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Australian Plants articles

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Contributions and offers to produce an issue are welcome. Please contact:

John Aitken and Merle Thompson
Editors, *Australian Plants*
PO Box 5026 OLD TOONGABBIE NSW 2146
E-mail edap@austplants-nsw.org.au
Fax (02) 9631 4293

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The Victorian Wimmera – a floral hot spot

Jan-Bert Brouwer

Jan-Bert is a retired plant scientist who is pursuing his interest in native plants with involvement in several groups such as the Wimmera Growers of Australian Plants, Friends of Wail Arboretum, Friends of Grampians–Gariwerd, and Grampians to Little Desert Biolink.

The flat to gently undulating plains in western Victoria were named the Wimmera in 1836 by the Surveyor-General Major Thomas Mitchell after the Aboriginal word for the river that flows through this area. Once people become familiar with this landscape, it is easy to discover why this area is so attractive to native plant enthusiasts.

Many casual visitors to the Wimmera are surprised to learn how diverse the region is from the perspectives of topography, geology, archaeology and ecology. The plains are largely of aeolian origin and are predominantly cleared for agricultural use. Yet the region retains a wide range of natural assets. For example, it is not commonly known that this semi-arid environment contains 25% of Victoria's wetlands. The region is crossed by large fields of sand dunes mostly in the west, preserved in the Little Desert and the Big Desert. The Grampians and Mount Arapiles are the highest outcrops in the east, while a number of isolated but lower peaks such as Mount Jeffcott can be found in the north. The 'closed catchment' system associated with the Wimmera River supports a wide range of plants and animals. It is home to 420 species of native animals and 1,500 native plant species, some of which are unique to this area, including the most endangered Grampians Pincushion Lily, *Borya mirabilis*.

The semi-arid climate of the Wimmera is not a true Mediterranean type as both winter and spring rainfall account for major proportions of the annual rainfall. Summer temperatures are hot. They range typically from a daily maximum of over 35–40°C to a minimum of 14°C or lower. Radiation night frosts of a few degrees below zero are not uncommon and can occur as late as November. The comparatively low annual rainfall, with the average varying from 550 to 350mm, decreases across the Wimmera from south-west to north-east. This gradient adds a notable dimension to the ecological variation. The wide range in soil types is another factor that greatly influences the natural occurrence of different plant species and it determines which plants the local residents choose when they establish their gardens and plantations. In general, acidic soils are more prevalent in the higher rainfall zones in the southern Wimmera where drainage can be a problem in wet years. Alkaline soils of quite high pH characterise the northern plains.

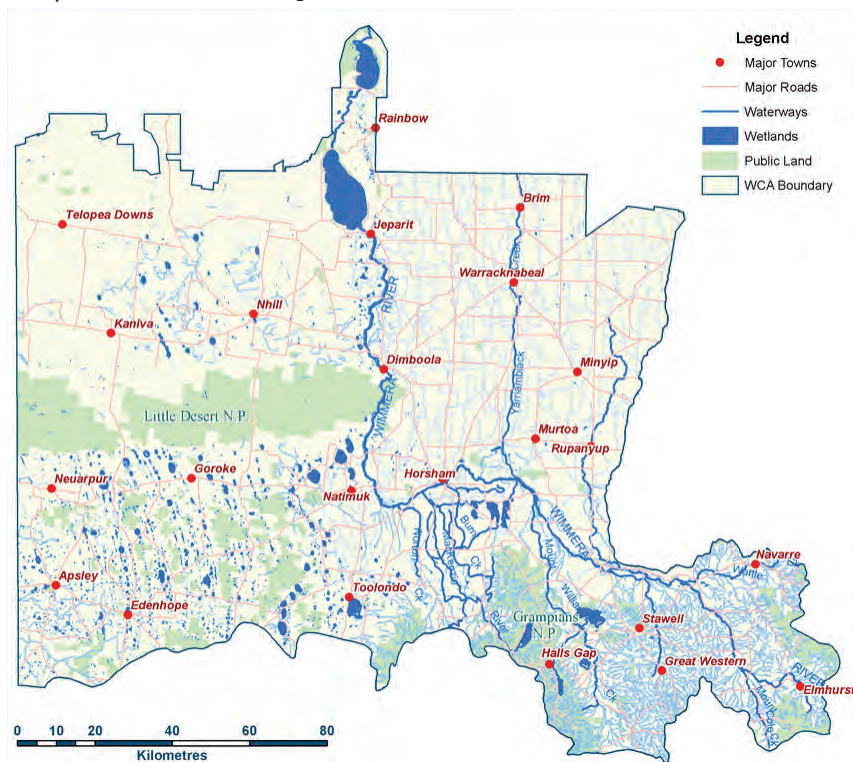


All these elements add challenging but rewarding dimensions to studying and protecting the indigenous flora and in cultivating native plants for pleasure or commercial purposes.

For instance, the recent drought years have encouraged people to turn to the *Eremophila* genus for dry conditions on the heavier alkaline clays. In contrast, the *Hakea* species have shown their resilience on the neutral-acid sandy soils in the Wimmera.

Active promotion of Australian plants in the region is carried out by enthusiastic and dedicated groups, which include the Wimmera Growers of Australian Plants, an affiliate district group of APS Victoria, Friends of Wail Arboretum and the Grampians to Little Desert Biolink.

Map of the Wimmera Region



Source: Wimmera Catchment Management Authority.

Waterways of the Wimmera

Maree Goods

Maree is a Life Member of the Wimmera Growers of Australian Plants and coordinated this issue of 'Australian Plants'. She is a co-author of 'Australia's Eremophilas: changing gardens for a changing climate'.

From 1997 to mid 2010 the Wimmera experienced one of its worst droughts ever recorded with the level of water storages down to 5% at the beginning of 2010. Lakes and rivers dried up, bird life disappeared and the health of trees, hundreds of years old, deteriorated, many dying.

