Top End Native Plant Society NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2026

A WET SEASON TOP END FLOWER

Clerodendrum floribundum

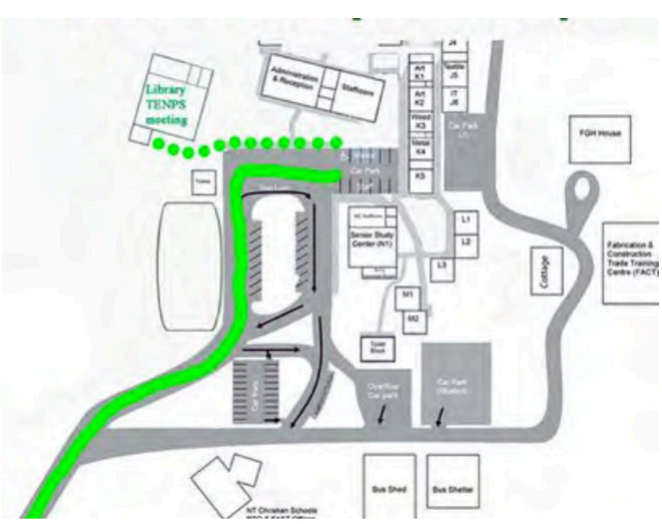
Monthly Meetings

Top End Native Plant Society (TENPS) general meetings are held at 7:00 pm on the third Thursday of the month at Marrara Christian College library on the corner of Amy Johnson Ave and McMillans Rd.

Bring your plants to swap, sell or have identified over a cuppa. Note this item, unlike previous meetings, will be after the monthly talk. Please be there at 7 pm sharp so not to miss the presentation.

The April talk will be a presentation on the propagation of 'Top End Natives' by Russell Dempster and also be the last meeting at this venue.

NEXT Meeting: April 16th



TENPS (Top End Native Plant Society) Committee Members

President: Plaxy Purich

(0435027116)

Vice President: Sean Stieber

Secretary: Johanna Stieber

Treasurer: Graham Zemunik

Publications: Roland Muench

General Committee Member: Claire Hewitt

Webmaster: Amanda Lockwood

Public Officer: Dave Liddle

Publicity: Vacant please inquire

In this Newsletter

Visit our Facebook for info on our next events and sales!

www.topendnativeplants.org.au

As we have done in the past for months with plant sales, no fieldtrip was conducted in order to encourage members to attend the plant sale in Humpty Doo instead. Below follows Plaxy's appreciation of the sale and its importance.

Northern Territory Native Plant Sale Humpty Doo 21/3/26

The recent plant sale held at Humpty Doo village Green on the 21st March 2026, in conjunction with Territory Native Plants, was an outstanding success, attracting close to a thousand people throughout the day from the Litchfield municipality. With a wide variety of plants on offer and minimal overlap between the two stalls, the event showcased the roles of Territory Native Plants Society as a community club providing 10% discount for members and Territory Native Plants as a supportive local business, which generously contributed 10% of their profits to TENPS and continued to offer discounts to our members.

Our stall, featuring plants grown by Russell Dempster, was extremely well received, with many visitors' seeking advice and guidance from our members, highlighting the value of our collective knowledge of native plants. This plant sale raised awareness of NT native plants, and 15 members signed up.

Sincere thanks go to all TENPS members and committee who assisted with the planning, setting up, packing down and staffing the stall, as well as to everyone who supported the day. A very special thank you to Russell for the immense time, care, and dedication he has given to growing NT plants for the Society; his contribution has created a lasting legacy. As Russell prepares to step back, we must begin planning now to build up our plant stock and continue this important part of TENPS into the future.

Plaxy Purich
President

Adiantum philipense (Maidenhair Fern) Photos Roland Muench

Many members have purchased interesting and relatively hard to obtain plants from Russell over the years and I'm no exception to this. One purchase from Russell at one of our plant sales is now growing happily at my home with lovely details shown opposite. Known as Maidenhair Fern it features attractive 40 cm long 1-pinnate lamina, with the pinnules (shown) being semi-circular and and having a false indusium (soral flaps). They usually grow near rocks or at the base of trees near a watercourse such as at Wangi Falls, the latter being a hot-spot for a variety of ferns in the Top End.

