

NATIONAL WATTLE DAY 1ST SEPTEMBER 2009



National Wattle Day is celebrated throughout Australia on the 1st September each year. The day has significance as a day to celebrate our natural environment, our flora, our rainforests and bushland, our coastal heathlands and desert dunes. The sprig of wattle should encourage us to preserve our fragile environment, so that future generations will experience the joy of seeing our bushland light up each spring with golden bloom.

This is the message of National Wattle Day: Wattles are usually the first pioneer plants to rise from the ashes of bushfires, using the extra nutrients to support their growth. They then provide protection for other seedlings growing underneath in a natural succession of the bush.

There are over 600 different species distributed throughout Australia with shapes varying from low, spreading shrubs to large, upright trees. It is often called 'Mulga'. Whilst most are early spring and summer-flowering, there are wattles that bloom all year round.

Wattles are the most widespread of all Australian plants, some inhabiting the most remote and inhospitable areas, growing in parched sand in the desert under the scorching sun, spiked, hard and leafless. In the rainforest gullies they have soft feathery foliage with pale golden heads.

One species of wattle, *Acacia pycnantha*, is the floral emblem of Australia and is featured on the coat-of-arms.

Some acacias produce toxic, cyanogenic chemicals which may act as a defence against predators. There are few native vertebrate herbivores which eat wattles, although sheep, goats and rabbits will damage seedlings, and the latter are known to strip the bark from mulga trees (*A. aneura*) in times of drought, ringbarking and killing the trees. Other herbivores include phyllode-eating moth larvae, sap-sucking leaf hoppers, white flies, scale insects and mealy bugs and lerps.

Two species that are abundant on the Gold Coast are:- *Acacia sophorae* (Coast Wattle) located in Burleigh, Southport Spit & South Stradbroke Island, and *Acacia longifolia* (Coastal Wattle). For the GCCC flora list for the Gold Coast region, users should click on the link to Flora Species list sorted by either Genus or Family. (<http://www.goldcoastflorafauna.com.au/>).

Gecko Regen has a "growing list" which gives an indication of local species readily available for home garden plantings. Visit (www.geckoregen.org.au).

Despite the popularity of native plants in Australian gardens, the growing of wattles has never been widespread. Whilst they are fast growing they do have a short lifespan. They are useful hedge or screen plants.

Source: "Acacias of Southeast Australia" REF 583.321 TAM, available now in Gecko Library