The completion of the multi-million-dollar Wimmera-Mallee Pipeline was fast-tracked to enable the water supply to 36 towns, 7,000 rural customers and for environmental purposes.

After above average rain in 2010, water storages are at 48.5% full. The Wimmera River and the Yarriambiack Creek both flooded in 2010 allowing a substantial flow into the second largest lake in Victoria, Lake Hindmarsh. Recreational lakes such as Green Lake and Batyo Catyo have a constant flow of visitors and large River Red Gums along the Wimmera River are having their best flowering for years. Bird life has returned with many water birds being seen for the first time for years.

Reference: <http://www.gwmwater.org.au/>



Horseshoe Bend on the Wimmera River near Dimboola. Photo: Maree Goods





Gary and Bev Aitken's Garden and adjoining wetlands

Gary and Bev Aitken

Gary and Bev have been members of the Wimmera Growers of Australian Plants for 25 years. In 2010 Gary was awarded Citizen of the Year by the Rural City Council of Horsham for his work and commitment to Landcare Groups, Biolinks and improvement to the Wimmera River and Wetlands.



Gary and Bev Aitken's garden. Photo: Maree Goods

Our garden, in Horsham, is downstream from the weir on the Wimmera River and adjoining the wetlands. The wetlands, originally a grazing paddock, were developed 11 years ago. They are made up of a series of dams to capture stormwater from urban streets and in doing so the water travels from one dam to another through planted reed beds and other aquatic plants until it reaches the Wimmera River, free of any urban contamination. There are several islands incorporated throughout the wetlands, which make very secure habitat for birds, especially at nesting time. This project has proved to be very successful judging by the increase in bird species and also increased numbers of walkers and cyclists who enjoy daily the many tracks and surrounding areas. These wetlands, in conjunction with the Wimmera River, are cared for by a group of local enthusiastic volunteers who have worked hard in making it what it is today from a grazing paddock 11 years ago.



Wetlands along the Wimmera River near Gary and Bev Aitken's garden.
Photos: Gary Aitken



Around the same time we began to develop our own garden, which surrounds our house on a block of 4,305 square metres. The lower section of the garden was heavy grey clay suitable for bricks. Ten tonne of gypsum was spread over the area, ripped, and then overlaid with 100 tonne of drift sand, which had blown over fences on the family farm during the 1940s. We direct seeded the perimeter of the block with local acacias, dodonaeas and sennas and several of our local forms of *Myoporum parvifolium*.



The Aitken garden with the Wetlands in the background. Coming towards the foreground are a prostrate form of *Acacia baileyana*, *Acacia glaucoptera* and *Myoporum parvifolium*. Photo: Maree Goods

Over the last nine years we have struggled with drought and severe water restrictions. A few months ago, flood from the Wimmera River covered the wetlands and the lower section of our garden, but not the house, thank goodness. Plants which have done well in our low water-use garden are eremophilas, some of the eucalypts especially *Eucalyptus* 'Silver Princess', correas, dianellas, some grevilleas, local dampieras, eriostemon, and *Acacia glaucoptera*. Many of the daisies especially *Xerochrysum bracteatum*, common on Mt Arapiles, *Senecio pinnatifolius* and *Rhodanthe chlorocephala* subsp *rosea*, have self-seeded throughout the garden and are a picture in the spring.



The back garden looking onto the wetlands. Photo: Maree Goods



The front garden. Photo: Gary Aitken

Little Desert National Park

Article and photos by Graham Goods

Graham is a member of the Wimmera Growers of Australian Plants and, with his wife Maree, has been growing native plants for 38 years. He has a great knowledge of the flora of the Little Desert and for 20 years Graham has led tours for Little Desert Nature Lodge.



A drive through the Little Desert in spring may disappoint the casual and vehicle-bound traveller, but there are many delights to enthrall the person willing to stop, get out of the comfortable 4WD and examine closely that which surrounds them. The Wimmera River borders the Little Desert National Park on the east and the Victorian-South Australian border on the west. To the south lies the Wimmera's answer to Uluru in Mount Arapiles, and the Western Highway towns of Nhill, Kaniva and Dimboola provide services and access from the north. There is similar habitat in the Wail Forest Reserve, which extends east of the Wimmera River to the Western Highway at Wail. Rainfall of 300–550mm per year is too high for a true desert but the poor sandy soil explains the name.

The interior of the park can only be accessed by 4WD as the tracks are quite sandy. Very quickly visitors will find one of the signature plants of the area in *Banksia ornata*; usually flowering with cream-grey and

a hint of pink, but you may occasionally see a striking luminescent bronze flower. *Banksia ornata* and the only other *Banksia* in the desert, *B. marginata*, tend to be late autumn to winter flowering. Other plants commonly associated are *Leptospermum myrsinoides* and *Allocasuarina mackliniana*.



Banksia ornata



Calytrix tetragona



Leptospermum myrsinoides



Correa reflexa also flowers in winter and a little later the pretty little *Baeckea crassifolia* which ranges in colour from white to quite a strong pink and is notoriously difficult to photograph accurately. Spring is definitely the most colourful season.



Correa reflexa

However one could visit the Little Desert National Park every three weeks starting in June through to November and expect to see something new each time.

The massed gold of acacias is a real spectacle at times, with a nominal 13 species fairly readily found. *Acacia euthycarpa* (previously *A. calamifolia*), *A. glandulicarpa* and *A. brachybotrya* are desirable in any garden. *A. acinacea* is one of the hardiest, tolerating drought, frost and winter wetness, and it is also one of the few local wattles that will coppice if heavily pruned. Another extremely hardy wattle, particularly for heavy soil, is *A. microcarpa*, a good understorey plant, found mainly in the south of the Park. A small wattle suitable for a rockery is *A. mitchellii*, well suited to the cooler and moister Grampians National Park; surprisingly it survives quite well in more southerly parts of the Little Desert. Whilst on the subject of plants you would expect in more hospitable environs, another infrequently seen little gem is *Tetratheca ciliata*. Look for it in good seasons in stringy bark country or after fire.



