



KUNZEA

Australian Plants Society Maroondah
Preservation by Cultivation



December 2020

Merry Christmas Season Greetings Happy Holidays

On behalf of the Committee, I am thrilled to have this chance to wish you all a wonderful festive season.

It has certainly been a unique year for all of us. With all the extra time at home, I hope your gardens are all thriving and completely weed free! I must admit that I have been more focussed on my fish pond as the change of season always seems to bring with it algae and debris from next door's tree.

Certain things occur each year to remind us of the seasons, and as gardeners I believe we are a little more in tune with the earth. For the first time this season I heard cicadas in the afternoon, and it struck me that summer is here. Other clues as to the time of year is the absence of football and the start of cricket!

My family has started putting up our Christmas lights early, and I am proud to say that there is a very strong Australiana theme happening here. We have a koala eating gum leaves in the *Eucalyptus caesia* 'Silver Princess', an emu walking through an *Agonis flexuosa* 'After Shock' and kangaroos hopping under the *Acacia cognata* 'Lime Magik'. If anybody ever finds a kookaburra or platypus – LET ME KNOW!

I received a card today from our East Gippsland friends at APS thanking us for the donation earlier this year. They included a photo of the plants ready for distribution, and I hope you feel as proud as I do that we did something to help this area. It made me stop and think about what we were facing twelve months ago, and then I realised that the pending devastation of the fires and then COVID were behind us now.

Like many people, I am ready to bid 2020 farewell and embrace a new year full of fresh opportunities. This is the time to heal and support each other, and I look forward to meeting up with you again and exchanging stories about the year in lockdown.

– Debbie Jerkovic, President

A Real Get-Together!

6pm Friday 15th January, 2021

Yarran Dheran, Mitcham

(parking is off Ashburton Drive, Melway map 49 B6)

We are planning to have a BYO picnic on the evening of the third Friday in January (unless there is a setback in the CoVid situation).

This would normally be the night for our first member meeting of the year.

Meet in the picnic area at Yarran Dheran near the Visitors' Centre from 6pm.

Bring anything that you want to eat and drink.

A chair is probably a good idea as well.

We look forward to seeing lots of you there.

2020 Annual General Meeting of APS Maroondah Inc.

The AGM was held by Zoom and your new Committee was elected as follows:

President	Deb Jerkovic
Vice President(s)	Bruce Schroder
Secretary	Peter Rogers
Treasurer	Bev Fox

Ordinary Committee Members Alison Rogers, Barry Ellis, Bill Aitchison, Dallas Boulton, Graeme Nicholls, Jan Nicholls, Joe Wilson, Sue Guymer.

This is substantially the same committee as last year with the addition of Bev Fox. Bev is taking on the role of Treasurer, and we welcome her back to the Maroondah Committee.

Since the AGM Tim Morrow has also volunteered to rejoin the Committee. Thanks Tim and welcome back to you also.

We would still be happy to hear from anyone else who would like to join. New people bring fresh ideas, which is always a good thing.

Vale Pam Faraghar and Neville Hatten

Unfortunately, in November, two former Maroondah members passed away.

Pam Faraghar was a fixture at a meetings for some years, generally sitting in the front row with her close friend Moira Minty, and also Pam's daughter Lynn Smith. She had not been well enough to come to meetings for some time.

Neville, and his wife Robin Allison, were members in the early 2000s. More recently they have been more involved with Friends of Cranbourne RBG than with APS.

Our condolences to both families, particularly to Lynn and Robin.

Membership Renewal

There are still a few of you who have not paid your membership subscription for the year 1/7/20 to 30/6/21.

We would normally have removed unpaid members from the distribution list for *Kunzea* newsletter by this stage of the year. However, given the unusual circumstances, we have extended the grace period.

If you have not yet paid, or have decided not to rejoin, please contact our Membership Officer, Jan Nicholls on maroondah@apsvic.org.au or 9893 4422.

Welcome to a New Member

We welcome Helen McGeehan to APS Maroondah. It is wonderful to get new members anytime, but particularly when CoVid restrictions are preventing us from getting together. We hope to meet Helen soon – perhaps at our January picnic.

