



FOUR SEASONS OF WILDFLOWERS AND BOTANICA ON KANGAROO ISLAND

Kangaroo Island's abundant native vegetation frames its sense of place.

Mallee expanses glint in the sun, narrow-leaf avenues glowing in morning and evening light, groves of tall Sugar Gums or ancient Cypress Pines, low heath on the exposed limestone coast, Tea-tree coastal shrubland, Drooping Sheoak woodlands feeding Glossy-black Cockatoos – that's Kangaroo Island.

Around half of Kangaroo Island's 4500 square kilometres is native vegetation – along roadsides and creeks, and in enormous expanses, particularly in the west and south. Much of the western reaches of Kangaroo Island were impacted by the summer bushfires of 2019-2020, and the recovery and regeneration of the native vegetation is astonishing.

From towering gums, to a plethora of native flowers across the seasons, including delightful orchids, sometimes elusive, at times abundant. The wildflowers and botanica of the island are varied and at times surprising. Whilst spring is a favourite for flowering blossoms, in the cooler wetter months parks abound with the glorious colours and forms of hundreds of species of fungus. From bright oranges to cool whites, get low to the ground to discover some of Kangaroo Island's most interesting organisms. Since the bushfires, some unique and rare species have emerged on western Kangaroo Island including the rare Bolete Mushroom. There are species that have not been seen in almost a century, mostly fire colonisers, meaning they will thrive with fire and are at risk of extinction without it.

Not so welcome is the **Phytophthora** organism (or root rot), which attacks the roots and stems of susceptible plants and causes them to rot, affecting native and introduced species. Protect our native vegetation by keeping to paths and cleaning your boots between sites.

Autumn

Autumn invites nature lovers to Kangaroo Island and asks them to explore. The wind is low; the days are bright, clear and still warm; and winter rain has not yet kicked in. From late summer into autumn, the bush produces iconic and distinctly Australian seed pods - woody nuts of hakea, cones of banksias, pea pods and gum nuts. The autumn tones of the Silver and Desert Banksia are a delight and extend year-round.

Some of the gum trees and mallees are flowering in cream and pink, such as the Kangaroo Island Narrow-leaf Mallee, widespread across the east. The Flame Heath begins its bright red flower display on small bushes, alongside the Common Heath with flowers showing bright red through to fuschia, pink or white.

Vineyards dotted around the island bring a traditional warmth as leaves change from bright green to autumn hues.

Winter

Winter on Kangaroo Island brings a surprising plethora of colour as native plants begin to burst into flower. In every patch of scrub and expanse of national park, along roadsides and tracks, colour peeks through.

The scarlet-flowered Running Postman is in bloom and the distinctive Native Lilac climbs over fences and trees. Tubular Correa flowers are displaying colours from green to red to salmon pink across the island.

Wattle flowers adorn shrubs and trees. The fruits of the native currant, which is locally made into jam, are ready to pick on sandy soils.

In Flinders Chase National Park and Kelly Hill Conservation Park up to 450 species of fungi, many of them rare, make themselves visible when it's wet, and for some, who are reliant on fire, it is the first time they have emerged for decades.

The classic mushroom shape, Bracket Fungi, Ground Cups, Puff Balls, glow-in-the-dark fungi, and truffles that feed our Southern Brown Bandicoot – they're all there to discover.

Spring

By the time September arrives the Old Man's Beard covers bushes and trees and creamy rice flowers dot roadsides. Wattles flower cream, lemon, canary and apricot – each species to its own tone. But behind the predominant yellow – cream show, and more so as the season progresses, a rich palette of the visible spectrum awaits.

By late September, any trail – Ironstone Hike in Penneshaw, a trail at Murray Lagoon, Beyeria Conservation Park or Dudley Conservation Park – is a painter's paradise with rich palates of pastels to vivid hues. The pinks alone range from dusky tinges on Heath Myrtles and Velvet Bushes to 'shocking' on Tetrathecas. Scan the ground for the rich reward of the small, delicate, utterly gorgeous flowers too many to name.

Spring is prime orchid time, yet orchids can actually be found year round. Acustom your eyes to the tiny flowers – and once you see one in the leaf litter, you'll see dozens – Pink Fingers, Daddy Long-legs, Helmet Orchids, Donkey Orchids, Greenhoods and Sun Orchids.

The pea flowers, mostly yellow and red, come into their own in October, and the showiest of all is the Cockies Tongue with its large orange-red flowers.

Summer

The local hop bushes, of which there are three varieties, come into their own as the weather warms, displaying coppery to purple fruits that cover the small shrubs.

Bronzed flower tassels hang heavily on male she-oak trees and flowering mallees will be simpler to find amidst a chorus of feeding parrots and honeyeaters.

Many pea flowers, mostly yellow and red, but also pinks and purples, last well into summer growing low to the ground. The endemic Green Correa is flowering, and the velvet bushes continue their elegant show, as does the island's only native bottlebrush, Scarlet Bottlebrush.

The samphire meadows along Chapman River glow red against the grey soil and shedding trunks of the melaleuca paperbarks, who put on a white-cream flower show from late spring through summer.

Bushfires and vegetation

Fire plays an important role in Australian landscapes, with many native plants and vegetation communities in fact evolving to depend on it. For some species bushfire events trigger seed germination, after seeds have lay dormant in the soil for decades. With research discovering that bushfires help provide nutrients specifically needed by native vegetation to rejuvenate and seed.

The remains of burnt trees, with hollowed out logs, provide important refuge for birds and mammals seeking shelter and nesting.

Some plant species have been seen on Kangaroo Island following the summer 2019-2020 bushfires that had not been recorded for more than 70 years!

A small population of the critically endangered orchid, Black-beak Duck-orchid, had only two records on Kangaroo Island that were around 30 years old. In the fire scar, four newly observed populations have been located, with the help of botanists who'd never before observed this orchid in their many years of working on the island.

The SA Seed Conservation Centre has been doing extensive work looking at the recovery of plants and in particular threatened species.

Discover more...

- Book a tour that has a wildflower theme. Visit Kangaroo Island Tourism Alliance at www.tourkangarooisland.com.au for information on tours and locations, and much more.
- Learn about the island's environment from the Kangaroo Island Landscape Board. Picking native plants, even outside conservation areas, is not allowed.
- Please park in safe areas, well off the road, and explore along walking trails.
- **Fungi lovers** - <https://data.environment.sa.gov.au/Content/Publications/ki-fungi-web-2013.pdf>
- Ann Prescott's wonderful book - It's Blue With Five Petals – Kangaroo Island Field Guide (1995) Openbook Publishers and Bev and Dean Overton's lovely - Discover Kangaroo Island's Native Plants (2012) Environmental Realist.