Roland Muench

Plant of the Month - April 2026
By Claire Hewitt

Sorghum grasses

***Sorghum* Moench: Andropogoneae: Poaceae**

There are 13 native sorghum grasses recognised in the Northern Territory (NT) and two introduced species (Northern Territory Government, 2026); and they dominate landscapes in the Top End, particularly the annual species *Sorghum stipoideum* (around Katherine) and *Sorghum intrans* (around Darwin), and the perennial *Sorghum plumosum* (in varied habitats and soils) and *Sorghum timorense* (in heavy textured clay soils on floodplains). The introduced species (*Sorghum* x *almum*) and *Sorghum bicolor* are used as livestock forage and fodder crops. Of the 13 native species in the *Sorghum* genus in the NT, nine are annual and four are perennial (Lazarides et al., 1991).

The genus is characterised by being tall to very tall grasses with flat leaf blades with a thickened central vein. The inflorescence (flowerhead) is arranged in a panicle, generally with paired spikelets (the flowering unit); one being fertile and sessile (no stalk) and one being sterile and pedicellate (with a stalk) (Jacobs et al., 2008; Lazarides et al., 1991). The lemma (a leaf like covering which protects the flower) of the fertile spikelet is often awned; this needle-like structure is what gives the species one of its common names – spear grasses. The awn and the sharp callus (hard point) at the other end of the lemma play a vital role in seed dispersal and germination as the unit can be embedded in animal skin or fur and / or can help the seed to corkscrew into the ground and aid burial (Andrew & Mott, 1983). The awn can move in response to moisture changes – it is hygroscopically active - and this may help with its burial. Burial helps the fertile unit to access suitable substrates and avoid heat and moisture extremes (Mott, 1978). The *Sorghum* species which grow on substrates in which the seed can easily be buried such as cracking clay soils (*S. timorense*) and limestone (*S. macrospermum*) tend not to have this feature *(Lazarides et al., 1991).*

Most native Australian sorghum species are adapted to the periods of hot, alternating wet and dry conditions in monsoonal areas, and can cope with poor soils, water stress and frequent fires (Myrans et al., 2024). They dominate large areas of northern Australia and form large areas of monospecific grassland (Andrew & Mott, 1983; Lazarides et al., 1991). Senescence occurs near the end of the wet season and provide fuel for fires (Andrew & Mott, 1983; Cook & Andrew, 1991). Fire can kill the seeds of annual sorghums or break dormancy but dry season fire does not seem to interfere with the persistence of sorghum populations. However, wet season fires are detrimental to the species, particularly the annuals with their transient seed banks (Andrew & Mott, 1983; Lazarides et al., 1991).

Annual sorghums set seed at different times, with the more southerly occurring *Sorghum stipoideum* maturing about a month before the more northerly occurring *Sorghum intrans*. Heavy soils are dominated by perennial *Sorghum* species (Andrew & Mott, 1983). Seeds of annual species have an innate dormancy which prevents germination during late rains in the wet season, and once they emerge from dormancy around late June, germination is suppressed by lack of moisture during the dry season. Once pre-monsoonal rains trigger germination in annual species then all viable seeds germinate, i.e. there is no long term dormancy, and flowering occurs simultaneously in January or February, perhaps triggered by day length (Andrew & Mott, 1983; Lazarides et al., 1991). The species which grow on heavy clay soils, such as *S. timorense,* mature latest, which may be due to the high moisture holding capacity of clay soils (Lazarides et al., 1991).

Sorghum is a useful crop in arid areas globally due to its ability to persist during dry conditions. Research suggests that hunter gatherers from the Sahara region used sorghum (likely *Sorghum bicolor* subsp. *verticilliflorum*) as food as early as 7500 BC, and archaeological evidence suggests that it was domesticated around 3000 BC in eastern Sudan (Ananda et al., 2020). It is often used for feeding livestock as pasture or fodder, but also for human consumption as a grain for baking and cooking. It can also be used to make syrups and alcohol, for biofuel, and for making items such as brooms and baskets (Ananda et al., 2020; Jacobs et al., 2008; Simpson, 2019). It is closely related to sugarcane (*Saccharum* spp.) and can hybridise with it. Efforts have been made to cross wild sorghums with their cultivated relatives to gain advantageous genetic properties such as resistance to pests, pathogens, reductions in livestock toxicity (from cyanogenetic glycosides in young leaves) and the ability to grow in a range of environmental conditions (Ananda et al., 2020; Myrans et al., 2024). However, gene transfer has proved difficult and the creation of viable hybrids hasn't been successful. Australian native sorghums currently remain uncultivated (Ananda et al., 2020).

