

Some climbing vines native to the eastern Darling Downs

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INTRODUCTION

Vines are a characteristic component of ecosystems on the eastern Darling Downs that have been described over the years as softwood scrub, vine scrub, vine thicket, hoop pine scrub, vine forest and dryland rainforest.

Scrubs documented in 1862 near what is now Peacehaven Botanic Park included the Gowrie Scrub along the northern watershed of Gowrie Creek, the small Five-Mile Scrub between Wetalla and the New England Highway, and the large Main Range Scrub on the Highfields Plateau.

The original land portion on which Peacehaven lies extended from Kuhls Road in the east to Kratzke Road in the west and supported the Main Range Scrub on more than half of its western extent. The eastern side originally supported blackbutt open forest with a dense understorey. Farmers were attracted to these areas by the generally rich soils, and the scrubs have been extensively cleared. Any remnant areas are usually on steep banks and along drainage lines.

CHARACTERISTICS OF VINES

Most vines, whether they are climbers or scramblers, have long stems. This feature gives them a strategic advantage in ecosystems with a tree canopy that limits the availability of sunlight. By growing a long stem but not investing energy in a sturdy trunk for support, the young vine can quickly ascend towards openings in the canopy.

Climbers have evolved in many plant families worldwide, typically with some of the structural adaptations described below.

Adventitious roots. Roots adapted for climbing develop not on root tissue under the ground but on the stem, usually at a node. These are called adventitious roots. They cling to the support structure, be it a tree or a rock face, and grow into any available crevices where there is a likelihood of residual moisture.

Twining stems. Some stems grow in a spiral fashion, rather than straight up, and thus are able to twine around their support. *Pandorea* species, for example, twine and can quickly ascend from ground to sunlight, covering the supporting structures with their exuberant growth. Twiners are not parasitic; they are merely leaning on their friends for support.

Tendrils. The stems or leaves of many vines are adapted to produce tendrils, which are slender thready structures that enable climbing.

Tendrils are remarkable in that they can sense physical contact and respond to this stimulation. The cells on the opposite side of the tendril from the contact elongate, forcing the tendril to curl around the object. You can try this yourself if you have a plant with tendrils in your garden (e.g. pumpkin). A light touch should trigger a reaction within a few minutes.

Through the production of lignin in the cell walls, tendrils may harden into strong wiry cords that support the increasing weight of the vine.

SOME LOCAL CLIMBERS

This fact sheet covers just a few of the many local native climbers.

These include possibly the most spectacular, *Pandorea pandorana* and *P. jasminoides*; two of the most beautifully scented, *Jasminum simplicifolium* and *J. didymum*; and two clematis species, *Clematis glycinoides* and *C. fawcettii*.

Scrambling vines will be covered in a separate fact sheet.

First, a word of explanation about flowers. The petals of many flowers are joined at the base to form a tube, with the tops of the petals, termed lobes, turned outwards. Botanists typically deal with dried, flat specimens, on which they can see and accurately measure the tube. This is not so easy in the field, where the best measure of a flower's size is the diameter of the 'face' of the flower across the lobes.



Photo: Patricia Gardner

Pandorea pandorana: note how the petals are fused at the base and extend out into lobes nearer the top.



Pandorea

The genus *Pandorea* belongs to the family Bignoniaceae, a global plant family of the tropics and subtropics. The family includes trees, shrubs and vines, and has about 120 genera worldwide; ten of these genera occur in Australia, with four in South East Queensland. The genus *Pandorea* includes eight species, two of which have only recently been identified.

***Pandorea pandorana* (wonga vine)** has pinnate leaves up to 13 cm long and usually bright mid-green in colour. They have 3–13 ovate to linear leaflets, each of them 2–10 cm by 0.2–4 cm; they tend to be narrower in drier regions.

The abundant bell flowers, about 2–2.5 cm across the face, are borne on terminal panicles. They are normally white or cream with dark red throats or sometimes with deep red lobes. Flowering is from early winter to midsummer. The resultant capsules are large cylinders up to about 12 cm long.

