

Growing Native Trees to assist with recovery from Bush Fire

Background to Idea

When I moved to my present address in western Sydney my plan was to create a yard that was ecologically friendly. The front yard is as big as most people's backyards used to be, whilst the back yard is as small as front yards. This is because about thirty years ago my house was roughly renovated with the back of the house becoming the front. The land on which it sat, initially a poultry farm, was sold and subdivided. It became part of an easement for the mains power lines and a cul de sac with houses around one side, backing onto a busy main road.

The few plants in the yard consisted of a *Schinus areira* (Pepper Tree), newly planted as a present from departing tenants, *Clivias* along the back of the house, an *Hydrangea*, some *Grevillea robusta* (Silky Oak) and *Lagerstroemia indica* (Crepe Myrtle), and lots and lots of onion weed.

So, in the ensuing years I meticulously dug out the onion weed, successfully in some areas of the yard, and not so successfully in others. I dug new gardens and made ponds, planted lots of new plants and many native and non-native trees and shrubs, and have made half-hearted attempts at growing vegetables. Initially I recycled and composted all plant matter from the garden and from household use. The result has been a multitude of plants germinating needing new homes. Now I find I have too much plant matter to recycle so have become more discerning about what goes into the compost and worm farm. As Blacktown Council does not have a green recycling service much of my excess greenery has gone into the rubbish bin!

Edible plants I began repotting and donating to the community garden. Other seedlings I cultivated and planted in other projects with which I have been involved, and of course, shared plants with family and friends. Then the bush fires began!

The ferocity of our most recent bush fires started me thinking about the challenges people having to reestablish their properties would be facing. I also knew that although many native trees can regenerate after fires, any new growth and seeds, and other plants cannot, and indeed have been destroyed.

The Idea/Project now under way

The rain has been a blessing, and with the rain has come wonderful new plant growth. Plants I thought had succumbed to the blistering heat have regenerated, and the compost used to top up the soil and pot plants is encouraging strong and healthy seedlings of many different fruits and vegetables to grow prolifically.

Collecting seed has been a side interest of mine for many years, so this interest I am now putting to practical use by sowing the seed of the native plants I have. Seed from my Iron Bark tree has germinated and the seedlings are now sprouting their second pair of leaves, Brush Box seeds are germinating, and I am about to sow *Leptospermum* seeds. The next stage for these plants will be distributing them. Both these species are found readily in the bush. The *Lophostem* is one species listed by the Koala Society as food for our now endangered koala population.



Grevillia robusta seedlings

Other native seedlings which grow in the garden naturally, and which I am potting, are *Grevillea robusta* (Silky Oak), *Casuarina glauca* (She Oak), and *Hibiscus geranioides* (Native Hibiscus). *Melaleucas* and *Callistemons* have also set seed, some of which I have sown and are germinating. Some of these plants may not be suitable for bush regeneration due to their 'weedy' propensity, but may be useful as specimen trees. Recently I was given seed from *Strelitzia* plants, some seed of which I have planted and am hoping they germinate. Other trees which seed and germinate readily are from *Melia azederach* (White Cedar) and *Jacaranda* trees. Some of these I have also potted.

To distribute the plants I have been considering where they may be of most use, and have some ideas to follow up. However, in the present lockdown situation some public outlets, such as Growers' Markets, may not be viable options. But perhaps giving them away on Gumtree might work.



Seeds from a tree I cannot identify, but it is either a Callistemon or Melaleuca



More advanced, self sown seedlings of Brush Box, White Cedar and Hibiscus geranioides



Brush Box seedlings