However, Australian sorghums have been used as food by indigenous Australians. For instance, *Sorghum* species were gathered, pounded into grain and cleaned in order to make a meal called morkul by the Tagoman and Wardaman peoples of the Katherine area (Arndt, 1961). It is also an important food source for granivorous rodents, birds and ants but provides insufficient nutrients for larger herbivorous mammals, including livestock (Cook & Andrew, 1991).

Figure 1 (a) Cropped sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor*). Cropped sorghum is mainly used for livestock feed in Australia. Image © NSW DPI and Regional Development, 2021; (b) Area dominated by *Sorghum* sp. between Kununurra and Wyndham in Western Australia. Image © Claire Hewitt, 2024; (c) Spikelets of *Sorghum plumosum* showing twisted awns. Image © Russell Cumming, 2025; (d) Awns of *Sorghum intrans* showing callus point of the fertile lemma and its emergent awn embedded in a leaf. Image © maxark, 2025.

References

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TENPS Questionnaire Feedback 2026

At a recent TENPS meeting, members were invited to share their thoughts through a short, informal feedback survey. The responses provided valuable insight into what members enjoy most, along with ideas to help strengthen and grow the Society. The responses were thoughtful and encouraging, highlighting the strong sense of purpose and community within TENPS.

A clear theme among members was the importance of learning and connection. Members consistently highlighted their enjoyment of monthly events, guest speakers, field trips to new places, learning new things about NT Native Plants and spending time with like-minded people. It was about deepening knowledge while connecting with others who share a passion for plants.

Other feedback provided suggestions for improving the overall experience by enhancing meetings and events: by having shorter presentations (30-45 minutes) with time for Q&A, starting meetings at 7.00 pm, with a short tea break beforehand, and keeping events well-timed and starting punctually. Members also emphasised the importance of keeping a strong focus on plants as the core purpose of TENPS.

Communication was identified for improvement. Members would like email updates with clear details and two reminders before events. Newsletters are distributed about a week in advance, with useful links included (e.g. iNaturalist (to be created), websites of the topic).

We identified several ideas and opportunities when asked what new ideas or opportunities we should explore. Some of those were learning how to key out plants, particularly grasses, weeds and native plants. Some members wanted to learn about the plant relationships with birds, fauna, fungi and insects, and guidance on planting for specific conditions, i.e., cyclone-proofing species. In addition, learning to collect seeds and propagate a variety of NT native plant species. There was also interest in building stronger partnerships with other like-minded groups such as Landcare, Land for Wildlife and other environmental organisations.

Overall, feedback was positive and very constructive, and with this information, the Committee can move forward with some recommendations based on member input. There are clear opportunities to expand practical, hands-on learning experiences. Strengthen communication and event reminders, improve accessibility through updated systems for membership and plant identification on the website. And, to continue to foster a welcoming and connected community with our regular events. These insights will help the Society evolve and respond to the needs of its members.

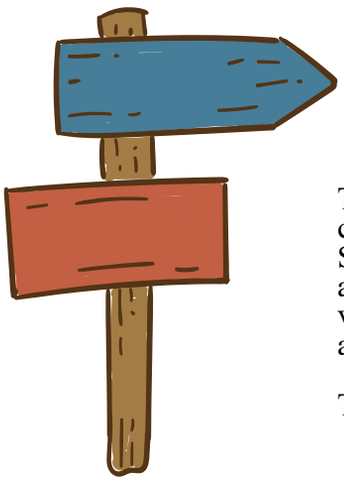
Thank you to everyone who contributed their thoughts. Your feedback is invaluable and will help shape things moving forward.

Plaxy Purich
President

Change of venue for our regular monthly meetings

April will the last meeting event at the Marrara Christian Collage where Russell has been teaching, however now retiring. The May meeting will be at our new venue, the Knuckey Lagoon Recreation Reserve.

Plaxy Purich
President



April 2026 Field Trip

The field trip for April will be the escarpment walk in Palmerston. TENPS conducted this walk on 23rd September 2023. It has an good variety of Savannah plants and it will be interesting to see the difference in season. This is a walk of 2-3 km on a gravel path and will be lead by Richard Boyne who is very familiar with the plant species in this area, as he is living nearby. We meet at the Woolworth carpark adjoining Mannikan Court. See map below.

