

# Sixty local native plants to grow in Hamilton, Victoria

Rod Bird, May 2017

In this talk I will list 60 interesting or attractive local native trees (of modest height), shrubs or ground cover plants that you could consider growing in your garden. Almost all of the species will be illustrated. Some guidance will be given as to how to propagate the plants and the conditions most suited to them. Your garden may not be suitable to grow some of these species, even if you modify the site with sand or gravel, because other factors, such as size, shade or frost, may be a problem.

There are many other 'local' species for you to try and the *Hamilton Field Naturalist Club* and the *Society for Growing Australian Plants* are best placed to assist you in discovering and growing them.

An excellent source of information on growing a wide number of native plants is the publication by Kevin Sparrow for the *Warrnambool & District Group of the Society for Growing Australian Plants*: "*Plants of the Great South West*" (2013)

## Trees

**Blackwood** (*Acacia melanoxylon*) – this is a great shade tree with lovely flowers and unlikely to shed branches but can grow to 15 m in Hamilton! Be careful where you plant them. They are also competitive with lawn grass. Grow from seed that has been put into freshly boiled water and left for at least 1 minute. If not required to be sown immediately, seed can be dried and stored. Some trees will be attacked by wood grubs, especially at any pruning stubs. It is best to remove those individuals and try again.

**Black Wattle** (*Acacia mearnsii*) – this is a common tree in our area and across southern Victoria, growing to 8 m in height and sometimes 50 cm in diameter. It flowers in spring and produces copious secretions of gum along the branches and trunk. Sugar Gliders often depend upon this for food in winter. The tree produces very dense, hard wood that contains much silica. It is excellent firewood and could be planted for that purpose. Splitting the wood at dusk with an axe will produce sparks! The tree has a life span of about 30 years at most. Borers attack the tree and may be the main reason for its short life. The species is an excellent pioneer in tree restoration programs, fast-growing and providing shelter for the other planted or direct-sown species. It is easy to grow from treated seed.

**Cherry Ballart** (*Exocarpos cupressiformis*) – this is a lovely shaped and shady tree that can grow to 10 m. It is at least partly parasitic on other vegetation, attaching to the roots of other plants, but unlikely to kill them. It produces small reddish berries, of which emus are very fond and of course the seeds are distributed widely by the birds. It is very difficult for us to propagate the tree from seed or cuttings but you can give it a go! I have observed that the tree will sprout from roots that have been severed when a channel has been dug within 10 m of Cherry Ballart and severed the root.

**Drooping Sheoak** (*Allocasuarina verticillata*) – this is a hardy tree, growing to 10 m. The attraction of this tree is its drooping 'needle foliage, the sound of the wind through its branches and the impact of the fallen needles as a grass-suppressor. The latter attribute can be used to eliminate weeds in difficult spots. The trees are either male or female. The dense, hard wood is used for wood-turning and also burns well. Collect a few cones when mature, dry in a cotton bag or tray until the seed is released. Plant in a sand/soil mix.

**Golden Wattle** (*Acacia pycnantha*) – this attractive, fast-growing large wattle has been widely planted across Victoria. It occurs naturally from the coast and into the dry country of Wyperfeld National Park. There is some doubt whether it was originally found in the Hamilton area but it does grow quite well on a range of soils.

**Grampians Gum** (*Eucalyptus serraensis*) – this small eucalypt is ideal for gardens, since it rarely grows to more than 6 m in height. It produces large creamy flowers and warty capsules. It is confined to the Serra Range. Be aware that similar-looking trees from other parts of the Grampians may be crossed with Brown Stringybark (*E. baxteri*) and may grow to more than 20 m in height.

**Oyster Bay Pine** (*Callitris rhomboidea*) – this is the common ‘pine’ that you will see in the Grampians. It was first recorded at Oyster Bay in Tasmania by the French explorer Baudin. It occurs in all States except WA.

**Silver Banksia** (*Banksia marginata*) – this is our local banksia and it produces flowers copiously, therefore is good for honeyeaters, flower wasps, bees and butterflies. Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoos love the cones, too and will enter the garden to get them. The tree will grow slowly to 10 m on a good site and can be long-lived. Try and get the local basalt plains provenance. The plant is easy to grow – just sow a few seeds in pots with a sandy soil mixture.

