

2.

The following article is from 'The Conversation' and was written by Dr Gregory Moore. It is published here under Creative Commons Licence.

Get to know blackwood better: a magnificent timber and a tough, towering wattle that can survive landslides



Blackwood's main claim to fame is its magnificent dark and durable timber. It has been prized since colonial times and is still widely used for high quality, bespoke furniture that often becomes family heirlooms. It has also been used for making boats, musical instruments, inlaid boxes and high value veneers.

But today, I'll introduce you to the tree – a stunning native wattle with large Christmas-green, leaf-like phyllodes (modified leaf stalks) and masses of showy pale lemon flowers that bloom from late winter to late summer.

Versatile and mighty

Blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*) can live for over 150 years, and its range extends from South Australia and Tasmania through to northern Queensland. It's often found in the understorey of giant eucalypts in Australia's

east-coast forests, though the tree is hardy and adapts well to diverse conditions, making it popular in urban gardens.



Depending on soil type and rainfall, it can become an imposing tree 40 metres tall, with a trunk diameter of up to 1.5m. Under tougher conditions, it may grow to only 10m in height, often with a spreading canopy. While it's not drought resistant, blackwood can be quite tough and tolerates wet soils, even salty coastal winds.

3.

Acacia melanoxylon often grows among the understory of eucalypt forests.

Blackwood is also resistant to fungal pathogens, such as Phytophthora and Fusarium species, which decimate many other native plants such as banksias and many eucalypts. The reasons for its resistance are unclear, but it's possible that, like some other acacias, chemicals released from the roots can reduce pathogen growth.

One reason Blackwood timber is so dark is because it contains high levels (up to 20%) of tannins, the dark staining chemicals you see after you've drained your daily dose of tea and coffee.

These tannins were also useful to Indigenous people. Tannins are toxic to fish and wood and bark with high tannin content was, and is, used for fishing. Blackwood extract can also be used as a painkiller.

Withstanding landslides and bushfires

Blackwood's spreading root system is another reason the tree is so tough. In mountainous habitats, its roots often help consolidate soil on steep slopes, preventing landslides. I've seen large blackwood trees carried downhill by a landslide, but the roots held the soil together and the trees continued growing when the soil settled.

But the same, strong root system can cause problems in the urban environment, by cracking paths and blocking old leaky pipes.

Like many native trees, the tree is adapted to bushfires. The tough leathery phyllodes can slow the movement of bushfires, providing a barrier which might help stop fires from spreading in a fire smart garden. The phyllodes remain green and have a low flammability all year round, so while the tree is usually killed by fire, it may still have a place in gardens where fire is a risk.



A curious feature of blackwood is how its young, feathery foliage can grow alongside the mature, harder ones.

The seed of blackwood can persist in the soil and leaf litter of a forest for many years and, after a bushfire strikes, may regenerate even if few trees were present beforehand.

Benefits for gardeners

Blackwood has been widely planted across Australia and in many other parts of the world for its timber and has become a weed in parts of Africa, South America and California, as well as Western Australia.

And it spreads easily. When blackwood seeds are harvested by birds and insects, they don't digest the seed, giving it free transport and dispersal.

4.

Blackwood can also develop suckers – new growth that sprouts from the roots; aptly named because they exploit a plant's root system. These tend to develop if roots are damaged or disturbed, and can be difficult to control.



Blackwood is popular in gardens and parks all over the world.

But for those planting it in gardens or parks, there are many benefits. Like all wattles, blackwood is a nitrogen fixer thanks to its root bacteria, which take in nitrogen from the atmosphere and add it to depleted soils.

Its discarded flowers, phyllodes and fruits can help create a thick mulch, which is often weed free. Alongside the benefit of added nitrogen, it can really improve the quality of soils on a local scale in gardens, windbreaks or plantations over time.

Blackwood is highly recommended as an agroforestry tree. It's still actively logged in Tasmania, and my agroforestry colleague Rowan Reid warns that with the lack of research and incentives for growing blackwood on farms in Australia, we might soon be in the sad position of importing our blackwood timber from more innovative overseas growers.

I wonder about the future of Australian blackwood, and its role in future climates, fires and agroforestry. It will undoubtedly persist, but will it be significant and appreciated?

