



AUSTRALIAN PLANTS FOR  
CONTAINERS STUDY GROUP

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## Leaders' comments

### Welcome to Australian Plants for Containers *Newsletter 39, March 2022*

We hope that you are experimenting with growing Australian native plants in pots. There are now so many exciting new cultivars to try that it is hard to choose among them. In this *Newsletter* we will feature a couple of the new cultivars of native hibiscus that are so rewarding to grow in pots, where you can satisfy their soil requirements and protect them from the frost. Hibiscus, with their pure colours and 'tropical' appearance bring a welcome variety to the garden. Another cultivar with 'tropical' leanings and glorious colour is *Gossypium* 'Flirtatious'. The species *Gossypium sturtianum*, the flower emblem of the Northern Territory, is attractive too with its purple flowers and grey-green water-shedding foliage, and thrives in a pot. Please send us photos and text detailing your experiments with new cultivars in pots and, of course, equally valued, your experience with older cultivars and species.



Left: *Gossypium* 'Flirtatious' growing in a pot next to our house in Canberra

Right: *Gossypium sturtianum* in the Red Centre Garden at the Australian National Botanic Gardens

**Karen Nicoll, Newcastle, NSW**



**Left:** *Grevillea lavandulacea* 'Victor Harbor' Showy red flowers, Attracts bees and butterflies  
*Billardiera scandens* - Apple Berry - hopefully eventually there will be some fruit for me to eat (a blue tongue lizard beat me to my strawberries!)  
And I think the grass is *Poa*.

**Middle:** *Backhousia myrtifolia* - Cinnamon Myrtle I use the leaves as a substitute for cinnamon ie curries and muffins. Some leaves are a tad yellow - I probably need to feed it some fertiliser.

**Right:** *Plectranthus parviflorus* - Blue Spires The plant on the right is a cutting from the plant on the left.



**Left:** *Tasmannia lanceolata* - Mountain Pepperberry No berries yet but I have used the dried leaves on chicken.  
I think the grass is *Rytidosperma* - Wallaby Grass

**Middle:** Spot the *Backhousia citriodora* -Lemon Myrtle! I love lemon myrtle tea combined with lemongrass - exotic or native.  
I probably need to prune the *Backhousia* but it creates a convenient screen.

**Right:** *Cymbopogon ambiguus* - Native Lemongrass

### Progress with Planter Boxes

To augment my little back north-facing garden courtyard in my Retirement Villa, I had several planter boxes established when the landscaper planted the small strip of soil ( ~8 m long by ~2.5 m wide) with native plants with a focus on contrasting foliage (as opposed to an emphasis on flowering). This was done about 22 months ago in April 2020. A well-draining soil mix was used and the boxes were set on bricks to further enhance drainage.

The plants in the boxes have flourished but flowering has been very shy apart from the *Anigozanthos* which grew tall and flowered well in their first summer. This summer they have managed to flower to some extent but as is evident from the photo they are leaning well over due to the “prevailing” wind which whistles down the side corridor between the house and fence. I have been careful not to overwater but may have been too zealous in this regard as they responded thirstily when given more. Currently the boxes are watered automatically 3 times weekly (3 drippers per box delivering about 5 L per box) and they are given Seasol now and then. **Advice about non-flowering would be greatly appreciated.**



This planter box is 550 mm high, 1200mm long and 450 mm deep and is made of fibre glass; so is light weight (without the contents!). It has been planted with *Correa* “Dusky Bells”, *Anigozanthus flavidus* “Yellow & Red Landscape Gold”, *Dianella* “Little Jess” and *Correa alba*. Only the *Anigozanthus* has flowered.



This smaller planter box, 400 mm high, 1020 mm long and 280 mm deep, has *Dianella* “Little Jess” in leafy profusion (but no flowers or purple fruit). The *Hibbertia scandens* flowered a little in the first season before being severely decimated by caterpillars (before I realized what was happening and acted accordingly). It has started to regrow on its trellis in the second season but with not a flower in sight. It is supposed to soften the view of the tin fence from the living room side window!



