



AUSTRALIAN PLANTS FOR  
CONTAINERS STUDY GROUP

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## NEWSLETTER # 36, September 2020

Group Leaders: Ros and Ben Walcott: [roswaltcott5@gmail.com](mailto:roswaltcott5@gmail.com) and [benwaltcott5@gmail.com](mailto:benwaltcott5@gmail.com)

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### **Leaders' Comments:**

Ben and I are very pleased to have received so many contributions from you. Your input makes the APC *Newsletter* interesting and relevant to everyone around Australia. We have two apologies to make from APC *Newsletter* #35 where we failed to notice the second page of Anne Campbell's information on the growth of her potted grass trees – her paper in its entirety is presented on page 12 of this *Newsletter*. Not only did we omit Anne's page but we also added a stray photo at the end of Fran Middleton's article on potting up her Blueberry Ash, *Elaeocarpus reticulatus* 'Prima Donna'. Apologies to both – we will try to do better in the future. Plague year continues, but Ben and I managed to drive up to Warwick, Queensland for the ANPSA Eremophila Study Group Conference, July 31-August 3, where we saw a great variety of excellent eremophilas in pots at the six gardens that we visited. Please continue to send in your experiences with native plants in containers so that we can gather them together for the next APC *Newsletter* in April 2021.

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### **Pam Russell, SA**

Thank you for the newsletters, I found some very useful information in them.

I thought you might like to know that I belonged to the Bonsai study group, but unfortunately it is in recession, so I thought I would send you some of my photos of bonsai as well as a Correa I have in a pot that has a little story to it. I have an *Eremophila oldfieldii* looking good at the moment, also the Lilly Pilly does well as a bonsai which I will attach to this email. I do have many more which will be looking better when in flower.

The story of the Correa is : I found this very small plant coming up between my cement path, which looked very familiar, so I dug it up and nurtured it and put it in a small pot. Eventually it grew and looked like a correa. I put it in the pot it is in now and was very pleased that it has now flowered. The unusual thing is that the flowers are not like any of the ones I have growing in my garden. The colour is a nice pink with a much brighter pink underneath. I have orange and lemon coloured Correas growing near by where I found this one, so it must be a hybrid.





*Eremophila oldfieldii* as bonsai



Lilly Pilly as bonsai

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## Sharon Percy, Tas

There is a lovely Acacia at the back with 3 Leptospermum in the front with a prostrate Acacia as well. The 2 urns on the retaining wall have mini Lomandra with Dampiera spilling down. It snowed overnight in Tassie on Tues 4th into Wed 5th August, an 100 year event



***Phaius australis* syn *Phaius tankervilleae***

**Swamp Orchid**

Family: Orchidaceae Conservation status: Endangered

- ORIGIN** South East Queensland – coastal wallum, swamps and wetland edges; Bribie Island; Stradbroke Island; Moreton Island; Cooloola & Great Sandy areas; always found in shallow depressions with seasonal water; also found in north Queensland.
- SIZE** Terrestrial orchid growing from underground pseudo-bulbs; foliage grows to approx. 500mm above ground; emergent erect flower spikes to 1m above ground.
- FOLIAGE** Broad upright spath type leaves to 100mm wide in a rosette; pale to mid green and slightly pleated;
- FLOWERS** Typical orchid flower (not unlike a *Cymbidium*) basically cream, but variously patterned with white, pink, yellow & orange; there is colour diversity between various specimens; flowers are clustered along the erect stem (like a gladioli) and can reach to 1.5 m high; Flowers emerge in early spring September & October and persist for several weeks.
- COMMENT** Grows naturally in moist sandy soils in semi shaded conditions as an understory, rarely in full sun. Excellent flowers for use in arrangements; probably does best in container culture where moist conditions can be maintained.

Plants will persist in a large container for many years and produce many flower spikes as they age. Readily propagated from 300mm long sections of the flower stem laid in the top layer of moist course sand in shaded conditions.



***Tripladenia cunninghamii*** synonym ***Kreysigia multiflora***

**Bush Lily**

Family: Colchicaceae

**ORIGIN:** A subtropical understorey plant of coastal rainforest and moist Eucalypt forest extending from northern New South Wales to southeast Queensland.

