

GREEN THUMB

AROUND THE GARDEN

■ Now's a good time to divide up your herbaceous, clump-forming perennials.

■ Both native and non-native can be divided at this time. Don't divide any perennials that are in flower, that would be such a waste of a display.

■ When dividing, re-plant or pot up quickly so root systems don't dry out.

DEB'S DIARY

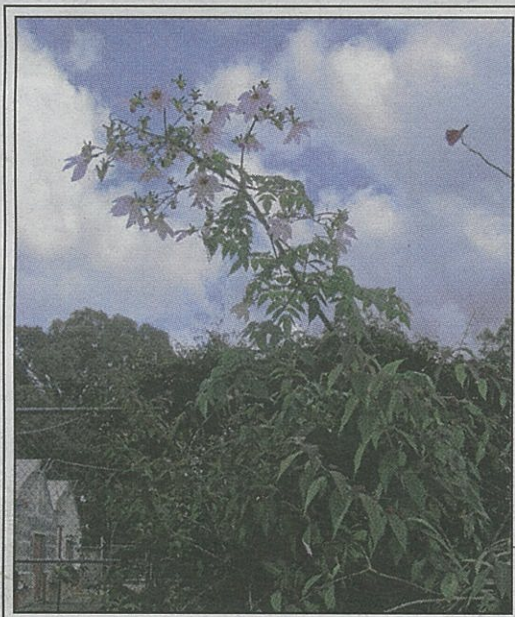
FRIENDS of Willow Park Inc will hold a **National Tree Day** on Sunday, July 29. Bring your gardening gloves and wear suitable planting clothes and help in planting new trees and shrubs at Willow Park, Wodonga. Barbecue lunch included. Planting 10am to 1pm, meet at Pearce Street car park. Want to know more? Phone Bart on 0419 390 329.

WHERE 2 start — Kitchen Gardening. This short course will run over three half-day sessions, Monday September 3 to 17, cost \$200. This course will help you with creating your own sustainable veggie patch so you can reap the benefits of your own home-grown produce. Phone the Horticulture Department at Wodonga TAFE on (02) 6055 6644.

To have your event listed here, email Deb Delahunty at ddelahunty@wodongatafe.edu.au



The tree dahlia produces masses of quite large flowers; this is such an interesting and decorative plant.



This flowering tree dahlia at Wodonga TAFE soars above the fenceline.

“This sun-loving plant is a strange one. It waits until the cold months to flower ...”



Water Land & Food
HORTICULTURE

Flowers you will look up to

BY DEB DELAHUNTY

of Wodonga TAFE

THE tree dahlia is a dramatic plant that flowers during late autumn and into winter.

I call this a dramatic plant because it grows quickly on almost bamboo-like stems and then produces masses of flowers.

These flowers are produced terminally — on the ends of the branches.

If your tree dahlia is extremely tall and grown among other plants, the first inkling you might get it's in flower is when you find spent petals on the ground, and then you look up.

This sun-loving plant is a strange one.

It waits until the cold months to flower but should it be exposed to a heavy frost, the newly opened flowers will blacken and turn to mush.

This is not a frost-hardy plant.

The tree dahlia, *Dahlia imperialis*, is native to South America and grows best with full sun, however, it will grow quite well with some shade.

In the Border region it can grow to about five metres tall but you'll find it will need some support during its growing stage and particularly when it's heavily in flower.

Planting the tree dahlia in a position sheltered from the wind is ideal because the stems are quite brittle and break easily.

The most common form of the tree dahlia is the lilac version, however, there are other colours available including white, purple and even double forms.

This plant likes a rich soil that's kept moist but it will grow in sandy loams and even in soils that contain some clay.

But it's really important to make sure that the drainage is excellent — this plant is very touchy about getting wet feet and even touchier about getting too little water and drying out.

Make sure you pick your position carefully for this plant or it will all be in vain.

If you've managed to get your *Dahlia imperialis* to the flowering stage, the next job is pruning when flowering finishes.

Cut your plant back hard and use the stems to make cuttings.

These will be among the largest cuttings you will ever take. Ensure each cutting has at least two nodes (location where bud or leaf is or was attached to the stem).

There are a couple of easy ways to take the cuttings, either planting them vertically in a pot or laying the cuttings horizontally in trays. Or even just put them in shallow trenches in the garden.

Cover the horizontal cuttings with soil and before long new growth will appear.

If the novelty value of a very tall, skinny flowering plant doesn't appeal then, with a bit of work, you can keep it shorter and bushier. Pinch out the growing tips at least twice when the plant reaches about one metre.

If you've never grown a tree dahlia, give it a go.

And remember to look up.

LIVING LIGHTLY

Watch for windows of opportunity

MOHANDAS “Mahatma” Gandhi once famously encouraged his countrymen to “be the change you want to see in the world”.

Living lightly is a meaningful and inclusive way of taking up Gandhi's challenge.

Our commitment to living lightly should ideally cover all facets of our life, from the ballot box to the shopping centre and the workplace.

The choice to respond constructively and collaboratively to the sustainable living challenge, rather

than be overwhelmed by it, can be an empowering and uplifting experience. What might this mean in practice?

We the public need to be engaged in the political process if our liberal-democratic political system is to function effectively.

A critical mass of people taking a conscious political stand can demonstrate a constituency for change, by incubating the community pressure that shifts the opinion polls and alters voting patterns that compel politicians into action.

Our consumption habits and pur-

chasing decisions have significant flow-on effects.

What we know as “the market” is the collection of individual buying and selling transactions.

The “wisdom” of the market — supply and demand — changes according to the nature of those transactions. Making those choices consciously, in collaboration with others, can add up to a positive market-altering trend.

The organisations we work for are owned, managed and staffed by people just like us, who make decisions that influence how these

organisations operate. When living lightly in our workplace decision-making can be difficult because we are often constrained by standard operating procedures.

However, windows of opportunity arise from time to time when we can encourage our workplaces to be more sustainable and we should be ready to contribute.

We can all be influential players in our community as informed political actors, as consumers making conscious purchasing choices, as employees encouraging sustainable work practices, or as decision-mak-

ers shaping the direction of over an organisation. When many people live lightly together, the ripple effect can reverberate all the way up to the policy-making chain to the level of international politics.

We are privileged to be alive at a pivotal moment in modern history, where our actions can have a profound influence on the future of our society. I challenge you to embrace that responsibility and live lightly in all facets of your life.

— Ben Habib
Wodonga and Albury Toward
Climate Health (WATCH)