

Flourish

ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS
VICTORIA

SUPPORTER NEWS
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ISSUE 21

Cranbourne's New How to Garden

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Conservation

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Royal
Botanic
Gardens
Victoria



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Global Collection Progress Update

Housed in the National Herbarium of Victoria, the Global Collection offers a picture of biodiversity through time. With specimens dating back to the 16th century, it provides invaluable baseline data for researchers worldwide. Led by *Manager Collections* Alison Vaughan, the team undertake fascinating detective work to transform historical specimens into useful measures of biodiversity. Databasing the collection enables researchers to map, model and predict the impact of climate change on plant life.

The team have just finished mounting the Global Collection's fungi specimens and can now begin to curate and database the algae family thanks to the generous support of the Alan and Elizabeth Finkel Foundation.

"The Finkels' support for the global algae collection is helping unlock centuries of scientific data that will be indispensable for current and future generations of researchers working to understand and protect the world's marine biodiversity," said Alison.

The mounted specimens will be photographed and uploaded to the Australasian Virtual Herbarium, while physical specimens will be available to other institutions for DNA retrieval and microscopic investigation. The Gardens are incredibly grateful to the Trustees of the Alan and Elizabeth Finkel Foundation and the Gidleigh Foundation for their contribution to our work unlocking the important scientific information in our Global Collection. •

Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and learn and pay our respects to their Elders past and present.



Welcome to Summer Flourish

Dear supporters,

In this edition of *Flourish*, we pause to reflect on the incredible network of supporters that sustain our Gardens. At the core of our work are people whose passion and dedication make a lasting impact—like Seedbank Volunteer Dr Bob Hare. Bob has generously devoted countless hours to advancing seed conservation research at the National Herbarium, helping safeguard the future of our unique plant life.

We are truly fortunate to be surrounded by individuals like the Hares, who share in the wonder of what can be achieved when we come together in the spirit of conservation and care for our landscapes. Their commitment reminds us that every contribution—large or small—helps our Gardens thrive for generations to come.

At the end of 2025, I, along with a handful of others from across the organisation, attended the 10th Botanic Gardens of Australia and New Zealand (BGANZ) Congress. It was a stimulating program where we shared stories, challenges, and ideas, and explored how we can be more impactful. We were honoured to receive several industry awards, including the 'Education and Public Engagement Award' for our Raising Rarity Schools Outreach Program which we celebrate in these pages. This recognition speaks to the quality, impact and integrity of our projects.

What a joy it was to celebrate with so many of you at our End of Year gathering in December at The Observatory Cafe. The evening truly captured the spirit of what we can accomplish together—thanks to the unwavering support of our Gardens' community.

We are thrilled to share several new projects taking shape across both our landscapes. The revitalised How to Garden at Cranbourne Gardens is now open, and we are delighted to welcome visitors to this newly activated space. I encourage you to plan a visit to experience the wonder of Australian edible plants and learn how useful they can be in your own gardens – and summer BBQ recipes! This project would not have been possible without the support of the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust and Phil and Debbie Moors.

For the late Noel Waite, esteemed business-woman and talented watercolour artist, the Ornamental Lake at Melbourne Gardens was a lifelong source of inspiration. Noel chose this cherished location as the site for her family's Seat Dedication. Today, we look forward to enhancing access and appreciation of this inner-city biodiversity haven through the new Terrace Boardwalk on Observatory Lake, made possible through the generosity and passion of our donors.

Whether it be at Cranbourne or Melbourne Gardens, we invite you to experience these initiatives and find moments to connect with nature and the beauty of the Gardens this summer.

Best wishes,

Chris Russell
Director and Chief Executive,
Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria

A Re-imagined Space for Learning and Connection

The revitalisation of the How to Garden at Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne is now complete, made possible through the generous support of the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust and former Gardens Director and Chief Executive Dr Philip Moors AO and Dr Debbie Moors.

Located at the northern end of Cranbourne's Australian Garden, the renewed space invites visitors to connect with nature through the practical art of growing, preparing and enjoying native Australian food plants.

