



Summer 2007-08

# BOTANIC NEWS

FRIENDS *of the* ROYAL BOTANIC  
GARDENS MELBOURNE INC.

FEATURE:

Tribute to a benefactor page 6

SEASON'S GREETINGS AND A  
HAPPY AND HEALTHY 2008

For all our Members



# FROM THE PRESIDENT

Excitement, magnificent surprises and so much of interest have all been part of 2007 for the Friends. Last March we had the opportunity to celebrate our 25th birthday at a party where warmth, wonderful fellowship, enjoyment and pride in past achievements were paramount features.

At the birthday party I advised that the Friends had established a Scholarship Scheme for all staff employed by the Royal Botanic Gardens Board. The Scholarships, to a total value of \$10,000 per annum, are intended to aid the professional development and skills of staff members. I am now delighted to let you know that at the Annual General Meeting on 19 November, two scholarships were awarded – one to the value of \$8,000 to Peter Symes, Melbourne Gardens Division, for his project *Diminishing water resources – strategic climate change adaption for RBG Melbourne* and the other, of \$2,000, to Meg Hirst, Plant Sciences and Biodiversity Division, for her project *Identifying pre-treatments and procedures to assist seed germination in targeted Victorian plant species*. We congratulate Peter and Meg on their success and look forward to hearing more about their projects in due course.

As promised in my column in the Spring edition of *Botanic News*, I can now give more information about our magnificent surprise – the bequest left to us by Helen (universally known as Pat) McLellan. The transfer of cash and shares into the Friends'

Trust Fund is now complete and the Fund's Trustees, Prof. Robin Sharwood, Frank Phillips and Lawrence Cohn have appointed UBS Asset Management (Australia) Ltd to manage this gift on their behalf. In addition, the Trustees and the Friends' Finance Committee are consulting with the Director and Chief Executive of the RBG, Dr Philip Moors, as to how best the income from the bequest can benefit the Botanic Gardens in the long term.

Pat McLellan has indeed blessed the Gardens and the Friends and I suggest you turn to page 6 to read more about this retiring, passionate plant and gardens person in Prof. Robin Sharwood's beautifully written article.

Another very special birthday is looming – that of the Growing Friends who turn 20 years old. Past and present members of this group have always been totally committed to propagating the very best quality plants to the highest standard possible, much to the delight of vast numbers of Friends and many others. Their gardens are filled with rare and wonderful plants purchased at the biannual plant sales or from the Nursery on Friday mornings (Members only). As well, the RBG has benefitted on many occasions, using plant material propagated by the Growing Friends out in the Gardens. Just think of the number of pots and the hard work needed to raise over \$800,000 net since 1988 – a lot on both counts. On behalf of the Friends I thank the Growing Friends for their commitment and hard work



Photo: Cathy Trmca

and wish them a very happy birthday.

Despite the continuing drought and water restrictions, the Growing Friends' spring sale raised a net amount of \$23,350. This was a really wonderful result and everyone is to be congratulated. Our thanks go to everyone involved on both the sale days and to the Growing Friends.

During November, in conjunction with the Friends of the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney, we welcomed David Howard, Head Gardener to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales at Highgrove House in Gloucestershire. David gave three lectures to capacity audiences in the Clemenger Auditorium, National Gallery of Victoria, and Mueller Hall and inspired all those who have an interest in beautiful gardens and organic and sustainable gardening. Thank you to Council Member, Susan Brookes, who worked very hard over many months to ensure the great success of these lectures and in arranging David's program whilst he was in Melbourne.

Christmas is fast approaching: I wish all Members, their families and friends the very best for the festive season and a peaceful and drought-free New Year.

Janet Thomson

## 2007 Annual General Meeting

This meeting of the Friends was presided over by Janet Thomson who welcomed John Goodwin as an Ordinary Member of Council. Volunteer Service medals were awarded to Lawrence Cohn and Louise Coronel (25 years); Isobel Allan, Heather Ironmonger, Judy Jarman and Phyll McLean (15 years); Virginia Morrison and June Cherrey (10 years).

Members enjoyed the presentation of scholarships to Peter Symes and Meg Hirst and the pictorial historical presentation of the Friends' 25 years' support of the Gardens. The catering committee and barman Geoff Hardy once again satisfied the inner Member with an excellent supper.

Meg Miller



# FROM THE GARDENS AND HERBARIUM

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Front cover: *Eucalyptus erythrocorys* growing near the Temple of the Winds. Photo: Jennifer Marshall

The *Grevillea* featured on the Spring 2007 cover is 'Sylvia'. Thanks to Neil Marriott, Manager of the Dunkeld Pastoral Company's Gardens.

Photo: John Hauker

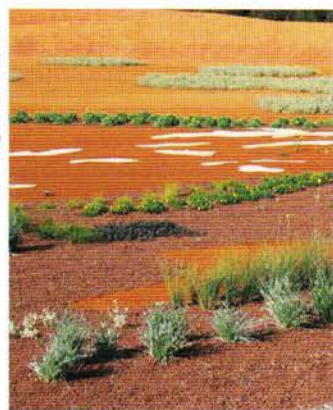


Photo: Greg Hoxley of painting by Merle McIntyre



## Australian Garden

The Australian Garden has continued its award successes, winning the 'Accommodation and Attractions' and the 'Environmental Sustainability' categories in the 2007 *Leader Business Achiever Awards*. These awards are based on nominations received from readers of *Leader* newspapers in south-eastern Melbourne. A pleasing aspect of these successes is that they arise from the number of nominations received from the public and therefore reflect the view of the community about the quality of the finalists.

*The Australian Garden – a unique garden for the 21<sup>st</sup> century* is a new souvenir booklet that has recently been published by the Royal Botanic Gardens. The booklet traces the journey of the Garden from its inspiration in the Australian bush to the development of Stage 1 and the first nine hectares. Full colour photographs and text about some of the Garden highlights feature in the booklet. This souvenir booklet retails for \$9.95 and is available from The Gardens Shop.

The Australian Garden was a major sponsor of the seventh Australian Landscape Conference held in Melbourne in September. Approximately 360 attendees visited the Garden during the pre-conference tour and we have received a large number of very positive comments about the Garden, its design and the quality of the plant collections – in fact, they are best described as 'rave reviews'.