This *Adenanthos sericeus* "Silver Streak" in the larger of the two boxes is doing particularly well with its soft, woolly foliage if nothing else. I have not noticed any flowers, nor visitations from birds which in turn is usually a good sign my other potted *Adenanthos* (*cunninghamii*) is flowering. I think I may have over pruned it recently – removing some of the very low branches. Perhaps this was a mistake.

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## Jane Fountain, Qld

My garden is dominated by 30+ metre eucalypts which pull as much moisture as they can from the ground. So I have worked out that the only way for little plants to thrive is to have them in a pot which I bury in the ground with plastic - old pot mix bags - lining the hole to prevent the gum tree roots finding their way into the pot through the drainage holes. I've learnt from experience!



**Left:** Photo shows size of the tree trunk and so you can guess at the height

**Right:** Thirsty tree roots from around a pot.



**Left:** *Xanthostemon verticillatus* Little Penda



**Right:** *Asplenium australasicum* Bird's Nest Fern, *Renunculus inundatus* in pot in water bowl for birds, *Proiphys cunninghamii* Brisbane Lily with long stalks after flowering, waiting for seed to mature.



**Above:** *Bowenia spectabilis* which is a cycad not a fern,



**Above:** *Phaius australis* Swamp Orchid which grows on coastal wallum/heathland where there is plenty of water, so plants have to be kept in pots and well watered.



**Above:** *Lobelia membranacea*

## Barbara Melville, NSW

### *Dampiera trigona*

I am sure a water-well hanging pot was the reason this wonderful *Dampiera trigona* soldiered on in our NSW Central Coast humidity. Being a native of WA I was sceptical that it would grow here but it thrived. This photo was taken in 2010 but I did have other successes with two or three of this species but not in recent years. Note to self - must try again! However ... we probably don't have the amount of sun required these days. I don't recall pruning it but I've read that pruning is beneficial. Perhaps that is why this species only lived for about three years in my care.

It would have been planted into a native potting mix and received native fertiliser now and then. I clearly remember recommending *Dampiera trigona* to anyone who would listen way back then.



Left: *Dampiera trigona*



Below: *Scaevola albida*

### *Scaevola albida*

This tough ground cover is known simply to us as the little blue Scaevola in comparison to the much larger & shorter-lived *Scaevola aemula*. Little Blue has been growing for many years in a black plastic pot inserted inside another slightly better looking pot. The gap between the two pots is supposed to keep the plant's roots cooler in summer on the NSW Central Coast.

It might catch a few grains of native fertiliser or blood & bone now and then and does require plenty of water in summer. Pruning is necessary to keep it from being too woody & untidy. Unfortunately *Scaevola albida* is showing potential to become a weed in our garden. It has invaded a water well trough where it also looks pretty good but has also set itself up in a couple of garden spaces. Growing prettily close by this one is another plant we call the little pink Scaevola.

## Liesbeth Uijtewaal, The Netherlands



The three *Banksia speciosa* plants are 9 y.o. They've lived inside the glasshouse for quite some time now since they're quite big. Not too big to move outdoors but too prone to toppling over on windy days – which we have a lot. As you can see, life under cover doesn't stop them from flowering even though they didn't flower last year. I did fertilize them a bit but they might like a larger pot or maybe a better watering regime: it is quite hard to determine now whether or not they need water. I normally lift the pots to judge but these have become a bit big. Potting on will be quite a task too, the largest pot is a 50 litre one I think and so, quite heavy. I haven't decided what to do as yet.





Last image on previous page and the two above show the smaller glasshouse in winter. After the 15<sup>th</sup> of May in general the risk of frost is over and the pots can be safely moved outdoors again.

*Editor's note: Liesbeth has the most extraordinary collection of Australian plants in containers. She has made a number of trips to Australia and visited many gardens and has collected cuttings for her pots.*

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## Janet and Andy Russell, Canberra

We have lived in an apartment in Reid for the last five years. We are fortunate to have quite a large balcony which is 10 by 5 metres facing southwest open to the sky with opaque glass side walls. We have fitted electronic shutters to reduce sun and wind when necessary. Wind can be a particular problem which is probably accentuated by the fact that we are on the ninth floor of our building. When we left our Aranda home, we took all our pot plants with us. There were about 20 pots at that time. Our garden in Aranda was all native and we have continued this theme here in Reid (we do have some culinary herbs). Now our pot numbers are around about the eighty mark. Most of our pots are of the glazed type though we recently added some lightweight Cherry Primolite pots made from high density resin with a glossy finish. The balcony garden is the perfect foil for the cranes and concrete pumps for the massive building site that is just over the road.



