

PRACTICALITIES

Sand bags: a technique for establishing fringing vegetation in boggy sites

by Jenny Dewing

CLEARING and the subsequent rise in the water table has resulted in many creeklines being wet throughout the year. In addition to waterlogging, trampling by stock pugs up the banks. A poorly defined watercourse with waterlogged, compacted soil makes plant establishment difficult.

These sites are often unsuitable for site preparation techniques such as ripping and mounding. Mature vegetation growing in these conditions is more tolerant of the waterlogging. Getting young seedlings established is the challenge.

One technique that has been tried in Bridgetown is the use of sandbags to raise the seedlings out of the water while they are establishing.

Small jute sandbags of roughly 45 x 30 cm are two-thirds filled with coarse sand, crushed aged pine bark or other suitable material. It is important to choose a filling mix that will not introduce weed seed into the riparian area. The bag is then tied and placed on its side.

A small slit is cut into the top of the bag and the seedling is firmly planted into the bag. This is transferred to the revegetation site where the bag is wedged into a depression or excavation in the wet area, with the bag being about half way out of the water. Bags can be covered with soil to reduce the drying effect of the sun and wind on the surface of the bag.

Paperbarks, tea-trees, rushes and sedges have all been successfully established in this way. This technique should be restricted to those plants that are observed to grow in wet sites. The seedling grows rapidly through the bottom of the bag and the bag rots away over the following season.

Trials to date have involved brackish sites. Saline sites may result



Paperbark seedlings, Melaleuca raphiophylla, being established in sand bags.



*Two year old Paperbark, *M. raphiophylla*, and Grey Honey-myrtle, *M. incana*, which were established using the sandbag technique. Riparian soak adjacent to the Blackwood River. Note weed problem.*

in the buildup of salt on the surface of the bag and could effect plants that are not salt tolerant.

Jute bags cost about \$0.34 each (tax exempt) and can be purchased from bag companies in Perth.

The activity of water birds, particularly swamp hens, needs to be monitored during the first few weeks of establishment. They love

to uproot new seedlings, especially rushes and sedges. The occasional seedling needs to be replanted. After a few weeks, the swamp hens appear to lose interest in the new plants.

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