

Growing Notes

by GEORGE H. SPALDING

A recent phone call prompted this column. A lady's voice said, "I know this is not the best time to visit the Arboretum, but there will be something in bloom, won't there?" I assured her there was always something in bloom and then decided to make a tour of the grounds to see just what was in flower. Time was limited so the tour only covered the Australian section and a part of the South African section.

In the South African section, the Aloes were giving a fine account of themselves, as they had been for the last two or three months. There is at least one species, and usually several, for any size space in the garden. Many require a minimum of care and reward with a beautiful show of color, especially during the winter months.

The variety of bloom in the Australian section was surprising. Several of the Acacias were in their prime and others just at the end of blooming. *Eucalyptus orpettii* was just beginning to show full color. This fine small *Eucalyptus* is now coming into its own in the nurseries. Seedlings vary, of course, since it is a hybrid, but practically all are good. *Eucalyptus caesia* is believed to be one of the parents and many of the plants have the beautiful bark so typical of *E. caesia*.

An old friend, *Grevillea Thelemanniana*, was on the verge of passing out of full bloom although there was still plenty of color. This beautiful, light and lacy appearing shrub has been in southern California for many years. It appears and disappears in the nurseries. There are two likely reasons for this, the first is that it is not an easy plant to hold over very long after the retailer obtains it from the grower; the second is that it will suddenly die in the garden after years of fine growth. When it dies, it is often practically overnight. The greatest problem for nurseries is watering. *G. Thelemanniana* requires perfect drainage in containers, and must not be overwatered. The Arboretum planting, which consists of several plants, has reached maturity. The clump is about four feet high and eight to ten feet through. It blooms freely and is a very worthwhile sight each year.

Two shrubby Cassias drew attention. One for the foliage and form, the other for the bright yellow flowers. *Cassia phyllodinea* is an attractive little shrub approximately 18 inches tall and 24 inches across. The phyllodia are grey, about two to three inches long and $\frac{1}{4}$ inch wide. The bush has a neat, rounded appearance. The second Cassia, *C. Sturtii* is six feet tall and at least as broad. It has a rather open, somewhat lax habit, the branches actually lying on the ground. The flowers are rich golden yellow and the shrub was just coming into bloom.

Dodonea viscosa and its variety *atropurpurea* are both widely planted in southern California. *Dodonea microzyga* is equally attractive and has the added advantage of very showy seed pods. The Arboretum planting contains a dozen specimens, all grown from seed.

There is variation in denseness of branching and excellent forms can be selected.

All were in heavy seed, and provided a beautiful show from some distance off. The foliage is a dark green which sets off the deep ruby fruits to perfection. The oldest plants of at least 12 years were beginning to show some dead wood, indicating that this shrub may not be too long-lived. However, all were in good health at this time. At this age the plants have reached maturity. There were all approximately four to five feet tall and as much as ten feet wide.



Eucalyptus orpettii



Grevillea Thelemanniana

Clianthus formosus (*C. dampieri*), the Sturt Pea is again putting on quite a show at the Arboretum. This is the second time field plantings have grown well and produced what can be considered fully developed plants, with good bloom.

The Sturt Pea (*Clianthus formosus*) is undoubtedly one of the most highly publicized of all Australian wildflowers, and justly so. It is spectacular in bloom and well worth the effort required to grow it well. It is native to a large area of Australia from the northeast coast of western Australia to the western plains of New South Wales. In the wild it appears after there have been rains. There may be some question as to whether it is an annual or perennial even though it is generally listed as a perennial in botanical records. The plants at the Arboretum have been annual, and that is probably the best way to treat it here. Seed is available commercially from Australia.

There appears to be no great difficulty in germinating *Clianthus* if the seeds are scarified before planting. The boiling water method is also good. Seed should be planted in a sandy mixture to assure good drainage and minimize danger of

damp-off. This is the major problem in getting seedlings to survive.

Once the seedlings are off and growing get them out into the ground as soon as they are large enough to survive under field conditions. *Clianthus* will grow in a variety of soils from sandy through heavy. Keep in mind that root rots are the most prevalent problems in the field and watering should be done very carefully in heavy soils.

Once out in the field do not be surprised if the original upright shoot or shoots die back as lateral shoots form. The strong laterals will grow quite rapidly to six or eight feet in length and lie flat on the ground. The leaves are silvery grey and the brilliant scarlet, pea-shaped flowers are borne in clusters on stems rising to a height of six to eight inches. Each flower has a jet-black spot in the center. Plants grown from commercially produced seed may show variations, such as having maroon centers instead of black. Other variations in color of flower have been reported from Australia. Once this beautiful plant is grown in quantity, it is very likely that many forms will be developed, as has been done with the California Poppy.





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