

Amygdala — Healing Garden

Sunshine Coast Wildflowering Inspiration

Hiromi Tango &
Susan Davis



“I am captivated by the intricate detail,
the organised chaos and entanglements
of Hiromi’s work”.

- Dr Susan Davis



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Wildflowering and Healing

— Dr Susan Davis

06

Has there ever been a year when the soul of humanity yearned more for solace and healing? Probably not for generations, and not for me personally! With a heart bruised from losses, both personal and professional, I have sought ways to find joy, to acknowledge grief and loss, and move through.¹

Searching beyond a personal frame of reference, research from the fields of neuroscience, the arts and education reminds us of the importance of social connection as well as safe and engaging environments,² of how routines and calming practices can provide comfort and security,³ of how the arts can provide somatic experiences that can be expressive vehicles for our inner feelings,⁴ and of how engaging in creative activity can decrease negative emotions and increase the positive,⁵ enhancing healing processes.

Personally, I have found great comfort and inspiration in nature through wildflowering, making art and working with my hands.⁶ Wildflowering is a term coined by Sunshine Coast conservationist, artist and writer Kathleen McArthur and her friend the poet Judith Wright to describe their walks in nature looking for and at wildflowers.⁷

1 Susan Davis. 2020. "Perezhivanie, Art, and Creative Traversal: A Method of Marking and Moving Through COVID and Grief". *Qualitative Inquiry*. October 2020. doi:10.1177/1077800420960158

2 Judith Howard. 2019. "A Systemic Framework for Trauma-Informed Schooling: Complex but Necessary!". *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment and Trauma*, 28 (5): 545-65.

3 Helen Cahill, Babak Dadvand, Keren Shlezinger, Katherine Romei & Anne Farrelly. 2020. "Strategies for Supporting Student and Teacher Wellbeing Post-Emergency". *Ricerche* 12 (1): 23-38.

4 Kristi Perryman, Paul Blisard & Rochelle Moss. 2019. "Using Creative Arts in Trauma Therapy: The Neuroscience of Healing". *Journal of Mental Health Counselling*, 41 (1): 80-94.

5 Heather L. Stuckey & Jeremy Nobel. 2010. "The Connection Between Art, Healing, and Public Health: A Review of Current Literature". *American Journal of Public Health*, 100: 254-63. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2008.156497>

6 Susan Davis. 2019. "Wandering and Wildflowering: Walking With Women into Intimacy and Ecological Action". *M/C Journal* 22 (4). <https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.1566>.

7 Kathleen McArthur. 1986. *Looking at Australian Wildflowers*. Sydney: Kangaroo Press.

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While such experiences may include identifying the flowers and plants, they saw it as a multi-dimensional experience—sensuous, relational, educational and creative. My own experiences of wildflowering often involve walking with others, capturing impressions of our experiences, often art making on country or soon after.

So when I was invited to participate in 'gardener' training for Hiromi Tango's Amygdala—Healing Garden (in association with the NETS Victoria touring exhibition *Craftivism. Dissident Objects and Subversive Forms* at USC Art Gallery) and heard the focus would be on creating local wildflowers, I was inspired.

I am captivated by the intricate detail, the organised chaos and entanglements of Hiromi's work; the vibrancy of colours, the beauty and vulnerability of her presence within many of her works, revealed whilst also hidden within layers of re-imagined fibres, materials and meanings. Arriving at the Gallery to find a table covered in baskets of coloured paper and wool, a collection of Tango embellished stools and a warm and welcoming group of fellow gardeners, it felt like a safe and engaging place to be.

Hiromi shares her ideas, beliefs, expertise and practice in a gentle and artful way. She listens and attends to what people say and bring to the process. Years of working with different communities means she understands that people seek both freedom and constraints. She sees herself as the soil from which a garden can grow. She selects the materials and focus, and provides enough detail and demonstration for participants to feel confident to begin somewhere, but able to take a process somewhere else as well.



There is scope for connections across the group and beyond as we engage in acts which grow and bloom, woven into the threads of art-making and everyday life for each participant.

