

Banksia Bytes

Native Plants Sunshine Coast

www.npqsuncoast.org



Native Plants Queensland



Newsletter

July 2020 Number 23

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From the Editor

It is a long time since we met. I hope you and your loved ones are all staying Covid free. While we were in lockdown the insect world was very actively enjoying our native plants. The butterflies were wonderful. One butterfly decided to join us on the inside looking out! Of course butterflies have a larval phase which gardeners don't always appreciate and Anne describes a couple of very interesting characters. Joan is doing timed maintenance on her 'habitat' garden and recommends planting grass trees along with some lovely bark trees, Chrissie has some delightful ideas on ways to encourage children to enjoy the wonders of the natural world, and Spencer suggests planting the very pretty velvet leaf bush.



Keep gardening

Wendy

Don't Panic, Keep Planting

From our President Spencer Shaw

As the Covid 19 lockdown restrictions ease and life returns to some degree of normality (for now), I'm heartened that many of us turned to our gardens for emotional and physical sustenance in these trying times. For me, backyards and gardens are our own little bit of the natural world that we can grow our own food in; share with the local wildlife; preserve endangered species; enjoy the beauty of Australian native plants. As a bonus, gardening is good for us physically, mentally and spiritually.



In this time of great adversity for the health and wealth of people, it's heartening to see a few positive outcomes, including a strengthening of our local communities (while keeping a respectful distance, of course) and a resurgent interest in self and shared reliance when it comes to growing food and gardening and growing plants in general. Vegetable seedlings for a while there were almost worth their weight in gold (I wish) or at least their weight in toilet paper (apparently the second most valuable commodity after gold in a global pandemic?). Gardens have never looked so good, as the home isolation brings us back into contact with that lovely bit of earth that we call home and we all should be treating like our own precious little bit of Eden...literally!

For now, Native Plant Sunshine Coast activities are still on hold, but your committee is currently reviewing this as restrictions ease and with reference to the Covid 19 guidelines recently produced by NPQ, so stay tuned. Even if we can't all walk together, with this cool weather it's a great time for bush walks. Karen and I recently reacquainted ourselves with Ben Bennett Park at Caloundra, a stunning and diverse remnant forest with plenty of flowers and fruit to see at the moment. In closing, thanks to Wendy for producing this newsletter and putting such a great read together for us.



From the Friends of Ben Bennett Park:

We have an informal group in Caloundra called Friends of Ben Bennett (as in the bushland park). It formed in 2010 and they used to weed and clean up rubbish for about 5 years but now it's just on Clean Up Australia Day. We also do wildflower walks for council there in August. A couple of years ago we started meeting again, one reason being to have a voice in council/state govt plans to put a road through the southern corner of the park and RSL memorial garden. On behalf of the group I've recently started a FB group called Friends of Ben Bennett as a way to share and record flora and fauna of the park. I was wondering if you could



mention it in the Native Plants Sunshine Coast newsletter or on the facebook page as there may be members of NPSC who are fond of BB park and might like to share their images and see what others are posting.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/friendsofbenbennett>

What did you do during the lockdown for COVID-19?

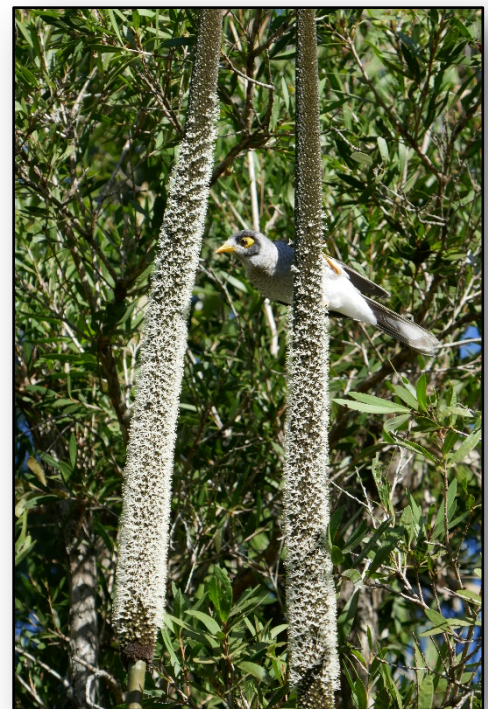
A lot of us gardened. We created a huge weed pile here that is reducing nicely. Our local male scrub turkey hasn't staked it out yet but I'm preparing for the battle this year. I have created a 'covid garden' and am working on 2 'covid water pots'. The covid garden is going fine but the water pots are a bit of an experiment. I quite like the lockdown as it gives me time to enjoy and discover the garden's good and not-so-good attributes, explore new ideas and dream of what might be.

