highlight of the collection. *Salvia clevelandii*, with its highly aromatic leaves is flowering sparsely. *Salvia splendens* 'Black Knight', a young plant is flowering well, while our old faithful. *S.microphylla neurepia* always seems to flash a few strawberry red flowers above its lime green leaves--a lovely contrast.

The leafiness of many of the plants is surprising, considering the lack of moisture during most of the summer but unfortunately a few plants have not survived the drought. At long last our *Salvia officinalis* 'Tricolor' which has grown (but not profusely) in a corner of one of the beds for more than 8 years has disappeared but a replacement planted only 12 months ago enjoyed a very brief life span. *Salvia glutinosa* (the sticky yellow flowered salvia) has survived for a couple of years but needs more water than I have been able to give it but its yellow flowered neighbour *S. nubicola*, although a small plant is flowering well and should last for at least another season.

The recently planted border of *Salvia nemorosa* 'Blue Hills' etc are in a very dry area and are struggling, strangely enough, the rampant Bog Sage *S. uliginosa* is flowering well in the same bed. *Salvia hians*, *S. hirtella* and *S. 'Electric Blue'* have all decided to depart this life, while *S. taraxifolia*, *S. tamalaupis* 'Tammy' and *S. broussonettii*, showing stress before their first deep watering are now deciding to stay in the collection!

All in all, in spite of our summer weather conditions, the plot is progressing well and the comments from the people passing by are favourable.

**Our February Workshop on the 16<sup>th</sup> is to be held at the plot and you are all welcome to come and see for yourselves its current state of growth.**

**Ray Boatman**

### Selby News

No rain and searing heat has sucked the earth dry beyond all recovery I fear, then a mist of rain replaces the smoke in the valley and some salvias revive and I smile again, temporarily. There is more to rain than just wetness, it contains trace elements beside nitrogen, and the healing effects on the plants is amazing. I expect that smoke from the bushfires filling my valley has all sorts of good things in it being spread by the rain. The 'keep them in pots in the shade system' to preserve my garden treasures is working well. Having the new tank is great and the twice daily watering is easier because the pots are close to it. I sit the pots on a layer of coarse perlite contained in polystyrene boxes or old trays or just about anything salvaged from anywhere. The idea is that salvias need drainage, i.e. their roots get waterlogged without air, even though the roots grow through the pots to the perlite below they are alive and even thriving. The nucleus of a new garden one day. When I had to leave so suddenly on December 1st for Queensland because my son Peter had a stroke the VSSG members organized a watering roster. I stayed away 5 weeks until he improved and flew back to find my plants looking wonderful. And Pete is recovering well, being young and fit is a great advantage. The rest of the garden is mostly dry sticks, some will survive but none will flower for a long while.

**Trudi Fry**

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