**SIZE:** A decorative sprawling plant with many tangled wiry stems up to 400mm long.

**FOLIAGE:** Leaves are mid-green, elliptical, broad, and shiny, up to 80mm long and 30mm wide, with prominent longitudinal veins.

**FLOWERS:** The attractive pale pink flowers with six petals and creamy yellow stamens, open flat to 15mm diameter in spring and summer, each held on a fine stem above the foliage.

**FRUIT:** Seeds are produced in small lobed capsules. Propagate from seeds or stem cuttings.

**COMMENT:** Although Bush Lily appears to be a delicate plant, it is an excellent hardy, low-maintenance climber or scrambler providing tropical character. Prefers a moist, shady location in a garden rockery with adequate light but no direct sun. Also thrives in a taller container or hanging basket where the cascading leaves can be best appreciated.

This specimen has been in this container for probably ten years or so and always adds character to the bush house or fernery, particularly when in flower. It seems to self-maintain and renew with minimum attention.



## Barbara Melville, NSW

This *Scaevola striata* has lived in a water-well trough for approximately six years. Most of the time the trough is amongst garden plants where it receives morning sun and filtered afternoon sun. In spring and early summer it often makes a move to our deck railing where it can really show off its flower sprays that are sometimes about 30 cm in length. This plant usually flowers throughout the year but predominantly late spring. During the cooler months the leaves become a bronzy green.



On hot summer days it often receives supplementary water because I think the root ball has taken up all available space in the trough and the plant looks limp. Normally the water-well keeps it refreshed. I fertilise with ½ strength Aquasol about twice a year and it receives Seasol more often. If I'm throwing blood & bone around the garden the *Scaevola striata* also receives a light dusting. Potash was given to it twice in 2019 but I'm not sure if it made a huge difference to the flowering regime. It would have been planted in a native potting mix. I have not attempted to repot it.

If my plant happened to perish I would be out quick smart to find another. However I'd have to purchase when in flower to find the magnificent deep blue flowered one. The label on my plant reads 'Misty Blue' but mine is hardly misty – it is that wonderful rich blue, almost iridescent.

