



Media release – November 2007

## Hidden in Plain View: the forgotten flora

**When:** 24 November – 17 December 2007  
**Where:** Domain House, Birdwood Avenue, South Yarra, 3141  
**Time:** 10am – 5pm: Tuesday – Friday;  
11am – 4pm: weekend  
**Entry:** Free  
**Enquiries:** 03 9252 2495

Which poisonous mushroom kills flies? What do fungi and stonewash jeans have in common? How do fungi feed themselves? What has a moss got to do with the Tyrolean iceman? Why do mosses have teeth? What are those little green umbrellas growing in my pot plant? How can lichens help us tell the age of a rock?

The answers to these questions and many more will be answered in a remarkable free touring exhibition, *Hidden in Plain View: the forgotten flora*, staged by the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne.

From 24 November to 17 December, *Hidden in Plain View: the forgotten flora* will be on show at the Domain House in Birdwood Avenue.

The exhibition introduces the research and conservation work that goes on at the National Herbarium of Victoria and the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne through the story of mosses, lichens and fungi.

The exhibition will include original illustrations, historical and contemporary writing and herbarium specimens from the State Botanical Collection housed at the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne.

Dr Teresa Lebel, a mycologist (fungi expert) and one of the exhibition organisers, said: “Visitors to the exhibition will be able to see watercolours, drawings and herbarium specimens that have never been shown to the public because of their precious and fragile nature.”

“The exhibition will give people a fascinating insight into what we call the forgotten flora because although mosses, lichen and fungi are found throughout Australia, most people know little about them.”

***Hidden in Plain View: the forgotten flora*** is the Royal Botanic Gardens’ first touring exhibition of its Heritage and State Botanical Art collections. In 2008 it will tour interstate to:

*National Museum of Australia, Canberra* -  
Monday 13 March - Monday 9 June 2008

*Museum of Economic Botany, Botanic Gardens Adelaide*  
Friday 5 June - Wednesday 30 September 2009

*Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery, Launceston*  
Saturday 16 August - Sunday 16 November 2008

**Public inquiries: (03) 9252 2495.**

**Media inquiries: Penny Underwood and John Myers on (03) 9818 8540.  
JPEGs are available.**

## Background

The **National Herbarium of Victoria** was founded in 1853 and is part of the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne. It houses about 1.2 million preserved specimens of flowering plants, algae, lichens and fungi, and contains Australian and international species of flora.

The State Botanical Collection includes historical and newly commissioned books, documents, paintings, illustrations and etchings.

The Herbarium is particularly rich in 19<sup>th</sup> century collections, including material from Robert Brown's Australian travels, specimens, and illustrations sent to Baron Ferdinand Mueller, the Gardens' first director.

The collections are extensively used in historical research into people and places and scientific research such as biodiversity, taxonomy, evolution, molecular systematics, conservation and horticulture.

### ***Hidden in Plain View: the forgotten flora***

The exhibition explores the world of cryptic organisms or 'the forgotten flora' from a variety of perspectives:

- What are the forgotten flora?
- A history of the forgotten flora in Victoria, highlighted by individuals and their achievements;
- The forgotten flora as inspiration in the arts;
- Society's use and interaction of the forgotten flora in their daily lives; and
- Biodiversity and conservation of the forgotten flora in Victoria.

These themes will be presented through a variety of media, most of which emanate from the Royal Botanic Gardens collections and including original illustrations and Herbarium specimens from the State Botanical Collection.

### **What are the forgotten flora?**

They are fungi, lichens, liverworts and mosses.

They provide vital decomposition services within ecosystems, food and shelter to animals and insects, are important to the nutrient and energy cycles and help to protect soils.

They can be found in many habitats throughout Australia, are extremely diverse and impact on our lives in many ways.

Many are small, often hidden but some are brightly coloured, large, have unusual textures, shapes and smells.

## **Historical**

Many individuals and organisations in Victoria from the 1850s to the current day have contributed to the study of the forgotten flora.

The exhibition will profile Baron Ferdinand von Mueller, the first Government botanist and Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, as well as field naturalists, botanical illustrators and modern day botanists.

## **Inspiration for the arts**

Illustrators, photographers, woodworkers, textile artists and children's book illustrators have all been inspired by the forgotten flora.

The exhibition will include the work of artists Anita Barley, Karen Beckmann, Dianne Emery, Merle McIntyre, Celia Rosser, Julie Ryder and Katrina Syme, and photographers Ron Oldfield and Tony Lockwood.

## **Community relevance**

Without microscopic fungi called yeasts, humans would not have been able to produce bread, cheese, wines and beer. The stone wash effect on jeans is not created by washing but by a fungus. Mosses are used extensively in the horticultural and floral industries, as well as scientific sector. Lichens are used in both perfume and dye industries and as pollution indicators.

## **Biodiversity and conservation**

The significance of Victoria's State Botanical Collection is explored, as is the role that the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne plays as a state institution in supporting and promoting biodiversity.