Acacia glandulicarpa



Tetratheca ciliata



Almost every year some part of the Little Desert suffers from fire, lightning being the major cause. Nevertheless large blocks throughout the Park are burnt to reduce the threat to towns, property and farms. Flora and fauna of the Little Desert generally cope reasonably well with this practice but Malleefowl are impacted severely if their habitat is burnt more frequently than 15 to 20 years, as accumulation of litter for mound construction takes that long.

After fires, which are followed up by good autumn and winter rains, massed wildflowers colour the landscape. You will see *Argentipallium obtusifolium*, *A. blandowskianum*, *Glischrocaryon behrii*, *Hibbertia fascicularis*, *H. virgata*, *Kennedia prostrata*, *Drosera whitakerii*, *Olearia ciliata* and *Euphrasia collina*.

If I were asked to name three of the showiest small plants of the Little Desert, I would suggest *Calytrix tetragona*, *Micromyrtus ciliata* and the elusive *Calectasia intermedia*. *Calytrix tetragona* and *Micromyrtus ciliata* strike fairly readily from cuttings but *Calectasia intermedia* is difficult to propagate.



Argentipallium obtusifolium

No trip to the Desert is complete without a search for orchids. Prior to recent revisions of the family there were 57 species recorded, now I have no idea of the numbers. *Pterostylis*, *Caladenia* and *Thelymitra* make up significant numbers of the orchid population, but there are many others as well.

Major habitats are banksia she-oak heaths, mallee, yellow gum flats and stringy bark woodland. The stringy bark is interesting in that it used to be included in *Eucalyptus baxteri* but due to differences in habit, leaves and buds it is now *E. arenacea*. Of the mallee eucalypts, *E. leptophylla*, *E. incrassata* and *E. viridis* or its subspecies *E. wimmerensis* would be the most common. They are all cream to white flowered and very occasionally *E. incrassata* can be found with a blush of pink.

There is much more to be seen including birds, reptiles and animals in this desert that isn't! Mid summer can be unpleasant, even dangerous, but the rest of the year has many rewards for the observant visitor to the Little Desert National Park.



Caladenia stricta



Xanthorrhoea australis



Glischrocaryon behrii



'Kumbala' – the garden of Peter & Leonne Gebert

Article and photos by Peter and Leonne Gebert

Peter and Leonne Gebert are members of the Wimmera Growers of Australian Plants and wonderful ambassadors for Australian native plants.

Our garden is situated beside the Dimboola/Rainbow Road 6.5km east of Jeparit and covers an area of approximately 2.5ha. It has extensive plantings of eucalyptus, atriplex, senna, acacia, grevilleas, hakea, callistemon, melaleuca and correa. In addition the garden contains a large collection of eremophilas and many other species suited to our Mallee light loam to clay soil. We like to plant the same species in groups often gathered around a specimen tree, shrub or ornamental feature. We believe group plantings give a swathe of colour or softness to the garden.

A highlight of our garden is the large Log Shed, which we constructed from posts and rails from some old stables. The shed is equipped with a rustic kitchen and furniture and is large enough to accommodate a coach load of visitors. This venue and the surrounding garden have been used for various activities such as parties, weddings, community groups and garden clubs.

The garden has many other features such as dried logs with hollows carefully selected to attract a wider range of birds, bird baths and rustic furniture placed strategically in personalised areas.



Eremophila 'Beryl's Blue' with the Log Shed in the background.



Hollow logs, bird bath and a windmill complement the garden.



Several years ago a flock of Zebra Finches were released and they are now permanent residents of the garden along with many other species of birds.

A large collection of succulents, some planted in among the native shrubs, have also added to the vibrancy of this oasis.

We love our garden and we welcome visitors to come and browse amongst the plantings. An appointment can be made by phoning us on (03) 5397 2138 or 0427 972 138.



Grevillea excelsior growing happily in the Gebert garden.



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(Australia)**

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Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park

Rod Sutherland

Rod lives next to the Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park. He was convenor of the Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park Advisory Committee from 1989 to 2007.

The Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park is situated in Western Victoria, 35km west of Horsham. The Park consists of two areas. The Mount Arapiles block contains 1,500 hectares and the Tooan block 3,550 hectares.

Mount Arapiles is sedimentary rock of hard quartzose sandstone composed almost entirely of silica and was laid down in the Devonian Age 400 million years ago. When approached from Horsham it appears as a mountain rising up from the flat surrounding plain. It has been described as “a beached whale on an ancient shore”.

Its main attraction these days is rock climbing. The rock is very stable and safe for climbing and there are more than 3,000 climbs recorded. Climbers from all over the world come to climb here and it is now a world famous attraction. The climbs are all graded so it can cater for beginners and the world's best.

Access to the Mount Arapiles block is the easiest because it has good roads to all areas, although the track around the west side is closed in wet weather. An asphalt road to the summit gives great views of



the surrounding countryside and the Grampians in the distance. The Arapiles block is the best place to explore because it is a relatively small area with a great variety of habitats and plants.

The Tooan block is much bigger but access is more limited. It can be boggy in wet years and sandy areas can be tricky in the summer. A 4WD is recommended although 2WD can be possible at times.

The two blocks contain over 500 species of native plants and have one seventh of Victoria's native flora. As well as the variety of native plants, it is an excellent area for bird watching and just walking along the various tracks.

The habitat contains woodlands, open forest rocky outcrops, open scrub and grasslands. Forest trees such as White Cypress Pines, Yellow Gums, River Red Gums, Peppermint Box, Red Mallee, Dumosa Mallee, Slender Leaf Mallee, Yellow-leaf Box and Brown Stringybark are scattered throughout the area. Understoreys consist of lots of wattles, heaths, guinea flowers, everlastings, correas, fringe myrtles, wax flowers, goodenias, orchids and many more.