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## Donald McKenzie, SA



*Lechenaultia formosa*



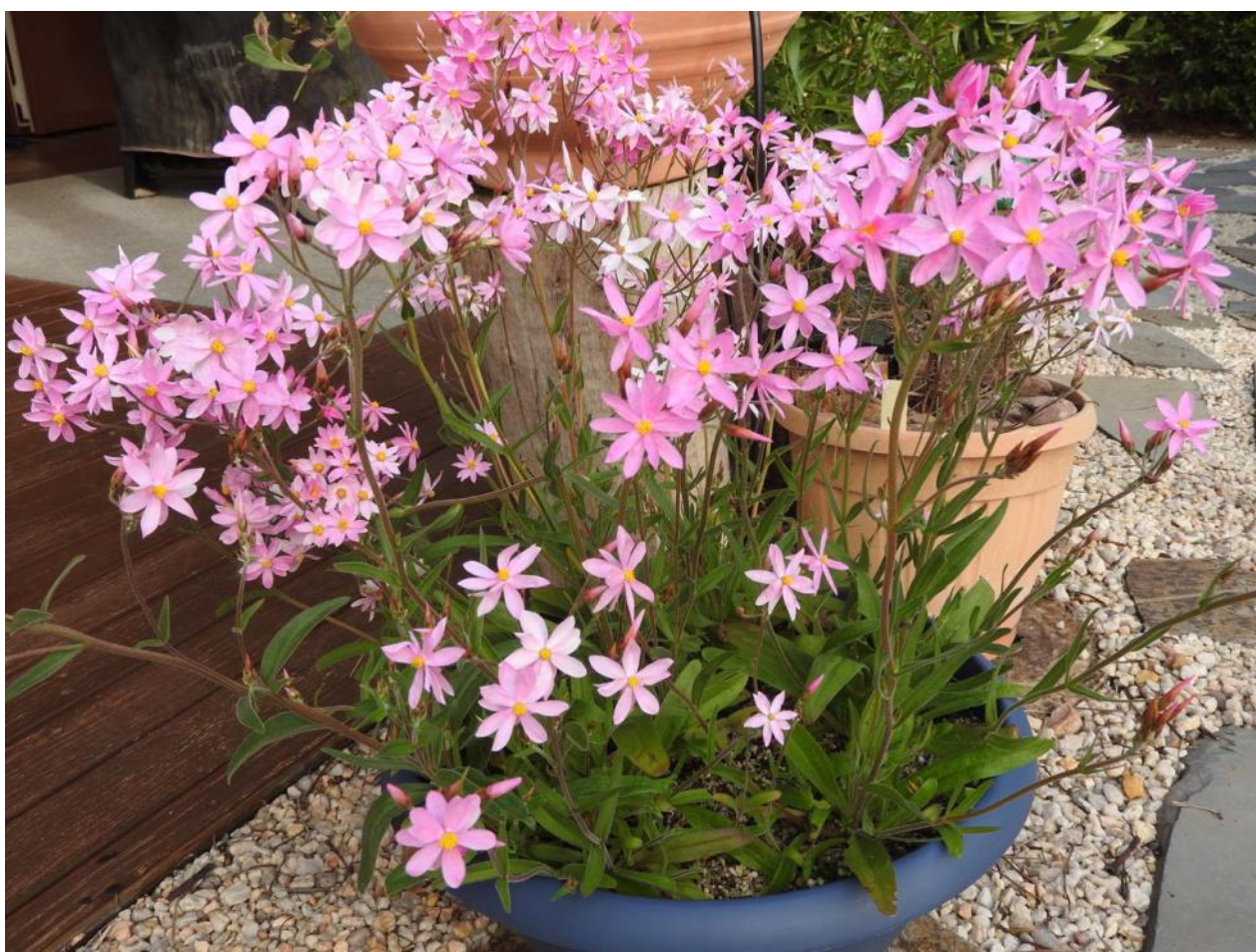
*Dampiera diversifolia*

I live at Moonta Bay in country Sth Aust, where I am a member of APS Northern Yorke Peninsula, based in Kadina.

Our soil is alkaline, at best 8.5 and because of this I grow many plants in pots. I have several Grevilleas, Hibbertias, Lechenaultias, Verticordias, Leptospermum, Scaevola, sundry others and some of the larger growing Eremophilas eg *E mirabilis*, and *muelleriana*, only because they grow too big for my small garden. The plants in pots provide varied colour throughout the year. I love the Hibbertias. Their bright yellow flowers add a special “zing” to the garden.

I have about 50 pots scattered about the garden, many growing on my verandahs which face northeast. Great in winter, sheltered from the prevailing southwesterly winds with lovely winter sunshine. Good spot for morning coffee.

I use standard Australian Native potting mix, fertilise with a top dressing of organic slow release fertiliser 2 times a year and the garden and pots are on a watering system so that we can travel, although Covid-19 has stopped that this year. We had intended to attend the Fred Rogers Seminar but we all know the story there. I really feel for the organisers. So much preparation, growing of plants for sale and organisation.



*Schoenia cassiniana*

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## Charles Ferrugia, NSW

*Eremophila cuneifolia* x *E. fraseri*

This plant has been hammered during our recent wet spells and I am getting the impression that the mature foliage doesn't like getting wet.

Also I don't prune the Eremophila as often as I should because first time around I would like to see how the plant react to Sydney's climate conditions.



*Eremophila cuneifolia* x *E. fraseri*



*Eremophila hygrophana*

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## Gail Ritchie-Knight, Canberra

### Cheering for the Green and Gold

I've had my *Correa glabra* 'Barossa Gold' since 2014. Its suggested dimensions are 1–1.5m high and wide. My plant hasn't reached anywhere near that probably because it's always been in a pot, having been potted up only once. It currently measures 0.5 x 0.5m. I haven't treated it very well, tending to ignore it most of the time. All I do is give it the occasional watering and some liquid seaweed. I haven't even



During flowering time, birds often visit the dusky red flowers that cover the plant. White-eared Honeyeaters especially love it. Situated in full sun on the north side of my house, somehow it survived last year's diabolical heat and drought. It has been a very hardy plant, never sulks and tolerates frosts very well. But to me, its crowning glory are its leaves — green turning golden throughout the year — a truly attractive plant.