**Slender Cypress-pine** (*Callitris gracillis*) – this species grows in arid areas of Australia but there is an outlier on a sand hill at Fulham Streamside Reserve on the Glenelg River. The tree is easily grown from seed and forms a bushy tree on sites that have heavy soil.

**Sweet Bursaria** (*Bursaria spinosa*) – this is found locally (e.g. on Hensley Park Rd and at Lake Linlithgow) and is a very important native species. While often seen as a bush to 3 m height it can eventually grow to 8 m in height. It flowers in the summer and feeds a host of insects and thus many small birds. Thornbills and pardalotes fossick in the foliage throughout the year. Most bushes have sharp spines so be careful where you plant them. The spines can be snapped off the trunks where the trees are adjacent to paths. The seed must be collected in late march or early April before the flat seed disks drop from the capsules. My method is to hold an upturned open umbrella under the branch and tap the capsules with a stick to dislodge them. The seed will only germinate freely in the wild after a frost (usually mid-winter) but you can obtain germination in late spring-summer period by putting the dry seed in the freezer for a day or two to simulate a frost event and then sow immediately in a very sandy mixture. The seedlings are subject to damping off in the pot, so do not over-water.

### **Tall Shrubs**

**Golden Spray** (*Viminaria juncea*) – a fast-growing large shrub to 4 m, bearing a glorious spray of yellow-gold pea-flowers on long needle-like leaves in spring. The species needs to have plenty of water (it occurs naturally along some watercourse in our region) and appears to have a life-time of about 10 years. Grow from seed, treated as for wattles and hard-seeded genera of Fabaceae family.

**Hedge Wattle** (*Acacia paradoxa*) – this is a very spiky plant that is excellent cover for small birds such as Superb Fairy-wren and Yellow-rumped Thornbills. Cats, raptors, ravens and bossy birds such as Red Wattlebirds are reluctant to enter the bushes. It is a common shrub along roadsides and edges of forests and woodlands in our region. It is best planted in a clump in a spot away from human contact with the prickly foliage and spines on the stems. The flowers are a bright golden colour.

**Kangaroo Apple** (*Solanum laciniatum*) – this is a great local pioneer species. The foliage often has a shape like a kangaroo foot. The plant is probably the fastest grower you will find and will grow to a 2 m bush in a year and offer early cover for slower-growing species. It will die after 4 or 5 years. It produces huge purple flowers and many orange fruits that are a magnet for Silver-eyes and other birds. The plant will germinate sporadically in the garden thereafter.

**River Bossiaea** (*Bossiaea riparia*) – this uncommon but very attractive species grows to 2-3 m in height and is generally confined to the edges of streams. It is a very interesting shrub, bearing colourful pea-flowers from flattened stems that appear to perform the role of leaves. This species occurs on a few places along the Wannon River. As with other species of Bossiaea, the seed should be heat-treated before sowing. I have not seen this species grown in gardens – I think it would need a damp site.

**Scented Paperbark** (*Melaleuca squarrosa*) – this species only grows well in wet soils. It is widespread in the Grampians and elsewhere in the region (including parts of the basalt plains) where conditions suit it. It can grow from 2-10 m in height, depending on the site. It produces scented yellowish flowers in terminal spikes. There may be a suitable spot for this species in some gardens. It is easily grown from seed.

**Scrub Sheoak** (*Allocasuarina paludosa*) – this sheoak does not usually grow taller than 2 m. It occurs on sandy heaths in the Hamilton area, including some spots on the Wannon River frontages, and many other areas in Victoria. The shrubs are dioecious, bearing either cones or flowers. This species is unlikely to flourish in heavy clay soil but does not require a very damp site.

**Sticky Boobialla** (*Myoporum petiolatum*) – this shrub is similar to the Common Boobialla but will only grow to 3 m or so in height and width. It is a local species, found on the Wannon and at Mt Napier. It grows easily from cuttings. As an evergreen species with low oil content it has a good use as a fire-retardant hedge species. As an ornamental plant it has attractive small white flowers.

**Totem Poles** (*Melaleuca decussata*) – this species occurs in swampy heathlands and river flats in the Grampians and areas north and west, also along the coast. The shrub is 1-2 m tall and produces attractive mauve flowers in cylindrical spikes. It is readily grown from seed. In the garden it does best in a damp area.

