

FLORA

HAKEAS are very much part of the Australian landscape. They are unique to Australia. There are about 150 species, of which over 100 are found in the south-west of WA - a rich heritage indeed.

To date, the cultivation of hakeas has been limited, perhaps because many of the species have very prickly leaves which make them unsuitable for gardens. However, it is now time to recognise the value and potential of hakeas in the environment, particularly in revegetation projects. They offer huge benefits in the way of erosion control, windbreaks, shade, shelter and fauna habitat. These plants are hardy and adaptable and do well on all soil types from sands to granite outcrops and swamps. They are found from throughout the jarrah forest to low heathlands and exposed coastal areas and inland.

Hakeas are characterised by their intriguing woody fruits, each containing two winged seeds. These fruits vary with each species in shape, size and texture. Most species retain their fruits for several seasons, while others quickly shed them when ripe. The hard woody fruits help protect the seeds from bird and insect predators. Hakea plants have evolved to withstand fire - the surface of the fruits are often fire retardant, only opening and releasing their seeds onto the ashbed after the fire has swept through.

Some hakea plants are lignotuberos, the underground root system being protected from fire and resprouting after rain. The ability to withstand hostile conditions make the hakeas very desirable in new plantings.

Hakeas vary from ground covers to small trees and the habit may be spreading or upright, dense or open. The leaves are also variable, they

Hakea cyclocarpa ram's-horn

HAKEAS

by Jennifer Young

may be terete, linear or wide with a prickly or entire margin. Probably the needle-like leaves are an adaptation to survive in poor soils and arid conditions.

The colour of the hakea flowers ranges mostly through white, yellow and red. The flowers are borne in axillary clusters or racemes and are usually very decorative and give an outstanding floral display in the

wildflower season. Best known is the splendid *H. laurina* (pincushion hakea) which is now grown not only in Perth gardens but also extensively overseas. Other wonderful blossoms are seen in the scarlet racemes of *H. bucculenta* and the bright chrome yellow of *H. cinerea*. Planted in garden or revegetation, the hakea flowers attract birds and insect pollinators.

Many hakeas are sought after by florists for dried flower arrangements, mainly for the leaves and interesting seed pods. Beekeepers place their hives amongst *H. trifurcata* thickets which are an excellent source of nectar and woodturners relentlessly pursue *H. preissii* for the attractive grain of the trunk wood. North-west Aboriginal people tracked the hakeas for various reasons. Some species were used as a food source, others for medicinal purposes and still others for spears and boomerangs.

The landscaping potential of some of these lesser-known plants can already be seen. One may observe, driving along the Kwinana Freeway at Mt. Pleasant in Perth, how well the sturdy *H. corymbosa* and *H. petiolaris* have successfully established to enhance and stabilise the banks.

Jennifer Young is an artist who devotes a lot of time to revegetation work through Men of the Trees. She is the author of three field guides to hakeas - see 'New Books' section.



The unusual fruit shape of Hakea bicornata

