

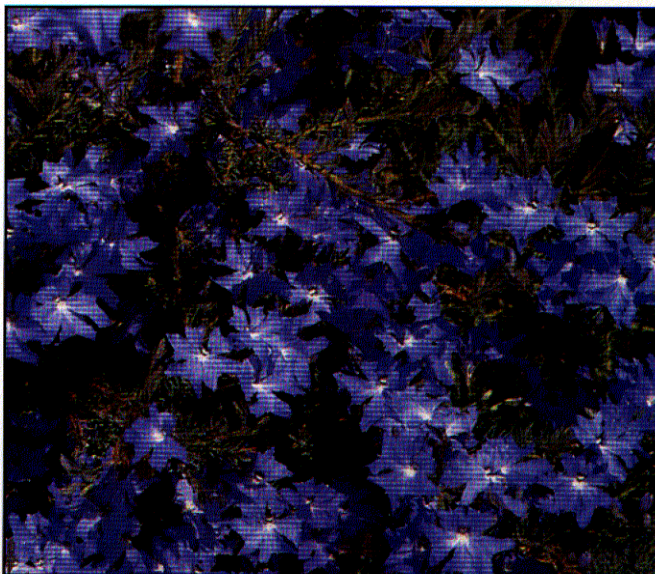
New Australian ornamentals for reduced upkeep

Ray Collett

Californians and their governmental agencies lavish both money and natural resources on ornamental plants and plantings. In general, as more money and resources are spent on ornamental landscaping, the harder it becomes for budgets and pocketbooks to cover other expenses. The more the water used on ornamental plantings, the more the water that must be pumped or obtained from rivers. Clearly Californians could save in many ways by switching to low-maintenance, environmentally sound landscaping. Since beauty is one of



Over 300 ornamentals of worldwide origin, low in requirements for water and nutrients and resistant to California diseases and pests, were introduced and propagated during a three-year project at Santa Cruz. They range from the brilliant *Lechenaultia formosa* (above) to a large-flowered *L. biloba* (below) to *Olearia axillaris* from South Australia (opposite page, top) and the bright yellow *Verticordia nitens*.



the chief aims of ornamental landscaping, however, low-maintenance landscaping is not likely to be accepted before beautiful, environmentally sound plants become available.

A bank of genetic stocks

The aim of this project was to increase the public availability of ornamental plants that are both beautiful and environmentally sound. The Elvenia J. Slosson Research Gardens were among the chief resources in this project, since they were created to become a bank or storehouse of the finest genetic stocks that might be obtained among Australian ornamentals. To a remarkable degree, ornamentals of Australian origin are sparing in their requirements for water and soil nutrients. Likewise, they tend to be resistant to the diseases and pests that are present in California. The pests and diseases that coevolved with them remain at home. For the most part, Australian ornamentals tend not to reseed and become weedy in California, since their pollinators also remain at home.



Other resources were available for this project, since the UC Santa Cruz Arboretum has sought out promising materials from native plants and from other countries aside from Australia. The Arboretum has likewise benefited from the finest private collections in California, such as those maintained in San Francisco by Victor Reiter, Jr. and (formerly) by Elizabeth Marshall in Los Angeles.

In the process of acquiring an enormous collection of ornamentals, the Arboretum also acquired valuable information on their propagation. From the beginning, it set about recording information regarding flowering times, growth habits, frost tolerance, and special requirements.

Choice plants

During this three-year project, more than 300 choice, environmentally sound ornamentals were propagated and released to the public, the nursery trade, and the cut-flower industry. The availability of plants was publicized in the

Arboretum Associates *Bulletin* and in mailings, newspapers, radio and television broadcasts, and paid advertisements in *Pacific Horticulture*. Also in use was a postcard system that informed distant parties of the availability of particular plants. For 50 cents, interested persons were able to purchase special postcards and enter the names of plants scheduled for propagation. The postcards were mailed when the propagated material was of reasonable size and well established in pots.

The propagation facilities of the Arboretum were fully utilized. To help supply the demand, these facilities were more than doubled (with the assistance of gift funds) before the end of the project. The project was fostered by donations of labor and materials.

Information sheets were produced regarding each plant released and were provided to everyone obtaining plants. Information was disseminated through other efforts. So that they could better inform the visiting public, the Arboretum's docents produced a massive loose-leaf reference set of photographs and notes regarding all of the new releases. Classes and workshops were held on environmentally sound plants and plantings. Tours were conducted through the gardens. The Arboretum staff and docents contributed time and information to garden editors and writers and to representatives from CalTrans, municipal parks and recreation organizations, landscapers, commercial nurseries, cut-flower growers, garden clubs, plant societies, visiting classes in landscaping and landscape architecture, and other interested parties.

A major step has been taken toward providing Californians with an excellent selection of highly desirable ornamentals that are environmentally sound. In time, the nursery industry will make them widely available at reasonable cost. Without the assistance of the Slosson Endowment Fund, this project could not have been undertaken.

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