Others have walked and cycled, getting to know their districts. Dan has been exploring a couple of Council areas nearby and finding some nice ferns.

Still others have been out with their cameras, photographing some of the local flora and fauna.



Banksia spinulosa var. *collina*



Xanthorrhoea latifolia



Blue tiger butterflies on a *Melaleuca* sp.

Maintenance in the time of COVID-19

By Joan Dillon

Many years ago, respected South American author Gabriel Garcia Marquez wrote the novel 'Love in the Time of Cholera' so I thought I might commence my career in creative writing with 'Maintenance in the Time of COVID-19'. It is of course related to garden maintenance but being active also relates to health, so that's useful.

What follows is a short introduction and if any of you would like to contribute a chapter of your own, you are more than welcome.

Most gardeners would recognise that tasks that are supposed to take 30 minutes do in fact take several hours and often the entire day. This has been a regular experience during COVID-19 isolation and has resulted in some interesting observations. A "habitat" garden, in other words one I avoid maintaining, has for years been a satisfactory jungle of Lomandra, a grass tree, scrambling *Austromyrtus dulcis*, some Crinum lilies, a few trees and sundry other plants.

Finally, it really did need some "minor" cleaning up along the edge of a path. Anyone with lomandra will know that the removal of large specimens requires a crowbar. This was avoided but in the process of removing smaller self-sown clumps serious competition was noted between the lomandra and several self-sown *Xanthorrhoea fulva*. Grass trees are remarkably competitive! Obviously, the *Xanthorrhoea* was preferred and 4 very full barrow-loads of very old foliage plus excess lomandra plants were removed to the mulch pile. The job was mostly done on hands and knees and did take several hours.

However, I definitely recommend grass trees for the garden. they are hardy, the birds love the flowers, they require virtually no attention and do self-seed. Some soil moisture is beneficial but the 6 plants I now have in that area are never watered. I haven't yet tried transplanting but probably will when the next crop of seedlings appears.

Xanthorrhoea fulva and *Xanthorrhoea glauca* have been the best performers. The latter hasn't yet sent up a flower spike, but the blue-green foliage is striking. It needs space but as a feature plant it's well worth growing and is not slow.

The above took the scheduled 30 minutes.



Xanthorrhoea fulva



Scarlet honeyeater on *X. fulva*

Keeping Young People Connected to Nature

by Chrissie McMaster

As a grandmother who wants to stay connected to the interstate, city-based grandchildren, I use nature to expand part of that connection. It began a few years ago when a seven year old asked for help to grow tomatoes in her backyard, and it has now become a way to keep them all interested in what's 'out there' in nature, so important for city-dwelling youngsters who can be quite divorced from our natural environment.



Perhaps you also have in your life young people who are missing out on a strong connection with nature. Many of you will already be doing nature-based activities with them. If not, you might consider how you can strengthen their interest by directing their innate curiosity towards the environment. It's my belief, and perhaps yours, that when children learn to notice and appreciate nature, they will cherish natural areas as adults, an essential value for society's balanced decision-making in the future.

To encourage my grandies to see, hear, feel, live the beauty of nature, I create activities and information for them, sharing these by Zoom, email, phone photos and text messages and by, wonder of wonders, a letter or parcel in the letterbox, a total novelty for small people.

Each article is tailored to the individual's interests; scorpions and centipedes for one adventurer, recordings of currawongs imitating other birds for one with a wicked sense of humour, the many forms of leaf-arrangements for a pattern-lover. My intention is to pique their inquisitiveness to get their attention onto nature.

'Miracles' feature frequently in my sharing; the miracle of a snake shedding its skin, the miracle of a frog living in the vegie garden bok choy, the miracle of a tree covered from top to base with pink leaves, the miracle of a Black Bean seed that exactly fits only one spot in one particular casing.

Along the way, I throw in diverse information to broaden their understanding; common and scientific names and their origins, life cycles, the relevance of seasons, indigenous names, soil types and

composition, human nutrition from plants, cloud variations, the role of geological formations, and anything else that might give the young ones a sense of wonder and a glimpse of the inter-relatedness of nature, our community and our wider world.



