

PIDAV—A New Plant Introduction Scheme for Victoria

Ross Hall

VCAH Ltd Burnley, Burnley Gardens, Swan St, Richmond 3121

INTRODUCTION

In contrast to many comparable countries Australia has no history of formal plant introduction and evaluation schemes. Typically our botanic gardens have very good collections but often little consideration is given to how those plants could be made available to the professional user of plants or to the nursery industry. Botanic gardens, of course, have not been the only source of plant introductions. Specialist nurseries and enthusiastic amateur horticulturists have a long history of introducing plants into the Australian garden landscape. In the case of the specialist nursery, the motivation for introducing new plants is often a combination of plantsmanship and pure commercialism. With a few notable exceptions, these nurseries are small and often highly specialised and their influence on the broader nursery industry has been, and remains, limited. The enthusiastic amateur horticulturists who introduce plants into Australia, or who seek to improve existing plants, have as their motive the purely altruistic desire to enhance the aesthetic characteristics of ornamental horticulture. Typically these plantsmen and plantswomen, while being highly committed are also highly specialised, consequently their impact has been significant in some aspects of ornamental horticulture but negligible in the mainstream. Rarely is any attempt made to assess a plant's suitability to the broader Australian environment, or to evaluate its uses in the landscape. It would be equally unusual for any attempt to be made to determine if the plant was from the most suitable provenance source.

The lack of formal introduction and evaluation schemes, committed to promoting selected plant introduction, is one of the reasons, along with strict quarantine regulations and the difficulties often associated with the acclimatisation of introduced plants, for a more deprived state of ornamental horticulture than necessary. The absence of such schemes, and the objective assessment of plant characteristics inherent in them, has also contributed to the less than optimal development and use of our own unique flora (Hall, 1991).

In contrast to this situation, plant introduction schemes in North America, New Zealand, and parts of Europe are seen to be important programs contributing to the improvement of ornamental horticulture. Successful schemes such as the University of British Columbia Botanical Gardens Plant Introduction Scheme (PISBG) involve a cooperation, seen to be essential, between the professional plant user and the production nursery industry (Macdonald, 1983). Indeed the founder of this program referred to it as "an opportunity for a new relationship between nurseries and the public garden" (Taylor, 1988). In order to achieve a successful program an involvement is required from botanic gardens, landscape architects, and contractors—particularly those working in the public arena—and the nursery industry. The Plant Introduction and Development Association of Victoria (PIDAV) has such an involvement of all sectors of the Victorian horticultural community.

PIDAV is a new, non-profit association of horticultural organizations formed to

fill the need for an industry-wide, independent, and credible way of trialling, evaluating, and awarding new plants for introduction.

At the time of formation PIDAV was an association of: Nurserymens Association of Victoria, Australian Institute of Landscape Architects, Landscape Industries Association of Victoria Inc., The Victorian College of Agriculture and Horticulture—Burnley, Royal Botanic Gardens—Melbourne, and Australian Institute of Horticulture.

Obviously such a scheme also needs a management structure dedicated to the pursuance of plant introduction and evaluation. PIDAV management consists of a Committee of Management, with representatives from each of the full members listed above, and a Technical Committee.

This latter committee is empowered to co-opt expertise from within the organisations comprising PIDAV and is responsible for the trialling and assessment of nominated plants.

OBJECTIVES

The purposes for which PIDAV was established include the following:

- To improve the aesthetic and biological quality of plant material available through nurseries by the provision of trial and evaluation facilities;
- To increase the diversity of plant material available through mainstream nurseries;
- To assess plant material for its landscape suitability;
- To better utilise botanic garden collections in the nursery and landscape industries;
- To encourage plant breeding and selection in the industry appropriate to local conditions;
- To make awards to organisations and persons successfully trialling plants and/or to plants successful in trial and to assist in the promotion of these plants.

SCHEME STRUCTURE

The management structure of plant introduction schemes depend, to some extent, on the local objectives. However, a number of stages seem obvious and have been outlined by a number of workers (MacDonald, 1987 Webster, 1988). They involve a nomination stage, trialling and evaluation, and the promotion and marketing of successfully trialled plants.

In the case of the PIDAV scheme, entrants can be individuals or companies who can legitimately claim rights to the plant material. The plant may be protected by trademark or plant variety rights but must be new, or sufficiently distinct, from previous introductions to be identified as a new variety or form or, of course, a provenance selection not previously introduced into Victoria. Comparison with existing forms may be used to determine the superiority of the new plant.

The entrant must provide information as to the origin of the plant material, sufficient for the technical committee to determine ownership and evaluate the potential of the plant and its suitability for inclusion in the trials. Several trial sites are located strategically around Melbourne and in country centres representing a reasonable range of growing conditions throughout Victoria. A judging panel will

visit each trial site on two occasions throughout the year, however, at each trial site the trial field manager will make regular judgements throughout the year. These will be recorded and made available to the official panel to help formulate their assessments. The PIDAV Executive Officer will make regular inspections of the trial sites and carry out an assessment. The results of these evaluations will also be available to the panel. This regular evaluation of a plant's performance is intended to remove any bias associated with the timing of the official panel assessments. PIDAV will promote winning entries by presenting medals and certificates to the entrants at an official presentation function and by publication of the results in the media and commercial publications.

FUNDING

Initial funding to establish PIDAV was from the Nurserymen Association of Victoria.

A small nomination fee is required with each entry and, if selected for trialling, an additional fee is required.

A promotional logo or label will be applied to winning entries. A royalty will be paid for the use of the label or logo. This royalty will be used to support the Association's activities and to further develop the scheme.

CONCLUSION

A formal plant introduction scheme such as PIDAV is long overdue. The failure of the ornamental plants industry in Victoria and, indeed, in other Australian States to establish such a scheme prior to this has resulted in a more deprived state of ornamental horticulture than is necessary. In order for a scheme such as PIDAV to succeed it will be necessary for the key players in the ornamentals industry to develop a more holistic view of their industry. It must be, and is, a cooperative joint venture. Introduction schemes such as PIDAV promote to the gardening public only truly new plants which have been evaluated for performance from the nursery to the landscape. The establishment of a formal plant introduction scheme for Victoria will benefit all participants. PIDAV will result in a more integrated and professional ornamental horticulture industry in Victoria and, ultimately, an enhanced horticultural environment for Victorians.

LITERATURE CITED

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