

Koala Blooms: New Australian Plants for California Gardens®

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Each year The Arboretum at University California Santa Cruz (UCSC) works closely with growers in Australia and here in California to introduce new plants through a unique program called Koala Blooms. In this collaborative effort, many impressive Australian plant cultivars are evaluated for their beauty, durability in landscape situations, potential for invasiveness, performance in nursery conditions, and sturdiness with regard to drought, weather extremes, and soil pathogens. From all the choice plants selected and trialed, only a few are introduced each year. The program generates a small income to support the Arboretum.

The Koala Blooms program had its roots in the mid 1970s, when Rodger and Gwen Elliot, of Melbourne, Australia, sent their first shipment of Australian plants from their native plants nursery to the UCSC Arboretum; plants have been arriving ever since. The enthusiasm for native plants has attracted Australians to the California countryside and Californians to the Australian bush. Countless long-standing friendships have emerged through all of this horticultural interaction. The Koala Blooms Introduction Program stands on the shoulders of these friendships and international exchanges.

2001 INTRODUCTIONS

Originally discovered on a point of land along the southern New South Wales (NSW) coast near Ulladula, *Banksia spinulosa* 'Schnapper Point' is a low-growing, compact selection of hairpin banksia that will grow 2 to 4 ft high and 4 to 5 ft wide. Typical selections of this species reach the height of a small tree, so 'Schnapper Point' is distinct and makes a dependable shrub for full sun or light shade in relatively well-drained soils. Though tolerant of drought, it benefits from a little supplemental water during the dry summer months; in its native haunts along the NSW coast, there is occasional summer rainfall as well as intense drought. Handsome, honey-red, candle-like flowers top the branches from fall through the winter months and into early spring. Like most members of the protea family, this banksia is sensitive to excess phosphorus in the soil and needs little fertilizer. It should be hardy to around 20 °F or possibly lower.

Correa pulchella 'Pink Flamingo' is a small shrub, only 2 to 3 ft high, with smooth, shiny, deep-green leaves on a dense branching habit. Its deep, salmon-pink, bell-shaped flowers are striking, both up close and from afar; the flower color can change as the flowers age and, at first, fooled us into believing that a sport was appearing on an established plant. The flowers appear in the middle of winter and last through late spring. 'Pink Flamingo' is from the coastal region of South Australia, where it grows on alkaline soils, unlike many Australian plants that require acid soil conditions.

Relatively good drainage is still recommended. It grows well in dry shade beneath native oaks and is said to be deer resistant. So far, we know it is hardy to the mid 20s °F.

Grevillea lanigera 'Coastal Gem' is a fantastic low, spreading, woody groundcover with crowded, narrow, grayish-green hairy leaves on prostrate stems. It has proven to be a sturdy and dependable groundcover and is already widely used in landscapes throughout much of coastal California. It grows to about 1 ft high by 4 ft across. The pinkish red and cream flowers are attractive in tight clusters at the ends of branchlets. Flowering starts well before Thanksgiving and lasts past St. Patrick's Day, perhaps through April. 'Coastal Gem' needs acidic to neutral soils for best results. It is excellent for general planting, in rockeries, and as an edging. It is hardy to the high teens or low 20s °F and attracts hummingbirds. *Grevillea lanigera* is called the woolly grevillea and has a wide natural distribution, from eucalypt woodlands and forests to subalpine habitats and coastal heathlands. Although 'Coastal Gem' is a coastal selection and tolerant of coastal exposure, it has shown itself to be true to its species and widely adaptable.

2002 INTRODUCTIONS

Pink-flowered *Boronia crenulata* 'Rosy Splendor' is a compact evergreen shrub growing to 3 to 4 ft high and about as wide. It is particularly appealing during late winter and spring, when it is encased in masses of flowers. Its light-green, oval leaves are highly aromatic. It performs best in full sun to part shade. Like many *Boronia* species, it is not a total drought lover, although this species is much sturdier than most. It is best to water during dry periods and to avoid overhead sprinkling during hot spells. 'Rosy Splendor' is excellent for rockeries, borders, and in large containers. Native to western Australia, it has proven hardy to the mid 20s °F.