Commemorative Maroondah Plant

In 2016 a Firewheel Tree (*Stenocarpus sinuatus*) was planted in Maranoa Gardens to commemorate the 50th anniversary of APS Maroondah. Barry Ellis reports that the tree is looking good and is now about 2m tall.



It's Christmas

Bruce Schroder



How could we publish a Christmas newsletter and not include all our Christmassy Australian plants. I'm bound to have left some out, but my research has come up with a short list of species whose common names (some have several) include a reference to Christmas. It does seem that most have received their name because of the peak flowering display being roughly around Christmas time but to suggest that their flowering is a universal heralding of Christmas might just be stretching it a little!

New South Wales Christmas Bush (*Ceratopetalum gummiferum*)

This is generally described as a tall shrub or small tree 3-6m in height. It usually grows in heath or in moist gullies, from Ulladulla to Evans Head in NSW, with patchy distribution along the north central coast, mostly on sandstone or old sand dunes (hint re cultivation needs – NOT heavy clay!). Small, white five-petaled flowers appear in sprays from October in the species' native range. As these die, the sepals enlarge and become pink to red in colour, the display peaking at about Christmas time.

Although New South Wales Christmas Bush flowers in spring, when it produces masses of small creamy white flowers, the species is generally grown for the floral bracts which remain on the tree after flowering, developing their distinctive red colour from November and through the Christmas period, until February. Over the years, a number of cultivars have been selected including 'Albery's Red', a large shrub which delivers dependably bright red flowers and 'Red, Red, Red Christmas' which boasts bracts that turn a darker shade of red as they age, while the dwarf 'Johanna's Christmas' is a smaller-growing cultivar which stays up to 3m in height and width.

Karwarra Botanic Gardens has a wonderful display of some very tall examples of the species, well beyond the nominal 6m, which are at their peak leading up to Christmas.



Graeme Nicholls



Graeme Nicholls

Possibly 'Johanna's Christmas' growing in Doncaster.

Tasmanian Christmas Bush (also South Australian Christmas Bush) (*Bursaria spinosa*)

Well it does depend which state you're from doesn't it? Tasmanian Christmas Bush is one of a number of common names for *Bursaria spinosa*, a shrub most of us would be familiar with from bushland areas around Melbourne, where it flowers in the lead up to Christmas and in the cooler southern climes of Tasmania, flowering nearer to Christmas and beyond. It is related to the pittosporums and often ignored in its wild state throughout temperate Australia but is one of those species that says, with its massed display in late spring of creamy white flowers, "hey, look at me!". They also offer a very sweetly-scented perfume, hence one of the other common names, Sweet Bursaria. In a garden, it can be valuable for its scented cream flower sprays and seed vessels turning bright green, then bronze and is a great plant for attracting butterflies to the garden, but maybe better suited to a bushland setting than the home garden. I have one remnant plant in my garden



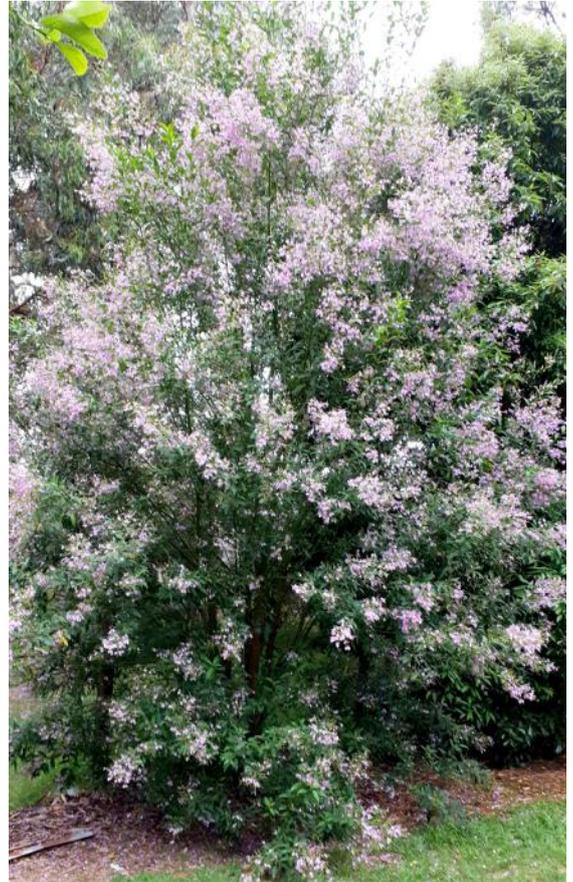
Graeme Nicholls

adjacent to Mount Dandenong National Park in Melbourne's outer east and its short sharp spiky branchlets drive me nuts when I'm cleaning up around it! I don't recall ever seeing it flower either!