"We are thrilled to support this redevelopment project in honour of former Helen Macpherson Smith Trust Chair, Dr Philip Moors AO," shares a Trustee. The Trust's contribution was generously matched by Debbie and Phil, who share a long and personal connection to the Gardens. "The Australian Garden will always remain close to our hearts since its development while Phil was RBGV Director," says Debbie. "It has been so rewarding to see its growth, beauty and visitation increase each year. It's become such a haven for families and gardeners in south-eastern Melbourne." Phil adds, "Debbie and I are delighted to be supporting the renovation of the How to Garden, alongside the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust."

Originally conceived as a demonstration space for bush food cultivation, the How to Garden has now been transformed into a practical and welcoming area that brings this vision to life. The garden showcases a variety of new plants, long seating benches, a teaching circle and fire pit. The redevelopment has been thoughtfully designed to create a contemporary garden with a focus on biodiversity, correct plant placement, and enhanced interpretive signage to encourage self-guided exploration of the area. Together, these new features position the garden as an invaluable education hub, designed to support hands-on learning and further community engagement in the Cranbourne area.

Under the guidance of *Landscape Architect* Andrew Laidlaw and *Project Manager* Philip Bowyer-Smith, the design process was completed in mid-2025, with site-specific planting finishing in November. They've created an environment where people of all ages can learn how to grow food sustainably, while deepening an understanding of soil health, water-sensitive gardening, and the harmful impacts of pesticides and chemicals on our food systems and biodiversity. Andrew explains, "Most of the featured species are food or medicinal plants, while a few are selected for their ability to grow in a difficult microclimate." Upon visiting the gardens, you'll find native Australian perennials like the *Arthropodium strictum* (chocolate lily) known for its sweet tubers and edible flowers, alongside *Tasmannia lanceolata* (mountain pepper) whose leaves and berries can be dried to form a distinct spice. The result is a fresh, cohesive and engaging space that welcomes Gardens' visitors into a living classroom of edible flavours—just in time for the start of the school year!

Close collaboration between the Gardens' Horticulture, Learning and Interpretation Teams ensured the design meets the needs of both visitors and educators. The Learning Team will deliver immersive workshops for students across early childhood, primary and tertiary levels, many of whom will experience the joy of planting, nurturing and harvesting food for the very first time.

Beyond structured learning programs, the How to Garden encourages everyone to get their hands dirty. "We know the revitalised garden will inspire thousands of visitors with exciting ideas about growing and enjoying Australian plants at home", says Phil.

The new How to Garden stands as a testament to what can be achieved through shared vision and collaboration, transforming a corner of Cranbourne Gardens into a vibrant centre for sustainability, education and inspiration. •



↶ *Cranbourne Horticulturalist*
Ali Wynne planting out the How to Garden at the start of summer.

⤵ *Landscape Architect* Andrew Laidlaw at work laying out the planting plan in the How to Garden.

“The new How to Garden demonstrates how any backyard—large or small—can support biodiversity, grow food, and thrive with the right plant choices.”

Andrew Laidlaw,
Landscape Architect



Dr Bob Hare and Seedbank Conservation



Bob and Gerry Hare have long believed in the importance of giving back to the community. This deeply held value has shaped their support of the Gardens and inspired their generous contribution towards vital seed conservation research, helping to protect our state's rare and threatened species.

- ① Bob in the Herbarium lab scoring germination.
- ➔ Detailed Seedbank images photographed by Bob with a map of where the species occur in the Victorian alps.

“Bob’s curiosity and passion for seed conservation have been a driving force for our team. His and Gerry’s generosity means we can now explore tissue culture techniques to safeguard species that were previously beyond our reach.”

Dr Meg Hirst, *Seed Ecologist*

A natural storyteller and keen historian, Gerry was a volunteer at The Shrine of Remembrance for over twenty years. She also appreciates botanical art and regularly visits TABI exhibitions. A cacti enthusiast at heart, Gerry fondly recalls being blown away by the natural abundance of succulents and cacti during travels through the southwestern United States. Today, she delights in visiting the Arid Garden at Melbourne Gardens, drawn to its vivid displays and rare specimens.

Bob has always been fascinated by plants, and when he retired from a long and happy career in anaesthetics, the botanical realm naturally beckoned. “I’d previously collected and propagated seeds from my local district and watched 6000 trees grow on our property,” Bob explains. He was able to further this newfound interest in seed conservation by joining a tour of the Victorian Conservation Seedbank. His curiosity was truly piqued, and by the end of the tour he had signed up as an official seedbank volunteer. “The moment he walked in, he started asking questions,” recalls *Seed Ecologist* Dr Meg Hirst of that fortuitous tour nearly 18 years ago.

