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Tips | Events | Forum | Shop

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Strappy-Leafed Natives



Presenter: Angus Stewart [11/03/2006]

Angus talks about new native plants

A really exciting thing is happening in the world of Australian plants. Wild species of native grasses and strappy-leafed plants that have long tantalised gardeners are now being improved for the market. The desire for water-wise low maintenance gardens has created a strong demand for ground covers that suppress weeds, stop erosion and create a wonderful native landscape.

For the past nine years Todd Layt has been growing and breeding native grasses and their relatives. Todd began by collecting species from various parts of Australia. He then let nature take its course and harvested the resulting seed. Thousands of seedlings were grown on and a handful displayed outstanding characteristics and were selected for propagation as new cultivars.

Todd explains that once the plant was bred vegetative propagation techniques such as division or tissue culture were used to multiply the same plant.

"We are using tissue culture or micro-propagation, which is cloning, to grow a lot of these plants. It means taking small divisions and growing them in a bacteria-free environment. Each little plantlet grows into a beautiful plant, faster, cheaper and we can export them overseas because they are bacteria free."

A new **Lomandra** called '**Nyalla**' has been selected because it has a slightly blue tone compared to other **Lomandras**. And it looks just like a large grass tree – in fact they used to be part of the same family, but they are much harder to grow. The plants add an upright texture to the garden.

Lomandra longifolia is commonly known as the **spiny-headed mat-rush** because of the little spikes on the flowers. But Todd has developed a fine-leaf form called **Lomandra 'Tanika'**. Why did you pick this one Todd?

"Firstly, you mentioned the spiky form of flowers. This one feels quite comfortable when you grab it, so it's not spiky, even though it may look like that. Secondly, it has a much finer leaf than the

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- 2004 Factsheets
- 2003 Factsheets
- 2002 Factsheets
- 2001 Factsheets
- 2000 Factsheets
- 1999 Factsheets

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common **Lomandra**. It is around half the height. It's very compact and looks very tidy. It performs well, whether on roadsides, homes, real estate developments or factories. "

Other favourites include: **Dianella 'Cassa Blue'** which has a blue foliage and produces baby blue coloured flowers. It's a tough plant, can handle 45 degree days and is great in subdivisions and around houses.

Poa labillardieri 'Eskdale' is a blue **Poa**. It's drought tolerant and can handle more humidity than other **Poas**. It's a lot tougher. It originated from the Cumberland Plain of Sydney and can cope with the northern areas of Australia.

Todd says: "We have not really found any pests on the plants yet." **Dianella 'Little Rev'** and **'Cassa Blue'** will get some fungus and discolour in the leaves if they are in the warmer humid areas where they get wet feet so plant these in raised beds.

Others such as **Dianella 'Little Jess'** and **'Breeze'**, cope well with poor drainage and are planted on roadsides.

There is an almost endless array of strappy-leafed native plants on the market. Not only do they look good in an informal bush garden but use them to create a more formal look. It's hard to underestimate the potential of this versatile group of Australian plants.

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