Litoria gracilentia
Graceful Tree Frog



Castanospermum australe
Black Bean

There are great resources online to help. Video clips such as 'How to draw a...(centipede, kookaburra, wombat)', plant identification online keys, nature poetry, recordings of bird and frog calls, photographic and

drawn images, nature storytelling clips, puzzles, in fact anything relevant to the topic are included as links.

Phone snaps of unusual aspects of living things are useful. A simple close-up of butterfly wings, a 'pink' tree, a strangler fig strangling, a colony of ground-dwelling spiders, the patterns formed by leaves in whorls... all introduce life 'out there' to city young people.

I'm very grateful that some of the youngsters' teachers have listened when a grandy has taken their information for 'news', then followed the theme, developed it and encouraged interest throughout the entire class.

Showing my grandchildren a perspective that's different from their familiar city life might influence their lives slightly to develop an interest, a curiosity about nature. If it doesn't, well, we've all had fun and enjoyed another connection along the way.



Message from Council: "With COVID-19 restrictions easing I am confident we can safely run a Wildflower Festival this year, **Saturday 15 - Sunday 30 August 2020**"



The Story of a humble Snake Vine *Stephania japonica*

By Anne Windsor

Part 2



Stephania japonica Snake Vine

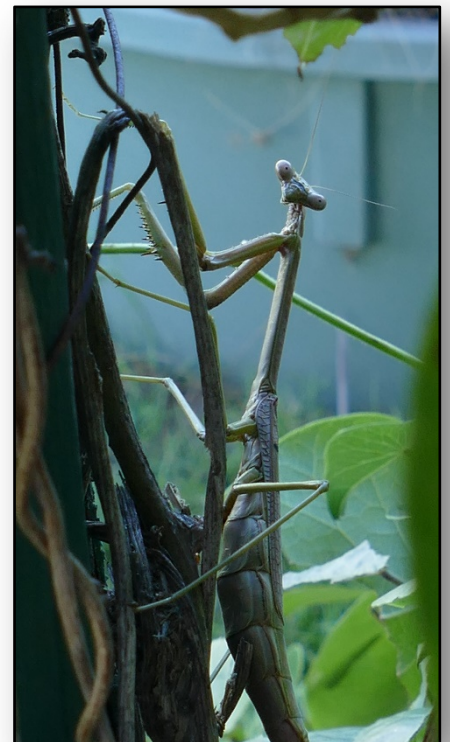
Before insect attack



Stephania japonica Snake Vine

After insect attack

Since then, the owner of the egg case has revealed herself to be a Large Brown Mantid (definitely not the most exciting common name) *Archimantis latistyla*. The Fruit-piercing Moth caterpillars have been feasting, and there is hardly one intact leaf left. This is awkward, because now they need the vine foliage to construct their 'pupal shelters'.



Archimantis latistyla

There are already several of these on the vine, and to my surprise, no two shelters are alike. There are some shelters which are almost completely closed (for the very private pupae) and others that are much more open (for the pupae casual about their pupal accommodation). As for the pupa itself, a large, black jellybean would be a fair description. Onward to the final stage of metamorphosis, and well-earned rest and recovery for my not-so-humble Snake Vine!



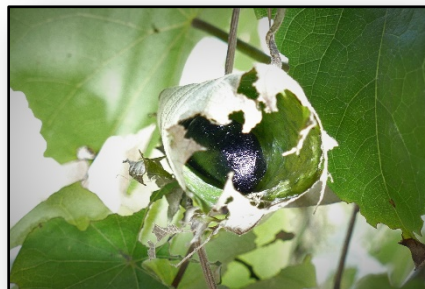
'Private' pupal shelter 1



'Private' pupal shelter 2



'Relaxed' pupal shelter



Pupa

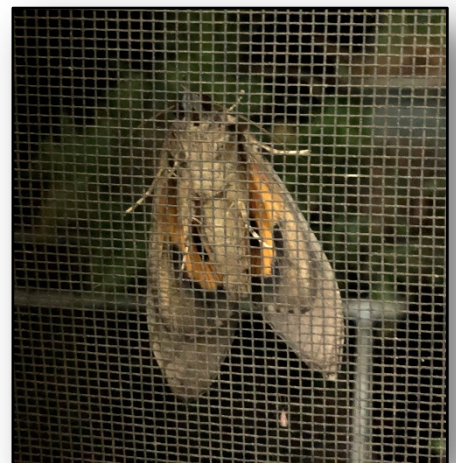
Part 3



Eudocema fullonia

The adult has emerged.