**Left:** General view of balcony eastwards

**Right:** *Templetonia retusa*





*Aphanopetalum resinsum*



*Pterostylis pedunculata*

Our choice of plants has been chiefly shrubs though we do have herbage plants like *Bulbine glauca* Rock Lily, various *Anigozanthos* Kangaroo Paws, *Brachyscome angustifolia* and *B formosa* Pilliga Daisy. *Goodenia elongata* Lanky Goodenia is a suckering plant that we have had since 2004. A favourite of ours is *Pterostylis pedunculata* the Maroonhood. We must have close to 50 flowering in a single pot at present. We started with them in 2008 from two plants. *Wahlenbergia stricta* 'Blue Mist' is a dwarf form of *W. stricta* with very attractive double flowers. *Pelargonium sp. striatellum*, Omeo Storksbill, is another of our herbage plants. It is an endangered species in NSW. Another plant in this category is *Lobelia quadrangularis*, Sky Blue. Several of these sit on a tiered wrought iron stand against the east glass wall.



*Telopea speciosissima x oreades* 'Shady Lady White'



*Templetonia retusa*

Our larger shrubs include a *Telopea* 'Shady Lady' which is a *T speciosissima x oreades* and is white flowered. We have had this since 2009. It has six heads open at present. Another is *Templetonia retusa*, Cockies Tongue. It has flowered well the last couple of months. A pair of Crimson Rosellas removed most of the flowers more than a month ago, but more flowers have now opened. We have a grafted *Corymbia ficifolia* 'Dwarf Red' doing well after losing a couple of other eucalypts. Medium sized shrubs include several *Correa*, *Eremophila* and *Grevillea*. Among the *Correas* our favourites are *C. pulchella* 'Ring a Ding Ding', and *C. 'Canberra Bells'*. A recent purchase is a pair of *Grevillea rhyolitica*, Deua *Grevillea*, which we hope will grow well. We have three acacias, *Acacia acinacea*, Gold Dust Wattle, which has just finished good flowering while other acacias are *A podalyriifolia* and *A subulata* neither of which have flowered yet. Something more unusual that is flowering now is *Aphanopetalum resinsum*, the Gum Vine. It is a rain forest climber though not given the chance to climb here.



*Eremophila glabra x maculate* 'Crazy Gal'



*Corymbia ficifolia* 'Dwarf Red'

*Pandorea jasminoides* Bower of Beauty climbs the main balcony post. It had a few flowers last year and we hope for more this year. It is in quite a large pot and is the only one we do not move.

Our fern corner, which is shaded by the closed Vergola includes *Dicksonia antarctica*, Soft Tree Fern, *Macrozamia communis*, Burrawang, *Polystichum proliferum* Mother Shield Fern and *Asplenium australasicum*, Bird's Nest Fern. Another is *Adiantum aethiopicum*, Maidenhair Fern, which is growing in a glass jar having started life as an indoor terrarium.

Our plant layout has changed over time. Currently we have plants around the east and front with remaining plants laid out in two double horseshoe formations. I use a probe to assess water needs of plants. We have a bird bath and a small water feature though the latter is out of order awaiting the opportunity to fix the pump.

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## Bruce Cadoret, Ballarat, Victoria



2019



2022

In 2019 Bruce wrote: Please see attached photo. This is our first attempt at growing a Quandong, it also needs a companion plant although we are not sure what it is - maybe an *Eremophila*. My partner Alison was recently in Mildura where she found this Quandong (red) at the Mildura Native Nursery, unfortunately we did not receive a tag. As we had not seen this before and we are interested in growing bush foods we thought to give this a go. Do you know where else you can get Quandong? Hopefully it will survive, we planted in a mixture of sand and native potting mix. It is up against the house and receives afternoon sun, if successful we might give you an update as it grows.