Victorian Christmas Bush
(*Prostanthera lasianthos*)

This species gets its festive common name from the prolific blooms of small white to lavender flowers that occur around Christmas time. Perhaps to early white settlers it gave the evocative appearance of being covered in snow. While this would be an odd occurrence in an Australian bush setting in summer, it is still a fine sight in its natural setting. It is a large shrub or small tree of the mint family, Lamiaceae, which is native to Queensland, NSW, Victoria and Tasmania. I'm really not sure how Victoria was able to claim it as theirs!

It ranges from a 10m tall tree in sheltered forest to a 2m tall shrub in exposed montane areas and is found in wet sclerophyll forests, often beside creeks. Its flowers, which appear in profuse sprays, are about 2cm long and white or pale lilac, with purple and orange blotches in the throat. They appear in late spring and summer and specifically around Christmas time in Victoria although mine is in full flower on 1 December! Cultivars include 'Kallista Pink', a tall pink-flowering form that flowers profusely, and 'Mint Ice', a form with variegated foliage, both from the Dandenong Ranges here in Victoria. Another tall cultivar, 'Liffey Falls' has lilac flowers.



Bruce Schroder

Prostanthera lasianthos 'Kallista Pink' plant.



Bruce Schroder

Prostanthera lasianthos 'Kallista Pink' flowers.

Tasmanian Christmas Bells
(*Blandfordia punicea*)

Blandfordia punicea is a large tufted perennial native species that grows in button grass plains and damp, sometimes coastal, heaths on very nutrient poor soils, ranging from Bruny Island through south west Tasmania and reaching Rocky Cape in the north west. The leaves can be up to about 1m long, ribbed and green with reddish tinges. The flowers are conspicuous and distinctive - red (with a yellowish interior), tubular, pendulous, about 2cm long and in terminal inflorescences on a slender spike to 75cm tall. Some forms appear to have the individual flowers in the inflorescence arising from almost the same point whereas other forms show a substantial elongation of the panicle, as in the specimen featured. The species has proven difficult to maintain in cultivation, probably for a variety of reasons, primarily the difficulty in replicating their natural conditions. In my circumstances, of 6 small plants bought from Plants of Tasmania Nursery earlier this year, only one has progressed sufficiently to justify potting up into a larger container, the others having rotted at the base of the tuft of leaves over Melbourne's winter. Notwithstanding, I still have one very large old (4 years?) plant in a 300mm pot that has unfortunately not flowered since the first year it was brought home from



Alison Rogers

the nursery. At least it's still alive! This pot has never seen direct sun – probably the reason it is still alive but at the same time, also most likely the reason it hasn't flowered!

Western Australian Christmas Tree

(*Nuytsia floribunda*)

This tree is a root hemiparasite (the species does feed off its hosts but they can also sustain themselves through photosynthesis) and mainly obtains water and mineral nutrients from its hosts.

The haustoria (structures by which mistletoes attach themselves to their host) arising from the roots of *nuytsia* attach themselves to roots of many nearby plants and draw water and therefore nutrients from them. It is reported that plants up to 150m away may be parasitised.

Almost all species are susceptible to attack – haustoria have even been found attached to underground cables! In natural settings *nuytsia* withdraws relatively little from each individual host but is attached to so many other plants that the benefit to this hemiparasitic tree is likely to be considerable. Roots and rhizomes extend out and may sucker to form new branches that give the appearance of a grove of trees. A network of fine and fragile roots arise from these larger underground parts, forming haustoria where they meet the roots of other species.

The trunk of very old trees is reported to be to 1.2m in diameter, with multiple layers of wood and bark that allow the tree to withstand fire.

