

AUSTRALIAN CORNER

DO YOU HAVE 'LEUCADENDROIDES'?

Cathy Powers

You may well have the plants but not by that genus name. Leucadendroides was the first name proposed for the genus which we now all know as Grevillea. It doesn't roll off the tongue quite the same does it?

The Australian Plants Society (APS) Victoria has a major event occurring in August 2010 and the theme will be "Grevilleas - cultivars, hybrids and new species". You may not have them in your own garden but I will bet that you know a plant or two.

This diverse genus provides every gardener with an opportunity to include at least one Grevillea in their garden plant selection. These plants range from prostrate (ground-hugging) to large trees. They can be grown in pots, tubs or rockeries. They can create a screen, windbreak or hedge. They can even be grown as a standard to display some of the more hidden flowers.

Grevilleas have a well founded reputation for easy hybridization. Unless you are a serious collector, care should be taken to choose plants with a reputation for success and those best suited to your requirements. Many cultivars have features that are the best of both parents and warrant a home in your garden.

Grevilleas provide you with foliage of various sizes, shapes and colours. The leaves can be soft, prickly, bright green, grey and just about anywhere in between. If you think their foliage is diverse, try looking at the many types of inflorescence (a non-specific term for an aggregation of flowers). They range from white, green, yellow, orange, pink and red. I have yet to see a 'blue' Grevillea flower but give the nursery industry time. This might happen sometime in the future. The flowers can be tiny or large, hidden or conspicuous. Some have the most delicious perfume (even smelling like vanilla). Most of those with a scent are in the white to cream colour range.

After you have made your selection, keep in mind that Grevilleas like free draining soil. If you don't have this, you can improve the spot for your new Grevillea by raising the garden bed or mounding the area. Most Grevilleas are intolerant of alkaline soils and rarely require added fertilizers.

Watering is always necessary to get the plant established. The old wives' tale about not needing to water Australian native plants is just that. All living things need some moisture to survive and if your plant is in a container, not giving it water is a sure way to create an addition to your compost heap.

Full sun is optimal for getting the best out of most Grevilleas. Often if they are shaded, the number and beauty of the flowers declines. Some will, however, require protection from the hot afternoon sun.

There are relatively few pests or diseases that impact on Grevilleas and probably the most annoying would be the Grevillea Looper, which is a smooth-skinned caterpillar. If you keep an eye on the plant, you can usually keep this pest under control with manual removing and squishing. A few other pests can be found, like in most gardens but one thing that helps fight the numbers are the birds. Unless you have an outdoor cat, birds will find their way to your Grevillea for insects, nectar and safety (especially if the foliage is prickly).

Except for the large tree species, most Grevilleas respond favourably to a regular prune. You can extend the life of your plant, as well as the aesthetic appeal, by giving it a re-shape for the first year or two. From then on, it is just a matter of choice. It is pretty much the same as with roses. Roses can get downright ugly if left to themselves; so can Grevilleas. If you want to learn more, there are many published books that will assist you – not least of which is the series titled *The Grevillea Book* by Peter Olde and Neil Marriott. Part 4 is about to be released soon.

Cathy is a Vice President of the Australian Plants Society - Victoria. Her main interest is in Australian terrestrial orchid photography but she is also fascinated by Australian plants generally. She is co-editor of the 'Resource Kit for Home Gardens in Victoria'. She can be contacted on: banjarah@hotmail.net.au or koolah@hotmail.net.au

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Grevilleas make wonderful garden plants

Photos by Cathy Powers

