

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN WILDFLOWERS.

THE SEA URCHIN.

(Hakea laurina, R. Br.)

(By C. A. GARDNER, Government Botanist.)

The Sea Urchin shrub is one of the best known of the local species of the Proteaceae, being cultivated extensively in various parts of the world. Few, however, recognize that this peculiar plant is native to Western Australia; but this plant is really one of the group of remarkable species which have made the flora of Western Australia famous throughout the world.

The plant is a shrub of from 10 to 18 feet with a slender, almost willow-like habit and drooping branches. The bark is of a dull grey-purple hue and smooth, the leaves a pale lustrous green and symmetrically three-nerved, and the flowers a bright red with flesh-coloured or pink prominent styles which protrude considerably beyond the perianths. It is this character of the protruding styles, together with the almost globular and compact nature of the flower-heads, which was earned for the plant its popular name. The bud-scales of the shrub are chestnut-brown in colour, and beautifully formed, with overlapping scales. The shrub blooms almost throughout the year, but bears flowers most prolifically during the winter months.

Hakea laurina occupies a fairly extensive tract of country near to our southern coast. One meets with it in abundance on the clay flats of the Gordon River at Tambellup, and from there along the clay plains surrounding the Stirling Range to Ravensthorpe and district, and eastward to Israelite Bay, but, in the last-named locality, it grows on stony hills as well as on the plains surrounding Mount Ragged.

The flowers are borne in almost globular clusters in the axils of the leaves; each cluster is popularly termed a "flower," but a close examination will reveal that each cluster consists of a large number of separate flowers, each on a distinct stalk. The flower is characteristic of other species of *Hakea*, having a perianth-tube of four segments rolled into a volute at the apex, and a large disc-shaped gland on one side of the short ovary-stalk. The long thick style terminates in a conical stigma. The fruit is a woody follicle which opens along one side, and the greater portion of the opposite side, forming two woody valves. Two seeds are contained in each fruit. They are a dull black in colour, and the seed proper is surrounded by a wing which is well developed on the upper side. The suture, along which the fruit opens, is marked in the unopened fruit by a raised crested ridge, and a short but sharp beak at the apex of the ridge on the summit of the fruit.

The accompanying plate gives most of the details of the species. Note the flaccid leaves, the swollen flower-buds and the slender branch-buds, the unilateral position of the flower-heads and alternative arrangement of the tri-nerved leaves.

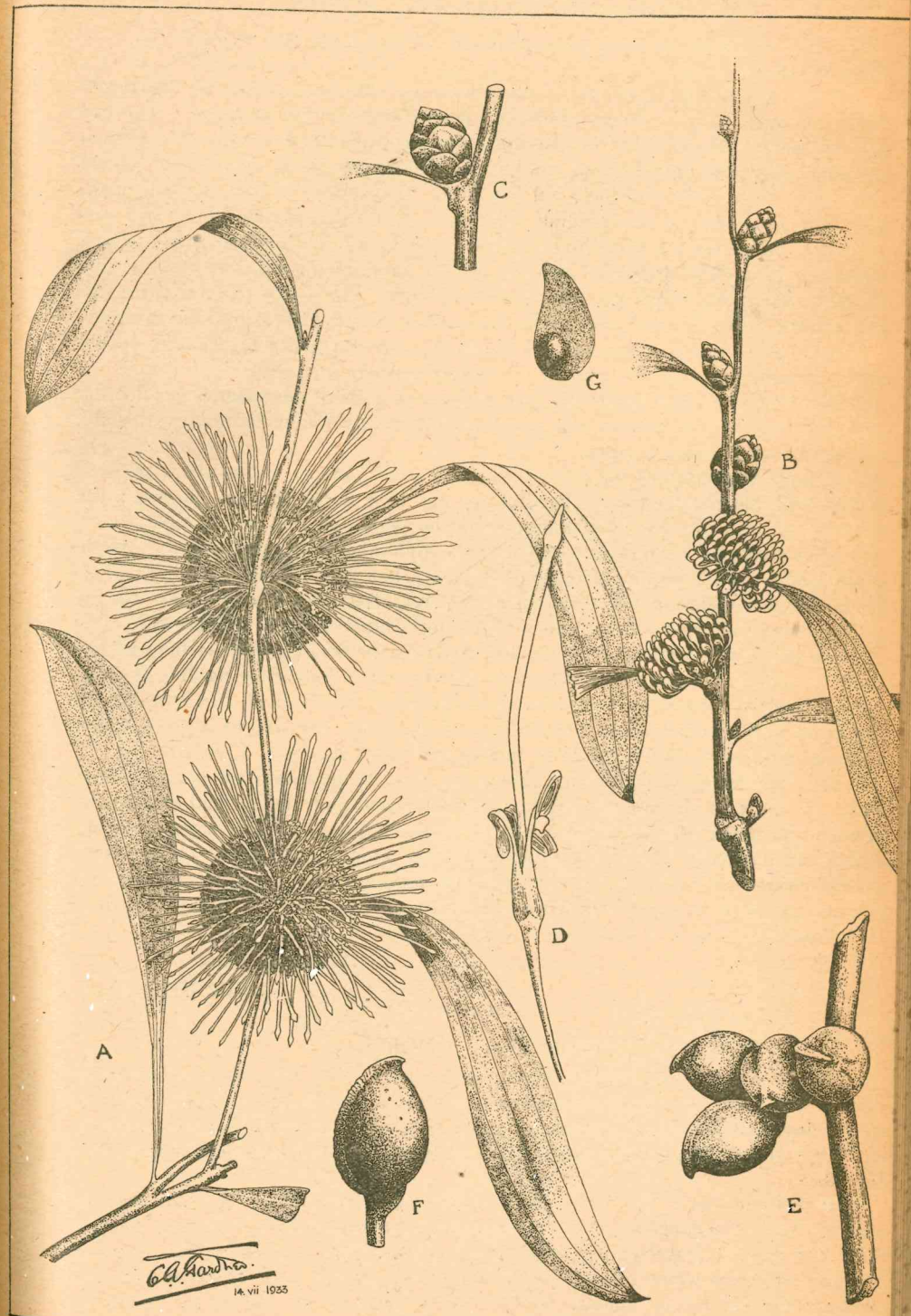
Note.—flaccid (flak'-sid) means soft and weak; early yielding to pressure.
uni-lateral: one-sided; springing from one side.

EXPLANATION OF PLATE.

A, Twig showing two flower-clusters. B, Twig showing flower- and branch-buds, and two unexpanded flower-clusters. C, Flower-bud. D, Individual flower (enlarged). E, Cluster of fruits. F, Single fruit. G, Seed. D enlarged, the others reduced in size.

Drawn from cultivated plant, Perth, W.A.

Icon. origin.



C. A. Gardner.
14. vii. 1933