In 2022 Bruce wrote: This my Quandong - *Santalum acuminatum*, it's about 3 years old, hopefully we will get some fruit in a year or two, it's situated where it gets the afternoon sun and being a desert plant needs sun and heat. It is hemiparasitic so uses the root system of other plants to acquire nutrients and water. So far it is growing well and in summer I just keep up the water. You do not often see this plant even in specialist native nurseries, it can be too big for the home garden, hence it is in a pot.

## Mirian Ford, Hurstbridge, Victoria



I am attaching two images of *Hemiantra pungens*, purple form, in native animal planters. These planters are made by Crows Foot Pottery, Panmure, Great Ocean Rd not far from Warrnambool in Victoria. We have them come to our APS Yarra Yarra plant sales when we can hold them ( in recent years COVID stopped that) which is where I purchased them a few years back. I felt that the form Hemiantra adopts would work well in them and sure enough they are looking great. These images are about one year on from the original planting. The planters have good drainage but I also included some stones in the base and I mulch with small pebbles. They are in full sun and thriving, so much so that I recently pruned them back by about one third.

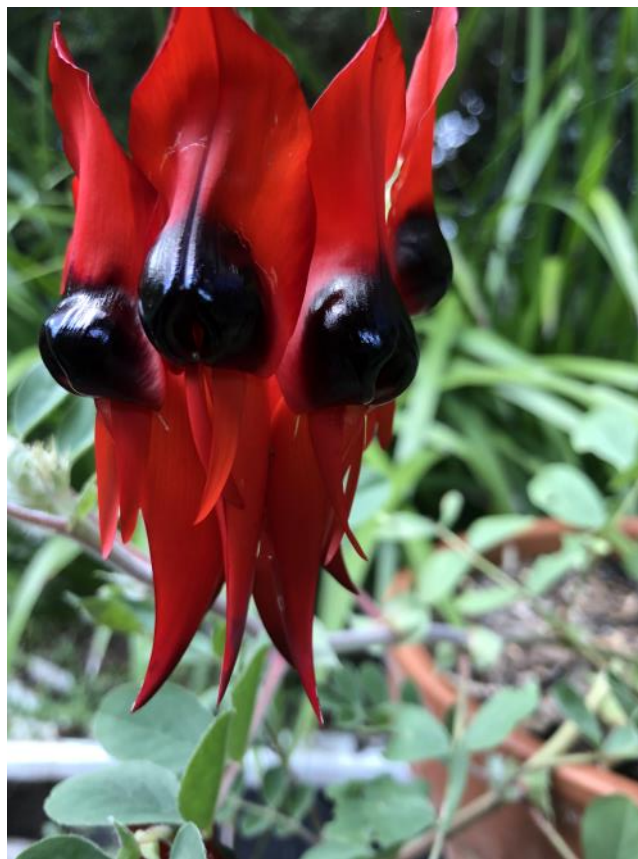
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## Jean Hancox, Adelaide, South Australia



This is *Scaevola* "Purple Fanfare". This one is by a wall facing slightly south of east. It is hard to keep going and dies by the end of summer despite good water, good drainage and morning sun only. Although the same variety has put on an amazing display in a large pot with afternoon sun, I could not keep it going for more than one year at a time. It would be interesting to know if anyone has had better results or is it best regarded as an annual.

## Arthur Kelly, Camden, NSW



Photos of Sturt's Desert Pea in a pot as promised. They are a challenge but one I am prepared to take on.

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## Nicky Zanen, Boronia, Victoria

Today I visited an Open Garden in Melbourne I hadn't been to before. The garden was on a small block in Hampton, not far from the beach, so the owners face several challenges; sandy soils, relatively close to the beach although the garden is generally protected from salt air, and limited planting space.

