

SPECIAL PLANTS OF THE MONTH

April 2022



This month's list begins with an unusual rainforest species of *Callitris*, and ends with one of the dryland species for comparison. Other contrasts include an acacia from the Americas with true leaves and two of our acacias which only have true leaves as seedlings. Look for the stone steps from the Sunken Garden to the upper level and numbers 7 and 8 in the Eremophila Garden

See over page for map

*An Australian native

- *1 *Callitris macleayana*** Stringybark pine (1) Central NSW to SE Qld, (2) NE Qld
An endemic Australian conifer from the family Cupressaceae, stringybark pine is found in rainforest margins in two widely separated regions along the east coast. Rusty-brown pollen cones can be found at the tips of branchlets, and typical cypress seed-cones further back in the canopy. In contrast to the scale-leaves of dryland species of *Callitris*, it often retains its spreading, 10-15 mm, needle-like juvenile leaves, long after reproductive maturity. Take a photo to compare with the mature foliage of *Callitris verrucosa* at station 10.
- *2 *Brachychiton acerifolius*** Illawarra flame tree Central NSW to far north Qld
This rainforest tree, from tropical and sub-tropical areas along the East Coast, is most famous for its masses of red flowers, but now that the flowers have faded it's the emerging leaves and the seed pods hanging in glossy claw-like bunches that command attention. The pods (follicles) will eventually open to expose seeds surrounded by a short coat of irritant hairs (*Brachychiton* is from the Greek for 'short tunic'). Once those irritant hairs have been removed, usually by roasting over a fire, the seeds are edible and nutritious.
- *3 *Acacia stenophylla*** River cooba, shoestring wattle All mainland states
A prominent species along inland watercourses, shoestring wattle often grows under river red gums. The long pods (legumes) are woody and do not split at maturity like most acacias, but break at constrictions between the seeds. The buoyant segments are then dispersed by floodwaters.
- *4 *Geijera parviflora*** Wilga, desert willow, sheep bush Inland Qld, NSW, SA, Vic (rare)
Named for its small flowers, this graceful, small arid-zone tree from the citrus family can be grown as a specimen tree and will benefit from pruning to shape. Useful as a fodder tree in its native range, it often has a browse line at sheep height. The flowers are said to have a faintly, foetid smell and attract many insect pollinators. The dense foliage also provides shelter for nesting arid-land birds. Indigenous people chewed the scented leaves to alleviate toothache.
- 5 *Acacia macracantha*** Long-spined acacia, porknut tree Mexico, South America
Overlooking the T-junction this impressive specimen from the Americas has a wide, spreading canopy of feathery pinnate leaves rather than the modified leaf-stalks (phyllodes) of most Australian acacias. In its native range it blooms and bears fruit in the rainy season, producing the familiar pompoms of tiny yellow flowers and flat, hard-seeded legumes. The nutrient content of pods has been analysed by agricultural scientists in Venezuela, to assess their suitability as animal feed, notably for rabbits and, presumably, pigs.
- 6 *Cussonia paniculata*** Mountain cabbage tree Southern Africa
In the beds around the lily pond in the centre of the Sunken Garden are several specimens of the mountain cabbage tree, with their grey- to blue-green compound leaves and thick corky bark. The wood is soft and light and was once used for brake blocks on ox-wagons. The roots can be peeled and eaten raw, or used as a source of water. The leaves of the closely related lowveld *Cussonia spicata* are relished by elephants, who might also eat the leaves of mountain cabbage tree should they venture into those rockier habitats.
- *7 *Eremophila polyclada*** Twiggy emu-bush, desert lignum NSW, Qld, SA, NT, Vic
A dense, sprawling, tangled shrub, twiggy emu-bush has hairless, fleshy linear leaves that are often sticky when young. One of the larger-flowered eremophilas, its bell-shaped, 5-lobed flowers are white with pale purple spots. They are borne singly or in pairs, at the base of leaves and are pollinated by insects. It is said that sheep enjoy eating the flowers and that younger plants are attractive to kangaroos.
- *8 *Eucalyptus wyolensis*** Wyola mallee South Australia
Endemic to SA and known from only two populations in the Wyola Lake region of the Great Victoria Desert, this rare multi-stemmed mallee is an attractive grey-leaved tree with pale-yellow flowers. Growing 4-7 m tall, the tree is rough-barked on its lower stems and has a dense, waxy bloom on branchlets, buds and fruit. The bud caps are horn-shaped. Trials show that the species has potential as a garden ornamental.
- *9 *Acacia glandulicarpa*** Hairy-pod wattle Wertaloona Stn and Burra gorge (SA), Little Desert (Vic)
Now endangered, with widely separated colonies due to land clearing, the SA populations of this wattle are thought to be partly clonal, regenerating from root suckers when disturbed by grazing or roadside grading. The small, flat, rounded phyllodes each have a tiny gland (extra-floral nectary) near the base. Its fruits (legumes), sticky when young, are covered with shining glandular hairs. If you look carefully, you can still see the hairs on small, shrivelled pods amongst the foliage.
- *10 *Callitris verrucosa*** Mallee pine, mallee cypress pine All mainland states
Mallee pine has much the same rusty pollen cones and seed cones seen earlier on *C. macleayana*, but its juvenile leaves are rarely seen. Transition to the mature foliage, (photosynthetic stems with whorls of tiny scale-leaves), occurs early in life, *Callitris verrucosa* rarely gets to a size suitable for harvest but, like the larger dryland species of *Callitris* once used for construction, its timber is termite-resistant.