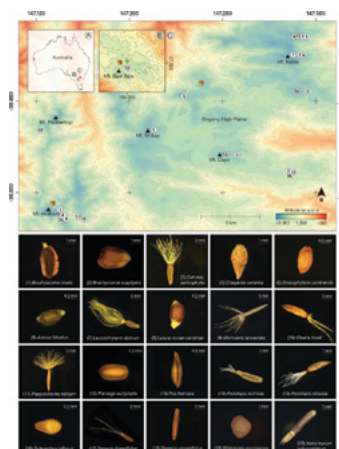
Bob’s curiosity and passion for seed conservation continues to this day. Over the years, he has joined fieldwork trips across Victoria, cleaned hundreds of freshly collected seeds for long-term storage, recorded germination trials, and helped set up large-scale seed experiments. He has also taken thousands of high-quality seed images, many now featured on VicFlora and even in published research. “I’ve learnt a lot about botany in my years at the Herbarium,” Bob reflects. “It has been a privilege to work with some of the top botanists in Australia—little old me!” he laughs.

Bob is an incredible asset to the Seedbank team, always willing to lend a hand, whether assisting with embryo extractions for an Honours project or measuring seed traits for PhD students.

Reflecting on what motivates him and Gerry to support the Gardens’ conservation work, Bob explains, “The staff are a dedicated team, and it is particularly satisfying to be working with rare and threatened species, with a view to preserving them through the ‘Raising Rarity’ program.”

Through Bob and Gerry’s recent generous donation, Seedbank staff can now expand their research using advanced tissue culture methods to protect genetic diversity and help restore endangered species. The new Tissue Culture Lab will allow the Gardens to remain at the cutting edge of plant conservation techniques, enabling on-site research into tissue propagation for species with low seed availability or complex germination requirements. This opens the door to tackling difficult woody species that staff cannot normally establish using standard germination protocols. Bob hopes their contribution will spark new possibilities for plant conservation.

“I envision our support will enable botanists to improve their knowledge of the conditions required to propagate and grow species at risk of extinction,” he says. Meg shares this excitement. “Bob and Gerry’s contribution is a game-changer for Victorian plant conservation.” ●



Celebrating the Gardens Community

In early December, The Observatory forecourt came alive for the Gardens annual End of Year celebration.

The green carpet was rolled out for an evening dedicated to gratitude, connection and a shared passion for the natural world that continues to drive the Gardens forward. The special event brought together supporters who recognise the importance of our landscapes, programs and incredible scientific work that occurs within the Gardens gates and beyond.

Guests enjoyed a cocktail on arrival, complemented by a delicious canapé menu from the ever-impressive Darling Group. A mid-century bebop jazz ensemble set a relaxed tone for the summer evening, while Interflora's floral

styling enhanced the beautiful venue. Throughout the evening, guests mingled and enjoyed connecting with new and old friends.

The night also featured a panel discussion hosted by *Royal Botanic Gardens Board Chair Penny Fowler AM*, joined by *Executive Director Science Professor David Cantrill* and *Manager Collections Alison Vaughan*, offering insights into the history and intricacy of the extraordinary State Botanical Collection and the Gardens role in maintaining it as a resource for future generations.

A heart-felt thank you to all our guests, whose care and kindness helps shape the future possibilities and preservation of Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria. •

↓ Felicia Mariani *Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria Board*, Hazel and Jane Brentnall, and Kara Ward *Director Creative and Tourism Programming*.





⬆️ Paul Evans and John Keats

⬅️ Sue and Alastair Campbell



⬆️ Simon McCall and Susie Hamson

⬅️ Sally Browne AM

The Terrace Boardwalk Project



A much-loved area of Melbourne Gardens is set for renewal, with plans underway to rebuild the Terrace Boardwalk and create new public seating beneath the graceful *Taxodium mucronatum* (Montezuma Cypress) at the Terrace Cafe.

“This exciting development is made possible thanks to the incredible generosity of donors who share our vision for a thriving, accessible landscape for all to enjoy.”

Chris Russell, *Director and Chief Executive*

The revitalised Terrace Boardwalk will strengthen accessibility and safety, while protecting and promoting an iconic element of the Gardens’ landscape.

