



WATTLE WALK

Self-guided Trail



This self-guided walk will introduce you to a number of Wattles (*Acacia* species) that grow in Central Australia. There are over 700 different wattles in Australia, and over 1200 *Acacia* species worldwide. The wattle has been regarded as our national flower since the 1890s, however, it was not until 1988 that it officially became our national emblem. Wattles have been used extensively by Aboriginal people and by European settlers for timber and firewood. The seeds of several different species are an important food resource for Aboriginal people, and more recently wattleseed products have been developed for the growing bushfood market.

1. Red Mulga *Acacia cyperophylla*



[About 6 m back from start of walk on right-hand side of path]

Red Mulga or Minni Ritchi occurs in scattered populations along stony ephemeral watercourses across the Lake Eyre Basin. Its distinctive curls of reddish bark capture the evening light beautifully. It flowers after good rainfall events and can grow up to 8 m high.

2. Waddy Wood *Acacia peuce*

Arerrnte name: Arripar

Conservation status: Vulnerable



This threatened species is only known from three different populations on the fringes of the Simpson Desert (Andado Station in the NT; and near Boulia and Birdsville in Queensland). The immature trees are much spikier and less elegant than mature specimens which grow up to 17 m high, and have pendulous branches and large, silvery seed pods. The timber was used by Aboriginal people for clubs, and by early European settlers for fences.

3. Myall Gidgee *Acacia calcicola*

Arrernte name: Irrakwetye



Growing predominantly on limestone soils in scattered populations across Central Australia this shrubby tree grows up to about 5 m high. It can be confused with Western Myall (*A. papyrocarpa*) which is common through arid parts of South Australia. Aboriginal people have used the timber to make artefacts and for firewood, while the ash from burnt leaves is mixed with pituri (*Nicotiana* species) for chewing.

4. Ironwood *Acacia estrophiolata*

Arrernte name: Athenge



Mature trees are very graceful, with drooping foliage and rough-barked trunks, while immature plants have broader, spiny, short leaves. Ironwoods are fairly common throughout arid parts of the Northern Territory and South Australia, and small parts of Western Australia and Queensland. Most of the specimens in the Garden are self-sown. Hot fires will kill mature trees, and the foliage is palatable to cattle and camels. The iron-hard timber is used for fence posts and firewood, and the resinous gum

and lerp honeydew that can be found on the leaves are collected as snack food by Aboriginal people.

5. Witchetty Bush *Acacia kempeana*

Arrernte name: Atnyeme



The common name refers to the Witchetty grubs (larvae of a moth) found in the roots of this wattle. These tasty grubs are a favoured food of Aboriginal people in Central Australia, and are also dug out of the roots of plants by bilbies (a rare desert marsupial) in the Tanami and Great Sandy Deserts. Witchetty Bush grows in a wide range of habitats across Central Australia, and occurs naturally in the Gardens. In this specimen you can see clumps of parasitic Pale-leaf Mistletoe (*Amyema maidenii*) – note

how similar the Mistletoe leaves are to the Witchetty Bush leaves. Mistletoe is spread by the Mistletoe Bird, and usually doesn't kill the host plant, except when the plant is very stressed by drought or disease.

6. Dead Finish *Acacia tetragonophylla*

Arrernte name: Arlketyerre



The drought-resistant nature of this spiky wattle is captured in its common name – Dead Finish: the last species to peg out in severe drought. Growing up to 3 m high, Dead Finish is found in a range of habitats across inland Australia. Very showy in flower, these dense shrubs create good habitat for nesting birds, and their seeds (though not prolific) are a favoured bush food of Aboriginal people.

7. Mt Conner Wattle *Acacia ammobia*

Conservation status: Rare



[Look to the right of # 6]

This rare wattle is only found growing on sand dunes and low gravelly hills within a 100 km radius of Uluru. Growing up to 4 m high, it produces a flush of cylindrical yellow flowers in winter. The ripe seeds were traditionally harvested for food by Pitjantjatjara people.

8. *Acacia acradenia*



Growing on rocky hillslopes and creeklines across northern arid parts of Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia *Acacia acradenia* grows up to 3 m high. Its broad yellowish-green leaves are offset by large yellow cylindrical flowers produced in spring. This short-lived species is killed by hot fires.

9. Coonavitra Wattle *Acacia jennerae*



A fast-growing, slender, bluish foliated shrub that occurs only in scattered populations in spinifex country around salt lakes in northern South Australia and desert regions of the Northern Territory, Western Australia and New South Wales. It is now commonly cultivated, and, although short-lived, is an attractive feature in bush gardens around Alice Springs.

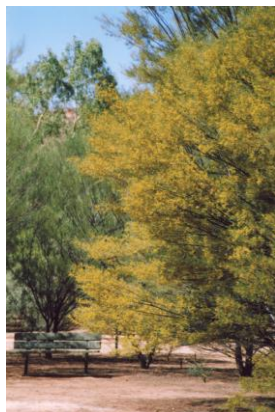
10. Turpentine Bush *Acacia lysiphloia*



Turpentine Bush is an attractive dense shrub to 2 m tall, with distinctive red curling bark (minniritchi bark). It occurs naturally in northern arid parts of the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland on gravelly soils on outcrops or fringing watercourses. This plant has strong medicinal properties for Warlpiri and Alyawarre people.