Mount Arapiles is at its best in spring because the variety of flowers brings to view a mass of colour, with yellow guinea flowers and



Prostanthera rotundifolia



Prostanthera spinescens



Acacia rupicola



Epacris impressa var *grandiflora*



Xerochrysum bracteatum



The autumn flowering form of *Acacia pycnantha*

everlastings, red flame heath, blue mint bush, pink wax flowers and colourful orchids. The grasslands have a variety of native grasses and some introduced plants as well. Bridal Creeper is one bad introduction. However, control has been better over the last few years.

The late FJC Rogers wrote *A Guide to Plants in Little Desert & Mt. Arapiles Area*, which is an excellent small publication with many pictures of the plants and a comprehensive plant list.

Mount Arapiles–Tooan State Park is a wonderful area and a visit would be well worthwhile for anyone with an interest in native plants.



Astroloma conostephioides

All photos for this article are by Maree Goods, except Mount Arapiles, which is by Graham Goods.

June Rogers' small garden in the Wimmera

June Rogers

June has been gardening with Australian native plants for over 50 years and is a Life Member of the Australian Plants Society, Victoria and the Wimmera Growers of Australian Plants.

Most native plant gardens in the Wimmera tend to be quite large, such as those found on farms, or acreage on the outskirts of towns. Previously I had a large garden on 37 acres, but in 2004 I moved into Horsham and began a new garden on a ¼ acre block. This was 50 years since starting native plant gardening on a suburban block in Ringwood, when native plants were rarely grown and hard to obtain. Now a wide variety of native plants is readily available and in addition I had brought many plants with me that I had propagated.

This last garden has proved to be the most challenging. Horsham has cold winters and hot summers and at the time was experiencing a severe drought. Water restrictions limited watering to buckets and watering cans every second day, so it was not easy to establish a new garden. During the worst of the drought, I kept new plantings alive with recycled water, caught from the washing machine and shower, and 7mm quartz pebble mulch. The mulch allowed water to penetrate, kept the soil cool and minimised weeds.



Screening fences. Photo: June Rogers



A 'dry creek bed' –
October 2005
Photo: June Rogers

In addition, there was an existing formal garden, with lawn back and front, raised boxed-up garden beds, brick paving and lots of roses (standard, bush, and climbing) plus perennials. Neighbours were initially puzzled when I removed these but were gradually won over.

The roses and perennials were the first to go – to good homes. Initial plantings in existing beds were designed to cover the fences, with good results from *Acacia acinacea*, *Alyogyne huegelii* (double purple), various *Callistemon* species, three colours of *Chamelaucium uncinatum*, *Eucalyptus caesia* subsp *magna*, *Eucalyptus erythrocorys*, *Hymenosporum flavum*, *Kunzea baxteri* and *Myoporum bateae*. Four colour varieties of *Anigozanthos flavidus* made a good show. *Xerochrysum bracteatum* were used extensively amongst the new plants to make a quick show of colour the first year as were other daisies – all colours of *Brachyscome multifida*, *Chrysocephalum apiculatum* varieties and *Helichrysum baxteri*.

One narrow bed was planted with *Olearia viscosa*, *O. passerinoides*, and *O. microdisca*. Another bed had *Alyogyne huegelii* (white) and *A. hakeifolia* (pink), grafted *Hakea bucculenta* and different colour forms of *correa*.

The next task was to remove the front lawn and plant the area as a screen from the street, as large windows in the living areas made for a 'fish bowl' feeling. The brick path separating the garden from the house was retained. A 'dry creek bed' was formed, running diagonally between two mounds, providing access to the garden and visual interest. Smaller shrubs were planted on the periphery and taller shrubs about a metre in from the edges.



Grafted eremophilas *E. nivea*, *E. platycalyx* and *E. pterocarpa* with grey leaves of different shapes and colour dominate the front garden, also with *Eremophila dicroantha* and yellow *E. maculata*. *Myoporum floribundum* is spectacular in flower but can be overlooked at other times. Medium sized shrubs *Boronia flava*, *Hibbertia glaberrima*, *Pimelea ferruginea* and many correas, especially *Correa pulchella* forms and 'White Tips', create the next level – all have done well despite being in shade for extended periods. Down at street level are *Brachyscome multifida*, mauve, purple and white and *Scaevola aemula*. Geraldton Wax (white, pink and purple) is rewarding and responds to hard cutting-back such as wildflower growers do.

When the front lawn was removed, the 'good' top soil bought in its place proved very sticky after rain, though it had been friable when planting due to being rotary hoed several times and spread with gypsum. My solution was to cover it with washed river sand so I could walk on it to water.



Front garden – October 2007. Photo: Maree Goods

The next focus was the north-facing back garden, which is partly overshadowed by a neighbour's large *Eucalyptus spathulata*.

After the lawn was removed down to bare clay, local loam was brought in and topped with larger quartz stones to a depth of 20mm highlighted with two groups of rocks and scattered pavers for interest. Conostylis,



Back garden – January 2010. Photo: June Rogers

lomandras, and xanthorrea were planted, together with two *Eucalyptus caesia* ssp *magna* 'Silver Princess' for height, ground hugging *Eremophila glabra*, *E. glabra* subsp. *tomentosa*, *E. glabra* 'Murchison River' and 'Kalbarri Carpet' forms, *Grevillea confertifolia* x *G. sericea*, *Thomasia pygmaea*, and *Dodonea viscosa*. Two new garden beds were extended into this area and planted with pretty little shrubs such as *Philotheca buxifolia* and *P. angustifolium*, *Crocea saligna*, *Prostanthera aspalathoides*, and more Eremophilas. Overshadowing everything in one bed is an ever-growing grafted *Eremophila nivea*.