Correa 'Ray's Tangerine' is a vibrant orange selection with narrow bell-shaped flowers appearing in fall and through the winter. Founding UCSC Arboretum Director Ray Collett, who has yet to divulge the whereabouts of its parents, hybridized this cultivar. Although it is a little slower growing than other *Correa* cultivars, it is well worth waiting for. It has shiny dark-green leaves and grows eventually to 2 ft. It performs well in full sun or partial shade, with good drainage and is tolerant of drought, but does best with regular water during long dry periods. It is hardy to 20 °F.

Bottlebrushes are common along California's freeways and in our gardens, but none match the delicate beauty of *Callistemon* 'Cane's Hybrid'. This is an evergreen shrub or small tree (10 ft by 5–8 ft) with a profuse display of pastel-pink bottlebrush flowers during late spring and early summer. It has narrow gray-green leaves on spreading, often arching branches. The young foliage is soft and tinged with pink. 'Cane's Hybrid' is excellent for screening, for windbreaks, and for hedging. Drought-tolerant once established, it responds well to pruning and is frost-hardy to at least 20 °F.

Chorizema 'Bush Flame' is a vining shrub that contributes a lot to a garden. Its brilliant, orange and pink, pea-like flowers are intense and long lasting, appearing from fall through early spring and sporadically all year. An evergreen for sun to light shade with good drainage and occasional water during the long summer, it can be used in rockeries, borders, large pots, and hanging baskets. It is frost hardy to around 20 °F.

Grevillea 'Granya Glory', a compact, low-spreading, evergreen shrublet, presents clusters of rose-red and cream flowers at the ends of branches in winter and

early spring. Growing 1–2 ft tall by 2–4 ft wide, it has blue-green, hairy, oblong leaves. It is excellent in rockeries and borders, preferring sun or partial shade and good drainage. Drought tolerant once established it is hardy to the upper 20s °F.

2003 INTRODUCTIONS

Brachysema praemorsum 'Bronze Butterfly' has been described as a "Berkeley kind of plant" due to its weird chartreuse-edged, dark bronzy-purple leaves. It is a prostrate creeper or slightly mounding groundcover. The pea-shaped flowers appear in spring, are initially cream, and then age to deep red. It grows best in full sun on the coast, but needs part shade inland and appreciates water during dry periods. It responds well to shearing and is frost-hardy to the mid 20s °F.

Found at Carpenter Rocks in South Australia, *Correa reflexa* 'Carpenter Rocks' is a choice selection, growing 3–4 ft tall and wide, with small, clasping, heart-shaped green leaves. The bell-like flowers are bright vermilion-red, tipped with chartreuse and appear profusely from fall through spring. It thrives in full sun to partial shade, with good drainage, and is drought tolerant once established. Like most of the correas, its nectar-rich flowers feed the local hummingbirds through the winter. It is hardy to the mid 20s °F.

Correa pulchella 'Pink Eyre' is a compact, evergreen shrub to three ft tall and about as wide. It has dark-green oval leaves and is loaded with rosy-pink, tubular flowers, which begin in fall and last well into spring. The heaviest bloom occurs during the winter months when 'Pink Eyre' can magically ignite a dreary and somber winter scene. 'Pink Eyre' hails from the Eyre Peninsula on the coast of South Australia, where it grows on limestone. It will perform well in full sun or partial shade and is a superb plant for a container on a porch, deck, or patio. It is drought tolerant once established and is hardy to about 20 °F.

Phebalium frondosum 'Elizabeth' is described as a narrow endemic from the Gippsland area of eastern Victoria, in southeastern Australia. There it grows on Mt. Elizabeth in "loamy or skeletal soils" (Rodger Elliot, pers. commun.). In the Arboretum, it is a narrow, upright shrub to 6 ft or more, with oval-green leaves that are silvery on the underside. Small, starry-white flowers sparkle against the foliage from late winter into spring. Useful as a hedging plant, both its foliage and flowers have a spicy-fruity fragrance. In sunny California it performs best in partial shade and in well-drained soils; it should be hardy to 20 °F.