Post Script: Since discovering the Fruit-piercing Moth caterpillars on my Snake Vine, all the reading I have done about them says only how much damage the adult moths cause to orchard crops, and how to kill them. I have been unable to find anything that mentions what their food choices and ecological role here would have been long before there were orchard crops to feed on...



Underside of moth

Editor's Note: If anyone knows anything about the moth's ecological role could they please let Anne know.

Bark and Other Bits

By Joan Dillon

Bark is often the unsung hero of our gardens, revegetation and even street trees. It is often beautiful, varied in texture, defines some species, and is wonderful habitat for insects plus support for lichens, ferns and occasionally orchids. Melaleucas are recognised as “paperbarks” and eucalyptus species are grouped according to whether they are half-barks, stringy barks, smooth barks, bloodwoods and so on.

Hunchy is largely eucalyptus free but a pleasant extended stroll revealed an incredible diversity of bark, textured rotting logs and other “bits”. Some trees favoured an amazing array of lichens, others with cosy spore niches supported aspleniums or staghorn ferns or, at least when they were young, had really beautiful peeling bark suitable for bark “paintings”. The majority hid small insects and spiders, a source of food for many birds. Old logs had habitat hollows, grew fungi or just looked sculptural. Old logs are an asset.

Some species are recognisable just by their bark, useful when the canopy is largely out of sight. The images are a selection demonstrating bark diversity from the smooth green trunk of a young *Brachychiton diversifolius* (grey when it's older), the layered bark of a *Melaleuca viridiflora*, peeling bark on *Leptospermum leuhmannii*, lichens and green tracery found on the smooth trunks of many rainforest trees and the very recognisable bark of *Banksia aemula*, plus a ‘bit’ titled “In Conversation”.



Brachychiton acerifolius



Melaleuca viridiflora



Leptospermum leuhmannii



Lichens and green tracery



Banksia aemula



In Conversation

Plant Profile: *Callicarpa pedunculata*

Family: Verbenaceae

Velvet Leaf

By Spencer Shaw

The Velvet Leaf is a fast-growing local rainforest edge plant that has suffered at the hands (or is that the leaves) of its introduced cousin Lantana and native vegetation clearance. Lantana is the dominating shrub/vine in what is left of our rainforest edges and has displaced many species including *C. pedunculata*.



Although mostly a sparse and straggly shrub in its natural habitat, *C. pedunculata* is another one of those hidden treasures that once planted in our garden and treated to ample sunlight, nutrients and moisture it thrives and can make a beautiful bushy specimen. The leaves are velvety to the touch, in full sun it will become a shrub around the two metre mark and very dense, in part shade it will be an open shrub that may ramble amongst its neighbours. The flowers are small and pink, but appear in clusters and can be very showy in a sunnier situation. The fruit are small purple berries, also in clusters, and can look great against the velvety foliage. Do yourself a favour, your garden just isn't complete without one!

The Junk Bug

By Anne Windsor

Along with the Fruit-piercing Moth, I discovered another fascinating creature after the January rain event. I had put a houseplant outside to get some sun (non-native, *Portulaca* cultivar) and I was removing spent flowers from it when I noticed movement. Weirdly, it appeared that one of the shrivelled flower remains had moved, and yes, it moved again. What was going on? There was no wind, so that was not the explanation, yet here in front of me was a clump of spent flowers moving across the plant. It made no sense. A hand lens and Google helped solve the mystery. This was not a clump of plant material, but a most extraordinary tiny creature, a murderous beastie that disguises itself not only with plant material but with the corpses of its prey. It was a Junk Bug (or Aphid Lion), larva of the Green Lacewing (Family Chrysopidae).



It is almost impossible to see the larva underneath its incredible corpse camouflage.

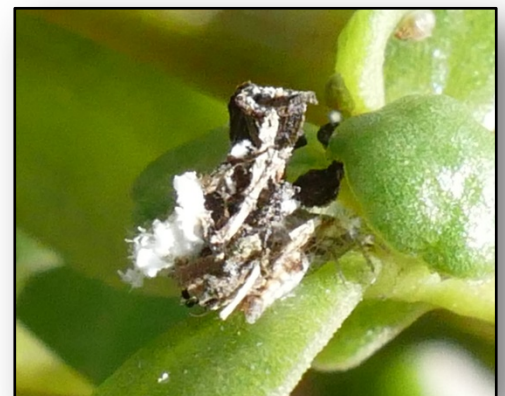
What I have learned is that the small larva (2-8 mm) is covered with ridiculously long spines which it uses to hold the bodies of its prey. The spines are visible in this photo.



