

10 Australian Plants to get to know

By Melinda Kralj, Curator of Collections
UCSC Arboretum January, 2012

Common name: **Lemon-scented Tea-tree**
Scientific name: **Leptospermum petersonii**
Family: **Myrtaceae (Myrtle Family)**

Description: Leptospermums and Melaleucas are collectively called "Tea Trees". They contain vitamin C; a tea was made from the leaves as a scurvy remedy. Crush a leaf to smell the delicious lemon fragrance.



Common name: **Prostrate Ovens Wattle**
Scientific name: **Acacia pravissima 'Golden Carpet'**
Family: **Fabaceae, subfamily Mimosoideae (Pea Family)**

Description: Acacia is a very large genus (over 700 species in Australia, about 1,100 world wide). Many have true leaves only for a brief time after they first germinate. Then, the flattened leaf stalk (petiole) functions as the leaves. This particular plant is a chance mutation of the "normal" tree-like Ovens Wattle. To maintain its undulating, groundcover form, it is propagated by cuttings. (Cuttings are a clone of the parent plant; seeds embody genetic information from both plant parents.)



Common name: **Grass Tree, Balga**
Scientific name: **Xanthorrhoea preisii**
Family: **Xanthorrhoeaceae (Grass Tree Family)**

Description: Grass Trees are extremely slow-growing and long-lived. Eventually, this plant will develop a trunk, at the rate of approximately 1 inch every 10 years! Often, grass trees bloom following a fire. The entire plant is blackened, and a long spear-like flower spike emerges. The resin from grass trees was used to attach spear heads. The seeds, roots, leaf bases and nectar are all edible.



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Common name: **Snow Gum**

Scientific name: ***Eucalyptus pauciflora***

Family: **Myrtaceae (Myrtle Family)**

Description: This species grows in a range of habitats. Those at the snow line are dwarfed, and sinuous in their growth habit. Eucalyptus is a large and varied genus. There are over 700 species. Some are single-trunked timber trees; others are multi-trunked shrubby trees called mallees. The name eucalyptus means "well-covered" in Greek. It refers to the petals & calyx, fused together to make the cap, or operculum, which covers the flower bud like a lidded box.



Common name: **Australian Fuchsia**

Scientific name: ***Correa pulchella* 'Pink Eyre'**

Family: **Rutaceae (Citrus Family)**

Description: Australia hosts many beautiful members of the Citrus Family. They do not form a hesperidium (a fruit such as a lemon or orange), but have attractive flowers, and often, fragrant foliage. It is not related to fuchsias, although the tubular, pendant flowers bear a superficial resemblance. Correas bloom during the winter months, attract hummingbirds, and are durable landscape plants here on the California coast. This particular cultivar is native to the Eyre Peninsula in Western Australia.



Common name: **Australian Heath**

Scientific name: ***Epacris impressa***

Family: **Ericaceae (Heather Family)**

Description: *Epacris impressa* blooms in a range of flower colors white, pink, red, and orange. The tubular flowers are attractive to nectar-eating birds (honey-eaters in Australia; hummingbirds here in California). It is the floral emblem of Victoria, the south-eastern State in mainland Australia.



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Common name: **Coolibah**

Scientific name: ***Eucalyptus microtheca***

Family name: **Myrtaceae (Myrtle Family)**

Description: This is the tree made famous by the song, "Waltzing Matilda", by Banjo Peterson. This tree grows along watercourses throughout much of Australia. Even when the streams dry up, its presence indicates water underground. Aboriginal people knew they could dig a well and find water where this tree grew. Sometimes they would cut a lateral root, turn it on end and drain the water into a bowl.



Common name: **Showy Banksia, Rick-rack Banksia**

Scientific name: ***Banksia speciosa***

Family name: **Proteaceae (Protea Family)**

Description: There are about 70 species of Banksia, all endemic to Australia, with the exception of *B. dentata*, which extends into Indonesia. They are members of the Protea Family, named after the Greek god Proteus, who could change his shape at will. Not surprisingly, the general appearance of the banksias is quite variable. The flower, however, is easy to recognize. The inflorescence usually looks somewhat like a corncob.



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Scientific name: **Darwinia leiostyla**

Family: **Myrtaceae**

Description: This genus is named after Charles' grandfather, Erasmus Darwin. The flower does not look like your typical Myrtle flower. The reason is that most of what you see are bracts surrounding the flower. These plants thrive with excellent drainage, and peaty soil in the Australian Rock Garden.



Scientific name: **Grevillea 'Superb'**

Family: **Proteaceae (Protea Family)**

Description: Grevilleas are variable in their foliage and general form, but the flower is always 4 tepals (flower parts not differentiated into sepals and petals) fused into a tubular flower. The style brushes past the anthers in the bud, gathering the pollen. It acts as the "pollen presenter". As nectar-eating birds or marsupials (hummingbirds here in California) suck nectar from the flower tube, the back of their head is dusted with pollen. Grevillea 'Superb' is a hybrid between Grevillea banksii and G. bipinnatifida.