Hiromi interweaves understandings from neuroscience that inform her practice, like how when anxiety claws and rises that is the time to engage in simple, repetitive acts. No need to wait for earth-shattering inspiration, but pick up the paper and cut, unravel the ball of wool and wrap, pick up the paper and chenille stick and twist, all while relishing the magic of colour and the joy of transformation.

There is a depth of knowing, thinking and feeling that underpins what she does—the brain, the self, the creative act, the soul’s yearning for connection and fulfilment and she shares this as we make flowers from paper and consider how healing may arise from creating this ‘garden’ of blossoms.

I ask Hiromi if she has been to the local national park not far from where we are meeting. A place where when the season is right all the flowers she has selected for us to make can be seen. She hasn’t, but is keen to venture out for a late afternoon wander with Megan (the Manager of USC Art Gallery) and myself. I am happy to now become a ‘gardener’—a cultivator of experience—and a guide.

Inspired by the stories of women who were conservationists, artists, writers and poets,⁸ I have sought out the places they loved and lobbied to protect. Through learning their stories, I’ve come to learn and love the flowers. I have done this by walking with others, hearing them talk of names and other points of interest to them. I’ve sat beside the plants and flowers, captured their image, created their image, observing, documenting, identifying and gradually falling in love.

⁸ Susan Davis. 2019. Kathleen McArthur: Wild/flower Woman online exhibition (curated with UQ Digital Curator Mandy Swingle), University of Queensland Library. <https://uqlibraryonlineexhibitions.omeka.net/exhibits/show/wild-flower-woman>





These environments, these flowers, and the ways that I capture their knowing have brought me comfort and joy that I now happily pass on to others. While it is December and long past the best wildflowering months of July to September, there is always something in flower and we find a range of blooms as well as gentle wilderness.

Amidst the spectrum of greens our eyes are caught by the soft pink of *Melastoma* which is also known as *Nunyi-um* in Aboriginal language because of the ‘yum yum’ delights of the fruit, or ‘Blue tongue’ for the colour of your tongue after you eat that fruit!

Other tiny pink stars of *Boronia* are to be found, and the heath section of the wallum is also dusted white as if with Christmas snow with sprays of ever tinier white flowers of the Weeping *baeckea*. Having mentioned that the *Banksia robur* spikes can be an incredible blue/green colour at a certain stage of development, but thinking it might not be the right time of season, Megan spots one and we all marvel at the intensity of the shade. It would have been so easy to skip the adventure that afternoon; to race home and back to our ordinary lives, but the experience of walking, connecting, seeing and being has provided the perfect way to end the day and the positive feelings stay with me well into the night and next morning.

These spaces, these environments, these actions may not be for everyone—and they are not everything—but we all need to find or create spaces and actions that can be catalysts for our own comfort and healing. And that is what I am reminded of as we appreciate nature’s healing garden and embrace Hiromi Tango’s invitation to create a healing garden; it is not an end point but a process, and through attending to, cultivating and appreciating beauty, and through making, imagining and continuing we are participating in acts of healing.



Wildflowers of the Sunshine Coast

— Selected and compiled by Dr Susan Davis
Photos by Dr Susan Davis

Here is a selection of native plants and wildflowers that may be used for inspiration and learning. The selection is based on some of the flowers we saw when we walked with Hiromi and most can be found in the Sunshine Coast region across the summer months. It is by no means an extensive list and should be complemented by using other books and resources.

Most of these photographs were taken in National Parks and Reserves in the region. It is important to remember that you cannot take any plants or parts of them when visting, however, many of these plants have been successfully cultivated and can be purchased from local native plant nurseries so you can always plant some and enjoy them in your own garden!

If you are new to 'wildflowering', walking and enjoying the joys of our native wildflowers, you might begin by simply trying to identify and learn the names of several plants each time you go out. Observing, photographing and drawing the flowers can help you come to know them and remember them. Look closely at their details, of the number and shape of petals and sepals, where the stamen and pistil are, and how the leaves are positioned on the stem. If you keep visiting over time you will see how the plants change and may even get to glimpse what their fruits and seeds look like.

As you become familiar with more of the flowers, consider how you might create versions of your own to 'plant' and create your own healing garden.