The overseas speakers at the conference, all respected international landscape designers, were equally positive, describing the Australian Garden as being 'cutting edge' in its quality of design in using landscape as the basis for plant collections rather than traditional botanical groupings.

## 'Hidden in Plain View' at RBG Melbourne

*Hidden in Plain View – the forgotten flora* touring exhibition from the State Botanical Collection opened its Melbourne season at Domain House on 23 November, and will run until 17 December. Australia's *forgotten flora* are the non-vascular plants – the liverworts, hornworts, mosses, lichens and fungi. They provide vital decomposition services, without which many ecosystems would collapse; offer food and shelter to many indigenous animals and insects; are important parts of nutrient and energy cycles; help to protect soils from water and wind erosion as well as to control run-off after rain. The exhibition is presented through a series of watercolour and pen-and-ink illustrations, herbarium specimens, historical books and botanical records, and three-dimensional displays. I encourage you to explore this 'hidden' world!

The exhibition has had a most successful touring program throughout Victoria in 2007 and has also recently been awarded a grant of \$48,000 from 'Visions of Australia' to enable it to be displayed at the National Museum of Australia

in Canberra, the Queen Victoria Museum in Launceston in 2008 and a venue to be confirmed in Adelaide in 2009.

## Spring Open Day

The 2007 annual Spring Open Day was held with great success on Sunday 14 October. A free program of tours and entertainment was offered at sites throughout the Gardens. As an added attraction, the Open Day coincided with the second day of the annual Spring Plant Sale held by the Friends of RBG Melbourne. Fine weather complemented the diverse range of attractions, and the Gardens were thronged with visitors. The Voluntary Guides and RBG staff collaborated on guided tours in the Gardens, and behind-the-scenes tours of the Nursery, Herbarium, and Gardens House. All tours (several were repeated during the day) were booked out. Observatory Gate hosted Markets in the Gardens and music recitals; other musical performances were also held on the Oak Lawn and at The Terrace. Children's programs and music were staged in The Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden.

## Friends' Scholarship recipients

The first recipients of the Friends' Scholarship were announced at the Friends' AGM on 19 November.

Peter Symes of the Melbourne Gardens Division was awarded \$8,000 for '*Diminishing water resources – strategic climate change*



*adaption for RBG Melbourne*'. This project will help RBG meet the water challenges of the future by studying technical solutions implemented in botanic gardens in the USA.

**Megan Hirst** of the Plant Sciences and Biodiversity Division was awarded \$2,000 for '*Identifying pre-treatments and procedures to assist seed germination in targeted Victorian plant species*'.

Megan will travel to Kings Park, Perth, to learn about the role of naturally occurring chemicals in seedling germination, particularly chemicals that occur in smoke.

On behalf of the staff and Board of the RBG I would like again to thank the Friends' Council for its generous support in establishing the Friends' Scholarship Scheme. It will bring benefits in the years ahead to both the RBG and individual staff.

### Floriscience Scholarship

The Trawalla Foundation recently established the Floriscience Scholarship, of up to \$30,000, to advance the scientific knowledge of Australian flora. The awards are intended to 'develop the potential and promote the value and uniqueness of Australian flora through research in the fields of propagation, nutrition, physiology, floral biology or water requirements'. The Scholarships are offered in alternate years through RBG Melbourne and Kings Park, Perth, commencing in 2007 with RBG Melbourne.

At an award ceremony in September, Neville Walsh from the Plant Sciences and

Biodiversity Division was awarded \$29,400 for the Victorian Conservation Seedbank Project to develop germination protocols for Victorian rare and threatened plants. Overcoming dormancy is a significant challenge for seed conservation. Although it is relatively easy to collect seeds, our ability to germinate them is hindered by dormancy and hence hampers our ability to conserve these rare and vulnerable taxa. The staff and RBG Board are most appreciative of the Trawalla Foundation's generous support.

### Rare and Threatened Species Collection

Work has commenced on an important new set of gardens in RBG Melbourne – the Rare and Threatened Species Collection. The Collection comprises five new garden beds on the site of the defunct Bulb Bed on Central Lawn. Designed by Andrew Laidlaw, the RBG's Landscape Architect, the beds display endangered plants from five major vegetation zones in Southeastern Australia: Mallee, Grampians, Alpine, Grasslands, and Gippsland Forests. The species displayed have been collected and propagated by RBG staff over the past five years or so, including in collaboration with the Victorian Conservation Seedbank project. The first stage of development is now under way, including laying out the beds, soil preparation, landscaping, and installation of drip irrigation systems; planting will take place in April-May 2008. This stage is being funded by grants of \$25,000 from both the Friends of RBG Melbourne, through the *Water Works*, *Water Wise* program, and the Director's

Circle. I am grateful for the Friends' continued support from this program which is making such a valuable contribution to the Gardens and biodiversity conservation. The second stage of the project (planned for 2008) will be the installation of interpretive signage and development of educational programs focusing on threatened plants and biodiversity conservation.

*Philip Moors*

*Worthy winners of the inaugural Friends' scholarships for RBG staff, announced at the Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the RBG on 19 November: Peter Symes and Megan Hirst*



This issue marks the 20th anniversary of the Growing Friends and so we focus on their history. It should come as no surprise that among the newly-convened Friends of the RBG, all very garden and Gardens conscious, there would be those who just loved plants and knew how to nurture them.

The Gardens staff offered a number of excess seedlings, resulting from the International Seed Exchange program, to the Friends as a fund-raiser.

At a meeting called to consider the matter, Gillian Kirk offered to look after the seedlings and after some deliberation the Growing Friends was born – the name the suggestion of Peter Lumley, a Gardens' Botanist at the time – with Gillian as Convener and Lydia Bartlett as Treasurer, and their husbands as de facto committee members. A small group of interested volunteers met in a gardener's shed at the rear of the Astronomer's residence for approximately six months until a suitable nursery site was fenced. Invaluable was the extensive nursery and plant management expertise of Dale McDonnell who had the vision and foresight to suggest an extensive shade house for nurturing young plants and who helped with other management issues.

Plants that were potted were moved on small trolleys past the perennial border to the back of the Director's residence (now known as Gardens House). Gillian and her husband Neil came every day for nearly two years to water plants and remove possum droppings and leaves fallen from the trees overhead.



