

FLORA

STURT'S DESERT PEA, that fabulously beautiful adornment of the spinfex country, has been given a new scientific name. What does this mean?

The scientific name is in three parts, the first is the name of the genus, the second the species name, followed by an abbreviation of the 'authority', the botanist who gave the plant this scientific name. For example, oats is *Avena fatua* L. for Linnaeus who invented the modern system of scientific nomenclature. So how does this work for Sturt's desert pea?

The plant was first collected in September 1699 on East Lewis Island in the Dampier Archipelago by the english privateer/explorer William Dampier. But it wasn't described scientifically until 1832 when G. Don wrote a book entitled "A General History of the Dichlamydeous Plants". He named the plant *Donia formosa* G. Don.

In 1950, two botanists decided that it was related to other species in the genus *Clianthus*, a small genus

What's in a name ...?



found throughout the south Pacific, so they published a note in "Contributions to the New South Wales National Herbarium" naming it *Clianthus formosus* (G. Don) Ford & Vickery. (Note that the authorities

who change names add their monikers to the plant's full title.)

In 1990, a botanist was reviewing the large genus *Swainsona*, the purple peas found throughout inland Australia, and decided that our plant was merely a bird-pollinated *Swainsona*. So it became, via the journal "Telopea", *Swainsona formosa* (G. Don) Thompson.

The newest change turned up in "The Western Australian Naturalist" in 1999. Because he considers it quite unique, botanist Alex George has placed it in a new genus, all on its own, named after William Dampier. So you can now call it *Willdampia formosa* (G. Don) A.S. George.

Wow! errrr which?

Any one of these names would be correct, as long as you cite the authority so that an investigating botanist can research the latin description.

Personally, I'll just be calling it, as I always have, Sturt's desert pea!

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