Pandorea pandorana
(right and above right)



Photo: Patricia Gardner



Photo: Patricia Gardner

Pandorea jasminoides (below)



Photo: Diana Beal

***Pandorea jasminoides* (bower vine)** has shiny green leaves with 5–9 ovate leaflets, each 2–8 cm long by 1.2–4 cm wide. The red-throated pink flowers are much bigger than those of *P. pandorana* at 5–6 cm across. This species usually prefers the edges of scrubs and flowers in spring to summer.

Wonga vine has a widespread distribution and grows in all states of Australia as well as some of the Pacific islands and New Guinea. In contrast, bower vine is much less abundant and has a more restricted distribution. Both species are spectacular when in full bloom and are a Downs sight not to be missed.



Jasminum

The genus *Jasminum* belongs to the olive family, Oleaceae. This is a global and pan-tropic family with almost 1000 recognised species in about 30 genera. Many members of the family have strong, attractive scents, and some are cultivated overseas to extract their aromatic oils for perfumery.

The two species of interest here are *J. simplicifolium* and *J. didymum*. Both have been divided into subspecies, with the divisions based on the dimensions of the flowers and width of the leaves. Wider leaves are found in the subspecies that prefer open eucalypt forest over the denser scrubs of the region.

Jasminum simplicifolium, as the Latin name suggests, has simple ovate leaves, 3–8 cm by 1–5 cm, with two lateral veins. The fragrant white flowers, about 2 cm across, are borne in terminal panicles. The fruits are black when mature and about 10 mm in diameter. Although most often a climber, this species can form a scrambling shrub.



Photo: Patricia Gardner

Jasminum simplicifolium: flowers (above) and fruits (above right)



Photo: Patricia Gardner

Jasminum didymum has the common jasmine leaf arrangement of trifoliate pinnate leaves. Like *J. simplicifolium*, *J. didymum* has been divided into subspecies based on leaf size. The most common subspecies in the eastern Darling Downs is *J. didymum* subsp. *racemosum*, which has ovate or orbicular leaflets 1–4 cm long by 0.5–2.5 cm wide. The flowers are borne in panicles of 9–40 or more and are white and about 8 mm across. The globular fruits are also about 8 mm in diameter.

Jasminum didymum



Photo: Patricia Gardner



Clematis

Somewhat surprisingly, the genus *Clematis* belongs to the family Ranunculaceae, the family of buttercups and anemones. Many species within the family are herbs, but there are a few climbers, including the *Clematis* species.

Members of this family normally prefer cool, moist environments, and in Australia are mostly found in the more southern parts of each state. This preference is an indicator of where they are most likely to be found locally: in cool, moist gullies of scrubs or forests.

Clematis species are woody climbers with opposite leaves, divided into three leaflets either once or more than once. The petioles often function as tendrils to assist climbing. Several species grow along the coastal plains and adjacent highlands in the eastern mainland states of Australia.

***Clematis glycinoides* (headache vine)** has a widespread distribution and is variable to the extent that additional species will probably be described. The common name comes from the pungent odour emitted from crushed young leaves. This irritates the assailant's nose and eyes to the extent that this new assault on the senses cures any existing headache.

The divided leaves have petioles up to 8 cm long. The three ovate leaflets are 2–11 cm by 1–7 cm and have petiolules (i.e. leaflet stalks branching off the petioles) up to 2 cm long.

The flowers are usually borne in panicles. Each flower has four white sepals up to 2 cm long, tiny petals and stamens 2–8 mm long. The showy white sepals are easily mistaken for petals.

Clematis fawcettii is a much rarer species than *C. glycinoides*. Its distribution appears to be restricted to the scrubs of the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales and the Great Divide from the Queensland–New South Wales border to the Bunya Mountains.

Locally, *C. fawcettii* has been collected along the Kingsthorpe–Gowrie Junction ridge (Gowrie Scrub) and in the remnant Franke Scrub at Cawdor. It is classed as Vulnerable in both Queensland and New South Wales.



Photo: Patricia Gardner

Clematis fawcettii



Photo: Patricia Gardner

Clematis glycinoides