# FRIENDS

Gardens staff who helped realise the vision and supported the new enterprise included Josie Vaganian, Dr David Churchill (then Director) and John Taylor, CEO after David Churchill's retirement. Josie in particular helped with practical problems like accessing potting soil, planning the potting area and providing sterile pots. David Churchill helped sell plants at the first sale held in 1988, and John Taylor provided some unwanted tables from the Herbarium which was undergoing a major refurbishment.

The Friends' Council underestimated the enthusiasm of this new group of amateur gardeners and their ability to become a viable enterprise within the Friends' organization. Moreover, the large queue waiting for the first sale contributed to an outstanding result of \$14,000. The success of the day, and the next sale, was greatly helped by Stephen Ryan of *Dicksonia Rare Plants* who helped for two days, pricing and selling plants.

Notwithstanding the caution of the Friends' Council, many Council members were very supportive of the Growing Friends at sale times. Such commitment has always been very much appreciated.

The quality and rarity of the plants being sold ensured that publicity also spread by word-of-mouth and people 'just kept turning up to help'. One of the best publicity ideas was the introduction of the inclusion of a dollar coin in a stamped, self-addressed envelope for notification of the next two sale dates. This ensured continuity of custom and spread

information very quickly.

In 1999 when the old nursery site was taken over by the Gardens for their staff car-park, the Growing Friends' nursery moved to its present site beside the work yards, between D and E gates. The sale area is now opposite the glasshouses and on sale days it is overflowing with interesting, healthy plant stock.

Among the successes of the Growing Friends Gillian and Lydia (who are still involved) count not only the first sale and the proof that the group was viable, but also the many strong friendships made, the solid reputation of the plant stock and the continued growth of the organisation.

The Spring 2007 Sale realized \$23,350 nett. Our thanks to all those enthusiasts who regularly support the sales, the volunteers who staff the entry tent, the sales tent and the numerous section areas, and the Gardens staff who bring their reference books and their expertise to help answer questions. We also thank the companies who willingly supplied goods for the raffles, and we look forward to seeing you all on 12 and 13 April 2008.

*Lydia Bartlett and Gillian Kirk, as told to Meg Miller*

**Thank You to the Generous Donors  
who helped make the Sale Raffle  
such a Great Success!**

Betta Grower Fertilizers P/L  
Bunnings Northland  
Hannah Dibella  
Jennifer Church from the  
Garden Shop



Top: Janet Morrison, Lydia Bartlett and Neil Kirk in the first shade house. Above: The first potting area. Below: First sale area. Bottom: The first sale queue. Photos: Growing Friends archives.





## Helen Patricia McLellan 1917 – 2006

GARDEN LOVER AND  
BENEFACTOR



Late in 2006 the Trustees of the Friends of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne Trust Fund (set up by deed in 1986) learned, to their immense surprise, that the Fund was to receive one half of the residuary estate of a certain Helen McLellan. That bequest has duly been received and, with the addition of accrued interest and dividends, now amounts to about \$2.6 million, making it one of the very largest benefactions ever received for the benefit of the RBG, Melbourne. Arrangements for the responsible management of this amazing and welcome gift are close to being finalised.

Who, however, was Helen Patricia McLellan? Although she had been a Life Member of the Friends for some years, her name meant nothing to the Trustees, the Council of the Friends or the Director of the Gardens. Fortunately the estate papers gave a contact address (in another State) for her stepdaughter, Mrs Trish Peters,

and she, very kindly, has not only provided me with much information about her stepmother, but has put me in touch with three of Mrs McLellan's close Melbourne friends, to all of whom I am most grateful for assistance.

Mrs McLellan's name was the first puzzle to be solved. Although her first given name was indeed Helen, it was a name neither she nor anyone else had used since her early childhood: she called herself, and was universally known as, 'Pat'. Furthermore, she had not married Harold McLellan until she was 68, and hence for most of her long life was known by her family surname of 'Atchison'.

Even that clarification, however, only took us so far because, as everyone who has written or spoken to me has said, "She was a very private person". An only child, her family life appears to have been rather unhappy, and it seems likely that from a very early age she realised that she had very much to fend for herself.

Private she may have been, but she was no recluse – indeed, she was sociable and outgoing. Despite clear evidence of family wealth, she worked for years as a Titles Office clerk for one of the big insurance companies. She dressed well (with, I'm told, a fondness for big hats), she played tennis at Royal South Yarra and, in later years, much competitive bridge there. She enjoyed food and good conversation and was a regular film-goer. She loved ballet, always taking prime season tickets for the Australian Ballet's performances. She travelled

widely and adventurously, especially in China and elsewhere in Asia, in later years with her husband (see below). Her travel agent described her as "an independent and gutsy lady".

But above all, to our great and lasting benefit, she was passionate about gardens and gardening, being not only a Life Member of the Friends, but also a member of the prestigious Royal Horticultural Society. Every cultivatable square inch of her Toorak garden, including what had once been lawn, was crammed with trees, shrubs, bulbs and other plants, many rare and valuable. Generous in her gardening enthusiasm, she potted up hundreds of cuttings over the years, giving them to friends and church fetes, and providing full botanical names and history. On her sudden death a last garden purchase – an azalea – remained unplanted.

For, sadly, her death was indeed sudden and unexpected, despite her advanced age. The friend who regularly took her to the ballet called one evening in June 2006 and found her dead. Alone in her house (her

husband had died in 1998), she had probably suffered a single fatal stroke. This 'very private person' was private to the end. She had directed in her Will that no death or funeral notice should be published in the press, and so only three people (her stepdaughter and husband, and – fittingly, I think – her travel agent) attended that last farewell. Yet somehow that quiet, almost solitary exit was consonant with so much that was the chosen pattern of her life.

Of course, the marvellous thing is that her name (or names!) and her devotion to gardens, will live on productively to the great enrichment of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne for the indefinite future. I am sure we should all want to say "Thank you, Pat." But let stepdaughter Trish Peters have the final word: Pat "was honest, modest and polite in the old-fashioned manner ... I believe that she lived her life to the full, in her quiet, unassuming way".

May she rest in peace.  
*Robin Sharwood AM*  
*Chairman of Trustees*





# FROM THE MEMBERS

## Spring Insiders' Walk: Government House Gardens

The peppercorn tree caught my eye: the lush lower foliage, the meagre growth around the crown, the tell-tale bands of possum-deterrent material around the trunk. Clearly Vice-regal gardens have no special immunity to the demands of the natural world, one of the facts impressed on the group of Friends fortunate enough to stroll in the splendid grounds with John Patrick following morning tea with gracious hosts: our Patron, Prof. David de Kretser, Governor of Victoria, and Mrs de Kretser.