DIARY

APS South East Melbourne Meetings:

2022	March 1st	Speaker Chris Long: "Boronia Oil"
	April 5th	Propagation night.
	May 3rd	Speaker Bill Aitchison: "Daviesias"
	June	Speaker: Malcolm Dow – "Sustainable Gardening"

APS Victoria

5 March - APS Vic Comm – hosted by APS Maroondah, Senior Cits Hall, 2-8 Lawrence Grove, Ringwood East 3135

19 March – APS Yarra Yarra Autumn Plant Sale, Eltham Community & Reception Centre, Eltham.
10 am - 4 pm. Updated 25/10/21

19 & 20 March- Cranbourne Friends Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria's Spring Plant Sale. 10 am to 4 pm. Wide range of plants, plant list available one week before sale. Free entry.

30 March - 3 April - MIFGS.

9 April - APS Geelong Australian Native Plant Sale, 'Wirrawilla', Lovely Banks. 8.30 am to 4.00 pm.

7 May - APS Mornington Peninsula Plant Sale. The Briars, Nepean Hwy, Mt Martha 10am – 3:30pm

June - APS Vic Comm, date to be advised. Hosted by APS Shepparton

16, 17 July – Cranbourne Friends Spring Plant Sale 10am - 4pm

27, 28 August – APS Yarra Yarra Australian Plants Expo, Eltham Community & Reception Centre 10 - 4

3 Sept – APS Wilson park (Berwick) Plant Sale. Date t

To be confirmed.

5.



11 – 16 September – ANPSA Biennial Conference 2022 – Kiama, New South Wales. Preliminary details of the Conference, pre- and post-Conference tours and the beautiful town of Kiama can be found on the APS (NSW) website.

26 to 30 September – 7th Global Botanic Gardens Congress, Melbourne. *Influence and Action: Botanic Gardens as Agents of Change*. Includes a youth program for future gardens’ leaders aged 18 to 24.

15 & 16 October – 14th FJC Rogers Seminar. Topic: Fabulous peas (the typical ‘pea-flowered’ plants from the sub-family Faboideae). York on Lilydale in Mt Evelyn. Expressions of interest and queries to fabulouspeas2022@gmail.com

22 & 23 October - Cranbourne Friends RBGV Spring Plant Sale. 10 am to 4 pm.

Monthly Photo Gallery

Firstly, some beauties from Ray and Eva’s garden:



Hibiscus heterophyllus – apricot and yellow forms



Hibiscus x Aussie Delight

Grevillea barkleyana



Grevillea beadleana



6.



Beaufortia aestiva



Blandfordia grandis



Dipodium roseum

Gillian has sent in the following photos with the places she took them:

*King parrot at Nowa Nowa,
East Gippsland*



East Gippsland Rail Trail in Colquhoun



Brunonia, Mt Nowa Nowa,



Melaleuca next to Aireys Inlet lighthouse



Acacia melanoxylon seed detail, Scotchmans Creek
7.

Betty found this Kurrajong
flowering beautifully in
Central Park:



PROMOTIONS

Cranbourne Friends

Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria



Growing Friends - Autumn Plant Sale

Saturday 19 & Sunday 20 March 2022

10am to 4pm

Australian Garden - Cranbourne near the kiosk

Come along and select from a range of small and large plants many of which you will find in the Australian Garden



Grasses, climbers, border-plants, ground-covers,
small & large bushes and trees, plants for wildlife

Plant-list available one week before plant-sale

rbgvfriendscranbourne.org.au
#friendscranbourne

03 9594 1000



11 – 16 September 2022 - ANPSA Biennial Conference 2022 –
Kiama, New South Wales.

Preliminary details of the Conference, pre- and post-Conference
tours and the beautiful town of Kiama can be found on the APS
(NSW) website

26 to 30 September 2022 - 7th Global Botanic Gardens Congress,
Melbourne. *Influence and Action: Botanic Gardens as Agents of
Change*. Includes a youth program for future gardens' leaders
aged 18 to 24.

8.



Fabulous Peas 2022

**FJC Rogers Biennial Seminar
15th - 16th October 2022**

Discover the extraordinary world of Australian pea plants.

Saturday York on Lilydale, Mount Evelyn

Speakers with expertise in identifying, growing and propagating peas. Learn about current research into propagation and growing-on techniques. Evening dinner and an entertaining speaker.

Plant sales of common and unusual pea species. Book

sales. Displays. Raffle.

Sunday Coach tours to public and private native gardens which include a wide variety of pea species.

Art exhibition and sale featuring pea plants from 8th – 16th October at Karwarra Australian Botanic Garden. Plant sales.

Expressions of interest: fabulouspeas2022@gmail.com

<https://apsvic.org.au/fjc-rogers-seminar-2022/>

Hosted: Australian Plants Society Maroondah Inc.