Blue tongue, Native lasiandra or Nunyi-um (*Melastomamalbathricum* subsp. *malabathricum*)

HYACINTH ORCHID (*DIPODIUM PUNCTATUM*)

Thyme honey-myrtle (*Melaleuca thymifolia*)

Pigface (*Carpobrotus glaucescens*)

FAN FLOWER (*SCAEVOLA CALENDULACEAE*)

Twining guinea flower (*Hibbertia scandens*)

Wallum geebung (*Persoonia virgata*)

HAT PIN (*XYRIS JUNCEA*)

Cotton tree (*Hibiscus tileaceus*)

CONESTICK (*PETROPHILE SHIRLEYAE*)

Weeping baeckea (*Baeckea frutescens*)

Midyim or Native sand berry (*Austromyrtus dulcis*)

SUNDEW (*DROSERA SPATULATA*)

Wallum bottlebrush (red) (*Melaleuca pachyphylla*)

01**Blue tongue, Native lasiandra or Nunyi-um***(Melastoma malbathricum subsp. malabathricum)*

This mid-sized shrub can be found in eucalypt forests and wallum woodlands and is also planted in the streets of some areas of Noosa and the Sunshine Coast. The native melastoma has three strong veins running lengthwise on the leaves. Care should be taken when planting your own as there are other species from Asia that have been planted in the region that look like native Melastoma but they are not. Often they have more petals and five rather than three strong veins. The flowers are a lilac/pink with five petals, and two sets of stamen—yellow and white. After flowering fruits gradually ripen in the capsules that remain. When ripe the capsules split and the fruit are almost black in colour. When eaten your tongue is stained a shade of blue, which fades. The name literally means black (*mela*) mouth (*stoma*). As well as being a bush food, the plant has reputedly been used for medicinal purposes including as a remedy for wounds, toothache and stomach ache.

02**Hyacinth orchid***(Dipodium punctatum)*

This unusual native orchid grows from 30-90 cm tall with a thick stem but no leaves. The plant grows together with a fungus that lives underground and so has no need for leaves. The Hyacinth orchid has proven difficult to propagate. The flowers are spotted with maroon and pink splotches and appear mostly in summer though flowers can be found randomly at other times of the year.

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Thyme honey-myrtle

(*Melaleuca thymifolia*)

A beautiful small spreading shrub that can grow to approximately 1m and is found in wallum habitats. It has small oblong leaves that are mostly opposite. This plant has been successfully cultivated for street plantings and home gardens. The flowers grow in clusters of lacy mauve. The flower spikes begin as little tangled balls opening up in spring and summer.

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Wallum Geebung

(*Persoonia virgata*)

A mid-sized shrub that can grow to 2-4 m and is often found in the sandy soil of heathland and woodlands. The plant has fine green leaves. From a distance when in flower it can look like leaves are yellowing and dying, but it is in fact the small yellow flowers budding or in bloom. The flowers begin as yellow pointed tubes, then open up to a two layered flower with recurved petals and stamen. After flowering, pods form as green ovoids with a little tip. When the green pods drop to the ground they can be collected and then eaten after they change colour to brown or purple black although some think they are not particularly palatable. Allan Carr records they were eaten by emus.

05**Hat pin***(Xyris juncea)*

A grass-like plant that grows in wet heathlands and sandy soils. It has thin leaves to 30 cm and distinctive tall straight stems. The plant produces three-petaled flowers in spring and summer, these then turn into capsules containing seeds.

0506**Cotton tree***(Hibiscus tiliaceus)*

A mid-sized spreading tree that grows in coastal areas. The leaves are heart shaped, light green on top and slightly furry underneath. Cotton tree makes a good street tree and has been planted in coastal parks. The Sunshine Coast suburb of 'Cotton Tree' was named for this tree which grows along the esplanade. The flowers are yellow with five petals and a dark red centre. As the flowers die and fade they turn a beautiful orange colour then grey/brown. Indigenous Australian uses include using the inner bark for making twine for weaving fishing nets and traps. Scarth Johnson reports that Fredrick Manson Bailey (Queensland colonial botanist in the early 20th Century) said Aboriginal people also ate the roots and young growth.