John, who is consulted regarding the conservation and rejuvenation of the gardens, entertained and educated us in his inimitable style. He informed us that the entire, immaculately-presented area is now maintained by three qualified horticulturists along with one apprentice gardener, in contrast with times past when Government house staff numbers were greater. Reminders of a more rarefied past include the mews and the croquet lawn.

However, the prime focus now is the preservation of historical plantings, planning renovation of 'tired' areas and – most urgently – waterwise gardening strategies to contend with the effects of the drought. A wide, heavily-mulched surrounding area indicated the most effective way of ensuring an adequate water supply to several large trees. Any growth around a tree, even the grass, will reduce the tree's supply.

John pointed out several shrubbery plantings currently not fashionable, but well worth considering for today's gardens. It was interesting, too, to see commemorative plantings by a variety of royal family members and international dignitaries. A *sotto voce* aside informed us that not all commemorative trees remained where they were originally planted, as most of the 'planters' preferred to perform the task close to the House.

Some corners of the gardens reminded us that this magnificent property has been home to many families. The presence of a small pet cemetery near the American Garden (a woodland-style area) was particularly poignant. While this still is a haven despite being so close to the city, the view through the trees to the various sporting stadiums across the Yarra River brings the present into focus with a jolt. So much has changed over the decades since the establishment of this landmark. How peaceful and remote these beautiful gardens must once have been.

*Helen Fabey*

*Top: Peppercorn tree favoured by possums.  
Centre: Government House from the front lawn.  
Bottom: Succulent sentinels by the ballroom.  
Photos: Bruce Sandie*







## Summer Talking Plants and Guided Nursery Visit

**ESPECIALLY FOR NEW MEMBERS – SUMMER SUCCESS IN YOUR GARDEN**

Friday 15 February at 10.00am

Meet at Domain House on Dallas Brooks Drive (Map showing Domain House is available from our office or download from our website)

Cost: \$10 MEMBERS ONLY

RSVP by Wednesday 13 February on enclosed booking form

This morning will be especially suitable for new members to meet other plant loving Friends and will be held in Domain House. It will be an informal gathering of Friends with a common interest in plants and gardening. Refreshments will be served during the morning.

How has your garden survived the Summer? Come along with a piece of your favourite 'Summer survivor' and share some of your best tips.

Following the discussion there will be a guided visit to the Growing Friends' Nursery. There will be a brief overview of the nursery and some specials will be available.

If you plan to buy a number of plants, think about bringing your shopping jeep or market trolley to help carry your purchases home.



## Summer Fit Friends Ramble

**OUTER CIRCLE RAILWAY AND THE STREETS OF CANTERBURY**

Thursday 28 February at 9.30am

Meet at the car park in Campbell Road just off Whitehorse Road Balwyn  
Melways Map 45 ref K6

COST: \$10 MEMBERS ONLY

RSVP by Monday 25 February on enclosed booking form

We will walk through a deep shady cutting as part of the trail of the Outer Circle Railway where the Deepdene Dasher service operated from 1900 to 1927. At the Canterbury Road exit we will follow the main road until we meet Monomeath Avenue. This is, or was, a lovely, gracious street and former home to a Premier of Victoria and other high-profile personalities.

We will look at the work of developers in recent years and

decide if the changes have improved or spoilt the streetscape. We'll compare this to the adjacent plane-tree-lined Victoria Avenue which is relatively untouched.

Morning tea will be served at a private home in Boston Road before returning along Mont Albert Road back to the car park.



## Summer Insiders Walk BILLABONG TO RAIN GARDEN

Tuesday 19 February at 10.00 am

Meet at Gate Lodge (opposite the Shrine)

Cost: \$10 MEMBERS ONLY

RSVP by Tuesday 12 February on enclosed booking form or download a booking form from the Events page on our website  
[www.rbgfriendsmelbourne.org](http://www.rbgfriendsmelbourne.org)

Book early as numbers will be limited

This walk will journey through the Gardens' areas of heritage and European culture to look at some of the RBG's methods of conserving water.

One area to be visited is Long Island, which was developed to re-create this place's traditional heritage. It now shows examples of indigenous plants, birdlife and reptiles within the Lower Yarra region in areas of wetlands, grass woodlands and riverscape. Through cooler locations we

will move to observe the feature Rain Garden/Canna Bed. It is of interest to all and demonstrates an ideal way to conserve and re-use water within a garden design.

Please wear suitable shoes to take a circuit including Long Island and the Fern Gully.





## Spring in Greece CORFU/EPIRUS/DELHI

Thursday 1 – Saturday 24 May 2008

With more than 6000 species of flowering plants and ferns, Greece is the richest country in botanical terms in the whole of Europe. Our spring tour offers a unique opportunity to explore Epirus, an area which is not on the usual 'tourist trail' as well as sites carefully chosen for their beauty and wealth of wildflowers. The exceptional itinerary has been designed by Caroline Davies and David Martin, in consultation with The Friends, and they will both accompany the group.

The tour begins in the Ionian Island of *Corfu*, 'Venus of the Isles', with lush vegetation, romantic coastline and a fascinating Venetian, French and British heritage along with its Greek character. We visit private villas and Mediterranean gardens, explore the picturesque bays by traditional *caïque*, and walk in the gentle countryside of olive groves, cypresses, ancient villages and tiny churches.

A short ferry trip to Igoumenitsa brings us to unspoilt *Epirus* with its dramatic mountain scenery, verdant forests, deep gorges and ancient culture, in the outer reaches of north-west Greece. With our base at Ioannina, on the shores of Lake Pamvotis, we explore the heritage of Turkish mosques, minarets, forts and bazaars, Byzantine art and early Orthodox monasteries. We visit sites of antiquity in the countryside, folk art collections rich in embroidery, the mountain villages of *Zagoria* with

traditional stone houses and their famous stone bridges. Our walks follow the Akheronda River through the mountains of Souli ... the Voidamatis River with crystal clear water and immense plane trees ... the Vikos Gorge in the North Pindhos Mountains with spectacular cliffs, wildflowers and virgin forests ...

