



**AUSTRALIAN PLANTS FOR
CONTAINERS STUDY GROUP**

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Leaders' comments

Welcome to the October APC Newsletter. We are facing, with some anxiety, the change for the last three years of La Nina with its extra rain, to a much hotter and drier El Nino summer. We have received much benefit in our garden from the reliable rain of the last three years. Our rainfall is usually so variable, as can be seen from the data below. One benefit from the expected warmer and drier summer might be that our eremophilas will welcome the change - most have been miserable in Canberra's wetter conditions. Some of our pots are under protection from the frost, but many are in the open and depend partly on the rain.

Year	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	Jun	Jul	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
2023	95	46	120	139	63	44	3	26	20			
2022	142	92	37	119	109	36	26	166	89	241	131	64
2021	77	106	157	41	9	130	80	51	112	66	237	91
2020	43	82	129	107	14	52	39	116	59	156	111	64
2019	78	25	78	22	38	34	6	20	41	31	18	0
2018	26	58	2	27	19	29	5	31	31	21	79	48
2017	11	15	79	36	45	0	20	53	16	44	114	106
2016	115	20	42	8	46	142	81	59	152	60	74	62
2015	121	43	18	100	19	71	46	76	0	20	77	39
2014	10	80	77	77	7	82	20	30	34	48	37	107
2013	70	77	21	14	0	48	64	30	79	9	84	19
2012	48	141	204	22	23	38	40	37	39	62	34	40
2011	72	114	51	11	17	9	23	60	17	69	167	87
2010	7	150	127	19	79	38	64	70	76	130	128	214
2009	57	0	25	89	0	34	42	21	60	49	15	73
2008	45	55	33	16	13	29	43	22	45	27	71	112
2007	32	90	53	32	50	79	29	10	11	41	76	106
2006	19	37	27	7	0	109	58	44	48	106	72	20
AVE	59.33	68.39	71.11	49.22	30.61	55.78	38.28	51.22	51.61	69.41	89.71	73.65

One plant which flowers reliably for us every year, wet or dry, is the magnificent *Pimelea phytodes*, or Qualup Bell, which blooms for several months in winter into early spring.



This small garden shrub growing in a pot to 1m high and wide, with spectacular, fragrant bell flowers on blue grey foliage attracts honeyeaters, native bees and butterflies. Our resident Satin Bowerbirds jump up underneath the plant to feed on the nectar. The plant needs a well drained soil with protection from the hot afternoon sun and strong winds and responds to tip pruning from a young age. This shrub is native to the south coast of WA.

For this Newsletter, we only have contributions from Bruce Cadoret, Anne Campbell and Ian Cox (thank you all), so we have added some examples from the Australian National Botanic Gardens as well as material our own experiences with pots. This study group's goal is to share experiences with growing native plants in pots so we should be sharing our experiences both positive and negative. A few photos and some comments on your favourite type of pot and potting soil will help and inspire others. We recently had an enquiry from a local person who wanted to know what type of sand we used in our potting mix for Banksias. We told him we use coarse washed river sand available at a local landscape supplier in 20 kilo bags. We suggested that he use quite a lot of sand in the mix for most Banksias as they like well-drained soil. This raises the question of what Banksias do well in pots and how long do they live? We have just had to remove a *Banksia menziesii* dwarf form that we have had in a pot for 13 years. This plant bloomed regularly but quite suddenly branches browned off and we removed it. We have had similar experiences with *Banksia victoriae* which was glorious for many years. Which Australian plants do well in pots and which do not? So many people these days have very limited garden space but can have a few pots on a balcony, for example. What plants do best, look good and thrive in your location? We have a number of Boronias in pots that are just coming into bloom and the colour and fragrance is spectacular. What are your experiences and your favourite plants? Please let us know.

Bruce Cadoret, Ballarat, Victoria



Left: *Cyanothamnus anemonifolius* (Sticky Boronia)
Only small but with plenty of flowers but no fragrance.



Right top: Not sure if it's *Xanthorrhoea australis* or *Xanthorrhoea minor*, but it's beginning to flower...



Right bottom: *Eremophila maculata* growing in Ballarat.

Anne Campbell, Mount Barker, South Australia.

My potted grass tree, 10.5 years old, has just had its second flower!! The actual inflorescence on the flower spike is 44% smaller (320 mm vs 720 mm).

It is *Xanthorrhoea johnsonii* hybrid x 'Supergrass' which was bought as a seedling at Kuranga Nursery in Melbourne in February 2013 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 spent its first 6.5 years in Canberra before being transferred in a truck to the Adelaide Hills (Mt Barker) and was in the dark, no water, for 9-10 days), where upon it developed a handsome flower spike in August 2019. Then to my great surprise it has just developed a second flower spike in late August after 10.5 years. It is still in its original pot and has been drip/hand irrigated regularly. I will be interested to see if flowers develop as they did on the first flower spike. I also wonder if it is growing a trunk as the pot itself seems very full of plant tissue as opposed to potting mix.

Notes on the plant label: 'Supergrass' is an exceptional hybrid grown from seed for its amazing vigour surpassing the growth habits of all 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.

Here is the progression of the growth of the flower spike.



Left: 19th Aug. what is lurking in the bunched leaf frond



Right: 19th Aug. pushing back the protective leaf fronds reveals a developing spike



Left: 30th Aug: Spike is more visible & growing.



Middle: 4th Sept: Spike is clearly visible and nearly above the leaf fronds.



Right: 12th Sept: Spike is well above the leaf fronds.