Landscape Architect Andrew Laidlaw describes the project as “a chance to reconnect people with one of the Gardens’ most beautiful outlooks—a place where plants, wildlife and community meet.”

The new Terrace Boardwalk will provide a smooth transition from Phoenix Lawn to the Terrace forecourt, offering visitors an inviting space to sit and enjoy the enchanting views of the Ornamental Lake. The area is a biodiversity hotspot, a haven for wildlife, from kingfishers to eels, and during the summer months, the surface of the lake bursts to life as the Lotus bloom.

The project’s goal is to optimise and value the landscape by replacing the old boardwalk structure and creating a place where visitors can slow down, connect, and experience the Gardens in a new way. The project will unfold in stages, including design, heritage permits, engineering, arboriculture and water

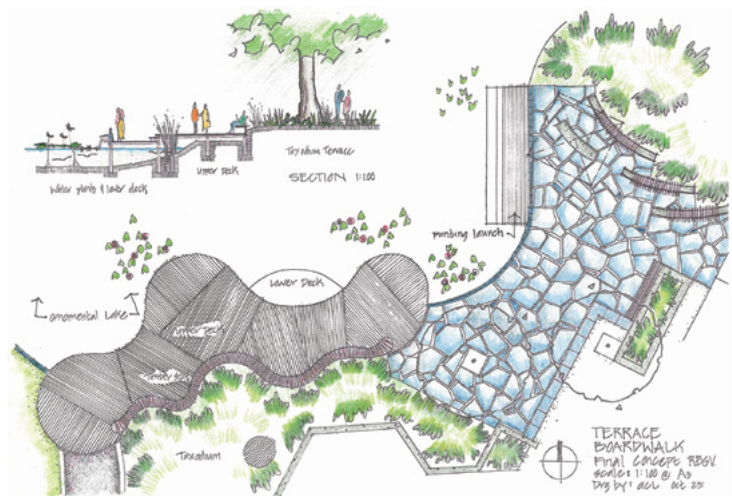
management, ensuring the boardwalk is both robust and environmentally sensitive.

Generous funding from a donor has already enabled detailed site investigations and the completion of the design process. They felt motivated to give back to the Gardens, and particularly a high-profile location overlooking the lake that has provided them and their families with so many memorable moments of connection, exploration and joy. And now, thrilled with the concept developed, they have followed up with an exciting offer. Our generous donors have pledged further funding for construction, bringing their contribution for the project to \$500,000, and have invited others to join them in making the beautiful new Terrace Boardwalk a reality!

This new initiative offers our supporter community a moment of reflection, celebrating the role the Gardens plays in people’s lives as a place of relaxation and discovery. •

If you are interested in contributing to this significant project, please contact *Philanthropy Manager Nicola Kaufman* on +61 3 9252 2713 for more information.

- ➡ The iconic flowering of the Carolina Queen Lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*) offers Gardens visitors a transcending moment of connection with the plant world.
- ➡ Documentation of the newly proposed boardwalk design from the desk of Andrew Laidlaw.



Dr Lynette Noel Waite AO – An Extraordinary Life Well Lived

Three years ago, the extended Waite family gathered at Melbourne Gardens to celebrate their much-loved senior family member, Noel. After a wonderful picnic lunch, Noel chose this moment to share a personal wish with those closest to her. She explained that when her time came, she didn't want a burial site. She'd had two husbands—one who had died many years ago in a car accident, and one who had passed away more recently. "She said, 'Out of all things, I would love to be remembered on a seat here in the Gardens with my name on it, where all the family and friends can visit me for years to come,'" recounts Noel's eldest daughter, Debbie Waite. Since Noel's passing in July 2025, her legacy now lives on in the Gardens.

Noel Waite wore many hats. She was a devoted mother, a pioneering woman in the business world, a trained pianist and singer, an accomplished fashion illustrator, and a portrait and landscape painter. She also spent many a Sunday afternoon painting beside the Ornamental Lake at Melbourne Gardens.

Noel mainly specialised in watercolour and pen and ink—a skill that extended from her time studying 'Commercial Art' at Swinburne University—and carried her on to an early career with Myer and Wittner Shoes illustrating fashion and shoes for daily newspaper advertising.

The devastating loss of Noel's first husband back in the late 1960s would alter her life plans, prompting her to take over his recruitment business while continuing to raise four young children. Noel's determination and exceptional people skills soon gained her respect and trust

in the business world. She went on to become a leading businesswoman and a passionate advocate for women in the workplace.

