



Introduction

If "variety be the spice of life" then the small plants are the spices of the garden.

*Actinodium cunninghamii in the foreground
with Scaevola aemula*

Small plants have a unique role in our gardens. When we arrange plants it is the small ones that are placed in the foreground. Here, they grow closest to the path, driveway, edge of the garden bed and cascading over the retaining wall. We also tuck them into highly visible spots to add splashes of colour. Therefore, despite their stature these small plants have a huge impact on our senses.

Our eyes are drawn to their colours, shapes and textures. We catch their scents in the breeze. We love to touch their soft foliage and notice when we catch their prickles. We see and hear the birds and butterflies, insects and lizards that visit and live within their foliage and flowers.

While the trees and larger plants have a dominance of size and character on the garden, they live in the background. It is the small plants that provide the change and diversity, the surprise and drama, the novelty and innovation.

With one of the highest diversity of plant types in the world, Australia is blessed with some of the most beautiful small plants. We are indebted to our scientists, plant breeders, horticulturalists and the wholesale and retail nursery industries for bringing these plants into cultivation. Our aim in this book is to introduce a wide and diverse range of small native plants and show how they can be used in gardens and landscaping. By doing so, we hope that many people will come to appreciate how fortunate we are to have such amazing native Australian plants to add beauty to our gardens.



Actinotus helianthi



Dichopogon fimbriatus



Lomandra glauca



Hibbertia vestita



Lechenaultia formosa 'Tropicana'



Pelargonium rodneyanum



Chapter I

What is a Small Native Plant?

Australia has a wide range of small plants that reflects the harshness and diversity of the climate. While they may be smaller than many other plants in the garden, they are often characterised by bright flower colours and ornate detail.

The small plants described in this book are shrubs, grasses, herbaceous plants and annuals that grow up to 1 metre high with a spread of less than 1 metre. However, the local climate, soil and moisture levels will affect the growth of a plant and differences are likely to occur.

Another factor that affects plant size and shape is the variation that naturally occurs within a plant species. These different forms can vary considerably from the original true species and are often grown as new plant cultivars for use in gardens, parks and commercial landscaping. *Adenanthos sericeus* 'Dwarf Form' is an example, where this plant is significantly smaller than the original species.

Some of the plants in this book are listed under their cultivar name only, such as *Anigozanthos* 'Bush Pearl' and *Brachyscome* 'Starscope'. These plants may be hybrids or their exact origin is not clear. However, the plant is well established and clearly identifiable by its cultivar name.

The plants described as grasses covers true grasses belonging to the family *Poaceae*, (eg *Eragrostis elongata*) as well as the strappy-leaf plants such as the *Lomandra* and *Dianella* species. Small native grasses are a beautiful and versatile addition to any garden as their habit is distinctly different from other plants.

Many small plants do not have a long life span, although some have the ability to rejuvenate using seeds or suckering roots. Seasonal displays take advantage of their short lives, creating special features that change over time, providing interest and variety.



Agrostocrinum scabrum



Brachyscome 'Starscope'



Boronia crenulata 'Pink Passion'



Philotheca buxifolia 'Cascade of Stars'



Ptilotus gaudichaudii



Wahlenbergia stricta 'Blue Mist'