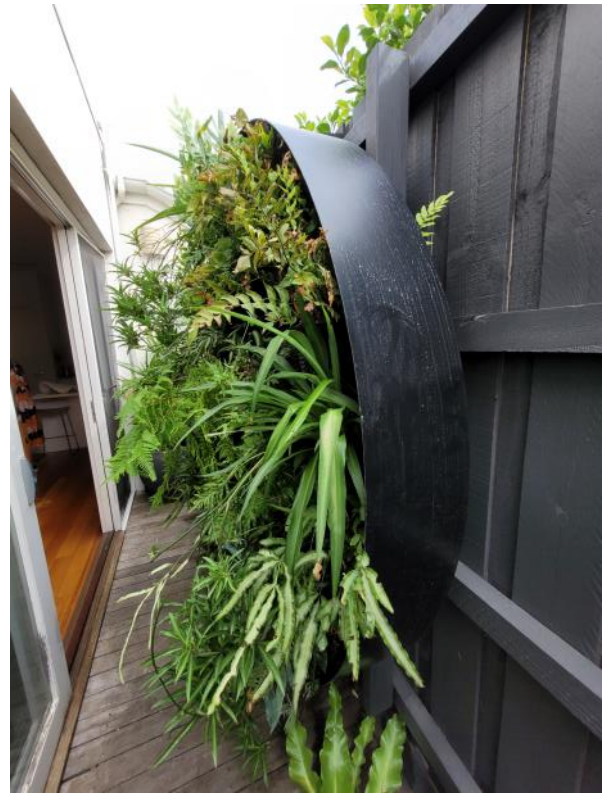
As a result the owners have found that using containers to trial their conditions and suitability of the plants is an efficient way of assessing which plants to use in their garden.



**Left:** *Grevillea lanigera* in a hanging basket  
*Grevillea synapheae*  
*Banksia serrata* prostrate  
*Acacia cultriformis*

**Right:** *Cryptandra amara* and  
*Thelionema umbellatum* (not flowering but beautifully shaped)





**Left:** two *Eucalyptus caesia* trees which appear to be growing very well in a boxed container. It's hard to know if their roots are in the ground

**Right:** The wall garden is in a very tricky situation with a narrow passage that runs parallel to the east side of the house. The owners have purchased and installed a vertical garden which is viewed from the lounge.



**Left:** *Lomandra* 'Seascape' in front of *Eremophila nivea* which blended in well with the house walls.

**Right:** The container holding the Woolly Bush, *Adenanthos sericeus*, is big enough for the plant to grow into an impressive tree. Ideal for Christmas decorations



To hide one of my water tanks I have a *Hibbertia scandens* in a small pot, which grows vigorously even though it is confined by the size of the pot and also erratic watering regimes. When it rains the pot stays waterlogged for days. At other times it doesn't get watered. It is a tough plant. It is meant to climb on plastic lattice round the watertank, but the lattice has collapsed and needs replacing. Last spring I was pleasantly surprised to see a nest, albeit with two blackbird babies in it, in this bush.

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## Native Hibiscus

Words: Ros Walcott, Canberra

Photos: Ben Walcott, Canberra



### **Hibiscus 'Aussie Delight' (left photo)**

We planted this hybrid hibiscus, *H. heterophyllus* x *H. divaricatus*, 2m high x 1.5m wide, a fast growing shrub with glossy green leaves, red-brown stems and scented light pink flowers, in March 2021. The stems are covered in irritating hairs.

### **Hibiscus geranioides (right photo)**

We planted this annual or biennial species, 0.75m high x 0.75m wide, with dark green, lobed leaves and delicate pink flowers with a darker throat, in a pot in October 2015. This charming plant flowers over many months. We removed our original plant in 2021, as it had grown too large for its position and was not blooming so freely, but the cutting Ben made is growing and flowering well. This plant is widespread in tropical areas of Western Australia, Northern Territory and Queensland. In common with most *Hibiscus* species, the individual flowers last only 1-2 days but new flowers continue to open over a long period.



**Hibiscus heterophyllus pink (photo above)**

Also known as Native Rosella, this hibiscus is endemic to New South Wales and Queensland where it can grow to a shrub or small tree. We planted one in a pot in November 2019. Our plant had its beautiful (but prickly) leaves shredded by hail in January 2020, but they have re-grown. The pink flowers are large and showy.

**Hibiscus 'lan's Gold' (photo below)**

We planted this hybrid hibiscus, dedicated to the memory of Ian Waldron, in a pot in October 2021. This plant forms a bushy shrub, 2m high x 1.5m wide, with large single gold flowers with a burgundy throat. The reddish stems are prickly. This plant needs a sunny well drained position and tolerates only light frosts, so must be protected in Canberra.



Please send us your thoughts comments and ideas and when we get enough, we will produce another *Newsletter*.

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