The latest addition has been to take over what had been the vegetable garden. I had previously planted the fence boundaries here with some unusual choices, including *Backhousia citriodora*, and *Viminaria juncea*. I replanted a *Doryanthes excelsa* which had been growing for about 20 years in my previous garden without much result – now its leaves are fence height but there are still no flowers! *Eucalyptus websteriana* and *caesia* subsp *caesia*, self-sown *Brachyscome diversifolia*, *Chrysocephalum apiculatum*, and various prostrate plants such as *Eremophila subterretifolia*, *Hemiandra pungens*, *Scaevola* 'Mauve Clusters', *Templetonia retusa*, both upright and prostrate, are making this a pleasant utility area.

When selecting plants I look for leaf shape, colour, texture, and whether they are aromatic, as well as considering the colour and form of the flowers. I particularly like strappy plants, such as conostylis, dianellas, lomandras, orthrosanthus, and patersonias, as they give a different dimension to a garden. These have been planted along the 'dry creek bed' in the front garden as well as other areas, often adjacent to large rocks.



I'm very fond of small yellow flowered plants as they brighten up the garden. Small acacias such as *Acacia chinchillensis*, *A. guinetii* and *A. glandulicarpa*, and the lovely wispy *A. merinthophora* are worthwhile, as is the suckering *Chrysocephalum apiculatum* (all forms), and *Goodenia viscida* and *ovata*. Other suckering plants used are dampieras with dark purple or blue flowers, *Scaevola albida* white, pink and mauve, and *Scaevola* 'Mauve Clusters' covers a wide area. *Viola hederacea* thrives in shaded areas, as does *Hibbertia grossulariifolia* with lovely yellow flowers. *Brachyscome multifida* (all colour forms) are useful edging plants.



Front garden – November 2010. Photo: Maree Goods

In addition to the fixed garden beds, I have many plants in pots, which can be shifted around to brighten up areas of the garden at different times or to protect them from the harsh weather. Some of the 'little gems' in pots are *Boronia serrulata* and *B. megastigma*, *Lechenaultia biloba*, and *Phebalium whitei*.

The hard work in establishing this garden has been rewarded by several prizes in the Horsham Garden Festival – best 'mostly native' garden, best low water use garden and best garden under five years. But the real reward has been the pleasure it has given me. My garden is open for visiting by appointment. Phone (03) 5382 1869.

The Wail Arboretum – an iconic showcase for Australian plants

Article and photos by Jan-Bert Brouwer

Jan-Bert is currently the President/Secretary of the Friends of Wail Arboretum Inc.

The Wimmera region contains many flora reserves but only one purposely designed botanic display garden, the Wail Arboretum, which highlights the environmental or horticultural merits of our native flora.

The Arboretum is located between Horsham and Dimboola but within the Horsham Rural City Council. It surrounds the Wail Nursery and borders on to the Wail State Forest, covering an area of 10ha.

In the mid 1940s, little was known about dry area planting and because the natural vegetation in this area had been declining for many reasons since the turn of the century, the then Forestry Commission of Victoria established a nursery at Wail in 1946. The Arboretum was developed shortly after the commencement of the Nursery as a place for people to come and view matured plant specimens.

The initiatives that led to the development of both the Wail Arboretum and the Wail Nursery are interwoven. Their history is quite colourful and varied. The Arboretum was established at a time when interest in Australian native plants was just emerging and Commission staff at Wail were instrumental in leading this movement, and not only in the Wimmera region as their activities had a truly national impact.

One of these pioneers was Alf Gray who was sent to Wail in 1940 by the Forestry Commission as the Nursery Manager, because farmers in north western Victoria were complaining about the unsuitable types of trees that they were being supplied with by the Commission's Macedon Nursery (John Walter, 2007).

Little was then known about planting trees in semi-arid environments. The Commission at that time was running a small nursery at Wail producing sugar gums to be used in firewood plantations by local farmers. Alf recognised that the Wimmera region needed more trees and soon started a seed arboretum using both local and Western Australian species. He made contact with farmers Alby and Heiny Lindner from nearby Vectis, who had already been interested in collecting and propagating Australian plants for a long time.

That exchange of local knowledge was of tremendous benefit to the success of the Wail Nursery and resulted in the development of the

Arboretum. It dramatically increased the variety of native species available to local farmers for use in revegetation and shelterbelt plantings. As an example, Gray made excursions into the Grampians where he collected emu droppings as he had discovered that a large number of local species could be propagated from these seed-laden piles (John Walter, 2007).

In its initial phase, Forest Commission staff were responsible for the maintenance of the Arboretum and it was kept in pristine condition attracting bus loads of visitors for many years. The Arboretum has always been regarded as a regional icon providing an ideal venue for family outings and excursions of community groups and schools in a natural and peaceful setting.

However, the Nursery was privatised in 1995 and as the Arboretum was not covered by new management plans for commercial nursery operations, it fell into disrepair. At a public meeting in August 2001 the Friends of the Wail Arboretum Inc (FoWA) was formed to preserve, restore and enhance the Arboretum and to promote its use as a tourist, education and recreation facility. The well-known TV presenter and gardening expert, Jane Edmanson, consented to be the Patron.



Eucalyptus woodwardii, one of the ornamental tree species on display.



Wheelchair accessible walking paths.

Over the years, more than 120 bird species have been recorded at Wail. Many plant species are labelled for identification. A shaded picnic area has been landscaped and two nature trails into the Wail State Forest commence nearby. This makes it an ideal venue for family and group outings.

As a volunteer organisation FoWA received approval from the Department of Sustainability and Environment for their activities in restoring the Arboretum as it is situated on Crown Land.

Three areas within the Arboretum have been developed as specialty sections, each with prominent interpretive signage.

Ted Brown Dryland Garden

FoWA has been developing the Ted Brown Dryland Garden over the last ten years. This garden was named after Ted Brown, a leading employee at the Wail Nursery, in recognition of his outstanding contributions to the promotion of Australian flora.

The Ted Brown Dryland Garden, which is part of the Wail Arboretum, covers approximately 1.2ha of landscaped garden beds and is still under development as a more recent feature to the Arboretum.

