

# URBAN ANTICS!



## SOWING YOUR SEEDS WITH PRIDE

*"Give me a home among the gum trees" . . . so the song goes; or the paperbarks, or the banksias, or even the sheoaks, it doesn't matter, so long as they're . . . trees.*

These days, there is an urban antic that gives city folk an opportunity to grow hundreds of trees in a few square metres outside the back doors of their town houses. It is an opportunity to learn about and be involved in plant propagation, while providing a great service to the State's farming community. And while sitting on your patio, sipping a "coldie", you can relax and watch the grass . . . er, trees . . . grow.

The Farm Tree Help Scheme is administered by Men of the Trees WA (Inc.), an international, voluntary, non-profit organisation dedicated to the planting and protection of trees.

The scheme takes advantage of the many thousands of urban dwellers who can cope with growing a car boot-full of seedlings (from supplied seed), and are interested in learning something new while doing a good turn for Western Australia.

In about the last 100 years, vast tracts of native woodlands in the semi-arid south-west of the State have been converted to agricultural use. Nearly all the tall, perennial native trees have been replaced with low annual crops and pastures. The changes in vegetation density and type have caused major changes in water balance and left many areas of farmland depauperate.

The growing of new trees in mini-nurseries by "urbanites" complements the large scale plantings of trees supplied by commercial operators. Together, both systems of supply will eventually be responsible for rejuvenating soil, purifying water resources, providing habitat and shelter, and aesthetically improving degraded landscape. Put simply, it will help restore nature's balance.

The Men of the Trees group (MOTT) has members who are well qualified to advise landowners on tree types and the specifics of how and what to plant where. Both farmers and would-be growers are encouraged to contact MOTT now, so that participants in next season's schedule can be matched, and instructions, implements and training organised.

Growers are contacted in November each year and are asked to attend a propagation training day. They are given sterilised seed pots, racks, soil, seeds, fungicide and printed instructions. And then the fun starts.

Depending on whether your seed stock is for slow or quick-growing species, propagation starts either in November or January, for planting out in June or July. Under strict hygiene conditions, a small bench is constructed, and by following the instruction sheet to the letter, the tiny pots are filled and the seed sown.

From here on, a sense of parenthood evolves. Continual watering and heaps of TLC will soon reward you with the appearance of tiny green shoots.

Continuous reference to the instruction sheet will result in a whole new family on your doorstep and a "growing" sense of pride. The really good thing about these youngsters is, they don't squawk at night, they don't eat you out of house and home, don't answer back when given a bath, and there's no washing or ironing to do.

The following winter is planting time, and with your seedlings and your other family in the car, it's off to the farm for the official adoption of your charges, a pleasant day in the field and, probably, a barbecue to round off the day.

## JOHN HUNTER

### DID YOU KNOW?

- Soil hygiene measures must always be followed to avoid the loss of seedlings and to prevent the possible spread of soil pathogens (such as "dieback") to planting sites.
- Do not smoke while handling pots. This will help to prevent the spread of Tobacco Mosaic Virus.
- For further information on the Farm Tree Help Scheme write to PO Box 103, Guildford WA 6055 or telephone (09) 250 3113.

# LANDSCOPE

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*The Pinnacles, in Nambung National Park, is one of the most photographed landscapes in the world. But there is another side to Nambung. See page 41.*

*The hidden caves and tunnels of Cape Range National Park harbour several animals found nowhere else. Turn to page 22 to find out about these bizarre cave dwellers.*



*The characteristics that made WA inhospitable to the first Europeans are now helping us create new industries that can also repair the environment. See page 47.*



*Perth has at least 70 species of skinks, geckoes and other reptiles. Find out how to attract these fascinating creatures to your garden on page 28.*



*Devastation caused by the recent NSW bushfires has fuelled debate on the practice of prescribed burning. How do managers fight fire with fire? See page 35.*

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## COVER

The bobtail (*Tiliqua rugosa*) is sometimes incorrectly called the 'bobtail goanna' but is actually a very large skink. They are common around Perth and often seen in gardens. During hot weather they can be seen basking on footpaths, verges or roadways. See our story 'Reptiles in the Garden' on Page 30. *The illustration is by Philippa Nikulinsky.*



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