**Wimmera Bottlebrush** (*Callistemon wimmerensis*) – this scarlet-flowered species grows at Rocklands, at sites along the Glenelg River and as an outlier in the south-eastern corner of the Grampians National Park at Bradys Swamp. The tree can grow to at least 6 m in height and is very hardy. It does well in Hamilton gardens, despite only occurring naturally near water.

**Woolly Tea-tree** (*Leptospermum lanigerum*) – this shrub can grow to a height of 8 m in a swamp position. Commonly it will be 2-4 m tall. It prefers a wet site, usually on the edge of a swamp or watercourse. You will see this shrub in patches along the Grange Burn and Wannon River and on swamp margins to the south. The foliage has a delightful bluish colour and it produces white-petalled flowers. In a garden setting one needs to find a damp site to plant it, preferably in a clump.

### Medium Shrubs

**Australian Hollyhock** (*Malva preissiana*) – this short-lived plant is quite similar to the garden hollyhock and may grow to 2 m in height. It grows naturally at Lake Linlithgow, near Boonawah Creek, and widely on coastal sandy limestone and saltmarsh soils. It is readily propagated from seed.

**Desert Banksia** (*Banksia ornata*) – this showy shrub that may grow to 3 m height and width. It is found in the Grampians and you may have seen it near the roadside at Glenisla Flat (Henty Highway). Honeyeaters love this shrub. You must have sand for this species – and plenty of sun.

**Heath Tea-tree** (*Leptospermum myrsinoides*) – this species grows on sandy heaths in the Hamilton area and widely across Victoria. Some forms have pinkish flowers but the majority are white.

**Mountain Bitter Pepper** (*Tasmannia lanceolata*) – this is a shrub to 2 m and it produces a very aromatic leaf and berries that have a strong bitter taste. The plant is used to produce ‘spice’. The nearest source of this plant is on higher ground in the Grampians (e.g. on the walk up to Mt William). The plant can be grown from cuttings or seed.

**Prickly Moses** (*Acacia verticillata*) – a prickly bush to 3 m height that is ideal for small birds in the garden. It does not thrive on very dry sites.

**Prickly Tea-tree** (*Leptospermum continentale*) – this species is more easily grown than the Heath Tea-tree (*L. myrsinoides*), which requires sandy soil. Prickly Tea-tree is found in some areas of the basalt plains near Hamilton as well as on sedimentary soils. A beautiful pink-flowered form can be found that is impressive.

**Shiny Tea-tree** (*Leptospermum turbinatum*) – this is a very showy white-flowered species of Tea-tree that grows on the high peaks of the Grampians. It does well in Hamilton but where there is competition it may need water in dry summers.

**Tree Violet** (*Melyctus dentatus*) – this rigid and sometimes spiny species occurs on the Wannon as a taller shrub but as a stunted shrub on the stones on the lava flows near Byaduk and Wallacedale. It

produces tiny cream or yellow flowers on stems and, later, green or purple berries. It is an ideal shrub to plant in a corner of the garden for protection of Fairy-wrens and Thornbills.

**Casterton Varnish Wattle** (*Acacia exudans*) – this small wattle has a varnish-like appearance to the broad phylodes. It is found mainly on hilltop roadsides in the Casterton-Coleraine area. However, small sites occur on the Victoria Point Rd, the rail reserve west of the Wannan Falls and Kearneys Rd near the Wannan River. It prefers a well-drained site but can cope with heavy clay. A related species with narrow phylodes (*A. verniciflua*) is found in the Grampians and Black Range area. The Casterton form was declared a distinct species in 2009. At the Victoria Point Rd site there are hybrids with the Hedge Wattle.

**Wedge-leaved Hop-bush** (*Dodonaea cuneata*) – this species occurs on the Wannan River and is common in the Grampians and further north and west of Hamilton. It produces showy rusty flower capsules.

### **Small Shrubs**

**Common Fringe-myrtle** (*Calytrix tetragona*) – this is a showy small shrub that occurs at one site near the Wannan but is common in the Grampians and elsewhere in the region north of Hamilton.

**Fringed Heath-myrtle** (*Micromyrtus ciliatus*) – this plant must have a sunny, well-drained position. It grows to about 2 m and produces pretty pink and white flowers. The species occurs in the Grampians.

