

SPECIAL PLANTS: August-September 2022

WITTUNGA TRAIL

Acacias (family Fabaceae) and both South African and Australian members of the Protea family are prominent in this month's walk. Fire often plays a role in the germination of hard-seeded acacias, and also in the ecology of the banksia, cone-bush, featherbush and hakea in the list below,



See over page for map

*An Australian native

- 1 ***Buddleja salviifolia*** Butterfly bush, mountain sage South Africa
One of seven South African species, butterfly bush is widespread in forest margins, on rocky hillsides and along stream banks. It is also widely grown in gardens for its sweetly-scented, white to lilac flowers which attract bees, butterflies and birds. Local African peoples used a decoction of roots for a cough remedy, and the leaves for a herbal tea and an eye lotion. It can be found growing on both sides of the path here.
- 2 ***Chasmanthe floribunda*** Suurkanol, Aunt Eliza, African corn-flag South Africa
Although a weed in some environments, suurkanol is useful for basket-making. When spread out and left to dry, the strap-like hairless leaves turn yellowish-brown. The leaves are later rewetted and used for making exposed cores in stitched baskets, for moulding into different basket shapes using spiral or glove stitches, for weaving lightweight hats and melon baskets, and for making 2-ply cord and plaits.
- 3 ***Anisodonteia capensis*** Annie's cape, African mallow, dwarf pink hibiscus South Africa
Annie's cape is a species found on well-drained, upper hill slopes in the South African fynbos, a region of remarkable species diversity. Sometimes likened to a small hibiscus, these shrubs have palmately-veined, lobed leaves and flower almost continuously over the year, attracting bees and butterflies to the garden.
- *4 ***Alyogyne huegelii*** 'West Coast Gem' Blue hibiscus Parent from SA, WA
This hardy, fast-growing cultivar, also from the mallow family, has deeply-lobed, felty leaves. The large pale-mauve to deep-purple flowers appear in profusion in spring and summer but also sporadically over the rest of the year, providing nectar for honeyeaters and insects. It is easily struck from cuttings and, like the African mallow, West Coast Gem needs good drainage and a sunny to partly shaded position.
- *5 ***Acacia pravissima*** Oven's wattle, wedge-leaf wattle NSW, VIC and ACT
In bloom, Oven's wattle is a showpiece, with an abundance of scented golden-yellow flowers that grace its slender pendulous branches. The crowded triangular or wedge-shaped phyllodes (modified leaf stalks) are blue-green and lie on edge along the branchlets. Tolerant of both drought and frost, it grows in sclerophyll forest and woodland on a wide range of soils and basement rocks on hill slopes, ridges and riverbanks.
- 6 ***Leucadendron salignum*** Common sunshine cone-bush South Africa
The colourful leaves and bracts surrounding the flowers, along with its vigorous response to pruning, makes this species from the family Proteaceae a popular choice of foliage for the cut flower industry. Like the related featherbush below, it has both male and female plants, and retains seed on the plant in fire resistant 'cones'. However, it is one of the few cone-bushes which can also resprout after fire.
- 7 ***Aulax cancellata*** Channel-leaf featherbush, bronze haze South Africa
Featherbush is an attractive red-stemmed, upright shrub branching from a single main stem up to 2.5m tall. Flowerheads appear in spring and summer on both male and female plants. Plants in this little group, with orange-yellow feathery racemes at the ends of branches are males. As the bracts surrounding the heads on female plants dry out, they form a woody shell around the seeds which are normally released after fire.
- *8 ***Acacia pycnantha*** Golden wattle NSW, SA, Vic
Long considered the floral emblem of Australia it was officially proclaimed only in 1988. In contrast to the delicate foliage of Oven's wattle, *A. pycnantha* has large leathery phyllodes. The familiar pom-poms of fragrant golden-yellow flowers each contain 40-100 flowers. Visitors in early August can find a young stand in flower at **8b**. The species reproduces only by seed, which are long lived and germinate readily after fire.
- *9 ***Acacia glaucoptera*** Clay wattle, flat wattle Western Australia
Flat wattle is an attractive shrub with a rounded, spreading habit, growing to about 1.5 m high and 2-3 m wide. Unlike the phyllodes of Oven's wattle, which attach to the stem at a single point, those of flat wattle are continuous with the stem, giving the appearance of winged stems. This ornamental acacia is grown for its striking blue-green foliage, and especially for the often purple-red tinge on the new growth.
- *10 ***Banksia blechnifolia*** Fern-leaf banksia Western Australia
Found naturally growing in the south of WA this ornamental species is a low, spreading shrub which flowers mainly in spring. Its upright, showy, cylindrical flowerheads arise from prostrate stems at ground level. The developing flowerheads change colour and texture from the early covering of rusty orange-brown 'fur' to a smooth cream spike, becoming dusky pink or red in bud, and finally back to cream as the flowers open. Like its South African relatives it also retains seed on the plant in its familiar woody 'banksia cones'
- *11 ***Hakea victoria*** Royal or lantern hakea Endemic to the Barren Ra. south-west WA
Lantern hakea is noted for its large, stem-clasping leaves, with patches of yellow, orange and red glowing in the sunlight. Our young specimen has only hints of colour, but even descriptions of specimens from King's Park in Perth lament the less vibrant colours of their garden specimens, so perhaps it's worth an on-line search for images of this unusual hakea. For a closer view you can find the tall stems of mature specimens overtopping the fence on Shepherd's Hill Road, about 40-50 m from the Sherbourne Road corner.