Nuytsia floribunda is well-known in south west Australia, primarily due to the appearance of abundant bright orange/yellow flowers in summer which is a spectacular display. Its distribution is in the south west corner of Western Australia from the Murchison River to the western end of the Great Australian Bight, in sandy or granitic soil in open forest, woodland and heath.

Although *nuytsia* seeds germinate readily and seedlings are easy to grow for a year or two, cultivation of the species to maturity is regarded as difficult, with little success outside of its native habitat. Kings Park notes that the seeds are relatively easy to germinate with a small growing host plant in the same pot, but they are a long-term garden plant proposition, taking up to 20 years to flower from seed sowing. An unusual characteristic of the seedlings is the four to six cotyledons rather than two.

Interestingly, there had been a specimen in the Cranbourne Botanic Gardens (RBGC) which had grown for approximately 40 years. It was the most southerly-growing specimen in the world and one of only a few known to be in cultivation outside Western Australia. Unfortunately, it died recently.

In 1979, the then Assistant Propagator in the RBGM nursery, Warren Worboys, was given a large bag of seed of *Nuytsia floribunda* from Western Australia. Some of this seed was sown and germinated in community pots and pricked out into tubes to grow on. Other seed was taken to the RBGC site and hundreds of seeds were direct seeded around the roots of a diversity of existing cultivated plant species which had been growing since 1976. Over the next three years, fresh seed was



Peter Rogers

Nuytsia floribunda WA Christmas Tree.

obtained and germinated and/or direct seeded in a variety of ways including direct seeding into pots of established plants.

The immediate area where the *nuytsia* grew was variously direct seeded and planted with tubed seedlings of the species. It is unclear from which method of propagation the current tree arose. The area where it grew is a sandy knoll, which was sparsely vegetated by indigenous species. It is unknown which species root system was parasitised by the tree.

For approximately five years, the seedling remained a single stem (to 25cm tall) then it started producing numerous, apparently adventitious, root suckers across an area of approximately 0.3m², but all the suckers still remained only 25cm tall. By approximately the 12th year after germination, the suckers were covering 1m². Then one sucker started to dominate and grow to form an upright stem. This stem developed into the trunk while the surrounding suckers disappeared. In late December 1996, the first flowers were observed, with a few flower shoots scattered across the top of the tree. The following year no flowers were observed and over the ensuing six years flowering was irregular. Since 2003 the summer-flowering had occurred annually and the number of flowers across the canopy had continued to increase.



Peter Rogers

Nuytsia floribunda flower.

New South Wales Christmas Bells

(*Blandfordia grandiflora*)

What a sight at Christmas time (well around Christmas time)! My mother's maiden name was Blandford and with my early interest in Australian plants and her nurturing, it was inevitable that I would try to grow this species in Melbourne. It is another *Blandfordia* which grows naturally in near coastal heathy swamps but this time in somewhat warmer climates from near Sydney and north to Noosa Heads in Queensland. It is certainly not as fussy as its Tasmanian cousin but nevertheless couldn't be considered "hardy"! In their natural range, they generally do flower in the lead up to Christmas but Evan Clucas at Kurunga Nursery tends to call them January Bells because the ones he grows for the nursery rarely start flowering until early to mid January!

The best forms have large pendulous open bell-shaped flowers, predominantly vermilion red with contrasting yellow tips to the petals but forms from their northern range can be pure yellow. In between forms with a mottled red and yellow combination are most often sold but to me lack the boldness of the former two.

I have a number of plants in the garden which flower each summer, the commonality in their position in the garden being well-drained soil and plenty of moisture – they don't tolerate drying out. One plant, which is



Bruce Schroder

possibly past its prime but currently still with a couple of developing flower spikes, is in a large inverted terracotta sewerage pipe under a downpipe chain which funnels water onto the plant every time it rains, saturating the roots until the water slowly drains away. This clump is now more than 12 years old and has, in its best seasons, had upwards of a dozen flower spikes.

So, have I left anything out? Well, I could possibly sneak in one more so that the top end is also represented but I don't think too many of us will be attempting to grow this one in our gardens, viz **The Christmas Mistletoe** (*Amyema sanguineum*). This species is common across northern parts of Western Australia, Northern Territory and northern Queensland in monsoonal open eucalypt forest and woodland and extends into arid and semi-arid inland regions.