**Gaunt Rice-flower** (*Pimelea stricta*) - this is a species more common to the Wimmera and Mallee. I found an outlier population on the Wannan River frontage in the 1980s and the plant seems to have retained a presence there. The plant does not grow beyond 0.5-1 m in height. It may not cope with basalt soils.

**Goldfields Grevillea** (*Grevillea alpina*) – this showy species occurs in the Grampians on well-drained banks. It requires the same conditions in gardens.

**Hop Goodenia** (*Goodenia ovata*) – this is a species that occurs at one or two sites on the Wannan and is common in the Grampians streams. It grows as a dense, soft-leaved shrub to 1 m or so and can form a hedge. It produces small yellow flowers that contrast well with the dark green foliage. The plant is easily grown from cuttings. It will spread from roots and that needs to be remembered when you select a site for it, otherwise it may dominate your garden.

**Lavender Grevillea** (*Grevillea lavandulacea*) – this is a spreading, prickly shrub that has lovely pink and white flowers in late spring. It grows naturally in the Black Range and western block of the Little Desert. It prefers a sandy site.

**Myrtle Wattle** (*Acacia myrtifolia*) – this small wattle (height about 1 m) has lemon-yellow flowers and occurs widely to the north and west of Hamilton. It grows particularly well on sandy soils in woodlands.

**Slender Velvet-bush** (*Lasiopetalum baueri*) – this is a compact little shrub to 1 m height that prefers a well-drained bank or a sandy site. It produces a mass of pink flowers with a dark centre. It is not found near Hamilton but can be seen in the forest near Casterton.

**Small-leaved Wax-flower** (*Phylotheca angustifolius*) – this is a species more common to the Wimmera and Mallee. However, I found an outlier population on the Wannan River frontage in the 1980s and the species still survives there among rhyolite boulders where stock once grazed. This little shrub has tiny leaves and lovely pink buds and white flowers. The plant would probably require a sandy site with good drainage.

**Variable Prickly Grevillea** (*Grevillea aquifolium*) – this species occurs in the Grampians and widely elsewhere, including coastal areas. This hardy plant produces reddish tooth-brush flowers. It is readily grown from cuttings.

**Violet Kunzea** (*Kunzea parvifolia*) – this small shrub occurs in the Grampians and heathlands to the NW, including Jilpanger Flora Reserve. It probably needs a sandy site, or at least a well-drained sunny spot to grow well at Hamilton.

**Western Golden-tip** (*Goodia medicaginea*) – this is a straggly plant to 2 m that bears lovely golden pea-flowers in spring. It occurs locally at Mt Napier but is hard to find there. It also occurs on the Hamilton Community Parklands and at Wannan Falls but again is hard to find, germinating only sporadically over the years. Treat the seed as you would acacia, to allow germination. Once grown you can obtain seed and it will store dry for many years. The plant produces long stems that can be pruned back after flowering.

### **Ground-cover Plants**

**Austral Stork's-bill** (*Pelargonium australe*) – this plant has a wide distribution, occurring in forests, woodlands and in coastal heathlands. Its pink and white flowers may be seen at Mt Napier State Park in summer. This little plant has flowers and leaves that have a resemblance to introduced geraniums. It can be grown from cuttings or seed.

**Black-anther Flax-lily** (*Dianella revoluta*) – this common species occurs locally at the Wannan and is very common in SW Victoria. It produces blue flowers with black tips to the orange anthers. It grows well in gardens. It can be grown from seed or by division of clumps.

**Blue Devils** (*Eryngium ovinum*) – the globular flower heads of this prickly small plant have metallic blue bracts that are very decorative in summer. It grows in conjunction with Kangaroo Grass on the basalt plains and should be planted with that species in the garden to achieve the best contrast with the rusty flowers heads of the Kangaroo Grass. It is propagated by seed.

**Candles or Creamy Stackhousia** (*Stackhousia monogyna*) – this perennial species is found in open forests, woodlands, heathlands and grasslands of our region. It may be seen locally on basaltic soils in the Kanawalla Railway Reserve and on sedimentary soils along the Hamilton-Coleraine Rail Reserve. The plant bears cream-coloured flowers in spring and summer, in a dense, cylindrical raceme. The plant may be grown from cuttings.

**Chocolate Lily** (*Arthropodium strictum*) – this is a tuberous, tufted plant of plains and woodlands. It is common in the Hamilton region. It has scented pink or mauve flowers in spring. It can be grown from seed or by division.