However, art was always her calming passion. "What she loved most was to paint out in the open—the Gardens provided endless fascinations and were a place where she could connect with nature and nourish her soul," says Debbie. Noel would set up her easel and paints on the grass beside the lake, and passersby would often stop to watch her serene landscapes take shape.

As young children, Debbie and Rosie, along with their brothers Peter and David, would visit Melbourne Gardens to feed the ducks and take in the beauty of nature. "Mum would later bring the grandchildren to the Terrace Teahouse, chatting and laughing with them while gently educating them on their table manners with the aid of china teacups, scones and jam," Rosie laughs. "Then, afterwards, she would sit by the lake and paint, while the grandchildren would continue feeding the ducks!"

In early 2025, Noel and her family visited her seat, positioned near the peaceful and familiar Ornamental Lake. Rosie recalls, "The weather was beautiful, the lake looked like a mirror, and eventually when the time came to leave, Mum just wanted to stay—perhaps in some way she knew it would be her last time here at the Gardens." Debbie adds, "That day, in her favourite place, beside the lake, in the sunshine, with family, it was so very special for us all." Noel's love of life and nature lives on in her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, who will continue to visit her family seat at the Gardens. •



- ➔ Noel working on a watercolour during one of the many joyful trips she and Debbie shared, making art together.
- ⌚ A watercolour painting Noel created, capturing her granddaughter watching the ducks by Ornamental Lake.



“The Gardens bought mum peace, connection to nature, and great enrichment, a place of beauty where she wanted to bring her loved ones.”

The Waite Family

Inspiring Local Action and Future Environmental Leaders



Schools and local communities across Victoria are working alongside conservation experts from Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria to protect rare and threatened native species. Building on the success of the 2024 Raising Rarity pilot program, the initiative is expanding its innovative 'citizen science in schools' model.

“Every Raising Rarity lesson ignites real-world action, turning knowledge into change, whilst building a future network of champions who will safeguard biodiversity and strengthen the resilience of their local environment.”

Tash van Velzen, *Raising Rarity Outreach Officer*



Thanks to the ongoing support of the Ian and Shirley Norman Foundation, City of Casey, Cranbourne Friends and a number of generous donors, primary to secondary students are becoming active stewards of biodiversity, gaining real-world insights into conservation science.

The program introduced regional and metropolitan schools to the process of growing, researching and collecting seed from two threatened species, *Craspedia canens* (Grey Billy-button) and *Xerochrysum palustre* (Swamp Everlasting). This was a unique and highly successful program, demonstrating the effectiveness of hands-on learning in building scientific and horticultural skills and fostering environmental awareness in students.

Raising Rarity Outreach Officer Tash van Velzen provides students and educators with direct support throughout the school year. Along with *Seed Ecologist* Dr. Meg Hirst and the Gardens’ Horticulture Team, Raising Rarity brings scientific expertise to provide authentic, interdisciplinary learning experiences. The team help coordinate species Discovery Day excursions and are on hand for student enquiries during the plant growing season. This excellent work culminates in harvesting the seeds and a Celebration Day event at the end of the school year.

“Through plant cultivation, monitoring and seed harvesting, students are contributing valuable scientific data to ongoing research,” explains Tash. They study the entire lifecycle of each plant, from germination to seed production, concluding with the careful harvesting of the

rare seeds. Once collected, these seeds are cleaned, tested, and securely stored at the Victorian Conservation Seedbank, ensuring they contribute to long-term species preservation. Meg shares, “By working with these schools, and community gardens, we are growing a culture of care, curiosity, and ecological stewardship across generations.”

In 2025, the program expanded to include ten schools across two bioregional hubs located in East Gippsland and across the Melbourne Metro area. The team is now focusing on research and development of suitable new species for the next school hub in the Ballarat region. Meg reflects, “Raising Rarity has shown that conservation is most powerful when it’s community-led and rooted in place.” Consultation with Traditional Owners is underway to embed cultural knowledge and traditional understandings of caring for Country throughout the program, further strengthening its connection to community and place.