At this time, Judas trees bring splashes of colour throughout the countryside, slopes are covered with cistus varieties, hillsides with yellow asphodels (*Asphodeline lutea*), *Narcissus poeticus* fill damp alpine meadows, colonies of fritillaries hide on rocky outcrops and rarities include *Ramonda serbica* clustered on the rock face in river gorges ....

We travel through magnificent scenery, with a day at the traditional Vlach village of *Metsovo* on the highest peaks of the Pindhos, to reach *Meteora* where we visit the famous monasteries in breathtaking surroundings.

Our final days are spent at *Delphi*, sacred to Apollo and home of the Oracle, where we explore the ancient sites and walk on the slopes of Mount Parnassus. Contributing to the leisurely nature of this tour, we spend time at four hotels only during our 22 days in Greece. These are all of a very high standard with ensuite accommodation. We'll also enjoy many lunches and dinners at traditional tavernas and fine restaurants.

May is a perfect time to visit this part of Greece, with mild to warm temperatures before summer's heat, witnessing the peak of spring flowering,

particularly in the higher regions.

To register interest, or for further information, please contact:

Caroline Davies Garden Tours  
Tel/fax 03 9827 6944  
in conjunction with Acland Travel  
Agency Licence No.30016



## Association of Friends of Botanic Gardens Inc.

The Friends of the Orange Botanic Gardens Inc. will host the next Association of Friends of Botanic Gardens Conference from 4–6 April 2008. The Conference, *Passion Bears Fruit*, will address several themes – the Value of Volunteering, Event Management, Maintaining a Friends' Group and Sponsorship and Fundraising.

The Orange Botanic Gardens are situated on the northern outskirts of Orange, NSW, on an undulating 17ha site. Officially opened in 1988 for the Australian Bicentenary, the Gardens feature an impressive native and exotic plant collection.

These conferences are always stimulating and very friendly, enjoyable occasions. Don't miss out on an interesting weekend coupled with a visit to a beautiful part of NSW.

For further information please call the Friends' Office 9650 6398 or visit the Association website: [www.friendsbotanicgardens.org](http://www.friendsbotanicgardens.org)



# MISCELLANY

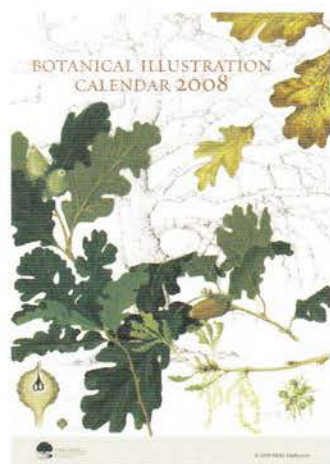
## Unique Christmas Gift Ideas from The Friends

### Gift Membership

Surprise someone this Christmas with a gift that will last all year – a membership subscription to the Friends. Give a relative or a friend access to all the fabulous events and activities put on by the Friends, a beautiful quarterly magazine, exclusive access to the Growing Friends' Nursery and the opportunity to take Botanical Illustration classes at a reduced rate. You'll have the satisfaction of knowing your gift membership also helps to support the Gardens.

A Gift membership form is available from the Friends' office or can be downloaded from our website:

[www.rbgfriendsmelbourne.org](http://www.rbgfriendsmelbourne.org)



2008 Botanical Illustration Calendar

This beautiful calendar is based on the *Oaks Florilegium* – a collection of illustrations of the oaks of the RBG Melbourne, painted by the Friends' Botanical Illustrators Group.

Each month has a unique oak painting complete with details of leaf, flower, seed and growth habit. This would make a very special gift.

Available for \$15 from the Friends' office or by mail order (download order form from our website).



### Christmas Cards

Our beautiful card this year features detail from Marta Salamon's painting of the popular flowering gum *Corymbia ficifolia*.

Priced at \$10 (incl. packing and postage) for a pack of five cards, they are available from the Friends' office, telephone 9650 6398 or download an order form from our website.

Cards from other years are also available from the Friends' office for personal shoppers. Some cards contain the Seasons's Greetings message, and some are blank. All are \$10 for a pack of five cards.

Special orders for printing personal or business details inside cards are available by request (minimum 100 cards). For details and prices, contact the Friends' office on 9650 6398 or email: [friends@frbgmelb.org.au](mailto:friends@frbgmelb.org.au)

### Recipe Books

A small spiral-bound collection of morning and afternoon tea treats provided by our Catering Committee is available for \$8 from the Friends' office.

### Olive Oil

Extra Virgin olive oil (first cold pressing) can be purchased from the Friends' office for \$15 for 250ml or \$20 for 500ml.

### Growing Friends Vouchers

Available in denominations of \$10, \$20 and \$50, these popular vouchers can be purchased from the Growing Friends' Nursery on Fridays between 10.00am-1.00pm. Recipients may use these vouchers either at the Growing Friends' twice-yearly sales, or on Fridays at the Growing Friends' Nursery.

## The Gardens Market

Do something different with your family and friends and visit the Gardens Market at the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne.

Listen to live music, tempt your tastebuds with the many culinary delights on offer and visit over 100 stallholders selling quality gifts in beautiful surroundings.

What a great way to kickstart your weekend!

### Music, Food, Entertainment!

Plants  
Artwork  
Garden Sculptures  
Jewellery

Fresh seasonal produce  
Gourmet food  
Ceramics and Mosaics

### The Gardens Market

at the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne, Birdwood Ave, South Yarra (opposite Shrine of Remembrance)  
9.00am to 2.00pm

Saturday 8 December 2007  
Saturday 12 January 2008  
Saturday 9 February 2008  
Saturday 8 March 2008  
Saturday 12 April 2008  
Saturday 10 May 2008

For more details visit [www.marketsinthegarden.com.au](http://www.marketsinthegarden.com.au)





# ILLUSTRATORS

## Classes

Term 1 will start in the week beginning Monday 4 February. Classes will be held on Tuesday evenings and in the daytime on Mondays, Wednesdays, Saturdays (two sessions each day) and Fridays (one three-hour session)

2.5hr classes: \$255 (incl GST)

Friends \$215 (incl GST)

3hr classes: \$295 (incl GST)

Friends \$255 (incl GST)

For further information on classes contact the Friends' office, 9650 6398.

