

“Paying attention is a form of
reciprocity with the living world,
receiving the gifts with open eyes
and open heart.”

– Robin Wall Kimmerer



<https://www.castlemaineseedlibrary.org.au/>

Cover image – Jo Matthews

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that is correct and relevant at the time of publication.



Arthropodium strictum
Chocolate Lily

Acknowledgments

The Indigenous Seed Project acknowledges the local Dja Dja Wurrung people as the first inhabitants of the land we live upon. We recognise their continuing connection to this land, rivers and creeks and to their rich ancient culture.

We acknowledge that at the time of European arrival the totality of the lands that are now known as Victoria were occupied by sovereign Indigenous nations who owned, cared for and enjoyed their land in accordance with their laws, customs and traditions.

We acknowledge, with full respect, the strength and power of all Traditional Owners, Elder, Ancestors, and young leaders who fight to protect and look after Country, Community, Language and Lore in the face of ongoing colonial interruptions and cultural genocide.

To Learn more please visit djadjawurrung.com.au

The Indigenous Seed Project supports a Treaty for Victoria.

I would like to thank Frances Cincotta for her all-round local plant wisdom - having access to lived knowledge is such a privilege. Thank you also for your excellent proofreading skills and constant support for the project.

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I would also like to thank Eliza-Jane Gilchrist for her constant support and help during the creation of this project - having a right-hand woman like Eliza was invaluable.

Thanks to the lovely group of volunteers who assisted in picking Chocolate Lily seed. Big thanks to The Castlemaine Seed Library Working Group; Dayna, Annelise and Susan - the collective capacity you women have is incredible. The Castlemaine Library for supporting, assisting with logistics and offering a space to accommodate the project in its completed state. Thanks to our regular Seed Library volunteers who helped package and label the seeds. This event/project is supported by the Mount Alexander Shire Council's Events/Community Grants Program.

Jo Matthews - Indigenous Seed Project Coordinator

Terminology

Indigenous

Refers to a plant species that occurs naturally in a region but not exclusively. For example, River Red Gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) is indigenous to our shire but it is also indigenous to many other parts of Australia.

Endemic

Refers to a plant species that grows only in a specific designated area. In Mount Alexander Shire we only have one plant species that is endemic - the Southern Shepherd's Purse (*Ballantinia antipoda*), a highly threatened species that occurs only on Mt. Alexander. It is also correct to say that Southern Shepherd's Purse is indigenous to Victoria, or indigenous to Australia, or indigenous to Shire of Mount Alexander.

River Red Gum, which occurs naturally in every state and territory of Australia except for Tasmania, is endemic to Australia, meaning it does not occur naturally in any other country.

Provenance

Refers to the area that the seed was originally collected from. Across Mount Alexander Shire conditions for plants vary from place to place with changes in soil type, altitude, aspect, annual rainfall, frost severity, etc. so where the seed is sourced from influences how well the plants grown from that seed will thrive when they are planted out. For example the summit of Mt Alexander is 430m higher than Castlemaine, receives 2 inches more rain annually, and is granitic in geology whereas Castlemaine is sedimentary so plants grown from seed collected on the mountain would not do so well in Castlemaine and vice versa.

Hello and thank-you for taking some Indigenous seeds to germinate!

The Indigenous Seed Project emerged from the desire to raise awareness of the local flora in Leanganook (Mount Alexander). The project will create the opportunity for anyone to experience propagating indigenous seeds and to also learn about the ecological and cultural significance of the plant they are growing. The accompanying booklets will also provide valuable information about how to use the plant in a garden context and information on growing conditions for each plant.

With only 15% of the local Box Iron Bark forests remaining, it's more important than ever that we get to know these plants and include them in our gardens. This will help extend habitats for the local fauna and make your garden more resilient to future climate changes by using plants that have adapted to local conditions.

I hope you will sit with this little book, read its content and create a connection to the plant/s you have chosen to grow. Perhaps next time you are in the bush you will be able to recognise, name and appreciate these plants deepening your connection to the local environment.

Jo Matthews, Indigenous Seed Project coordinator

Chocolate Lily

Arthropodium strictum

Family: Asparagaceae

Description:

An upright, long lived perennial herb with Grass - like leaves and tuberous roots. Slender stems to 1m tall are studded with delicate, purple flowers that have a delicious fragrance of chocolate. Flowers are held high above the leaves with new buds opening daily, mostly between October - December. Leaves wither in December and plants survive as tubers over the hottest months of the year, re-emerging in Autumn.

Growing Conditions:

Grows well in full sun and part-shade. Some tolerance of drought, wind and waterlogging. Benefits from supplementary watering during extended dry. Prefers acid soils but tolerates a wide variety of soil types. Tolerant of frosts and cold temperatures to -10 degrees.

Cultivation and maintenance:

A moderate to slow growing perennial. Generally, trouble free with no special requirements. Careful weeding in late-winter, early spring will avoid accidentally removing this lily along with exotic, weedy grasses. It's broader, thicker leaves are a distinguishing feature. May recruit seedlings from self-sown seeds, with germination in Autumn.

Cultural Value:

Like many tuberous plants that grow in our region, Chocolate Lily was an important part of the Dja Dja Wurrung diet. The tubers were best eaten after they have been roasted on the fire but could be eaten raw. The tubers are most palatable and juicy from the current year's growth and best harvested towards the end of flowering. The flowers were eaten and helped to cleanse the blood.

According to local elder Aunty Julie McHale; "Because this area was prolific in this species it was often used to trade with other mobs."

Aunty Julie goes on to quote; "Beth Gott states from Grey, 1841- 'The natives have a law that no plant bearing seeds is to be dug up before it has flowered. They call the flowers the 'Bar-boop or Mother'- I have never seen a native violate this rule.' "

Websites cited:

www.recreatingthecountry.com.au

www.tuckerbush.com.au

Garden value:

Beautiful in Spring, whether grown as scattered flowers or in a mass planting. A great addition to any cottage or grassland garden, perennial border or in an understory planting below a lightly-shaded tree canopy. The flowers are an important source of pollen and nectar for native bees.

Ecology:

Abundant locally in grasslands, woodlands and open forest, Chocolate Lilies are a striking Spring feature in the Goldfields when mass flowering turns the understory purple. Like many wildflowers in our region, this lily makes the most of Winter and Spring rains through rapid growth, flowering and setting of seed before the heat of Summer. Plants resprout from their dormant tubers following Autumn rains.

Seed collection and propagation:

When the seed pods go brown and brittle and start to open, collect them in a paper bag. This is usually between December to January. It can be some work separating the seed from the round pods, crumbling them between your fingers is a good method and using a sieve to separate seeds from capsules. Sow seeds in March in individual tubes into quality native potting mix. Cover with 5mm of seed raising mix. You can plant up to 3 seeds in a tube and if all germinate, carefully 'prick-out' seedlings into new tubes (try not to disturb roots). Water in seeds and place in semi-shade, keep moist. Their single leaf will appear within four weeks. Seedlings can be planted out into garden in August.



Road grading exposing tubers
of the Chocolate Lily
Photo - Frances Cincotta



Chocolate Lily growing en masse
in open woodland. Photo - Jo.
Matthews