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07**Pigface***(Carpobrotus glaucescens)*

A vigorous groundcover plant found on coastal dunes. Leaves have three sides and like many succulents, plants can grow from cuttings. Pigface is important for dune stabilisation. Brilliant pink circular flowers 4-6 cm across with many petals. It can be found in flower from spring to autumn. After flowering the fruits develop as a peaked capsule and turn a reddish colour. The fruit can be picked and then squeezed for a mouthful of juicy sweetness (sometimes with a salty tang). Crushed leaves can be used for bites, stings and sunburn. Apparently the leaves can also be roasted.

08**Fan flower***(Scaevola calendulaceae)*

Another compact groundcover plant found on coastal dunes. It has succulent green leaves to 2.5 cm. Fan flower is important for dune stabilisation. It has been cultivated and grows in sandy soil in home gardens and regeneration plantings. Beautiful fan shaped pale lilac/blue flowers with five petals, the throat of the flowers is a cream/yellow. This plant flowers throughout the year. After flowering edible purply-black berries are formed. Apparently the flowers attract butterflies.

09**Twining guinea flower***(Hibbertia scandens)*

A large creeper that can grow as a groundcover or a climbing vine with oblong shaped leaves. A large member of the hibbertia family that can flower throughout the year. This plant has large bright yellow flowers with five petals and a pom-pom spray of stamen in the middle. There are two versions of this species; one can be found on the beach and other on the edge of rainforests. After flowering the plant develops reddish/orange berries that are relished by birds.

10**Conestick***(Petrophile shirleyae)*

A low growing shrub of the protea family also related to banksias. It has lacy green foliage and for most of the year can be identified by its woody cone shaped fruit. Cream white flower spike in summer with flowers opening from the bottom up. The pods contain numerous papery winged seeds. Flowers attract nectar feeding birds and insects.

11**Weeping baeckea***(Baeckea frutescens)*

A shrub that grows up to 2.5 m with arching branches, small pointed leaves and tiny white flowers. Weeping baeckea likes full sun and has been successfully cultivated and grown in home gardens and street plantings. When in full flower these bushes are a shower of white. The flowers have five petals and grow to 1.5 mm.

12**Midyim or Native sand berry***(Austromyrtus dulcis)*

Midyim grows low to the ground as a ground cover or small shrub. It has beautiful pink leaves and buds. Midyim can cope with sun or shade and has been successfully cultivated and grown in home gardens and street plantings. Midyim explodes with white flowers around October or November. The flowers have five petals and a spray of white stamen in the middle. Some months after flowering (around March) the berries can be found. Midyim is an Indigenous Australian name for the fruit. Kathleen McArthur reports her friend Sylvia Fox telling her the name was one used by the Quandamooka people from Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island). The fruit are a bushfood. They are a speckled pale grey/white and are quite pleasant tasting though the texture can be a little grainy. They are reported to be eaten by dingos and birds as well as humans.

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Native parsnip or carrot

(Trachymene incisa subsp. Incisa)

A small delicate herb that grows in sunny areas. Foliage is low to the ground and similar to carrot or parsnip foliage. White heads of flowers bloom from spring to summer on long stems. Each flower head is actually made up of 30-60 flowers and each have five petals. The tubers that grow underground are reported to look like parsnips but taste like carrots.

1414

Sundew

(Drosera spatulata)

A small insectivorous plant found on the ground in wet heath areas. It has a basal rosette of leaves with leaves of 1-3 cm. The common sundews are generally red but there is also a green version. The leaves have sensitive tentacles that respond to external stimuli to trap insects. Flowering can take place for much of the year and flowers are white or pink with five petals and 1-5 buds arranged on upright stems.

15**Wallum bottlebrush (red)***(Melaleuca pachyphylla)*

A native version of the bottlebrush, this plant grows to around 1.5 m in wet heath or swampy areas. The leaves are narrow with blunt tips and there are both red and white/green flowering versions. The red flowering version can be found around Emu Mountain and the Peregrine section of Noosa National Park with both colours at Kathleen McArthur Reserve.

This is another plant that has been cultivated for home gardens. The soft, cylindrical flower spikes are generally between 5-10 cm long and actually consist of numerous flowers that are made up of five petals, five sepals and filaments of the stamens which are red. It mainly flowers in spring and autumn but can be found throughout the year. Like many other melaleucas (paperbark and bottlebrushes) these flowers are nectar producing, which is why birds love them! Early in the morning when the flowers are fresh it is possible to pour water over the blossoms and catch it in a cup or dip them in water to create a delicately sweet drink.