## Workshops

**ALL CLASSES WILL BE HELD IN THE WHIRLING ROOM STUDIO, OBSERVATORY GATE**

Beginners' Workshop with Dianne Emery

2, 3, 4 and 5 January 2008, 10.00am-4.00pm

Cost: \$290 Friends \$250

This intensive course is an introduction to botanical art via pencil and watercolour. Students will begin to develop skills in outline drawing and foreshortening, tonal work and rendering of surfaces, basic colour work and paint application.

The cost includes drawing materials, paint, watercolour paper and brushes and morning and afternoon tea.

Drawing Workshop with Dianne Emery 8,9,10 and 11 January, 10.00am-4.00pm

Cost: \$275 Friends \$235

This workshop is open to all students and in particular will revisit some of the fundamental skills of outline, tonal work, perspective and composition via graphite and coloured pencils. Morning and afternoon tea will be supplied, but students

will need to apply for a materials list.

Plant Dissection and Microscope Workshop with Mali Moir 14,15 January 2008, 10.00am-4.00pm  
Cost \$170 Friends \$130

Suitable for both beginners and more advanced artists. Basic botany and plant dissection for illustration will be covered. Choose your medium – pen and ink, graphite pencil or watercolour. Students will need to apply for a materials list.

Vellum Workshop 16, 17 January, 10.00am-4.00pm  
Cost: \$170 Friends \$130

A workshop for students experienced in watercolour. Vellum is an animal skin from the leather industry, specially prepared for painting. Its semi-opaque quality gives watercolours a uniquely lustrous and vibrant effect. This course will focus on producing small works using primarily a 'dry brush' technique. Kelmscott vellum from England will be available for purchase at the workshop or you may bring your own. One 6 x 8 inch piece will cost approx \$25. Students will need to apply for a materials list.

Insect Illustration with Kate Nolan 23,24,25 January 2008 10.00am – 3.30pm

Cost: \$ 240 Friends \$180

This course will aim to teach you all you need to know about illustrating insects – from the technical and scientific to the more creative aspects. It will look in particular at insects as part of a botanical artwork. The basic steps will be covered first. Then we will explore black and white and full colour illustrations on various media

specific to these methods, and will touch on modern methods of insect image creation.

Prior illustration experience is helpful but not essential. The cost includes a basic selection of insects as models, but students will need to apply for a materials list.

## Botanical Illustrators Quarterly Meeting

Tuesday 4 December at 11.00am  
RSVP to Friends' office: 9650 6398

We will have a short talk at 11.00am, then share a Christmas lunch to celebrate the year's activities. Please bring a plate of savoury or dessert food to share.

## Whirlybirds

Following our involvement and success in *The Art of Botanical Illustration* Exhibition in November 2006, the Whirlybirds resumed with renewed enthusiasm.

If you are an artist Friend of the RBG, you are most welcome to join our botanical illustration group on Tuesdays. To enquire about joining us please contact Sandra Sanger on 9598 9532 for further information.

## The Art of Botanical Illustration

### POTENTIAL EXHIBITORS

Are you planning for the 2008 exhibition?

Do you have work completed or nearing completion by the beginning of February? Could this work possibly be used for publicity for the exhibition? If so, could you please contact Edyta Hoxley on 9761 9711 or Dianne Emery on 9523 5397 to discuss the possibilities.

## Aboriginal Heritage Walk

The Botanical Illustrators were taken on a very interesting Aboriginal Heritage Walk in the Gardens by Trevor Gallagher on 11 September. We all enjoyed the smoking ceremony and the walk showing us special plants used by the Boonwurring and Woiwurrung people when they lived in this area. All of us came away with a better understanding of earlier times – and we even conjured up some rain during the walk!

Judy Jarman



Trevor Gallagher with illustrators Mary Gregory and Lois Brunt

Photo: Judy Jarman



## Notes From The Gardens

As we wander the paths of the Gardens, humming a Christmas tune or two and contemplating the various avenues available to us to bring joy to the world, considering exactly what proportion of the halls should be decked with boughs of holly this time round, maybe reassuring ye merry gentlemen that there is nothing about which they should be overly dismayed, it's hardly surprising that we start to see our surroundings through Yuletide-coloured spectacles.

It was during one of these periods of festive-season-induced reverie that a link between two previously disparate items became apparent. Let me pose a question: what does the Bird of Paradise (*Strelitzia reginae*) have in common with the custom of decorating Christmas trees? If you know the answer, then you're too clever for your own good.

To explain the link, we need to step back a few hundred years, to find out where the whole decorated coniferous tree custom originated. My reliable sources tell me that it is possible that the habit began perhaps among the pagan traditions in ancient Europe (or perhaps not, who can tell), but at the least the first recorded instances of decorating small conifers was in 16th Century Germany, where a fir was decorated with apples, nuts, dates, pretzels, and paper flowers and was erected in the Guild-house for the benefit of the members' children. At around the same time, the townsfolk of Basel

carried around a tree decorated with apples and cheese.

The trees were not always strictly linked to Christmas itself, but perhaps the coming of a new year. If you visit the town of Riga in Latvia, you will reportedly find an octagonal plaque in the town's square that reads 'The first New Year's Tree in Riga in 1510'. Who knows who was first, but it would appear that for a few

followed suit with the first such tree in France in 1840.

"Well, that's mildly diverting", I can hear you say, "but for goodness' sake get to the point." Well – here it is: the first Christmas tree introduced to Britain is recorded as being the work of the wife of King George III, Queen Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz. She had arrived in Britain in 1761, and married George later that year.



hundred years, conifers were decorated around the Christmas season, with various things, for varying periods of time. By the early 18th Century decorated Christmas trees were by all accounts widespread in the upper Rhineland, and thereafter became popular among the nobility and royalty of several European countries. Princess Henrietta von Nassau-Weilburg is noted as introducing the first Christmas tree to Vienna in 1816, and the Duchess of Orleans

In her spare time when not decorating the royal Christmas tree, she also managed to have 15 children (13 surviving to adulthood), and sadly endured the madness of her husband, which by all reports led to erratic behaviour and violent episodes. His mental illness is now believed to be porphyria, but I wouldn't rule out the cause being that he just might not have enjoyed having a tree appear in his vestibule on a regular basis. Family tensions can arise, so I observe.

Queen Charlotte was a supporter of the arts, and also an avid amateur botanist – playing a key role in the establishment of the botanic gardens at Kew. Hence she was honoured by the naming of the whole genus of Bird of Paradise flowers – that most exotic and glamorous of plants, *Strelitzia*.

