

ANZAC grevillea hybrid marks centenary celebrations

April 27 2015, by Brooke Hunter



Anzac Grevillea: the first of the Kings Park breeding program's hybrid grevilleas to be commercially released. Credit: Digby Grown

Through an intense breeding program of native flora, Kings Park botanists have provided the Western Australian RSL with a commemorative grevillea (Proteaceae) in time for the Anzac Centenary.

For approximately 10 years, botanists have been running an

environmental-based plant-[breeding program](#), which Kings Park senior plant breeder Digby Grown says produces native WA plant varieties for general cultivation.

For seven years the hybridisation program has incorporated breedings for classic natives, combining the attributes of differing species to allow for tough, yet ornamental flora.

In 2013 RSL WA approached Kings Park in search of a suitable commemorative plant for today's centenary celebrations.

"We had a look at what we had and we jointly selected a particular variety of grevillea that has red flowers," Mr Grown says.

"That was very important as red is the colour of the Anzacs and symbolises the blood that was shed.

"We also wanted a plant that was robust and flowered for a long period, particularly around autumn when Anzac Day is."

Suitably named RSL Spirit of Anzac Grevillea, it is the first of the breeding program's hybrid grevilleas to be commercially released, with the initial cross completed in 2007.

Multiple parents add to resilient offspring

The plant has a combination of parents sourced from WA's Wheatbelt, the South Australian desert and the northern New South Wales coast.

"We breed resilience into the [plants](#) through parent selection," Mr Grown says. "We choose parents that have a combination of features that we are seeking in their progeny, such as disease tolerance, low water requirements, heat tolerance, large flowers, flower colour, floral display,

flower period, plant form and leaf shape.

"By crossing these parents we get progeny that have various combinations of these features.

"Each hybrid seedling will have a different range of these features due to recombination and expression of the parental genes."

Mr Grows says one cross incorporates approximately one hundred siblings, with each performing differently.

"We don't treat for disease and provide little in the way of fertiliser and water. Many of these seedlings will succumb to our harsh testing," he says.

"We throw away about 99 per cent of the hybrids that we cross because we only want the elite...and this one survived that assessment."

The grevillea were used in today's dawn service by being planted around the state war memorial at Kings Park.

The perennial plants are expected to live 20 to 40 years.

Provided by Science Network WA

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