The garden is designed with large size plant beds intersected by easily accessible pathways, to show-case the wide array of Australian



ornamental plants suitable for use in rural and urban gardens in an arid environment. The purpose is to inspire gardeners into using Australian species by demonstrating both the natural beauty and hardiness of these plants.

Another major aim of this section is to educate the local and the wider communities in waterwise gardening. Conservation of water resources is of utmost importance to the communities of north west Victoria.

This garden features a bed of indigenous plants, including those that have a role in indigenous culture as sources of food or fibre.

Plant propagation material from the garden is provided to interest groups on request.

The different plant beds have been allocated to different plant groups or genera. Where possible, two or more specimens of the same taxon are planted for a more striking effect. The *eremophila* group is well represented and its colourful form attracts a lot of attention.

The earlier plantings have flourished but later plantings have suffered badly from kangaroo, wallaby and rabbit damage and from the drought conditions that have severely affected our region over recent years.

FoWA has erected animal-proof fencing and gates with the assistance of a Green Corps Australia team. Garden mulch has been applied to the plant beds for water conservation and weed control.

The Rare and Endangered Plant Enclosure

The Rare and Endangered Plant section was established in collaboration with the Wimmera Farm Tree Group and Wimmera Growers of Australian Plants to display and conserve local species that are vulnerable. It includes various indigenous forms of shrubs, forbs and grasses.

Native Grasslands Demonstration Area

The purpose of the Native Grasslands Demonstration Area is to show that such grasslands contain many valuable forbs and grass species and can be restored using various management methods such as using animal-proof fencing and control of invasive weeds.

The public has free access to the Arboretum at any time during daylight hours. If gates are locked for security reasons, pedestrian access is still possible. In addition, the Friends conduct guided tours on request for community groups such as CWA branches, garden clubs, bird observers and schools. FoWA consider such activities to be of very high priority in a region where community facilities of equivalent calibre are scarce.



Attractive colourful shrubs suitable for home gardens in a dry environment.



FoWA volunteers prepare garden beds with mulch.



Information on the Wail Arboretum can be accessed at:
www.wailarboretum.org.au and through brochures distributed to visitors.

Reference: John Walter (2007) *SGAP – The Story of Arthur Swaby and the Society for Growing Australian Plants*. Australian Plants Society (SGAP Victoria) Inc.



Yaraandoo

Carol and Greg Wells

Carol and Greg are members of the Wimmera Growers of Australian Plants and Greg has held various positions with the group over the years. Their garden has been open in the Australian Open Garden Scheme.

The name of our property comes from the local Aboriginal word for the Southern Cross constellation. Since purchasing the land in 1976 we have enjoyed looking at the stars on the many clear nights which occur here, just as others must have done long before us.

Our small farm is located 12km west of Horsham. The garden, in particular, is situated on a 'lunette', a crescent shaped bank of sand formed many thousands of years ago when the prevailing winds from the south west picked up sand particles from the surface of a dry lake bed and dropped them on its leeward side. Thus the soil is very poor in nutrients and has a pH of between 6.5 and 7.0. This largely determines the type of plant species which can be grown – very few exotic species survive, though many have been tried. Happily Australian species from many parts of the country do grow well and that has been our interest in establishing this garden.

Originally the lunette supported natural vegetation of native grasses, tea tree and yellow gum. After clearing for agricultural use, South African Veldt Grass colonised the area and stabilised the sand hill in





the process. It now provides useful sheep feed in the paddocks, but in the garden, seedlings are not so welcome.

Initially three small banksia plantations were planted in 1978 and 1986 to supply the cut-flower market. The species selected were *Banksia prionotes*, *B. burdettii*, *B. speciosa*, *B. baxteri* and *B. attenuata*, all of which grew very well. With annual pruning, most of these trees are still productive, although we no longer sell cut-flowers.



Acacia denticulosa



Petrophile sp.



Banksia praemorsa, yellow form



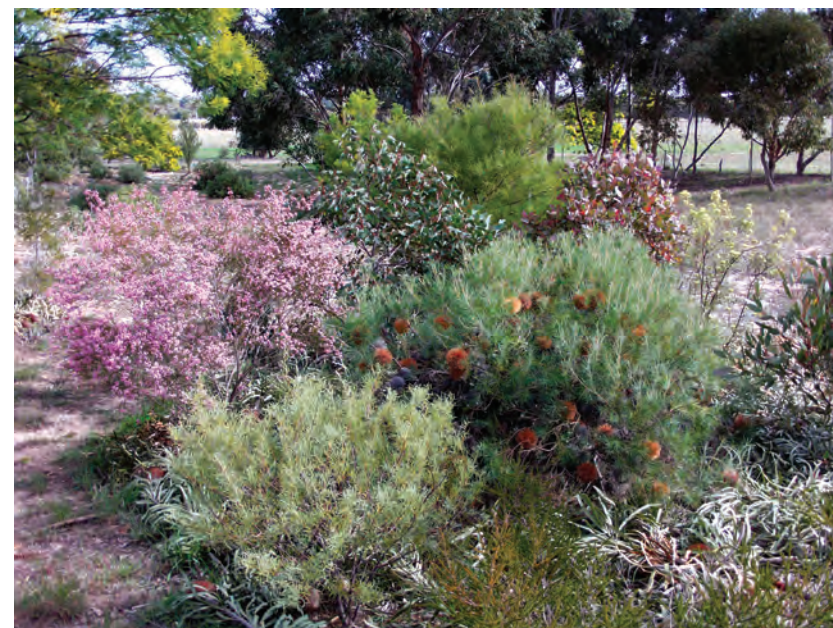
Dryandra praemorsa

The house was built in 1998 and the surrounding garden commenced at the same time, expanding year by year as gardens do, to its present size of three acres. We have also established a number of small vegetated areas around the farm with wattles and eucalypts. They have improved the biodiversity – where else would you plant all those extra seedlings?