The walk will start at 9 am on Saturday the 18th of April.

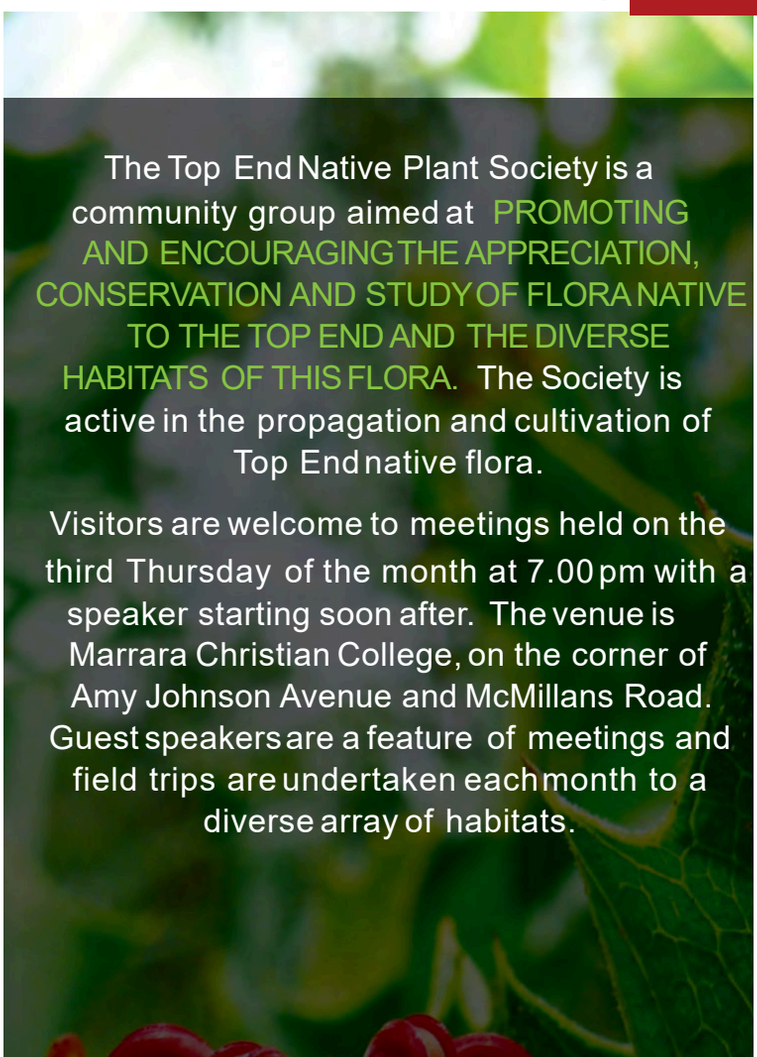
Top End Native Plant Society

BECOME A MEMBER!

Member discounts for plant sales.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

(Due annually on 1st July each year)



The Top End Native Plant Society is a community group aimed at PROMOTING AND ENCOURAGING THE APPRECIATION, CONSERVATION AND STUDY OF FLORA NATIVE TO THE TOP END AND THE DIVERSE HABITATS OF THIS FLORA. The Society is active in the propagation and cultivation of Top End native flora.

Visitors are welcome to meetings held on the third Thursday of the month at 7.00 pm with a speaker starting soon after. The venue is Marrara Christian College, on the corner of Amy Johnson Avenue and McMillans Road. Guest speakers are a feature of meetings and field trips are undertaken each month to a diverse array of habitats.

New Membership ☐ Renewal ☐

Membership fees are:

Individual Waged:	$35.00
Family Waged:	$45.00
Individual Unwaged:	$15.00
Family Unwaged:	$20.00

Name/s: _____

Postal address: _____

To pay online:

Bank Bendigo Bank

Account Name: Top End Native Plant Society

BSB: 633 000

Account: 207 974 247

Note: Please include your name in the transfer reference and email the information in this form to topendnativeplantsociety@hotmail.com
Or pay in person at meetings or events where cash or card will be accepted.

Follow 'Top End Native Plant Society' on Facebook for information on current activities and events.

Contact us by

topendnativeplantsociety@hotmail.com

www.topendnativeplants.org.au

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