

The Checklist of Australian Native Plant Cultivars®

Paul Carmen

Australian National Botanic Gardens, Canberra, ACT 2600

Email: paul.carmen@environment.gov.au

INTRODUCTION

The Australian Cultivar Registration Authority (ACRA) was established by the International Commission for the Nomenclature of Cultivated Plants (ICNCP) in 1962, to register and record the names and descriptions of Australian native plant cultivars. Over the years ACRA has registered over 400 cultivars thereby playing a major role in the preservation of their identity and history. However, these represent a very small proportion of the cultivars for which there are published names and descriptions.

The idea of having a single website which could be used to research Australian native plant cultivar names and descriptions has, until now, been a pipe dream. The Checklist of Australian Plant Cultivars Project aims to address this need.

BACKGROUND HISTORY OF ACRA

When the Society for Growing Australian Plants (SGAP, now called the Australian Native Plants Society Australia, ANPSA) was formed in the late 1950s, it seemed only natural that the Society should have a role in the registration of the cultivars of Australian native plants (Walter, 2007).

Correspondence was initiated by the publication branch of the newly formed SGAP with the Royal Horticultural Society in England, between 1959 and 1962.

In February 1962, the South East Region of SGAP accepted an offer from the International Commission for the Nomenclature of Cultivated Plants (ICNCP) to undertake the registrations of cultivars of genera endemic to Australia, and to act as the national registration authority, in conjunction with the National Herbarium (in Melbourne) (Brickell et al., 2004).

Initially the new ACRA committee had two members from the National Herbarium (with Jim Willis as Chairman) and two representing SGAP. Over the years, the ACRA committee has been significantly expanded, and it now includes representatives of most major Australian Botanic Gardens, ANPSA, and the nursery industry.

Since 1973, staff of the Australian National Botanic Gardens (ANBG) have filled the roles of Registrar and Secretary of ACRA (on a part-time basis), and the ANBG has also provided office space, storage of herbarium specimens, database and administrative functions, and in more recent years a website at <<http://www.anbg.gov.au/acra>>.

SO WHAT IS A CULTIVAR?

A cultivar is a plant that has been selected for a particular character (or combination of characters) that is clearly distinct, uniform, stable in these characters, and when propagated by appropriate means retains these characters.

THE ROLE OF ACRA

Over the years ACRA has performed three major functions in regard to the cultivars of Australian plants:

- 1) A registration function
- 2) The recording of published names
- 3) An advisory role for plant breeders rights applications

Cultivar Registrations. The registration process creates a comprehensive description of each cultivar. This description can then be used to identify the cultivar and compare it with others.

The description of the cultivar records:

- The parentage (if known)
- History of the cultivar
- The derivation of meaning of the cultivar name or epithet
- The names of the raiser or breeder, nominant and introducer (when known)
- Indicates one or more recognizable attributes or characters
- Indicates how the cultivar differs from similar cultivars
- Records the colour codes for leaves and flowers (from the Royal Horticultural Society colour charts)
- Includes a photo or photos

The ACRA description also includes cultivation and propagation information.

The guidelines for registering cultivars are recorded in the *International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants* (2004), often shortened to the *Cultivated Plant Code*, and have been adopted by ACRA for all cultivars of Australian plants.

To date ACRA has registered over 400 cultivars with full descriptions and these can be found at <www.anbg.gov.au/acra/acra-list-2009.html>. Many of these cultivars represent a documentary history of the Australian Plants Society and its role in developing Australian plants. For example, many of the Poorinda hybrids bred by Leo Hodge in the 1960s and 1970s have been registered or recorded with ACRA.

Although by no means comprehensive, the descriptions on the ACRA website provide a reference point for the horticultural industry and the public alike.

Recording of Names. In 1962, the newly formed ACRA committee sent letters to nurseries and members of the nursery industry and horticultural societies throughout Australia asking for lists of names of known cultivars. Gradually over time, lists of names of cultivars were compiled, and eventually a card system was developed to record all the information gathered.

Plant Breeders Rights. As an authority on the cultivars of Australian plants, the ACRA committee plays a significant role in the assessment of Plant Breeders Rights (PBR) applications and provides advice on:

- Identification.
- Novelty.
- Distinctiveness.

The ACRA committee also comments on the comparators used to distinguish new cultivars and suggests additional potential comparators. It also processes and stores herbarium specimens of PBR cultivars in the Australian National Herbarium.

THE CHECKLIST OF AUSTRALIAN PLANT CULTIVARS PROJECT

The primary purpose of the Checklist of Australian Plant Cultivars project is to bring all the published names and descriptions of Australia's native plant cultivars together in one website location within the searchable database the Australian Plant Name Index (APNI) <<http://www.anbg.gov.au/cgi-bin/apni>>.

APNI is a tool for the botanical community which deals with plant names and their usage in scientific literature, whether as a current name or synonym. The information available from APNI includes scientific and cultivar names, author details, original publication details (protologue), and links to other information such as plant distributions, descriptions, and images (where available). APNI does not recommend any particular taxonomy or nomenclature.

The Checklist Project will involve a thorough search of all known publications featuring articles about Australian plants and the information gathered will include:

- All cultivar names.
- Publication references.
- A link to a pdf file of the protologue (first published description).
- A photo of the cultivar if possible.

Progress Report. The project has been funded by donations from ANPS groups and matching sponsorship by Horticulture Australia Ltd. Funding has been sufficient to employ a person (on a part-time basis) for 1 year from November 2009, to carry out the research and data entry work. The project is now at the half-way point, and there are over 4,300 cultivar names recorded in APNI and all the PBR journals have been processed.

CONCLUSION

As a result of this project, all Australians will have a “one-stop-shop” on the web for comprehensive information on all the cultivars of Australian plants. The website “publication” of these descriptions and names will promote uniformity, accuracy, and stability in the horticultural industry and significantly increase the knowledge and understanding of Australia's cultivated varieties.

The substantial financial support provided by ANPS groups throughout Australia and Horticulture Australia has been instrumental in getting this project off the ground.

LITERATURE CITED

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