11. Mulga *Acacia aneura*

Arnernte name: Artetye



Mulga woodlands are a common plant community across inland Australia, often occurring on red earths in grove formations. These groves are separated by inter-grove areas where no Mulga grows, and they mirror the pattern of deposition of seed and debris as flood waters recede following heavy rainfall events. Mulga seed is an important bushfood throughout the region, and the timber is used extensively as firewood and by Aboriginal people for making shields, woomeras and digging sticks. Mulga apples (the gall formed around insect larvae) are also a favoured bushfood. There are two different species of Mistletoe species in this plant: Pale-leaf Mistletoe (*Amyema maidenii* – grey leaves and green flowers); and Flat-leaf Mistletoe (*Amyema spathulata* – greenish-yellow leaves and red flowers).

12. *Acacia neurocarpa*



[To the right of # 7]

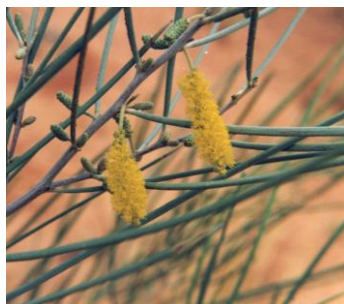
This species was until recently considered to be synonymous with Candelabra Wattle (*Acacia holosericea*). Occurring in scattered populations in the Tanami Desert and around the Davenport Ranges in the Northern Territory, the bulk of its distribution is in the Pilbara region in Western Australia where it grows along watercourses or in floodout areas. This is a fast-growing, short-lived species.

13. Horse Mulga *Acacia ramulosa*



Horse Mulga grows into a dense rounded shrub across a range of habitats in inland Australia. In the Northern Territory it can be found in salt lake-edge habitats and on sandplains in association with Mulga. It produces a flush of cylindrical Wattle flowers after rain events, and the seeds are collected as bushfood by Aboriginal people. As with Mulga, Horse Mulga is killed by hot summer wildfires.

14. Hill Mulga *Acacia macdonnelliensis* Arnernte name: Irrkwarteke



[To the left of track, just past # 13]

Growing up to 5 m high in rocky range habitat in Central Australia, Hill Mulga differs from Mulga in being less bushy, having darker, more furrowed bark, and narrower seed pods. The timber is favoured as firewood, and some Aboriginal people harvest the seed to eat.

15. Silver Witchetty *Acacia cuthbertsonii* subsp. *cuthbertsonii*



[To the right diagonally opposite # 14]

Occurring sporadically throughout northern arid parts of Northern Territory and Western Australia, Silver Witchetty occurs mostly on gravelly hills or along watercourses. It produces large, gnarly seed pods after good rainfall events, and the green seeds are harvested and eaten by Aboriginal people. Warlpiri and Pintupi people also use fibre from the inner bark as bandages, or for making bark sandals.

16. Undoolya Wattle *Acacia undoolyana*

Conservation status: Vulnerable



Undoolya Wattle is listed nationally as a threatened species due to its limited distribution in the East MacDonnell Ranges, and its vulnerability to hot summer wildfires. It grows up to 15 m high on rocky hillslopes, and it mainly flowers in August. It is most easily seen in the wild at N'Dhala Gorge Reserve. Like other threatened arid zone wattles, this species does not set viable seed readily in the wild, and these specimens are mostly derived from seed harvested from cultivated plants.

17. Des Nelson Wattle *Acacia desmondii*

Conservation status: Rare



The common name of this rare wattle honours local botanist Des Nelson, who first collected this species in 1964 from hillslopes in the Rodinga Range south of Alice Springs. Originally named *Acacia nelsonii*, the name had to be revised because there was already an African *Acacia* of that name. Known from only a few locations in the area, this Wattle grows to 5 m high on sandstone ridge habitat. It propagates readily from seed, and seems to do well in cultivation in some Alice Springs gardens.

18. Latz's Wattle *Acacia latzii*

Conservation status: Vulnerable



This nationally-listed threatened species is only known from two range systems in the NT and northern South Australia. First collected in 1974 by Peter Latz, a prominent botanist in Central Australia who wrote *Bushfires and Bushtucker*, this species grows on silcrete mesas, gravelly hillslopes and along creeklines. The Australian Plants Society has been monitoring populations of Latz's Wattle in the Bacon Ranges for over a decade. There is very low seed set in the

wild, and the only recorded successful recruitment events have been circa 1974 and in 2000-1. Very slow-growing, this specimen was planted in 1988.

19. Mt Olga Wattle *Acacia olgana*



Mainly occurring on granite hills and ranges and along creeklines in the Central Range system that straddles the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia, this species grows to around 6 m high. Pitjantjatjara people are reputed to eat the seed, and, like a number of other wattles, this species is killed by hot wildfires.

20. Georgina Gidgee *Acacia georginae* Arrernte name: Urrenyenke



This dense, small tree occurs in clusters on floodplains and creeklines around the Georgina Basin in western Queensland and in eastern parts of the Northern Territory. Poisonous to stock due to fluoroacetate compounds in the seeds and seed pods, this species is disliked by pastoralists. The flowers and foliage also emit a strong sulphuric odour after rains, but these negative qualities are more than compensated for by its attractive gnarled appearance, silvery foliage and contrasting dark bark.

There are many other wattle species represented in the Garden. Further along this path you will find specimens of Umbrella Bush (*Acacia ligulata*), Dogwood (*Acacia sericophylla*), Colony Wattle (*Acacia murryana*), Black Gidgee (*Acacia pruinocarpa*), Maitland's Wattle (*Acacia maitlandii*), Blue Wattle (*Acacia validinervia*), Salt Wattle (*Acacia maconochieana*), and Prickly Acacia (*Acacia victoriae*).

We hope you enjoyed this walk!

Photo credits: The images used in this guide are from past and present OPBG staff members: Alex Nelson, Colleen O'Malley, Chris Benz, Connie Spencer, and Frances Smith (dec.), apart from the Red Mulga image which is by B.R. Maslin.