## Georgina Till, Canberra



Our native plants are marvelous in containers but not just in the garden, on paths, or showing off one particular specimen, but as multiple specimens in one container. I miss my large Victorian garden but have found a new challenge in container gardening. Our balcony is facing NNW in South Canberra.

This large terracotta pot (photo on the left) was planted on 19th August 2019 using all tube stock, and here it is a year later with *Eremophlia youngii* coming to the end of its flowering session. I have used native potting mix and water regularly then about every six weeks a dose of seasol. The *Eremophlia* will be pruned soon and the same with the *Chrysocephalum*.

Plants in the container: *Eremophlia youngii*, *Scaevola albida* 'Blue Mist', *Chrysocephalum apiculatum* with 2 different leaf forms and *Brachyscome multifida*.

There is also *Grevillea brownnae* putting on a great show in its first year and the lovely *Hibbertia dentata* that survived the time in storage with the furniture and now flowering beautifully (photo on the right).



### *Goodenia albiflora*

It's good value as the container is on a mini wheeled trolley so that the 'green foliage side' or 'grey foliage side' can be on display and it allows good air movement under the container.



## Jan Hall, Vic

The new newsletter was very interesting. I do like to read of others using the plants I grow, but maybe doing something different in a different climate. I would like to comment on some that were mentioned.

I loved Fran Middleton's cautionary tale of repotting the *Elaeocarpus*. How often have we been impelled to take on a plant task at the wrong time, then waited a year for it to forgive us?

The detailed care of the *Xanthorrhoea johnsonii* x Supergrass .That was a winner too. My *X. johnsonii* , [ not sure if it is the hybrid], is over 20 years old in the same pot and moved house twice. It came bare rooted with a short trunk, [ about 12cm], and has flowered 5 times. The trunk now measures 30cm, and probably depends on frequent summer watering and feeding to keep it happy in the same terracotta pot. Too big for me to move now, so has developed a lean away from a big *Grevillea*, towards the light. The position here is also on the edge of a small pergola on the north [hot] side near my front door.



Wildflower garden



*Tasmannia lanceolata* near front door

My watering around the house is basically with three 2 litre plastic jugs which are to collect shower hot water runoff. This reminds me to empty them on the neediest pots each day, then use the hose in dry weather. I do have an automatic system in a small nursery area for rest and care, growing on etc. Also a system on the shady side for the softer fern/foliage plants or anything needing protection during our long dry summers. I do have a lot of pots, mostly *Eremophilas*, Kangaroo paws, grafted plants and anything that is unlikely to thrive in the garden while small, or needs light soil and good drainage.

Margaret Lee says that she grows Flannel Flowers in pots as her soil is alkaline clay. Well I do too, but my clay is OK. for Ph but too hard and dry. Pots are much easier, and I have just pricked out new little seedlings. These come up in about March, after rain, and after the pots have sat, neglected all summer, where old [to 3yrs] plants have been. Some self seed into nearby pots, or into deliberately placed, newly prepared, pots. The 2 year olds will be cared for, to go again, all being well. I use a small gravel on top of all pot plants.

*Boronia* 'Purple Jared' is rewarding for me too. As long as it stays sheltered and is automatically watered all summer. My big one was 6 ys/o before it gave up. I have grown cuttings though, so have another 1m plant for this year. Perhaps the 6 year mark is the limit for many plants to look healthy in pots.

*Tasmannia lanceolata*, I have them both in the sheltered area as the climate is too harsh for many months. But in April, I was looking for a good foliage plant to put near my north facing, but partly shaded front door, and the female plant was just the thing. I had a silver foliated *Chrysocephalum apiculatum*, to contrast with it. I do move things around in this spot, but it will stay for the cooler months.



Dampiera (left photo) is using my log ,at front door in spring. The wood was part of a large dead Banksia, I salvaged as a potstand. On the right is a pot with seedlings of Flannel Flowers seen in autumn.

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## Jane Fountain, Qld

### Planting in Containers

I have a practical approach to planting in containers, because I live under some very large spotted gums – (30m *Corymbia henryi*) which are very thirsty. The biggest one is 3m from the front door! So in order to have a garden I have found that I have to have plants living in pots which I bury in the ground! I had thought that this would be sufficient, but where there's a will there's a way, and those gum roots can invade through the drainage holes so that after a while the little plant that was flourishing begins to look lack-lustre as it loses its access to water and nutrition and its will to live.