**Clover Glycine** (*Glycine latrobeana*) – this rare grassland species is readily distinguished by its trifoliate leaflets and small, purplish pea-flowers that are borne on a very short stem. While its status has been classified as 'threatened' it does occur widely in our region, even on basaltic soils. It would make a great addition to a native garden. The seeds would need heat treatment to permit germination.

**Common Corea** (*Corea reflexa*) – this plant has reddish tubular flowers and is common in the Grampians, woodlands to the west and sandy heaths along the coast. It is easily grown from cuttings or seed. It prefers a well-drained sandy soil.

**Common Eutaxia** (*Eutaxia microphylla*) – this is an unusual pea-plant that occurs naturally on the foreshore of Lake Linlithgow. It was not detected there until sheep grazing was removed in about 2003. The plant does not grow higher than about 30 cm on this mildly saline salt. The plant produces a copious amount of seed when it flowers, but that event does not appear to be often. Heat treatment may be needed to germinate the seed.

**Common Everlasting** (*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*) – this small plant produces masses of yellow papery flowers in late spring-summer on roadsides in the district that have not been cultivated or sprayed with herbicide. It is easily grown in gardens but requires weeding to keep the plants going.

**Featherheads** (*Ptilotus macrocephalus*) – this is a showy grassland species that you will see in abundance on the roadside near Back Creek as you approach Wickliffe. Its feathery heads appear in early summer and lasts for weeks. It can be easily grown from seed.

**Kangaroo Grass** (*Themeda triandra*) – this species of grass is widespread across Australia. It is still very visible in summer in the roadside grassland strips on the basalt plains, especially where the reserves have been burned annually for many years and thus controlled pasture species such as phalaris. Cultivation or continuous grazing has eliminated it from farmland. In the garden it is best grown in a narrow bed alongside a path where other grasses can easily be manually removed.

**Lemon Beauty-heads** (*Calocephalus citreus*) – this and another species, Milky Beauty-head (*C. lacteus*), are commonly seen on the shores of wetlands in the Hamilton area, including the Old Reservoir, Lake Dolling Dolling, Lake Linlithgow and Brians Swamp. Both species also occur on some roadside grasslands. Both species may be grown from seed.

**Pale Vanilla-lily** (*Arthropodium milleflorum*) – this is a perennial, tufted species of our grasslands and woodlands locally and widely across Victoria, including sub-alpine and coastal areas. The plants bear pinkish flowers on long, leafless stems and then senesce in late summer. They do best in moist clay soil.

**Pale Flax-lily** (*Dianella longifolia*) – similar to other *Dianella* spp. except the anthers are all orange-tipped.

**Magenta Stork's-bill** (*Pelargonium rodneyanum*) – this is an attractive plains grassland species, flowering in late spring and summer, and commonly found near Hamilton. It prefers a well-drained site and can be easily propagated from cuttings or seed.

**Running Postman** (*Kennedia prostrata*) – this common species occurs widely across Victoria. It enjoys a well-drained site and can provide a mass of flowers in spring-early summer. The seed requires heat treatment to allow germination.

**Small-flower Flax-lily** (*Dianella brevicaulis*) – similar to Black-anther Flax-lily except flowers are borne near the base of the plant. Common in the region.

**Spiny Matrush** (*Lomandra longifolia*) – this species grows along watercourses in the region and is a tough plant growing to about 1 m in height, with long leaf blades. It bears spiny seed heads. This species is much-used by landscape gardeners. The plant is easy to grow and puts up with adverse conditions, while protecting other plants.

**Thin-leaf Wattle** (*Acacia aculeatissima*) – this almost prostrate wattle is present on sedimentary soils near Hamilton. The species was once very prominent on the Coleraine Points Reserve. In the 1980s one large plant covered 10-20 m<sup>2</sup> on the lookout spur but was killed when the area was slashed! The plant must have been many decades old. The species would probably need a very well drained gravelly or sandy site in a garden to flourish.

**White Tussock** (*Poa labillardierei*) – this is the common large tussock grass that once, with Kangaroo Grass, dominated the plains and particularly the wetter parts of the landscape. It is easily grown from seed. The tussock, or Kangaroo Grass, gives structure and some protection to a native grassland garden.