

Jumping the garden fence: Partnering with botanic gardens to protect nature in the city

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Keywords: connection to nature, living collection, threatened species, urban ecology, urban forestry

Cities around the world face growing challenges to their liveability, biodiversity and sustainability. Urban expansion and infill development are an increasing threat to biodiversity, resulting in the broad scale clearance of habitat and reduced opportunities for people to connect with nature. Climate change also creates and exacerbates serious economic and health issues for urban populations, particularly urban heat and water management, adaption to which usually falls under the jurisdiction of sub-national governments. The City of Melbourne employs a suite of strategies that work together to achieve an ecosystem based response to these challenges. Under its Urban Forest and Nature in the City strategies, the city has partnered with the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria to bring a range of new species to civic spaces to meet multiple objectives including adaptation to climate change, urban forest resilience, conservation of biodiversity and connecting people with nature. This work was brought together under the recently released Threatened Plant Living Collection Plan, which aims to widen the focus of the city's parks and gardens from primarily amenity purposes to include the cultivation of threatened plant species to make meaningful contributions towards their conservation. This is a collaborative initiative between the City of Melbourne and the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, and incorporates methods typically undertaken by botanical gardens to curate living collections. The plan is used to guide the selection, acquisition, maintenance, documentation, interpretation and display of threatened plant species for green spaces managed by the City of Melbourne. A Threatened Species Assessment Tool was developed to rate the species for inclusion in landscape plantings. The highest ratings were given to species which are the most threatened and locally indigenous. Work is underway to incorporate these species into garden asset renewal processes and new park projects.