



SGAP Cairns

February 2012
Newsletter 117

Society for Growing Australian Plants (Queensland Region) Inc., Cairns Branch
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February 2012

Stuart Worboys

Happy New Year!

Happy 2012 to all Cairns SGAppers. I trust everyone has had a good break and are now back in the garden fighting back the wet season growth spurts.

After a slow start to the wet season, the weather is starting to get a little more lively. The Bureau of Meteorology reports the development of a "deep and well organised monsoon trough" (the trough marks the great convergence between temperate and tropical weather systems) across Australia's northern coastline. They predict weather movements associated with the trough will bring above average rainfall to out part of the world, and an increased likelihood of cyclones.

All of this means the chances of rain for our February outing are high. To avoid the risks of being washed out, the meeting will be held at my place in Stratford (directions below). We'll have a chance to have a look at a couple of native-dominated gardens on this street, including one developed over several years by botanical scientist, Dr Mark Harrington.

Please bring barbecue lunch and a chair. Look forward to seeing you then.



Upcoming Activities

SGAP CAIRNS BRANCH
OUTING

Saturday 18 February

*Garden tour at Holmes St,
Stratford*

SGAP TABLELANDS BRANCH
OUTING.

Sunday 26 February

Any queries please contact
Chris Jaminon 4095 2882 or
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TOWNVILLE SGAP

Meets on the 2nd
Wednesday of the month,
February to November, in
Annandale Community
Centre at 8pm, and holds
excursions the following
Sunday.

Plant Cuttings

News from the wide world of plants

Giant flowers in Cairns

24 Jan, *The Rock News* - One of the spectacular *Amorphophallus titanum* lilies held in the Cairns Botanic Gardens, has flowered. It was reported to be at its best on Tuesday 25th January. This aroid lily produces the largest **unbranched** inflorescence of any plant in the world. Apparently the largest **branched** inflorescence is produced by the huge Talipot Palm (*Corypha umbraculifera*), a close relative of the Australian native *Corypha utan*.



Amorphophallus titanum at the Cairns Botanic Gardens, Jan 2011.

The largest **single flower** is produced by *Rafflesia arnoldii*, a

parasite of south east Asian rainforest vines.

Golden orbs to golden textiles

26 Jan – ABC. ABC reports the successful “milking” of Madagascan golden orb weavers to produce a useable silken thread.



The Madagascan golden orb spiders, closely related to the huge *Nephila maculata* we often find in our gardens, produce about 25 m of silk at each milking. Over a millions separate milkings were needed to gather sufficient silk for the weaving of a 4 m long textile. The fabric, a wonderful lustrous golden colour, is on display at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. A short video about it can be found on youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2z07dB3sKTs>

This month at the Australian Tropical Herbarium

The Australian Tropical Herbarium (ATH), based at James Cook University Cairns Campus, contains the world’s largest research collection of Australian tropical plants. The collection, comprising pressed dried specimens, pickled fruits and deep frozen DNA samples, is not a static dusty museum collection: it is the subject of ongoing scientific research.

Of particular interest at the ATH is the use of DNA to develop our understanding of relationships between plant groups and their evolutionary history. For example, DNA “bar-coding” is being used to estimate diversity in poorly known tropical floras. Bar-coding is a nickname for a new program in which the DNA code of one or more genes in a plant species is determined. As each plant species is likely to have a unique DNA sequence for each of these genes, in theory it should be possible to read a sequence from an unknown plant species, compare it against a database of sequences from known species, and thus determine the species. More excitingly, this method can be applied to poorly known floras. By collecting material from a poorly known plant community (e.g. in Papua New Guinea), and working out the DNA code for selected genes, it has been shown you can assess the biodiversity of the vegetation, even if you don’t know the species.

Native Plants for the Tropics

Stuart Worboys

Grevillea baileyana: PROTEACEAE

White Oak, Bailey's Silky Oak, Brown Silky Oak, Findley's Silky Oak

An attractive, fast growing tree for the tropics. This tree has it all – a native tree with appealing foliage, large attractive inflorescences that produce large quantities of bird-attracting nectar, and it's easy to grow. The tree's foliage is a deep, shiny green above, and a glistening bronze colour below. When in flowers, in the leadup to the Wet Season, it bears hundreds of white flowers in dense, honey scented, lacy spikes.