Sources and Resources

— Selected and compiled by Dr Susan Davis

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Local plant identification website:

Noosa Native Plants

<https://noosanativeplants.com.au/>

Places to see local native wildflowers:

Kathleen McArthur Reserve, Lake Currimundi

Mooloolah River National Park

Noosa National Park—Emu Mountain and Peregrian sections

Girraween Reserve, Noosa

Arthur Harrold Reserve, Noosa North Shore

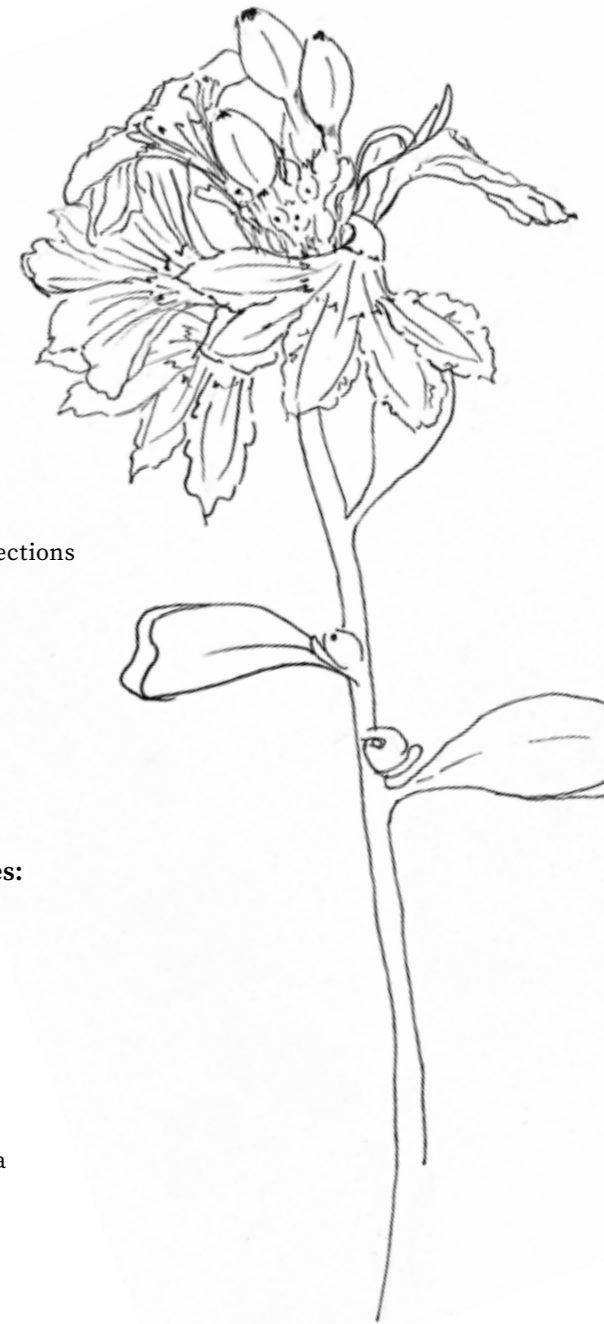
Native Plant nurseries that cultivate local species:

Barung Landcare, Maleny

Coolum Community Native Nursery

Mooloolah Native Nursery

Noosa and District Landcare Native Nursery, Pomona



Acknowledgments

Craftivism, Dissident Objects and Subversive Forms is a Shepparton Art Museum exhibition, curated by Anna Briers and Rebecca Coates, touring nationally by NETS Victoria. The exhibition will be on view at the University of Sunshine Coast Art Gallery, Sunshine Coast, Queensland 22 November 2020 – 16 January 2021.



NETS Victoria, the University of the Sunshine Coast, Hiromi Tango and the community pays tribute to the ongoing culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which the USC campuses sit.

Content development by Dr Susan Davis. Susan is the founder of the 'Wild/flower Women' projects and exhibitions and Associate Professor (Adjunct) at Central Queensland University.

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