

PHOTOS: ROBBIE BLACKHALL-MILES, BEN BAIN

Robbie inspects *Protea magnifica* on a South African mountain



**BE A  
PLANT  
HERO**

Grow your own!



Banksias need acid soil and no fertiliser

**Try banksia  
'Birthday Candles'**

The dwarf, spreading selection from *Banksia spinulosa* is one of the best to grow in the UK, tolerating -6C (21F). Achieving 60x90cm (2x3ft), this evergreen shrub produces yellow, candle-like blossoms from winter to spring. It needs full sun in a warm, sheltered spot in moist, but well-drained, acid soil. If growing it in pots use an ericaceous or finely milled bark compost, adding equal amounts of washed sand and grit. Avoid composts containing fertilisers as many plants in the protea family are sensitive to phosphorus. This and other banksias are available from [www.penberthplants.co.uk](http://www.penberthplants.co.uk).

## Robbie's banking on banksia

A childhood fascination with the prehistoric world of dinosaurs spurred Robbie Blackhall-Miles' life-long passion for ancient plant families and species around the globe.

Based near Caernarfon, North Wales, Robbie has a particular love for the exotic-looking protea family from the Southern Hemisphere, woody shrubs and trees



**Robbie Blackhall-Miles**  
National collection holder of banksia based in North Wales

that are particularly well represented in South Africa and Australia.

"Over the last few years my partner Ben and I have created one of the largest collections of hardier kinds in the UK," said Robbie.

"It's just part of the 1,118 different species squeezed into our tiny garden and small nursery!"

After becoming a member of conservation charity Plant Heritage

of the first to be discovered in 1770 by scientist Sir Joseph Banks.

Now a horticultural consultant, currently helping the Natural History Museum develop its garden, his analytical approach to plant care involves developing a complete understanding of how a plant reproduces, grows and survives in the wild. "I want to establish protocols that future generations can use and, if necessary, restore a critically endangered plant back to the wild."

■ Visit [www.fossilplants.co.uk](http://www.fossilplants.co.uk).

in 2011 he started collecting banksia from South East Australia, evergreen shrubs of distinctive form and stout, candle-like blooms little changed over millions of years. The charity gave him National Plant Collection status in 2015.

Of 173 species of banksia, all but one is native to Australia. Of those from Eastern Australia, Robbie grows 12 species and one variety selected from the wild, namely banksia 'Birthday Candles'. "It's one of the easiest types to grow in the UK," he said. He also grows *B. integrifolia*, one



*Banksia integrifolia* needs a sheltered spot in the UK

### How you can be a plant hero

You can help preserve rare and unusual plants in your garden! The Plant Heritage charity works to conserve the nation's garden plants through the National Plant Collection® scheme and individual Plant Guardians®, and is looking

for Garden News readers to get involved with its crucial work. Contact [collections@plantheritage.org.uk](mailto:collections@plantheritage.org.uk) for more information or visit [www.plantheritage.org.uk](http://www.plantheritage.org.uk).

 **Plant Heritage**  
CONSERVING THE DIVERSITY OF GARDEN PLANTS

**NEXT WEEK** The woman who cares for more than 100 rare plants

Are you growing any rare or unusual plants? Let us know – see our contact details on page 3

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