

SPECIAL PLANTS:

August - September 2023

WITTUNGA



Some of the interests of the Ashby family, who developed Wittunga over many years, are included in this month's list, along with some winter-flowering species. If the weather is kind, we may see some of those still in bud flowering by September. Two species (4 & 10) are included mainly for their foliage.

See over page for map

*An Australian native

- 1 ***Erica cerinthoides*** Fire heath, red hairy heath Widespread in South Africa
In the Fynbos (F) and Terrace beds (A) at Wittunga there are many ericas - a special interest of Keith Ashby who donated Wittunga to the people of South Australia in 1965. The red-flowered *Erica cerinthoides* has fine hairs on foliage and petals, and is one of few species in the genus which resprout from a woody rootstock after fire. Fire also promotes flowering, which becomes less prolific with time since fire.
- 2 ***Chasmanthe floribunda*** African flag, suurkanol Cape Province, South Africa
Just as some Australian natives (eg hakeas, wattles, eucalypts) are now pests in South Africa, this attractive species from the iris family has become an environmental weed in parts of Australia. Underground corms, seed, and dumped garden waste can all contribute to its spread. For some, however, the leaves are very useful for basket-making, for weaving lightweight hats, and for making 2-ply cord and plaits.
- *3 ***Hakea multilineata*** Grass-leaved hakea Endemic to south-west WA
Next to a minor gravel path leading more or less SE this hakea is spectacular when in full bloom. What appears to be a spike of red flowers is actually a number of overlapping smaller clusters. It has no lignotuber so after fire it relies on recruitment from seed held in persistent woody fruits. Its common name stems from the prominent grass-like (ie parallel) veins on its long, linear leaves.
- *4 ***Melaleuca calycina ssp. dempta*** (now *M. dempta*) Southwest WA
The delicate white flowers at or near the branch tips of this large, (unlabelled) sprawling paperbark have stamens in five bundles, a feature which once separated melaleucas from callistemons, which have many separate stamens. The tips of the branchlets continue to grow after flowering. Perhaps the most attractive feature is the arrangement of the densely-packed leaves - each pair of opposite leaves at 90 degrees to the pair above and below. A labelled specimen, still in bud in late July, can be found at the next site (#5).
- *5 ***Callistemon rugulosus*** (near a Gondwana trail sign) Scarlet bottlebrush SA, Vic
Now *Melaleuca rugulosa* in some treatments, this specimen, (also still in bud in late July) is a good example of continued growth at the apex after flowering. The closely-packed woody fruits from previous flower spikes can be seen further back along the stem. When in flower, the scarlet bottlebrushes are formed from up to 60 individual flowers each with 30-60 red filaments tipped with yellow anthers.
- *6 ***Hakea francisiana*** Grass-leaf or bottlebrush hakea Mainly WA and SA
Next to a Naming Walk sign (for *Leptospermum!*) *Hakea francisiana* has the same common name and parallel veins as *H. multilineata* (#3) but its leaves are about one fifth the width, and sharply-pointed rather than rounded at the tips. This species also relies on recruitment from seed. The rich red-brown of young stems and flower buds, and the racemes of pinkish-red flowers provide a long-lasting display in the home garden. The species is named for George Francis, the first Director of the Adelaide Botanic Gardens.
- *7 **Kangaroo Island flora (C)**
Edwin Ashby, the father of Keith (above) had a keen interest in the flora and fauna of Kangaroo Island and *Pomaderris halmaturina* (#7) with round, dark-green leaves and deeply-incised veins may have been one of the many species he brought back to plant in this area of Wittunga. If you have time to explore the area inside the red rectangle there are several species with KI in the common name, or with names based on *Halmaturus* an archaic genus in the kangaroo family (Macropodidae). For example, *Correa calycina* var. *halmaturorum*, *Spyridium halmaturinum*, and, near the NW corner, *Adenanthos macropodiana* beneath a young sugar gum (*E.cladocalyx*) which has one of its wild populations on Kangaroo Island.
- 8 ***Leucospermum praecox*** Mossel Bay pincushion Western Cape South Africa
Mossel Bay pincushion is endemic to a very small area on the south coast of the Cape. Young leaves are softly hairy, but later become smooth and leathery with 5-11 glandular teeth. It is said to be an early-flowering leucospermum, (from mid-autumn to early spring) so we may see it in flower before the end of September. The 'pins' in the flowerhead are the styles of the many individual flowers, each tipped with a mass of pollen which must be removed before the flower becomes receptive to pollen from another plant.
- 9 ***Bowkeria gerrardiana*** (now *B. verticillata*) Natal shell-flower South Africa
Natal shell-flower is a large single or multi-stemmed shrub found in thick evergreen scrub along small watercourses in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. It flowers from winter to early spring. The glossy, white petals form an unusual pouch and have a sweet lemon scent. In its native habitat it is pollinated by a specialist bee which collects oil from glandular hairs lining the inside of the pouch to feed to its larvae.
- 10 ***Diospyros scabrída*** Hard-leaved monkey plum South Africa
On the path back from the Terrace Beds are several compact, rounded shrubs with glossy, dark-green leaves, often with a tinge of red from the coppery hairs on the new growth. Slow-growing, dense and hardy, *D. scabrída* is perfect for the Japanese cloud pruning (niwaki) opposite the path leading up to the car park.

To limit the spread of soil-borne diseases, please avoid walking on the garden beds