Jane's garden



Roots invading a pot

However, I worked out an answer to that – I now line the hole with the plastic bag from the native plant potting mix that I use, after I’ve punctured it with a few drainage holes. Then they require probably a bit more water than if they were in the ground. In Spring I do the ‘great dunking’ which verifies that you don’t need a gym if you’re a gardener. I fill an old plastic rubbish bin with water and fertiliser and dunk the whole pot and watch all the air-bubbles come up. Then the pot drains into another big container. This allows me to see what is going on with roots in the ground and the pot. Often I take out the plant to add a bit of new soil to the bottom of the pot before re-inserting the plant. It’s a bit strenuous! Pots of very wet soil can be very heavy and trying not to break the plant at all makes it a tricky exercise – handy if you have man-muscles around!



Native Violets and *Lobelia membranacea*



*Bowenia spectabilis*

There are a few advantages, though. If a plant is not thriving I tip it out into the wheelbarrow and can see what the problem is, or re-pot etc. It is easy to remove a plant that is either too big or not happy and find a different spot, and I can give a really thorough re-hydrating/fertilising as above. It’s also handy if you want to take a potted plant for a display.



*Xanthostemon verticillatus*



*Austromyrtus dulcis* (Midyim)



Left: *Leptospermum* 'Pacific Beauty'

Right: *Lobelia membranacea*



## Anne Campbell, SA

### Stimulating a grass tree to flower!

Treatment: 13 days in the dark with no water in transit from Canberra to Adelaide via Sydney!!

In February 2013 a grass tree *Xanthorrhoea johnsonii* hybrid x 'Supergrass' was bought as a seedling at Kuranga Nursery in Melbourne and duly planted in a large pot (50L, 500mm) with native plant potting mix – the size of the pot selected to allow for growth over the long term and reduce the need for transplanting too soon if the need arose. It was watered via a drip system – daily in summer and less frequently in winter (every 3 days) for about 2 min. It was outside but a little protected at the edge of a small pergola and so was exposed to the elements catching the western sun in the afternoon, in particular (see below).



September 2015 – to the left of the white BBQ

It grew steadily, developing into quite a handsome plant about 1m wide by 1m high by October 2015. It continued to grow and by March 2019 I noticed that a dense central cluster of new leaves had developed. I was about to relocate to the Adelaide Hills in the middle of that year so was anxious to take it with me having ascertained with the SA Quarantine authority that this was permitted. I prepared it for transport (June 25th) by clipping away the large lower skirt to reduce the area it took up. However, it was going to be a tortuous journey from the time of loading into the transit container to its delivery (8 July) – some 13 days in the dark with no water. I was not optimistic but delighted to find it survived and proceeded to administer liquid seaweed fertilizer, now and then. Several weeks later a friend happened to peer down through the central cluster of leaves to find the beginnings of a flower spike (12 August 2019)!

By 21st September  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the brown flower spike (of some 400mm) had appeared above the leaves and was clearly visible. By 3rd November, the flower spike was fully covered in white flowers (starting first on the North side); it was glistening with nectar and became the target of several yellow-crested cockatoos; indeed, one of them demolished about 10 cm of the spike. Fortunately, after shooing them away with much clapping and shouting, they did not return and by early January the sharp-edged seeds were well developed.

The plant label information indicated that it was likely to be a good performer – whether it actually develops a trunk remains to be seen.

'Supergrass' is an exceptional hybrid grown from seed for its amazing vigour surpassing the growth habits of all of the grasstrees. Trials planting out young plants in 15 cm pots have produced trunks 50 cm high in 9 years and 60 cm in 12 years. Normal grasstrees take about 15 years to even begin to form a trunk.

