

SPECIAL PLANTS: December 2022-January 2023 WITTUNGA TRAIL

This month's walk begins in the beds housing plants from the **fynbos**, a fire-prone vegetation growing on nutrient-poor soils in the mediterranean climate of South Africa. One of the most species-rich floras in the world, its dominant elements are from the families Restionaceae, Ericaceae and Proteaceae.



See over page for map

*An Australian native

- 1 The Fynbos** Western Cape and Eastern Cape provinces of South Africa
The restios (tall grass-like plants) and ericas are prominent here (eg the red-flowered *E. cerinthoides*), but you can find also species from many smaller families like the tall *Aristea major* from the iris family, with a few hundred bright-blue flowers on each stem. *Salvia muiirii* also has intense blue flowers and leathery, oval leaves with a menthol scent. *Pelargonium graveolens* with pinkish-white flowers and rose-scented velvety leaves is just another example of the thousands of species contributing to the huge diversity of colour, form and scent in the fynbos. Examples of the Proteaceae are best-seen in the terrace beds (sites 8-10).
- 2 *Melaleuca sheathiana*** Boree or booree Central and south-western WA
The creamy-white flowers of boree are arranged in short spikes of 4 to 11 individual flowers. The main flowering season is in spring, followed by development of the fruit in the typical dense clusters of woody capsules along the stem. Boree is a useful shrub for hedges and windbreaks in temperate climates. The common name is taken from the Noongar name for the plant
- 3 *Melaleuca linariifolia*** Flax-leaved paperbark Qld, NSW
Further along the path, set back behind a naming walk sign for *Hakea* is a small tree with thick, papery bark and a dense canopy of narrow leaves. In the warmer months the leaves can be almost obscured by fluffy clusters of perfumed white flowers, leading to another common name 'snow in summer'. It occurs naturally along watercourses but is tolerant of a range of conditions. The leaves are rich in essential oils and this species has potential to supplement *M. alternifolia* as an alternative source of 'tea tree' oil.
- 4 *Eucalyptus woodwardii*** Lemon-flowered gum WA
Native to a small area east of Kalgoorlie, this drought and frost tolerant species, to about 10 m tall, is widely grown as an ornamental in southern Australia for its grey, weeping foliage, and large, lemon-yellow flowers, which attract insects and birds. The bark is smooth, shedding in long strips showing white, pink or green. The branchlets, and flower buds in groups of three to seven, are grey. Look for the cap on the flower bud for comparison with the adjacent *Angophora*, a eucalypt with opposite rather than alternate leaves.
- 5 *Angophora hispida*** Dwarf apple, scrub apple NSW
Endemic to eastern Australia and commonly called 'apples', the nine species of *Angophora* are also the only eucalypts with recognisable petals and sepals. In the other eucalypt genera, *Eucalyptus* and *Corymbia*, the petals and sepals are fused into a bud cap (operculum) which is shed as the flower opens. The dwarf apple has vivid red, softly-hairy young leaves, whereas older leaves are grey green with bristly hairs. In warmer months the tree produces terminal clusters of large cream to white flowers.
- 6 *Eucalyptus preissiana*** Bell-fruited mallee South-western WA
When in flower, large vibrant-yellow flowers form a prominent display along the branches, with blooms up to an impressive 30 mm or more in diameter, which are highly attractive to nectar-feeding birds. They flower in winter and spring and produce the large, bell-shaped gumnuts, which give the species its common name. The stems of this sprawling specimen arise from a prominent lignotuber characteristic of the mallees.
- 7 *Anigozanthos* species** Kangaroo paws South-western WA
The tall kangaroo paws with strappy leaves growing in this area, (mainly forms of *A. flavidus*) belong to the genus *Anigozanthos* which has 11 species, in part varying in height of the flower-stalk and flower colour. The overall appearance is influenced by the fine hairs covering the floral tube and sometimes part of the stalk. Many new forms and colours have also arisen from hybridisation programmes.
- 8 *Aulax cancellata*** Channel-leaf featherbush South Africa
An appealing shrub with attractive red stems and needle-like foliage, its delicate yellow flowers appear in spring to early summer. The shrub grows upright to about 2.5 m tall branching from a single main stem. This species is dioecious (separate male and female plants) and in this little stand all of the plants appear to be male. Like most plants in the family Proteaceae they grow best in well drained acidic soil.
- 9 *Agonis flexuosa*** Willow myrtle South-western WA
Willow myrtle has graceful weeping foliage reminiscent of its namesake, the common willow. The narrow green leaves are lance-shaped and have a peppermint smell when crushed. New leaves are a rich glowing rust-red. Small white flowers with five petals are in abundance along the branches in spring and summer. When mature, willow myrtle makes a great shade tree suitable for street planting.
- 10 *Leucospermum* spp.** Pincushion flowers South Africa
On the path above the willow myrtle are several species from the genus, including a large, robust specimen of rocket pincushion (*L. reflexum*) next to the Naming Walk sign. On either side are other leucospermums, (eg *L. praecox*, *L. patersonii*, *L. cordifolium*, and *L. grandiflorum*) all with the characteristic pincushion flowerheads in various colours. The 'pins' 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.