Our philosophy is to create an attractive mix of species which provides colour at different times of the year, with interesting flower forms, all



View of the south garden.



Scholtzia sp, *Hakea* sp and *Banksia sphaerocarpa*



View from the house looking north.

of which will survive within our local, natural environment. Seeds of interesting species have been collected throughout Southern Australia and propagated for use in the garden, but the success rate varies considerably as they battle low soil fertility and hot, dry conditions. Most species planted here require bucket watering during the first summer but, after that, they receive nothing. Very little fertiliser is used. Once established, the plants have to look after themselves although protection from hares is essential in the first two to three years.

Genera which have done well include hakea, acacia, eucalypt, some grevillea, melaleuca, adenanthos, calothamnus, isopogon, thryptomene, dryandra and chamelaucium. Eremophilas such as *E. maculata*, *E. glabra* and *E. nivea* do well but many others struggle.

We do have a lawn of Santa Anna couch surrounding the house, which is watered through the summer, water restrictions permitting. It is our main fire-break against bushfires and also reduces reflected heat and light from the sandy soil.

Establishment of the garden has markedly increased the number of bird species living here. We have identified 42 species on the farm and, in the evening, many groups line up to take their turn for a bath in the ornamental pond. Once a Brahminy Kite visited us and on asking a friend if this was likely, he replied, "Did it look lost"? Our garden is open for visiting by appointment. Phone (03) 5384 0394.

Wimmera revegetation projects

Article and photos by Gil Hopkins

Gil is a member of the Wimmera Growers of Australian Plants with many years in landcare and revegetation projects.

Across the Wimmera there are a number of major revegetation projects. Project Platypus works in the upper catchment of the Wimmera River from Elmhurst to Dadswell's Bridge; Project Hindmarsh links the Little Desert north to the Big Desert; Yarrilinks revegetates in its Shire surrounding Yarrambiack Creek; Kowree Biolink links the Little Desert south to the Glenelg River; and the Grampians to Little Desert Biolink re-establishes links along waterways. There are now moves to involve all of these projects in the icon Habitat 141 project surrounding the South Australian, Victorian, and NSW borders, linking and restoring all natural areas from the 'ocean to the outback'.

Many APS members work voluntarily in their local organisations and Landcare groups on these projects, using locally indigenous herbs and grasses, shrubs and trees to restore biodiversity, provide some protection from future changes and improve farm productivity.



View of the vast Wimmera plains as seen from the Northern Grampians towards Mount Arapiles.

Each year there are at least four major planting weekends where hundreds of locals and visitors gather to plant thousands of plants at a time – maybe you have helped!

Our Wimmera Grower members have especially been involved in setting up and running the Grampians to Little Desert Biolink over more than ten years. They investigated local natural areas, sought funding, organised local seed collection and plant propagation and helped Landcare Groups and interested landholders protect and revegetate creeks and riverbanks to help link public and private natural remnant vegetation.



Above: Laharum Landcare Group planting out one of the revegetation projects.

Right: Regenerated grassland.



Wartook Gardens

Royce and Jeanne Raleigh. Photos by Royce Raleigh.

Royce and Jeanne have been members of the Wimmera Growers of Australian Plants since the group first formed 34 years ago. Royce is a Life Member of the group. Their garden has been open in the Australian Open Garden Scheme many times.

A visit to Wartook Gardens in the spring is to enter a world of colour, diversity of shapes and movement. With approximately 1,000 plant species, 120 bird species, large garden beds set amongst grassed areas spreading over 2ha, together with great views of the Grampians, the garden offers a lot to see and explore. A visit at other times of the year will still see lots of bird activity and a different range of plants in flower.

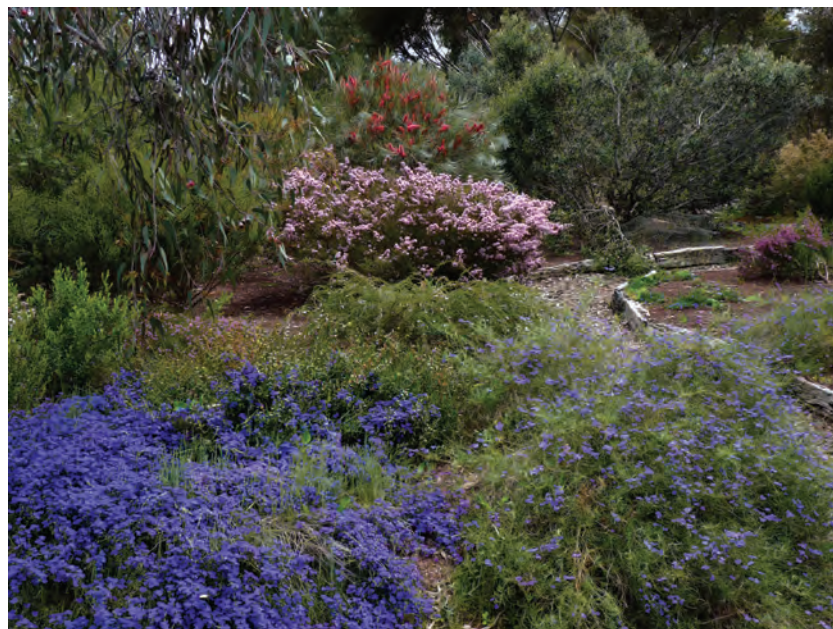
Royce and Jeanne purchased 28ha in the Wartook Valley on the north western side of the Grampians in 1973 while living in Montrose on the eastern side of Melbourne. The property was a bare sheep pasture with a small number of magnificent old River Red Gums, *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*. The aim was to establish a native garden to display a large variety of plants and try to persuade others that there are spectacular plants that rarely find their way into the nursery trade and many others that should be introduced into our gardens.



The soil is a slightly acidic duplex clay loam, with occasional buckshot patches, over clay, all sitting on at least 100m of granite. The average rainfall is 550 to 600mm, falling mainly in July, August, September with extended dry periods, e.g. nine months with no rain in the drought of 1982-3. Frosts are numerous and can be severe, such as 31 consecutive frosts to -9°C in the 1982-3 drought.

