New African Garden opens
On Sunday 29 May, the new African-Madagascan Garden in the George Brown Darwin Botanic Gardens was officially opened by the Northern Territory Chief Minister, Adam Giles.

The event marked the occasion of the first Australia and New Zealand Botanic Garden Open Day, celebrated around both countries with a wide range of events.

The new garden was inspired by the acquisition of a collection of baobab seeds some years ago and is a stunning transformation of a previously neglected part of the Darwin Botanic Gardens.

Entertainment and refreshments were provided courtesy of the Malagasy community of Darwin, plus displays and guided tours.

The Friends assisted financially in purchasing plants for the garden and our past President, Harvey Cooper-Preston, donated many plants from her collection prior to leaving Darwin.

The Friends’ praises were sung loudly at the opening by both the Chief Minister and Bryan Harty, Director of the Gardens.

Friends of the Darwin Botanic Gardens
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Friends email address: info.fodbg@gmail.com
Friends committee elected in May 2016
Patron: The Hon. Austin Asche AC QC
Chairperson: Peter Pusterla 0408 947 890
Vice Chairperson: Sue Dibbs 0417 844 983
Secretary: Peter Knibbs 0478 418 587
Treasurer: Fiona Douglas 8985 4179
Newsletter Editor: Sue Dibbs 8981 4589
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Date set for the Friends’ big plant sale

The annual Friends grand plant sale will be held on SATURDAY 12 NOVEMBER. A huge range of plants will be available, propagated and tended in the Friends nursery at the Gardens during our Thursday and Saturday morning working bees.

The sale is a highlight of the Friends’ year, and raises funds to assist its aims of increasing community awareness of the scientific, educational, horticultural, cultural, therapeutic and recreational functions of the Gardens.

Last year (below), keen plant hunters were queued up early, bags and baskets at the ready, waiting for the Friends’ gates to open at 9am.

Tropical Garden Fair for August

The NT Nursery and Garden Industry Association’s Tropical Garden Spectacular, which has been a feature of the Gardens’ annual calendar for several years, is not being held this year. Instead, the Darwin Botanic Gardens is organising its own smaller scale Tropical Garden Fair, to be held on the weekend of 13 and 14 August.

The free admission Tropical Garden Fair will feature a huge range of local plants for sale, garden club and organisation information stands, food and craft stalls, and special events and activities.

The Friends will have a stand and plant sale area, and are also hosting a special guest to attend the weekend event. Internationally renowned tropical landscape designer Made Wijaya (below left) will be attending the Fair to meet local gardeners and to talk about his work on the international tropical garden design stage.

Made Wijaya is the author of the Tropical Garden Design and Modern Tropical Garden Design books, and for nearly 40 years has designed stunning tropical gardens around the world, both domestic and commercial. He was born in Sydney and completed an architecture degree at Sydney Uni before jumping ship in Bali more than 40 years ago and making the island his home and commercial base.

Made Wijaya’s hotel garden designs include the iconic Bali Hyatt Hotel in Sanur, the Oberoi and Four Seasons hotels in Bali, and projects in Australia, India, Malaysia, Florida, Sri Lanka, Java, Singapore and Belize. This will be his first visit to Darwin.

Another event to be held during the Garden Fair weekend will be the launch of a book by local author Deb Bisa on Maurice Holtze, first curator of the Darwin Botanic Gardens. The Friends will be hosting the Saturday afternoon launch.
The message says it all

The Friends of the Darwin Botanic Gardens recently said goodbye to long-standing member and recent Chairperson, Dr Harvey Cooper-Preston.

Harvey has relocated to Brisbane, where she will continue pursuing her interest in succulents, cycads, bromeliads and all manner of spiky plants. Her bull terrier Essie-Mae has accompanied her and both are settling in well.

A plaque was erected on a large and beautiful local rock, and a simple ceremony marked the unveiling. The Friends will miss Harvey’s leadership and friendship.

Left: Friends say goodbye to Harvey Cooper-Preston and below, Essie-Mae enjoys the view from the rock bearing Harvey’s plaque.

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Boabs in Australia

One species of boab, *Adansonia gregorii* grows naturally from about Derby in WA to Timber Creek in the NT in northern Australia. Two species are found in southern Africa (*A. digitata* and *A. Kilima*) while six species are found in Madagascar.

Applying conventional botanical evolution theory dictates that Madagascar is the centre of diversity for the genus, which assumes that it probably evolved there. The genus then radiated out to Africa and Australia. However the reverse could be case: of originating in Australia and after travelling to Madagascar, radiating out in Madagascar and Africa. The genus is only 10 million years old and accordingly, could not have been transported via continental drift.

It is relatively easy to understand how boabs made it from Madagascar to Africa. The distance isn’t too large and boab fruit do float. However boabs being transported by currents to Australia is a huge jump!