Looking ahead, a rollout is planned to gradually expand into more bioregional hubs, strengthening relations between schools, regional botanic gardens and local communities. By 2027, Raising Rarity aims to involve at least 22 schools, engaging over 1,000 students from Years 5 to 10. Each year, the students who participate in the program build on their practical plant skills, conservation knowledge and confidence. Tash reflects, “when children and communities engage through hands-on science and conservation, they don’t just understand nature – they become empowered to protect it.” •

🕒 Meg and Tash in the Melbourne Gardens nursery with their Education and Public Engagement BGANZ award.

👩‍🌾 Students carefully attach seed collecting bags to *Xerochrysum palustre* flower heads to capture seed.

A Home for All

Our recent End of Year Appeal highlighted how the Gardens are a 'Home for All' – a haven for plants, people and wildlife. Thank you to all the supporters for their kindness and care in helping to ensure the Gardens can remain a sanctuary for our littlest and most vulnerable fauna friends.

Your support will help us continue to deliver research trials and conservation initiatives, such as the incredible work Eilish Roberts *Southern Brown Bandicoot Outreach Officer* is achieving at Cranbourne Gardens. The new trial is providing the local Southern Brown Bandicoot population with safe places to hide as much of their natural habitat has been lost to urban developments.

Eilish and the team are testing out five different structures to see which temporary refuges the endangered species will use. The shelters range from a biodegradable cone developed by ReHabitat—designed to break down after a year—to wooden hideaways, tile-based shelters, and cages packed with native vegetation. Since the start of summer, cameras have been set up across the bushland site to observe interactions and track bandicoot behaviour. The shelters are placed to offer quick cover from predators in exposed areas. The team are encouraging local residences and land managers to help by planting native species such as Lomandra and Tussock grasses—simple backyard choices that can make a life-saving difference.



“We often advise land managers on creating habitat and shelter for bandicoots, so we hope this trial will further enhance our knowledge and improve the way they are managed and protected in the surrounding landscape.”

Eilish Roberts, *Southern Brown Bandicoot Outreach Officer*



Little is known about the Southern Brown Bandicoot’s true preferences, making this one of Australia’s few field studies on the topic. With a fluctuating population of 100 to 300 bandicoots, Cranbourne Gardens provide the perfect natural setting to gain important detailed insight.

Our Gardens also provide a rare sanctuary for nocturnal invertebrates, offering diverse vegetation and significantly less light pollution than the surrounding city area. This unique environment makes Melbourne Gardens an ideal place to observe the often-overlooked creatures that thrive after dark. To better understand and protect this hidden biodiversity, a group of passionate Gardens staff members have launched nighttime invertebrate surveys, gathering valuable data about the species that share the Melbourne Gardens landscape with us.

One spring evening, Jack Dewhurst, Alana O’Neill, Pascale Jacq and Kim Colman set out to explore this hidden world. Using a wide catchment net and blue light, they were able to gently attract and photograph a variety of small, elusive species for documentation. The pictures taken during their survey were uploaded to iNaturalist, where they contribute to global research efforts and help identify unusual or rare finds. As Kim noted with excitement, “There was a Bogong moth among the mix which was thrilling!” •

📍 A Southern Brown Bandicoot at home amongst the shrubbery of Cranbourne Gardens. Image taken by Ricardo Simao.

📷 Photographs taken by Pascale Jacq at Melbourne Gardens of an *Ocybadistes walkeri* (Green grass-dart), and an unidentified butterfly and moth caterpillar during a recent nighttime invertebrate survey.



For Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria to be the best possible custodians of our unique natural heritage, we need to continue to uncover plant knowledge and save the rarest Australian flora and fauna from extinction.

It is through the generosity of our donors that the Gardens continue our efforts in world-class science and horticultural research, landscape development and public programs.

Show your support today by making a fully tax-deductible donation.



YES, I would like to support the Gardens mission to see life enriched and sustained by plants.

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All donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible

"I enjoyed the tour and talk on native Orchid conservation in September."

Alan Killeen

"Thanks for the tour, never knew how much effort goes into keeping native orchids from extinction."

Meg Matthews

"One of the absolute highlights of our trip – thank you."

Maddi Condren (WA)

"I visited the gardens in Cranbourne. Thank you very much for maintaining such a gorgeous site!"

Jan Sprenger

"Love all the work the learning team is doing at RBGV – will continue to support, promote and advocate in my work in the field of public wellbeing."

Rachel Liang



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To support our work or learn more please contact us on:

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