



KANGAROO PAW A TRUE-BLUE WORLD FIRST

Ground-breaking plant hybridisation research at the Botanic Gardens and Parks Authority has produced a blue kangaroo paw (*Anigozanthos*) for commercial release in early 2022.

The 'Masquerade' kangaroo paw, the only blue variant in existence world-wide, is the result of nearly a decade of development by BGPA plant breeders.

But this *Anigozanthos* would not have existed without a trick of fate.

'It was serendipitous,' Kings Park's Senior Plant Breeder Digby Grows said.

'The current dedicated breeding program with *Anigozanthos* in Kings Park and Botanic Garden began in 2007.

'The initial focus of the program was to breed plants that were hardier for people's gardens.

'In 2013 a teal blue one started flowering from a cross that we did in 2012. It had an absolute wow factor, and I knew we had to target this one.'

True blue flowers are rare in native plants and the commercial development of the 'Masquerade' kangaroo paw required controlled cross-pollination between green and red-and-green varieties over years.

The main technique used to produce hybrids is a process called recurrent selection.

This breeding system selects the top two to four progeny of each cross rated by the particular attribute.

These progeny are then crossed between themselves, other promising progeny or backcrossed to their parents.

Species, cultivars and hybrids used as the original parents are selected for features such as extended flowering, flower colour, inflorescence presentation, hardiness to cold and heat, tolerance to arid conditions and low nutrients, and form.

'We're the only breeding program in the world that is focused on the environment,' Digby said.

'We want to breed plants that use less water, have less disease and provide habitat for local fauna.

'Kangaroo paws are really special plants. They are endemic to Western Australia, which means they are known nowhere else.

'By planting them in your garden you provide a food source for native honey-eating birds and the plants also make a really colourful addition to your garden.'

The blue kangaroo paw has been developed to be disease tolerant to ink-spot and rust, common issues affecting the plants species' survival.

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Blue kangaroo paws will be available in commercial nurseries from 9 March 2022.

By developing new hybrids Kings Park aims to encourage the community to plant native plants in their gardens, thereby preserving our endemic plants, supporting biodiversity and creating gardens that can survive in our changing climate.