

Western Australian Species as Summer Annuals

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INTRODUCTION

Western Australian flora is known worldwide as one of the most unique. However there is a perception, "that once spring is over there is nothing to be admired". One of Kings Park and Botanic Garden's current challenges is to prove to the world that this perception is incorrect. The strategy adopted has been to focus on the development of year-round native floral displays throughout the gardens. Annuals are proven winners when visual impact is the desired effect, so the move to develop the Western Australian summer annuals for their bedding potential was one logical way to improve perception of Western Australian plants as year-round displays.

BACKGROUND

Since the mid 1960s Kings Park and Botanic Garden has undertaken field trips to the Kimberley and Pilbara regions to the North of Western Australian. Its major growing season is centred around Monsoonal weather patterns. So when looking for potential summer bedding annuals which would thrive in the Perth hot dry summer conditions, the flora from these regions is most suited to achieve our goals. Initial trials and developments were focused on potted specimens to gain cultivation knowledge and assess those with display potential. Trialing of this flora began in the early 1980s and it wasn't until 1997-98 seasons we achieved satisfactory success with summer bedding displays within the Botanic Garden.

METHODS OF CULTIVATION

The following methods were used for most of the species tested.

- Bottom heat
- Seeds sown in October
- Planting in ground with slow-release fertiliser
- Liquid feeding weekly until point of flowering
- Subsurface irrigation
- Full sun aspect.

ACHIEVEMENTS

The species considered and trialed for future bedding potential were from the following genera: *Gomphrena*, *Ptilotus*, *Calandrinia*, *Portulaca*, *Swainsona*, *Borreria*, *Solenostemon*, and *Amaranthus*.

The genera with the most broad-scale potential for bedding are: *Gomphrena*, *Ptilotus*, *Swainsona*, and *Calandrinia*.

Sufficient seed has allowed us to successfully display: *Ptilotus exaltatus*, *P. fusiformis*, *P. macrocephalus*, *P. aervooides*, *P. chamaecladus*, *Gomphrena affinis*, *G. canescens*, *G. flaccida*, *G. tenella*, *G. leptoclada*, *Swainsona formosa*, and *C. polyandra* within the Botanic Gardens.

CONCLUSIONS

This group of plants has enormous potential and has shown enough positive signs to be developed further. One of the major challenges that lie ahead is to make these species available to the general community. Some of the areas that require further development focus on seed becoming readily available and/or vegetative material. The continuation and development of inspirational displays within Kings Park and Botanic Garden will only further show that Western Australian floral displays are beautiful the year round.