



## Small Delights

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*From the February 2005 issue of the Study Group Newsletter.*

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Lovers of Australian plants sometimes feel almost apologetic about the prevalence of Australian shrubs with small leaves and small flowers. We shouldn't! Last week Brian and I went for a walk near Lorne and I was fascinated by the textures of steep hillsides of shrubs, with contrasting trunks of occasional trees. Small leaves and small flowers predominated and the effect was most beautiful.

Among the 2 to 4 metre shrubs, numerous scattered prostantheras were conspicuous in lilac. Occasional peaflowers contributed yellows (few acacias were still flowering) and olearias some white. Spyridiums had finished flowering but their bushes now appeared a pale, slightly rusty grey green. The whole hillside looked like a large tapestry of subtle shapes and also subtle shades of green and other colours, the overall impression being one of softness - very calm and soothing. I certainly did not miss the 'in your eye' look of large leaves and masses of strong colours. This attractive softness is characteristic of many Australian landscapes - even spiky spinifex looks soft.

Recently we have at last had some steady rain and this has reminded me of another delight of small leaves and fine foliage, as large chamelauciums (Geraldton Waxes) gently arch and bow with their burden of raindrops. Their flowers are small too but the bushes as a whole are lovely (not only in the rain) and the delicate flowers (as with many Australian plants) draw you close to look. I also enjoyed the soft beauty of our one casuarina in the rain, its fine needles laced with drops. Many other plants in our garden with size-challenged leaves and flowers looked equally beautiful.

I think another interesting aspect of fine foliage, small leaves and flowers is their gentle interaction with light. The resulting texture is very different from the more solid look of large leaves and flowers. Smaller units give a greater range of shades and different effects, even semi-transparency.

Large leaves might feature strongly in a rainforest garden and they provide excellent contrast among fine-foliaged plants (as do trunks) but I for one could not do without the delights of fine foliage, small leaves and small flowers.