

COMMUNITY NURSERY



Accessing local provenance plants was always a problem for projects until our Seed Bank was set up. Native plants were only produced in Mackay or Gladstone, the seed used to propagate them sometimes came from even further afield.

Once the Community Seed Bank was functioning however, and word of the availability of local provenance seed spread, more local groups applied for grants in order to undertake revegetation work.

In 2000 when Livingstone Shire Council (LSC) offered Rem Veg the opportunity to use the old council nursery to propagate local natives for community revegetation projects the Community Nursery was born

A considerable amount of work and ingenuity was needed to transform the old neglected nursery into something that would produce good plants but with many hands and a great deal of ingenuity we succeeded almost beyond our wildest dreams. We were very fortunate that a number of our volunteers were great handymen who would think through a problem and come up with an inexpensive answer.

By the time that the Government Grant money expired after a couple of years the Community Nursery had proved so successful that L.S.C. employed a supervisor to work part time and paid for propagation and potting materials, the bulk of the work being undertaken by the volunteers. Since then it has expanded to having a full time supervisor and producing from 30,000 to 50,000 plants a year

The issue of local provenance is a driving factor. It means that we are able to maintain pure strains of local vegetation without cross breeding and that our local species are specific to this one area. We couldn't do this without the availability of our seed bank



From Negative to Positive
With
Ingenuity and Hard Work

A considerable amount of volunteer support has contributed to the successes of the nursery to date. Many individuals and groups use the nursery not only because they are motivated from an environmental point of view but also to gain work experience or social skilling. In part, because of their efforts the Community Nursery won a National Heritage Trust Gold Award for Excellence in 2004.

Volunteers have carried out almost 22,000 hours of work in the last ten years, which would equate to over \$402,000 of value to the local community

Since 2000 we have put nearly 200 species and almost 300,000 actual plants of local provenance into the revegetation of our community. Many of these were provided free to groups, individuals and the revegetation projects of other environment groups.

Times are changing. Climatic conditions, long periods of drought and increased population have placed escalating demands on water supplies forcing us to take stock of our water use. When water restrictions were first enforced in Livingstone in 2002 we were currently using around 14 megalitres per day. With the reduction of sprinkler use the water consumption dropped to about 8 megalitres per day, which told us that nearly 40% of our daily water consumption was being wasted. As restrictions were here to stay this was not sustainable water usage. It became apparent that we needed to rethink our gardens and the type of plants we were growing.

To many people the local natives lack the colour and familiarity of the exotic species that have been promoted for years. There is a perception that natives are dull or unattractive. Not so! Some natives do flower with brilliant displays of colour; others have the most remarkable fruits with wonderful colours, shapes and textures. The best part about natives of course is their ability to need little or no water apart from rain, once they are established.

There are many things as yet unknown, or untried, in using natives in our gardens. A surprising number of plants have the potential for hedging and topiary. Others used in mass plantings can create more dramatic effects. Even traditional formal gardens can be achieved with the correct selection of plants. What a plant looks like in the bush in drought conditions, can be radically different to same plant in our backyard with a little TLC (tender loving care).

The Nursery Supervisor is always willing to give practical advice on what plants to use, and where. We are aware that many of our local plants are still difficult to obtain from commercial nurseries, so we are always happy to share information on propagation. A large number of local species are relatively easy to grow and while others need specific treatments for successful germination, the effort is rewarded by the long term benefits.

Our primary objectives at the nursery are still revegetation orientated. Our original priority, providing endemic species for community driven projects is still important. Over the years though, it has become increasingly apparent that the community also has a very great need for the people component of the nursery. We have school children and long term unemployed, relearning vital work and social skills we also have a number of people doing community service. Others are just enthusiastic volunteers doing what they love. Some have disabilities. The most important thing is that all of these people have a place where they can learn the necessary skills to encourage active participation in society. A place where, regardless of age, race, or previous experiences, what matters is the willingness of each person to learn from others and be part of the community spirit.