Grevillea baileyana is native to drier low-elevation rainforests (although occasionally reported from altitudes up to 660 m) from Mission Beach to south west Papua New Guinea. It is quite common in regrowth rainforest – for example, several specimens can be seen on the shoulders of the Kuranda Range Road. In cultivation, it has been grown successfully as far south as Melbourne.

The *Grevillea Study Group*¹ reports “*G. baileyana* is long lived and establishes readily in a wide range of coastal and near coastal climates. In cultivation it tends to branch from the base forming a tall shrubby habit. It requires little maintenance, except for summer watering during dry periods, although exposure to excessive winds may cause damage to the foliage.” It reportedly reaches only 6-10 m in cultivation.

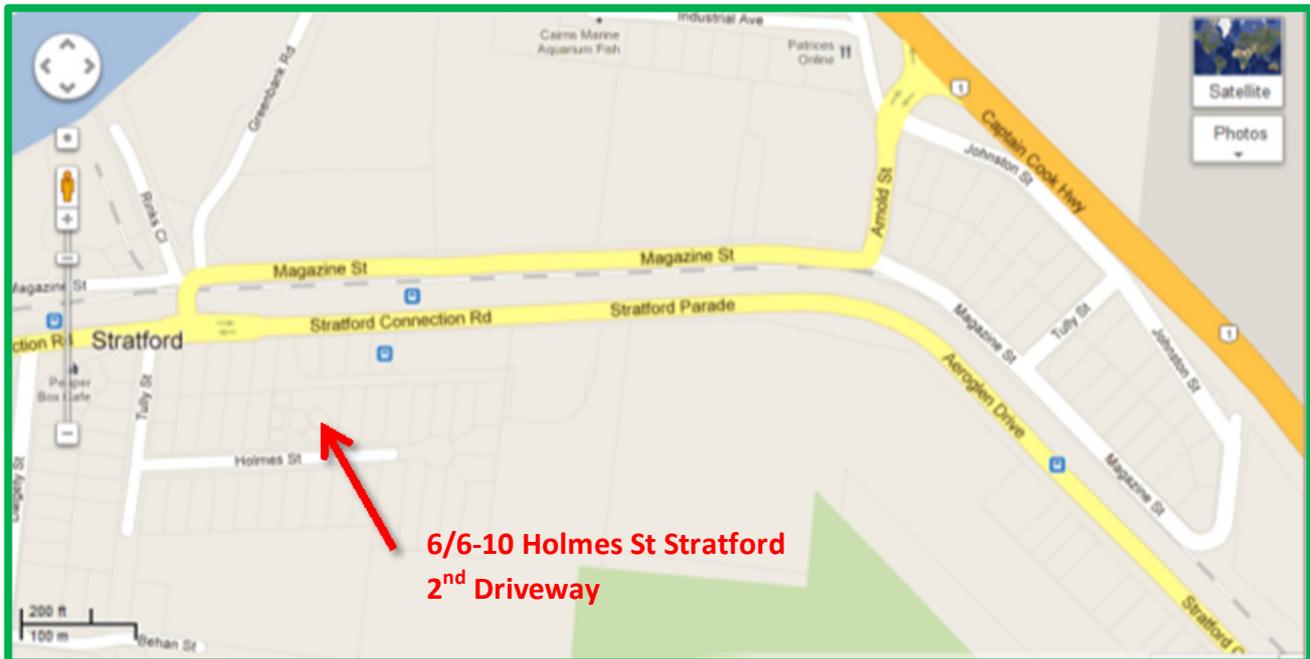
The specimen in our garden has been planted onto a trench filled with well-composted cow-manure, and is well mulched. Surrounding soils are moderately acidic rainforest clays. Beyond the occasional regulatory prune, it has received little attention, but has thrived in its semi-shaded position.

This is an outstanding tree for a medium to large garden.



Grevillea baileyana (Photo by Tatiana Gerus)

¹ A member group of the SGAP national parent organisation, the Australian Native Plants Society.



February Excursion - Directions

When?

12 noon, 18 February.

Where?

Unit 6, 6-10 Holmes Street, Stratford.

What to bring?

Lunch (a barbecue will be available)

Chair

To get there:

1. Head north from Cairns City along Sheridan St.
2. Pass the turnoff to the main Airport terminal.
3. Take the first left turn into Aeroglen Drive; follow this for about 3 km.
4. Immediately after passing the Barron River Hotel, turn left onto Tully Street.
5. Turn left into Holmes St.
6. Enter via the **second driveway** of the Stratford Gardens unit complex.

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