It is more commonly known as the Scarlet or Blood Mistletoe because of its deep red flowers, and more than 30 eucalypt and corymbia species are listed as the host of this parasitic species, along with melaleuca, lophostemon and timonius species.



Peter Rogers

Climbers in the Lay Garden

Geoff Lay sent the following images of some of the climbers which flowered in their garden in spring.



Callerya megasperma



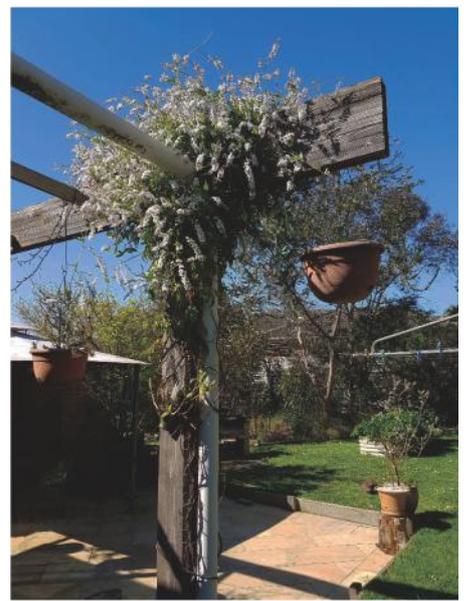
Tecomanthe hillii



Paphia meiniana



Hibbertia scandens



Hardenbergia comptoniana

FJC Rogers' Lamiaceae Seminar 2020

Sue Guymer

The Lamiaceae Seminar has now been held. CoVid restrictions required changes to the normal format of in-person lectures on the Saturday with visits to several gardens on the Sunday. The lectures were held via Zoom in October.

Visits to 5 gardens were able to be held over the weekend of November 28th and 29th. Numbers of people visiting had to be limited but it was still great to see the gardens and to catch up with some APS friends in person.

APS Yarra Yarra's Organising Committee did an amazing job to achieve these presentations and garden visits. They had also propagated many Lamiaceae plants for sale and some of these are still available. Bill and I bought a few and are very impressed by their quality. A basket with *Prostanthera saxicola* 'Pigeon Blue' and *Prostanthera serpyllifolia* (with lemon flowers) is looking gorgeous.

APS Yarra Yarra still have 80 species of prostanthera



Prostanthera saxicola

Sue Guymer

and 20 species of westringia for sale. There is an online order form at:

<https://apsvic.org.au/fjc-rogers-seminar-2020/>
or ring Miriam Ford on 0409 600 644.

Peacock Spiders

Ken Gosbell

Over the last month several people have photographed the iconic Peacock Spiders. The following are a few snippets of their story.

There is wide fascination with Peacock Spiders and for good reason. They are part of the Salticidae family, a group of small spiders often called jumping spiders. Males are characterized by colourful abdomen flaps that are used, along with courtship dances, to attract females. These spiders are native to Australia and have characteristically large front eyes providing excellent eyesight which helps them with hunting. The genus is reputed to be the smartest spider in the world. (J Schubert, Vic Entomologist, Dec 2019). This was explained by David Attenborough in this video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UDtlvZGmHYk>

The majority of Peacock spiders are ground dwelling and found on leaf litter or dry twigs; however, they can be found in a wide variety of habitats such as sand dunes to grasslands – which makes them pretty hard to find!

Three new disco-dancing peacock spider species have recently been discovered in Western Australia. The males of these previously unknown species are flamboyant showmen. Though they are only as large as a grain of rice, the males have the bright colours of peacocks and do an elaborate funky disco dance to attract female mates. Enjoy the action video “Stayin Alive” at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPh_Gi7PCqs

See also:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5qkzwG2ILPc>

I took the following photos of the Flying Peacock Spider (*Maratus volans*) at Black Rock and Sandringham.



Lots of Eyes



Peacock Spider

Australian Plants Society Maroondah Inc.

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Newsletter contributions:

Contributions for the January 2021 Newsletter should be sent to Sue Guymer at aitchguy@gmail.com.au no later than

Friday 25th December 2020

Maroondah Group website:

australianplantsoc.wix.com/maroondah

APS Vic website:

www.apsvic.org.au



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