

Red and Pink

by Leigh Murray

With deep red flowers, *Kunzea baxteri* has been a surprising success in our Tuross garden. I say surprising because it is planted in a fairly shady spot. It is growing happily under the Norfolk Island Pines, amongst granite boulders. Our shrub doesn't flower prolifically but by tip-pruning it from time to time, it often sports a few beautiful red flowers that are fancied by honeyeaters. Rosellas love to eat the seeds.

We also grow a few of the large-flowered hybrid grevilleas: a *Grevillea* 'Superb', a *G.* 'Misty Pink', a *G.* 'Sylvia', and a *G.* 'Flamingo'. The Superb is a major drawcard for honeyeaters (although the bush is the personal property of Red, the resident Red Wattlebird, and she doesn't let others dine there often). Sylvia, with its gorgeous pinky-red flowers, is a knockout for looks but isn't as popular with the birds.

Flamingo – a much younger shrub – is already proving attractive to birds but its flower colour does NOT live up to the picture on the label, which shows a colour not unlike that of Sylvia, just a bit paler. The flowers of *G.* 'Flamingo' that I've seen on TV were a beautiful deep pink, but our Flamingo started out with pale pink flowers. Ditto our Misty Pink.

I've tried sulfate of potash and Epsom salts (separately, over a month apart, a few teaspoons of each per plant) watered in around Flamingo and Misty Pink. Regardless of whether these additives have had any effect on flower colour, they don't seem to have harmed the plants, and the flowers of both shrubs are now a stronger colour than the very pasty pink they were to start with. After many years of pale pink flowers, Misty Pink's flower colour has intensified to a mid-pink, and Flamingo's flowers are also a deeper colour, although they aren't yet anywhere near Sylvia's stunning colour. The photo shows the new, stronger colour – it's not exactly deep pink yet, is it?

I've read recently that iron can intensify the colours of pink or red flowers, so iron chelates will be my next try. It's interesting that such elements may be able to modify colour intensity (as can things I can't change, such as temperature and cell pH and sun exposure).

