

SPECIAL PLANTS OF THE MONTH

August 2022



Many of the species in this month's list display features associated with life in a nutrient-poor, arid environment - from the phyllodes (modified leaf stalks) of acacias to the hard, fibrous leaves of species exposed on slopes of rocky ranges. The waxy cuticles and sunken stomates of pine needles, eucalypt leaves and water-rich succulents also slow water loss in their respective habitats.

See over page for map

*An Australian native

- *1 *Acacia strongylophylla*** (Greek strongylus = round) Round-leaf wattle WA, NT, SA
A straggly, prickly shrub to 3 m it grows in shallow red soils of the rocky ranges of central Australia, around the junction of the borders between the three states. It is also called wait-a-while wattle for its armour. It has spiny stipules at the base, and a sharp mucro at the apex, of each phyllode.
- *2 *Triodia irritans*** Porcupine grass ('spinifex') Inland SA, WA, NT
Growing in association with mallee eucalypts *Eucalyptus cretata* and *E. gillii*, porcupine grass is a perennial tussock grass which spreads by means of creeping stolons (above-ground horizontal stems) forming large hummocks bristling with grey-green, needle-sharp leaves. This formidable barrier provides a refuge for small mammals, birds and lizards. As early growth dies off, the slowly advancing perimeter of older clumps can form eye-catching rings (or crescent-shaped segments) up to 3 m across and many years old.
- *3 *Hakea ednieana*** Mainly Flinders Ranges, SA
Part of the group known as corkwoods, this intricate, prickly shrub with very fibrous compound leaves is found growing on cliff faces and creek lines in the Flinders Ranges. It is named for Mr J. Ednie Brown, SA Conservator of Forests in the late 19th century. This specimen is probably still too young to flower.
- *4 *Maireana sedifolia*** Bluebush, pearl bluebush
Away from the poor soils and exposed sites in the rocky ranges, bluebush is often a codominant on the more fertile saltbush-bluebush plains further south. Semi-succulent, club-shaped leaves with reflective hairs and a deep root system help to maintain its water balance in the semi-arid climate. Scattering of light by the leaf hairs results in the striking contrast of blue foliage against the reddish-brown soils in its native range.
- 5 The Dead House Aloes** 4 species, 6 cultivars and 7 hybrids Mainly cultivars and hybrids
Not the name of a heavy metal band, but a colourful display of winter-flowering aloes around the Dead House, once a mortuary for a nearby asylum. The most striking are hybrids with trade names 'Capricorn' and 'Always Red' but around the building you can find other attractive forms such as ***Aloe 'Fairy Pink'***, a very small aloe with delicate, fleshy green leaves, and ***Aloe 'Tusker'***, a much larger single-stemmed aloe with ivory- coloured spires of tubular flowers. The aptly-named ***Aloe 'Moonglow'*** on the SE corner has pale-yellow rather luminous flowers. Nearby is a young ***Aloe marlothii*** (mountain aloe) a species from South Africa which should develop a candelabrum of orange, yellow or bright red flowers when in full bloom.
- 6 *Pinus brutia*** Turkish pine Primarily NE Mediterranean
The most important forest tree in the region, its long needle leaves are held in fascicles of two. The erect to forward-pointing cones contain many seeds which form part of the diet of local Mediterranean birds, and here, black cockatoos are known to feed on the seeds. In the Mediterranean area, honeydew collected by bees from a sap-sucking insect *Marchalina hellenica* is sold as 'pine honey'. *P. brutia*, and the closely related *P. halepensis* have been planted in Australia as memorials to the Gallipoli campaign of 1915.
- *7 *Eremophila stenophylla*** SW Queensland
There is a small stand of this tall eremophila with pink to brick-red flowers under the canopy of the two ironbarks (*Eucalyptus sideroxylon*). Its lovely, pendulous, shimmery form, enhanced by the long, narrow leaves, is best seen from inside the eremophila garden, but the labelled specimen is on the bitumen path. Slow-growing and long-lived, it tolerates skeletal soils and makes a suitable screening plant or windbreak. It was first described in 2007 by R. Chinnock, a botanist from the South Australian State Herbarium.
- *8 *Eucalyptus youngiana*** Oldeea mallee, yardarbarra Great Victoria Desert (SA and WA)
Named for Oldeea, once a settlement on the Transcontinental Railway, and for Jess Young who collected the type specimen on Ernest Giles' east-west expedition in 1875, this mallee has the heaviest fruits (gumnuts) of any eucalypt. Aboriginal people used the lignotubers of yardarbarra as a water source when travelling. If you are lucky you may catch a snapshot of the pinkish-red stamens pushing off one of the large bud-caps.
- *9 *Araucaria cunninghamii*** Hoop pine NSW, QLD, PNG
Like *Pinus brutia*, with its typical needles, *A. cunninghamii* is a conifer, but its closely-packed awl-shaped leaves show that it is not a pine. Sulphur-crested white cockatoos (*Cacatua galerita*) are attracted to the female cones which disintegrate at maturity, releasing the edible seeds. Measured at over 46 m in 2019, another hoop pine on the east side of the path from the main gate is the tallest tree in the Gardens. The Australian plywood industry was founded largely on this tall, straight-trunked species.
- *10 *Flindersia australis*** Crow's Ash, Australian teak Qld, NSW
From low altitude dry and sub-tropical forests this large evergreen tree is thought to be one of the oldest introduced trees in the Garden, probably planted during the time of the first Director George Francis (1855-1865). The leaves are glossy-green above and paler below. Masses of small white flowers in spring are followed by prominent ovoid woody capsules which split into a 5-pointed 'star' covered with distinctive blunt spikes at maturity. Those with good eyes may find one in the canopy, otherwise check the lawn beneath.