Ian Cox, Parramatta Hills, NSW

Growing Hoyas in pots:

I've been growing a *Hoya australis* in a concrete trough for several years, and each year in the warmer months it puts on a nice display of pink flowers over a long period.



Hoyas seem to like their roots restricted, and I haven't seen a need to repot it yet. I found that the medium should be well-drained and open, so I gave it half pine bark and half potting mix. It gets a 9-month slow-release fertilizer each spring and is placed in bright filtered light away from frosts.

My Hoya is supported by plastic stakes slightly more than a metre high, which it soon covered and made invisible. One thing to remember is that it flowers each year from the same stems, so it shouldn't be trimmed too much.

I've found it's easy to grow, needs little care, and has had no pests so far. It's also very easy to propagate from cuttings.

Ros and Ben Walcott, Canberra

The Australian National Botanic Gardens in Canberra have some plants that they grow in pots. Some of the "pots" are large open-ended pipes partly buried in the ground while others are conventional pots. In all cases, the soil in the pot can be tailored to suit the particular plant often quite different from the soil the pot is sitting on. Additionally, these raised pots bring the plant up off the ground to make it easier to see, particularly if it is a small plant. The following are some examples.



Dracophyllum macranthum with long spiky leaves and bright pink flowers. This plant is native to the north coast of New South Wales and is listed as vulnerable in the wild.





Isopogon cuneatus, an upright shrub with floppy branches of flat bright green leaves, often tinged with red, and large pink heads of drumstick flowers. This plant is native to southwestern Western Australia.



Acacia aphylla, or Leafless Rock Wattle, with large gold balls of flowers on leathery, leafless, grey-green stems. This plant is native to the area around Perth, Western Australia.



Banksia vincentia, probably Australia's rarest banksia from a restricted area near Jervis Bay, NSW that belongs to the *Banksia spinulosa* species complex, with affinities to *Banksia neoanglica*, two species which are native to areas several hundred kilometres to the north. This small shrub has linear green foliage and yellow flowers with maroon to black styles.

We too have over 100 plants in pots distributed on the hardscape of the several patios that surround the house. Some of them we move close to house for winter for frost protection but many stay partly undercover of projecting roofs. Here are a few examples.



Acacia binervia 'Stirling Silver'



Left: *Aotus ericoides*

We have planted two of these upright spreading shrubs, 0.5-1.5m high x 0.5 – 1.5m wide producing yellow flowers with a red centre, in 2019-2020. The first one died in the heat of December 2019, but the second persists in a pot and the long flowering stems, crowded with flowers, wave attractively in the wind. Look for leaves with recurved margins in pseudo whorls and absence of bracteoles (*Aotus* translates to no ears) This plant is native to all states except NT.

Middle: *Banksia lindleyana*

We planted this shrub to 3m high, with grey fissured bark, yellow flowers with a red base, and hard fruiting cones, in May 2009. This plant is native to the area around Shark Bay, WA and grows in deep yellow sand on plains and in tall open shrubland. Flowers January to March. This plant is very popular with both birds and insects when in flower. The cockatoos trashed this plant and we cut it back severely in 2021.

Right: *Crowea saligna* 'Large Flower'

We planted three of these small shrubs in pots, 80cm high x 60cm wide, with large pink flowers and aromatic foliage. Native bees and butterflies are attracted to this plant.



Epacris reclinata: We planted this shrub, 0.6-1m high x 0.5m wide, with small prickly leaves and pink to red bell flowers in August 2019. This plant is native to the Blue Mountains, NSW. Magnificent all over flowering in May 2022 and 2023.



Eremophila cuneifolia - grafted: We planted this bushy shrub, 1.2-1.5m high, with many mauve/ pink flowers, in February 2018. Be careful to remove the Myoporum rootstock. This plant is native to the Pilbara region, WA.



Left: *Eremophila glandulifera* 'Lipstick Pink' - grafted: We planted this upright shrub with attractive grey foliage and lolly pink flowers in a pot in December 2019. This plant is from central WA and grows to a height of 1.5m.

Right: *Grevillea pimelioides*: We planted this erect shrub, 2.5m high, with red tipped, hard yellow flowers in a pot in September 2010. This plant is native to the Helena and Canning River regions southeast of Perth, WA. We transplanted our specimen to a large pot in February 2012 and cut it back quite severely. Our original plant died in December 2016 and we planted another in July 2020.



Left: *Brachychiton bidwillii* - Little Kurrajong

Brachychiton bidwillii, planted in a pot in 2013, has grown to 3 metres tall. This plant needs protection from the frost as it comes from dry rainforest from southeastern Queensland to Bowen in the north. The foliage is one of its distinctive features with five lobed felty leaves reminiscent of a human hand. The flowers are bell shaped and coral red, coming for us appropriately at Xmas. Flower production is supposed to increase with age, so we are looking forward to even more flowers in future.

Right: *Eremophila (polyclada x divaricata)* 'Summertime Blue'

We have planted five of these open shrubs, 1m high x 1.5m wide, with narrow, shiny dark green foliage and large showy lilac-blue flowers, from 2005-19. This plant is native to the flood plains of the Murray River in northwestern Victoria. This plant grows in a variety of soils, particularly heavy clay, is best in full sun, but will tolerate filtered shade. All of the plants in our garden have died, but the latest planted in a tall pot is thriving.



Marianthus (Billardiera) ringens – Chapman River Climber

We planted three of these light climbers with dark green leathery foliage and large clusters of orange-red tubular flowers, in hanging baskets in August 2021. This plant responds to pruning and needs good drainage in a sunny to partly shaded position. This species is native to the area between Kalbarri and Mingenew, WA.

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

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