

# What To See At Mt Lofty Botanic Garden

Among the many trees and shrubs unusual in cultivation to be seen at Mt Lofty Botanic Garden are three which are especially eye-catching at this time of the year.

In the Australian collection, native pepper, *Tasmannia lanceolata* bears black shiny berries from late spring into summer. The dried ground berries and leaves are becoming well known as 'bush tucker' food. The plant is a medium shrub growing up to 3m high and prefers semi-shade and moist, well-drained soil. There are several specimens on the western side of Fern Gully.

Its close relative Winter's bark, *Drimys winteri* is native to South America. It was named for Captain Winter of The Beagle, the ship upon which Charles Darwin sailed during the time he formulated his ideas on the origin of species. It is a tree to about 5m high, preferring dappled light and moist conditions during the warm months. It has showy white flowers, followed by small fleshy fruits which ripen to dark purple in autumn. Indigenous people use the leaves and bark as a tea for sore throats. There are two trees growing in the beds either side of the entrance to South American Gully.



*Puya berteroniana*. Photo by Nicky Fidler

Another South American plant looking spectacular at this time of the year is the blue puya, *Puya berteroniana*. It is allied to pineapple, both being members of the bromeliad family but, unlike the topic to be presented at our next general meeting, these belong to the terrestrial group. In the wild plants can form huge clumps consisting of large leathery leaves and old and new flower spikes, which can reach 3m high. The leaves have spines pointing downwards by which animals can become trapped - easily moving into the clump but then finding it fatally impossible to withdraw. There is a large specimen at the upper end of South American Gully.

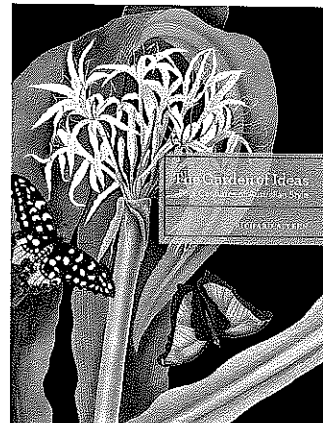
Mt Lofty Botanic Garden displays many species rare in cultivation and, often, rare and/or threatened in the wild. It is worth making time to come and familiarise yourself with a few of its treasures.

Nicky Fidler

# Book Review

The Garden of Ideas - Four Centuries of Australian Style  
Richard Aitken

I confess to having spent a great deal of time delving into this *magnum opus* by Richard Aitken. I was aware of Aitken's work and the amount of information which he uncovers for his writings, but I am amazed at the vast amount involved in this publication. I must agree with John Patrick's reference to Aitken as 'the ultimate Australian garden detective.' Aitken has drawn



together comments and statements from many different authors in a wide variety of fields, including philosophy, geography, poetry, painting, exploration, science, horticulture and religion to underline his observations. The role of early colonists is also given its place. The breadth of information used is staggering and yet it all works, combining to achieve an excellent totality.

In addition to the scholarly, yet readable, text which contains many beautiful 'turns of phrase', there is a vast array of illustrations and photographs, once again drawn from a wide range of disciplines. These complement the text and show Aitken's thought processes. The fact that the Select Bibliography runs to three pages and the List of Illustrations to seven pages, gives some idea of the scholarship involved in this work.

Aitken's book traces the story from colonists regarding the 'bush' as the enemy and clearing it, leaving small pockets to create a park-like appearance, similar to the gardens of 'home', through the interest in Australian plants being taken overseas as curiosities, on then to the creation of the wild garden or bush garden and finally to gardening for a sustainable future. Adelaide readers will be pleased with the very positive references to some of the gardens in South Australia and the complimentary remarks about the Adelaide Botanic Garden.

In summary, this is not a coffee table book. It is a scholarly, well written and eminently readable history of the development of the Australian gardening style and its place in the past, present and future. This book is one to be 'dipped into' on a regular basis. The excellent way in which the book is divided into virtually self-contained chapters allows one to take one's time with the book and savour each developing theme. This short review does not do full justice to this publication but I do recommend it not only to the professional horticulturist, but to the enthusiastic and erudite amateur, of whom there are many, and it deserves a place on many bookshelves.

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