



KINGS PARK HAS PLANTS FOR THE FUTURE

Kings Park's plant development program is the only botanic garden program in the world to focus on breeding native plants for horticultural use. The release of the upcoming blue kangaroo paw variant is just the latest cultivar contributing to the campaign to promote Western Australian native flora.

A leader in Australian plant breeding research since the 1970s, Kings Park has developed more than 50 varieties of native Western Australian plants that have been sold in both national and international markets.

Senior Plant Breeder Digby Grouns said the driver of the program was to increase Western Australian flora in home gardens and landscapes.

'Kings Park cultivars provide environmental benefits including reduced water and fertiliser needs and urban habitat for birds, insects, reptiles and small mammals.'

'There are more than 15,000 Western Australian species to choose from, so we work with commercial partners to identify a crop that will have mass appeal in horticultural markets while delivering on that important environmental benefit.'

Digby said the plant breeding program had an important role in creating and maintaining customer interest in Western Australian flora and improving the suitability of species for use in residential and commercial settings.

'The plant market is like the fashion industry and it is all about what's new. By developing new varieties regularly we strengthen the market appeal of WA species.'

The plant development program has an international impact, with fauna from around the world benefiting from Kings Park cultivars.

'Kings Park grevilleas for example have been bred to flower year-round with nectar-rich blooms,' Digby said.

'In the United States the endangered hummingbirds absolutely love them. There is an international environmental benefit to our program even when we are putting a foreign plant in the global market.'

Plants chosen for the program require both sufficient genetic diversity within the main species or genus to deliver a whole range of different styles and colours, as well as be able to be propagated clinically.

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The plant breeding process typically involves the cross-pollination of desirable species and forms. Tissue-culture and advanced genetic testing techniques are employed to assist in the germination and propagation of hybrid material.

'The popularity of native plants continues to grow and Kings Park is an important advocate in the conversation,' Digby said.

'Our plant development program has plans to release new varieties each year to continue to meet that demand and help promote and enhance community appreciation of our State's rich biodiversity.'