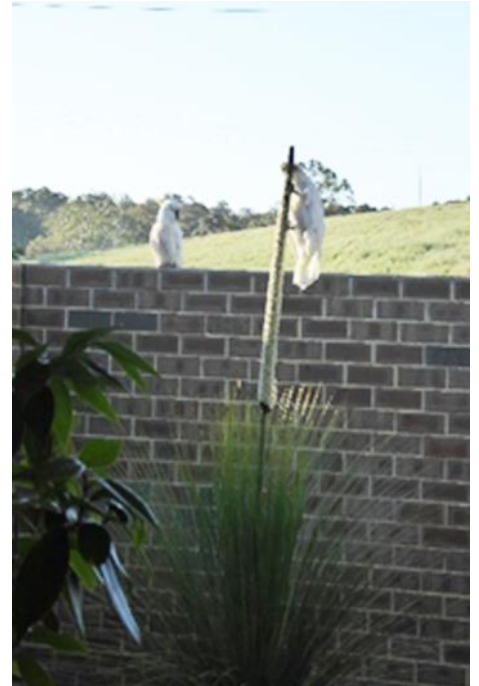
Planting conditions: Being seed grown, it is easy to establish in almost any soils that are well drained. You don't have to worry about root disturbance. It can be removed from the pot and planted like any normal Australian native plant, using low phosphorus fertilizers. Trials have even produced vigorous healthy plants fed on Dynamic Lifter...Amazing.



12th August 2019



21st September 2019



3rd Nov 2019: Such yummy nectar. There were actually three stomping along the brick wall; there have been no further attacks.

## Nicky Zanen, Vic

### Stories of neglect and erratic gardening



Left: Orchids kept in this pot for over 15 years. I don't repot them – they are left untouched.

Right: *Randia chartacea*, Narrow leaved Gardenia, hiding some ugly drain pipes. The saddest thing is that the pot which is a good size has paint peeling off. This plant has flowered, but no fruit.



*Tasmannia lanceolata*. I think this may be a female plant but I need a male to pollinate it to get seed pods. I've tried growing this several times in my garden but the only survivor is this plant in an old wine barrel. The plant is about 9 years old and I haven't repotted it at all. The milk bottle is my way of giving the plant a deep watering over summer.

The pepper bush is next to a native Rhododendron, *Rhododendron lochiaie*. This flowered well in autumn and then gave me two flowers at the beginning of August. I moved the plant from a shady position at the end of November to a protected position under a pergola covered by grape vines and it is thriving in its new position.



Left: This is a flat bottomed container that once held two Flannel Flowers. These have since lived their three years and been removed, but at one stage my *Einadia nutans* (Nodding Saltbush) has established itself in this container. The two replacement Flannel Flowers are waiting to be repotted, but I rather like the Einadia in there as it is.

Right and below: *Acacia* 'Scarlet Blaze': I've had this tree in a pot for a number of years, and it has grown gangly and ugly. I wasn't sure how to prune it and asked Bill Aitchison, Acacia Study Group Leader, for advice. He advised not to worry about it because it was likely not to last for long. I feel it continues to defiantly grow, and might have a go at pruning it after flowering.



Many of our APS Foothills members have been commenting that potting mixes are holding too much water. One member even has water crystals coming up to the top of her pots. Have other members had these issues too? One suggestion was to add cactus mix to the native potting mix; another to add perlite to the mix, with ratios of 3 or 4 potting to 1 of perlite.

Do people actually take note of the warnings on potting mix bags? While the risk of dying is very slim, the rules are similar to managing the current Coronavirus Pandemic – wear a mask, wash your hands carefully with soap and water, and wear gloves.