After putting in a dam, planting began in 1977. Initially, the garden was a square with 100m sides where we formed many different shaped and sized garden beds amongst a number of large grassed areas. The plan was to provide differing vistas and enable the plants to be seen more easily, as well as providing a variety of situations to grow a wide range of species. Since then the garden has more than doubled in size and now comprises close to 1,000 species, with the majority of plants from a similar dry climate zone and from many parts of Australia.

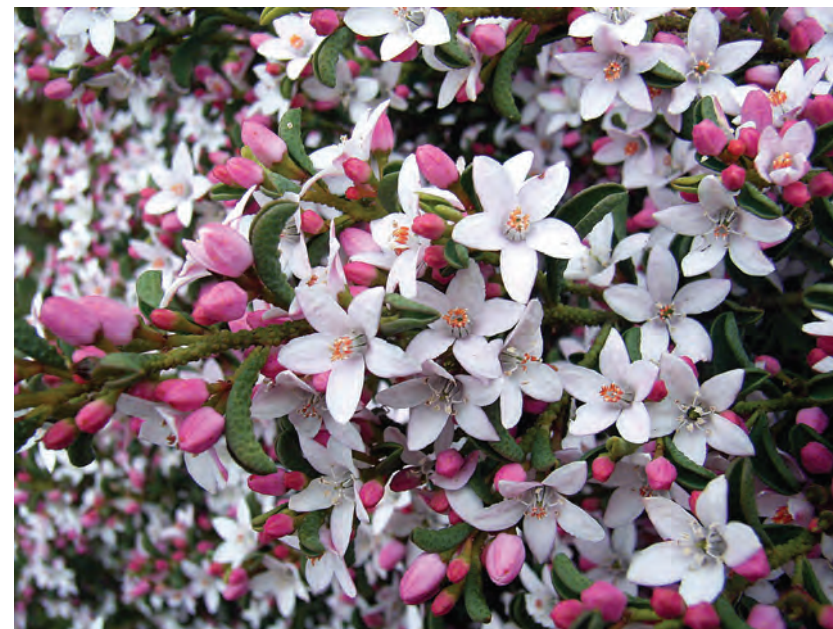
Garden beds are generally at natural soil level and drainage is provided by digging down paths and drains around beds. All paths with gardens have been edged with logs and the beds mulched with scoria to prevent garden beds from getting too hot in our hot, dry summers. Each year there can be many days over 40°C and bare soil temperatures can be very high.



Garden view.



Conostylis setigera



Philotheca verrucosus



Leptospermum seedling.

Many log seats have been placed around the garden, as Jeanne and Royce believe an important aspect of gardening is to take time to sit and listen. With 120 bird species there is always much to hear and observe.

Initially our planting was “any quick growing plant”, mainly acacias, to protect us from the wind. Gradually the garden plants established themselves. We were able to remove most of the initial plantings to create many differing areas, to grow the smaller and more colourful plants.

New beds are rotary hoed or dug over with a fork, shaped, edges logged, drains and new paths dug. Plants are placed according to size, habit and colour. Frost tenderness and need for shade or full sun are also taken into consideration. Most of our planting is done using small tube plants rather than larger potted plants and are watered in with Maxicrop. Most plants are watered for the first two summers, but once established most of the garden receives little or no water.

For a number of years we mulched with pine bark but we noticed that after time plants were losing vigour and not flowering as well. The organic mulch was not allowing summer rain events to reach the soil. Being in a bushfire prone area, Royce gradually replaced the pine bark with scoria, which has proved very successful. Not only does it mulch the beds, but any weed growth is very easily removed and the

scoria forms a great seed bed for all sorts of self seeding wonderful plants. We are delighted to get seedling acacias, boronias, croweas, darwinias, dryandras, hakeas, pimeleas and thryptomene which can then be readily transplanted to another section of the garden.

We suspect that there may be some trace elements in the scoria as many WA species grow and flower so much better after being mulched with scoria.

In the summers of 2007 and 2008 with both dams empty, Royce and Jeanne lost a number of plants, but were pleasantly surprised at the range of small and large plants that had survived. With reasonable rain in 2009, and good rains in 2010, Wartook Gardens has both dams full and many hundreds more plants have been established.

In such a large garden there has been a conscious effort to plant multiples of plants for a more natural and greater colour impact. Plants are also repeated around the garden and the differing situations greatly extends the flowering period. The dominance of a particular colour changes throughout the season. Late winter and early spring is dominated by the brilliant acacias and the range of whites and pinks of the many hakeas. In the spring, this is followed by the brilliant blues of the many differing dampieras, hoveas and lechenaultias as well as the cream and yellow of acacias, conostylis and phebaliums.



Lechenaultia biloba



The many colour forms of *Hakea francisiana* and a number of boronias also on display at this time and swathes of everlastings, form an understorey through portions of the garden.

In the late spring the brilliant alyogynes, callistemons, melaleucas, pimeleas and *Hakea bucculenta* make massed displays and the colourful verticordias start their show. Throughout much of this time there are eucalypts, dryandras, regelias, philothecas, beaufortias, tetrathecas, anigozanthos, lasiopetalums, correas and thomasias and others showing their colours.

There are many more brilliant Australian plants that can and should be grown, but have not yet found their way into our gardens. With the loss of habitat and the gradual disappearance of much of our wonderful heathlands, we believe that the Australian Plants Society must take a more active role in introducing new plants to our members and in turn into the wider community. There are still many who do not believe that a native garden can be just as colourful as any other type of garden – we are trying to show that they are very colourful. Our garden is open for visiting by appointment. Phone (03) 5383 6200.



A general view of the Wartook garden.

Receiving Australian Plants

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BOWENFELS NSW 2790;

Email: merleaps@bigpond.com
Phone: 02 6351 2384

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