

In My Garden

Leigh Murray

Traffic Stoppers

Our gardens at Queanbeyan and Turoos are both pretty scruffy. But despite this, we have a few traffic stoppers (by our standards).

A plant that has been grabbing my attention every time I walk down one track in our Queanbeyan garden is *Callistemon phoeniceus*.

It's an elderly, sparse plant, growing in quite unsuitable conditions (it's said to like sunny, damp spots; ours is growing in shade under big eucalypts, on a dry rocky ridge). But for what seems like months, it has borne 2 beautiful scarlet flowers that light up the whole area. It really is beautiful. The photo really doesn't do it justice.



What we know as *Olearia persoonioides* is another favourite plant, and it's usually a mass of flowers in Spring. It's a small, neat plant, maybe 50cm high and wide, planted over 30 years ago in full sun on our rocky ridge. It has plugged along through multiple severe droughts, just sitting there tidily most of the year, and then flowering profusely in Spring.



I said "what we know as" because when I try to look it up on the Net, it is shown with white flowers. We got it from SGAP (delivered, as we remember, by Lyndal Thorburn) so I'd have thought the naming was accurate. A small mystery, but a wow of a plant.

(Ed. I contacted Leigh to discuss the identity of the Olearia, because what I remember of *O.persoonioides* is that it's a fairly robust subshrub growing in higher elevations in Tasmania. It was grown by Austraflo nursery when I worked there in the 1980's. The plant had oval shaped leaves and definitely white flowers. So I sent Leigh on a mission, and she replied a couple of days later that she had found the original label, so back to her to tell the story.)

The original label is metal, that I printed on laboriously back then, firmly attached by wire; it's been buried for years under leaf litter.

All it says is **OLEARIA PERSONIOIDES Autumn 88**. I wouldn't have gone to all that labelling trouble if I hadn't been sure I knew what it was. Back then, before we'd become fully aware of just how harsh our conditions were, and how poor we were at keeping plants alive, we were really diligent at labelling plants.

It is strongly likely that we got the plant from SGAP, though I don't have any written record of where it came from. The photo of the foliage shows the leaf surface is discoloured, and appears to be covered with warty protuberances.

Leigh's partner David wonders if it could be a form of *O. iodichroa*.

The challenge for members is to come to the rescue with a determination.

Regardless, if the plant is over 30 years old it is certainly a survivor, and would be a great addition to any garden.