Various places around the world are also named for her – all the many towns and counties in the south-east of the USA (Charlotte, Charlottesville, Charlottetown, Port Charlotte etc.), Charlotte-town in Canada, and even Charlotte Place in Sydney, Australia, to name only a few.

The classic Christmas trees are generally evergreen conifers. Firs (*Abies spp.*) have usually been the preferred choice in the northern hemisphere, though others such as Cypresses, Sequoias and Junipers have stepped up from time to time. Spruces are usually avoided, as they start to drop their leaves soon after being brought indoors.

Some of the Christmas traditions were (and are) just downright risky. My wife Anita's Austrian grandmother apparently used to decorate a pine or other tree indoors with many candles, which were lit and burned through the evenings! So far as I'm aware, the house never burned down! Can you imagine anyone in modern Victoria being allowed to do this? I suspect that the Government would launch an entire public education campaign to ensure that no-one strayed down this foolish path. Penalties would be introduced for recalcitrant candle-lighters – fines, jail terms, or both.

As an aside: I note that the fine row of *Cryptomeria japonica* at the Hamer Arboretum near Olinda was specifically planted for its resistance to fire, to provide a protective barrier to the local dwellings from advancing fires.



On one visit I tried to light a small piece of *Cryptomeria* (a small sample pruned from the tree, of course), and it just wouldn't burn! Maybe this would be the tree of choice if you were still seeking the traditional Austrian live candle spectacular.

There are some classic examples of other 'Christmas tree' styled offerings around the Gardens. One of my favourites is the very symmetrical Dawn Redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*) on the Eastern Lawn. It is deciduous, but presents its full livery of fine feathery leaves throughout our summer. I don't think I'd care to climb to the top to place an angel or star, though. It's way too high up for me.

A number of *Araucaria* species, such as the Norfolk Island Pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*) are ideally suited to the Christmas tree role. Their shape and structure are perfect for the decorative function. I can't ever imagine cutting one to use for this purpose, but a living tree in a pot would be perfect. So too would be a living specimen of the New Zealand Christmas Tree (*Pohutukawa*). These are in full bright red bloom right through the middle of summer, and so at Christmas time.

But of course the most commonly chosen Christmas tree here in Victoria is the humble Monterey Pine (*Pinus radiata*). Here is another link with the Gardens in Melbourne – Ferdinand Mueller played a key role in the introduction of this species to Australia, and in promoting it for its silvicultural qualities. During the mid 1800s

it went by the name *Pinus insignis*, and was available through nurseries from 1857.

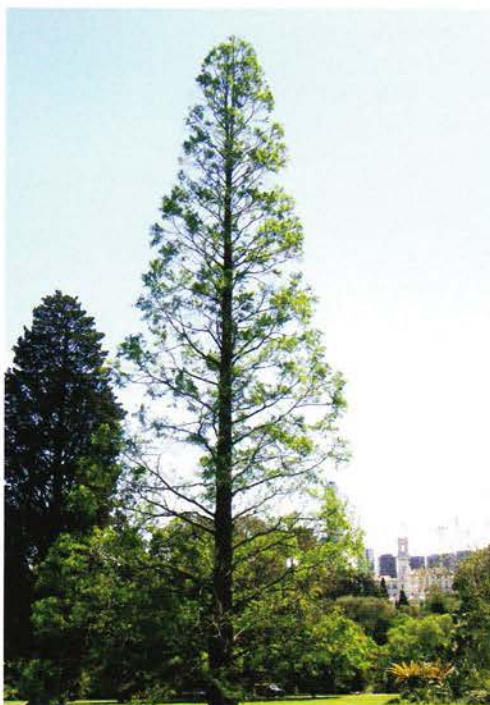
A number of old pines around Victoria in public gardens and other reserves are possibly linked to Mueller's acclimatisation zeal.

As far as Christmas trees go, these pines are not too bad – they have reasonable structure, they support decorative ornaments, and they are fast growing. A cut tree will almost last for the Christmas season (the exact period varies according to where you live and the particular views to which you subscribe), which in the height of an Australian summer is no mean feat. I have noticed a trend in recent years for tree growers to trim the developing trees to a more

regular conical shape. This results in a lot of soft shoot growth, which is the first to wilt when the shock of moving from the paddock to the living room sets in. Wilting shoots can mean shedding ornaments (sometimes assisted through the agency of a cat or two) which can be undesirable if the ornaments happen to be traditional glass orbs which smash on a timber floor.

The Monterey Pine is now grown by the billion across

south-eastern Australia and is one of the main staples of our softwood industry. Sadly it is also known for its habit of wishing to extend its territories into bushland near the plantations. Seedlings readily invade these environments, and for this reason, at home we have recently selected and harvested our Christmas trees from local bushland – which can give one a very satisfactory



failures was a small *Ficus* of some sort, which with its smooth branches effectively shed almost the entire complement of fragile ornamentation. I think that in the end we reverted to the ever-reliable *P. radiata*.

Of course, one's fancy might turn to one of the artificial fabrications – there are many plastic varieties that are accompanied by all manner of claims about their convenience and practicality. Since when has Christmas been about convenience and practicality? I think if you're going to follow this path, then the least you can do is revert to the original artificial tree, which was apparently made from green-dyed goose feathers, wound onto sticks. Now there's convenience and practicality! I presume the feathers were removed from the geese before they were dyed?

Richard Barley

*Strelitzia reginae* (facing page): Our link to Queen Charlotte and the Christmas Tree tradition.  
*Metasequoia glyptostroboides* (left): The classic Christmas tree shape  
Photos: Richard Barley

tree (sometimes not quite so regular but definitely with character), and also a warm inner glow arising from knowing that there is one less weedy tree in the local reserve.

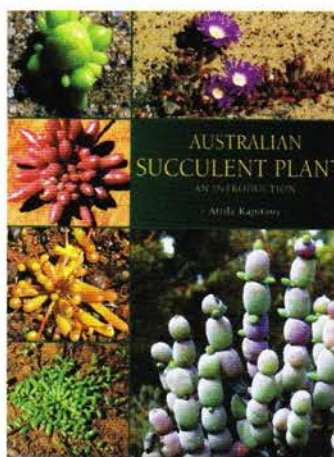
In my youth my family used to be in the caravan during the Christmas holiday season, often somewhere along the south coast of New South Wales. We would employ various caravan-sized plants as Christmas trees, and some were OK, some weren't. One of the classic

## Letters to the Editor

We plan to include your thoughts in 2008 issues of *Botanic News*, giving you an opportunity to voice your opinions, enjoyment of your membership of the Friends and your constructive suggestions to help further our organisation.

