

PICTURES: WILD ABOUT GARDENS

Striking Australiana you can bank on

Our unique native trees give a garden brilliance

You may be noticing the acorn banksia, *Banksia prionotes*, coming into its full glory this time of year, with its creamy flowers emerging from an orange base. It represents just one of a very spectacular group of plants.

The banksias are a very ancient genus and their magnificent flowers are the envy of the world. They are unique to Australia, apart from one species found in Papua New Guinea. Most banksias are found only in WA and they are fabulous, rewarding plants to grow. Providing a food source for nectar-feeding birds and small mammals, many have very long flowering periods.

Although they are such old plants, representing eons of evolutionary ingenuity on the part of nature, banksias are well-suited to contemporary gardens. Their sculptural forms are very striking and architectural and can be used to great effect as specimen or accent plants. Having so many variations in growth habit and leaf type, shapes and

colours, they are useful as foliage plants in garden design before you even consider their stunning flowers.

Check out specialist Australian plant nurseries to find a banksia suitable for your garden.

To see a complete collection of banksias, visit the Banksia Farm at Mt Barker and talk to Kevin Collins, who is passionate and knowledgeable about this most amazing genus. And if you are keen to learn more, Alex George's *The Banksia Book* is a fantastic reference.

GROWING TIPS

- Well-adapted to our impoverished soils, banksias need no fertiliser and little water to establish — and are best not watered in the long term.
- They can be lightly pruned and several species are grown as cut flowers due to their big showy blooms and extended vase life.
- Banksias will tolerate a range of soil types but insist on good drainage.
- In some coastal soils, they can become iron-deficient but this can be remedied with an application of a



Banksia blechnifolia

small amount of iron sulfate to the base of plants with yellowing leaves.

WHICH BANKSIA?

There are so many wonderful species to choose from. Ranging from trees to shrubs and ground covers, you could have a whole garden of banksias. Kings Park has done just that with its banksia garden.

Starting from the ground up, check out prostrate species like *Banksia*



Banksia menziesii

blechnifolia, with its divided leaves and pinky cone flower. Its striking sculptural leaves add interesting texture to the floor of the garden. *Banksia petiolaris* and *repens* are also excellent ground covers.

The dwarf banksia, 'Birthday Candles', has a bonsai-like habit and pretty orange-type flowers set on a deep-green, pine-like foliage. It makes a great pot specimen and can be grown in the garden as well. (A slow-growing Eastern States variety, it sneaks in here because it is very cute — a kind of banksia mascot.)

NEW DWARF FORMS

For low shrub-style plants, several smaller forms of banksia have come on to the market recently and are proving very reliable and popular. Now available are dwarf forms of *Banksia menziesii* (with its grey leaves and pinky cones), *attenuata* (with long, thin, deep-green leaves with silvery undersides and tall, slender yellow flowers), *ashbyi* (with huge bright orange flowers and long divided grey leaves) and *Banksia prionotes*.

For taller shrubs, take a look at *Banksia media*, an easy-to-grow form from coast to hills which hedges quite well. *Banksia speciosa*, showy banksia, is another tall, very elegant



Dwarf Banksia menziesii

variety with very long leaves and creamy flowers.

The bull banksia, *Banksia grandis*, makes a magnificent little specimen tree with its bright-green, big divided architectural leaves and huge flowers.

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Banksia 'Birthday Candles'

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