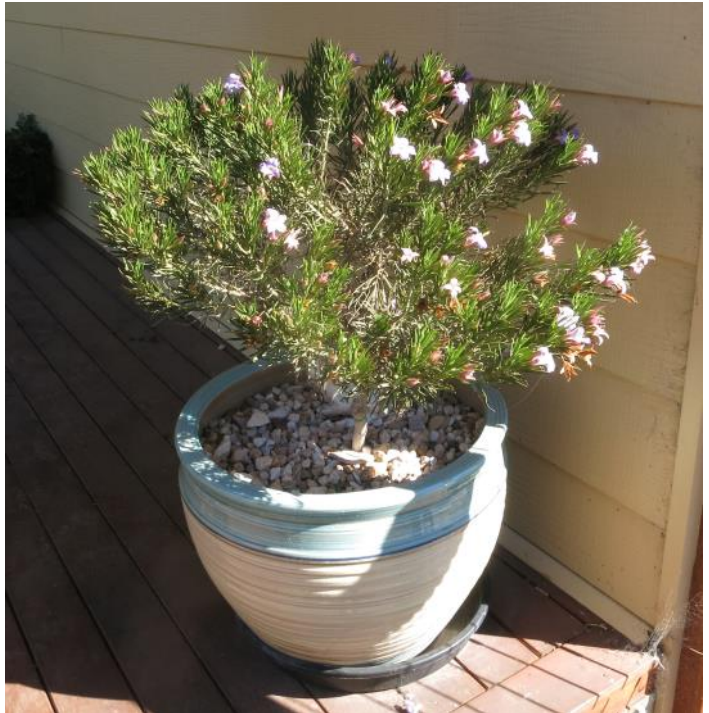
## Ros Walcott, Canberra

### Eremophilas in pots

Ben and I have just attended an ANPSA Eremophila Study Group conference in Warwick, Queensland from 31 July to 3 August. Thanks to great timing by the organizers, Lyndal Thorburn and Jan Glazebrook, we were able to slip through the Queensland border and back again without incident. We noticed that in every garden we visited there were eremophilas in pots, even in the comparatively mild climate and deep soil profile of southeastern Queensland. Of course, there were plenty of eremophilas in the ground as well, some growing to much larger size than we manage in Canberra, but it was significant that all the impressive gardeners we met also grew special plants in pots. If you need excellent drainage, if you need sandier soil than you have in your garden, if you want to shelter favourite plants from wind, sun, rain and frost, pots give you that flexibility.



*Eremophila punica*



*Eremophila prolata*



*Eremophila gilesii* white

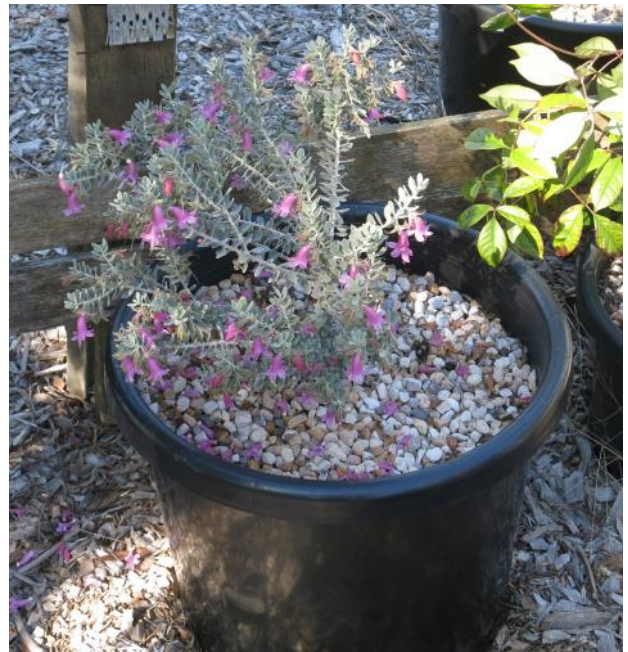


*E. gilesii* flower detail





*Eremophila accrescens* 'Lavender Blue'



*Eremophila glandulifera*

In the Glencoe garden of Lorelei and Matthew Bartkowski we noticed a variety of choice eremophilas in pots, *Eremophilas punica*, *prolata*, *gilesii* (white), *accrescens* 'Lavender Blue', *glandulifera* and *flaccida*. All these plants were growing and flowering well.



*Eremophila flaccida*



*Eremophila cuneifolia* in a pot in the Walcott garden



*Eremophila foliosissima* in the Walcott garden



*Eremophila glandulifera* 'Lipstick Pink' Walcott garden

## Attacks on potted plants

Oh no! Our palm has been attacked and the culprits are sloping away. For some unknown reason, our Italian Greyhounds, Bella and Lia, have designs on our potted palm, Golden Cane Palm or *Dypsis lutescens*. They break off fronds with their teeth and we have had to cage the palm, which does not add anything at all to its attraction as a house plant.



Death knell for a potted *Rhododendron lochiaie*. Our home band of choughs, variably 7-24 members, have settled on a newly planted Rhododendron and shredded it. The next new plant now has a wire cover over and around it and is thriving.



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

Ros Walcott: [roswaltcott5@gmail.com](mailto:roswaltcott5@gmail.com)

Ben Walcott: [benwaltcott5@gmail.com](mailto:benwaltcott5@gmail.com)