

Catching up with Dorrobee Grass

It's been some time since Dorrobee Grass Trust become managers of Dorrobee Grass. In that time we have started to get an understanding of how the grassland ticks. We know that the grass either needs to be eaten, burnt or slashed to maintain it in a healthy state. We removed the grazing option by making it a public area for people to use. We also slashed the area but slashing lays mulch down over the grass and smothers the slashed clumps. Unfortunately, this creates a seedbed for annual weeds like farmers friends to grow in. We had burning trials and find that this is the best way to keep the grass healthy.

The best time to burn we have found is in spring, but this has been difficult in the last 2 years because we have had wet springs which haven't allowed us to burn. There will always be a fine line between getting the site burnt and introduction of fire restrictions. We have had to resort to herbicide spraying to reduce the build up of annual weeds which if left unchecked can eventually shade out the grass and kill it.

Crofton weed and Setaria grass have been our main weed targets and we have continued to work toward removing them from the site. We have also been removing Lantana and Camphor Laurel from the areas surrounding the top of the hill. The trees planted around the tank on top of the hill have become a threat to the grassland because they were closely planted and quickly formed a canopy creating a shady ground surface. Kangaroo grass will not grow and

the birds quickly supply the seeds whilst perching in the trees.

The main trees to germinate are Camphor Laurel and Privet but many rainforest species have also germinated with Lantana and several weedy vines filling the gaps. Two of the trustees spend much of their volunteer time weeding in this area. This weed forest if unmanaged will quickly start spreading its boundaries. Three of the vines, Siratro, Silver Leaf Desmodium and Glycine are difficult to eradicate once established in the grassland and pose a particular threat.

Many of the planted eucalypts are taller than the tank and have a canopy diameter nearly the width of the tank. The land surrounding the tank that the trees are planted on belongs to Lismore City Council and the trust has been in communication with the council seeking to resolve this threat. We proposed that all of the understorey trees and as many of eucalypts as needs be should be cut down to allow enough light onto the floor to re-establish a Kangaroo Grass sward with those trees remaining causing a screening effect for the tank. Almost all of the understorey trees don't naturally grow in this ecosystem and similarly many of the eucalypts don't either. This would stop the ecological process that is happening now and reinstate a more stable system that should require far less maintenance than the system that is there presently.

The council has tentatively agreed to this once we have acceptance within the

Dunoon community. If anyone has concerns or wants to talk more about this issue they can contact me on 6689 5474 after hours or speak to Martin Suttor, Parks & Gardens on 6620 1668, email council@lismore.nsw.gov.au attention Martin Suttor.

We are also in negotiation with the council to remove the weeds along the roadside verges surrounding the grassland on Frasers Road and Dunoon Road. These weedy areas pose a similar threat to the grass as they contain many of the weeds that are establishing around the top tank planting. We are presently creating a management plan for the area and these two threats need to be dealt with to reduce ongoing maintenance.

I can't emphasize how important and valuable Dorrobee Grass is to our community and the area. It is the largest intact native grassland left in the Big Scrub region. Not only is it important for its ecological values but it is also important for the Widjibal people whose presence is strong on the site.

We are always looking for more people to get involved with the restoration of the site and encourage comment and discussion with the community about the process.

Ralph Woodford
Dorrobee Grass Trust president

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Next Community Garden working bee is Saturday December 10th from 2-4pm.

It seems strange to be talking about a community garden in Spring, and have nothing growing in the garden yet. With this very warm dry November, I can't help thinking that's a very good thing. Delicate seeds and seedlings need lots of tender loving care to prepare them for strong and healthy growth, and so it is with our garden.

Behind the scenes much has happened in the last couple of months that will see our garden well and truly established by the time next planting season comes around...which for us, in the sub-tropics, is really autumn.

We had our first working bee on Saturday October 22nd and thirteen wonderful people turned up. Brian Tarlinton and his front-loader did a sterling job of starting to re-shape the mound into a garden—and begin the work of pushing and pulling the damned Singapore Daisy off the site. Thanks Brian for your time, effort and equipment!

Many hands made good work of piling up the nasty daisy ready for disposal and then shaping up and top-dressing the six garden beds and a herb parterre that Brian pushed into shape for us.

There's a lot more planning to go into the final design of the garden, but these beds mark a symbolic beginning and it felt good to stand back and look at them at the end of the morning's work.

Peter Hood, our Secretary, worked hard (thanks Pete!) to prepare a submission for a State Government community grant that closed at the end of October which, if successful, will allow us to invest in some serious infrastructure for the Garden: a shed, tools, tank stand, paths and much more. The grant announcement is not until March. It seemed a long way off in October, but not so long now as we stare down the barrel of Christmas and the New Year.

In the meantime, Peter and Ros Little visited the Recycle auction at the Showgrounds a few weeks ago and bought a load of timbers. Pete had also received some generously donated roofing iron, so a small working bee was held a couple of weekends ago where a few of us roughed out a template for framing up the existing beds.

There will be another working bee on Saturday December 10th from 2-4pm. We'd love to see some eager helpers with hammers, saws and nails, ready to build garden beds. Keep your eyes on the community notice boards (general store and Post Office), for a date to be announced shortly. You can send me your details at dunooncommunitygarden@gmail.com and I'll put you on the mailing list for information and news.

In the meantime, if you're planning or planting right now, here's a few useful sources of information as to what is best to be doing here in sub-tropical Dunoon:

- Local Organic Australia guru Jerry Coleby-Williams' Basic Organic Subtropical Monthly Garden Action Plan can be found at <http://www.grow-local.com.au/assets/documents/Grow%20It/Grow%20Local-%20Subtropical%20annual%20action%20plan.pdf>
- The website www.gardenate.com lists what you can grow in your region and what to prepare for the next month.
- You might find a subscription to www.cityfoodgrowers.com.au worthwhile. They have a ton of localised resources and support for the home gardener as part of their mission to transform our food system to become local and organic.

Until next year, I wish you happy gardening and a Happy Christmas.

Tracy Rudd
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