Back in 1980, Tim Willing was a newly arrived Englishman who got a job as a shire gardener in Broome. A few years later, he successfully applied for a Churchill Fellowship – with one of its objects to study boabs in Madagascar.

Tim returned to Australia from Madagascar in 1985 with seed of three of the southern boab species that grow there (*A. grandidenti*, *A. rubrostipa* and *A. za*). He later contacted a fellow British researcher, David Baum, to obtain seed of the northern species – *A. madagascariensis*, *A. perrieri* and *A. suarezensis*. The two latter species are endangered and rare in the wild.

With David’s help, Tim was finally able to forward seed of all the Malagasy species to the Darwin Gardens (then run by the enthusiastic George Brown) and they were duly planted out. The trees growing in the Darwin Botanic Gardens today are the result.

Tim retained some seed and Malagasy boabs were planted around Broome, Derby and Kununurra in WA. The photographed tree (*A. grandidenti*) is progeny of this seed. He also tried grafting the red-flowering *A. madagascariensis* on to rootstock of *A. gregorii*, successfully accelerating flowering by many years. Previously, circa 1975, Tim had asked his father (then visiting Mombasa in Kenya) to collect seed of the African baobab (*A. digitata*). Seed was sent on to the Government Nursery in Broome, then run by the legendary Fred Lullfitz. Seedlings from this source are now large trees in Broome, Lombadina-Djarindjin and Kununurra. However the African boabs in Darwin (Nightcliff) and the Darwin Botanic Gardens date from a much earlier, unknown, introduction.

By all accounts, boabs appear to be under threat in Madagascar from land clearing and general people pressure and we are lucky to have a full complement of this genus at the Darwin Botanic Gardens.
Grant funding successes
By Friends Treasurer, Fiona Douglas

Spurred on by the need to renovate our nursery and by our decision to have only one plant sale a year, the Friends decided to apply for grants to try to keep our level of support for Gardens’ projects at its usual high level.

The NT Government’s Community Benefit Fund, administered by the Department of Business, uses the money from gambling levies to support community projects. Over the last 12 months we have received three grants from the CBF Small Grants program.

We purchased a mobility scooter that will go just about anywhere in the Gardens, except up the steps to the waterfall at the top of the monsoon forest. The Friends had fun road-testing a couple of models, and the one chosen was handed over in April.

A second grant funded a set of ironwood timber picnic furniture from local craftsman Rex Maxwell. This set joined another two that we funded ourselves, and all three can be seen near the main loop and car park on the lower level.

Finally, we have just heard that our application for assistance with replacing the irrigation system for our nursery has been successful. Combined with last year’s shade-cloth replacement, general clear out and rearrangement of the nursery, a modern irrigation system should mean our plants will thrive. We can expect our plant sales to continue to be very successful and to continue providing significant funds for future Gardens projects.

New Committee
At the AGM held on 9 April 2016, Peter Pusterla was elected as chairperson and Sue Dibbs as vice chairperson. Peter Knibbs and Fiona Douglas remain in their positions of secretary and treasurer.

Before moving to Darwin several years ago, Peter Pusterla was a member of the Men of the Trees organisation in WA, and served as quality control officer and secretary of its Rockingham branch. Founded in 1979, Men of the Trees has planted more than 13 million seedlings to prevent the spread of deserts, erosion and salinity in the state.

Sue was the NT Co-ordinator of the Australian Open Garden Scheme from 2005 until its closure in 2015.

Lime, Ginger and Chilli Zing - Energising and cleansing!

 Juice of 11 limes, juice of 3 lemons, juice of 1/2 cup raspberries, 3-9 chopped chillis, 1/2 cup sliced ginger, 2 cups clear water, 1-2 cups raw sugar, 2 tablespoons honey
 Bring water, honey and sugar to gentle simmer. Add chilli and ginger. Simmer 30 minutes and turn off heat. Add the juices and cool before draining through a clean cloth and bottling.
 Drink with hot or cold water or add to juice. The larger the quantity of sugar, the longer the mixture will keep.

Garden outing for the Friends

On Saturday 11 May, the Friends had a special treat in place of their regular morning nursery workshop meeting.

They were invited to visit the wonderful suburban garden of Kaye Aldenhoven (standing, above) to enjoy morning tea and track down new plants for the nursery stock.

Kaye’s garden was a delight, and provided lots of ideas, some great plants for the nursery and opportunities to wander along shady pathways.

Then it was morning tea time on Kaye’s cool and welcoming patio. Fresh and delicious scones and a cuppa were the perfect touch, and a home-made cooling drink was much appreciated also. (See recipe on this page).

Thank you Kaye! More garden visits are planned for the future.