Winner
2025 Living Collection Curation Award

Botanic Gardens AUS & NZ

‘Creating A Future With A Living Collection’

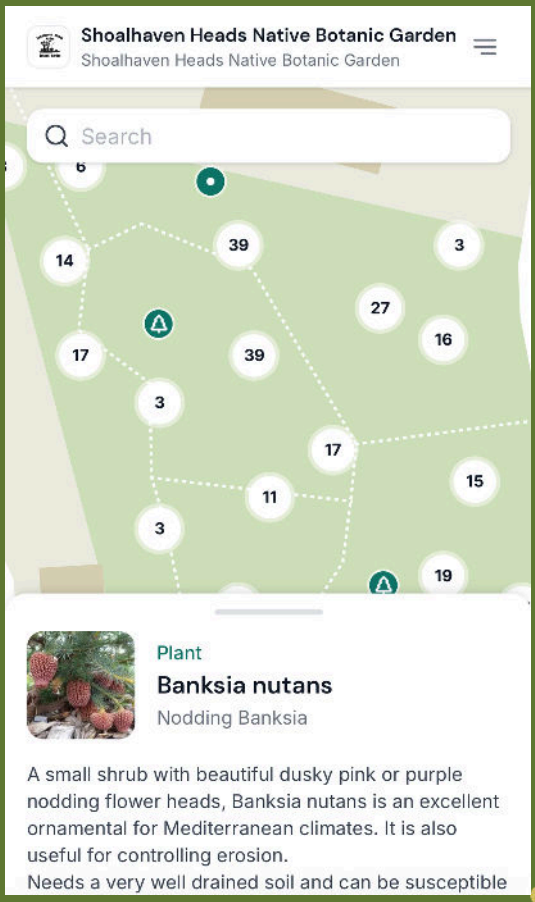
Shoalhaven Heads Native Botanic Garden

Award Overview

This award recognises excellence in systems and tools that support living collection curation. The Shoalhaven Heads Native Botanic Garden (SHNBG), a volunteer-run one-hectare native garden, was recognised for its project *Creating a Future With a Living Collection*. With support from a Horizon Bank grant in 2023, Curator Rob Stewart began transferring the garden’s plant records into the Hortis database. This work enables visitors, researchers, and volunteers to access accurate information on the garden’s Australian native species, including many threatened plants. For a volunteer group of around 20 retirees, having an easily accessed, centralised system is essential and replaces reliance on personal memory or paperwork.

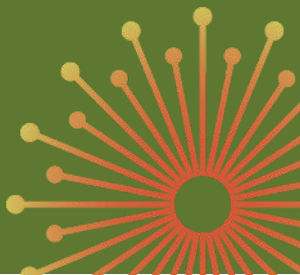
Impact
Online access to the plant database now records location, condition, management, and provenance. This improves understanding of growing requirements and assists decisions about suitability and weed potential. Previously, all information was held by a single horticulturist or in a filing cabinet, limiting access and risking loss of knowledge. The new system improves accuracy, access, and long-term continuity of curatorial processes.

Excellence in Design
The project uses limited resources effectively by preserving records of past management and ensuring new volunteers can learn from previous successes and failures. With only one qualified horticulturist and one hectare of space, accurate records are essential for selective planting of rare, threatened, and unusual species. Documenting how these species cope in local conditions supports best practice and strengthens the garden's conservation mission.



Management and Maintenance
All volunteers can now access plant records online, rather than relying on word of mouth. This supports better understanding of plant needs—including position, soil, and watering—and helps avoid repeating unsuccessful practices. Online storage protects knowledge and assists with ongoing care and propagation.

Evaluation and Continuous Improvement
Visitors can use onsite QR codes or website links to identify plants and access basic information, supporting home gardening and learning. Volunteers can easily locate plants for propagation and avoid duplicating ineffective maintenance methods. Documented practices help ensure consistent, evidence-based care.

Sharing and Adaptability
The Hortis database provides public access to plant information, maps, and conservation status. As the only native-only botanic garden in the Shoalhaven LGA, SHNBG plays a key role in sharing knowledge about rare and endangered species. Horticulture students at Nowra TAFE and other institutions can also use the database to support their studies.

Conclusion
The project has strengthened SHNBG's ability to manage, share, and protect its living collection. By moving to an accessible digital system, the garden has secured vital knowledge for the future and improved the way volunteers, visitors, and students engage with its unique native plant collection. This will underpin and help secure SHNBG's long term future - which is a serious challenge when a community volunteer project is developed in a council owned public reserve.