

SPECIAL PLANTS: February-March 2022 WITTUNGA TRAIL

At this time of year the selection is a mix of plants chosen for flowers, or other interesting features of fruit, foliage or bark likely to last through the period. The fruits of *Corymbia calophylla* for example are said to be the largest of the corymbias. Stations 6 and 7 are in the Maluka beds (B); stations 8 and 9 are on an unmapped path east of the (C) for Kangaroo Island flora.

See over page for map



- 1 ***Nymanea capensis*** Chinese lantern South Africa
The common name of this large, slow-growing, drought-tolerant shrub comes from the shape of its pale-pink inflated fruits enclosing pea-shaped brown seeds. Once dry, the papery capsules are carried away by wind and the seeds germinate after rain. In its native range it survives on as little as 120 mm annual rainfall and tolerates temperatures from just below zero to over 40° C. Its small pink flowers are pollinated by bees.
- 2 ***Melianthus major*** Giant honey flower South Africa
A sprawling, suckering shrub with large blue-green leaves which have an unpleasant odour when bruised. In spring it produces tall spikes of closely-packed small rust-red flowers, attracting birds and insects. The seed pods seen here, each containing four shiny black seeds, are initially pale green, drying to brown. All parts of the plant are toxic; nevertheless bees feeding on the nectar produce good honey.
- 3 ***Erica cerinthoides x coronata*** Hybrid South Africa
Erica cerinthoides is a variable species and the most widely distributed of the heaths in southern Africa. It grows in a range of habitats from coastal plains to mountain tops and is one of a few ericas that resprout from a woody rootstock after fire. This hybrid has short branches with very small leaves. The hairy, tubular, bright-red flowers appear in clusters at the ends of branches.
- 4 ***Aloe plicatilis*** Fan aloe South Africa
Older specimens of this slow-growing succulent may reach a height of 3-5 m. The stems are forked with clusters of strap-shaped, fleshy leaves arranged in two opposite rows resembling an open fan. The fruiting stems on display now have developed from tall racemes of up to 30 tubular red flowers which grow from each leaf cluster in winter. The fruits are capsules containing rather poorly-dispersed small black seeds.
- 5 ***Corymbia calophylla x ficifolia*** Hybrid Both parents are from south-west WA
This natural hybrid eucalypt displays features from both parents. The fruits (gumnuts) tend towards the urn-shape of *C. calophylla* fruits and the leaves, with differing upper and lower surfaces, towards those of *C. ficifolia* (= *Ficus* or fig-like). You may be able to see all obvious stages of flowering and fruiting, from pink-tinged flower buds, to orange-red stamens pushing off the bud cap and finally, mature woody fruits. The large seeds of the fruit provide food for native birds including parrots and cockatoos. The gumnuts are said to be the inspiration for the gumnut babies from the Tales of Snugglepot and Cuddlepie by May Gibbs.
- 6 ***Phoenix canariensis*** Canary Island date palm Canary Islands
This tall solitary palm is widely grown as an attractive ornamental. Clusters of oval, yellow-orange cherry-sized fruits develop high in the canopy but, although the thin pulp surrounding the central stone is edible, it does not compare well with the quality of the fruit from the commercial date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*)
- 7 ***Colletia paradoxa*** Anchor plant, Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Chile.
A nearly leafless woody, deciduous shrub to 3m, with oppositely-arranged, flattened, photosynthetic stems forming triangles said to resemble ship's anchors. If they are still present, you may find the tiny leaves at the apex of the triangles, but be careful of the spines at the tips of the 'anchors'. These hardy plants, like other members of the genus, have root nodules which can fix nitrogen from the atmosphere.
- 8 ***Eucalyptus cneorifolia*** KI narrow-leafed mallee Mainly Kangaroo Island
This small, slender mallee species, on the second path south of the Maluka Beds, once underpinned a thriving eucalyptus oil industry on KI, until sheep farming proved to be an easier and more profitable occupation. Its oil glands are clearly visible in leaves held against the light. Oil is still harvested by one KI distillery for the tourism market. Compare the size of the fruits with those of the hybrid eucalypt (#5)
- 9 ***Bursaria spinosa*** Native box, Christmas bush NSW, QLD, SA, TAS, VIC, WA
Further along the same path is *Bursaria spinosa*, a spiny, often multi-stemmed shrub or small tree with a rhizomatous root system which can resprout after a disturbance. Dense terminal clusters of sweet-scented white to cream flowers appear in mid-summer, attracting bees and butterflies. In Victoria, it is important for the conservation of the Eltham copper butterfly, whose larvae feed only on the leaves of this species. ***Bursaria*** is from the Latin 'bursa', for bag or purse, referring to the purse- or heart-shaped seed capsules.
- 10 ***Eucalyptus macrandra*** Long-flowered marlock Southern WA
Normally multi-stemmed, our specimen is a single stem arising from a lignotuber. It is a popular garden specimen for its attractive peeling bark, its large clusters of long straight slender buds and spectacular "balls" of up to 31 lemon-yellow flowers. Both the Latin and common name refer to the rather long stamens.
- 11 ***Solanum laciniatum*** Kangaroo apple SE Australia, NZ
A fast-growing shrub to 3 m from the nightshade family, with orange-yellow berries. Cultivars are grown in NZ, India, eastern Europe and elsewhere for the young foliage, which contains steroids used as precursors for the manufacture of contraceptives. A colonising species, it has also been used in mine-site reclamation.