Tetratheca ericifolia 'Heathland Gem' is a dazzling jewel from central New South Wales, where the species grows in sandstone regions as a member of the heathland communities. It is an evergreen perennial with upright stems to about 2 ft tall, clumping to 18 inches in diameter. It offers nodding, vivid-pink flowers in profusion, starting in early spring and lasting into summer. Planted in full sun and given excellent drainage, it will appreciate some water during extended dry periods and is hardy to the mid 20s °F.

An evergreen flowering shrub related to the correas and boronias, *Philothea* (syn. *Eriostemon*) *verrucosa* 'Starbright' grows 3 to 4 ft high and about 5 ft wide. Its leaves and branchlets are covered with "warty" aromatic oil glands emitting a strong and powerful fragrance. Its pink buds open to pale-pink starry flowers and bloom profusely from late winter to early spring, with scattered flowers throughout the year. Being frost hardy and drought tolerant, it makes an attractive container plant.

It will grow in most soils, but is not recommended for alkaline conditions.

2004 INTRODUCTIONS

Boronia clavata ‘**Heather Wand**’ is an unusual shrub that grows from 5–8 ft high and 5–10 ft wide, with slightly hairy, pinnate, aromatic leaves. The attractive, delicately perfumed, bell-shaped flowers are pale yellow-green and spring from the leaf axils along the stems; flowering is from late winter through early spring. This selection responds well to light pruning and needs acid to neutral soils for best results. It will withstand periods of dryness, but needs some irrigation during the driest summer months. It is an excellent shrub for any garden as a border plant and as a low screening plant. It should be hardy into the mid 20s °F or lower.

Another coastal plant adapted to salty sea air is *Correa alba* var. *pannosa* ‘**Western Pink Star**’, a low-spreading, evergreen shrub to 18 inches tall and 3 ft or more wide. Its leaves and stems are covered with felt-like, grayish white hairs. Its delicate pink, four-petalled flowers appear heavily in spring and early summer and last into the fall. It will thrive in partial shade to full sun with fairly good drainage. Once established, ‘Western Pink Star’ correa will be tolerant of our long, dry summers, although a monthly irrigation is beneficial. It is hardy to at least 28 °F and possibly to 25 °F.

Formerly known as ‘Uncle Jack’s Red’, *Boronia megastigma* ‘**Jack Maguire’s Red**’, is a seedling variant of brown boronia that was selected in 1928 by the late Jack Maguire from the town of Boronia, Victoria. This is a superb, deep orange-red color variation of the normally subdued brown boronia; it possesses the same mysterious and alluring perfume that swirls and sweeps invisibly through the garden far from the flowering source. ‘Jack Maguire’s Red’ is an upright shrub to 3–4 ft high and 4–6 ft wide. The narrow leaves are almost needle-like; the pendant, bell-shaped flowers approach ½ inch in diameter. It grows best in well drained, slightly acid soils that neither dry out entirely nor become soggy. It prefers dappled shade and will tolerate cold temperatures down to the low to mid-20s °F. When the first flowers open in mid-February and release the wonderful perfume, you will be happy you added this boronia to your garden.

With each purchase of a Koala Blooms plant, a small royalty comes back to the UCSC Arboretum to support the Australian Gardens; a percentage of the royalty also goes to Australia in support of the growers who were responsible for the initial selection or breeding of each plant. Koala Blooms plants are available through Norrie’s gift shop at the UCSC Arboretum and through retail nurseries. Participating wholesale nurseries responsible for helping this program succeed are: Monterey Bay Nursery, Native Sons Nursery, Perry’s Panorama, Rosendale Nursery, San Marcos Growers, and Suncrest Nursery. The UCSC Arboretum is happy to receive so much support from these wholesale nurseries, from the Australian growers, and from plant lovers who purchase these superb new plants.