

PLANT PROFILE

The genus *Kennedia* of the Fabaceae family

I love bright orange and coral shaded flowers and thought it timely to talk about one of the prolific wildflowers here in the south west emerging from their winter slumber as the sun is doing likewise.

The genus *Kennedia* of the Fabaceae family is a small genus of climbing or prostrate trailing plants with trifoliate leaves

It is named to honour one John Kennedy (1759-1842), a nurseryman at Hammersmith in London who apparently advised and supplied plants to the Empress Josephine. Kennedy took over from his Scottish father who had established a nursery with another Scot named Lee on a former vineyard which, according to sources, say it produced very good quality 'burgundy'.

It was considered to be the best nursery of its time and was involved in plant hunting expeditions and responsible for many new plant introductions to Europe including the dahlia and fuchsia and the very first China rose, after which they introduced to the UK the French style of standardising. John's son eventually worked at Malmaison. There appeared to be a special bond between the Empress and the nursery but they also had close links to a number of big houses and estates in the UK who would have been sponsoring the plant hunting expeditions. Even during the late 1700s the company was producing plant catalogues and extended this by regularly producing educational material to keep themselves in the public eye.

Back to our genus the colourful *Kennedia*.

My research tells me there are 15 species with 11 in Western Australia but this is constantly being revised with subspecies appearing from different regional areas. The plants are found from as far as Geraldton in the north, right through to the south coastal areas.

Kennedia prostrata or 'running postman' is possibly the best known and easily available commercially. In our region we are seeing it being used to self seed the verges after new road works and it is a vivid attractive plant in season. It has a distinctive crinkly leaf and fewer flowers

Kennedia macrophylla, a softer dusky coral with a big leaf formation grows in the wild near me and is considered rare and endangered. I am so lucky to enjoy these plants which I believe are diminishing in size. Members may remember seeing it en masse at Heronsbrook garden last year.

Kennedia coccinea loves our sandy soil and is to be found twining its way through the shrubs of the forests and heath land with masses of flowers to create a bright slash amongst the greenery.

Kennedia nigricans has distinctive black and yellow pea flowers, and flowers from winter to late spring in the south west. This one is easily available from nurseries and scrambles up fences quite happily to provide a useful cover but the flower colour isn't to everyone's taste.

A wonderful plant to enjoy in the wild or in your own garden. When we used to live in the eastern hills above Perth as new gardeners, we 'tidied up' the gravel area around our entrance only to be rewarded with *Kennedia prostrata* scrambling to take over the whole area and making our entrance very clear when in flower. I have fond memories of our 'running postman' and never did bother to do any more in that area.



Text and photographs: Julie Kinney