It is armed with enormous, hollow, pincer jaws, which it uses to place the corpses.

First it uses these jaws to suck the juices from its prey, and then it hoists their lifeless bodies aloft to adorn itself. This creates a thick protective barrier against predators - which should be running fast in the opposite direction anyway! The side view shows the height of this one's adornment.

As one of its common names suggests, this larva preys on aphids and mealy bugs, and is so voracious it is often used as a biological control for these pests.



It is an amazing creature that I had the joy of observing for several days, before it disappeared to pupate and become another generation of Green Lacewing.



‘Australian Rainforest Seeds. A Guide to Collecting, Processing, and Propagation’ by Mark Dunphy, Steve McAlpin, Paul Nelson and Michelle Chapman, with photos by Hugh Nicholson.

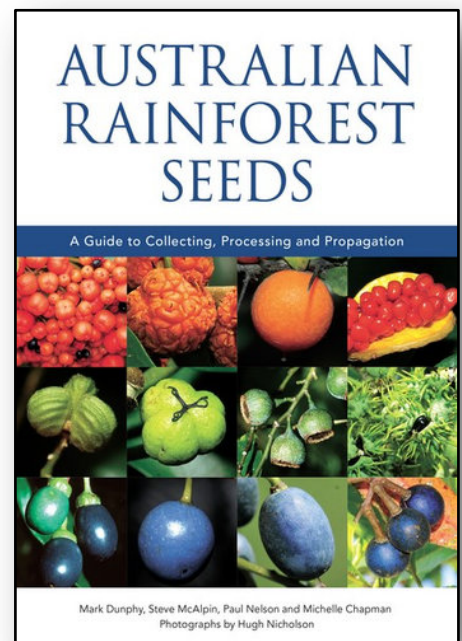
Published by CSIRO Publishing, 216 pages

ISBN 978-1-4863-11507

Recommended retail price \$49.99

This book was given high recommendation by both Glenn Leiper and Peter Storer in the June addition of Native Plants Queensland. To quote Glenn

“I think it will be one of those indispensable books that will be heavily worn, grubby fingerprints everywhere, dog ears and notes scribbled throughout the pages by each owner, a clear indication of a much used and valued book.”



Interview with Marie Livingstone

How old is the garden?

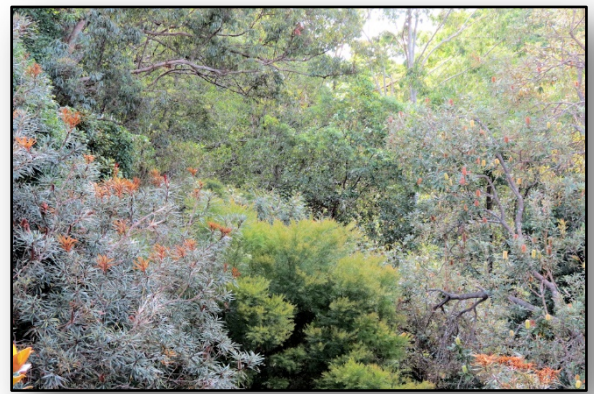


The garden is almost 20 years old but the surrounding bush would be at least 50 to 60 years old.

The site was a blank slate with a steep slope at the front of the house.

Why did you choose native plants?

I am a lazy gardener on tank water so: low maintenance and drought tolerance were key issues. Given the above requirements, native plants seem like the best solution and unlikely to spread weeds to the rest of the property. The plants had to create a micro-climate around the house.



Where the garden meets the bush

What plants worked well in your garden?

Surprisingly, the hardiest plants are the rainforest species. They require no maintenance except for a prune. They are long-lived and their foliage is usually dense and beautiful. Banksias are also hardy and their spectacular flowers and colourful foliage are hard to go past. There is no place for “sooky” plants in this garden.



Banksia aemula thrives in tough conditions

What wildlife have you noticed enjoying your plantings?

The wildlife has increased year after year as the plants provided shelter and food. Because the garden flows into natural bushland, we get a great variety of birds with none of the nuisances like the Noisy Miner. The whip birds seem to really enjoy all the ground litter. Echidnas, bandicoots, frogs, lizards, beetles all love the rather messy garden.