Emailed or written contributions should be addressed to The Editor, *Botanic News*, at Gate Lodge (see back page for address).





Australian Succulent Plants  
Kapitany Concepts, 2007  
RRP \$79.95

This is Attila Kapitany's eighth book about succulents – the others were co-written with Rudolf Schultz. He is passionate about rare and unusual plants and is currently President of the Cactus and Succulent Society of Australia.

This book is basically a pictorial introduction to the beauty and diversity of Australian succulent plants. At least 400 of the 20,000 species that make up the Australian flora are considered to have a notable degree of succulence. Here he provides a useful identification guide for almost 100 species from 40 genera. Each plant has a short description, in generally non-technical terms, and clear and very beautiful photographs (many taken by Michele Kapitany) showing the plant's interesting features and how it grows in its native habitat.

The plants vary from tiny ground covers (such as *Calandrinia pumila*) to large trees (such as *Brachychiton australis*) and orchids (*Dendrobium speciosum*).

They vary in looks from quite beautiful to quite bizarre. The range and variety are eye-opening. Many of them are among the most drought or dry tolerant of all plants, though some are not always obviously succulent.

The book appears to be very well researched and referenced. There are additional notes providing a background on this group and associated plants, as well as cultivation, conservation and other items of interest.

Attila Kapitany claims that his ambition is to "research and promote the greater appreciation and awareness of Australian native plants, especially those that are considered succulent" and with this book he shows that he is on the way to realising it.

Terri Kay

## Other Christmas Reading

*The Education of a Gardener* by Russell Page. We were unable to obtain a review copy of this work in time for this issue, but hope the following information will be of use. The book is available in paperback as a reprint from Brunswick Bookstore at \$37.95.

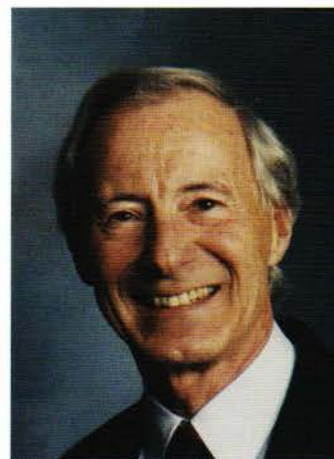
Notification of a new book, *Plant Names: A Guide to Botanical Nomenclature* by Roger Spencer, Rob Cross and Peter Lumley published by CSIRO, rrp \$39.95, has arrived too late for review in this issue.

At the local library there are two historical novels about the Tradescant family. The author is Philippa Gregory and the books are *Earthly Joy* and *Virgin Earth*.

Beth Higgs – Our Founding Chairperson from 1982-1983 who was subsequently referred to as The Immediate Past President. Beth had an innate understanding of the possible, and calmly and graciously managed to harness the sometimes boundless enthusiasm of the steering committee into a successful enterprise. See pages 14 and 15 of Winter 2007 *Botanic News* for more details of Beth's involvement.



Frank Phillips – President from 1983-1989. Frank was a businessman and member of the steering committee. He had a strong interest in the Gardens. Beth says Frank was very approachable as a President and contributed enormously to a very young association. His business contacts enriched the Friends and their work in many ways. Frank has been a Trustee of the Friends of the Royal Botanic Gardens Trust Fund since 1992.



David Wilkinson – President from 1989-1992. David is an architect and it was his design of the Friends' original logo which was adopted. David has a deep interest in gardens, opening his own in the Open Gardens Scheme. His sphere of influence spread into the Arts and social areas, to a younger group, which was just what was needed at the time. David gave his time willingly, generously and with great charm.





# MEMORIES

Sir Rupert Hamer – President from 1992-1996. A former Premier of Victoria, Sir Rupert placed great emphasis and value on the volunteer nature of the Friends. On his election he said “..these gardens..are without question one of Melbourne’s proudest show-places.” Despite time spent on numerous committees, he was very considerate and appreciative of the office staff. Sir Rupert, a keen gardener, appeared several times on the ABC Gardening Show talking about his vegetable patch.



Irwin Newman – President from 2002-2006. Irwin, an electrical engineer with considerable senior corporate experience (he was the Manager of Special Duties for the joint consortium responsible for the fitout of the Channel Tunnel) brought to his presidential role a vast amount of expertise. His attributes, when teamed with an ability to quickly identify the core of any particular issue, enabled him to make a substantial contribution to the Friends’ affairs.



John Harper – President from 1996-1998. John was a widely-respected University economist and a major contributor to the important Henderson *Enquiry on Poverty*. He was a quiet and sincere advocate for the Friends, particularly the shop and the Growing Friends. During his Presidency he chaired the seventh Annual Conference of the Association of Friends of Botanic Gardens (Vic). Sadly, he died while in office and is remembered with affection and gratitude.



Janet Thomson – Current President from 2006, Janet has the distinction of serving during the Friends’ 25th Anniversary Year. Previously Vice-President and a Council Member since 1996, Janet is a tireless volunteer worker for the Friends. She represents us on the committee of the Association of Friends of Botanic Gardens, and as a Voluntary Guide provides an important link between these organisations.



Sir Ninian Stephen – President from 1998-2002. Sir Ninian’s distinguished law career culminated in his appointment as a Justice of the High Court of Australia. He also served as Governor-General of Australia from 1982-89 with great distinction and became Australia’s first Ambassador for the Environment in 1989. Sir Ninian presided over Council meetings and many Friends’ functions with skill and a wonderful sense of humour.



Lawrence Cohn – Secretary from 1982-2002. If it weren’t for Lawrence our organisation would not be in the strong position it is today. Not only were his actuarial skills required for establishing our legal foundations, but also his reliability in preparing all documentation for both monthly Council meetings and the Annual General Meeting. So well did he work as our Secretary for 20 years, that six Presidents found their duties a pleasure.





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100 Birdwood Ave, Melbourne 3004



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ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS  
MELBOURNE INC.

# BOTANIC NEWS

BOTANIC NEWS is produced quarterly for Friends of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne Inc. which was formed to stimulate further interest in the Gardens and the National Herbarium and to support and assist them whenever possible.

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