Birds, bees and butterflies love the *Banksia oblongifolia*



Echnidas shred the log garden edges

What one piece of advice would you like to share about growing a native garden?

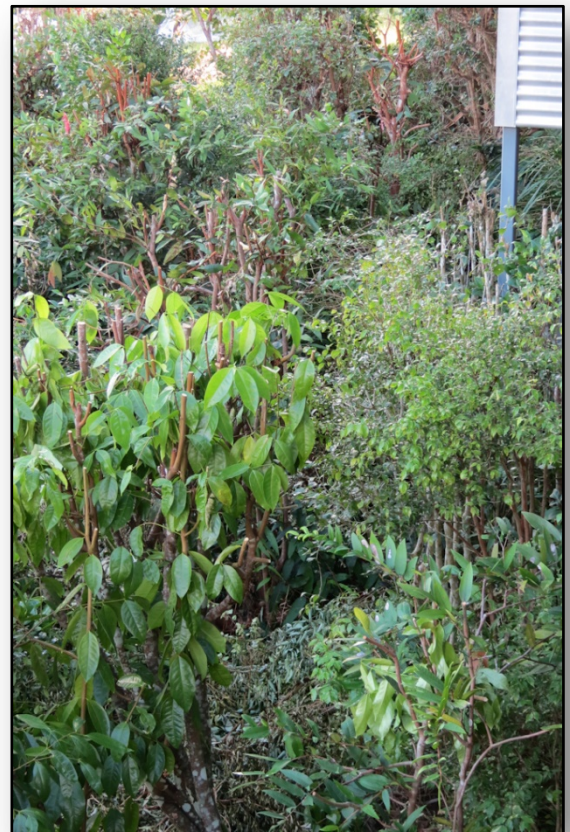
Do your homework on what will work in your situation, buy mostly tube stock so you take any losses in your stride, know when to quit on a plant you just love but is not thriving, prune the plants while they are small, mulch, mulch and mulch. Well, it is one sentence!

What are the future plans for the garden?

The garden is over-planted so some culling is on the agenda.



Thermal control from the plants



Thermal control winter cut back

Here are a few selected paragraphs extracted from Research Matters, the Newsletter of the Australian Flora Foundation No. 31, January 2020, on the subject 'The Joy of Plants'. I found them interesting and relevant.

Extracts from **The Joy of Plants**

Assoc. Prof. Rosanne Quinnell

School of Life and Environmental Sciences, University of Sydney, NSW

There is no doubt that phototrophs support all life on our planet, and this makes the care of our botanical environment critical for the survival of animal life. Plants, and other photosynthetic oxygenic organisms sequester carbon from the atmosphere. But they cannot keep up with the amounts of carbon dioxide for which we humans are responsible. Carbon emissions are able to cross international borders so this is collective 'we'.

Our Great Southern Continent is unique and our plants and animals have adapted ways to survive here. These adaptations are being put to the ultimate test as fires increase in intensity and frequency and there is emerging evidence that tree survival is diminishing because of this (Fairman *et al.* 2019). The recent fires that have raged across millions of hectares have resulted in what ecologists would call a 'natural experiment', offering opportunities to assess diversity of biota of the scorched earth, to count the survival rates of vertebrates, and diversity of pollinators visiting the plants as they regenerate in comparison to unburnt areas. As a plant scientist, I found the focus on animals (mainly koalas) to be strange. With the notable exception of the Wollemi Pine, it was as if the trees, the things that were burning, were invisible. This invisibility of plants is referred to in the scholarly literature as 'plant blindness' (Wandersee and Schussler 1999), the antidote to which is 'botanical literacy' (e.g. Mathes 1983).



But beyond our very existence being contingent on plants (calories, nutrients, oxygen, medicine, shelter) our emotional and cultural wellness is connected with plants. In our celebrations we include plants, roses on Valentine's day, the bride's bouquet, chrysanthemums on Mothers' day. And plants are integral to our commemorations – lilies for death, rosemary for remembrance, trees planted as memory waypoints. More explicitly, the Australian War Memorial offers an opportunity to purchase one of progeny of Gallipoli's Lone Pine; sunflower seeds from the field in the Ukraine where MH17 was shot down were sent back to Australia to respectfully commemorate those who were not able to come home. There are many more examples. I find it acutely interesting that plants, particularly their flowers, offer us ways to express what our words cannot. Gently and with beauty.

